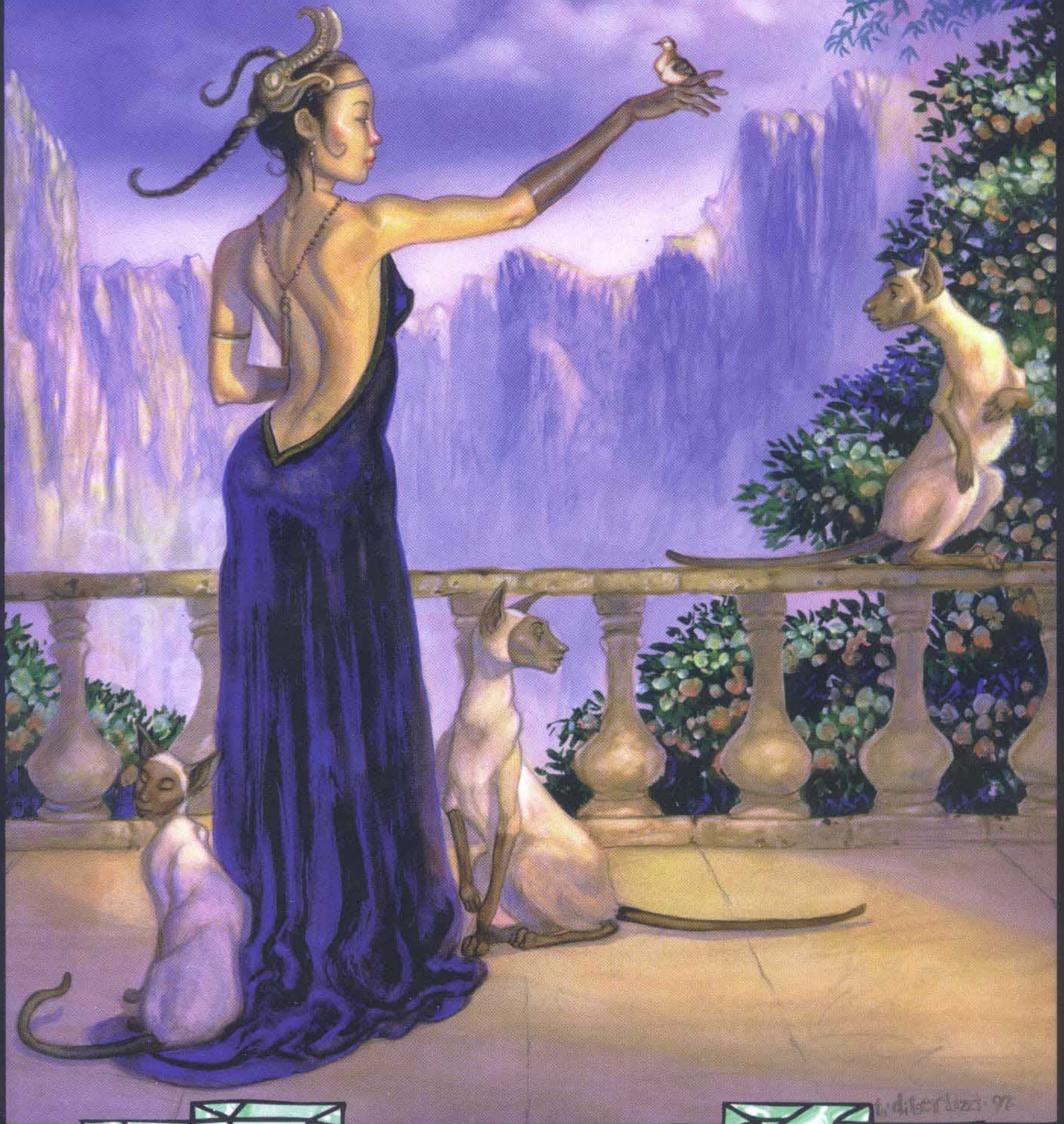
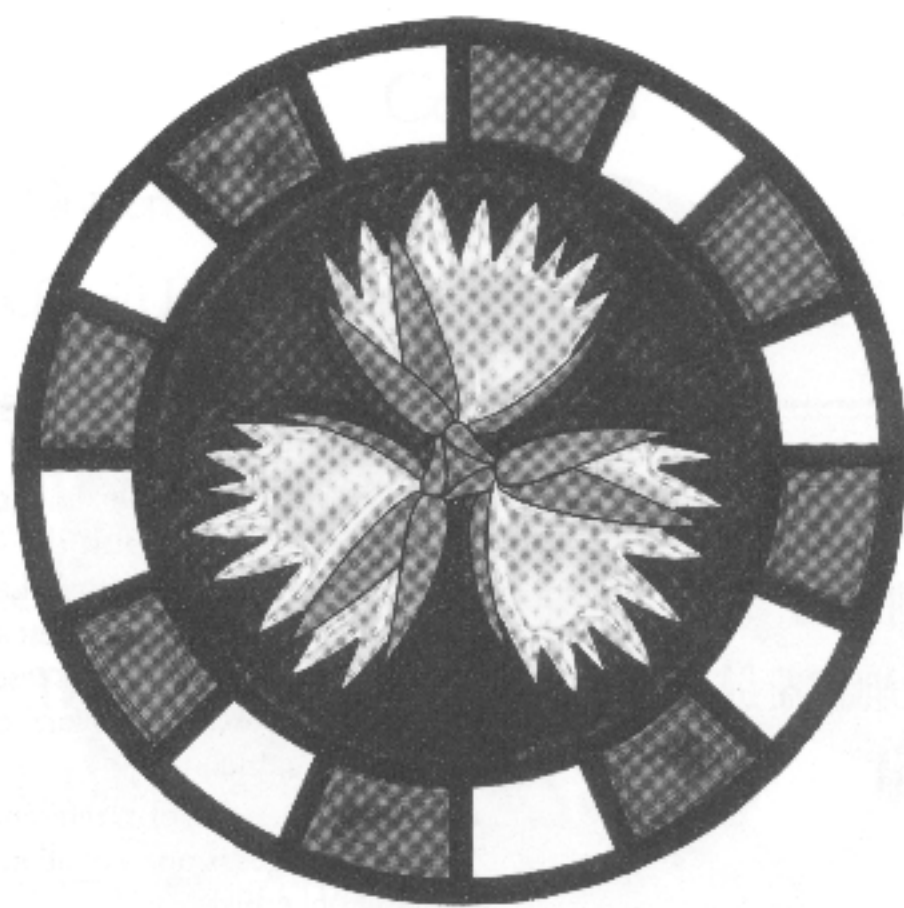


Band of Eight Million Dreams™



For Changeling: The Dreaming™

Band of Eight Million Dreams



by Deena McKinney, Jim Moore and Wayne Peacock

Credits

Written by: Deena McKinney, Jim Moore, Wayne Peacock

Developed by: Ian Lemke

Edited by: Count Rocksha Von Sputnik II

Art Director: Aileen Miles

Layout and Typesetting: Pauline Benney

Interior Art: Theodor Black, John Dollar, Steve Ellis, Michael Gaydos, Jeff Holt, Kostas Kiriakakis, James Stowe, Drew Tucker

Front Cover Art: Tony DiTerlizzi

Front and Back Cover Design: Pauline Benney

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From Wayne Peacock

This one's for Emma and her mom, Kim Peacock. The best Halloween, ever. Thanks to my system-guru buddies: Stewart MacWilliam, Keith Martin, and Buck Marchinton.

From James A. Moore

To Su Lee and Ming, for all of their invaluable assistance. Thanks also to Wayne and Deena, for being great folks to work with, and to Ian for his patience. Lastly, as always, thanks to Bonnie, my wife, for putting up with me.



735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, CA 94001
USA

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AH KUM LAM: GOLDEN ORCHIDS

*I have a round head pointing to the Heavens, and square feet for
stomping over the earth... How am I different from other people?*
— David Kherdian (translation), *Monkey: A Journey to the West*

Deep in the heart of the western mountains, where the rocky land meets sunset's golden sky, stands the Library of Earth. From the Age of Heaven to the present Age of Tribulation, many komuko have tended this immortal place. They hear the tales of days and nights that have come and gone. Laughing at the Monkey King's antics, these kamuii learn the story of Hanumen and T'u, of how this unlikely pair brought the Tao Te Hsien to the Shinma. With anger and fear in their hearts, the komuko hear the story of the fallen Wan Xian, and how from their treachery, barriers arose around the Middle Kingdom, denying the hsien access

to the August Personage of Jade. And on the first day of planting each year, when earth's soil, water's coolness, metal's sharp edges, wood's growth and the sun's fire come together in the farmers' fields, these komuko repeat the story of Ah Kum Lam. They burn a hundred golden orchids in memory of her name and from the Library of Earth's great marble balcony, they scatter into the air the ashes mixed with their tears. When the winds carry the ashes across the lands throughout the seasons, explain the librarians, this is a good omen for hsien and mortals alike. "We remember," they whisper, "and do not forget her tale."

Once upon the time in the Age of Beautiful Sadness lived a hanumen named Ah Kum Lam. Like most of her kwannon-jin, Ah Kum Lam was spry and mischievous. She liked nothing better than to show her mastery of Wu Tan by playing little tricks on all the students at the Library of Earth, where she served Munghee, a venerable komuko. Such pranks included turning all the inkstones into rocks (well, only for a day), making the most delicate soba noodles taste like dirt (but just for one meal) and sticking her tail through the walls to snatch and tug at the students' robes (just every so often). The gentle kamui Munghee would only nod disapprovingly at the hanumen in the presence of angered students, laugh at the monkey's wit in private and send Ah Kum Lam out to pick ginkgo nuts as punishment.

"She has much spirit," Munghee confided to the other komuko, "and what's more, I like her. Ah Kum Lam would never injure anyone." All his companions agreed; besides, the gift of laughter from one heart to another was more valuable than a basketful of gold.

Unfortunately, not all the students at the Library of Earth agreed.

"We should not stand for this," grumbled Ushi the suijen, toying with her pearl amulet. "That hanumen makes us look like fools."

"Indeed, it is not proper and fitting for her impudence to exist in such an important place," agreed Guotin, her hou-chi companion. "Do you have a plan to teach her a lesson, my friend?"

Ushi smiled. "When the time is right, I will teach that naughty monkey her proper place and give her something else to think of besides her ridiculous tricks."

Guotin shuddered and wondered exactly what the suijen had in mind. He had seen her take revenge on others, and the results could be as devastating as a flood or as subtle as water washing away a stone.

Now what Guotin did not know was that Ushi had a handsome chu jung warrior in her service named Jinlong. This dashing kamui, too passionate in his study of martial arts to pay much attention to other *shen*, had denied her favors. Ushi was not at heart a cruel *hsien*, but she had been angered and hurt by Jinlong's polite but firm rejection. Out of spite, she wanted to make the warrior look silly; in truth, Ushi did not intend any lasting harm. Unfortunately, like many of her kwannon-jin, she blithely ignored the rocks before diving headfirst into dark waters.

Ushi retreated to her private dwelling on the shores of the Lake of Unknown Depths and set about a magical ritual. She called on Yin, with its affinity to things cool and feminine, to build connections from herself to Jinlong and Ah Kum Lam. Then she called on Yang, with its bonds to things active, hot and male, to breach the heart of the chu jung warrior Jinlong. For some time, she prepared her magic, until the rising of the Third Moon, Chi'n Ming, that which favored the element of wood. When a cold breeze

blew and raindrops struck her face, Ushi tossed a mahogany box into the bottomless depths of the lake, and watched as it sank beneath the waves. Only then did she rest, content that her I Chih, her righteous judgment, was a success. Ushi sent a message to Jinlong, asking him to retrieve a scroll for her from the Library of Earth, and the warrior went with haste.

Arriving at the gates, he was readily greeted and admitted by a young komuko librarian, Baulai.

"My mistress bids me to bring the Scroll of Six Thousand Excessive Storms," Jinlong explained.

"I remember that is a favorite of the Lady Ushi," responded Baulai politely. "It shall soon be in your hand." He called out softly. "Ah Kum Lam! Come to me!" The hanumen had been dancing along the garden walls, but she heard the summons echo through the stones and skipped quickly to Baulai's side. For the first time, Jinlong's dark flashing eyes beheld the lovely young hanumen.

Souls can be tricky things, fickle and deceitful. Poor Ushi only desired to stir the chu jung warrior's Wood Soul, to stimulate his affection for the hanumen. Perhaps Jinlong would then swear his service to the monkey for a season or possibly make some high decree of law in Ah Kum Lam's name, so that even the chu-ih-yu might laugh at him, a proud kamui humbling himself so publicly before a hirayanu. But when Ushi touched Jinlong's Wood Soul with her magic, perhaps she was thinking of her own unrequited passion for the chu jung warrior. When Ushi's Wu Tan magic awakened the roots of the chu jung's heart, she set to boiling not only a deep affection in Jinlong for the hanumen but also a great outpouring of love and devotion. This was certainly not what she had intended.

Jinlong dropped to his knees and bowed before Ah Kum Lam. "Lady hanumen," he cried, "having seen you this moment, my heart is yours! Say the word, and I will do your bidding for I am greatly in love with you."

"What is this, fire lord?" Ah Kum Lam replied in a merry tone. "A jest? Do let me in on your game! For I love good humor, as I am sure Baulai will attest."

Hot tears splashed down Jinlong's cheeks. "No jest, most beloved lady whose eyes are like the gold of the sun! I am yours to command, well and truly, if you will but give me your heart, now and always. Marry me, Ah Kum Lam, that we may stride through the Ten Thousand Things together!"

Even the hanumen was speechless for the moment, but then her eyes twinkled. "A fine idea, and what a handsome warrior you are! What fun we shall have swinging through the vines of this life. Very well, I will marry you on the auspicious day of the waning of the Second Moon, a good omen for earth and fire alike."

Baulai had never seen anything so bizarre in all his young life. He was torn; should he summon one of the elders or stay and keep an eye on these strange events? Fortunately, Baulai was wise beyond his years; he ran for his mistress Lady Siang, the head librarian. By the time the two had returned, Jinlong

sat with Ah Kum Lam in his lap, eagerly running his hands through her fur, so that she squirmed with pleasure.

"We are to marry in one week," Jinlong announced proudly. "Ah Kum Lam will make all arrangements with advice from the wise fu hsi, Chen Jun."

"But what of your service to Lady Ushi?" asked Lady Siang gently. "Will you not tell her? And what of announcements to the other Shinma? You cannot do this with such haste!"

Jinlong's eyes blazed and his skin turned crimson. "With all due respect, we *will* be wed on the waning of the Second Moon, in a week. All shall be of the highest propriety, I assure you!" Lady Siang nodded politely and said no more, but her heart was troubled.

Among hsien, no other kwannon-jin is so highly prized for its advice and service to engaged couples as the fu hsi. Chen Jun, in fact, was one of the most famous counselors of any age, and it was from this wise old fu hsi that Ah Kum Lam and Jinlong sought aid. He welcomed them to his humble abode in the Swamp of Bending Trees and burned seasoned wood to bless the occasion. Chen Jun watched smoke rise from the small pyre then asked Jinlong to let him speak with the bride alone.

"You do not love Jinlong," he said, coming straight to the point. "Furthermore, I see great sadness in both your futures. Please show the wisdom of your ancestor, the Monkey King, and have done with this farce, dear child. There are more rivers of fate flowing in your lives than even I can see. It is best to take a clear path through this dark forest I envision before you."

Ah Kum Lam stubbornly lifted her chin and shook her furry head. "No, venerable one, the wedding shall take place. The chu jung has chosen me, and it would be most rude should I deny his favor." Chen Jun gave a heavy sigh, then gave Ah Kum Lam his most powerful blessing.

"May wood cause your passions to grow, to let fire bring you warmth, metal allow you to hear each other's hearts, water carry your faith, and finally, earth bind you for eternity." The ancient fu hsi then watched the chu jung and the hanumen wind their way from his house, his heart heavy with concern for their future.

The wedding was to take place at sunset on the great balcony of the Library of Earth. All of the local magistrates and governors were invited, and many Shinma were in attendance, for Jinlong was a famous warrior, and his bride, despite her tricks, was greatly loved by many who frequented the library. Mughee himself was to officiate, and as was customary, the bride and groom were taken to a small curtained room away from the guests while the ceremony was performed. Jinlong was stunning in his red and gold robes while Ah Kum Lam wore every piece of jewelry she and her hanumen cousins could find. Hardly an inch of her lithe body was not covered in a precious trinket. To Jinlong, she was perfection itself. They sat without speaking, listening to the words of Mughee echoing from outside their curtained chamber.

The ceremony was long and full of many stories and tidbits of wisdom, for Mughee admired both the bride and bridegroom; a magnificent and thoughtful lesson from his lips was the greatest gift he could offer. But as hanumen are wont to do, Ah Kum Lam became bored with all the talk. She knew better than to make noise or play tricks on the guests, but her eyes wandered. And then she spied a trailing golden thread from the hem of Jinlong's wedding robe, barely touching her foot. Perhaps he had snagged it on a twig coming into the library? Fascinated, Ah Kum Lam wiggled her toes and tugged the thread. It moved easily, and so intent was he on listening to Mughee and meditating, Jinlong never noticed. Ah Kum Lam could not resist, and soon a golden puddle of thread was wrapped around her toes. With little difficulty, she whispered to the golden thread, asking it to do her bidding on this auspicious day of her wedding. By the time Mughee had stopped speaking and came to summon the bride and groom, her mischief was done.

Mughee pulled aside the curtain to reveal the happy couple. He first presented the bride, almost gaudy in her finery. But when Jinlong stood, his elegant gold and scarlet robed crumpled to the ground, the threads weaving the fine cloth together having been coerced by his bride into loosening their grip on one another. Underneath, he wore nothing, and so the flesh of this honorable chu jung was made bare for all to see.

The kamuii present stifled their gasps and politely averted their eyes. Even most of the hirayanu were wise enough to look at the warrior's feet and bite back their mirth. But all the hanumen and several nyan laughed and jeered, all in good nature, of course, for the chu jung warrior was handsome indeed. Jinlong felt only rage and deep humiliation; he was the most gracious and seemly of warriors. His eyes beheld the scarlet robe of his hanumen bride and his anger burned hot and hateful. Shouting his fury, his body became flushed with rage, flames burning around his face and hands.

Without warning, the flames leapt forth toward Ah Kum Lam. Fiery claws bit into the hanumen's red silk wedding robe, and the delicate strands became engulfed in the blaze, scorching her fur and flesh in an instant. The tragedy was almost over before it began; where once had stood a mischievous but innocent young hirayanu now rested a pile of burned, smoking bones. In one moment of rage, Jinlong had murdered his bride.

The wedding guests shrieked and screamed in horror. Mughee sobbed in terrible grief, for the hanumen had been like a daughter to him. Ushi, watching among the crowd, shuddered in terror at what atrocity her wayward magic had inflicted on the poor hanumen bride. Jinlong fell to his knees, overcome with horror at what he had done in the grip of his anger and embarrassment. Where seconds before he felt only a blinding fury, he now felt shame and sorrow almost too great to bear. Amidst the chaos, a tall and imposing chu-ih-yu with long silver hair stepped forth, and all bowed before her, for she was the famous Min-ho, known throughout the land for her judgments on kamuii and hirayanu alike.



"You have killed a Shinma in your fury," she said evenly, "and for this you must stand trial. Will you submit to my judgment?"

Jinlong bowed his head. "Yes, great lady, though I beg a favor. I slew one of the hanumen in my moment of madness, and I ask that one of Ah Kum Lam's people also sit in judgment of me."

"That is wise," replied Min-ho. "So then shall Liko the hanumen join Shen An of the komuko, Chun of the hou-chi and myself in your trial."

Jinlong hoped for death from these four righteous judges; he could think of no punishment more dreadful than living the rest of his years without Ah Kum Lam, so great was the pain of his heart. Of the four, Shen An the komuko and Chun the hou-chi were reputed to be more merciful, inclined to listen to all sides of a story, whereas Min-ho the chu-ih-yu was known for her impartiality. Jinlong knew nothing of Liko the hanumen. Little did he realize that Liko did not know what to think in her heart; she found the entire love affair strange. But the face she showed to the world was angry at the impetuous warrior.

On the day of the trial, the court was full; everyone wanted to hear Jinlong's tale. He told how he had been so overcome with embarrassment, that his temper had taken over his better judgment.

"And so, without thinking, I slew my beloved. No greater kindness could you give me than death, for I dread living out the rest of this life without her by my side," Jinlong finished.

Unlike the other judges who accepted Jinlong's story without question, Liko was suspicious. Why had no one thought to question this bizarre love affair before? How was it that a high-ranking chu jung warrior met and fell in love with a hirayanu?

As the other judges muttered among themselves about the clear guilt of the chu jung, she spoke out. "You have said you met and became betrothed to Ah Kum Lam scarce three weeks ago? I do not understand how this can be possible. Can you explain this unusual turn of fortune to me?"

Jinlong's brow furrowed. "I never thought about it. My passion for her seemed to come from nowhere. Yet it seemed so natural, so pure, so righteous."

Liko looked out upon the throng assembled. "Does anyone present have words to offer? Here stands a kamuii accused of a grievous crime, which most of us witnessed with our own eyes, yet why has no one questioned the impossibility of this entire affair? Since when do chu jung warriors fling aside their duties and love of propriety to meet and wed with a hanumen in less than a fortnight? Have you nothing to say?"

Ushi was in the crowd, debating with her conscience over this entire affair. The kamuii had never intended such tragedy by her actions, yet the worst had happened. She knew that word of her deed might come forth sooner or later and, thus, the sui jen came to a decision. Far better that she should confess now and hope for clemency than be accused later of

both cowardice and treachery. The greater honor, perhaps, was to be earned in the present. She stood up, stiff and proud.

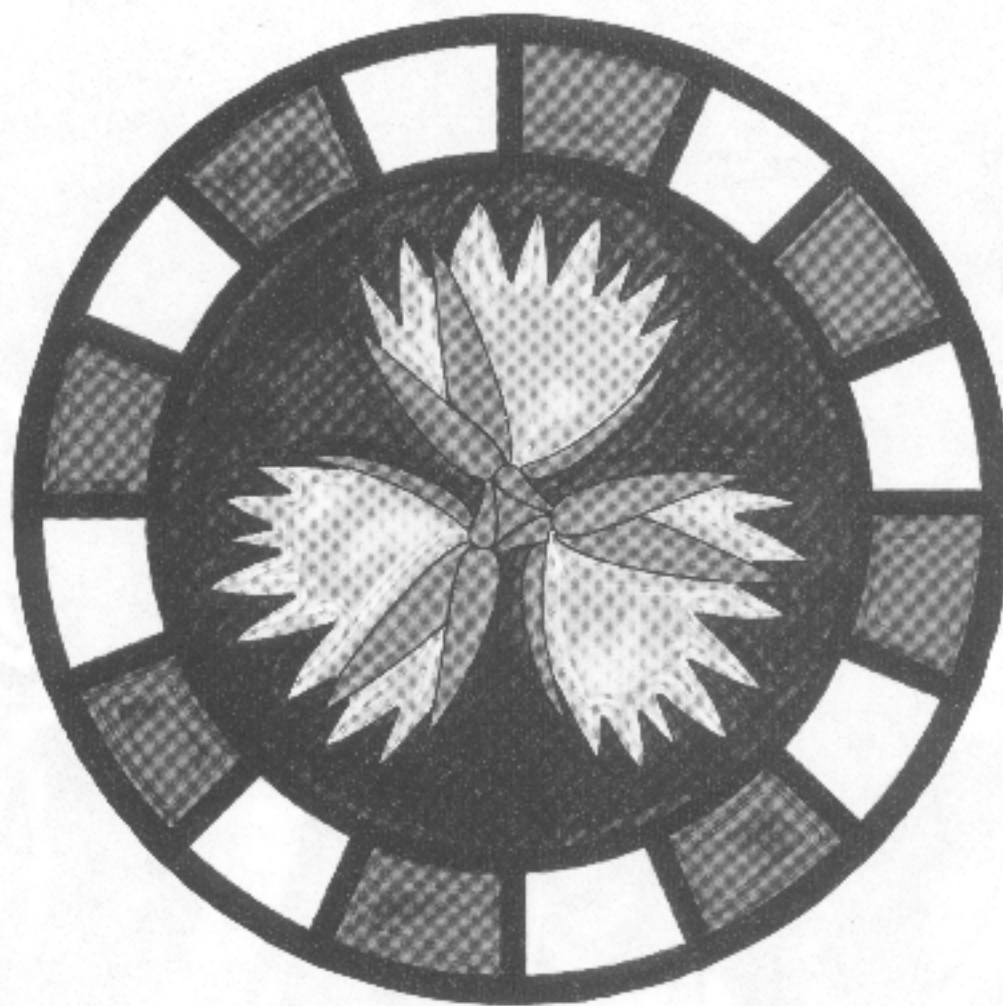
"Benevolent and wise judges, I must admit to a part in this sad affair. For I was the one who caused Jinlong to fall in love with Ah Kum Lam. Truly, all I had wanted was a momentary affection, for him to pay her attention for a short time and appear a fool. But his passions were stronger than I had ever realized. I am sorry for what I have done and will make amends as you see fit."

Chun and Liko both swallowed their anger with difficulty, while Shen An and Min-ho hardly blinked their eyes. Now things made sense, and what irony, thought the kamuii, that Liko the hanumen should see so much of the hidden truth. Min-ho spoke softly to her fellow judges, then made her pronouncement.

"Death is too easy and serves no purpose for either of you," she said coldly. "Ushi and Jinlong are truly repentant; of that, we have no doubt. But we would see some good come from this terrible tragedy. Therefore, you both shall walk a difficult path from now until you pass from this existence. First, you two shall never meet again face to face. For Jinlong, this will deny him a chance to invoke revenge against Ushi, and as for her,

she will never again see the object of her affections. You shall both wander alone, apart from hirayanu and kamuii, living only among mortals, seeking a path of enlightenment, the Tao Te Hsien. You shall report to a scholar once per year, sharing your learning, then once more take up your solitary path. So is our judgment spoken." The assembled crowd gasped at both the harshness and fairness of the sentence. For the two kamuii it would be devastating, never to see court and their friends again. Yet to wander among mortals for the rest of their days, seeking enlightenment, was indeed fitting and just, and the judges were well pleased with their decision. That same evening, the two kamuii set forth on their paths, never to meet again and never to be seen by any but the most isolated of scholars.

Too often, grief overcomes those at the Library of Earth when telling this tale. Some weave a happier ending where after several lifetimes and kun shou rituals, those spirits who were Ah Kum Lam, Jinlong and Ushi come together as friends within a hui t'ung, a sign from the distant August Personage of Jade that he still smiles on the Middle Kingdom and his lost servants. Only the spirits themselves know the truth of it.





INTRODUCTION: MANY DREAMERS, COUNTLESS DREAMS

Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous.
— Confucius, *The Confucian Analects*

Have a care what you whisper in the night, for they are forever there, listening and waiting, watching and wondering. Some exist to serve mortals; others are silent and deadly guardians of the elements. They are the *hsien*, messengers of the spirit world, protectors of sacred places (or at least, that is how their history began). Now, the *hsien* are trapped in the Middle Kingdom; no longer can they pass over into the realms of spirit. Were they trapped by the treachery of the Kuei-jin? Are they here to fulfill an ancient debt? Not even the *hsien* themselves know the absolute truth. For now, they seek enlightenment by progressing from lifetime to lifetime in a host of human guises. Rarely do the *hsien* appear as their true selves lest others discover them and destroy their souls forever.

Land of Eight Million Dreams is a book about the elusive changelings of the East, the *hsien*, or Shinma (as these creatures call themselves). They have little in common with the fae of the Western world, for the Shinma are far more spirit than dream. Here, Storytellers and players alike will find a host of new friends and enemies, and many interesting elements of *hsien* history and society.

The Shinma

The Shinma, like the Kuei-jin and *hengeyokai*, are supernatural beings of the East. While many names exist for all of these creatures, most collectively refer to themselves as *shen*.

Most *hsien* live in China. A few, however, like the *tanuki*, also dwell in Japan. The *hsien* are changelings, but they aren't born of mortal dreams. They are living between Banality and Glamour. Most *Shinma* are spiritual creatures of Yin, Yang or balance on a quest for enlightenment. They inhabit human bodies as a defense against other *shen* and as a means to gain the elusive understanding of the Ten Thousand Things. Even in their human guises, *hsien* possess formidable elemental magic called *Wu Tan*. Additionally, all *hsien* have a *wani* form, their true fae appearance. Each *kwannon-jin* (or *kith*) of *Shinma* have special abilities when in their *wani* forms. While transforming into this form grants wondrous powers, it offers no shield of anonymity to the *hsien*; they are exposed for anyone and everyone to see. Many other *shen* find the *hsien* to be founts of Chi and eagerly hunt them down.

Other major differences between the *Kithain* and the *Shinma* include:

Chi and Yugen: Rather than Glamour and Banality, *Shinma* have Yin Chi, Yang Chi and Yugen (Chi that is neither Yin nor Yang). In some ways, Chi and Yugen function like Glamour and Banality, but the concept of such complete opposites is foreign to the *hsien*. See **Chapters Five and Six** for lengthier explanations.

Wu Tan: The magic of the *Shinma* is called *Wu Tan*. It includes the *I Chih*, which have some similarities to *Kithain* cantrips. **Chapter Five** details *Wu Tan* and the *Tao Te Hsien*, a more complex type of magic that is learned by those *hsien* seeking a means to return to the spirit realms.

Hotei, Wani and Animal Forms: All *Shinma* have a *hotei* form, their human form. Only rarely can individuals recognize the *hsien* while she's human, though *hsien* recognize each other on sight. *Hsien* can use *Wu Tan* in human form with increased difficulty. All *Shinma* have a *wani* form, which is their truly magical form. As *wani*, they are blatantly different and mystical for all the world to see; some are beautiful; some are terrifying. In addition to these two forms, *hirayanu* can take the shape of a designated animal much like the *pooka*. As with the *pooka*, this form is of a normal animal with no special fangs or claws other than what that animal normally possesses.

Trapped: *Hsien* cannot cross into the spirit worlds on their own accord. Sometimes, other beings take *Shinma* across the barriers using certain types of magic (such as a mage's True Magick). Immediately, the *Shinma* begins to wither and fade, and if he doesn't escape, he will be utterly destroyed in a short time. Why this happens is a matter of much debate among the *hsien*.

Ties with Mortals and Nature: The *Shinma* have existed since the dawn of time. When they were the free and beloved servitors of the spirit realms, many helped create the Middle Kingdom itself, including the humans, animals and nature. For this reason, they are inexorably tied to mortals and the elements. Such bonds have strengthened over the years, with the human's knowledge of the *Tao*, and weakened with the advance of technology.

Dragon's Nests and Dragon Lines: The *Shinma* don't have balefires and trods; instead, they have dragon nests and dragon lines, which are sources of either Yin Chi or Yang Chi.

Kamuii

The *kamuii* are the elemental nobles of the *Shinma*; each has a strong connection with one of the five Chinese elements. *Kamuii kwannon-jin* include the *chu-ih-yo* (metal), the *chu jung* (fire), the *hou-chi* (wood), the *komuko* (earth) and the *suijen* (water). *Kamuii* use their formidable powers to safeguard nature and protect mystic places sacred to their element. They also act as protectors and arbiters among the *hsien*. Most *kamuii* have little direct involvement in human affairs, a distinct disadvantage in a world teeming with mortals.

Hirayanu

The *hirayanu* are the commoners of the *Shinma*, though they have little understanding of that term as it is used in the West, since no similar feudal system exists in the East. The *hirayanu* undertake dangerous and daring quests, give aid to humans, and act as spies and messengers for the *kamuii*. They have much more interaction with mortals and are useful allies. The *hirayanu* can also take the forms of certain animals; *hirayanu kwannon-jin* include *fu hsi* (serpents), *hanumen* (monkeys), *heng po* (fish), *nyan* (cats) and *tanuki* (badgers). Others exist, but these are by far the most common.

How to Use This Book

Each portion of *Land of Eight Million Dreams* describes a particular piece necessary to run a chronicle with *hsien* player characters. A wise Storyteller will invest time in becoming familiar with the many new *kwannon-jin*, *Wu Tan* rules and *Shinma* societies, perhaps creating some sample characters, since the system is significantly different from *Changeling: The Dreaming*.

Chapter One discusses the complex history of the *Shinma*. It also offers specifics about the provinces, government and societies of the *hsien*. This information provides a rich and exciting backdrop for the Storyteller and players to stage their chronicle.

Chapter Two explores the rich setting of China. Complementary to **Chapter One**, this material describes the Land of Eight Million Dreams, including geography and people.

Chapter Three details the individual *Shinma*, both *kamuii* and *hirayanu*. Each *kwannon-jin* has its own story to tell, including goals, beliefs and shortcomings.

Chapter Four explains character creation. Here, players and the Storyteller will discover tools to build *hirayanu* and *kamuii* from scratch.

Chapter Five illustrates the *hsien's* *Wu Tan* magic. This powerful elemental alchemy makes the *Shinma* excellent companions — or intimidating foes.

Chapter Six reviews the various system elements necessary to run the game. Here, the Storyteller will find information on other *shen*, spirits and on how to use experience points.

Finally, **Chapter Seven** offers suggestions for putting together a *hsien* chronicle, including plotting tips, story seeds and hints on using *shen* as enemies and allies.

Theme

The ancient heritage of the Shinma is to assist the August Personage and his servants in all things, and to protect mortals and nature. The *hirayanu* traditionally served the *kamuii*, the lords of the spirit world, and tended to the needs of worthy humans; they were messengers and questing emissaries. The *kamuii* protected sacred places of the elements and also acted as judges and arbiters for all *hsien*. Even though the Shinma are trapped in the Middle Kingdom, their goals haven't changed. Some Shinma believe that their presence here is a test of their mission to serve the August Personage and protect mortals and nature, and that only when they prove their ability to fulfill their destinies will they once more be welcomed in the spirit world. Others believe that discovery of balance or completion of quests for self-understanding are the keys to ending their Earthly exile.

Good Books

First of all, if you don't already own a copy of **Kindred of the East**, go immediately and get one. This tome of wisdom has many suggestions for running a game set in the East. Check out pages 16-17, in particular, for movies and books to provide inspiration.

Additionally, you may find the following books helpful for getting the theme and mood of a *hsien* chronicle just right:

Anything by Amy Tan, including *The Kitchen God's Wife*, *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *The Joy Luck Club*. (The movie is also excellent.) Tan's stories are full of references by mortals to *hsien*-like beings.

Five Thousand Years of Chinese Costume by Zhou Xun and Gao Chunming. This beautiful book will give you lots of ideas about Chinese dress and ornament. It has excellent drawings and photographs.

"The Stone Lion" and Other Chinese Detective Stories: The Wisdom of Lord Bau by Yin-lien C. Chin, Yetta S. Center and Mildred Ross. Set in the Sung Dynasty, some of the mysteries in these tales make great story seeds.

Monkey: A Journey to the West retold by David Kherdian. Many versions of the monkey's story exist; this is an excellent edition.

A History of Chinese Civilization by Jacques Gernet. While definitely written for the serious scholar, this book is a nice blend of Chinese history and philosophy.

Bridge of Birds by Barry Huchart. A wonderful tale of a China that never was, but should have been.

Mood

The Shinma are perplexing and enigmatic. Some have minimal concern for the rest of the world and are content to guard their sacred lands and deal as little with the outside world as possible. Others are extremely social with other *shen* and mortals. *Hsien* rarely act like anyone expects. When setting the mood for interactions with *hsien*, the Storyteller should cultivate an air of mystery and whimsy. Most Shinma are essentially beneficent creatures, but rarely do they ever let their true intentions show to others.

Lexicon

Most of the Shinma's terms are Chinese in origin. With the spread of cultural knowledge through modern communication, some crossover has occurred with Japanese words. The *tanuki*, originally a Japanese *kwannon-jin*, have long migrated into China, bringing along certain influences from their homeland.

August Personage of Jade — The ruler of Heaven, who is apparently silent and inactive.

Charms — Magical powers possessed by spirits.

Chi — The positive and negative energies that flow through the Ten Thousand Things. Similar to Glamour and Banality.

Chi'n Ta — Mages.

Chu-ih-yo — *Kamuii kwannon-jin* attuned to metal.

Chu Jung — *Kamuii kwannon-jin* attuned to fire.

Courts — The political, religious and social groups of *hsien* society.

Di Fu — Ministry of Earth.

Di Shen — Earth elemental.

Di Tan — "Earth alchemy."

Dragon Line — A trod; a line of Chi energy that connects the Middle Kingdom with the spirit worlds, and that links dragon nests.

Dragon Nest — The Eastern equivalent to a balefire, node or caern; a mystic site with ties to the spirit worlds.

Dzi Dzat — "Folded paper" sacrifices used to appease ancestors; *hsien* use these for working I Chih.

Elements — Water (*shui*), earth (*di*), metal (*tieh*), wood (*lin*) and fire (*hou*). Each is traditionally associated with a color, season, direction and aspect of Yin or Yang.

Fang Shih — Practitioners of feng shui.

Feng — Phoenixes, powerful entities who impart dictates of the August Personage of Jade.

Feng Shui — Often labeled geomancy, it is concerned with the flow of Chi in and around human dwellings.

Fortunes — Certain factors that influence *hsien* magic, *Wu Tan*. Each *kwannon-jin* has an elemental Fortune (earth, fire, wood, water or metal).

Fu — "Ministry." Another word for the *Li Shen*.

Fu Hsi — *Hirayanu* snake *kwannon-jin*.

Guan — A bureaucrat, one of low rank in the Li Shen. A guan may have influence over a small town.

Haap — Equal to rank of knight or baronet, one of lowest titled rank in the Yü. A haap often has power over a small group of Yü.

Hanumen — Hirayanu monkey kwannon-jin.

Heng Po — Hirayanu fish kwannon-jin.

Hengeyokai — Shapeshifters, the Changing Breeds.

Hirayanu — The animalistic "commoners" of the *hsien*.

Hotei — The human form of a Shinma.

Hou-chi — Kamuii kwannon-jin attuned to wood.

Hou Fu — Ministry of fire.

Hou Shen — Fire elemental.

Hou Tan — "Fire alchemy."

Hsien — The Eastern changelings. Spirits dwelling in human shells.

Hsien-jin — The name Shinma give themselves when they enter an adult body during *kun shou*.

Hsien-tsu — The name Shinma give themselves when they enter a child's body during *kun shou*.

Hui T'ung — A "social unity group," or in Western terms, a motley of *hsien*.

Hwang Sheh — Courts, the political arenas of the Shinma.

I Chih — "Righteous Judgments," similar to Kithain cantrips.

Jade — When attuned, jade becomes a living substance capable of holding Yin Chi and Yang Chi. Different colors of jade have various properties.

Jimu-Tenno — Spirits who go between the Celestial Courts and the Middle Kingdoms.

Kamuii — The elemental "nobles" of the *hsien*.

Komoku — Kamuii kwannon-jin attuned to earth.

Kuan — Equivalent to the rank of count. A position of moderate importance in the Yü. They have influence over cities, districts or counties.

Kuei-jin — An Asian vampire.

Kung — Equivalent to the rank of duke, a high office in the Yü. Kung have influence over prefectures, large cities or minor provinces.

Kun Shou — The process by which a *hsien* acquires a human body.

Kwannon-jin — The various kith of the Shinma, such as hanumen or *chu-jung*.

Lin Fu — Ministry of Wood.

Lin Shen — Wood elemental.

Lin Tan — "Wood alchemy."

Li Shen — The "Ceremony Gods." Traditionalists in Shinma society.

Mandarin — One of the Ten Yü, a king among Shinma. A mandarin controls a major province of the Middle Kingdom.

Mask of Shintai — Mask of the God-body; Shinma use this power to appear quite terrifying.

Middle Kingdom — Asia and its environs; sometimes used to describe all Earth.

Mikado — Powerful spirits of the Celestial Courts.

Mirror Lands — The spiritual reflection of the Middle Kingdom; the first spirit world usually encountered.

Mu Courts — Shinma who live outside *hsien* society; these include the Daitya who want to break the walls between the Spirit Lands and the Middle Kingdom, and the Kura Sau, allies of the Yama Kings.

Mu-jen — Tungwood "voodoo dolls." *Hsien* can use each doll one time only when working I Chih.

Naam — Equal to rank of baron; a naam has influence over a town.

Nei Tan — "Internal alchemy," Taoist magic of the *hsien*.

Nyan — Hirayanu cat kwannon-jin.

Pakua — A Chinese luck symbol; the ability of *hsien* to avoid notice of other *shen* or nosy mortals.

Rank — In ancient times, rank was the sole measure of a *hsien*'s social standing, and it still has some sway in the various Hwang Sheh. Rank, like maximum Yugen, is the sum of a character's Yin and Yang scores.

Realm — A pocket reality within one of the "worlds."

Shen — Term encompassing all supernatural and Awakened creatures.

Shinma — The proper name for the *hsien*; Eastern term for Kithain.

Shui Fu — Ministry of Water.

Shui Shen — Water elemental.

Shui Tan — "Water alchemy."

Shu Shen — The "Profane Gods," the dissolute in Shinma society.

Slumber — A trance-like state that many spirits fall into in the spirit worlds. It resembles hibernation rather than sleep.

Suijen — Kamuii kwannon-jin attuned to water.

Tanuki — Hirayanu badger kwannon-jin.

Tao Te Hsien — The wisdom of a priest named Hou Ti as relayed to Hanumen, then written down by T'u, komoku guardian of the Library of Earth. The Tao Te Hsien is both philosophy and magic, a means by which some Shinma believe they may return to the spirit worlds.

The Ten Thousand Things — All the people, places and things in Heaven and Earth; the Tellurian.

Tieh Fu — Ministry of metals.

Tieh Shen — Metal elemental.

Tieh Tan — "Metal alchemy."

Tu-di — Patron, the lowest rank in the Li Shen.

Tu Shen — The "Gods of Harmony," fanatics seeking the Age of Joy.

Waigoren — Chinese term for foreigners, Westerners, outsiders.

Wall — The barrier separating the spirit worlds from the Middle Kingdom.

Wani — The *hsien*'s true form, often awesome and terrible. Wani are also the rare Dragons who serve the August Personage of Jade.

Wan Xian — Ten Thousand Immortals; guardians who became Kuei-jin.

Wong — Equal to rank of king.

Wu Hsien — The "Family of *Hsien*," the majority of Shinma society.

Wu Tan — The alchemical and elemental magic of the *hsien*.

Xian Hsien — "Immortal *hsien*." *Hsien* who have mastered the Tao Te Hsien.

Xian Mo — The "Immortal Spirits," contemplative mystics of Shinma society.

Xian Mun — The "Immortal Society," Shinma who are closer to their human lives and interests.

Xuicai — Professor, a medium rank in the Li Shen. A xuicai has influence over a city, district or county.

Xunfu — Magistrate, a high position in the Li Shen. A xunfu has influence over a prefecture, huge city or minor province.

Yama Kings — Powerful demons.

Yang — That which is light, active, hot, dry, beneficent, positive, offensive or male.

Yang Worlds — The home realm of the *hsien*; it includes the Heavens and the Elemental realms.

Yellow Lotus — A powerful secret society among the Shinma.

Yin — That which is dark, passive, cold, moist, malignant, negative, defensive or female.

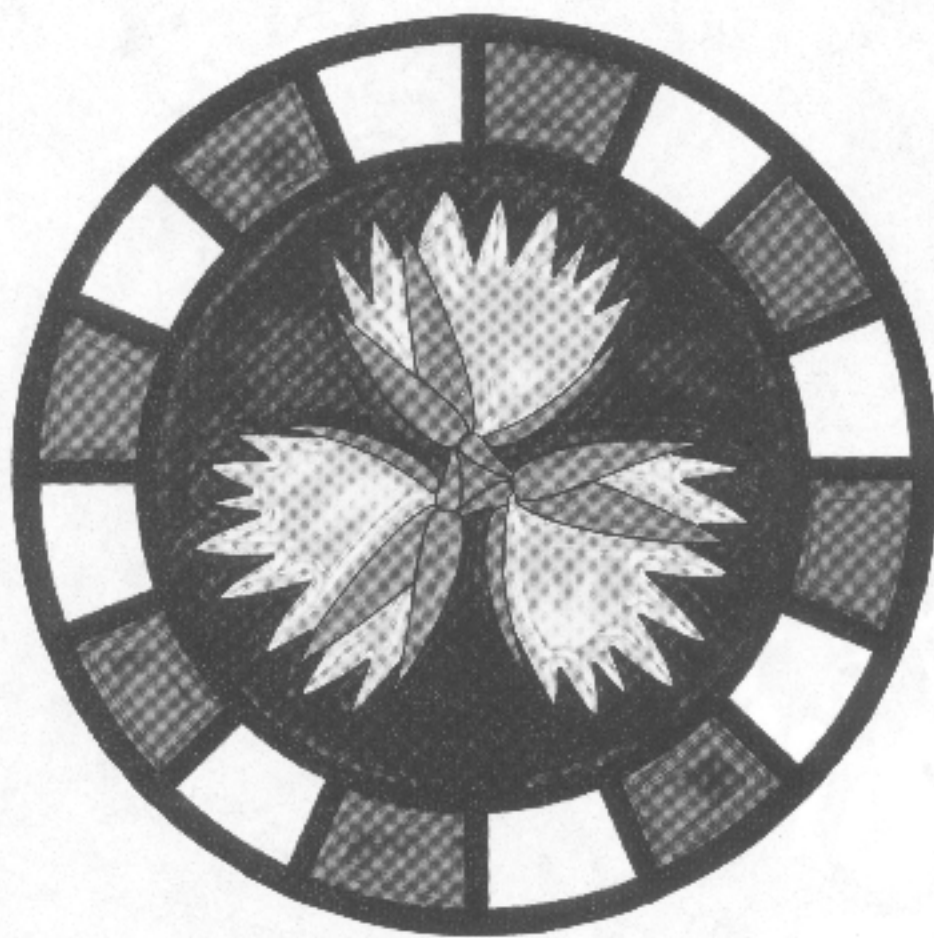
Yin Worlds — The home of the dead; the "lower" worlds. Even in ancient times, few *hsien* journeyed here.

Yomi Worlds — These realms are the hells, even lower than the Yin Worlds. These are the homes of the Yama Kings.

Yü — The "Great Ten," the ambitious warlords of the Shinma patterned after prehistoric kings.

Yugen — Undifferentiated Chi; may be either Yin or Yang.

Zongdu — A governor or viceroy, the leader of a ministry. Zongdu have influence over major provinces or govern states.





CHAPTER ONE: THE DUTIES OF THE GODS

*The Dragon Kings are our rulers.
We go where they command
We follow their orders and in turn
They grant us immortality.
We are the children of the gods
We are the servants of the faithful
We are the Guardians of the Wheel of Fate
We are the past brought forth to save the future.
We walk where few dare go freely
We summon the Elements to do our bidding
We carry the burden left us by the failed Wan Xian
We Work toward preserving all that is still right with the world.
We are the hsien
We are the servants of the Mikado
We are the followers of Dragons
The Protectors of the Middle Kingdom
We are both cursed and blessed
Do not forget your past
Do not surrender your future
We will be free when the time is come
— From the Dictates of Hanuman to the rest of the Monkey Kings*



In a time more ancient than even most of the immortals' memories, the Middle Kingdom was one with the Yin World, the Yang World and even the Yomi World. That time is past and the hsien carry the burdens caused by its passing.

In a time when most of the world has forgotten itself, there is one place where people still accept and believe with every fiber of their being in the gods that once walked among mortals. That place is the Middle Kingdom, known by most as Asia, or rather, it is parts of Asia where the past beliefs and the modern world have managed a certain harmony of coexistence.

The Middle Kingdom comprises all of China, Tibet, both Koreas, Japan and a dozen neighboring countries. In these locations, there are traditions running back over the millennia, altered but not forgotten. There is history and a sense of stability that simply does not exist elsewhere in the world. The governments of these places come and go, changing as quickly as the seasons, rising and falling in bloodshed and raging as they do elsewhere, but the people who dwell in these places — in the Middle Kingdom — continue on as they always have, refusing to forget where they came from, regardless of official mandates and laws.

The Middle Kingdom is a place separated from the rest of the World of Darkness not only by location, but by belief and acceptance. While most of the world lives in willful ignorance of the darker truths (the existence of vampires and werewolves, the hidden societies of mages, and societies of the Dead that have grown throughout the world), the Middle Kingdom and the people who live there still acknowledge and accept that there are forces beyond the understanding of humanity.

The Middle Kingdom still holds wonders and horrors that were long abandoned elsewhere. Gods still answer prayers; demons still haunt and torment the unwary. The Dead are accepted for what they are, and many grant them places of honor within their homes. The werewolves and others of the *hengeyokai* — the Changing Breeds — are known and given the respect they deserve, except by the most foolish of individuals. The vampires, the Cathayans, still feed on mortals and rule in shadowy courts where only the bravest dare confront them. Demon hunters still seek to stop the evils of the *shen*.

And the *hsien* still follow the Mandates of Heaven, serving as protectors of the Middle Kingdom's most sacred places and doing all they can to ensure that humans always believe in the truths hidden from the rest of the world.

The Hsien

The *hsien* are very different from their Western counterparts. They don't need dreams to exist. The wrong frame of mind does not separate them from their ability to exist, and they are not born of human stock. For the most part, they can't travel to the Dreaming, though they know it exists. They seldom gather in anything resembling a freehold, and they are even less likely to care what their "lords" think than even the most rebellious of the Unseelie.

The *hsien* are real. They are a part of the Middle Kingdom as surely as the rains from the ocean are carried by the wind.

They are the servants of the Dragons, the last solid link between the Middle Kingdom and the other worlds beyond the dragon's nests.

The *hsien* are gods, albeit minor ones, and they are capable of more than the Western *fae* could ever hope to achieve. They are immortal, and they have the power to carry out the Mandates of the August Personage of Jade, a task that their predecessors failed to achieve.

The Cycles of the Middle Kingdom

The Great Cycle of Being, also simply called the Wheel of Fate, is a concept shared by all of the *shen* in one form or another. It is a guideline of where the Middle Kingdom now stands, and an idea of how long it will continue to exist. It is also a point of great contention between most of the *shen*, who simply cannot agree as to where on the Great Cycle they now exist.

The Wan Xian — the 10,000 Immortals, were the first to follow a belief in the Great Cycle of Being. They were also the first guardians of the world chosen by the August Personage of Jade; they were considered right in their assumptions. Disagreements came later, after the Age of Beautiful Sadness.

The Age of Perfection

In this age, even the Heavens and Hells were not separated yet. The universe was in a state of spiritual perfection that has never been achieved again.

The *hsien* know and understand that their goal is to achieve the same level of perfection as the August Personage of Jade. They also understand that they aren't very likely to manage this feat anytime soon, though a few have succeeded over the centuries.

It is this lack of perfection in most beings that has brought about the current dilemmas facing the *shen*, but the *hsien*, like most of the supernatural beings in the Middle Kingdom, accept only their individual portion of the blame. Each must find his or her own way back to the enlightened ways of the Age of Heaven.

The Age of Beauty

The Age of Beauty, also called the Second Age, was the true start of the Great Cycle. The August Personage of Jade, already having achieved Perfection, decided the time had come to create other worlds and other forms of life. His intention was to rule over these worlds in a beneficial way, and for a great span of time he succeeded. The August Personage of Jade created many worlds, some he chose to leave to their own devices and others he chose to tend very carefully. His greatest division of power was the separation of Male and Female. The Dragons, the male aspects of the universal equation, and the Phoenixes, the female aspects, each took control over one half of the universe as a whole.





The greatest of the Dragons, called the Ebon Dragon by the Wan Xian, and the greatest of the Phoenixes, called the Scarlet Queen, were created with a powerful love of each other, a natural harmony that exists even to this day. When this division had taken place, the August Personage began giving separate tasks to each and certain tasks that both would oversee to ensure that universal harmony was a possibility. The Middle Kingdom became the domain of the both, with the Phoenixes in charge all things Yin and the Dragons in charge of all things Yang.

His first choice resulted in the separation of the spiritual world from the physical world. In this decision, some claim the beginning of the end started, a part of the August Personage's plans to end what he started. The *hsien* believe otherwise. They believe that in order to give every created thing a chance to achieve perfection, everything was created flawed, but salvageable.

During the Age of Beauty, the *hsien* were created as observers and messengers, their duties were simply to watch over the rest of creation and report back to the Chi-Ling, the great spirits who answered directly to the Dragons and the Phoenixes who, in turn, answered directly to the August Personage of Jade. From the time of their creation, they were meant to be simply minor officials. They had a second duty, one that they continue to this day: The *hsien* were given the task of answering prayers.

For all the tasks placed before the Dragons and the Phoenixes, it was inevitable that a few mistakes would occur. Like the universe they were given charge over, they were no longer perfect. Some of the August Personage of Jade's creations slipped away before they could be properly trained and taught how to follow the Mandates of Heaven. Over the course of time, they became perverted mockeries of what they were supposed to be, and they were given new names. They became the monsters and the demons that haunt the Middle Kingdom even to this day.

The August Personage of Jade ordered that his chosen servants be allowed to live without need of food, and to aid in this requirement, he allowed all of them to feed on Chi, the elemental life force of the universe. Knowing that there would always be times when Chi would be harder to come by, the August personage gave of Himself, creating the powerful jade that stores Chi for a later time. Some claim he gave too much of himself, for there are many among the *shen* who covet all colors of jade, seeking to take its power and hoard it as a treasure.

A greater task, one that required much more diligence, fell to the Wan Xian, the 10,000 Immortals chosen by the August Personage of Jade. Their sacred duty was to watch over all of humanity, to aid their lesser brethren along the way to spiritual enlightenment. Along the same course, the task of maintaining nature went to the *hsien*, who were to protect the Five Elements from abuse by humanity.

For a time, all went according to the August Personage's plans. That time is called the Age of Legends, for all in the universe was as it was meant to be.

Answering Prayers

How then will we answer the prayers of those who ask for the Heavens intervention?

That will depend on the nature of the request and the nature of the individual who asks us for Celestial Favor.

— The Great Dragon, Kung Kung, in response to a question from Yo Ti Ming, one of the Wu Hsien

The hsien have always had the task of answering the prayers of mortals. This is not as simple as it might first appear. When a denizen of the Middle Kingdom made a prayer, the hsien had to report this request for Celestial Assistance to the Chi Ling, who in turn had to report to the Dragons. The Dragons then decided how the prayer should be answered, or in rare cases, placed the question before the August Personage on Jade for his final say in the matter. Then the entire process was reversed, leaving the hsien to act on the decisions of their superiors.

Since the time of the Maha Kala, when the first barriers between the Middle Kingdom and the Yin and Yang Worlds were created, the job has changed and evolved. The Chi Ling seldom show themselves except to express the newest Mandates of Heaven for the kamuii to interpret. The hsien have gradually taken to answering prayers more directly rather than waiting for orders from above.

The Nature of Answering Prayers

Prayers are not commands, nor are they always wishes. They are a request for Celestial Intervention in otherwise mundane situations. Prayers can range from requesting a woman be made to love a particular man, that a favored uncle be spared from the disease that is devouring his body and mind, or a request for rains when the air has been too dry and the crops of the farmers in a province below are suffering as a result.

Prayers can be both requests for favors and requests for revenge. There are over 2,000,000,000 people in the Middle Kingdom, and most make prayers regularly. The political climate in China is unsettled and dangerous at the present time. Tibet suffers as a result of the population's unrest and China seeks to rule over the Tibetan people, often resulting to torture and murder to gain their means. Natural disasters, those created by the hsien and those that simply occur, cause grief for mortals regularly, from the raging tsunamis that wreak the coasts of the Middle Kingdom to the earthquakes that level vast areas. There are prayers regarding all of these things, and the hsien must respond to those prayers, for that is their sacred duty and their first priority since the time of their creation.

Most importantly, while the hsien must answer all prayers, those from humans and those from animals and plants as well, the responses they give are not always favorable. Sometimes, despite whatever good intentions a person might have, the hsien must respond with a simple, quiet "no."

The Chi Ling still give intervention in cases of great importance. The hsien continue their work as messengers for the greater Celestial beings, though the method of delivering the messages has changed and will continue change as the barrier between the worlds grow ever stronger.

In the Middle Kingdom, the mortals understand what only a few people in other lands have ever understood: The gods exist, but they are not always on the side of the individual who makes a request. This is not a deliberate callousness; it is simply the way of the gods.



The Age of Legends

The Age of Legends was a time of perfection, at first. This era, also called the Third Age, was meant to last forever, according to some and, perhaps, it would have if not for the demons and monsters.

The Yama Kings

The demons created their own ways and their own societies, hidden from the August Personage of Jade and distorted by the perverse beliefs of its minions.

The demons chose great leaders from among themselves, demons of vast power and influence. Most call them the Yama Kings.

The Yama Kings were so powerful and so influential, that they managed to convince the Great Dragon, Kung Kung, that it was the August Personage's will that the Middle Kingdom be destroyed. Never one to question the August Personage's desires, Kung Kung knocked down the Pillars of Heaven and brought a great flood upon the world. Fortunately, the Hsien learned of his folly before it was too late, and managed to stop the flood from extinguishing all life. Kung Kung was so shamed by his foolishness that he left Heaven and took up residence in the Kun Lun Mountains, where he hoped to never cause trouble again.

The Yama Kings loathed all that was in balance and all that sought perfection. They chose instead to follow their own whims, taking what they could by force and destroying whatever offended them.

The Wan Xian, the protectors of humanity, were given the task of fighting these vile creatures. During the Age of Legends, they accomplished their tasks with honor and the nobility they were created to help others achieve. They led with wisdom and compassion.

Jade, just like Chi, was everywhere, but sometimes the battles took more from them than could easily be replenished. They were forced to steal Chi, the very life force, from their enemies in certain circumstances, merely to survive a battle, and to win at any cost. In doing so, they stole what had been granted by the August Personage.

Perhaps the Chi they stole from the demons caused the first problems. Perhaps the Yama Kings were responsible for what happened as the Age of Legends ended, or perhaps the Wan Xian simply grew too full of their importance and fell from their assigned tasks. Whatever the case, the Wan Xian became corrupted, they started falling from the Mandates of Heaven, claiming that they were not mere servants, but the rulers of Heaven itself. They turned their backs on the August Personage, all the while gathering as much jade as they could in an effort to keep themselves powerful. Worse still, they began looking upon their charges not as a duty, but as a source of power and food.

Then the Wan Xian did the unthinkable; they began feeding on the life forces of those they were meant to guide. This was a gradual process. The Wan Xian changed slowly, becoming



more arrogant, and bolder in their actions. In time, they held sway over most of the Middle Kingdom, setting themselves up as gods, claiming domain over entire regions and forcing their will on the mortals who looked to them for protection. If a woman struck the fancy of a Wan Xian, she was forced to join with him. If a piece of land looked particularly appealing, the Wan Xian took it by force and claimed it as his own. Many even demanded sacrifices be made to them in order to avoid their wrath.

Ironically, at the very same time, the Wan Xian created some of their greatest works, writing down the secrets of the Heavens and the Hells and devising new methods of exploiting those secrets for their own benefit. The Dragons and the Phoenixes alike were appalled, but there was nothing to be done about the situation, for the Wan Xian managed their greatest blasphemy before the August Personage of Jade could order them punished. They allied themselves with the Yama Kings.

The Age of Beautiful Sadness

The Age Beautiful Sadness, also called the Fourth Age, began in corruption and bloodshed. The Wan Xian, the very creatures chosen to guide humanity and charged with protecting the world from the monsters and demons, gathered great armies together and began a crusade to rule over all of the Middle Kingdom, even those areas under the protection of the *hsien*.

The manipulations of the Wan Xian, taught so well by the Yama Kings, were grand and sweeping. Their power was so great that they even managed to force the *hsien* into battle with one another. Many of the *hsien* felt the time had come to step in and take the place of the Wan Xian, working to protect the humans as well as the animals that were their charges. Others felt that the humans were doomed, and that aiding them in any way would simply work to doom everything. The battles that raged under the Wan Xian's rule were mirrored in the Heavens, where the *hsien* fought amongst themselves for control over what should be done.

During this time, the Middle Kingdom fell into chaos, and the Yama Kings almost managed to seize control over everything. In certain areas, the mortals refused to bow to the Wan Xian, fighting back and often getting help from the *hsien*. Enraged by this action, the Wan Xian turned to their new allies among the Yama Kings and made a pact that would later seal their fate. In exchange for the Yama Kings' help in destroying their enemies, the Wan Xian vowed to abandon the Mandates of Heaven completely, never again to cause harm in the name of the August Personage of Jade.

The Yama Kings agreed, and used their great powers to create nine new suns in the heavens. The heat from the suns was incredible, enough to cause villages to burn and to wither crops across much of the land. Rivers dried up and portions of the oceans boiled. The *hsien* did all they could to diminish the damage, summoning storms of cataclysmic proportions and bringing clouds to hide the terrible light of the 10 suns. But everything they tried was useless; the clouds evaporated, leaving

the land to burn and the rain from the storms only eased the burden slightly before the waters they brought with them disappeared.

In the end, it was one mortal, Yi the Excellent Archer, and one Dragon, the Great Kung Kung, who ended the war and destroyed all but the original Sun in the Heavens. The Excellent Archer shot down the nine false suns and Kung Kung summoned a Dragon Storm to cool the blistered Earth. Then the true battle began and the Wan Xian felt the wrath of the mortals and the other *shen* alike.

Yi and his Celestial Army aided the rising Chou Dynasty in creating the first true empire in China. The cost to Yi was high and not long after the war ended, so too did the life of the Excellent Archer. For him, at least, the battle was over. There are still a dedicated few who follow his doctrines, even now, over 3,000 years later.

For the Wan Xian and the *hsien*, the time of punishment finally came. Kung Kung spoke to the other Dragons, and they, in turn, gathered together to make a plea for aid from their creator. The August Personage of Jade listened to their requests and responded. He turned from his studies of the Heavens and made corrections to the problems at hand. For the Wan Xian, the punishment for abandoning their Heavenly duties was the loss of all their false power. They were cast from their thrones and scattered across the Five Directions. The August Personage took from his failed servants the ability to feed on any Chi but that which they stole from others, a fitting punishment for their endless greed. What was once given freely was now only theirs if they took it by force. He also reinforced the punishing curses of Yi, and stole from them the ability to walk freely in the light of the Sun they had so misused. Lastly, he took from the Wan Xian the ability to breathe, making their godlike bodies deathly pale, and far weaker than they had been. Their great dreams of empirical rule were shattered and for many years the remaining Wan Xian hid in the shadows, afraid to be seen by anyone who would remember what they had once been.

The *hsien* were made to suffer as well, both those who refused to aid the humans and those who decided on their own to take the place of the Wan Xian. The great animal spirits who had once been in charge of the forests and oceans were allowed to keep their charges, but as a lesson of humility, they were forced into mortal bodies. They became *hengeyokai*, the Changing Breeds. Where once they could choose to imitate humans, now they were forced to live among mortals a part of the human race, but always separated by their differences. While they could still visit the Heavens, they were forced to endure in the Middle Kingdom as well, captured in forms of flesh and bone.

The other *hsien*, those who dared wage war in the Heavens and try to usurp the power of the Wan Xian were cast down from the Celestial Palace and forced to live in the Middle Kingdom. As further punishment, they were made to continue in their previous tasks and given the duties of the Wan Xian as well. They were granted immortality of a sort. For as long as they could protect their forms, they could continue on. If their forms were destroyed, only then could they again visit the Heavens,



where the Dragons would judge them. If they were found wanting, they would again be cast down from the Celestial Palace and forced to live in the Middle Kingdom, in a new body and in a new place.

And so it came to pass that the *hsien* and the Wan Xian became bitter enemies. The *hsien*, the very beings who once walked the Middle Kingdom as minor gods, above and apart from their charges, were placed among the very people they were charged to protect, and lost the rights to move freely between Earth and the Heavens.

The punishments were just, but harsh, and prevented the *hsien* from ever falling to the same degree as the Wan Xian. Given only short spans of time in the Middle Kingdom — the only exceptions being those who kept their place and performed their duties properly — they could never grow as arrogant or foolish as their predecessors. Between their cycles on the Earth, the *hsien* would be judged in the Heavens and placed again in the Middle Kingdom in positions that best suited their drive for spiritual perfection.

The Age of Beautiful Sadness marked a great change for the *hsien*, one from which they realized they might never recover. Despite being trapped in solid, physical forms, they were still spirits of Yin or Yang. In many ways, they were almost powerless in comparison to what they had once been.

Still, some things remained the same, especially the hierarchy of order they followed. The Earth-bound *hsien* still listened to the Dragons and obeyed. They still worked as the messengers of the gods, and they continued to answer prayers. Even within their own ranks there was a certain hierarchy. The *kamuii*, the great elementals, still worked to oversee their domains, and the *hirayanu*, the animal spirits, still kept reign over nature's charges — at least in theory. The war and the Celestial Punishments placed on the *hsien* had certain side effects that were almost inevitable. The original power to command the *hirayanu* was gone, though both groups understood that the chain of command as they'd always followed still made the most sense.

In short, the *kamuii* had to ask nicely if they wanted the *hirayanu* to obey them. For their part, the *hirayanu* still listened, but they made certain demands. The demands varied depending on the assignment the *kamuii* wished to send the *hirayanu* on, but mostly the demands were for more Chi, without which, the bodies of the *hsien* began to unravel.

The *hsien*, completely comprised of Chi, learned very quickly that they were vulnerable to attacks by Kuei-jin and other creatures that wanted their life energies. Having no real shell to protect themselves, they were often destroyed very quickly, despite their still impressive powers.

Though all agreed that the August Personage of Jade was just in his punishments, they began to fear that a grievous error had been committed against them. They could not properly defend themselves from the other forces in the Middle Kingdom, and several of those forces were greedy for the power contained in the *hsien*'s forms. Some died quickly, others went insane, and others still turned to the Yama Kings for protection, feeling they'd been abandoned by the Celestial Court.

Despite the Mandates of Heaven, the *hsien* began to war among themselves, ignoring their charges and trying desperately to survive in a world that was far too hostile. They would have surely died out completely, if not for one of their own whom defied the Mandates for the good of all. At least that's how he likes to tell the tale.

The Gift of the Chien

Unlike the Wan Xian now called the Wan Kuei — the Ten Thousand Demons — or the Kuei-jin, the *hsien* were not forced to reinhabit the bodies of the dead. Instead, they were granted the Gift of the Chien. The Gift of the Chien allows the *hsien* to take a new body, that of a mortal who is near death or in the process of dying. In most cases, the bodies they assume come with a full set of memories and even all of the identification needed to pass as that person. Therefore, a *hsien* who is freshly reborn in the Middle Kingdom comes complete with a past and the memories to live the life of the person they are mirroring if they so desire. However, they bear no memories of their past experiences as a *hsien*. They know what they are; they know their reason for existing, but they lack the knowledge of what they have done before they were reborn. Only a few can access past memories through meditation and by practicing certain mental exercises. For most, the only past they have access to is the past of someone who is dead or dying.

Complications arise from time to time, far more often now than in the past. Once a body is chosen, there is no turning back for the *hsien*. The body they mirror is the one in which they are stuck, complete with its own memories and connections to the mortal world. In the past, that was seldom a difficulty, but with the advances of modern medicine, the bodies they mirror sometimes come back from the brink of death. In such cases, the *hsien* is stuck with a full set of memories, connections to a family and friends, and no ability to use these assets. It would be wrong to steal a life from someone who remains living, and only the vilest of creatures would attempt to do so. For the *hsien*, the idea is reprehensible.

The other major complication comes from humans dying in places where others witness their deaths. Very few humans readily accept seeing their beloved mother return home only hours or days after they gave her a proper funeral. While much of the Middle Kingdom accepts the supernatural with ease, there are exceptions to every rule. Coming back from the dead is often one of those sensitive areas most mortals would rather not deal with.

Remarkably few *hsien* ever live out the lives they've mirrored. Instead, they move on to other areas and start anew, keeping only the name of the person they've become. This, too, is in keeping with the faiths of most of the Middle Kingdom, where more than one person has reported running across the spirit of a departed relative or friend who has been given the task of guarding a river or lake or a certain region. This helps foster the beliefs that are so strong in the Middle Kingdom, and so essential to the *hsien*.



Hanuman was one of the Monkey Kings. Like all of his kind, he was irreverent, audacious, often obnoxious, and curious to a fault. He was also opinionated, determined to do only what he had to do to avoid the wrath of the Dragons, and sorely displeased by the punishments laid upon all *hsien* and himself in particular.

Having decided that he preferred living a life of ease to working for the *kamuii*, Hanuman chose to stay on the mountain where he experienced his second mirroring — having quickly lost his first life after urinating on one of the Yama Kings. He wanted nothing to do with any of his responsibilities, at least until he could solve the puzzle of why he was trapped in a form that made no sense: a form that was made for battle, yet couldn't stand against most of the other *shen*.

There came a day when Hanuman met a mortal priest, a wise man named Hou Ti. Hou Ti was traveling through the mountains, seeking wisdom and knowledge. Sadly for him, a Kuei-jin was seeking food and entertainment. Hou Ti was wise, but he was not a warrior. The demon fell upon him and would surely have killed the monk if Hanuman hadn't decided to intervene.

Hanuman killed the Kuei-jin, not because it was his duty to protect the monk — which it was though he refused to admit it — but because the Kuei-jin was responsible for his current predicament. If the Cathayan had only done his duties as the August Personage of Jade had demanded, Hanuman could have continued on minding his own business, never ending up stuck in a body that refused to work properly. Hanuman did not like being inconvenienced, and made his point very clearly before lopping the head off his enemy.

Hou Ti was very grateful and prepared a meal for his new friend. While the two ate, Hanuman regaled the man with stories of his own bravery and explained the working of the universe to the man.

Along the way, the two became friends. They agree to travel together for a time, and between tales of Hanuman's craftiness and courage, Hou Ti told tales of the Taoist philosophies. For the first time in his long life, Hanuman did more than talk; he listened. He listened and he learned. Though they had many adventures together, Hanuman and Hou Ti eventually parted ways, but not before the Monkey King learned certain philosophies. One of these wisdoms gained by the Monkey King was simply that no creature should endeavor to be all Yin or all Yang. Only in a balance of the two could there be actual change and harmony of mind and body.

When this revelation came to Hanuman, he began to see that the great Wall placed between himself and the Heavens was not as solid as he'd thought. He came to understand that there are doorways in the Wall. With this wisdom came power. A jade key appeared on Hanuman's tail.

Had it been another of the *hsien*, all might have perished, for the fighting between factions had only grown much worse and many were suffering from the lack of proper defenses. On the other hand, others might have shared the information immediately instead of getting into trouble first.

Hanuman, finally able to enter the Heavens again, promptly went straight to the August Personage's Orchard and ate of the



Peaches of Immortality, the fruit saved only for the very wisest, whom the August Personage believed deserved an immortal life. The creator of the universe was understandably upset about what Hanuman did, but could not change the fact that Hanuman was now properly immortal. Still, he cast Hanuman back into the Middle Kingdom and considered the matter closed.

Had Hanuman not consumed the fruit, the knowledge he'd earned would have surely been lost. Instead, he retained all the secrets he'd learned and, being a Monkey King, promptly set about bragging of his great feats.

He told his tales to T'u, the Komoku Guardian of the Library of Earth — and to about a thousand others who could be bothered to listen. T'u, in his wisdom, wrote down the knowledge and began sharing the secrets of Tao with the other *hsien*.

Yin and Yang

The *hsien*, like all spirits, were originally comprised of Yin or Yang Chi, as the August Personage had planned all along. But because of Hanuman's trickery, the *hsien* learned to control the Chi, to start balancing the differences and, thus, protect themselves from the other *shen*.

Yin and Yang are opposites, created to counter and balance each other. The *hsien* (being either Yin or Yang entities) had no defenses against their counterparts. Before the *hsien* learned to create this balance within themselves, they were vulnerable to attacks by their opposites. Now even creatures of greater Yang have Yin as well, though seldom in a harmony that makes both forms of Chi equal within the form they take.

This has caused a few problems for the *hsien*, but has saved them from certain death as well. The biggest challenge they face is the same one that's haunted them since the August Personage decided to shift things around: Being made completely of very potent Chi has made them a target for the Kuei-jin and for the demons who simply like the idea of gobbling down as much Chi as they can get their hands, tentacles and talons on. Kuei-jin and Demons not only feed on Chi, but employ it in their mystical assaults; the unbalanced *hsien* were doubly vulnerable before Hanuman discovered the secret of surviving in their new home.

These days, the problem of being attacked still remains, but the *hsien* can better defend themselves as they can counter the Chi in which they were once vulnerable. The danger is still real, however, as the *hsien* are immortal, but not if their very life force is consumed. Death is nothing to fear in most cases, but any *hsien* absorbed as Chi by another supernatural can't regenerate that Chi; it's gone forever. Any *hsien* killed in this fashion is gone for all time.

Just to make matters worse, there are certain of their human-born brethren, the *hengeyokai*, who also know the secrets of devouring Chi in this way. Fortunately, only a few of the most vile are willing to kill a kindred spirit in this fashion.



T'u has long since ascended to perfection. Hanuman could be anywhere at all, though most likely he is still in great trouble. But the knowledge one gained and the other shared saved the *hsien* from certain doom and allowed them to continue in their quest to serve the Heavens.

The Age of Tribulation

The Fifth Age, also called the Age of Tribulation, is the current time we live in. The world has continued to change in ways that no one was ever prepared for, and in ways that threaten everything the *hsien* have struggled so long to achieve. Many among the *shen* believe the Fifth Age is the turning point, the time when all of the Middle Kingdom prepares itself for complete disaster.

The *hsien* disagree. This is the Age of Tribulation, when the *shen* must either prove themselves worthy or be destroyed utterly. The time is fast approaching when the lives that the *hsien* have been granted will run out. There will be no more reincarnations in the Sixth Age, but those who've proven themselves worthy will be rewarded with reentrance into the Celestial Court. There are factions who believe differently, but the majority agree that this is the time for the *hsien* to prove themselves and to obey the Mandates of Heaven as never before.

The Middle Kingdom is changing, being invaded by strangers from other lands, and by the creatures they bring with them. The "Children of Caine," who are at least as vulgar as the Kuei-jin, and the *hengeyokai* from other lands, fail to understand the Eastern ways and tend to offend more than they manage to befriend. There are also the strange *chi'n ta* who call themselves the "Five Metal Dragons," who work to destroy all that the *hsien* have managed to preserve, and are succeeding far too often. Then there are the Kithain, who believe they are related to the *hsien*, though they can't quite explain how. All of these and even stranger invaders have come to the Middle Kingdom in the Fifth Age, trying to change the ways of the East and corrupt them with their savage, soulless pursuits of physical wealth.

Small wonder that most are sneered upon by the *shen* in general and the *hsien* in particular. Where once the only mortal threat to the *hsien* was the Shih warriors, descendants of Yi the Excellent Archer and guardians of the mortals from the *shen*, now there is a growing threat from Strike Force Zero, a group determined to eradicate all of the *shen*, regardless of any crimes they may or may not have committed. The Shih punish only the guilty, working to enforce the Mandates of Heaven in their own way. Strike Force Zero seeks annihilation of all that is not mortal.

Demon hunters have a long tradition among mortals, but this new faction ignores the long established rules and does as it pleases without consideration of the consequences. They are a plague that must be dealt with before it destroys everything. The worst problem is that no one is truly certain if this Strike Force is real, or just an imagined threat. Those who encounter them don't usually manage to survive the meeting.

Technologies beyond imagination have come into existence, and only the constant vigilance of the *hsien* can counter



The Mu Courts - The Greater Demon Courts

The Mu Courts surrendered themselves to the Yama Kings in the Fourth Age, seeing no way out of the dilemma they'd brought on themselves by breaking the Mandates of Heaven.

Though these two courts are both at odds with the *hsien*, they are not allied to one another. There is no love lost between the Kura Sau and the Daityas.

The Daityas

The Daityas turned away from the Yama Kings shortly after their allegiance began, realizing that the demons would only corrupt them and feed upon their life energies. Through their own dark sorceries, they too discovered the secrets of maintaining their bodies and avoiding falling to nothingness.

The Daityas work to encourage the Sixth Age, doing all that they can to bring about a time when the August Personage of Jade is forced from his Celestial Court and the Dragons and Phoenixes war against one another in a bloody conflagration. By promoting a callous lack of belief, the Daityas seek to weaken the Wall created by the August Personage, hoping to once again claim what they see as their "rightful" place within the Celestial Court.

Though they are misguided in the eyes of the *hsien*, they are not beyond redemption. They could, if they so desired, still

bring themselves back to the proper path and aid the *hsien* in avoiding the Age of Sorrow.

The Kura Sau

The Kura Sau embraced the madness of the Yama Kings and became a part of the demon-courts. They serve the Yama Kings to this day, growing more powerful in the face the Sixth Age and aiding in the corruption of all that they once held sacred. Through the powers of their masters they have managed to enter the Yomi Worlds, serving as minions of their dark lords and often working through mortal agents to destroy the foundations of the Middle Kingdom.

These dark spirits have become a deliberate mockery of the *hsien*, a twisted, darkened reflection that seeks to undo all that the *hsien* have achieved. They, too, answer the prayers of mortals, provided those prayers demand blood satisfaction or sate lusts best ignored.

There are claims that the Kura Sau have even corrupted some of the Dragons and Phoenixes, breaking their minds with whispers of great rewards and greater powers in the service of the Yama Kings.

Whatever the true agendas of the Mu Courts, they are at opposition with the *hsien* and they are often deadly foes.

their negative effects. It's not the advances in machination that cause the threat, it's the possibility that mortals will stop believing in the truth.

The truth is lost to most of the world, but in the Middle Kingdom, the truth has prevailed so far. People still make prayers and know they will be answered. People still understand the powers of Chi. In the West, these simple beliefs are questioned more everyday as the mortals strive to unlock the secrets of the universe in cold, sterile laboratories, rather than through simple acceptance of the elemental truths of reality.

In the West, the only idol worshipped properly is technology, a god that has built its throne on the bodies of the dead in Nagasaki and Hiroshima; a god that kills more than it cures.

The Middle Kingdom survives, but with the influx of foreign influences, it's no longer easy to know how long the *hsien* can maintain the faiths that in turn maintain the *shen*.

The Age of Sorrow, The Age of Joy

The Sixth Age is coming, growing closer with every beat of the heart and every wave that crashes against the shores of the Middle Kingdom. Here the *hsien* and most other *shen* disagree as

to what will soon come their way. For the Kuei-jin, this time is called the Age of Sorrow, for they believe the August Personage of Jade will leave his throne within the Celestial Courts and abandon the Heavens to the Yama Kings. Many of the *hengeyokai* seem to agree, and the Kuei-jin have long since surrendered themselves to an eternity in the 10,000 Hells. Some *hsien* agree as well, and some, those who turned to the Yama Kings for assistance in the Fourth Age, do all they can to encourage this belief.

This group is broken and fragmented, holding two courts prepared to make war against the August Personage of Jade and the Heavens alike.

The *hsien* believe that the Sixth Age is the Age of Joy, the time when the Wall Between the Worlds will fall and the Three Worlds will once again be united in the perfection that is the August Personage of Jade. Once all beings have been perfected, the fabric of the universe will be properly mended and harmony will reign over all.

Some of the *hsien* consider this a bad idea. It is the beliefs of how best to handle the coming Sixth Age that have led to the fractioning of vision among the *hsien*, which in turn has led to the strange twists in *hsien* society.



CHAPTER TWO: THE EIGHT MILLION DREAMS

*The body is the holy Bodhi tree
The mind is like a mirror shining bright;
Exert yourself to keep them clean,
And never let dust accumulate.*

☉ ☉ ☉

*No holy tree exists as Bodhi known,
No Mirror shining bright is standing here;
Since there is nothing from the very first,
Where can the dust itself accumulate?*

—Two disciples of Hung Jen, the fifth patriarch
of the Dhyana sect of Buddhism in China.

The Worlds of the Hsien

P'an Ku, the August Personage of Jade, is said to have given his body over to create the Worlds. The sum of everything that exists was created from his form. Therefore, it is easy enough to understand that all things are connected, regardless of whatever barriers may exist. Because of the legends of how the Tellurian came to be, it is often referred to by the August Personage's name, P'an Ku, as a sign of respect for all that He sacrificed in creating the universe as a whole.

The Middle Kingdom, the Yin Worlds, the Yang Worlds and the Yomi Worlds are all sum parts of the whole. But the August Personage of Jade, being their creator, changed the rules

and sundered the whole of the P'an Ku as punishment for the transgressions of *shen* during the Third Age and the beginning of the Fourth Age. This punishment was just in the eyes of the Celestial Courts, but not everyone sees it that way.

The Wall Between the Worlds separates the Middle Kingdom from the other Worlds. This powerful barrier is the *shen*'s punishment by the August Personage, and something that all of the denizens of the Middle Kingdom have come to accept, even if they are not satisfied with the suffering this causes.

But the punishment goes beyond merely the Middle Kingdom; it encompasses the other Worlds as well, keeping at bay

many of the forces that once walked the Earth with impunity. To understand the world of the *hsien*, this must be made clear.

The *hsien* are creatures of spirit, but their punishment for disobeying the August Personage is to dwell within the Middle Kingdom, continuing with the duties they have always had and with the duties chosen for them when the Wan Xian went astray. The Middle Kingdom is their world now. Despite their best efforts, however, that world is changing, being altered from outside forces as the West slowly forces its way into the whole of Asia, for many of the *shen* in general and for the *hsien* in particular.

The Worlds Beyond the Wall

There are places few mortals have ever seen and return to describe. Among these places are the Yin World, the Yang World and the Yomi World. The differences between these places are greater than most could comprehend. Even the *hsien*, who once walked freely in the Yin and Yang Worlds have lost many of the memories of these places. They are primal, and it can truthfully be said that in these lands the gods still walk freely. Within each of these Worlds, there is both structure and chaos, but each is radically different from the others.

The Yin World

The Yin World is the land of Negative Chi. While there is great energy here, it is also the land where the Dead dwell. Westerners call this place the Shadowlands, the Land of the Dead, and speak of great storms that rage throughout the area, tearing away everything that isn't strong enough to resist their powers. The *hsien* call this land by the proper name, the Yellow Springs.

Still, within these great storms there are places of stability, anchors where the spirits of the dead can walk in relative safety and dwell together. The greatest of these are called Dark Kingdoms, and among the most powerful of these places is the Dark Kingdom of Jade.

The Dark Kingdom of Jade is almost completely unknown to the *hsien*, though there are those among the *Daityas* who sometimes travel there and are known to speak with the ruler of the great land, the Jade Emperor, Yu Huang.

The Jade Emperor sometimes sends his minions to do his bidding in the Middle Kingdom, though it is sad, the Dead who serve him are often at cross purposes with the Shinma.

More importantly, there are those among the Dead who once inhabited the bodies now controlled by the Shinma, and very few of them take well to the loss of their lives and the theft of their forms. True, the *hsien* are not the cause of their deaths, but these wraiths don't seem to care about that. They sometimes



seek revenge on the usurpers, and they are not known to be subtle when it comes to getting revenge.

There are greater beings than the Dead wandering throughout the Yin World, creatures of Yin Chi who would see everything that exists destroyed. These creatures are called by many names; the *hsien* merely call them demons. Most of these demons are believed to have slithered over from the Yomi World, corrupting all they see and encounter. Some, however, are almost certainly creatures that were once human spirits who have been corrupted by their darker aspects, the *P'o*, into something far worse than they were ever meant to be.

Hsien who die do not go to the Yin World. They are kept away from this dark area by the power of the August Personage of Jade, who returns them to the Middle Kingdom and a new life.

Many *hsien* believe the *kun shou* takes place immediately after a *hsien* dies. This may or may not be true, but if the *hsien* spirit does move into the areas beyond the Wall, it most certainly does not move within the Yin World. The most common belief is that the *hsien* body is either immediately placed within another body or is judged within the Celestial Court before being reborn. If the latter is the case, then it is far easier to explain why the *hsien* are often granted bodies that are different from the ones they would prefer.

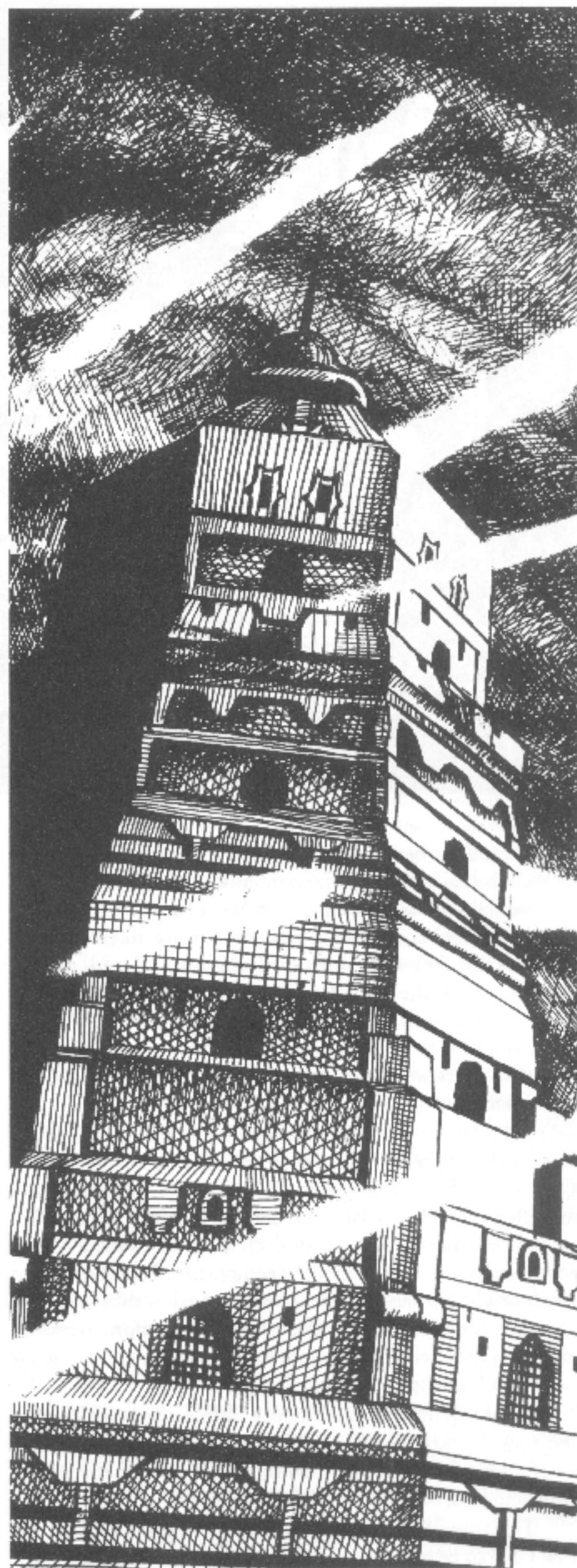
The Yang World

The Yang World is believed to hold most of the greater Celestial Courts. This area is filled with nature spirits and the greater elementals and spirits often called the *Jimu-Tenno*, who are the messengers of the Mikado and the Dragons and Phoenixes. Most *hsien* who manage to attain a Jade Key come to the Yang World seeking wisdom and knowledge, in addition to favors from their superiors.

There are several Palaces within the Yang World that are parts of the Greater Celestial Court, among these are *Ryujin*, the Palace of the Dragon Kings and the *Kami* Palaces of Summer, Winter, Autumn and Spring. A magnificent, sheer, jade wall surrounds this enormous complex of buildings. The few *hsien* who've managed to wander through the Yang World and locate the Hall of Seasons (the only known entrance into the Palaces) have all found the door barred and guarded by dozens of *Fu* Dogs. None of the *hsien* have been within the walls of the Hall of Seasons and the Palaces beyond since the time of the *Maha Kala*, with the sole exception of *Hanuman*, who managed to sneak into the Celestial Court and even see The August Personage of Jade walking through his Orchard of Immortality before being expelled.

Most of the *Shinma* believe that the answer to the final puzzle of regaining their right to stay within the Celestial Courts is simply to find a way to enter the Palaces without being injured. Perhaps there is some truth to this, as evidenced by the foolhardy Monkey King surviving his first trek and an encounter with the August Personage.

The secrets of immortality, the truths of the universe itself, and the final destinies of the *hsien* lie beyond the entrance to the Hall of Seasons. The only challenge is gaining entry, a task no one has accomplished in centuries.





There are other places within the Yang World that can best be described as close to perfection. Many among the *hirayanu* who've managed to enter the Yang World speak of the spirits that roam freely, and the great elementals who walk through the Heavens, treading miles with each step they take. None who manage to enter the Yang World and return does so unchanged. The experience is said to bring the *hsien* closer to what they once were, and that may be the truth of the matter, for most come back with a renewed sense of purpose and a greater understanding of Balance.

Still, despite the magnificence that all behold, there is a great deal of the Yang World that remains a complete mystery. Long before the *hsien* who enter the Yang World could hope to find the Greater Celestial Court and the Palaces, they encounter the Bureaucracy of Heaven. Each spirit seems to have a set office and a task that must be accomplished. Each bureaucrat seems intent on questioning any *hsien* as to why they are there, and equally driven to delay the *hsien* with questions, demands and visits to other offices, before letting the *hsien* go about the tasks that brought them to the Heavens.

It's not all that uncommon for a *Shinma* to spend weeks in the Yang World before managing even the first steps in any task — assuming they aren't sent spinning back down to the Middle Kingdom long before that. The Yomi World

The Yomi World is filled with both Yin and Yang Chi, but that Chi has been corrupted and altered by the presence of the

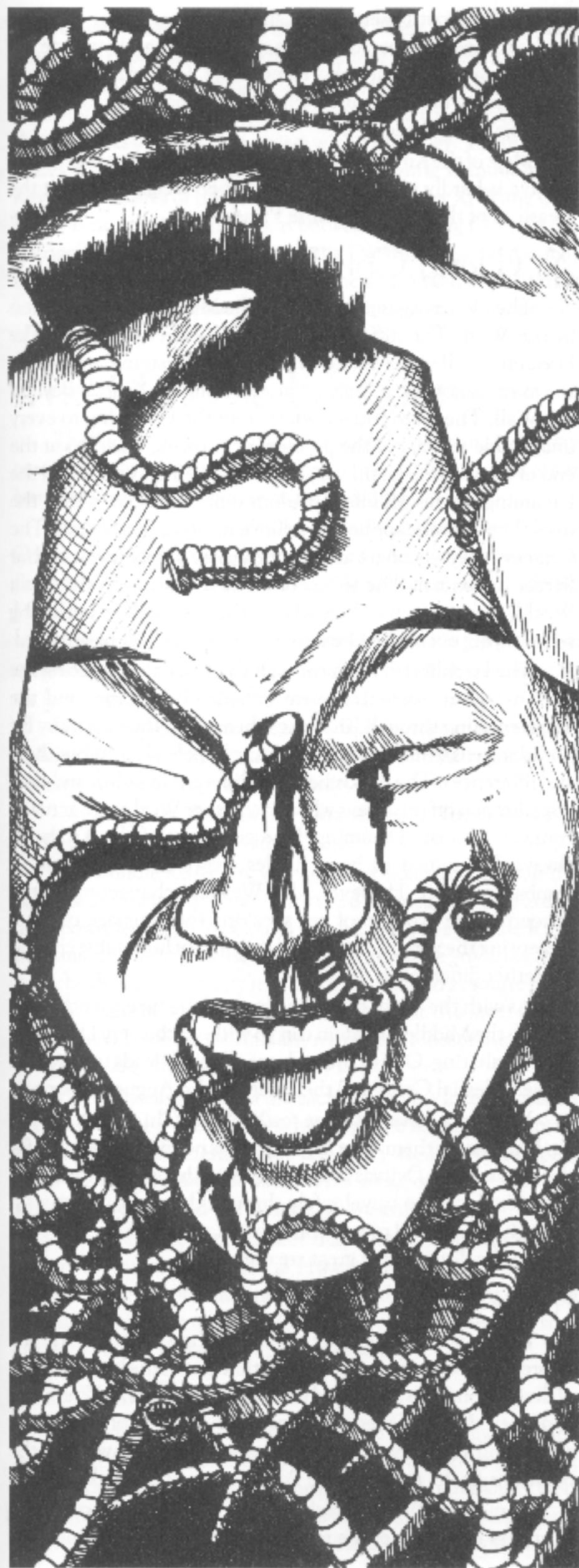
Yama Kings. The Yomi is not a reflection of all that is bad in the Middle Kingdom. Instead, it is an exaggeration of the same. The worst atrocities ever committed in the Middle Kingdom are but shadows of the daily occurrences in Yomi Realms. That is but one reason this place is also called the Ten Thousand Hells.

Many believe that every vile act that happens in the Middle Kingdom makes the Yomi World even stronger. *Hsien* with long memories tend to agree. The Yama Kings rule over the Ten Thousand Hells, and their influence is as great as the Dragons and Phoenixes of other lands.

The Wicked City

Mikaboshi is the Yama King in charge of the Wicked City, and he is responsible for many of the degradations heaped upon the Middle Kingdom. The *Kura Sau* beneath him are among the most aggressive in the Middle Kingdom, often actively seeking to kill anyone or anything that could thwart their plans, and just as often stealing away the humans and *shen* alike who cause them grief of any sort.

Just what happens to those taken to the Wicked City is anyone's guess, as no evidence of them has ever been found. Naturally, there are rumors claiming that the *hsien* taken there come back bound by the *Xue Lien* and serve faithfully their *Okuma* masters. There are also tales of the humans being used to open doors between the Worlds for the Yama Kings though, again, there is no proof.



Chi in the Other Worlds

The Worlds Beyond the Wall are fountains of Chi. The *hsien* who find their way to these lands have access to pure Yin Chi and Yang Chi in abundance. Those who have lost their Chi by theft or destruction (thus being weakened), can replenish the energy here, but only if they are permitted. Simply taking what they desire from the Yin and Yang Worlds is a crime worthy of punishment. Why? Because the *Shinma* aren't supposed to be in the worlds beyond the Middle Kingdom in the first place.

In order to gain Yin Chi, the *hsien* must actually enter the Yin World and deal with the politics and tribulations that present themselves. Once there, gaining Chi is simply a matter of absorbing it through meditation. One Chi may be absorbed per hour. The same is true of Yang Chi in the Yang World. Attempting to absorb either Chi while in the Yomi World is practically an invitation for demons to assault the character.

It is possible that denizens of the proper authority will allow the characters to absorb Yin or Yang Chi, but there is normally a price required, a favor to be granted or an item to be located and returned *æ* or stolen *æ* beforehand.

The Wicked City itself is a terrible place, which bears strong resemblance to the worst parts of Tokyo, Bangkok and Hong Kong. This great, sprawling cesspool is overflowing with tortured spirits and the armies of demons who practice their skills on anything too weak to resist. While seemingly disorganized, these armies are frightfully powerful and capable of acting in unison when they must. It is said that several dragons have been captured, tortured and released from the Wicked City, to work as sleeper agents for when Mikaboshi storms the Celestial Palaces and destroys the August Personage of Jade. Few doubt that Mikaboshi is the much feared Demon Emperor who will bring about the Age of Sorrow.

The Hell of Being Eaten Alive

Beings both living and dead are brought to the Hell of Being Eaten Alive, where strange, maggoty creatures writhe everywhere, consuming anything that moves, even each other. What is eaten is then excreted, and eaten again by another. Each time a creature is eaten, it changes for the worse, until after going through this process several times, what remains has nothing in common with what first came to the Hell.

This Hell is ruled by all of the Yama Kings, and many among the *hsien* believe the *Kura Sau* are forged into their new identities in this dark, bloody realm.

Hiruko

Hiruko is apparently a set aside for those who served the Yama Kings well and have died again. In this place, every imaginable treat is offered freely, and no work need be done. This Hell changes shape to suit the whims of its few inhabitants, and it is seldom populated for very long. Those who enter this place are treated lavishly for a few weeks or months, then they



are sent back out to serve the Yama Kings again. For the Kura Sau, visiting such a paradise is the surest sign that they made the right decision in serving the Yama Kings, for Hiruko is exactly what they've been promised when the Yama Kings overthrow the August Personage.

Most of the Kura Sau agree that any punishment they might receive is hardly worth considering when weighed against the pleasures of the Hell of Infinite Pleasures.

Xi Wang Chi "The Dreaming"

The Dreaming is just as real in the Middle Kingdom as it is in the West. The difference is that it's easier to access. The Dreaming, called "Xi Wang Chi" or "The Western Paradise" by the *hsien*, is not completely separated from the Worlds Beyond the Wall. There are paths leading from the Dreaming to every imaginable realm, but the problem of knowing what lies at the end of those paths is still very real. Changelings walking in the Dreaming of the Middle Kingdom quickly discover that the rules they thought applied have little meaning in the East. The Chimera they meet here are stronger, more independent and far fiercer in combat. The spirits of other realms, even the Yomi World, seem to make themselves at home, seldom bothering with staying out of the Dreaming for fear they will be attacked.

The Firchlis still roam through the Dreaming, altering the Dreamscape in ways that seem completely random, and the Trods running through Xi Wang Chi are still the safest way for non-denizens to move without getting hopelessly lost. But there are differences. The Trods here are different in color, and they often branch off into areas where the Other Worlds are actually connected to the Dreaming. The guardians of the Trods are always determined to have riddles answered and honorable combat engaged. However, the Western changelings often encounter the problem of not speaking the language of those presenting the verbal puzzles, and the rules of honorable combat are rather different in the East.

As with the West, there are places where no entity that has been to the Middle Kingdom can go without the very Dreaming itself retaliating. One of these places allegedly leads to the heart of the Celestial Court and the Palace of the August Personage.

Most *hsien* have little use for Xi Wang Chi, which in turn has little use for them. The Dreaming has no special meaning for the Shinma, the Daityas or the Kura Sau, though all three have discovered ways to travel safely through the realm. Mostly, Xi Wang Chi is a useful route to other areas, and upon occasion can lead to the discovery of great treasures.

Po Jen

Po Jen are those among the *hsien* who seek to divine the future. The Po Jen have discovered that one of the best methods of divination is to simply find a quiet place within Xi Wang Chi and sleep deeply. Often, it helps to bring tools of divination along, and hope that these devices grant the answers to the questions in the minds of the Po Jen when they awaken.

Very few of the Po Jen share their secrets, and most refuse to answer questions of the future save with riddles. Some have

been driven insane by what they saw. Others have come back from their expeditions into the Dreaming with enlightenment.

The only way any *hsien* has of entering the Dreaming is to either fall asleep and hope for the best — a method that seldom, if ever, works — or to gain access with a Jade Key. There are no places where the *hsien* can enter the Dreaming without a Jade Key or the desires of the Heavens that they enter Xi Wang Chi. There is no special connection between Xi Wang Chi and the changelings of the East. Entering the Dreaming has no particular effects upon the *hsien*, and few remember much of what they learn there after they awaken, with the exception of the prophecies learned by the Po Jen.

The Middle Kingdom

The August Personage of Jade has made his decision, and we are punished fairly for what we have done. The Middle Kingdom is our home now, no matter how we might wish it wasn't so.

Perhaps we shall one day be allowed back into the Celestial Courts, but until that time, we must make the best of what the August Personage has granted us, and we must do all that we can to fulfill the Mandates of Heaven.

In time, we shall either usher in the Age of Joy or fall to the Age of Sorrow. If the former, we shall be where we belong once more. If the latter, we shall know suffering as few have before.

We are not abandoned; we have simply been given new responsibilities. We must accept these duties as the only way to regain all that we have lost, or we are surely doomed.

— Ching Hoi, Second Gray Mandarin of Nihon Province in his first address to the Gray Court.

The Middle Kingdom, with all its wonders and flaws, is the domain the *hsien* call home. They are displaced, but they are far from powerless. The Yu Courts have divided the Middle Kingdom, making their provinces, which seldom have anything to do with the domains ruled by mortals. There are no absolute rulers here. Mortals may claim what they wish, but the *hsien* do not follow the rules of the mortals any more than most of the mortals accept the *hsien* for what they truly are.

The following sections list each of the provinces in greater detail. While it is true that the *hsien* seldom attempt to control the mortal governments, they are often vigilant in stopping other *shen* from doing the same. This is but one of the reasons why the Kuei-jin and the Shinma share enmity.

It is important to remember that even among the separate provinces, members of all the Hwang Sheh are present. The provinces are simply the lines drawn by the Yu, a single Court among many. Most of the Shinma respect these lines, but they are not the end all be all of Shinma society.

Mongolia Province

Mongolia is ruled by the ruled by the Black Mandarin, and is the northernmost of the provinces. The human government here is communist, a fact that the *hsien* ignore remarkably well. Most of the population in this area is Mongolian, though some Russians and a good number of Chinese live here as well.

Mongolia is one of the more war-like provinces, often doing all they can to drive away the Brujah vampires of Russia and the Russian Kithain. There is little love lost between the *hsien* and the Waigoren of the North. The Black Mandarin is often referred to as the Hun, a title she relishes. Wan Na Gon, the current mandarin, insists on stronger discipline than any of the other mandarins, though strictly out of necessity. There are a great number of Kura Sau agents moving through the bitter, frozen tundra, and the growing human population — most of whom are in their early 20s or younger, is a cause for concern to the demons. The promise of power and prestige in a land where there is little beyond moderate farm land and massive herds of livestock has often tempted the young mortals to side with the Yama Kings.

To date, the Black Mandarin and her fellow *hsien* are still holding off the forces from Russia, but with the growing political unrest in the area, there is a real fear that the Waigoren will make a move to seize control of the province. At present, there is a fragile truce between the Shinma and the Daityas in the area, though no one trusts that it will last long.

The attacks from the North have grown more frantic of late, and whispered comments about the witch Baba Yaga lead the *hsien* to believe that matters will only grow worse.

Most of the Mongolia Province is still farm and grazing land for the herds of cattle, oxen, sheep and horses that populate the area. A very large portion of the human population lives in the capitol city of Ulan Bator; while small by Western standards, is still a sizable populated area. Most of Ulan Bator is considered enemy territory, as the Kuei-jin in the area have long since established their power bases.

The Kuei-jin tend to leave the Shinma alone in Mongolia, considering them the first line of defense against the Kin-jin of the North. Though hostilities still exist between the two groups, they have come to a quiet understanding: Don't bother us, and we won't bother you. Naturally, there are a few on both sides who refuse to play by this simple silent rule, and sporadic battles still occur.

Inner Mongolia, though part of the province, is a separate human country, and is far more populated by Chinese than is Outer Mongolia. The rules that apply to Kura Sau and Kuei-jin also apply here, but only because of the Black Mandarin's demands for order.

Wan Na Gon rules through her abilities as a powerful *suijen*. Though all of Mongolia is landlocked, there are hundreds of lakes and her ability to command the waters and generate storms is legendary in the area. She is one of the few mandarins who has maintained control over a province through more than one incarnation.

Hunan Province

Ruled by the Red Mandarin, Hunan Province is far more liberal in approach than most of the provinces. Hunan has control over Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Jiangxi, which, in turn, means controlling a great number of the major port towns in Eastern and Southern China. This means little by way of monetary gain, but means a great deal by way of control over the influences of the Kuei-jin and Kin-jin. Any import or export shipped by boat into the area risks severe trouble if the Red Mandarin decides to

work against those shipping the prizes. Though there is definitely no love lost between the Cathayans and the *hsien*, there is a great deal of respect. For the most part, the Red Mandarin, Lee Kung Xue, leaves the Kuei-jin's imports in peace, in exchange for the controlling Kuei-jin of the major port towns leaving his followers alone.

Lee Kung Xue, a very powerful *chu-jung*, is known for his more liberal approaches to ruling the Hunan Province, including allowing the Daityas to move through his territories unmolested. This has not won him great favor with some of the more militant mandarins, but has allowed him and his followers to survive several unpleasant situations regarding the Waigoren coming to Hong Kong, where he holds his court. Most of his advisors and close associates are *suijen*, and his use of their storm generating abilities is well respected by the Kuei-jin in the area.

Once again, due mostly to the constant influx of foreign powers and the continuing war against the Kura Sau, there is little actual control over any aspect of the mortal population in Hunan Province. The closest controls achieved are in the form of the careful balance of power between the Kuei-jin and the *hsien* in the area. Should the Red Mandarin wish to achieve something, he need merely speak with the appropriate Cathayans and promise to leave their transport ships alone in order to accomplish his tasks.

The Yellow Lotus is strong in this area, but they are also very careful before moving against anyone. Here, as in few other places, the balance of power is too easily tipped, and a very real war between the *shen* is all too possible.

Hong Kong

If there has ever been proof of the reality of the Age of Sorrow, that proof resides in Xiang-gang (Hong Kong)

— Yi Han Sook, The Peacock Mandarin, in a letter to Lee Kung Xue, the Red Mandarin

Hong Kong, locally called Xiang-gang, is almost a country in and of itself. With a teeming population and more economic business than any other city in Asia — except Tokyo — the city is responsible for over 40 percent of the exports from China to the US and Europe, and is a mixed blessing and curse to the people of China. Many of the Chinese people wish to live there, and many others fear Hong Kong as a cesspool of foreign influences and decadence.

Despite these fears, even the Communist Party in China accepts that Hong Kong is a necessary evil. Far too much of the money to sustain China comes from Hong Kong's businesses to simply ignore the way of life that exists there.



The Red Mandarin holds his courts in Hong Kong, and spends most of his time in the city, despite the fact that he is among the first to say that Xiang-gang is ruled by the Keui-jin. While the Cathayans do not, in fact, rule the city, they have far more influence than the *hsien*.

As with any major town, the levels of political intrigue are vast, and the ability to understand them is almost a necessity for any *shen* attempting to survive there. Very few of the *hsien* actually dwell within Hong Kong, but many visit regularly, especially among the Xian Mun and Shu Shen. The Kura Sau and Daityas are also strong within the city, and in the case of the Kura Sau, there is little doubt that the tongs and triads of Hong Kong have become their stomping grounds.

One of the favored sayings of the Komoku is: "There is no escape in Hong Kong. The *shen* are as prevalent as the garbage in the streets." Very few who come to Xiang-gang to stay remain unaltered by the experience. For better or worse, there is no way to avoid the influence of both the *shen* and the Waigoren in the city.

One of the biggest problems faced by any *shen* in Hong Kong comes in the form of the demon hunters. Both Strike Force Zero and the Shih have active representatives in Hong Kong, and in the case of the Shih, at least one Shih Master uses the city as a testing ground for his disciples.

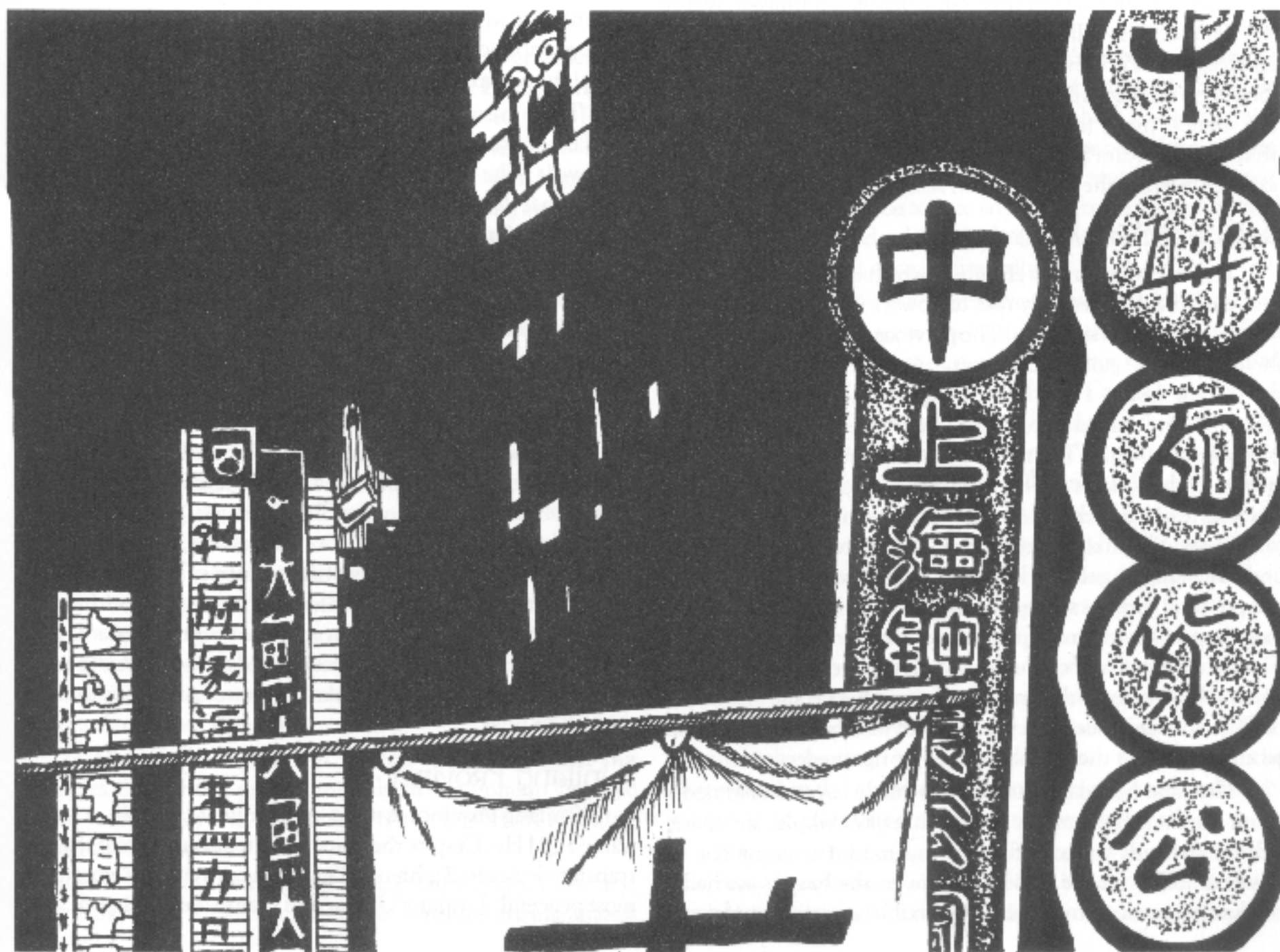
Greater details on Hong Kong can be found in *Hong Kong by Night*, the first supplement for *Kindred of the East*.

Jilin Province

Ruled by, Tsung Chow Yun, the Yellow Mandarin, Jilin Province is the other northernmost province in the Ten Provinces. Heilongjiang, Jilin, Lioaning, North and South Korea and Liaoning comprise the area that runs along the eastern coast of China and covers both Koreas. As with many of the coastal provinces, the *hsien* here are more accustomed to dealing with Waigoren than many of the inner provinces.

There is a great deal of influence from the Kuei-jin here as well, but it is lessened with the help of the *hengeyokai*, in particular, the Middle Dragons, who have made several of the dragon nests and dragon lines running through the area their special places. Few are foolish enough to cross them. The Zhong Lung do little to interfere with the other *shen* in the area, but they are quick to react to any threats to their sacred places.

The constant tensions between North and South Korea are reflected in the Yu Court as well, where many of the *kamuii*, Tsung Chow Yun among them, tend to pressure the *hirayanu* into obeying them, rather than simply making requests.



The internal politics in the Jilin Province have stopped the area from becoming more influential. The continuous arguments between "nobles" and "peasants" seem almost exaggerated in the area, and Tsung Chow Yun seems to prefer it that way.

Despite being located away from Mainland China, the Yellow Mandarin's courts are normally held in Seoul, where the Komoku Mandarin finds a variety of situations to keep him amused.

Jilin and the other bordering regions of the province within China proper are sometimes referred to as Manchuria, and throughout the history of the region, violence has often been a continuous problem. Both Japan and Russia have held the area at different times, and even used the area as a battlefield during the Russo-Japanese War. During that time, the Daityas became a powerful force within the region, and they remain that way even to this day.

Suto Manahari, the leader of the Daityas in the province, has long referred to the area as his territory, and few have the power to dispute his claims, a fact that haunts the Shinma constantly.

There are rumors claiming that Tsung Chow Yun has taken to dealing in the more extreme aspects of the black market in Seoul, including slavery, prostitution and the drug trade. Several *hsien* have visited the city and left in disgust, vowing never to return as long as Tsung remains in command of the province.

Darker rumors claim that Tsung has given himself over to the Yama Kings, willingly joining with the Kura Sau for profit and pleasure. Very few take these rumors seriously, as Tsung has long been regarded highly by the other mandarins. Still, despite the silence, many find it an interesting point of conversation that very few Kura Sau ever seem present in the Jilin Province, especially when they are so often seen almost everywhere else.

Beijing (Peking) Province

The Jade Mandarin (a *chu-ih-yo* who has proved herself over the years and only recently rose to power) is trying to make the best of an awkward situation. The previous mandarin, also a *chu-ih-yo*, was found guilty of consorting with the Russian *Kin-jin* by the Yellow Lotus. His sudden disappearance and the yellow blossom found draped across his throne were enough to convince everyone of his guilt. The new mandarin, San Zho Li, must now face the embarrassment of her predecessor's actions and adjust to a new style of life as the ruler of Beijing Province. Hebei, Henan, Shanxi and Shaanxi combined make up the territory nominally under her charge, and San has little trouble with that aspect, but the political arena is still a new one for the veteran soldier and judge, especially when one adds in the other *shen* and the mortals. There is a great deal of confusion in Beijing as to just what impact San will have in the turbulent capitol city of the People's Republic of China. There is also speculation as to whether or not she will be able to handle the troubles started by her predecessor.

The Jade Mandarin has already made several comments about the financial dangers facing China as a whole, and many believe she will try to influence the mortal government to ensure stability for the nation. However, she has always had a tendency toward pushing away from industrialization, and many

fear her wrath should things fail to go her way. There are some who are already stating that San Zho Li will be very short-lived as the Jade Mandarin, and the court over which she presides is eagerly looking for her predecessor.

The political games of the previous Jade Mandarin have already come back to haunt San, who must deal with angry *Kuei-jin* and *hengeyokai* enraged by the dealings with the *Kin-jin*. There are also a good number of wraiths who seek revenge for something the previous Jade Mandarin did, though so far no one has been able to determine what crimes were committed against the Dead. And lastly, the Five Metal Dragons who have a long held claim in the capitol city are making a great deal of trouble, moving in Technocracy forces and causing endless grief for the *hsien*. There is little doubt that times in Peking are about to become very interesting, indeed.

Yunnan Province

The White Mandarin, Lo Shan, a *suijen* whose reputation for incompetence is second to none, rules Yunnan Province. The province covers the human territories of North and South Vietnam, Laos, Guangxi Zhuang, Huizhou and Yunnan. Most of these areas suffer greatly during typhoon season, and in general, the human populations in these area are among the most impoverished in the world. Drug trade, black market dealings and out-and-out slavery are often the primary sources of income for entire towns, and the overcrowded cities are rapidly falling into economic ruin. Through all of this, Lo Shan has done nothing to stop the suffering.

There are many who claim Lo Shan is simply trying to make the best of what the mortals have done to themselves, but others believe it is the White Mandarin's attempts to influence human affairs that have caused a great deal of the troubles in the province. Many *hsien* point fingers, but so far no one has attempted to remove the mandarin from his throne.

One of the reasons for his continuance as the White Mandarin might well be Lo Shan's connections to the *chi'n ta*. There are numerous rumors that several powerful mages have sworn fealty to the mandarin, though no one can understand why they would, or why the mandarin would seek to employ them.

Lo Shan holds his courts in the mountains not far from Kun-ming, the largest town in Yunnan, and a major source of revenue in China. Most of the Shinma in the Yunnan Province acknowledge his "leadership" only in passing, and few of them consider the Yu, in general, worthy of notice. The large areas of unfarmable land in the area has lead to (or may well be the cause of) a greater number of Li Shen and Wu Hsien in the area than in most others. While most acknowledge the Yu Courts and their boundaries, they seldom allow these trivialities to influence their lives.

Xinjiang Province

Xinjiang Province is ruled by the Blue Mandarin, a *tanuki* named Qi I Hu. Despite the mandarin's fearsome name (literally translated: Seven Righteous Tigers) the province is among the most peaceful. Xinjiang Uighur and Gansu are the mortal areas

that make up Xinjiang Province, which is mostly mountainous terrain and desert. The land is not overly developed, with the lowest population centers in all of China, and the primary sources of income come from raising herd animals.

The largest problem facing the region regularly is earthquakes, which cause substantial damage to the area every few years. If the area were better developed, this would likely create much greater problems.

The mortals in Xinjiang Province are descendants of the Mongolians in many cases, meaning they are often taller than most Chinese, and often of fairer skin. The Uighur region of the province is free from Communist Chinese control, and has become a haven for many seeking to flee from political troubles in other parts of the country. In an area where there are so few people and where the land is so vast, hiding is fairly easy, doubly so for the Shinma.

Despite being "ruled" by a tanuki, the province is home to many of the Li Shen and is heavily favored by the Xian Mo, who believe that Kun Lun, the mountain destroyed by the Kuei-jin and the Yama Kings at the beginning of the Fourth Age, once stood in this region. The Xian Mo believe the loss of the legendary earthly home of the Dragons is very possibly the cause of the earthquakes within the area, and often seek to find lost artifacts that could lead to enlightenment.

Tibet Province

Yi Han Sook, the Peacock Mandarin, rules over Tibet. Yi Han Sook looks toward China as a whole, and Hong Kong in particular, as places where the Mandates of Heaven have been denied for far too long. Though he is not radical enough to start conflicts over his beliefs, he has never been soft-spoken regarding his contempt for any modernization. The continuing attempts by China's military to completely destroy the ancient ways of life in Tibet might have something to do with the Peacock Mandarin's attitudes, including the substantial span of time when Chinese was the forced official language of the Tibetans, and an equal length of years when religion in the region was outlawed by the Chinese government. Despite all efforts on the part of the Chinese, the language and faith of the Tibetans remain intact.

Yi Han Sook is a Komoku, and one of the oldest of the kamui. He has ruled over Tibet for several hundred years, and leans very heavily toward Buddhist philosophies. The Kura Sau have made their presence known in the region recently, but have failed to gain much of a foothold in the province. The greatest threats to date remain the mortal Chinese government and the continuing efforts to eradicate the Tibetan way of life. These efforts have come to include violence, imprisonment and other, darker acts that are often kept at a low profile to keep the world at large from noticing.

Yi Han Sook is doing all he can to make certain the atrocities committed on the mortals in his domain become public knowledge, and other *shen* in the region are working toward the same goal.

There is a war going on between Tibet and China, and while this war is between mortals, the tensions arising among

the *shen* in Tibet toward others are growing stronger all the time. There are few in and around the Tibet Province who believe the war will remain strictly among the humans for very much longer. As in few other places, the *shen* have united for a common cause. The only problem is in locating an enemy they can strike against. Tibet is small and China is huge; there can be no direct war if the denizens of Tibet wish to survive the confrontation.

Qinghai Province

The Green Mandarin, a *hou-chi* whose beliefs in the simpler ways of life are reflected by the region over which she has ruled for a very long time, rules Qinghai. Sadly, the times are changing faster than the mandarin would like, and her province is rapidly becoming modernized.

Despite the mountainous terrain, and the long-standing traditions of farming and raising livestock in the region, the proximity to Tibet has made the Qinghai Province something of a target for the Chinese military forces and with them, the Technocracy.

New weapons are being field tested in the area; a well-concealed base for the Five Metal Dragons is becoming something more than a mere nuisance. More and more of the Technocratic Conventions are joining forces in the area, spurred by the requests of certain Chinese military officials for weapons to either alter the way the Tibetans think, or aid in their destruction.

The Shinma of Qinghai Province are not among the more militaristic, but they are willing to learn. A growing number of Daityas in the region have begun causing problems for the Shinma, and there is little they've been able to do about the matter as a number of the Shinma moving into the area are part of the military forces gaining a foothold in the region. Any attempts to actively stop them would likely be seen as an attack on the soldiers by local radicals and could lead to hideous conflicts between the mortals of the province and the encroaching military.

The Hwang Ho and Yangtze rivers have their headwaters in Qinghai, these rivers are a constant source of trouble as well, as there are several groups of *shen* who call them home, including *heng po*, *suijen* and *fu his*, as well as Middle Dragons and a group of Kuei-jin. All of these groups are beginning to have rather serious debates as to who will rule over the dragon nests found at the head of each river, and no one is willing to share peacefully.

Making matters worse with the two rivers, the Technocracy has recently been looking into building a complex of "research facilities" near the locations of the dragon nests, and were painfully efficient in procuring the rights to build on the land before anyone discovered their plans. Though actual work on the buildings has not yet begun — mostly as a result of several *hanumen* and *nyan* keeping the surveyors busy — the work will doubtless begin soon. Not knowing what the Technocracy has planned is beginning to frustrate the *hsien* in the area, and the *Zhong Lung* in the region are beginning to make rather disturbing noises about settling the matter once and for all.

With as much growing chaos as is in the province at the present time, most suspect it's only a matter of time before the Kuei-jin begin manipulating matters and driving their claws into the already messy affair.



Lastly, while the Kura Sau have not begun moving into the areas around the great rivers, they have made their presence known in Hsi-ning, the capital of the region, and have actually driven most of the Shinma from the city. While nothing is really happening in Qinghai Province, there is little doubt that matters of grave importance are rapidly escalating, and Sha Hong Ming, the Green Mandarin is looking increasingly ready to take drastic actions. For an area that has known peace for so long, the time when weapons must be drawn is coming soon.

Sichuan Province

Sichuan is a troubled province. Sam Na Ku, the Orange Mandarin, is growing more concerned by the day, and those within the court are speaking more openly of the need for extreme action. Sichuan, Lower Gansu and Ningxia Hui are the mortal realms contained within the province, and all of them are expected to suffer greatly if the current plans to build the Three Gorges Dam come to fruition.

The Three Gorges Dam Project is one of the largest, most ambitious plans devised to date for building a hydroelectric plant. The dam project would require flooding the plains near the Three Gorges, and relocating almost 2,000,000 people from their traditional homes and into areas where they would have a great deal of difficulty living. Most of these mortals are farmers, and the land being offered is not exactly the best for growing crops. Several temples and shrines, many of them hundreds of years old, will be destroyed if the dam project continues, and the loss of these sites would be a strong blow to the *hsien* in the region. Additionally, there are no less than four dragon nests in the area that would be lost to all of the *shen*, and the loss would be devastating.

The Li Shen Shui Fu, Ministry of Water, is gathering a great many of the *suijen* in this area, and many of them have been making threats that only the most foolhardy would take lightly. They consider the continuing plans for the dam as one of their greatest failures, and many fear they will carry out some of their more serious threats, including summoning the Four Rivers Dragon to destroy the Three Gorges Dam should it ever be completed. The Dragon is certainly capable of reducing the dam to rubble, but the devastation caused in the process would be immense, and even some within the ministry feel that the cure for the problem would be worse than the disease.

What is not known by the Li Shen, is that they are being opposed at every step by the Kura Sau, who see the Three Gorges Dam as an excellent opportunity to start a complex chain of events that would likely usher in the Age of Sorrow. The machinations of the Kura Sau are extremely complex, and every move they have made to date has been handled in their mortal guises. Making matters worse, the Li Shen are shutting themselves off from the other *hsien* in the province, growing more insular and more dangerous as the plans for the dam continue. Most of the Ministry of Water refuses to speak of the project with anyone outside their immediate group, and often take mention of the matter as a personal insult.

Honor is at stake, and for many of the Li Shen in the area, the matter has become personal. Those who remain on the outside of the Shui Fu feel, and rightly so, that the Three Gorges Dam Project might

very well be the catalyst that brings about an end to all they have known in the Sichuan Province. The Li Shen have become irrational on the matter, and many *hsien* are abandoning the area altogether.

Nihon Province

Nihon Province is ruled by the Gray Mandarin, Rei Mihinato, and includes the mortal territories of Japan, Cambodia, Taiwan and Hainan Island. All of these locations have one major theme in common, they are heavily industrialized... at least in comparison with most of the Middle Kingdom.

The Technocracy is powerful in the Nihon Province, but not as incredible a force as they would like to be. Financial woes have slowed down the technological growth in Japan and in the other industrial areas as well. Though she would like to believe otherwise, Mihinato has not been the main impetus for slowing the Five Metal Dragons; simple misfortune and the changing financial world have taken care of that. However, the province prospers from a *hsien* point of view, especially with the growing resurgence of the Shinto faith in Japan, and the general increase in religious followings throughout the region.

The Daityas are strongest in Nihon Province, which is where the Mu Court originates. Most of the growing troubles the Shinma have brought to China and the other areas of the Middle Kingdom are simply a reflection of their success in Nihon.

The Gray Mandarin is a *chi-ih-yo*, and in her mortal life is the wife of a high-ranking Yakuza in Japan. While the marriage was arranged, she has found it useful to keep her husband as a pawn for the present time, thus allowing her to know more of what goes on in the underworld than most would. It would be unfair to say that the relationship is based on love, but the two understand each other, and there is a strong friendship between the husband and wife. Despite this connection to the Yakuza, Mihinato seldom sets foot in Tokyo, preferring to remain in the family's palatial estate to the north of the city.

Tokyo

Tokyo belongs to the Daityas. Though there are many Shinma *hsien* within the city, the power belongs to the Shinma *hsien*, and their leading Council of Five, a powerful group of Naobi who rule over the Daityas. This council is the primary force driving all the Shinma in their quests, and all but one have remained in the same incarnation for hundreds of years.

There are very strict rules against battle between the Daityas and the Shinma in Tokyo, especially in light of the troubles with both the Technocracy and Kuei-jin of Tokyo. The Daityas are not as tolerant of mistakes as many of the mandarins, and have little hesitation to kill anyone who breaks their rules without very good reason. Though the Shinma *hsien* are not obligated to follow these rules, they find it much safer to do so anyway.

Tokyo is a city of paradox. On one hand, the industry in the city and its surrounding suburbs is the heart and blood of the nation. On the other hand, the religious faith of the people is seldom taken lightly by anyone who sees the number of shrines and pagodas that exist alongside the factories and industrial complexes. Religious holidays are taken very seriously in Japan at

large and in Tokyo as well, and in a city of over 11,000,000 mortal souls, the Yugen gathered at the ceremonies is beyond plentiful.

Despite the earthquake that leveled Tokyo in 1923 and the fire-bombings that took place during World War Two, Tokyo still stands and grows larger all the time. Over one tenth of the entire population of Japan lives and works within the area of Tokyo and its suburbs.

The *shen* of Tokyo weave together new allegiances and break old ones regularly, and the political miasma is a dangerous place for anyone who has not learned just who is currently siding with whom, to enter into an agreement. The *hengyokai* have dealings with both the Shinma and the Shinma; the local *chi'n ta* often work with both groups, and the Kuei-jin have been known to ally themselves with various factions within the city. Even the Kura Sau have joined forces with the mages from time to time, though such gatherings normally fail to hold themselves together for very long. The wraiths of the region are considered part of the Dark Kingdom of Jade, but most find the current situation intolerable and seek to break away from their Chinese overlords. The ghosts in Japan are often seeking allies, and offering rewards in exchange for assistance. They, too, have even been known to go to the Kura Sau in an effort to find allies in their war for freedom.

Where there are gatherings of *shen*, there are demon hunters. In the case of Tokyo, that truth is more deadly than most realize, as Strike Force Zero is headquartered somewhere in the city, and is always on the lookout for demons to capture, kill or vivisectionalize. Currently, the Kura Sau, the Daityas Council of Five and the Gray Mandarin are all offering rewards to anyone who can bring them a Strike Team member who is alive to answer questions. The size of the bounties offered is constantly growing, and the few who have attempted to seize the rewards have come back empty handed, they came back at all. Though there are no Shih known to live in Tokyo, at least one makes a point of traveling through the town regularly.

Religions of the Middle Kingdom

Religion is a necessity to the *hsien*. Without the beliefs of the mortals, the *hsien* would lose their ability to collect Yugen, and the duties they perform would be much harder to accomplish. To a certain extent, the *hsien* answer the calls of all faiths, even Christianity; they simply tend to tread more carefully around those religions that don't actively acknowledge their existence. When it comes to answering prayers, the *hsien* of the Shinma and Daityas are nondenominational.

It is important to understand that what is listed below is simply the barest basics of the various faiths. Each of the predominant faiths in the Middle Kingdom is complex and deserves a proper discourse, but the listings below only cover the general beliefs of the faiths, and cannot do them justice. Numerous books exist that can better explain the beauty and depth of the religions of the Middle Kingdom, those who are curious should visit their local library or book store.

For the *hsien*, the religions listed below are part of their own path to enlightenment. Most have been of influence to one degree

or another, but none of them could be said to be the exact truth as far as the Shinma are concerned. Rather, the *hsien*'s beliefs are an amalgamation of the different beliefs, and are constantly changing as individual *hsien* seek enlightenment in their own way.

Animalism

Animalism, in one form or another, has existed in almost every part of the world since humans could reason. The belief that every creature, even the planet itself and the sky above, has a personal spirit that can be reached, understood and communicated with is one of the most basic tenets of most religions. There are exceptions, and many areas have moved beyond this "shamanistic" outlook to more complex religions, but have also incorporated this belief into their faith in one form or another. For the *hsien*, Animalism is the simple truth: They are among the very spirits worshipped in this way.

Atheism

Atheism is the belief that there are no divine beings, no spirits and nothing beyond the flesh. The *hsien* have nothing to do with atheists, and never answer their prayers. Despite the best efforts of the Communist Parties in several countries in the Middle Kingdom, Atheists remain the exception more often than the rule in Asia.

Buddhism

Buddhism is the most influential religion in Asia, and has spread through other parts of the world as well. Buddhist beliefs

state that mortal existence is a transitory state, illusory at best, and one that can be overcome by following an Eightfold Path: right aspiration, right knowledge, right speech, right absorption, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right behavior. By following the Eightfold Path, one can transcend the limitations of mortal thinking and move along the path to Nirvana, a perfect state of being.

The challenges of reaching Nirvana are many, and few seem able to reach their goal without enduring multiple incarnations in the process. Still, those who follow the Eightfold Path properly are powerful beings, and many can call on the *hsien* for aid and almost certainly receive it. The Yugen generated by these mortals is immense, and anything the *hsien* can do to aid them is granted without hesitation if it is within the abilities of the *hsien* to accommodate.

Confucianism

Confucianism is responsible for much of the ways in which Chinese culture has evolved. Confucian ideals state that righteous people who live righteous lives can reach a state of harmony that transcends the mortal existence. Jen, the Confucian ideal that holds the virtues of love, benevolence, dignity, compassion and dignity as the greatest virtues, is the driving force toward achieving the perfection required to move beyond the imperfect world. By following the philosophies of Confucianism, the devout believe they can change the world for the better, living in harmony with all that are around them. Order and virtue produce harmony, and harmony in turn leads to



Heaven. This faith is one of the most important to the *hsien*, and is at least, in part, responsible for their own salvation.

Hinduism

The Hindu faith holds that the world around us is much greater than mortals realize, and that even the gods are only a larger part of a picture that cannot be perceived by the unrighteous. Everything that we are, everything that we see is but a fraction of the pattern of existence. Therefore, if this life is an illusion, one must see past this life, even while living this life out. The Hindu faith is the foundation for many of the other faiths in Asian culture, and its influence over those faiths is strong. The concept that life is transitory and mostly misperceived by those experiencing it is not new to the *hsien*, who have long understood that their current incarnations are really a loss of perception in their part. Though they may not word it the same way as those who practice Hinduism, the *hsien* all seek to gain back the perceptions they've lost, through enlightenment.

Shintoism

In many ways, the Shinto faith embodies the heart of the *hsien* beliefs. According to this Japanese faith, the spirits of the dead and the spirits of nature are all around us, and it is possible to communicate and even interacted with them. These entities can be friendly or vicious. The best way to make sure these spirits remain on one's good side is to placate them with sacrifices, prayers and worship.

The Daityas, in particular, are very influenced by the Shinto faith, and have shaped their own society around these beliefs. Those who appease the spirits remain on good terms with the Daityas, so long as they also remember that Shintoism rewards kindness and punishes acts of cruelty.

Shinto has evolved over the years, and many of the practitioners of Shinto also seek enlightenment for themselves, even as they seek to appease the spirits. The lines between Buddhism and Shintoism have become blurred over the years, and many Shinto practitioners consider themselves followers of both faiths, though there are still no solid decisions as to what may lie beyond this life. Does one transcend or remain behind to watch over one's descendants? Perhaps both, maybe neither, in the end, the only way to know for certain is to leave the mortal existence behind.

Taoism

Taoism is the main impetus behind the beliefs of the Shinma. This religion (or philosophy depending with whom you speak) revolves around personal enlightenment and the power of Chi. Tao (literally translated: the Way) requires attuning oneself to the power of creation (The August Personage of Jade, in the eyes of the Shinma), Chi, and using that energy to better oneself. In some cases, this is done through meditation and purification. In some cases, magic or alchemy are the most direct routes. The martial arts, science, magic and anything that aids in reaching one's goals are all a part of the Taoist philosophies. The individual must choose his path to enlightenment and eventual ascension above one's beginnings. Mortals must work much harder to achieve the ability to

manipulate Chi than do the *hsien*, but even for the *hsien*, work is required and understanding is important, especially if one wishes to survive any potential conflicts.

The Tao de Hsien is very much an offshoot of these philosophies, and has been integral in saving the *hsien* from the punishments imposed on them. All of the Shinma *hsien* follow the Taoist beliefs to one extent or another.

Other faiths

Christian and Islamic beliefs are practiced by a growing number of mortals in Asia. While neither of these religions are influential in the ways of the *hsien*, both the Shinma and the Daityas accept and respect these faiths, answering prayers for their followers as they do for all other worthy religions.

True Faith of any sort is not a bane to the *hsien*, who can actually feed on the Yugen generated by the devout without causing harm to the devout in the process. While these beliefs are different, they are not considered threats by the *hsien* in general. The Kura Sau are the exception to this rule, and are not known for taking well to those with true faith who wish to cast away demons.

Religious Celebrations

Religious celebrations generate Yugen, which in turn offers the *hsien* what they need to survive. Fortunately for the *hsien*, the majority of people in Asia are fairly devout, and the celebrations of the faithful are relatively plentiful. It is important to remember that most *hsien* are likely to show up at these celebrations in their human forms as active participants of the celebrations and rituals. Being in their mortal guises does not stop the *hsien* from absorbing the Yugen generated at these events. Below is a list of some of the festivals that generate Yugen for the *hsien*. Even religious celebrations that have nothing to do with the *hsien* themselves still generate Yugen, though in some cases, not very much. The *hsien* take full advantage of the energies generated, regardless of the source.

Nanusuka — A festival in Japan where seven fresh herbs are blended with a rice stew and eaten ceremoniously. The belief is that this ritual wards off disease during the following year. This ritual occurs every January 7th.

New Years Day (Japan) — A three-day long celebration, the New Year is both a celebration of what has been and what will be, as well as the recognized "birthday" for all adults — as one's age is dictated by the number of New Years one has seen — as only children receive individual birthday celebrations in Japan. Many people visit shrines during this time, in addition to paying off debts and observing "First Dream" on January Third. The dreams people experience on that night are considered prophetic. The sheer excitement and enthusiasm created during the celebration generates immense amounts of Yugen.

Obun Festival — In July of every year, Obun, "The Lantern Festival" takes place in Japan. This festival is celebrated in most rural and many metropolitan areas, and involves music, dancing and celebration of life, love and happiness.

Moon Festivals — Each month a different festival of celebration is held. The chronology of seasons with these Moon festivals

might seem a bit out of pace with traditional Western standards, because they are. The Chinese celebrate the New Year with the coming of spring, not with the arrival of January First. These festivals celebrate a different subject in every case, but in every case, Yugen is generated. Below is a listing of each Moon festival.

- **First Moon** — First Moon is one of the longer and more elaborate Moon festivals, taking place over the course of many days, each with a special meaning and significance. The first is the birthday of fowl, the second celebrates the birthday of dogs, the third of pigs. The fourth celebrates the birthday of ducks, and so on. The seventh day celebrates the birth of humanity, and is used as a day of rest. Traditionally on the seventh day, men must eat seven red beans and women must eat 14 red beans as a measure to ensure good health throughout the year. On or around the same time, Li Ch'un the formal beginning of spring is celebrated with a feast. In times past, the feast included the sacrifice of oxen or other livestock to the gods, but these days the offerings are smaller, but no less heartfelt.

The 15th day of the month is the Feast of Lanterns, where offerings are made to the gods in hopes of receiving peace and longevity. Offerings to the Heavens are made on the 18th day, and on the 19th, families gather together; wives visit their parents, and most families retire early. Toward the end of the month, fairs open near most of the major cities.

- **Second Moon** — Second Moon is of particular importance to the *hsien*, as the celebrations made throughout the month are dedications to the Sun God and, most importantly, to the earth-bound gods... the *hsien* themselves. The birthdays of Kuan Yin, the goddess of Love and Compassion, Confucius and Lao Tze are also celebrated during the Second Moon.

- **Third Moon** — The celebrations of Third Moon include Chi'ng Ming, "Pure Brightness," a celebration of spring and fertility in China. Many people visit with their ancestors and it is customary to plant a tree during the spring festival. In some places, the celebrations are raucous and in others they are quiet. In both cases, Yugen is generated. The birthday of Hsi Wang Mu — Mother of the Western Paradise, is also celebrated and numerous planned visits to temples are attended to.

- **Fourth Moon** — Fourth Moon celebrates the coming of Summer, honors the Eight Immortals, these humans who have achieved divinity through perfection and have been allowed into the Celestial Courts. On the eighth day, the Chinese celebrate the birth of Gautama, the founder of Buddhism.

- **Fifth Moon** — Fifth Moon brings the Dragon Boat Festival, a colorful celebration that offers prayers and thanks to the water spirits, and rites to honor the Gods of Medicine and Exorcism are performed.

- **Sixth Moon** — Sixth Moon brings the traditional start of the rainy season to China, and numerous prayers and celebrations are carried out to honor Lung Wang, the Dragon King, in the hopes that he will bring the rains in sooner, thus aiding the growth of crops. In many places, great effigies of Lung Wang, made of paper or cloth, are carried on the shoulders of 12 or more celebrants who bear them through the streets. Should the rains be late, images of Lung Wang are brought out to view the fields

where rain is needed, and the Great Bell near Peking rings throughout the day as a summons. The *hirayanu* are given thanks for protecting the cattle and horses of the farmers.

- **Seventh Moon** — The Moon of the Hungry Ghosts is a festival that lasts from the 15th to the 30th of October. The offerings made here (burning effigies of money, food, and material possessions; placing candles in paper boats and floating them down the streams and rivers, and carrying lotus blossom lamps through the streets) are meant to honor the dead, as are the feasts set out for the ancestors of families. These festivities generate only Yin Yugen, but the ghosts and the *hsien* alike accept the offerings meant to keep the Hungry Dead satiated.

- **Eighth Moon** — The Harvest Moon celebrates the Moon itself, and the season of plenty. On the 15th day, the Moon's birthday is celebrated and the Harvest festival takes place throughout the land.

- **Ninth Moon** — On the ninth day of the month, multitudes take to the hills of China and fly kites of every imaginable shape and size. On the 25th day thanks is given to the gods of the cities, called the Cheng Huang by mortals. The *hsien* who dwell within the cities feast on the Yugen generated and simultaneously do all they can to answer as many prayers as possible throughout that day and night.

- **The Tenth Moon** — The Tenth Moon celebrates the ancestors of mortals with a festival of the Dead. Once again, only Yin Yugen is generated at this time.

- **Eleventh Moon** — Eleventh Moon, called the White Moon, is a time for weddings and the honoring of ancestors. The *hsien* remain busy throughout this time, often given orders by the Shichi Fukujin, who spend much of the month responding to the prayers of mortals and sending the Shinma to take care of the answers they give. This is considered appropriate and necessary as a proper way of thanking the mortals who give so much of themselves through their prayers during the other 11 months of the year. While Yugen is generated at this time, as with all others, the *hsien* tend to look at the time of the White Moon as a sort of "dry season," partially because they are so busy, and because there is less Yugen generated by prayers at this time than during any other month.

- **Twelfth Moon** — Twelfth Moon is often called the "Bitter Moon." This time is spent in preparation for the New Year, a time of paying debts. Houses are cleaned, an effigy of the Kitchen God is burned after his mouth is smeared with honey to prevent him reporting any bad behavior on the part of the inhabitants of the household, and when the burning is done, the Kitchen God makes his report to Heaven. For the Shinma, the day this occurs among the mortals is the day they traditionally expect to hear from the Mikado. It is expected that at least a few representatives of the Mikado will manifest themselves and speak with the Shinma. To date, they have never been disappointed. In many cases, the Shichi Fukujin of Chi Ling who appear have little to say, at other times they often give secrets about how to locate lost dragon nests, or explain part of the Way to the *hsien* that has not been known before. On other occasions, they chastise the Shinma for failing to keep the Mandates of

Heaven properly, or in extreme cases, actually mete out punishment on the foolish. By the last day of the year, all debts are supposed to be paid, and effigies of the Gate Gods are placed near or on doors as a prayer for protection from evil. The Gate Gods are but one of the names the mortals still carry for the Wan Xian, now called Kuei-jin. As the *hsien* have accepted the burdens once carried by the Wan Xian, they also accept the Yugen offered in these effigies.

Asian Culture

*May you live in interesting times,
May you gain the notice of those in high places,
And may your every wish come true.*

— Traditional Chinese curse

To properly explain the myriad differences between Western and Eastern cultures would require more pages than are in this entire book. The similarities between the two are numerous, but pale in comparison to the sometimes subtle and often blatant deviations that exist.

What follows should not be considered a discourse on the societal differences, but rather a hint at some of the larger differences. It is neither a condemnation of either the European/American culture, or the Chinese/Japanese. It is simply a starting point.

Religion

One of the primary differences between what is traditionally perceived as Asian culture and that of the West is simply that the religions are so radically different. The Judeo-Christian foundations upon which much of the Western world is built believe in a single god, and state that the proper behavior will be rewarded with Paradise. While the Eastern beliefs also state that Paradise exists, the ways one can achieve the rewards of a better life are substantially different... not just in how one reaches the final rewards of Heaven, but also in what levels of extreme are required. Compare the religions listed below — acknowledging that the information given is extremely basic, please — to those practiced by yourself and your friends and you can get an inkling of the different evolutions of these beliefs from those of Judeo-Christian society.

Tradition

Taoism is, in a very real sense, the foundation of virtually all the societal beliefs in China, and has been an established religion for almost 3,000 years. While the rulers may have changed as dynasties rose and fell, the religious and social structures of the country have remained almost unaltered. Even the worst upheavals in Chinese history have not caused the sorts of social alterations that have occurred regularly in European history.

Arranged marriages still occur regularly in China and in many of the surrounding Asian countries, long after many in Europe and the Americas have washed their hands of the concept. Why? Because 3,000 years of tradition say it's okay to plan the futures of your children, up to and including whom they can marry. The vast majority of China and the surrounding regions still follow a very strong tradition of a male-dominated

society. For better or worse, the husband/father of a family is in charge of handling most ceremonies and is expected to make any and all decisions regarding a family's livelihood. While it's no longer legal in most of these countries, it's still a common practice for parents to sell children, usually daughters, in order to ensure financial security.

This is not to say that women don't have important roles in the societies of the East, but those roles are radically different than they are in much of the West. In Japan, the wife is traditionally in charge of the household. She handles the finances her husband earns and receives the vast majority of the moneys to maintain the home. Her duties also include making certain that the children are raised properly, though the father is still traditionally held responsible for their actions, and handling the arrangements for visitors. The husband may be in charge of the family, but in the home, the wife remains the final voice of authority.

Responsibility

The family unit is extremely important to the Chinese and Japanese alike, as well as the neighboring countries. The actions of the children are reflections of the parents, and the parents are held accountable for whatever their offspring do, whether the children are behaving in exemplary fashion or are violating the laws of the land. The same stands for adult offspring as well, and the head of a family is almost always the oldest male, regardless of how old his children might be. Those caught misbehaving are, at least from a social point of view, disgracing not only themselves, but their entire family as well. While this particular tradition has been weakened to a certain extent in some of the major cities, it is as strong as ever in most of the rural areas.

Responsibility is learned at a young age in most Asian countries, and is strictly enforced until such time as the child has left the parents' home. Discipline is extremely important in the Asian culture as a whole, and the reason remains the same; those who do wrong bring disgrace to their entire family and to their parents especially.

Crime and Punishment

While the following statement does not stand as strongly as it once did in Japan, it remains true of most other areas of Asia: Those found guilty of a crime against another are punished quickly and harshly. The general belief is that if the punishment is extreme enough, those committing the crimes will do everything they can to avoid suffering the disciplinary action again. A golden example of this is the policy of caning in Singapore. Most people found guilty of minor offenses receive a specified number of blows from a stout bamboo cane across their bare backs and buttocks. A very practiced expert in the fine art of using force usually delivers this caning, and aside from very nasty welts and bruises, it's not uncommon for several open wounds to result from the incident. This punishment is generally meted out in a public forum, adding humiliation to the extremely painful sentence. While this may be considered barbaric by Western standards, the offenders very seldom return to their unacceptable behavior patterns afterward. Several past offenders spoke to American reporters after a US teenager was found guilty of vandalizing several cars and sentenced to 18 strokes from a cane. In every case,

they agreed that starving was a better concept than being caught stealing food if a caning was the resulting punishment.

In China, the laws of the land preach leniency to those who plead guilty and harsher punishments for those who plead their innocence, thus taking up the court's valuable time. Appeals courts do not generally exist in most of Asia, and the punishments demanded by the court are normally carried out immediately, or within one week in the case of death penalties.

While Japan has become almost too lenient by Asian standards, the fines for breaking the law are still much stiffer than they are in the US, at least in most cases. What might be a \$500.00 fine in the United States could just as easily be 10 times as high in Japan, provided the offense didn't result in immediate imprisonment.

Those who would rather avoid suffering tend to obey the laws of the land in Asia. There are seldom second chances for redemption.

Respect

Respect is far more important in Asian culture than it is in Western society. If many people in the West tend to think that the Easterners are almost ludicrous in their deference, they should remember the differences in upbringing. Very few children in Japan or China would dare misbehave in public. That very notion goes against everything they are taught from a very young age. Proper courtesy and respect are part of the fabric of the culture as well as a part of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism alike. In some cases, the respect shown to elders and those of higher station is simply a façade, but even when discourtesy is shown, it normally takes the form of subtle insults that could easily be misinterpreted as an accident.

Those who are on a friendly basis can forego certain levels of proper courtesy, much as friends in the US might not shake

hands every time they meet, but around strangers and those who are dealt with in a business association, proper courtesy is generally considered a must. Once again, this discipline has weakened slightly in metropolitan areas, but not to the point where it no longer exists.

The examples listed above are only a few of the very substantial differences between Western and Eastern culture. Though sometimes blatant and other times almost unnoticeable, the discrepancies are very real. This chapter provides a list of movies, in no particular order, that are mostly produced in Asia and are excellent examples of how numerous the variations between the two cultures really are. Even those made in the US have been carefully written by people who have experienced both the East and the West and understand the gap between the two societies.

Dangers of the Middle Kingdom

It is true that we are gods, but you should strive to remember that there are many in the Heavens to whom we are only servants. Also you should remember that we are gods who are suffering the punishments of P'an Ku. We are not what we once were, and there are many walking in the Middle Kingdom who are our equals or even greater than we.

— From the Tao Te Hsien

The hsien know and acknowledge that they are less than they once were. The punishments they suffer stripped them of much of their previous glory and left them all but defenseless in the Middle Kingdom. The Kura Sau turned to their enemies to handle this problem, embracing the warped designs of the Yama Kings. The Daityas turned to the Yama Kings and then turned away before the demons could change them. They then walked the Middle Kingdom, averted their eyes from August Personage of Jade and struggled to make the best of what was left to them. Only after they had reestablished themselves did they start looking toward the Celestial Court and thinking that things must change in Heaven. The Shinma alone — at least in their own eyes — continued to follow the Mandates of Heaven and serve the Celestial Courts. All three courts of the hsien are different than they once were, more powerful than when they were originally banished to the Middle Kingdom, and all too aware of the dangers that wait them if they grow careless.

The threats to the hsien are many of the same ones that threaten mortals, and the additional risks that seem to come naturally when dealing with the shen of the world. **Hengeyokai, Kindred of the East, Demon Hunter X, The Dark Kingdom of Jade and The Dark Kingdom of Jade Adventures** cover many of the supernatural and mortal obstacles to the hsien in greater detail. However, for those who do not wish to invest in these sourcebooks, here is an overview. **Chapter Six of Land of Eight Million Dreams** gives examples of many of the creatures listed below.

Mortal Threats

Among the most common of the mortal threats to the hsien are the human governments of the Middle Kingdom. China and many of the surrounding lands are currently under communist rule. One of the most basic tenets of communism is the belief that religion is a crutch, which should be taken from the masses

The Chinese Language

The Chinese language and all of its major dialects have certain things in common, not the least of which is a similarity between words. A slight difference in which part of a sound is emphasized and how the word is used in a sentence can completely change the meaning of that word, especially when used in speech as opposed to writing. A single syllable word in Chinese can often have as many as six different meanings. In example, the word "Li" means "carp," but it also means "ritual" and "oriole." "An" means "dark," but it also means "harmony," "peaceful," "tranquillity" and "quail." "Tieh" means "iron," but it also means "iodine," "traitor," "infiltrator" and "butterfly." "Feng" means "lunatic," "wind," "irony" and "direction." Each of these may have a different character in Chinese, but in speech the only way to know which meaning is to understand the careful emphasis of how the word is spoken, and to gather the meaning from the words used around it. The use of the proper words with the improper emphasis can often generate subtle jokes or insults, as well as have hidden meanings for those who know what to listen for.

in order to better allow them to stand strong. Fortunately for the *hsien*, the communist regime in China has all but given up in their efforts to quell religious fervor in the land. While the state still officially frowns on organized religion, the realization that the people would often sooner die than surrender their beliefs came quickly in China. Even in Tibet, where the Chinese Government has continually tried to eradicate religion by force, the struggles have weakened to a great extent.

While the removal of religious beliefs is not a strong passion for most of the Communist governments of Asia, it is still a consideration in many people's minds. Those who've devoted themselves to the Communist ideals often quietly encourage others to cease with their "foolish" practices, and while the number of devout followers still vastly outweighs the number of atheists in China and the other Communist countries, a great number of believers have turned their backs on the *hsien*, gradually removing sources of *Yugen*.

Moreover, the strict laws of China and most other Asian countries make it harder for the *hsien* to perform their duties in many cases. In order to protect themselves from the *shen* threats to their existence, the *hsien* must wear mortal forms. Mortal forms are still susceptible to the laws of mortal governments, and those who act too strangely in public might well fall subject to punishment, especially in a land where outrageous behavior is frowned upon, and the threat of any potential risk to the government is taken very seriously.

Those *hsien* who would warn mortals away from communism are very often locked away and forgotten. While the *hsien* do not usually have to fear death (knowing that they will be born again in a new form soon after death caused by mortal hands) imprisonment, torture and interrogation are extremely painful and the human form can withstand a great deal of all of the above before dying. Also, having to go through the *kun shou* means losing memories and experiences, as well as having to start along the Way again, possibly delaying the return to Enlightenment. It is extremely inconvenient.

Being mortal, even part time, means enduring the trials and tribulations of mortal life, from taxation to heavy traffic and all of the implications that coincide with mortal existence.

Family obligation is a strong tie for most *hsien*, even those who've done all they can to sever the relationships of their host body from themselves. Family ties are so thoroughly ingrained in the societies of the East that most *Shinma* and *Daityas* often find themselves torn between the needs to fulfill their duties as *hsien* and the duties of family. It isn't easy to ignore the families of the host bodies, especially when the *kun shou* leaves the memories of the body's previous inhabitant intact. Despite their desires to leave the mortal families behind, even the most callous of the *hsien* often find themselves drawn back into the fold in times of family crisis.

The matter is made worse by the fact that the Mandates of Heaven and the needs of the family are sometimes in opposition. When the Mikado demand an earthquake or a typhoon, the *kamui* are obligated to deliver, regardless of the costs to the families of their host body. Failure to obey the Mikado often

means strict punishment, and as with the legal systems of China herself, the laws of the Mikado are swift to judge and to punish.

The Criminal Element

Organized crime in Asia is a very serious threat, especially to anyone who decides to cross the paths of the Yakuza, the triads and the tongs. The *hsien* are required to answer prayers, and many of the prayers that come their way have to do with requests for Heavenly protection from the criminal element. Please note that while the Yakuza and triads are referred to as "criminals" here, that is not always the case, as will be explained below.

Threats to mortals must be dealt with, and more often than not they must be handled directly. The *hsien* are duty-bound to look out for the humans, sometimes even if that means a few of the humans must be punished for the betterment of all. For the *hsien*, the Yakuza and the triads are often a problem, but the tongs are a continuous threat. While the Mandates of Heaven forbid the *hsien* to involve themselves in the leadership of mortal governments — a later addendum brought on by the actions of the Wan Xian — they often tread this line just the same in the process of answering prayers. Especially with the triads and Yakuza who, while not officially recognized as governmental in nature, often work along the same lines as the local governments.

Make no mistake about it, the organizations listed below often do a great deal of good in their areas, but they also commit heinous crimes when they feel the need to. The triads, Yakuza and tongs all deal in slavery, prostitution, the pornographic industry, drugs, illegal arms and contraband of all sorts. They are universally efficient and ruthless in handling interlopers, and not at all above showing the results of their actions around as a warning for others to heed.

The Triads

Triads have existed for centuries. They evolved from the needs of local powers to protect the people in an area from extreme actions on the parts of the recognized rulers in China and have grown to encompass many of the shadier aspects of everyday life. Triads do not officially exist in China; they are strictly against the law. This does not stop them from ruling over many aspects of mundane life in the major cities of China. Almost a combination of union and local government, the Triads serve both as neighborhood watch groups and as businesses. The leaders of a triad are often very well connected with the official government in a city, and can move freely — within reason — to do as they please.

This does not mean that the Triads are bad — quite to the contrary. The chances of receiving expedient justice are far better when dealing with the Triads than they are when dealing with the official governments forces in China. The Triads often work as local law enforcement in the neighborhoods where they exist. Many would rather approach a triad for retribution or the settlement of a dispute than endure the paperwork and bureaucracy of the legitimate authorities. As with the Yakuza in Japan, the Triads evolved in most areas as a response to the feudal lords of the past, a local way of ensuring that what must be handled



is taken care of fairly and expediently. Tradition and duty keep the Triads working in this manner.

Just the same, the Triads deal in matters that are extremely risky and highly illegal. They deal drugs, weapons and anything else that can turn a profit. They smuggle in illegal goods and smuggle out just as much. They are criminals, and they keep their authority with bribes, never hesitating to use extortion and blackmail when necessary. Innocents who would report their crimes to the legitimate authorities often end up dead. That's bad enough, but when a *hsien* takes the form of one of their victims during the *kun shou*, the matter is not considered resolved by either side. The Triads hate threats, and are likely to kill anyone who "miraculously" survives their punishments a second time just as soon as they can. For the *hsien*, the memories of what the triad did to the host body's previous inhabitant are often very strong, and the need to revenge the previous occupant is sometimes an extremely powerful driving urge. Though they do not necessarily seek revenge for what was done to the departed soul, they seldom take the injustice of murdering an innocent lightly.

The Tongs

The triads might well work in many of the same ways as the *Mafioso* in Italy and the US, but the tongs are a different matter entirely. If they serve to protect someone, they do so for profit, and those who aren't willing to give tithing to the violent gangs often receive beatings instead. Some tongs still

work as legitimate neighborhood protection groups, but they are few and far between.

The Triads are often seen as feudal lords, mostly kind but often unaware of local problems before the situations get extreme. The tongs would generally like to be perceived in the same way, but lack the authority and the ability to earn that sort of respect. Tongs deal in drugs, weapons, prostitution and protection on a local level, normally in areas far smaller than the Triads. These gangs normally seek quick money and respect through fear, whereas the Triads already have both in abundance.

Tongs are not as well established as the triads, and often war against each other for territories. If innocents fall in the conflicts, few of the tongs care one way or the other. These are the hoods and punks, the hardened, bitter youths who seek to take what they want, regardless of the consequences for those around them. They are often a source of trouble for the *hsien*, and have been responsible for donating more than their fair share of host bodies for the *kamui* and *hirayanu*.

Once again, the drive to revenge the murderer of the host body is often strong, but there is also the need to stop the tongs from committing wanton violence whenever they so desire. It is not uncommon for *hsien* Hui T'ungs to seek out and actively war against the tongs. In the eyes of the *Shinma* and *Daiyas*, the tongs and their ilk are normally considered a good way to practice the art of war.



The Yakuza

The Yakuza share many of the same purposes as the Triads, and even share a common origin. In both cases, these criminal organizations evolved from a need to protect towns from abusive officials and to police themselves when the ruling governments failed to do so. Both have long since moved into overseeing the criminal elements of their areas and still continue to work as unofficial courts for the locals and as law enforcement for the same. They are protectors and mostly benign overlords who are respected by the people around them, even if they are sometimes feared. The difference in the case of the Yakuza is that they are very open about what they do. Many Yakuza are set up in public offices and are willing to see anyone who has a legitimate complaint in the open. This doesn't mean they don't commit criminal acts, but they do have the common sense to keep those clandestine.

The Japanese government knows about the Yakuza and it even knows who is involved with the criminal empires. The local police often count on the Yakuza to keep the peace in their territories, thus easing the burdens on the official law enforcement agencies. And if the police tend to turn a blind eye toward the less extreme actions of the Yakuza, there are few who blame them.

But just as with the Triads, the Yakuza can and will use violence to achieve their goals if nothing else seems to be working. Hsien oftentimes find themselves at odds with the Yakuza, and even the most militant of the Shinma and Daityas tread carefully where the Yakuza are concerned.

The Law of Silence

In the eyes of many city dwellers in China, the triads and the tongs are effectively the local law. These gangs offer protection, help mete out justice and even offer sources of income to many of the locals. The same is true of the Yakuza in Japan. The triads and Yakuza bring a sense of security to their territories, and even the tongs normally keep their word once their offer of protection is given. The alternative in far too many cases is to wait for the legitimate authorities to eventually offer to look into a matter and then take their own sweet time about lending their assistance. In other words, the locals have more respect for the criminals in their area than they do for the legitimate law as often as not.

Even without the very real threat of punishment for speaking out against one of these groups, most of the people in any given area would seldom consider reporting the criminal activities of the organized crime families to anyone in authority. There is little desire to see the security and opportunities offered by the groups removed, and there is little by way of reward for those who actually pursue the matter. While this is not a syndrome unique to Asia, the strength of silence in most Asian communities holds more power than any fear of the legitimate authorities.

The Shen Connection

Just as in the West, some shen tend to have a great deal of influence within the criminal communities. The tongs, in particular, are a favored stomping ground of the younger Kuei-

jin, and both the Yakuza and Triads have their fair share of the older, more powerful Cathayans lurking within them. For this reason alone, the criminal empires are feared by the *hsien*, but the influences working in these groups span virtually all of the *shen* to one degree or another.

The Kura Sau absolutely love the tongs, and often make promises of assistance in exchange for favors. Though they also have influence within the Triads and Yakuza, the ties are seldom as strong as they are with the smaller gangs. Both Daityas and Shinma have members reborn into these organizations, and few of them sever those ties upon once again awakening to life in the Middle Kingdom. Many of the power struggles within these groups are manipulated if not always created by, the *shen*. The *chi'n ta* are not above dealing with these groups, and often have hidden members within the organizations who work their subtle magicks to influence everything of importance to their goals. Even the *hengeyokai* and the ghosts work their influences here. What often amazes the enlightened is that the supernatural connections within the criminal gatherings have yet to destroy them from within. Truth be told, despite their manipulations, few of the Yakuza or Triads are ruled by any *shen*. Most are still very much under the control of the mortals.

Demon Hunters

Demon hunters are those mortals who, for whatever reasons, turn to hunting the *shen* and delivering punishment to the supernatural forces of the world. The two best known groups of demon hunters in the Middle Kingdom are the Shih and Strike Force Zero.

Strike Force Zero

No, I have never encountered the homicidal maniacs you call Strike Force Zero. My arm fell off of its own accord, and the scars on my face occurred when I sneezed too hard during the coldest part of the winter.

— Tsing Wa Luc, Hakken Warrior, in response to a question from a hanumen.

Little is known or understood about Strike Force Zero, despite the best efforts of many *shen* to learn everything they can about these high-tech warriors. Every government connection grows silent when the demon hunters are mentioned, and even the best bribes fall short of gleaning more than the most basic hints about what this organization is up to.

What is known is that they are merciless. The Strike Teams, normally five strong, are ruthless in their pursuit of the *shen*, and brutal in their methods of dealing with the ones they find.

Most of the encounters between Strike Force Zero and the supernatural powers have ended in fatalities on one side or the other (or both) and even those that don't leave the *shen* either captured and transported to another place, or grievously injured.

When the Strike Force first made itself known, there were few who paid attention. These days that has changed. Almost all of the *shen* can tell you of someone they knew who fought against the Strike Force, or can show you the scars of their own unfortunate encounters.

The general law of the land is simply that they should be avoided, and barring that, the demon hunters should be de-

Hsien Injuries

The *hsien* can suffer two types of injury: aggravated and normal damage. Normal damage is caused by blunt weapons and mundane items and can be healed using Yugen. Each Yugen spent restores one Health Level of damage. When healing in this fashion, the *hsien* cannot take any other actions. If he attempts to do so, the injuries remain unhealed, even though the Yugen is still spent.

Aggravated damage is a different matter entirely. Aggravated damage is caused by certain attacks of other *shen*, such as claws and fangs of *hengeyokai* and *Kuei-jin* and the powerful magicks of the *chi'n ta*. This damage must heal naturally, and is restored at the rate of one Health Level per day of rest. The speed of healing aggravated damage can be doubled in some cases, at the Storyteller's discretion, if the *hsien* makes a Stamina + Meditation roll, difficulty 6, while resting within the boundaries of a dragon nest.

Jade

Just as the *Kithain* are sensitive to cold iron, the *hsien* can be sensitive to jade. If the proper rituals awaken the Chi of the jade, it can cause aggravated wounds when used against the *hsien*. Demon hunters of the Shih know this and often carry jade weapons. It is important to realize that jade does not affect *hsien* the same way that cold iron affects the *Kithain*. *Hsien* don't lose powers or abilities as a result of close proximity to jade, and merely touching jade does not cause injury. Only in cases where the jade has been "activated," where the Chi within the jade has been deliberately attuned for the purpose of causing injury, does this occur. Even after the jade has been awakened for this reason, it must still be used as a weapon, and the *hsien* can still attempt to soak the damage caused by the attack, though they do so at a -2 on their Stamina roll.

It should be noted, however, that even mortals without proper training can awaken jade to this purpose with prayer and meditation. Jade has long been a source of protection from evil spirits, and while the *hsien* can hide within human bodies, they are still spirits all the same.

The *hsien* themselves often use jade to gather Yugen, and jade is considered precious and sacred by the *hsien*. Jade is a part of the Ten Thousand Things, and to the *hsien* it is an important gift from P'an Ku; a part of the August Personage of Jade's very body, which he left for all to find and use when he began the Second Age.

stroyed. Even the *hsien* agree with this philosophy, as several of them have been captured and never encountered again.

The weapons of Strike Force Zero are powerful indeed, and many are specifically designed for encounters with *shen*. Worse still, it is rare to encounter a Strike Team that doesn't bring along more powerful weapons than the last group, at least if the rumors about them are true.

The Shih

Best to be somewhere else when a Shih comes to pay you a visit. He might only want tea, but as often as not the tea he brews will be made from your freshly ground tendons.

— Omigari Yohiro, a known Kura Sau leader, on the Shih. If he had listened to his own advice he would likely still be alive.

The Shih are known and respected by most of the *shen*. Unlike Strike Force Zero, these mostly solitary demon hunters seem to discriminate in which “demons” they choose to hunt and kill. Several *hsien* have even worked with the Shih from time to time, banding together temporarily against a common foe.

But where the Strike Force Teams use technology as their weapons, the Shih use powerful magics and sheer brute force to accomplish their goals. Virtually all of the *shen* can point known encounters with the Shih, and most can list a few names of the victims of their wrath. These solitary mortals have proven themselves in battles against the “demons” on countless occasions, and most have walked away from the fallen bodies of their enemies on several occasions. The Shih are a small group, but their physical prowess and mystical knowledge are powerful weapons indeed. Their history can be traced back to the end of the Third Age, and they have a long-standing tradition as demon hunters. With only very rare exceptions, these mortals teeter at the edge of poverty and often seem dangerously close to insanity, but they are far more acceptable to the *shen* than their counterparts.

Shih often work as mediators between opposing groups of *shen*, and their judgments are universally considered fair. They have averted extended wars between separate factions on at least a dozen occasions, and the list of their victims numbers easily into the tens of hundreds. Most *shen* tend to make themselves scarce when a Shih warrior is known to be in the area.

The Shen

The *shen* of Asia have fewer conflicts, by and large, than the supernaturals of the West. They do not, in general, automatically assume that the other *shen* around them have no right to be wherever they so desire, or to interfere in their affairs. Part of the reason for this is simply acceptance that they are all part of the Ten Thousand Things. Nothing exists without a reason, and therefore, everything should be given a chance to prove itself an enemy or a friend. Naturally, not everyone agrees with this concept, but there are few that will simply attack for the sake of beating the snout out of a stranger. Proper *shen* decorum dictates that unknown *shen* should be left in peace to pursue their own agendas. If the goals of the others are in opposition with those of an individual, the matter will be resolved when the time is right.

There are still biases, however, and few openly walk up and begin speaking with another *shen* of a different race out of the blue. The *shen* are nothing if not universally good at ignoring each other... at least in public.

Hengeyokai

They are our cousins, and some would say their punishment from August Personage was less extreme than our own, but at least they can



move through the Heavens. I consider them friends and allies, except when they feel the need to attack those under my protection.

— Yee Cho, *suijen* kamui on the subject of the *hengeyokai*

The *hengeyokai* generally get along with the *hsien*, though there are occasional skirmishes. Most often, the fights start as simple misunderstandings, but some of the *hengeyokai* almost seem to thrive on conflicts with the *Daityas*, though they fail to explain why. This is a two-way street, especially when the *Shinma* feel that the *hengeyokai* have unfairly attacked a mortal and seek to avenge the deceased.

Wraiths

There I was, minding my own business, when the previous inhabitant of this form decided to make herself known to me. I was just looking in the mirror, brushing my hair and preparing for the day when a slightly wider version of my face suddenly appeared. She accused me of murdering her and swore she would have her revenge against me. Then she disappeared. I never even had time to point out that I've at least gotten her body into decent physical condition....

— Yi Mai Ling, *nyan*, on the subject of the Restless Dead.

Wraiths are a problem for many of the *hsien*, and one that they admit is partially justifiable, but completely unfair. The *kun shou* places a *hsien* where it will, and that normally means within the body of someone in the process of dying, or into a body that has just ceased living. The *hsien* don't have any control over these choices, though some claim they've managed to influence exactly where they are placed when the rebirth takes place. The exception here is the *Kura Sau*, who are given the bodies of ritually murdered victims to inhabit. The *Daityas* and *Shinma* go where they are allowed to go, not where they choose. This distinction is often lost on the ghosts of their bodies' former inhabitants, and that causes no end of grief for many of the *hsien*. In some cases the newly reborn even manage to feel some guilt over the matter, but not very often.

Wraiths can make a point of haunting a *hsien*, and in worst-case scenarios are spiritually connected to the body the *hsien* now inhabits. Wraiths require fetters to pull themselves from the Yellow Springs to the Middle Kingdom. In some cases their physical forms are also their fetters. This seldom leads to a peaceful existence for the *hsien* stuck in such predicaments, and often leads to the recently reborn doing the bidding of the recently deceased in order to have any peace at all. Many of the *hsien* who choose to keep close ties with their host body's families do so as a result of pressure from beyond the grave. Honor dictates that the *hsien* remain fairly civil to the departed as a way of respecting the life given over during the *kun shou*. Very few of the fights between the *hsien* and the Dead are started by the *hsien*, but there are known exceptions.

On rare occasions, the wraiths have even managed to force *hsien* out of their bodies. In every known situation where this has occurred, the body died immediately, only to rise 45 days later as a *Kuei-jin*.

Kuei-jin

These arrogant bastards have done nothing but make our lives more difficult!" True, but we must accept the punishments of the August Personage. We are at least partially to blame for the situation

we are now in, and only by working toward the Age of Joy can we reverse the dilemma. What? No, we do not have to like the Kuei-jin. That's not what I'm saying at all. Personally I think they should all be destroyed. I'm merely saying we must face the mistakes we have made and learn from them. Blaming the Kuei-jin for our current situation is wrong.

— T'u, the Komoku guardian of the Library of Earth, in a discussion about the Tao Te Hsien

The *Kuei-jin* are, in many ways, the progenitors of everything that went wrong for the *hsien*. If not for their follies, the August Personage of Jade would not have been obligated to punish the *hsien*, because the *hsien* would not have become involved in the affairs of mortals. For that reason there is a strong resentment of the *Kuei-jin*, and that bitterness is often returned by the older *Cathayans* who recall the Fourth Age clearly.

Making matters worse is the fact that some of the *Kuei-jin* feel it's perfectly fine to consume the *Chi* of the *hsien*, and are directly responsible for the deaths of many *hsien* before they learned to hide themselves in human form. If not for the actions of the fallen *Wan Xian*, the *hsien* would likely be a great deal more powerful than they are now. Many of the *hsien* lost *Chi* during the early parts of the Fourth Age, and that *Chi* was lost forever. Even among the *Shinma*, who accept the punishments of P'An Ku as just, the resentment toward the *Kuei-jin* is very strong. While an encounter with *Cathayans* is not automatically a guarantee of combat, it comes pretty close.

For their part, the *Kuei-jin* have rules against feeding on the *hsien*. The effects of eating the *Chi* of the *hsien* are often detrimental to the mental health. Aside from this law, they do their best to avoid the *kamui* and the *hirayanu* alike. The *Shinma* reciprocate whenever possible, though some tend to make hunting down young *Kuei-jin* a favorite sport, especially if mortals have been praying for deliverance from evil spirits.

The *Daityas* are not so kind. Lost to Heaven and the Ten Thousand Hells alike, they take their imprisonment in the Middle Kingdom very personally indeed. While they seldom go out of their way to encounter the *Cathayans*, those who find them often tend to call others together and make their own dark celebrations over the ruined remains of the fallen *Wan Xian*. This activity has done nothing to help calm the already strained relations between the two species of *shen*. Those *Kuei-jin* who follow the *Dharmas* of the Howl of the Devil Tiger and the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon are considered fair game by the *Daityas*, especially if they work their will upon the mortals too often.

The *Kura Sau* look upon *Cathayans* as allies as often as not, doing all they can to recruit the young *Kuei-jin* for the Yama Kings. Those they cannot corrupt are of no significance, and are usually ignored.

Chin Ta

The Lightning People are as crazy as Hanuman. Put in the same situation as the Monkey King, they would likely try to steal the August Personage's robes to wear and leave the Peaches of Immortality unmolested. The robes would make a better status symbol.

— Lu Shin Lo, *Daityas* Deng-jin, while talking with a *suijen* at a dragon nest.

The mages, also called the "Lightning People" are enigmas to the *hsien*. Though they seek Enlightenment, these sorcerers normally fail to remain humble. Though they have power, the *chi'n ta* often fail to use their abilities for any reason that makes sense, and though they are able to touch the Heavens, most seem too unstable to be anything but demons. The *chi'n ta* are a paradox, and one that normally makes the *hsien* in general sigh and shake their heads. Surely any mortal who can so easily change the world to their whims must be close to reaching Immortality, yet instead of concentrating on this most respected of goals, they turn and squabble among themselves with a ridiculous ferocity.

That they are worthy of respect is obvious, but that they then demand such respect rather than merely allowing their dues to come in their own time proves they are not yet as Enlightened as they first seem.

The Kura Sau, as always, do their best to corrupt the powerful mortals for the Yama Kings, but they tread very carefully, knowing full well the power of the Lightning People. The Daityas and Shinma agree that taking each, as an individual is the best way to deal with the *chi'n ta*.

The Zaibatsu, also called the Five Metal Dragons, is a different sort of beast altogether. There are few among the *hsien* who like the notions of the Zaibatsu. If the Technocracy mages have their way, there will be no need of religion, no need for the spirits and little cause for celebration. The *hsien*, in general, dislike the Zaibatsu, and the Shinma look upon them as agents of the Age of Sorrow. Though they do their best to watch over the technological wizards, they seldom intervene with their actions, understanding that doing so without cause is to invite the wrath of the Celestial Court. Of course, should they be given a reason, absolutely horrible things could happen to every building where the Zaibatsu are known to hide.

Waigoren

They are arrogant, insufferable and stranger than I can express with words. And you know how I love to talk. If they leave even me speechless, there is most definitely something to worry about.

— Siu Lee Kwang, hanuman, in a discussion of the changing face of Asia's larger cities.

Waigoren is a catchall phrase of the *hsien*. It covers everything from humans to the *shen* of the West. The *hsien*, much like the mortals around them, tolerate the foreigners, but that is all. Asia as a whole is not a place that openly embraces change, especially if that change comes from another land. Many in China and Japan consider the westerners who come to their lands as the root of all evil, but many more simply don't understand the strangers to their land. In China and Korea alike, it is considered less rude to completely ignore a stranger than to communicate with them. Communication could lead to misunderstanding, and that, in turn, could lead to conflict. To many Westerners this comes across as arrogance, when, in fact, it is merely proper manners.

There is a good deal of xenophobia in Asia. Many blame the Western influences for every sin imaginable, whether or not the West is responsible in reality. Sounds rude? Well, same has been true in the West from time to time, like when virtually every Japanese-American citizen was locked into detainment centers and had their properties taken away from them during World War Two. That which is strange is seldom easily accepted.

The same tenet is all but a part of the *hsien* outlook when it comes to the Waigoren *shen*. The Changing Breeds of the West are less likely to tolerate each other, and often view the *shen* native to the East as threats, even when nothing has occurred which should alarm them. The Kin-jin are strangely morose as often as not, and tend to meddle where they simply do not belong. They are rude and almost blatantly manipulative, and they are — if the Kuei-jin can be believed on this affair — all descended from a murderous farmer who killed his own brother. Not a very prestigious origin of the species, and nothing to redeem them in the eyes of the *hsien*. Many of the *hsien* have already encountered at least a few of the Waigoren wraiths, and have generally agreed that they are as strange as their living counterparts. At least very few *hsien* have ever been born into foreign bodies — an embarrassing predicament at best, a disaster of epic proportions in some cases — which means few have ever been haunted by the ghosts of the West.

The *hsien* look upon Western mages as more extreme examples of the very behavior they frown upon in the *chi'n ta*, and do all they can to avoid contact with them, just in case the rude manners might be catching. They are, however, constantly amused and guardedly optimistic about the Western examples of the Akashic Brotherhood. Perhaps there is hope for them yet. To counteract this optimism, they have their own Zaibatsu with intentions just as dark and extreme as those of the Technocracy mages in the East. Few have forgotten the events that occurred in Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and most of the *hsien* tend to look toward the Waigoren Technocracy as the architects of those dreadful explosions.

Then there are the Kithain, who believe they have a connection to the *hsien*, for reasons the *hsien* don't quite understand. While they are fascinating, and usually courteous for Waigoren, they are a little unsettling to be around for long periods of time. Their fascination with Xi Wang Chi is unusual, and they actually seem to physically change when they enter the place they call the Dreaming. Still, they are interesting traveling companions upon occasion, and they tell fabulous stories.

Overall, the Waigoren are simply considered very strange and left in peace, so long as they remember their place and remember not to walk where they are not wanted. Those who fail to leave alone what they should not touch are quickly reminded that they are tolerated, not welcomed by the *shen* in general. The *hsien* are among those who are particularly enthusiastic about teaching the foolish the error of their ways.



CHAPTER THREE: SHINMA: SPIRITS OF DREAMS

By copying, the ancient models should be perpetuated.

—Hsieh Ho, *Notes Concerning the Classification of Old Paintings*

The Shinma differ greatly from their Kithain cousins in the West. Rather than creatures born of mortal dreams, the *hsien* are spirits who take on the forms of human beings. The Shinma don't do this to hide from Banality, but to learn more about the Middle Kingdom where they must dwell. Being human, or animal in the case of the *hirayanu*, teaches valuable lessons about Yin, Yang and balance. Appearing human is also protection against the greed of the *Kuei-jin* and other *shen* who would steal the *hsien*'s magic. When *hsien* appear in their true *wani* forms, they're exposed to everyone. It's much safer to appear mortal in public if possible.

The Hotei: Human Shells

The *hsien*, unlike their Western counterparts, don't displace the mortal soul within a human body, or merge with it, an explanation some Kithain have suggested for their own rebirths. Instead, a Shinma finds a dying human whose soul is fleeing, and only as the soul departs does the *hsien* seize that body for her own use; this ritual is called *kun shou*, and the new form is called the *hotei*. Often, when the *hsien*'s previous incarnation dies, he finds a new body close to it. For



example, if the nyan Ming-yeh dies, her spirit escapes her old body and looks nearby for another. Obviously, her first choice would be a young, attractive person, since nyan thrive on social contact. When she finds what she wants (possibly a young child who is dying before her time) the spirit of Ming-yeh moves into the child's body as the soul flees; then, the nyan gets on with life, albeit with the restrictions of her new human form. This practice is even used with babes in the womb, young persons killed in accidents or, occasionally, a venerable dying grandmother. Over time, the human figure may take on some minor physical aspects associated with the particular kwannon-jin; a chu jung's human body, for example, may develop slight red highlights in the hair. A Shinma who enters a child's body is called a *hsien-tsu*, while those *hsien* who inhabit adult bodies are *hsien-jin*. A *hsien* keeps this status all through her life; for example, if born as a *hsien-tsu*, she doesn't become a *hsien-jin* upon turning 15.

The upshot of the *hsien*'s body snatching is that "wondrous recoveries" occur from time to time. Maybe Auntie Woo didn't die in the train wreck; miraculously, she survived, but then left Uncle Hou and their children! More than one happy partner has had a wife or husband suffer a near-death experience only to undergo a total personality

shift and leave home. One of the sadder aspects of Shinma existence is that none can bear children; after all, they're spirits in once-dead bodies. Some pessimistic *hsien* philosophers have suggested that there are a finite number of Shinma spirits, and all of them must pass through a thousand lifetimes before any can be welcomed back to the spirit worlds.

Is it possible for a more ruthless Shinma to purposely prepare a certain body for habitation? Yes, but these *shen* never discuss this foul practice openly. Such wanton murder is against the Mandate of Heaven; in truth, it does occur. Shu Shen in particular aren't above taking a body by force and removing the soul before its time.

So the human body is just a convenient shell or illusion for the Shinma to use when dealing with mortals. Few *hsien* have clear memories of their previous incarnations; their habitation of a human body seems to muddle memories. With some difficulty, Shinma can use Wu Tan while in hotei form, though specific kwannon-jin powers are only accessible in wani form. Shinma in all forms are subject to Lucks and Curses. Lucks are beneficial minor powers or abilities, while Curses are limitations, usually affecting personality or free will. Shifting into mortal aspect from wani form (or animal form for *hirayanu*) costs one Yugen. While

in hotel or animal form, Shinma are hard to pick out of a crowd, even for *shen* who know what they're looking for; any being other than another Shinma is at a +2 difficulty for all types of Perception or detection rolls.

Hsien-Tsu

A Shinma who inhabits a body while it is a baby or young child, from birth to about 15 years of age, is called a *hsien-tsu*. This *hsien* grows up with all the contacts and benefits of human society, though he won't realize he's Shinma until several years have passed. These beings are usually quite precocious for their age, and for some reason, more *hirayanu* than *kamuii* are reborn as *hsien-tsu*. Parents of *hsien-tsu* often find their children to be detached and self-absorbed. Some are loners while others seem to have a bevy of acquaintances, yet no close friends. When *hsien-tsu* reach their middle teens, most leave home in search of other Shinma or to formally join a *hui t'ung*, an affiliation of *hsien* similar to a motley. As in the West, an older *hsien* often watches over the young *hsien-tsu*, serving as a mentor and friend. Even when they grow up, *hsien-tsu* are much more capricious, playful and unpredictable than *hsien-jin*, the Shinma who manifest in adults.

Players of *hsien-tsu* characters should plan on spending points on Backgrounds such as Contacts and Mortal Soci-

ety Merits and Flaws to reflect connections with humanity. Additionally, players will note that costs for Alchemy are less expensive for *hsien-tsu* than *hsien-jin*. (See Chapter Four.)

Hsien-Jin

A *hsien* who inhabits the body of an adult, someone over the age of 15, is called a *hsien-jin*. *Hsien-jin* usually break off the human contacts of their new body abruptly; they have their own agendas to worry about and don't need to live with parents or guardians as do *hsien-tsu*. Many *hsien-jin* do this not only out of duty to the Shinma, but as a kindness to the humans. The Shinma respect that mortals may not understand the drastic personality changes taking place in their relatives saved from the brink of death. More *kamuii* than *hirayanu* tend to become *hsien-jin*, and as a rule, they are much more serious, driven and steadfast than the *hsien-tsu*.

Players of *hsien-jin* who wish their characters to maintain the family ties of their new body should purchase the Contacts Background. The tradeoff is that no one is going to question an adult wandering around alone, while a child would get sent back home in short order. Players will also note that costs for Attributes and Abilities are less than for *hsien-tsu* characters; this reflects the time



The Mask of Shintai

While in wani form, all Shinma have a fearsome power called the Mask of Shintai, or Mask of the God-Body. As a general rule, the *hsien* call on this ability only when extremely angered or when the occasion calls for an all-out show of force — bluff or not. When using the Mask of Shintai, hirayanu become twisted and horrible, while the kamuii appear too awesome and magnificent to behold. Any unusual features become exaggerated, and with the hirayanu, this hyperbole extends into the grotesque. A *fu hsi*'s fangs grow longer, dripping poison, and her scales become more pronounced and jagged; witnesses flee for their lives. The kamuii *hou-chi* radiates power and authority. His skin hardens and glistens like polished mahogany, and his green eyes flash with ancient wisdom, daring anyone to defy his might. Think of kamuii donning the Mask of Shintai in the same fashion as a furious *sidhe* invoking the Dragon's Ire. Both are resolute and terrifying, causing beholders to bend in complete supplication.

System: The Shinma decides how many points of Yugen he wants to spend on the Mask of Shintai effect.

Then, all beings present must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7 for mortals, 6 for *shen* and 5 for other *hsien*. Success must equal or exceed the amount of Yugen invested by the Shinma on the effect. Those who fail to achieve enough successes either flee in panic from the dread hirayanu or kowtow to the mighty kamuii. The effect lasts for a number of turns equal to the difference between the number of Yugen spent by the Shinma and the number of successes of the witness.

Example: Chung the *chu-ih-yu* kamuii gets angry at Sungyo the hanumen and dons the Mask of Shintai to scare the silly hirayanu. Chung spends four points of Yugen on the effect; since Sungyo is a *hsien*, the difficulty of her Willpower roll is 5. Poor Sungyo's player has only four dice to roll for Willpower, and she gets only three successes. Since Chung devoted four points of Yugen on his effect, Sungyo will kowtow for one turn. Maybe she'll know better next time.

In dragon nests, the unfortunate targets of this power must get two successes for every point of Yugen spent by the user to resist the Mask of Shintai.

the adults have spent learning various trades and life skills. (See Chapter Four.)

The Wani: True Forms

The Shinma are not caught between the mortal world and the Dreaming as the Kithain; when they drop their human illusion and become visible as their fae selves, a form called wani, they are wholly magical beings. As wani, the *hsien* can use Wu Tan, their magical arts, much more readily. The drawback is that when a *hsien* manifests in his wani form, or when he uses Wu Tan, anyone can see him. Consequently, it's a serious matter indeed when a wani appears; it's a bad idea for Shinma to take this form in plain sight unless circumstances are dire. Most *hsien* have learned the value of Pakua. (See Backgrounds in Chapter Four.) This aptitude allows Shinma to avoid drawing attention, unless they shift forms in public or fireblast the local fast-food restaurant.

As wani, Shinma do have a number of special powers according to their kwannon-jin. Most of the wani forms are awe-inspiring, if not completely frightening. Shifting to wani form costs one Yugen, as does shifting back to human shape from wani. For hirayanu, shifting back and forth from wani to animal form also costs one Yugen.

Animals (Hirayanu Only)

In addition to wani and hotei forms, hirayanu can also take the shape of animals and communicate with others of

their kind, according to their kwannon-jin. Nyan transform into cats, tanuki into badgers, *fu hsi* into serpents, *heng po* into fish and hanumen into monkeys. (For details on animal statistics, see Chapter Six.) These animal forms don't acquire additional powers or abilities; physically, they're just normal snakes or fish, though the hirayanu do retain their mental Attributes, Lucks and Curses in the animal form. In other words, a wise hirayanu won't turn into a carp and dive into the Yangtze when the fisherfolk are casting their nets. It costs one Yugen for a hirayanu to shift to animal form, whether he's changing from wani or hotei form.

Organization

Each kwannon-jin is detailed in the following manner. Hirayanu are detailed first, followed by kamuii.

Name and Pronunciation: What the kwannon-jin is called and how the name is pronounced. Please note that Chinese and Japanese are extremely complex languages with many dialects and linguistic conventions. These are common pronunciations, subject to regional inflections and accents.

General Description: What the kwannon-jin is like in terms of temperament, goals, lifestyle, history and outlook.

Appearance: General tendencies of appearance in wani form and with the Mask of Shintai for both kamuii and hirayanu, and animal form for hirayanu.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: The major element associated with the kwannon-jin.

Luck and Curse: The minor abilities and limitations the kwannon-jin has in all forms.

Wani Powers: The powers the *hsien* has in his true form.

Concepts: Character ideas for the kwannon-jin.

Merits and Flaws: Suggested Merits and Flaws for the kwannon-jin, subject to Storyteller approval.

Quote: A typical saying from a member of the kwannon-jin.

Outlook: The kith's perspective on other *hsien* and the Waigoren Kithain.

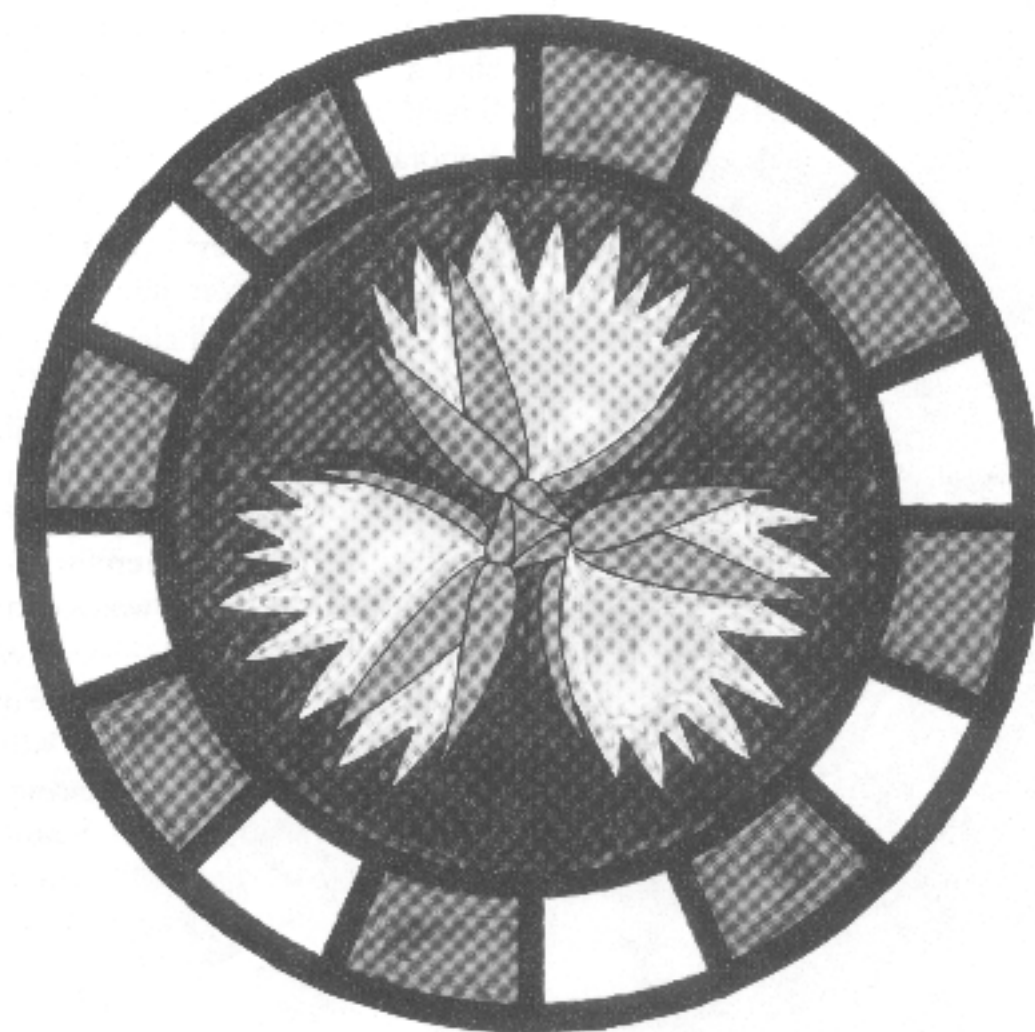
Hirayanu

The hirayanu are the commoners of the Shinma; their tasks include completing quests, fulfilling human prayers and serving as messengers for the kamuii. But rather than feeling like they're second-class citizens, most hirayanu consider their role in *hsien* society to be decreed by T'ien Ming, the Mandate of Heaven. They don't deny or mope about their destinies; they live them to the fullest.

Each hirayanu kwannon-jin has the ability to turn into a particular animal. These animal forms have no special powers, though the hirayanu maintain their mental Attributes and can communicate with their animal species. Often, the animals are the most excellent specimens of their kind; as a cat, a nyan will be large and sleek, while as monkeys, the hanumen will have exceptionally long tails and thick fur.

Kamuii

The elemental kwannon-jin of metal (*chu-ih-yu*), fire (*chu jung*), wood (*hou-chi*), earth (*komuko*) and water (*suijen*) comprise the kamuii, nobles among the Shinma. These *hsien* are protectors and arbiters; they safeguard natural wonders and mystic places, especially according to their element. *Hou-chi*, for example, tend to forests while *suijen* preserve rivers or lakes. Kamuii also coordinate the Elemental Bureaucracy, the ministries of the elements. All kamuii can withstand great amounts of physical damage from their element; for example, a *chu-jung* is nearly invulnerable to fire while a *suijen* simply can't drown. While these abilities are effective only in wani form, most kamuii are talented at sports and skilled in jobs that complement their elements.



Fu Hsi

(foo-hisee)

The serpent hirayanu are unfailingly wise, mysterious and curious; they have a calm demeanor and invest a great deal of time in listening and thinking. Their manners are impeccable, and they rejoice in the chance to share wisdom with *hsien* and mortals alike. Traditionally, the fu hsi have served as beneficial marriage counselors; human couples will often ask the fu hsi for enlightenment on approaching nuptials, or advice on arranging marriages. Most fu hsi practice monogamy, which other Shinma consider extremely odd. A member of this kwannon-jin makes for a good court advisor or member of a hui t'ung.

In addition to prenuptial counseling, the fu hsi love to delve into puzzles, mysteries and riddles. Legends say that the lo shu, a magic square of nine numbers that add to 15 in all directions, is the work of the fu hsi. Other stories tell how the honorable Lord Bau, a well-known Chinese magistrate of the Sung Dynasty, often consulted a trusted fu hsi companion for advice. Whatever the tales of legend may be, the fu hsi remain the consummate detectives among the *hsien*.

Nevertheless, their insatiable curiosity is sometimes a hindrance to these hirayanu. A fu hsi enraptured with a mystery will devote all his time to solving it, ignoring food, sleep and even the prayers of mortals. Usually, a mate or comrade will have to bring the errant *hsien* back to his senses with sharp words or a cold bucket of water.

Hsien-tsu among this kwannon-jin are quick-witted and clever. They can whiz through examinations requiring skill in logic, reasoning and mathematics. Many are also talented musicians, playing the traditional *erh-hu*, a stringed instrument resembling a violin, or the *chi'in*, an instrument with seven strings, much like the zither. Most young fu hsi are perfectly content to sit alone and ponder various mysteries of the universe.

Lo Shu

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

Hsien-jin fu hsi also value solitude, though they are genuinely devoted to their chosen mates and loyal to their sponsors and mentors. Many members of this kwannon-jin join the service of a kamui or higher-ranking fu hsi as advisors, investigators or administrators. Others live quietly in wooded retreats until they are called to service.

Not surprisingly, a number of fu hsi gravitate to the Xian Mo, seeking enlightenment and understanding of the Tao Te Hsien. Many others prefer sharing their wisdom and blessings with those in the local area; these fu hsi are part of the Wu Hsien majority. A scant few have joined with the Li Shen and spend their time thinking about the right order of nature.

Appearance: The fu hsi in wani form have serpent bodies from the waist down, with glittering scales in rainbow colors. Above the waist, they appear somewhat more human, albeit with extremely long hair and short fangs. Males usually wear a queue, a long single braid, while females shape their hair into elaborate fans or decorate their tresses with jeweled cauls and pins. For both sexes, the nails tend to be long and sharp, and the skin is faintly green in tint. Fu hsi can turn into any serpent of their choosing, but often pick the forms of boas or pythons, both of which have habitats in China. When the gentle fu hsi choose to wear the Mask of Shintai, they become the creatures of nightmares. The short fangs grow several inches, dripping black venom, while the bright scales darken and become jagged and rough. The fu hsi's claws turn green as rotting meat, and the long tresses tighten into snaky dreadlocks that twist and contract of the own accord. The hirayanu's neck swells and grows while the tail thrashes angrily, threatening to lash anyone who comes too close.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Wood

Luck: Master sages, the fu hsi may add +2 to Wits rolls involving knowledge, puzzles or lore.

Curse: The fu hsi find enigmas so enticing that they may lose track of time and other responsibilities. The difficulty of Will-power rolls to resist total involvement in a mystery or puzzle is 8.

Wani Powers: The hides of the fu hsi are extremely tough, adding two dice to all soak rolls. Fu hsi can also strike opponents with their sharp talons (Strength + 1) or use their fangs to rend flesh (Strength + 2) in close combat. Finally, these hsien can inject a paralyzing poison if their bite is successful; a victim must

roll Stamina (difficulty 6) to resist the effects, which becomes more difficult (+1) each time the fu hsi bites the target. If the victim fails to resist, he is helpless for one hour per point of damage inflicted.

Concepts: Court advisor, police detective, private investigator, psychologist, teacher.

Merits and Flaws: Concentration, Curiosity.

Quote: "No, no, no! He is not the one for you! When will you learn to listen to the wisdom of Auntie Yuk, my child?"

Hwei-ru, venerable father of wisdom,
offers his advice:

Chu-ih-yu — They have strength in their arms and fair judgment on their tongues, but do they truly strike with justice? What is the sound of a chu-ih-yu's compassion?

Chu Jung — Their hearts are as a fiery forge, yet absent are the cool waters to still the furnace's rage. How long can it burn without vanishing into the night?

Hou-chi — These kamui are our most cherished mentors and friends. We share their love of places alive with the heartbeats of life.

Komuko — They have solved their mysteries and achieved an honorable state of existence. Are they bored by the balance they have found?

Suijen — Their words are lovely and fluid, yet their hearts can be hollow and lonely. Too much attention to others deprives them of self-understanding.

Hanumen — They have so much to teach us all and so much yet to learn on their journeys. How can we share our love of lore with these impetuous and delightful folk?

Heng Po — Listen for the waves on a summer's night; those are the never-ceasing whispers of the heng po. When will the water's children learn to hear their own words?

Nyan — Their journey has not yet begun though their feet move far ahead of the music in the sacred dance. If they do not stop and listen, they will forever be apart from the beat.

Tanuki — They are always steadfast and will never stop in their quests. Their tenacity is worthy of respect, though their too-fierce natures are regrettable.

Waigoren — These wondrous creatures have quests and duties like our own, but their greed is terrible to behold. Will they let it consume them before achieving enlightenment? How can we teach them wisdom when they come to our ancient land?

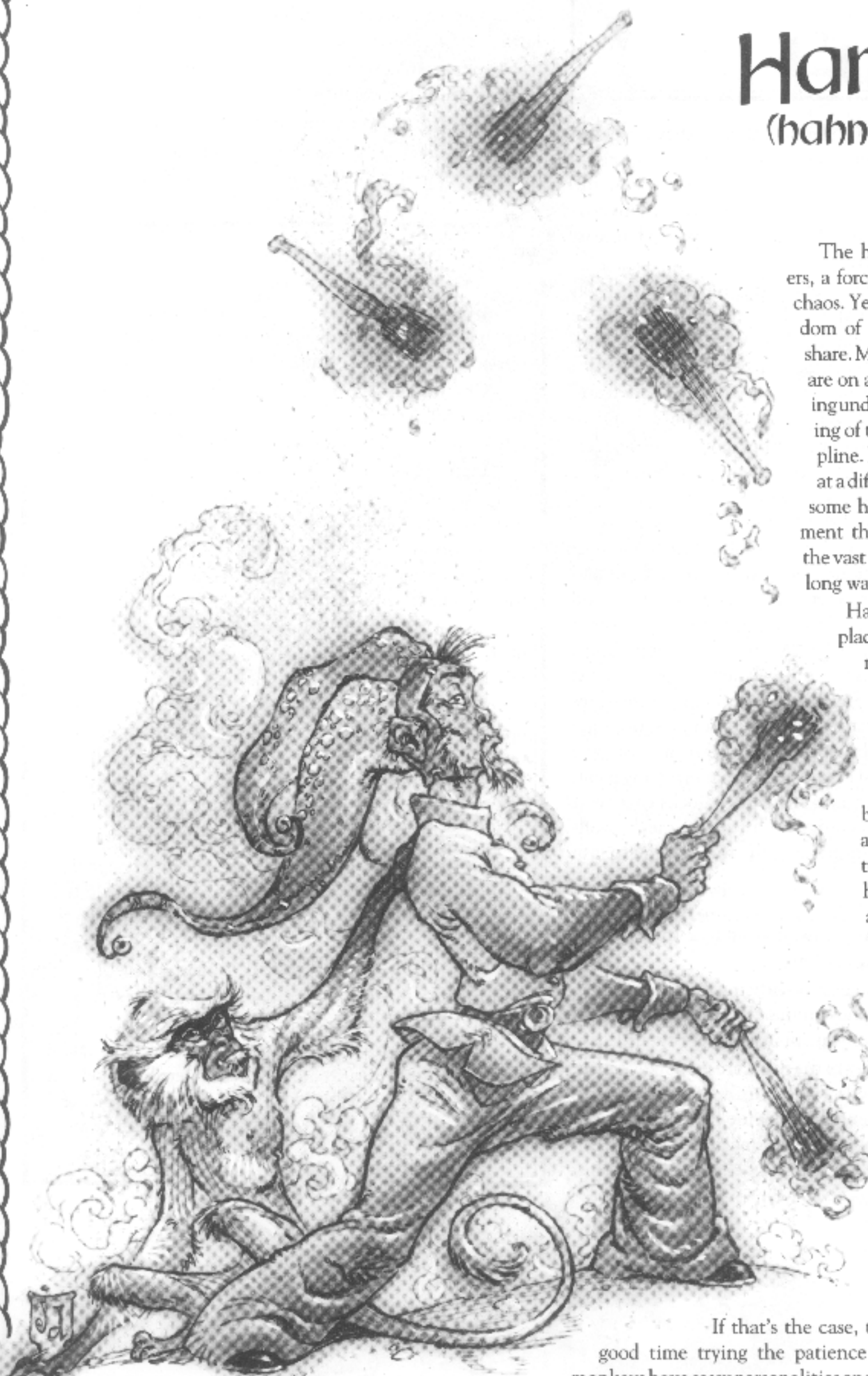
Hanumen

(hahn-you-men)

The hanumen are constant jesters, a force of undisciplined, random chaos. Yet these monkeys have a wisdom of laughter that they love to share. More than most Shinma, they are on an allegorical journey, seeking understanding through the taming of their restless minds by discipline. Each hanumen, of course, is at a different point on this journey; some have found more enlightenment than others. In other words, the vast majority of hanumen have a long way to go.

Hanumen occupy a strange place in *hsien* society. They are not elemental nobles like the *kamuii*, but *hsien* history is filled with stories of monkey kings who have ruled provinces and sacred places. Their link with the balanced element of earth also grants them a certain status. The upshot is that many *hirayanu* treat the hanumen as minor nobility while the *kamuii* look on them as distant cousins, a little closer than other *hirayanu*, but still progressing on a path of understanding the *kamuii* have already trod. Some *hsien* say that the hanumen came to the Middle Kingdom as a test of the gods, who would throw open the gates to the spirit worlds if the earthbound *hsien* could aid the monkeys in their journey.

If that's the case, the hanumen are having a good time trying the patience of their brethren. These monkeys have sassy personalities and will play naughty tricks on even the stuffiest *kamuii*. No one is spared their sharp wit. They



can also be temperamental, but their moods tend to be relatively cheerful; hanumen anger is short-lived.

Hanumen *hsien-tsu* are an armload of trouble. They're always climbing trees, rooftops and drainpipes. Their tricky ways start early; if a hanumen youngster hasn't played a prank by the time she's three, something's quite wrong. These children tend to excel in sports and games requiring manual and bodily dexterity. Despite these talents, many don't do well at all in the martial arts or dance, lacking the discipline to practice and play by the rules.

Hsien-jin aren't much better. Their jokes get more elaborate and their sharp tongues become even more well honed. Many like to hang around *kamuii*, hoping to play a great trick or else learn something about becoming more noble. They have genuine respect for the *komoku* who share their reverence for earth; these *kamuii* respond in kind by trying to help the hanumen develop wisdom and enlightenment. Hanumen are generally social and enjoy joining other *hirayanu* on quests also.

Hanumen think the idea of *hsien* society groups like the *Li Shen* or *Xian Mun* are quite funny. Of all the *Shinma*, they uphold strong beliefs in equality; anyone can laugh, cry or die, right? If pressed to explain their politics, they will probably explain that they are simply on a path and consider any *hsien* they meet along the way to be family.

Appearance: In *wani* form, these *Shinma* are a mix of human and monkey, approximately the same height as in their mortal form. The body is fur covered and has a long prehensile tail, but the hands are dexterous and capable of holding and using delicate instruments. Hanumen love to wear exotic clothes and gaudy jewelry in their *wani* forms; they tend to really stand out in a crowd. As monkeys, most hanumen appear as gibbons, which are roughly three feet tall; or macaques (such as the well-known rhesus monkey), which is slightly less than two feet tall. Both types are native to southeast Asia. As monkeys, hanumen will be prime specimens, with thick, luxurious fur, long tails and well-developed hands and feet. The hanumen who uses the *Mask of Shintai* is frightening because she's both familiar and bizarre. Imagine a muscle-bound gibbon over six feet tall, with a gaping maw, sharp teeth and bulging golden eyes. Add a long, whiplike tail and bony protrusions along the spine — this is truly a hanumen at her worst.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Earth

Luck: The Laughing Gods have shown favor to the hanumen, as long as these nimble jesters choose to help others. All hanumen may make a *Charisma + Empathy* roll at difficulty 4 to soothe the moods of other beings. This includes calming the fiery tempers of *chu jung*, the rages of *hengeyokai* or even the frenzy of a *Kin-jin*, should such a meeting ever occur. A hanumen can pacify one angry being for every two successes the player rolls.

Curse: Hanumen rarely take life seriously, which can be a problem, particularly if there's a need for them to be polite and courteous. The difficulty of any *Etiquette* rolls or similar tests is raised by two.

Wani Powers: Hanumen automatically gain two extra dots in *Dexterity*, even if this raises the *Attribute* over five. These *hsien* can also use their prehensile tail to grasp objects; they aren't skilled enough to wield swords and such with their tails, but these limbs can be useful to throw bags of noodles and liven up battles.

Concepts: Court jester, daredevil, entertainer, explorer, hopeful socialite.

Merits and Flaws: Common Sense, Wyld Mind.

Quote: "What do you mean I wasn't invited? How could you overlook someone as wonderfully entertaining as my monkey self?"

Sersus, great monkey warrior, shakes his tail and explains it all:

Chu-ih-yu — Ooooooh, I'm so scared. They think they know what's best for everyone and will back that up with a sword. They've become the bullies they say they despise.

Chu Jung — Don't let all their rules for proper living fool you. Underneath those prim exteriors, they're more mixed up and foul tempered than we are.

Hou-chi — The *hou-chi* are patient and friendly sorts. But watch out; they get really irritated when we climb the trees in their sacred groves and eat too many unripe bananas.

Komuko — Of all *kamuii*, they are the kindest to us and accept us for what we are. We want to please them, but that's easier said than done.

Suijen — These *kamuii* are a cold, unfeeling lot. Even our best tricks don't seem to ruffle them, which makes us try all the harder.

Fu Hsi — These snakes are nice enough, but they talk too much, always wanting us to remember countless bits of lore and such. When's school going to be over?

Heng Po — If you ever lose something, chances are the *heng po* have found it. The problem is, however, what they'll ask in return for your lost property.

Nyan — The cats aren't what they seem. Watch out for those glowing eyes; you never hear the *nyan* until they're ready to pounce.

Tanuki — They like to snarl and bite, but the badgers have much in common with us. Of all *hsien*, they honestly appreciate our good sense of humor.

Waigoren — You mean all those old stories about Western faeries are true? I thought it was just something made up to send us off on a wild goose chase. Maybe it's time to investigate!

Heng Po

(heng=poe)

The hengpo are useful companions, but entirely unpredictable.

On one hand, they like helping people find things they've lost; on the other hand, it may take these fish hirayanu years to fulfill a quest. They're in no hurry about anything. The worst of the heng po can be extremely fickle and switch sides in a conflict or dispute just for the fun of being contrary. Other heng po are social creatures who enjoy being in a crowd. Heng po also have a reputation for righting ancient wrongs, but they usually ask for some sort of payment; seldom is the knowledge that they've done a good deed a reward in itself. They're also packrats, which may help explain why they're so talented at locating missing things.

These hirayanu like to collect information as much as random junk. They'll sell rumors to anyone, provided the price is right. Heng po, however, have an unfortunate tendency to embroider on the truth. This isn't lying; in their eyes, it's making stories more interesting. Other Shinma listen to the tales just because they're told so well. Any-

one who buys information from the heng po will probably have something of value, albeit under several layers of exaggeration. These *hsien* are generally intelligent and have a good idea of where to halt the hyperbole and just how much people can afford to pay. Sometimes, their prices don't make sense to anyone but themselves; for example, they might charge a hirayanu a simple bag of rice for an elusive tidbit on Wu Tan, yet demand a kamuii's gold coin for a mere cup of water. The less something makes sense, the more appealing it is to the heng po.

Heng po *hsien-tsu* annoy their parents to no end. They're always underfoot wanting attention, yet never seem to make lasting accomplishments that would please their parents. To make matters worse, these children are perpetual slob and make mess after mess without ever bothering to help clean up. Even more than the

average kid, a heng po will flit from one interest to another and never finish anything he starts. The one saving grace of these *hsien* is that



they're good at water sports, such as fishing, sailing or swimming. If not harassed, a heng po child will generally provide more fresh seafood than a family could ever hope for.

Hsien-jin heng po are slightly more responsible. They remain untidy social butterflies, but they will answer human prayers and serve the kamui well, though on their own time-tables, of course. These older, wiser hirayanu will sometimes talk to fishermen and sailors just to see who can come up with the most improbable stories. Heng po don't always walk away the victors in such contests, but to them, the fun is in listening and talking.

Most heng po count themselves among the Wu Hsien; they aren't terribly interested in the high ideals of enlightenment. Self-interest is much more their kettle of fish. A few with close ties to human friends and families join the Xian Mu. Overall, these hirayanu are part of *hsien* society, but not really in it. They'd like to become more prominent, but presently, they aren't all that well trusted.

Appearance: These hirayanu are easily distinguishable from their kamui *suijen* cousins, as only the heng po have small dorsal and ankle fins. Their hands and feet are webbed, and skin color ranges from the deepest green to chartreuse. Male heng po have drooping whiskers that give them a comical look. Noses are blunt and the entire body is covered in thick scales; as a rule, they wear little clothing. Most heng po like to take the animal forms of carp, which can be up to four feet in length and weigh as much as 80 pounds. Others become sturgeons or more rarely, Yangtze dolphins. When using the Mask of Shintai effect, the male's whiskers become barbed; the dorsal and ankle fins of both sexes grow larger and are tipped with sharp spines. Skin color deepens to a puce-green shade, and the heng po's lips swell and curl into a sneer. The eyes become more bulbous and glow with an eerie purple light. The heng po looks much like a primeval, bipedal sea monster when using this effect.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Water

Luck: The heng po like to find lost items, valuable or inconsequential. They're not sages like the fu hsi, but they do have a knack for trivia dealing with long lost objects. Heng po receive a +2 dice on either Intelligence or Perception rolls (whichever is most appropriate) when searching for something that's been lost.

Curse: Heng po are in no haste to do anything. While they're quite interested in looking for lost things, their time is their own. What's more, an impatient patron will cause them to move even slower. Heng po must make a Willpower at difficulty 8 to do anything in a hurry; this difficulty is 9 if someone is rushing them along. Storytellers should note that

it takes about twice as long for a heng po to accomplish a task as anyone else.

Wani Powers: In wani form, heng po can breathe water like humans breathe air. Additionally, their scaly hides give these *hsien* two extra dice to all soak rolls.

Concepts: Avenger of wrongs, professional storyteller, sailor, socialite wanna be, starving PI.

Merits and Flaws: Compulsion, Eidetic Memory.

Quote: "Are you back already to ask about that ring you lost? It's only been two years! You must learn some patience."

For a good price, Ping Lee gladly offers a story:

Chu-ih-yu — These lofty creatures are so difficult to understand. They cannot see that our work takes time and that all their stern demands will avail them nothing.

Chu Jung — Temper, temper! If you wish to see a chu jung fall into rage, ask one to return in five years' time for his lost trinket.

Hou-chi — Their roots and our fins touch the same waters, yet the hou-chi remain enigmatic. They are slow and steady as we, but dwell in light while we love the dark. What else can we learn of them?

Komuko — Their balance of perfection is enviable; their preoccupation with higher matters of existence is not. Shouldn't they be more attuned to the needs of their fellow *hsien*?

Suijen — Theirs are the secrets of sacred places and lofty palaces, but we have much in common with these kamui. Will we one day inherit their rewards?

Fu Hsi — Their knowledge is profound, but they are so rigid and orderly. One would have a hard time finding her way on a dark, unknown path.

Hanumen — These droll creatures must know more than they're saying. What secrets do they keep hidden in their laughter?

Nyan — The cats can swim, but they know better than to disturb our waters. On land, they can be amusing; they well understand our perceptions of time and duty.

Tanuki — These badger folk have a number of interesting tales to share, if one can just get past that impossibly crusty exterior.

Waigoren — We have cause to be suspicious of these Westerners called Kithain. Who are they? What do they want? Have they come as friends or foes? We should not greet them with open arms, but rather with narrow eyes and cautious ears.

Nyan

(nee-ahn)

The cats of the hirayanu are highly social creatures who particularly adore humans. Sultry and sensual in mind and body, the nyan are full of passion and live life to the fullest — or so it appears. In truth, the nyan lack any depth of feeling beyond physical desires and vague affections. They're shallow, and they know it.

Most nyan don't even care. Those who do often spend their whole lives chasing after genuine love and ardor; precious few ever find what they seek.

Like the heng po, nyan don't really pay much attention to the passage of time. Many would rather play around with their human friends than fetch and tote for other *hsien*. They're not certain to come through in a tight spot, though if they do make a promise of service, they'll try their best to keep it. More than just messengers, *kamui* sometimes ask nyan to gather intelligence. It may take some time, but the information will usually be detailed and reliable. Nyan also make good scouts, as they can travel almost anywhere quietly and unseen.

Nyan *hsien-tsu* are difficult for parents to understand. One moment they're aloof and preoccupied, and the next, they want to play a game or get a hug. They're quite neat and tidy with a propensity for sports that involve running and they have good hand and eye coordination. Most nyan *hsien-tsu* are well behaved and quiet; they like to play outdoors either alone or with others. A parent may notice that these youngsters have an insatiable craving for meat, particularly fish or pork. This can be a serious problem if the family is poor. A similar trouble spot is the family dog; Foo Foo the Pekingnese may end up meeting his ancestors earlier than expected if a nyan *hsien-tsu* is in the household.



As *hsien-jin*, nyan are a bit on the lazy side; they sleep late and enjoy long naps in the warm afternoon sunshine. Nearly all these *hsien* desire the finer things in life, such as elegant homes and attractive clothes. Most enjoy a more nocturnal lifestyle with plenty of opportunities to shine in public and be at the center of social whirls among both humans and other *Shinma*. Nyan have a great fancy for human lovers and companions, particularly if they're good-looking. With nyan, though, it's the appearances that count; they're not overly faithful and don't put a lot of emotional stock in their mortal associates. Naturally, this can lead to a lot of trouble.

Nyan adore the intricate workings of *hsien* society and show great interest in the various relationships between groups. Most are involved with the *Xian Mu* or the *Shu Shen*; a few homebodies interact with the *Wu Hsien*. Few bother to join the *Li Shen*, *Xian Mo* or *Yü*; wars and philosophy are hardly the nyan's strong suit.

Appearance: It's a rare nyan that isn't physically attractive in some fashion or another. Most usually have one outstanding feature of beauty, such as lovely eyes, a pert nose or luxurious hair. These *hsien* are graceful and poised; they're always impeccably groomed and tend to enjoy fine clothes and jewelry. As *wani*, they grow a tail, cat ears and small claws. A fine fur, much like velvet, covers their bodies. *Wani nyan* are unmistakably feline, but they certainly aren't deadly hunters like the *hengeyokai Khan*. Nyan wear as little clothing as possible in this form. As animals, they make take the form of any cat they wish; some prefer the Chinese desert cat, which is about three feet long, with a ruffed mane and long, striped tail. When angered enough to use the *Mask of Shinrai*, nyan give the term "wildcat" new meaning. Their fur stands on end, making their bodies appear twice their normal size. Claws and fangs extend, honed to razor sharpness. Their eyes become enormous, the pupil narrowing to ebony slits, no matter what the level of lighting. A low, rumbling purr sounds in their throats, a sound of barely repressed fury. Even the most passionate cat lover will want to flee in terror from these beasts.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Fire

Luck: Nyan like being around other people, and they tend to attract friends and lovers easily. They gain +2 dice to *Charisma* rolls when on the prowl for a good time.

Curse: Nyan can be neglectful of responsibilities, even if their *Shinma* brethren are in dire need. A nyan must make a *Willpower* roll at difficulty 8 to leave her lovers and friends to answer duty's call.

Wani Powers: The nyan have exceptionally keen senses. They are also wonderfully agile and quick. Both *Perception* and

Dexterity increase by one dot when the nyan is in her *wani* form, even if this raises the *Attribute* above five. The nyan's small claws inflict *Strength* + 1 damage.

Concepts: Actor, courtesan, dancer, fashion model, gambler, investor.

Merits and Flaws: Dark Secret, Surreal Beauty.

Quote: "A missing person? What would I possibly know about such matters? So sorry, you have wasted time coming to see me. The least I could offer you is a nice dinner, yes?"

Xiu Mei, clad in rich purple and filled with many fine delicacies, whispers her thoughts:

Chu-ih-yu — Unforgiving wretches, all of them. They have no appreciation of anything joyful in life save bloodshed.

Chu Jung — If you find one alone in the night, make the most of the situation. We are often drawn to the *chu jung*, as one flame seeks another.

Hou-chi — They have long been our friends and protectors among the *kamui*. Often their kindness comes without price. It is an odd thing.

Komuko — While we respect these enlightened ones, we must admit to boredom in their presence. How little they have in common with us poor, imbalanced fools.

Suijen — Their fins are deadly barbs forever poised for the kill. Beware of their seemingly kind ways, for only ice runs in their veins.

Fu Hsi — No *shen* are more skilled than these wise serpents at gleaned knowledge even from splinters of wood. Have a care lest their fangs pierce your fur in search for truths.

Hanumen — The monkeys are a merry bunch, but do they ever sleep? We could teach them much about the pleasures of dreaming in the warm sunshine.

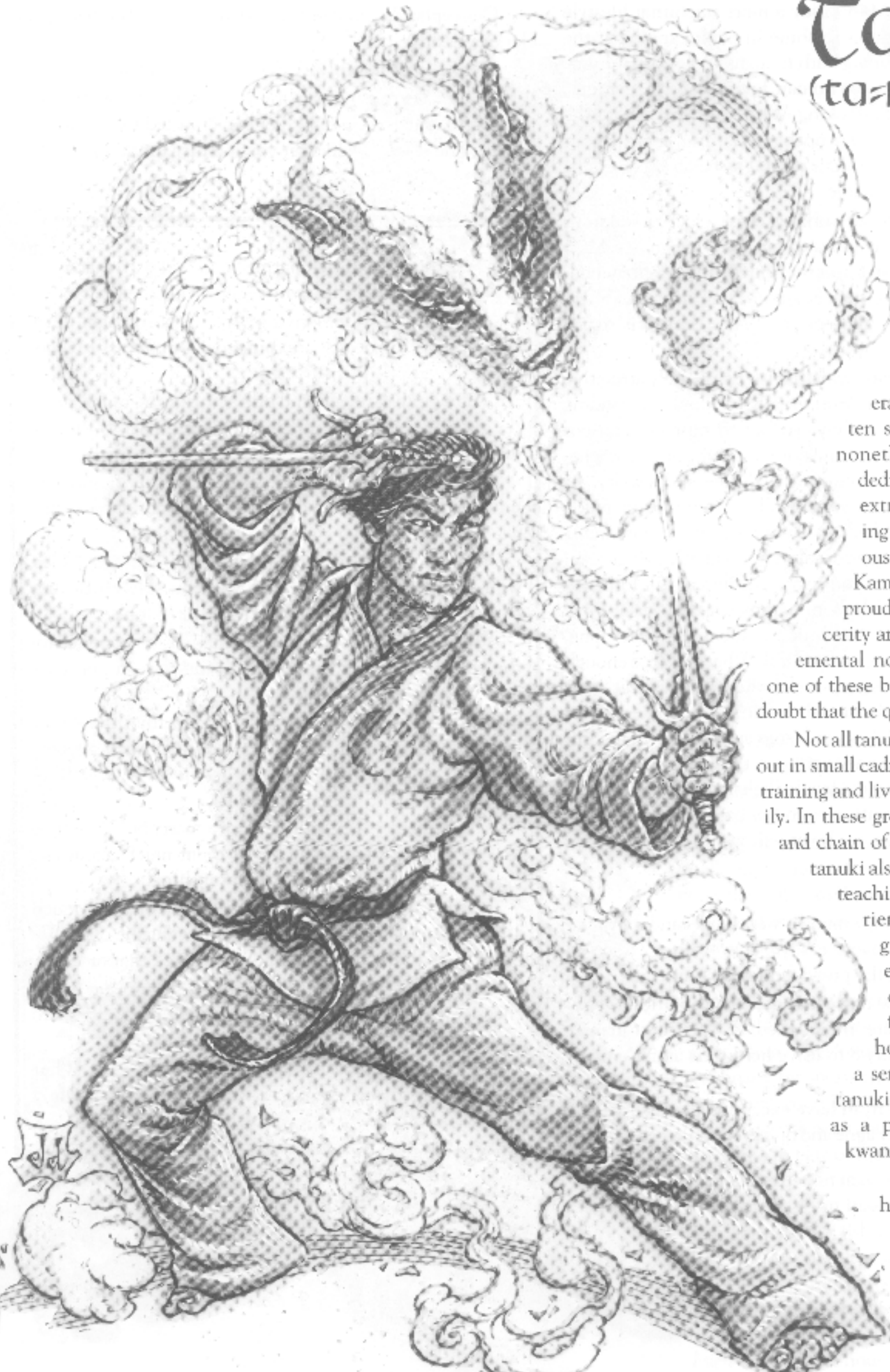
Heng Po — Silly, flighty packrats! They pay too much attention to useless objects rather than valuable ones. We could show them the difference, if we cared that much.

Tanuki — The worst of our kind on a rainy day is still cheerier than these plucky *sourpusses*. How can we speak to them when they growl all the time?

Waigoren — I met a man called a *Kithain* once. What fun! We danced, ate and played until dawn. They certainly know what it means to show a lady a good time!

Tanuki

(ta-noo-kee)



The tanuki are hirayanu who take the form of badgers. Originally from Japan, they have multiplied and migrated all over east Asia. Generally aggressive and often solitary, the tanuki are nonetheless tenacious and dedicated. These beings are extremely territorial, keeping their domains fastidiously clean, neat and safe. Kamui especially prize these proud warriors for their sincerity and persistence. If an elemental noble entrusts a task to one of these badgers, they'll have no doubt that the quest will be completed.

Not all tanuki are loners; some hang out in small cadres of half a dozen or so, training and living together like a family. In these groups, a strict hierarchy and chain of command exists; older tanuki also take responsibility for teaching young and less experienced members of the group. The actions of each individual reflect on all the tanuki. Therefore, skill in battle and honoring of one's quest is a serious thing indeed. No tanuki wants to be singled out as a poor example of her kwannon-jin.

Most of these hirayanu have gruff, even hostile, demeanors. They grumble about anything and everything, sparing no one from their curmudg-

only behavior. Their one humorous side is that they love to play tricks on unsuspecting victims, mortal and *shen* alike. Most of these pranks are meant to embarrass others, or make them look stupid; the cold and lofty *suijen* are a favorite target. Other tricks are more vicious and dangerous, usually set in motion to teach other *Shinma* a lesson about making fun of the *tanuki*.

Tanuki hsien-tsu are often bullies; they like to pick fights and prove their worth in trials of combat. Most don't have many friends and spend their time wondering why no one likes them. Parents find that no matter how much they chastise these kids, they keep getting into trouble. On the other hand, they're an honest bunch; if questioned about their misbehavior, they won't lie about it. A *tanuki hsien-tsu* would rather accept a stern punishment than tell a fib. Likewise, they are quite good about fulfilling household duties and chores.

Hsien-jin tanuki are loners for the most part, although many have at least one close friend or confidant. Their ferocity in battle nearly matches the *chu-ih-yu* because, unlike the *kamuii*, the *tanuki* have no idea when to give up the fight. If a *hsien-jin tanuki* has a soft spot, though, it's helping out humans who've been unjustly punished, blackmailed or extorted. *Tanuki* will often answer their prayers and seek to set wrongs to rights, and if the humans' foes are a bunch of tough guys, so much the better!

The *tanuki* have little use for the *Li Shen* or *Xian Mo*, viewing the members as highbrowed snobs who like to contemplate their navels. A few more sinister badgers follow the *Shu Shen*, while some simply consider themselves *Wu Hsien*. Mostly, though, the *tanuki* laugh about the *hsien* societies and keep to themselves.

Appearance: The *tanuki* are often stocky and thick-waisted. Their limbs are sturdy and strong, and their dark eyes are piercing. Most have black hair, and a few have streaks of white near their temples. These *hirayanu* rarely stand more than five feet tall and are muscled and stout, with sharp claws and teeth. Gray and black fur covers their bodies, and most disdain any form of clothing if possible. They look somewhat comical, like bipedal badgers with human hands and feet, though only a fool would laugh at them. In animal form, these *Shinma* appear as the largest possible specimens of badgers, about three feet long, including the tail, and weighing up to 45 pounds. They have fur on the back and their tails are gray, while the legs and underbelly are black. Elegant white stripes mark either side of the face. When a *tanuki* invokes the Mask of *Shintai*, her snout and jaw lengthen, allowing her sharp teeth to protrude. The *hirayanu*'s fur bristles like the quills of a porcupine, and her talons grow longer and sharper. An angry *tanuki* is perpetually snarling, standing ready to claw anyone who comes too close.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Metal

Luck: Strong willed and persistent, *tanuki* never want to give up. The difficulty of their Willpower rolls involving tenacity or resistance is lowered by 2.

Curse: The *tanuki*'s stubborn streak often can overrule their common sense. They must make a Wits + Alertness roll, difficulty 8, to realize that the fight is over, or that discretion in the form of retreat would be a good idea.

Wani Powers: The *tanuki*'s tough furred hide adds two dice to soak rolls. Their clawed hands inflict damage of Strength + 2. Additionally, the *tanuki* add one extra dot to Stamina, even if this raises the Attribute above five.

Concepts: Beat cop, bodyguard, martial arts instructor, mercenary, tong muscle.

Merits and Flaws: Daredevil, Overconfident.

Quote: "I had him right in my hands! I would've pounded that *Kuei-jin* bastard through the Earth's core to the USA if you hadn't stopped me!"

Hu Yuke growls and shows his teeth as he explains workings of the world:

Chu-ih-yu — They're excellent in battle and unrelenting critics. They have our extreme respect.

Chu Jung — Tactics are useful, but no substitute for a skillful blade. Perhaps they'd do better as lovers than warriors after all.

Hou-chi — They seem genuinely fond of us, though we find their lofty ideals about nature and renewal puzzling. Instead of talking so much about life, why not just live it?

Komuko — They are wise and kind, and it is our pleasure to serve them however we are able.

Suijen — Their chilly ways make them standoffish snobs, though if anybody can deliver a better cut with words than we can, it must be the *suijen*.

Fu Hsi — The *fu hsi* think they know everything there is to know, but how many have faced death while on a quest? Precious few, I dare say.

Hanumen — The wiser ones tell amusing tales, but the stupid ones have no idea when to shut up. Sometimes I think a monkey tail would be a fitting trophy.

Heng Po — Their untidiness is revolting. Their fighting style is even worse. They'll never be able to hurt a thing with all that ridiculous flopping around.

Nyan — Another useless bunch, though they are quick and deadly when they need to be. If they weren't so lazy, maybe there would be hope for the *nyan*.

Waigoren — Their warriors, I hear, are toughened and hardy. I hear they know something of honor, even if it's inferior to our own. I would like to test one in battle and see what these *Kithain* creatures know of the art of war.

Chu-ih-yu

(choo-EE-you)

Eternally just and fair-minded, the chu-ih-yu are the warriors of the kamuii. They are forces of lesser Yin, revering the west, the fall season and the color white. Many chu-ih-yu serve as high-ranking administrators in the Ministry of Metal (Tieh Fu). These kamuii guard not only mines of precious metals, but also temples with ancient bells and gongs, or museums that house priceless metal weapons.

The chu-ih-yu are objective to a fault. If someone, whether hirayanu or kamuii, has done wrong, chu-ih-yu believe that person must be brought to justice, with the punishment fitting the crime. Extenuating circumstances mean little to the chu-ih-yu; they uphold the eye-for-an-eye principle to the extreme. They never show fear in the face of battle and are famed for their resolute ways and bravery. A group of Shinma with a chu-ih-yu in their midst will cause foes to think twice before an attack. Once a chu-ih-yu has made up her mind to do something, nothing can sway her from that goal. Other *hsien* often consult with the chu-ih-yu on matters of law and justice; while they aren't as sagacious as the *fu hsi*, they are acknowledged as impartial arbiters, no matter who or what the incident involves.

The chu-ih-yu are beneficial allies, except that some other Shinma perceive them as cold, harsh and unfeeling. They're always polite, but a bit on the stiff and formal side.

Furthermore, they believe it is their duty to promote just behavior in others. A chu-ih-yu witnessing a bully or some



other unfair behavior will be quick to chide the offender, backing up the point with a sword if necessary. He'll then explain why the behavior was unjust, often to the point of boring both victim and offender to extremes. The chu-ih-yu may then set the parties up in some sort of contest, fair to both sides. Chances are the offenders will comply, because only a fool would ignore the fighting potential of the chu-ih-yu. Many are skilled with Chinese swords, the darn-do or jien, while others use the Japanese katana, polearms (tai-dao), chain whips (bian), spears (chiang), halberds (ghi) or even the fearsome dragon trident (gao loon cha). Most chu-ih-yu are proficient in several weapons.

Chu-ih-yu *hsien-tsu* are the children most parents dream of having. They're neat, precise and unfailingly well mannered. They enjoy martial sports and always finish what they start, such as school projects or household chores. What may get the young chu-ih-yu in trouble is their craving for fairness. If they believe they've been unjustly punished, they'll try to explain why they don't deserve such discipline, which usually gets them into more trouble. What puzzles many parents is that if the child thinks he deserves more punishment, he'll be quick to point this out as well. As these *hsien* mature, they are eager to leave their childhood homes and serve as administrators for higher-ranking Shinma.

Hsien-jin chu-ih-yu are the eternal peacemakers. They're always solving disputes and pointing out resolutions fair to all sides. These Shinma sometimes overstep their bounds, though, by telling people more than they want to hear about their failings. It's one thing to tell a fellow *hsien* that they made an unfair decision; it's quite another to spend an hour explaining precisely where they went wrong and what they should do to repair the error.

Many chu-ih-yu are Li Shen Traditionalists, appreciating the order of nature. Some turn to the warlike Yü, enjoying the role of knightly harbingers of justice. A silent few follow the excessive goals of the Shu Shen. Chu-ih-yu are more rare among the Xian Mo, Xian Mun and Wu Hsien.

Appearance: Members of this kwannon-jin are tall and imposing creatures with a proud bearing. In wani form, these *hsien* have silvery skin and solid-white glowing eyes. Their features are sharply angular, with finely chiseled bone structure in the cheeks, fingers and wrists. Hair is white and usually worn long and loose among both males and females. They favor simple garments and adornments that allow free movement in battle. Needless to say, chu-ih-yu always carry at least two weapons. When using Mask of the Shintai, a chu-ih-yu's face is frozen in a cold grimace. The body appears even more erect while the long, silvery hair blows like a spider's web in an unseen wind. The nails lengthen, and the whole effect is something like that of an ancient skeletal warrior promising a reign of death on any offenders.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Metal

Luck: Chu-ih-yu can see the geometry of truth in all things. They receive a +2 dice to Perception rolls when searching for lies.

Curse: Though fair, the hearts of the chu-ih-yu are often as cold as steel. They must make all Charisma rolls at +2 difficulty when attempting to socialize with others.

Wani Powers: Invulnerable to metals (automatically soaks levels of damage equal to Stamina versus swords or bullets).

Concepts: Bodyguards, counselors, judges, martial artists, soldiers, warrior priests.

Merits and Flaws: Bard's Tongue, Code of Honor.

Quote: "As metal is bent, broken and folded, it becomes stronger. To mete out justice is to be tempered in matters of life. We do not shirk from this duty."

Yin Chyou, Silver Autumn, forges words of wit and wisdom:

Chu Jung — They understand the immutable laws of justice, but choose to apply these only to situations of the heart, not the mind. This is a weakness the chu jung should endeavor to change.

Hou-chi — If you can convince a hou-chi to speak on matters other than joys of springtime, he may prove a trusted friend and advisor. This, of course, is a difficult task.

Komuko — We respect the wisdom of the komuko and their achievement of balance. Our relations are close, as the metal that forms us rests in the heart of the earth.

Suijen — Like tainted jade, the suijen are weak and brittle. They are content to play idly in their streams and ponds, with never a care for anyone but themselves.

Fu Hsi — The serpent folk possess a bounty of wealth in their knowledge. Revere their words; each is like a precious vein of silver running through dark stones.

Hanumen — These crude monkeys know little of justice and duty. Some say their laughter is worth gold, but I say it is like the willow's leaves, scattered and empty.

Heng Po — The heng po revere harmony much as we do, but their methods are devious and lack true understanding of justice. Many are untrustworthy and have no honor.

Nyan — Fickle, wasteful and lazy, these cats have few ideas that promote our friendship. Most spurn the notions of justice we hold dear.

Tanuki — They are strong warriors, resolute in their convictions even as we are. Their propensity for trickery is unfortunate, but they are the strong bases of iron among the hirayanu.

Waigoren — As these Kithain do not understand our laws, it is unlikely they comprehend justice. Their coming to our lands should prove interesting, to say the least.

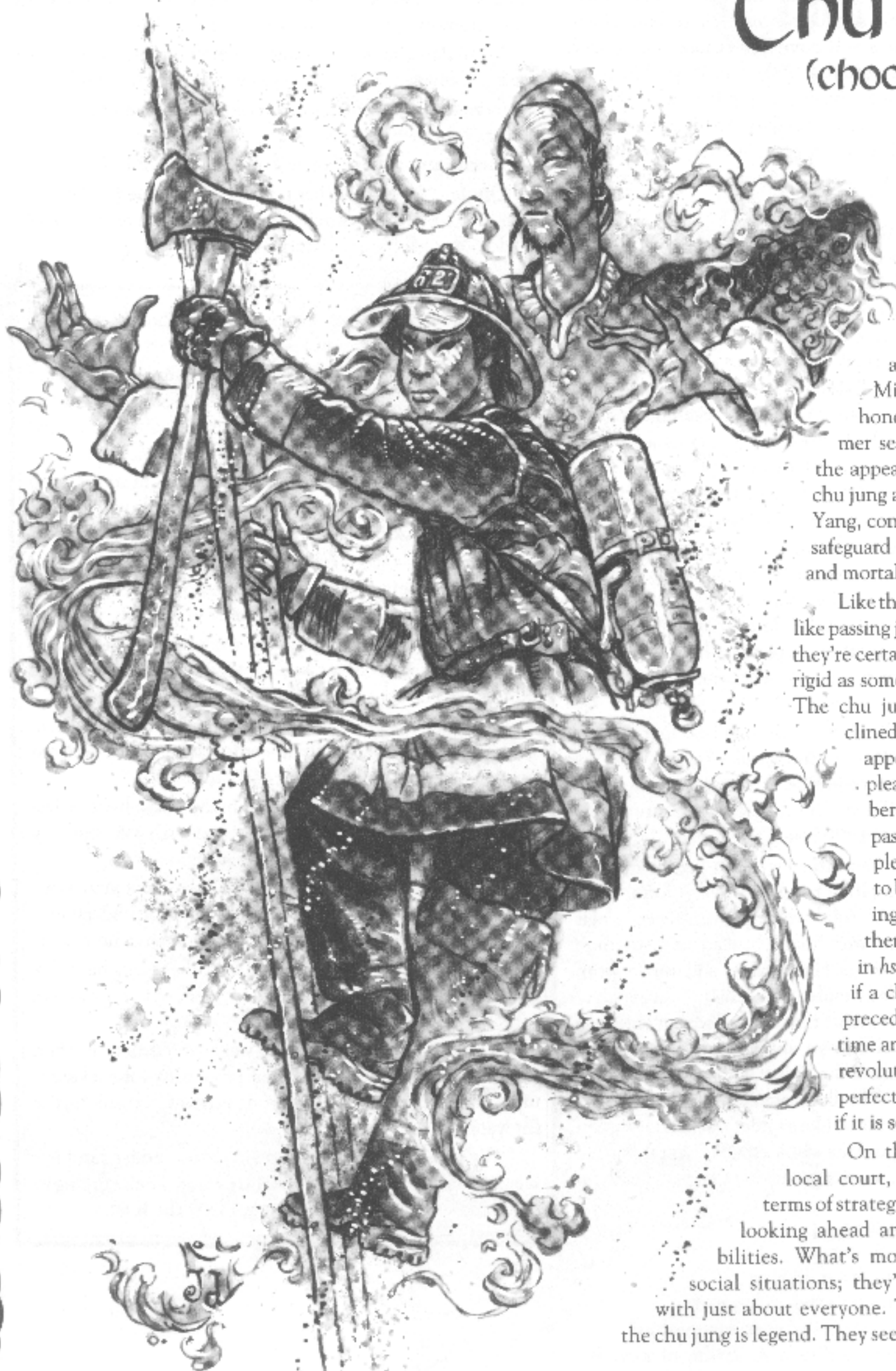
Chu Jung

(choo-jung)

Passionate and quick-witted, the chu jung are masters of strategy, both on the field of battle and in the halls of intrigue. They are a strong force in the Ministry of Fire (Hou Fu), honoring the south, the summer season, the color red and the appearance of propriety. The chu jung are also a force of greater Yang, constantly in motion. They safeguard volcanoes, temple fires and mortal firefighters.

Like the chu-ih-yu, the chu jung like passing judgments on others, but they're certainly not as impartial and rigid as some of their fellow kamuii. The chu jung are much more inclined to make decisions that appear well mannered and pleasing to the greatest number of people rather than pass judgments that are completely objective. They love to bend rules without breaking them, which also makes them a force of great change in *hsien* society. For example, if a chu jung wants to alter a precedent, she'll spend much time and effort to make sure her revolutionary idea is somehow perfectly legal and correct, even if it is scandalous.

On the battlefield or in the local court, the chu jung excel in terms of strategy. They have a knack for looking ahead and visualizing all possibilities. What's more, many are adept in social situations; they're likable and friendly with just about everyone. The keen perception of the chu jung is legend. They see with their eyes, but also



with their hearts. It's wise never to make a bet with a chu jung on a game of mah jongg or the outcome of any war.

The drawback to the chu jung is their fiery temper. They're quick to anger, especially if insulted, and they never hold back their fury. More than once a chu jung has struck out in rage, only to later regret his hasty action. Some chu jung who have hurt other *hsien* or even human guardians of *hsien-tsu* join the Xian Mo in hopes of channeling their passions toward seeking enlightenment.

Chu jung *hsien-tsu* are nosy creatures; they like overhearing what adults say, then embarrassing their elders at inauspicious moments. These young Shinma are often wise and clever for their apparent ages, though they're not above pitching fits when they don't get their way. Youthful chu jung often excel at children's games and tasks that involve memory and spurts of energy. They're usually loving to their human parents and remember them fondly even after passing into adulthood, which is an anomaly among the Shinma. Some *hsien-tsu* watch out for their childhood guardians in their old age, sending friendly *hirayanu* to answer the humans' prayers.

Many *hsien-jin* among the chu jung also maintain contacts with humans; they enjoy mimicking the personalities of their body's former soul after the *kun shou*. It's a fun test to see how long they can keep up the ruse. *Hsien-jin* chu jung are also known as passionate lovers and companions, despite their harsh tempers. They likewise make good war leaders, easily stirring up battle fervor among a gathering of *hsien*. While they may lack the natural martial prowess of the *chu-ih-yu*, the chu jung atone for their lack with endless enthusiasm.

Many chu jung are involved in the Xian Mun, for they often have close worldly connections. A few fall even deeper into the Middle Kingdom, joining the Shu Shen and pursuing their passions and desires to dangerous excess. The Yü and Li Shen also have a small number of devotees from the chu jung. Many of these *kamui* are involved in the Ministry of Fire (Hou Fu).

Appearance: As wani, a chu jung's skin is fiery red, and her head has a faint nimbus of orange around the long, dark hair. The eyes blaze scarlet, either with anger or laughter. The chu jung often are tall and graceful with long limbs. Their clothes tend to be flowing, with orange, red and amber being favorite colors. Females often wear elaborate gold mesh headdresses, while males favor skullcaps. After donning the Mask of Shintai, the skin of the chu jung darkens to an ominous crimson. The fiery halo expands outward from the head to envelop the *hsien*'s entire body. Small licks of blue flame spout from under the fingernails, a warning to the disobedient that their lives are soon to be forfeit for any insolence.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Fire

Luck: The chu jung's eyes can pierce the night, the day and the hearts of others; they gain a -1 difficulty to Perception rolls involving vision or insight.

Curse: To avoid a fight after being insulted, the chu jung must make a Willpower roll at difficulty 8. The chu jung have hot, volatile tempers.

Wani Powers: Invulnerable to fire, magical or natural (automatically soaks levels of damage equal to Stamina versus fire; fire is not considered aggravated).

Concepts: Firefighter, politician, rabble rouser, tactician, war counselor.

Merits and Flaws: True Love, Vengeance.

Quote: "I believe that one day you will pass through the many gates of understanding like rain through lotus petals, but for now, you must pay for the wager you lost."

Quon Sying, Bright Star, has a burning tongue and speaks his mind:

Chu-ih-yu — They call themselves judges, yet they have no ears to hear the hidden words of *hsien* or human. How can such creatures have the courage to decide the fates of others?

Hou-chi — Delicate is the blossom that opens in the eastern wind. The *hou-chi* seem too removed from the cares of mortals, too focused on their duties as guardians of nature. This may haunt them.

Komuko — The *komoku* are blessed in many ways. They understand desire and propriety, humility and pride. They are the best among us, treading a path we should all seek to follow.

Suijen — The *suijen* often try to make us bear the brunt of their complicated plots. Fortunately, they are as clear to us as an icy mountain stream.

Fu Hsi — The serpents spin interesting tales, even if they're long winded. But their marriage advice is too often based on logic rather than passion. This seems a paradox to us.

Hanumen — Now these eager little monkeys know what it means to truly live! Their laughter and enthusiasm for the Ten Thousand Things is an example to us all.

Heng Po — The *heng po* are indeed clever; they are valuable allies for those seeking lost people and things. However, they have an unfortunate tendency to stretch the truth too much.

Nyan — These cats have no genuine regard for anyone but themselves. Their passion is commendable, but they need to learn the fine art of subtlety.

Tanuki — Some Shinma say we have sour attitudes; I suggest they go speak with the *tanuki*. At least our manners respect others. *Tanuki* really have no respect for anyone.

Waigoren — I hear tales that some of the *Kithain* have passion to match our own. Will we befriend them or treat them as rivals? Sooner than later, we will know.

Hou-chi

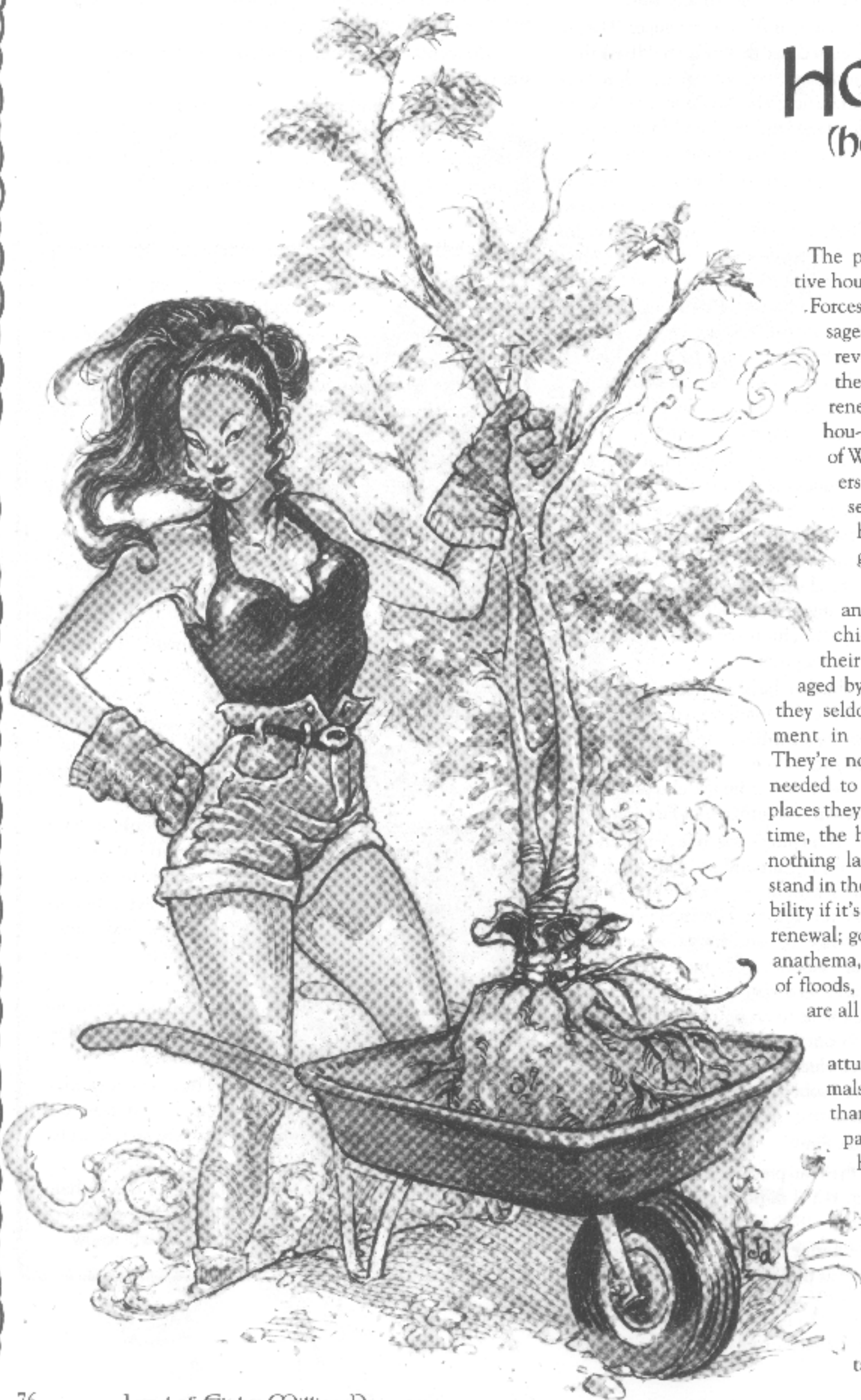
(how=chee)

The peaceful and contemplative hou-chi are lovers of nature.

Forces of lesser Yang, many are sages and guardians of life; all revere the east, springtime, the color green, goodness and renewal. A large number of hou-chi work in the Ministry of Wood (Lin Fu), while others watch over nature preserves, forests and even humble gardeners in their greenhouses.

While usually gentle and tranquil in nature, hou-chi become furious when their protectorates are damaged by humans or other *shen*; they seldom favor land development in the name of progress. They're not above violence if it's needed to defend the people and places they watch over. At the same time, the hou-chi understand that nothing lasts forever. They don't stand in the way of death and mutability if it's part of a natural cycle of renewal; government imposition is anathema, but the oft tragic results of floods, earthquakes and storms are all quite acceptable.

Hou-chi are intimately attuned to the needs of animals, plants and trees. More than other *kamuii*, they are particularly close to the *hirayanu*, often serving as mentors and patrons for other *hsien* and showing more leniency toward the *hirayanu's* faults than the *chuih-yu*, for example. A hou-chi will usually take the *hirayanu's* side in



a public argument, even if they secretly disagree; later in private, they might give the animal *hsien* a stern scolding.

Hsien-tsu of this *kwannon-jin* are impossible to keep indoors. They always want to be outside, playing with family pets or watching insects. Most have a distinct bond with animals and try to get their parents to take in every stray that comes along. Farming families who have *hou-chi* children will find that their crops grow well and their lands are incredibly fertile. Youthful members of this *kwannon-jin* enjoy hiking, tree climbing or any type of sport that keeps them out of the house; they tend to do poorly at strategy games such as chess or *mah-jongg*.

Hou-chi hsien-jin generally have green thumbs; their homes are full of thriving plants and probably several pets. They value their privacy, but generally welcome *hirayanu* or *kamuii* visitors who want to learn more about the joys of the outdoors. Some *hou-chi* know bits of lore about *hengeyokai* or spirits of nature, and they're usually willing to share this knowledge if respectfully approached.

A surprisingly large number of *hou-chi* follow the paths of the peasant *Wu Hsien*; to these *kamuii*, safeguarding nature and the environment is much more important than seeking enlightenment or fighting other *shen*. A few *hou-chi* pay close attention to their mortal lives and join the *Xian Mu*; some like the idea of making nature an orderly place and follow the *Li Shen*.

Appearance: In *wani* form, *hou-chi* skin color ranges from emerald to rich brown. Hair color is black, and the eyes usually have a green light to them. Most *hou-chi wani* are tall and slender, with long limbs and flowing hair. In all forms, they prefer simple dress favoring natural materials such as raw silk, cotton or linen. When the Mask of *Shintai* is in effect, a *hou-chi*'s skin seems to harden and turn glossy, like fine, luminescent mahogany. His voice becomes deep and booming; arms and legs lengthen, giving height and reach. The deep-set hazel eyes flash verdant fire down upon offenders, and the air crackles with the scent of leaves after a hard rain shower.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Wood

Luck: All *hou-chi* understand the beauty and joy of life, even among plants and animals. When trying to assist an injured plant or animal, including the *hirayanu* in their bestial forms, a *hou-chi* may make a Charisma + Empathy roll, difficulty 4, to ease pain and suffering. The tangible effect is that his patient takes one less wound penalty to her actions per success of the *hou-chi*. This is quite a useful skill when dealing with *hengeyokai* or certain spirits of nature.

Curse: *Hou-chi* are ill at ease when away from nature; they generally avoid big cities and industrial centers. When duty

requires that they visit such places, the *hou-chi* tend to be distracted and nervous. They make all *Wits* rolls at +1 difficulty when in such situations.

Wani Powers: The *hou-chi*'s attunement to wood allows them to automatically soak levels of damage equal to their Stamina versus wooden weapons (bats, clubs, bo sticks and so on).

Concepts: Botanist, naturalist, tree farmer, veterinarian, wildlife biologist.

Merits and Flaws: Absent-Minded, Animal Magnetism.

Quote: "Which is more beautiful, the cricket or the lotus? Both know their business in the world, whether to chirp merrily for our cheer, or to bloom and offer us benefit of color and sweet scent."

From the root of a cypress tree, Quon Park
whispers words for growth and insight:

Chu-ih-yu — They are the strongest warriors, with keen blades and just minds. But beware the frost in their words lest it freeze a tender heart.

Chu Jung — The *chu jung*'s passions for all life is commendable, as are their keen insights. But one angered is cause to make hasty retreat.

Komuko — These wisest of all *kamuii* have true understanding of nature's cycles. They should take more time to savor the joys of spring!

Suijen — The *suijen* are fools. They reach eagerly for all that is dark, little realizing that they are shunning the light.

Fu Hsi — Wise beyond all other *hirayanu*, the *fu hsi* have much to offer everyone if we will but listen to their soft voices.

Hanumen — Little do they know how we secretly laugh at their many antics in our branches. To admit this, though, would be to discourage their search for wisdom.

Heng Po — Like frogs, the *heng po* rarely know where to jump next. Will it be up the stream to enlightenment, or down the river to sorrow?

Nyan — These clever cats are oft misunderstood. They possess great beauty, love of life and a laughter all their own. We wish others could see this.

Tanuki — These *hirayanu* are irrefutably the most trustworthy and steadfast of all *Shinma*. Give them friendship, and you will find yourself immeasurably rewarded.

Waigoren — We find it distressing that Westerners, distant kin or not, will encroach on our lands. Do they know how to care for our forests and animals? More likely, they will destroy us.

Komuko

(koe-moo-koe)

Wise and beneficent, the komuko are powerful combinations of justice, mercy and stability. Like the Earth, they are solid and steadfast. Their hearts and minds revere the concept of centrality, all the seasons, the color yellow and a balance of Yang and Yin. Many komuko work as administrators in the Ministry of Earth (Di Fu) or protecting mines and mountainous areas.

Most other *hsien* take the words and directions of the komoku quite seriously. These *kamuii*'s praises are inspiring and their reprimands genuinely sorrowful. Even the most disrespectful *hanumen* or disdainful *nyan* bows courteously to a chastising komuko. By contrast, these *hsien*'s public praise of an individual will raise that person's status in others' eyes. The komuko seem preternaturally aware of all that happens around them, for good or ill. This is due to their own keen senses as well as their willingness to talk and listen to anyone, from the poorest human fishermen to the most resplendent *chu-ih-yu* warrior.

On the other hand, listening is not always the same as empathy and understanding. Many komuko are so far removed from the daily trials of existence that they can't see the forest for the trees. They might listen attentively to an inexperienced and troubled *Shinma* and then propose a solution to the person's problem that is quite impossible. This isn't because the komuko don't care, but rather because they are so idealistic that they have trouble conceiving the reality of day to day hardships. If Uncle Gan



needs a new fishing boat, for example, a komuko would encourage him to buy one by all means, not realizing that such devices cost a great deal of money.

Komuko *hsien-tsu* are delightful; they combine the natural exuberance and capriciousness of youth with a strong streak of practicality and obedience. These *hsien* are loving and kind, but sincere. They don't say things they think adults want to hear; they seek to answer questions honestly but politely. Young komuko are especially reverent to elders, humans and Shinma alike. It's disconcerting to some adults that the komuko *hsien-tsu* seem too wise for their years while appearing to be perfectly normal human children. They enjoy games and sports that require endurance and strength.

As *hsien-jin*, komuko exhibit the same patterns of balance. They are gracious, honest and fair. Perhaps more than any other *hsien* they set great store by keeping promises and fulfilling sworn duties. A komuko under an oath will do her utmost to satisfy the bargain, or die trying. These *hsien* also are equally content in a crowd or alone with the Earth on a mountain summit.

Komuko are heavily involved in the societies of the Li Shen and Xian Mo. They generally sigh and shake their heads over the antics of the Yü, Xian Mu and Shu Shen. Many komuko are on close terms with the Wu Hsien, believing that their simple lifestyles devoted to the land and people of the Middle Kingdom reveal a path to enlightenment.

Appearance: Members of this kwannon-jin in wani form have brownish-red or deep-amber skin and shining brown eyes. Males wear a long queue and gold skullcap while females have beautifully coifed braids with many gold pins and clasps. No matter what their form, komuko wear expensive embroidered silks, preferring traditional dress such as yellow dragon robes for court occasions. Only the mightiest *shen* could ignore an angered komuko wearing the Mask of Shintai. The earth around the komuko's body trembles, and her flesh glows with golden light. Her voice echoes and resonates with command while her eyes sparkle like yellow diamonds. The komuko appears to double in height, towering over the disobedient like a mountain over a lowly ant.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Earth

Luck: Because they are creatures of balance, komuko have a better understanding than most *hsien* of imbalance in others. They may make all Shentao rolls with a bonus of +2 dice.

Curse: Komuko have forgotten to some extent the struggles of greater Yang and Yin; they have lost touch with the negatives and positives that often dictate other *hsien*'s lives. All Empathy rolls are made at difficulty 8 when they are trying to understand and sympathize with other *hsien*'s more extreme points of view. Only the hanumen are unaffected by this Curse.

Wani Powers: Komuko cannot be hurt from falling or impact with the earth; they automatically soaks levels of damage

equal to Stamina against this kind of damage. They can combine this power with a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 6, and even jump from buildings up to three stories tall and land safely on their feet.

Concepts: Absent-minded professor, enlightened wanderer, geologist, sculptor.

Merits and Flaws: Echoes, Perfect Balance.

Quote: "As the earth stands beneath our feet, so too do we serve as the pillar for enlightenment of our people. All understanding begins with the sifting of sand through the fingers."

Bo Lien, revered sage, speaks words from the center of all things:

Chu-ih-yu — Every great civilization has its warriors, and these are the best of the Shinma. If their blades were tempered with mercy, though, it would not displease us.

Chu Jung — They have warm hearts and keen minds, but their souls are edged with a destroying fire. The chu jung must take care not to be consumed in flames of their own making.

Hou-chi — They are of one mind regarding the natures and the forests. It is sometimes a sorrow that they think of nothing else.

Suijen — Bittersweet is the water of truth. Perhaps there is much more to the barbed tongues of the suijen than we may think.

Fu Hsi — Their knowledge is a treasure for all *hsien*. However, the world is too much within them for their own good; perhaps they should be cautious of this danger.

Hanumen — Those who laugh at the monkey laugh at themselves. We are all monkeys in our own way. Therefore, it is usually wise to laugh.

Heng Po — Have you lost your favorite trinket? Then seek the advice of a heng po. But have a care that you do not lose something else along the journey.

Nyan — Do not let their laziness and carefree ways lure you into underestimation of the nyan. Like all cats, they have a thousand secrets.

Tanuki — If you wish for kind words, the tanuki have none. But if you need a warrior, here are soldiers who have never failed in any test set for them.

Waigoren — We have known for some time about the Kithain and wish nothing but goodwill toward these brethren. If there is imbalance in their hearts, perhaps we can show them a true path to wisdom.

Suijen

(soo-ee-gin)

The suijen are skilled courtiers and harpies. They thrive on the seemingly conflicting virtues of intrigue and trust, while they also favor the northern direction, the winter season and the color black. They are forces of greater Yin, and many serve in the Ministry of Water (Shui Fu). Suijen are guardians of all bodies of water and those mortals who make their living working the seas and rivers.

A suijen doesn't give his faith easily to anyone, but once granted, such confidence will never be revoked, even if the kamui is betrayed by the very source he trusts. Most Shinma think the suijen are underhanded and vicious; in truth, they are merely cautious in the extreme when dealing with others, mortal or *hsien*. They seldom admit to seeing good in anyone and are quick to point out faults and missteps. The tongue of a suijen is a harsh weapon, but so subtly barbed that the victim seldom knows she's been stung until hours later. A

member of this *kwannon-jin* will spend a great deal of time learning about a potential friend or foe, perhaps seeming harsh on the surface, but cultivating his opinion quite carefully before reaching any conclusions. If the suijen decides to embark on a friendship, it will be for many lifetimes.

Unfortunately, most Shinma mistrust the suijen on general principles, seeing them as forces of malignancy and darkness. These kamui have a knack for getting embroiled in controversy and intrigue, no matter how innocent their intents. They simply can't resist being gossip mongers and rumor mills, which often makes others angry and resentful. Granted, many suijen secrets are true, but what *hsien* wants others to know of her meeting with a *Kuei-jin* or worse, dealings with a Western foreigner?

Suijen *hsien-tsu* are usually polite,



but cold and formal. If parents expect proper behavior and strict adherence to rules, these Shinma will thrive, but if raised in a chaotic, ill-mannered household, they will become a problem. Young sui jen are not above eavesdropping and collecting useful rumors to later use against mortal parents. If, however, the parents treat them well, even these cool, calculating hsien will later remember their human guardians fondly.

As *hsien-jin*, sui jen spend much time with groups of *hsien*, listening and watching everything around them. Lacking the keen perceptive skills of the *chu jung*, they don't always discern what's really going on, but chances are, they'll have the best dirt on local Shinma politics. With each other, sui jen manners are formal with an air of sarcasm; to others, they seem a trifle on the chilly side of polite. Despite their disdainful, haughty ways, many sui jen have surprised other *hsien* by becoming genuinely helpful companions.

Many sui jen are attracted to the goals of the Li Shen and the Yü. A few secretly embrace the ideals of the Xian Mun and even the Shu Shen. Practically none are involved with the Wu Hsien or the Xian Mo.

Appearance: Most sui jen have green eyes, amber or blue eyes, and blue-black hair. In wani form, the sui jen's skin becomes scaly and takes on a bluish tinge. Hair is worn long and loose in both males and females, with all sorts of baubles entwined in their tresses. Sui jen have gill slits on their necks and slight webbing between their fingers and toes that aid in swimming. Most of these Shinma like pearls of all colors and sizes in their jewelry; favored colors of garments are emerald green and indigo blue. The Mask of Shintai causes these Shinma to grow taller; hair lengthens to the ankles while their skin becomes darker, glowing with a deep azure light. Scales are more pronounced, and all around the sui jen is the sound of waves crashing over rocks, with a tang of sea-salt in the air.

Kwannon-jin Fortune: Water

Luck: The sui jen are always exceptional swimmers and may take +2 dice to all rolls involving swimming or physical activities in the water.

Curse: Sui jen are often apathetic to others' needs and feelings, habitually blurting out brutally honest comments. They must make a successful Willpower roll at difficulty 8 to avoid saying what they think, even if will cause another person pain or anger.

Wani Powers: Sui jen can breathe water like humans breathe air. Likewise, sui jen can't drown in water, though they aren't invulnerable to other liquids. These *hsien* take no penalties for combat or Perception rolls in water.

Concepts: Beach resort owner, court advisor, professional scuba diver, swimming coach.

Merits and Flaws: Boon, Intolerance.

Quote: "What an interesting view you have taken on this matter. I had no idea you were so well-informed about the workings of the shipping industry. Pray speak on and share your knowledge with me, for I know so little."

With a dragon's tongue, Jaw-long speaks honestly to all who will listen:

Chu-ih-yu — They are brittle and will break before they bend. How sad that their own rigid minds will evoke their self-destruction.

Chu Jung — In every way, they are unlike us. Perhaps for that reason, we find these lords of fire unusually intriguing.

Hou-chi — They moan and groan about the miseries of the world, just like their precious trees creak in the wind. How pathetic.

Komuko — They wear the mantle of their power well, but seem to have little appreciation for others on the journey to balance.

Fu Hsi — The serpent is always coiled to strike, even when it wears jeweled scales and speaks knowledgeable words.

Hanumen — A nuisance at best, a temptation to commit murder at worst. We would all be the richer if these silly imps would just go away.

Heng Po — These distant relations have their uses. Many times, they have provided valuable information we were unable or unwilling to find.

Nyan — If they padded quietly to the hell of burning oil, we would shed few tears. As it is, they're howling and yowling on the journey. So noisy.

Tanuki — These badgers work for little reward and do an excellent job. Ignore their foul words and black tempers; they merely prefer fear to love. This is commendable.

Waigoren — Magical beings similar to us, you say? Westerners? This seems a wondrous opportunity, provided we plan a strategy to use, I mean, welcome them to our lands.



CHAPTER FOUR: THE WAY

*All mysteries are Tao, and Heaven is the mother:
She is the gateway and the womb-door.
— Tao Te Ching*

The first half of this chapter is a step-by-step listing of the procedure for creating a *hsien* character. The second half details the new and modified Abilities, Advantages, Tempers, Merits and Flaws. You can find any Traits not covered in **Chapter Four of *Changeling: The Dreaming***, pp. 115-169. Additionally, any page numbers listed here refer to this rulebook.

Creating a *Hsien* Character

Changeling players will soon notice many differences between creating a *hsien* and a Kithain. Most of the Trait descriptions still apply, just change the words "fae" or "Kithain" to "*hsien*."

Step One: Character Concept

Kun Shou: *Hsien-tsu* or *Hsien-jin*?

Kun shou is the process that *hsien* go through when they are reborn into their new human shells. *Hsien* have two ways of describing kun shou based on the age of their human form and the amount of time they have spent in it. *Hsien-tsu* is the name they give themselves when they inhabit the bodies of babes or children and grow up as humans. *Hsien-jin* is their name if they inhabit the form of an adult. In general, the *hsien-jin* have the clearest memories of their supernatural nature, and the *hsien-tsu* are more human — both have advantages and disadvantages.

Hsien-tsu usually spend several years in their human bodies before they become aware that they are *hsien*, so *hsien-tsu* often develop stronger ties to humans than other *hsien*. While infinitely more connected to humanity, they are also keenly aware of their separation from it. In some *hsien-tsu*, this realization brings madness, despair, or a rejection of their true place in the Middle Kingdom. For some unknown reason, most *hirayanu* go through *kun shou* as *hsien-tsu*.

Hsien-jin inhabit the bodies of adults. They rarely begin with many contacts in human society — they simply lack many memories of the person whose body they inhabit. Most of the time, the human whose body they occupy died an unnatural death. Strangely, some *hsien* seem attracted to a body with the express purpose of righting its wrongful death.

Some *hsien* have strong missions in their new life left over from a previous incarnation. The *hsien* occupies the new body out of desperation — usually when others murdered the last form of the *hsien* in the same area. These *hsien* often “haunt” the place where their previous body died — seeking clues to their past life and its failed mission. Many *kamuii* are *hsien-jin*.

System: This choice effects character creation in two ways. First of all, a player of a *hsien-tsu* should spend points on the Contacts Background (Changeling, p. 147) and Mortal Society Merits and Flaws, to reflect the character's ties to humanity (Changeling, pp. 166-168). *Hsien-jin*, on the other hand, should shun these in favor of high scores in the Remembrance Back-

ground — accentuating their separation from humanity and their close connection to their past incarnations. (See the end of this chapter.)

Also, this effects the cost of improving Traits during character creation (Step Five). *Hsien-jin* will find purchasing Attributes and Abilities less expensive than *hsien-tsu*. The *hsien-tsu* often carry more of their alchemical knowledge over into their new bodies. Therefore a *hsien-tsu*'s cost for purchasing dots in Alchemy is lower than the *hsien-jin*'s price.

Kith: Noble or Commoner?

One basic division remains in *hsien* society, although it no longer truly determines one's lot in life — the division between the distant but noble *kamuii* and the agrarian yet humanistic *hirayanu*.

The traditional roles of the *kamuii* are those of the protector of nature and mystic places, and the arbiter of disputes between the *shen*. The best of them are insightful sages, noble guardians and benevolent mandarins.

The *hirayanu* have stronger ties to nature and humanity than the *kamuii*. While the nobles serve the Elements, they no longer see the trees for the forest. The *kamuii* concern themselves with political power and their abstract understanding of the Elements, it is the *hirayanu* that end up doing much of the work. *Hirayanu* are the ones who complete quests (some given by *kamuii*) and seek to bolster human faith by fulfilling human prayers during festivals.



The choice of kith will be one of the most important factors in determining the personality of your character and how other characters react to him. Take your time.

Hsien Courts

The organization of *hsien* society is immeasurably complex. The clash of pre-historic spiritual bureaucracies with the ancient and new human governments has fragmented their once simple culture into a miasma of fighting factions.

Each player should choose a single court that she belongs to at character creation, but it is perfectly possible to join another court or break affiliations during a chronicle — although a member of the Li Shen would never admit being a Profane God too!

A brief description of each court follows, except for the secret courts: the Shu Shen, Yellow Lotus and Mu Courts. They are off limits for the purpose of character creation, although the Storyteller may decide to change this. Much more extensive discussions of the courts can be found in Chapter One.

• The Traditionalists (Li Shen, "The Ceremony Gods," The Fu)

Li Shen embrace Confucian values. They divide themselves into bureaucracies: Ministry of Water (Shui Fu), Ministry of Earth (Di Fu), Ministry of Metals (Tieh Fu), Ministry of Wood (Lin Fu), and Ministry of Fire (Hou Fu). They believe in the Tao Te Hsien but their emphasis is upon the orderliness of nature and how best to maintain it, not enlightenment of the self. The protection of nature concerns them above all else.

Once the most powerful court, the Ceremony Gods have lost touch with the other *shen*, and now look down their noses at them. Due to this prejudice (and the many internecine struggles between the ministries) the Li Shen no longer do their job very well.

The Three Gorges Dam project is their greatest failure. The Ministry of Water is frantically trying stop this juggernaut, but the crisis makes them even more introspective and paranoid. They have vowed to unleash the Four Rivers Dragon if the government completes the dam. All the other *hsien* fear this. The dragon's destruction of the dam will flood much of central China, killing millions. Worse yet, many *hsien* fear the dragon's rampage may herald the Sixth Age!

The Li Shen may not seem to be the most fun to play, but the political struggles and their vast knowledge of the Elements will attract some players. The Li Shen are arguably the most powerful group among the *hsien*, even if they don't get along with the others very well. At best they tend to ignore the other courts. Their numbers are entirely made up of *kamuii*.

• The Quiet Ones (Xian Mo, "Immortal Magical Spirits")

These Xian Mo are mystics, strong believers in the Tao Te Hsien. They believe that enlightened individuals can create a perfect world and reverse the turn of the Ages. This emphasis on the individual causes them to resist order — they refuse even to classify themselves as a court. Xian Mo is the name others give them.

The Quiet Ones gave the *hsien* hope, which most had given up at the end of the Fourth Age after the rise of the Wall barred them from the spirit worlds. Hanuman bought the Tao Te Ching to a *komuko* sage in the Di Fu (Ministry of Earth). The *komuko* resigned his position and retired to the mountains.

Eventually, his teachings lead to the writings now called the Tao Te Hsien, "The Way of Imminent Hsien Power." Its ardent disciples now make up the Xian Mo, and their teachings have led some to pass beyond the Wall.

• The Classicists (Yü, "The Great Ten")

These Yü model themselves after the Ten Kings of Chinese prehistory. (Heck, they probably were some of them!) The Yü carved the Middle Kingdom into 10 mystic provinces, but their battles cause the borders to continually shift. They generally support the Fu and their ministries — as long as they can play them off one another and draw upon their talent. The Yü have hoarded jade for centuries and still possess some of the most potent jade artifacts. They also control many dragon nests.

Not all of the Yü are noble. Some are little more than powerful warlords and criminals — controlling powerful tongs and triads. These *hsien* go toe to toe with other *shen* who have interests in the less savory business dealings of the Middle Kingdom, such as Kuei-jin, Kindred, and others.

None of the other courts can afford to have bad relations with the Yü, so in return they treat most of the others with respect. The Mu Courts and the Kuei-jin are their greatest foes.

Many players will want to create Kung Fu Hsien knights (Kuan-Yü, "demon killers"). The appeal of the Yü to **Change-lings** players is automatic. *Kamuii* gravitate to positions of power in the Great Ten, but many *hirayanu* serve them as important advisors and even *hirayanu* "kings" are not unheard of.

• The Worldly (Xian Mun — "The Immortal Society")

These *hsien* either reject their true natures, or are more concerned with their human lives. Some may use their powers to promote other agendas. The best of the Xian Mun feel that it is possible to follow the Tao outside traditional *hsien* society. The worst care little for it.

The Worldly regard members of the other courts as deluded fools. Individuals play lip service (with a little cash and jade) to the local ministries and Yü strongmen just to be left alone.

Many players may find this group the easiest to play. The Xian Mun organize themselves using human models — anything from families (like the Kuei-jin) to corporations. The Xian Mun live in Hong Kong, Beijing, Tokyo and even in the many "Chinatowns" that bless the great cities of North America and Europe. Due to the freedom offered in this faction, there are probably more *hirayanu* than *kamuii* amongst the Xian Mun.

• The Peasants (Wu Hsien, "The Family of Hsien")

This is a catchall epithet for the vast majority of *hsien*. These *hsien* still live in small villages and have strong ties to the land and local shrines. Some may have tight organizations, but only on a local scale. Insular, they are only concerned with the local people and the local environment.

There are undoubtedly more *hirayanu* than *kamuii* amongst the Xian Mun. The Wu Hsien are often regarded as retainers of both the Li Hsien and the Yü, but their true loyalties lie with their villages, shrines and local sites of natural beauty.

• The Ambassadors of Heaven (Tu Shen, "the Gods of Harmony")

While regarded by many of the Shinma as sybarites, the Tu Shen have the same goal as the Xian Mo, they just have a very

different path. These *hsien* seek to bring about the Age of Joy by convincing everyone to have a good time. Rapture, exultation, not mere physical ecstasy is their goal. They know that a good dinner with friends and family is more a satisfying and sustaining joy than a handful of pills! The Gods of Harmony act on their beliefs by doing good deeds, trying to get the different courts and shen to cooperate, or at least talk. They walk (and sometimes party) like they talk.

The Li Shen do not care for the Tu Shen one whit, and they have strained relations with the Yü. Most of the other groups at least enjoy the company of the Ambassadors of Heaven. They, of course, profess good relations with all groups.

Yin and Yang Legacies

There is no division between Seelie and Unseelie with the *hsien*. (The Shu Shen are as close as one gets to the *Changeling* concept of Unseelie.) Players still choose Legacies (*Changeling*, pp. 130-135) but they refer to the Yang and Yin balance of the character's nature. In *The Land of Eight Million Dreams*, Yin does not refer to Unseelie, nor does Yang correspond to Seelie — the Legacies do not fit into so neat a package.

The Yin Legacies are Courtier, Hermit, Orchid, Panderer, Saint, Squire, Fatalist, Knave, Outlaw, Riddler, Ringleader, Rogue and Wretch.

The Yang Legacies are Crafter, Dandy, Paladin, Regent, Sage, Troubadour, Wayfarer, Beast, Fool, Grotesque, Pandora, Peacock and Savage.

Again, Yin and Yang are not conflicting forces, but contrasting sides of the character's persona. These Legacies can help create great depth to a character. Whenever a character's Yin Chi score is higher than her Yang Chi, then her Yin Legacy has precedence over the Yang Legacy, and vice-versa. Other shen often find dealing with *hsien* confusing due to these ever-shifting natures.

Quest: The dominant Legacy's Quest determines how the character regains Willpower — just as in *Changeling*.

Ban: This affinity is very important for *hsien*. Fulfilling a character's ban in either Legacy helps the character gain permanent Chi. The rules in Chapter Six cover exactly how this system functions.

Rank

A *hsien*'s position in the Middle Kingdom has more to do with politics and personality, and goes beyond a mere statistic. Still, Rank is a rough estimate of a *hsien*'s power. In ancient times, Rank was the sole measure of a *hsien*'s stature, and it still has some sway with them — especially within a court. When two members of the Yü meet, one with a lower Rank will usually defer to one of a higher Rank. Even between different courts, acknowledging Rank is acknowledging tradition — so Rank has political uses as well. For example, it is very honorable for a Li Shen to kowtow to a Xian Mun of a higher Rank (even if he is insincere).

By using their Shentao skill, *hsien* are able to tell the Rank of other *hsien*. This Rank (like maximum Yugen) is the sum of the player's Yin and Yang Chi scores, so you will have to record your character's Rank after the character creation process is over.

Step Two: Traits

There are several new or modified traits in the game covered in the next section, cryptically titled, "New and Modified Traits."

Choosing Attributes

This step is identical to that in *Changeling: The Dreaming* (p. 117). The player may put seven points in primary Attributes, five in secondary Attributes, and three in tertiary Attributes.

Choosing Abilities

The Land of Eight Million Dreams contains several new Abilities, and a few from *Changeling* did not translate (such as Kenning, and Gremayre) into the culture of the East. Leadership has not changed, but it is now a Talent, not a Skill. (Great leaders are not made; they are born.)

The new Talents are Intuition, and Shentao (the Eastern version of Kenning). The new Skills are Athletics, Ceremony, Mediation, and Martial Arts. The new Knowledges are Cosmology, Occult, and Divination.

As with Attributes (see above) the rules are the same. The player assigns 13 points to primary Abilities, nine to secondary Abilities, and five to points in tertiary Abilities. A single Ability cannot exceed three dots at this stage of character creation. Players will be able to raise their Abilities later in the process.

Step Three: Advantages

Here is where the path of fae and *hsien* truly divide. The Eastern fae do not have Glamour or Banality — these essential differences produce the many changes in character creation that follow.

Kith Advantages:

Luck, Curse and Wani Form

Rather than Boons and Flaws, *hsien* have Luck and Curses based on their kith. These advantages serve to differentiate the kith and reflect their personalities.

The wani form of each kith also has unique powers. The hirayanu gain many advantages from their animal natures and the kamuii become nearly immune to damage inflicted from their associated element. More importantly, they can use the Mask of Shintai in the wani form. When the kamuii employ this power, they reveal their semi-divine nature — forcing others to kowtow to them. The hirayanu's mask is a visage of their savage nature — causing all but the most stout-hearted to flee from their gaze.

Backgrounds

Chimera, Dreamers, Retinue, Title and Treasures are no more. *Hsien* have three new Backgrounds: Auspicious Treasure, Jade Talisman and Pakua. Holdings (Dragon Nests), Remembrance, Retinue, and Title have been completely redefined, so be sure to check the listings later in this chapter before you assign dots to them.

Only the Lonely

Want some friends? There are several ways to go about networking even before you play your character.

Backgrounds

Contacts — Contacts are people with power and influence. Unlike Mortal Society Merits, they represent detailed personalities.

Dragon Nest — Access, much less owning a dragon nest is going to attract a lot of attention. It is a good focal point for the chronicle and will lead to a lot of friends (and enemies)!

Retinue — A retinue is a group of normal humans that follow your character. They usually know that you are a *hsien*, but will help you and stick up for you. Your retinue can be fairly large, up to 16 people!

Title — If you just buy a title, you may not have any friends who know your secret, but you have some pull with the powers-that-be in your area. You also might have a lot of sycophants who act like your friends! (Well, it's something!)

Merits

Mortal Society — The Merits and Flaws in this section of *Changeling* (pp. 166-169) allow the character to have ties to legal and illegal organizations in mortal society. These connections do not represent particular people, but they do reflect the fact that you are known to the organizations they represent.

Shen Companion — They are not as numerous or loyal as a Retinue, but companions have supernatural powers! You should consider taking advantage of this significant difference between the World of Darkness East and the more familiar (and balkanized) World of Darkness. We can all get along!

Combining Backgrounds and Merits

There are a lot of ways you can use these numbers to generate roleplaying possibilities. For instance, one of your Contacts might also be a Shen Companion. (Yes, you still have to buy both!) Your dragon nest may lead to a Retinue of lay priests who you inherit along with the shrine. Think about how you can interrelate these traits to create a rich environment for your character.

The character gets five dots in Backgrounds, just like in *Changeling*. Remember, you can spend freebie points on them later, if you don't have enough dots to complete your concept now.

Wu Tan

Hsien call their magic, Wu Tan (magical alchemy). Wu Tan has five elemental Arts or Alchemies: Di Tan (Earth Alchemy), Hou Tan (Fire Alchemy), Lin Tan (Wood Alchemy), Tieh Tan (Metal Alchemy), and Shui Tan (Water Alchemy). Some *hsien* study a sixth Alchemy, Nei Tan (Internal Alchemy). Its power springs from the primordial creation of the *hsien*, not the five elements. Each Tan is further divided into five levels called I Chih, or "righteous judgments." The judgments represent the powers entrusted to them by P'an Ku.

Each character has a Kith Fortune, an Element the kith has an affinity to — Earth, Fire, Wood, Metal or Water. A character

starts with one dot in the Alchemy associated with that fortune. No kith has an affinity for Nei Tan.

The character gets an additional three dots in any Wu Tan. Players will get a chance to place more dots in Wu Tan, but a character may not begin the game with more than three dots in any one Alchemy. Players have to spend freebie points to purchase Nei Tan; you cannot place any dots in that ability now.

Step Four: Tempers

Once again, Tempers are another example of the many differences between the *hsien* and their Western cousins.

Yin Chi and Yang Chi

Chi is the primal force of the universe. It literally means breath, and like everything else, it has Yin and Yang attributes. *Hsien* have Yin and Yang Chi ratings from 1 to 10. The personality of the character shifts as the balance between these forces shift. If a character's Yin Chi is higher, then her personality shifts to her Yin Legacy, and the opposite is also true. Only when the Yin and Yang forces are in balance can the character (and player) be free to act without influence from these forces.

This Temper is also extremely important for magic use. The higher the rating, the easier it is for them to create I Chih. When casting Yin magic, the player uses a difficulty number assigned by his Yin rating, and vice-versa for Yang magic.

Kith determines the starting values for Chi:

Kith	Yin	Yang
Chu Jung, Nyan	2	6
Suijen, Heng Po	6	2
Komuko, Hanumen	4	4
Chu-ih-yu, Tanuki	5	3
Hou-chi, Fu-hsi	3	5

Players will have a chance to increase their characters' Chi scores later in the character creation process, but no player can begin the game with balanced Chi except the komuko and hanumen.

Tao

This temper represents the *hsien*'s understanding of the relationship between Yin and Yang. During character creation, Tao may only be purchased with freebie points, but may never be higher than the average of the character's Yin and Yang Chi, rounded down.

This Trait is used as the Dice Pool for Nei Tan. The greater the character understands Tao, the greater the feats that are possible with this mysterious Alchemy.

Yugen

Yugen is the fuel for *hsien* magic. It is the Chi collected at dragon nests during festivals. The maximum Yugen score for a *hsien* is equal to the sum of the character's Yin and Yang Chi. All characters start the game with their maximum Yugen. Players may not increase the maximum, although Jade Talismans can also be sources of Yugen.

Willpower

All characters begin with four points of Willpower.

Step Five: Merits, Flaws and Freebies

Every player gets 15 freebie points to improve and personalize their character. Look through the Flaws and Merits and assign them first. Remember, Merits cost freebies and Flaws actually give you more freebies to spend. Once all the Merits and Flaws are purchased, the character will have a new freebie point total. Using the freebie point chart, spend the rest of your points to improve your character's Traits.

Spend them how you wish for the most part, but there are a few guidelines. No Alchemy can begin over three dots. No Trait (Abilities, Attributes, or Advantage) can begin over five dots. Players cannot raise Tempers above 10.

The listing for Merits and Flaws is in **Chapter Four of Changeling**, pp. 153-169. Psychological, Mental, Awareness, Changeling Ties, Mortal Society, and Physical Merits and Flaws remain unchanged (just substitute *hsien* for *changeling*). These Merits and Flaws are different: Art Affinity, Changeling Eyes, and Werewolf/Vampire Companion — see the end of this chapter.

Due to the difference in *hsien* and *fae* magic, many of the Supernatural Merits and Flaws can no longer be used: Surreal Quality, Iron Allergy, Chimerical Magnet, Faerie Eternity, Poetic Heart, Cleared Mists, Chimerical Disability, Seeming's Blessing, Slipped Seeming, and Sidhe's Curse.

Step Six: Specialties

The rules are unchanged for Specialties. Be sure to check out the new Abilities listed at the end of this chapter for their specialties.

Step Seven: Spark of Life

Hsien do not have a *fae* mien, but in general, this section (**Changeling**, pp. 120-122) is still important! What is your character's day job? How does she get along in mortal society. All of these questions are vital in bringing your character to life.

Freebie Points

Traits	Cost for Hsien-tsu	Cost for Hsien-jin
Abilities	1	2
Attributes	4	5
Backgrounds	1	1
Yin or Yang Chi*	4	4
Merits	Varies	Varies
Willpower	2	3
Wu Tan	6	5

* No kith can begin the game with balanced Chi except the komuko and hanumen. They do not have to begin the game with balanced Chi.

New and Modified Traits

New Talents

Please remember that Leadership is now a Talent. If you need to refer to the description, it is in **Chapter Four of Changeling**, p. 142.

Intuition

You can think beyond the bounds of Western logic. From the mere trace of evidence and innuendo you can intuit the truth. This is not mere problem solving, often you can see the pattern of cause and effect (or just effect) that lay hidden behind perception.

- **Novice:** Your guesses are often correct.
- **Practiced:** You now trust your hunches.
- **Competent:** Others trust your instincts.
- **Expert:** Your intuition is famous in your circle.
- **Master:** Your insight is legendary.

Possessed by: Artists, Investigators, Scientists, Feng Shui, System Analysts, Logicians, Diviners, and Entrepreneurs.

Specialties: Insight, Dumb Luck, Discernment, Inspiration

Shentao (Kenning)

Somewhere in the nexus of magic, Intuition and Perception lays Shentao. It is the ability to perceive the *shen* and those humans who consort or hunt them. It is also the ability to divine the presence of dragon lines and dragon nests. Shentao is partly cultural, therefore, *hsien* find it difficult to interpret the nature of Western supernaturals (+2 to the difficulty number).

- **Novice:** You know if you're sleeping on a dragon nest, or if you just slept with a *shen*.
- **Practiced:** You can locate dragon nests with ease. You always find True Jade.
- **Competent:** You can spot *hsien*, if given enough time. Sometimes you can determine the presence of other *shen*. You often find yourself traveling along dragon lines quite naturally.
- **Expert:** You can spot *hsien* unerringly. You can spot other *shen* if given enough time. Sometimes you can spot Western supernaturals as well.
- **Master:** Your gaze eventually reveals almost every supernatural item, place or being.

Possessed by: *Hsien*, and some humans who associate with them.

Specialties: Dragon Nests, Dragon Lines, *Hsien*, Hengeyokai, Kuei-jin, Shih, Chi'n Ta, True Jade, Ghosts, Spirits, Demons

New Skills

Acrobatics

You are a trained acrobat. You may have grown up as one of the many street performers or merely taken up tumbling for exercise or as part of your martial arts studies.

This skill allows a character to attempt incredible leaps and falls. This Eastern form also includes some contortions at its

higher levels. Each dot allows the practitioner to ignore a Health Level of damage from falling, as long as the character has a relatively soft, uneven surface to tumble upon.

- **Novice:** You can do a somersault and cartwheel.
- **Practiced:** A few impressive tricks are under your belt.
- **Competent:** You can make a meager living at this level.
- **Expert:** You can star in chop-saki movies.
- **Master:** Olympic medals hang around your neck.

Possessed by: Athletes, Martial Artists, Performers, Ninja
Specialties: Tumble, Jump, Swing, Contortions, Olympic Events

Meditation

Meditation can take the form of the katas of the Tai Chi, twirling of the dervishes, the quiet contemplation of Zen Buddhism or the silent ponderings of a Taoist priest.

Meditation has several uses, but employing it can take anywhere from one scene to one day. The Storyteller must determine the length of time for an effort. Success can act like Fortunes, lowering the number of successes for I Chih use. (Roll Meditation + Perception, difficulty 8 — each success lowers the number of successes required by one, with a maximum of three.) It can also add to Enigmas, Divination and Shentao. (Stamina + Meditation, difficulty 8, each success lowers the difficulty number for using one of these skills by 1.)

- **Novice:** You can calm yourself by concentrating.
- **Practiced:** You can forget your cares, for a time.
- **Competent:** You can center your being, and ignore distractions.
- **Expert:** You can focus your perceptions on a task at hand and drown out the world.
- **Master:** You can focus on a task and still be very aware of your surroundings. You have control over you emotions and perceptions in this state.

Possessed by: Artists, Priests, Martial Artists
Specialties: Zen, Sight, Sound, Touch, Taste, Hearing, Tantra

Martial Arts

Martial Arts covers a variety of techniques and styles. The Martial Arts skill can replace Brawl or Melee skill for attacking in combat. When you choose to do this, increase the difficulty of the attack by two, but the player can add the successes from the attack to the damage roll. The number of added dice cannot exceed the Strength of the attacker.

If you want to do justice to Martial Arts, ditch these combat rules, and get your hands on a copy of **World of Darkness: Combat** (a.k.a. The Big Book of Beating Ass). No amount of add-on rules in a sourcebook can adequately cover so broad a topic. Your game deserves it, and what's the fun of playing an Eastern RPG without katanas, katas, kung fu, and karate?

- **Novice:** Wannabes who read too many martial arts books
- **Practiced:** Student
- **Competent:** Brown Belt
- **Expert:** Black Belt
- **Master:** Bruce Lee

Possessed by: People You Least Expect, Police, Tong Thugs
Specialties: Katana, Sai, Kicks, Punches, Acrobatics, Chops

New Knowledges

Remember that there is no generic Lore. Each supernatural subculture has its own Lore skill, so the subsets for Lore in the **Land of Eight Million Dreams** are: Kuei-jin, Hsien, Dark Kingdom of Jade, Hengeyokai, Chi'n Ta, Human Cults, Mirror Lands, Realms, Yang World. A hsien can also take the Lores listed in **Changeling**, p. 145.

Classics

The study of ancient hsien texts, such as the Tao Te Hsien, the Chronicles of the Monkey King, and the Lo Shu, is extremely important to most hsien. Many masters learn them by heart, and most of the courts require passing exhaustive exams revolving around this cannon to rise in their ranks. Three rounds of exams are given — the most prestigious given every three years by the Ministry of Earth. Each test lasts for 10 days and includes written exams oral defenses, and literary essays.

In system terms, the Background "Title" can have no more dots than this Knowledge!

- **Novice:** You know the gist of each of the classics.
- **Practiced:** You have begun to study the classics earnestly.
- **Competent:** You passed the first round of exams, earning the title xuicai, "budding genius."
- **Expert:** You passed the second round of exams, earning the title juren, "promoted man."
- **Master:** You are jinshi, "achieved scholar."

Possessed by: hsien, chi'n ta, spirits, some hengeyokai

Specialties: Tao Te Hsien, the Chronicles of the Monkey King, Lo Shu

Divination

The purpose of divination is to find the auspiciousness of any action and provide general guidance for the future. Three traditional methods exist. The oldest is the use of augury bones, usually turtle shells or the shoulder blades of an ox. The practitioner cooks the bones over coals and the cracks are read for clues to the client's fate.

Bone witches give portents of injury, sickness and death. While rather limited in scope, this form of divination is, of course, very useful. (Roll Divination + Manipulation, difficulty 8. If she gets three successes then she can make a general statement of serious injury or sickness. More successes will give more accurate results.)

The second oldest form is the use of the book, the I Ching. The practitioner casts yarrow sticks or coins and cross-indexes the patterns they form with enigmatic phrases from the I Ching. She interprets the phrases to give the client advice. As with Western Astrology, the phrases from the I Ching are open to wide interpretation.

Masters of the I Ching can glean the will of Heaven. This allows them to predict if a course of action will correspond with the desires of Heaven. (Roll Divination + Manipulation, diffi-

culty 8. If he gets three successes then he will get a general positive or negative feeling about the action. More successes will give more definite results.)

The most recent, yet nonetheless ancient art is feng shui. Feng shui is a reactive Art. Its practitioners use elaborate compasses to determine the flow of Yin and Yang energies in a certain area. Clients use their services to locate homes and buildings in auspicious areas and to interpret bad turns of luck. Practitioners of feng shui, *fang shih*, can correct an imbalance by manipulating the environment — moving doors or trees for example — and restore the fortune of the gods to an area.

Fang shih can raise and lower the Wall in an area. (Roll Divination + Manipulation, difficulty 8. Each success adds or subtracts one from the Wall rating. The *fang shih* can only adjust the rating by three points.)

Reaching three dots in Divination means that the character is the master of a form of divination. A character can master another form of Divination for each dot after the third in Divination. While finding a master of bone Divination is difficult, the use of the I Ching is fairly common. In Hong Kong, feng shui is the law, and its practitioners, the *fang shih*, are in great demand.

- **Novice:** Occasionally, you surprise your friends.
- **Practiced:** Enough to bluff the public.
- **Competent:** Master of one art.
- **Expert:** *Fang Shih* — big bucks in Hong Kong! The *shen* know who you are.
- **Master:** If you are human, you have *shen* buddies and enemies.

Possessed by: *Fang Shih*, Taoist Medium, Shaman
Specialties: Feng Shui, I Ching, Bone Augury

Occult

Hidden in the gobbledygook of human occultism are grains of truth. *Hsien* often study these funny tomes seeking knowledge, or to use it as a convenient cover for their true identity.

- **Novice:** Own a ouija board, a tarot deck, and a human skull.
- **Practiced:** You have general knowledge of occult groups in your area.
- **Competent:** You know enough to run a bookstore and not embarrass yourself.
- **Expert:** You authored an occult book, and are asked to speak professionally.
- **Master:** You have several books under you belt; students seek you out.

Possessed by: Occultists (duh!), Kuei-jin, Chi'n Ta, Hedge Wizards
Specialties: Satanism, New Age Religion, Folk Magic,

Backgrounds

Auspicious Treasure (Treasures)

Auspicious Treasures are items created by powerful *hsien*. Most still take the owner's Yugen to function, but others have true jade built into and attuned to the item. This background functions like Treasures in *Changeling* (pp. 149-50). Each dot



represents a dot in the Alchemy or Tan used to create the item's magical effect. So a 1 dot Auspicious Treasure reproduces the effect of a level 1 I Chih.

- **Basic:** Effect is equal to a level 1 I Chih.
- **Minor:** Effect is equal to a level 2 I Chih, or a cohort level 1 I Chih.
- **Useful:** Effect is equal to a level 3 I Chih, or a combination of effects no greater than level 2 I Chih.
- **Significant:** Effect is equal to a level 4 I Chih, or a cohort of effects no greater than level 3 I Chih.
- **Incredible:** Effect is equal to a level 5 I Chih, or a cohort of effects no greater than level 4 I Chih.

Dragon Nest (Holdings)

Your character has ready access to a dragon nest. They are the only place a *hsien* can go to regain Yugen and commune with the Elements and the spirit worlds. All *hsien* crave the ability to visit these sites freely, but they must pay a fee or beg a favor to obtain admittance to the dragon nest, if they do not possess this Background.

Your character is not considered to own or have exclusive rights to the site, unless they also purchase Title at the same level. Doing so has great benefits, but will inevitably make enemies of other covetous *hsien*. Even if the dragon nest is hidden away, many *hsien* courts (and other *shen*) will regard the site as a great treasure to be found, and if necessary, taken from the character. If you retain it for one of these groups, then the character will be expected to maintain and defend it.

Dragon nests are most often shrines to one of the thousands of Chinese deities — although they can be scenes of natural beauty, unmarred by buildings of any kind. Unlike freeholds, they are not disconnected with human society. Many operate relatively openly and are often crowded with humans and other *shen*. Sometimes the dragon nest is held in a cooperative arrangement with them. More often than not, it is considered the possession of one of the *hsien* courts. They guard their rights to these sites vigorously. The Yü and Li Shen possess more dragon nests than other organizations.

All *shen* hold dragon nests as sacred places and most as "holy ground" that should not be polluted with combat. Disputes, even over ownership, are usually settled elsewhere. Once admitted to a dragon nest, the *shen* is considered an honored guest of its owner and has his or her protection.

The trait rating determines the overall power of the site — including the points of Yugen that it produces for each *shen* per day.

- **Basic:** You have access to a minor shrine that produces one Yugen.
- **Minor:** You freely visit a minor temple that produces two Yugen a day.
- **Useful:** You are admitted to a large temple that produces three Yugen.
- **Significant:** You are a member of a major temple that produces four Yugen a day.
- **Incredible:** You often attend a huge temple that produces five Yugen a day.

Jade Talisman: True Jade

Jade is jade unless a *hsien* has attuned it. Once attuned, it becomes an item of great value — often inspiring jealousy and hatred in other *hsien*. Each form of jade is attuned to varying levels of Yin or Yang. Attuning jade gives it a Chi rating of 1-5, in one or both forms of Chi. Attuned jade is considered alive to most *shen*.

These Chi points generate a Yugen pool just like *Hsien*. (The Yugen pool is equal to the sum of its Yin and Yang Chi.) *Hsien* can use this Yugen just as if it was draining her own Yugen.

Alternatively, *hsien* can sacrifice Chi points from the jade to create Yugen, just as if he was sacrificing his own Chi. One point of Yang Chi sacrificed from a true jade talisman will give two points of Yugen for a Yang 1 Chih effect. Likewise, one point of Yin Chi sacrificed will create two points of Yugen for a Yin 1 Chih effect. This Chi does not regenerate, and the jade either cracks, clouds, or loses some of its luster.

Each dot gives one point of Chi for the talisman. The player can choose the form of jade that best suits his needs. If appropriate for the level and form of jade, the player may assign the points as he or she wishes to Yin and/or Yang Chi. The player should also decide if the jade is a raw stone, jewelry or some animal totem.

- **Basic:** The jade has 1 point of Chi.
- **Minor:** The jade has 2 points of Chi.
- **Useful:** The jade has 3 points of Chi.
- **Significant:** The talisman has 4 points of Chi.
- **Incredible:** The jade has 5 points of Chi.

Black Jade — Tortoise Jade

Black jade can have a total Yin Chi score of 5. Artisans carve it into teardrop shapes or to represent animals of the sea or rivers.

Blue or Green Jade — Dragon Jade

These colors of jade represent the Element Wood. It can have a Yang Chi of up to 3, and Yin Chi of up to 2.

Red Jade — Feng (Phoenix) Jade

Fire jade, like the Element it exemplifies, represents the Yang world. As such, it can have a total Yang rating of 5.

White Jade — Tiger Jade

White jade exemplifies Metal. It has a maximum Yin rating of 3, and Yang Chi of 2. White Jade often adorns the pommels of weapons — nowadays it is inlaid on pistol grips.

Yu Ying Jade — The Perfection of Jade

This semi-mythical form of jade hales from the Age of Beautiful Sadness. It can have many shades, but it is most often golden in hue with red striations. It can have a rating of 10 in both Yin and Yang Chi. *Shen* prize Yu Ying Jade above all other jade, and it is the impetus of many quests and misfortunes.

Yellow or Gray Jade — Mandarin Jade

This jade is the most valuable since it can have both Yin and Yang Chi scores of 5. It simulates Earth and rulership. Creators of mandarin jade talismans carve them to depict noble beasts or the trappings of kings — fans, scepters, etc.

Pakua

A pakua is a luck symbol, the Chinese equivalent of a rabbit's foot. It looks like a small mirror bordered with the eight I Ching trigrams. It is usually manufactured in the form of an octagonal plaque, which is hung to face out the main entranceway or onto a street. (The magical mirror reflects the bad karma away from the house.) It does not so much confer luck as repel the unwanted attentions of demons, kuei (ghosts) or bad feng shui.

A *hsien*'s Pakua is her preternatural ability to avoid the notice of other *shen* or even nosey mortals. All *hsien* have this ability to some degree when in human form (and animal form for *hirayanu*). Other *shen* must add two to the difficulty when trying to discover them. Each level of Pakua adds an additional success needed to locate the *hsien*. Therefore, level 3 Pakua means that a Kuei-jin would need four successes at +2 to his or her difficulty to spot a *hsien* in human or animal form. While *hsien* do not add to their difficulty to spot each other (see *Shentao*), they still add the success due to Pakua — sometimes you want to hide from your relatives!

This natural ability cannot conceal them when they use *Wu Tan* or shift forms in public. A *kamui* in *wani* form demands attention after all! So if a *chi 'n Ta* (mage) attacks Mr. Li and he turns into a snake man (*fu hsi*), his cover is blown.

Let's say that Mr. Li escapes the mage. Is his life ruined? Not if he has Pakua. Purchased at its higher levels, Pakua will conceal even this over time. Like the Mists, Pakua begins to slowly erode the order and details of events, even when they are recorded in some way. Given enough time (or a clever excuse) no one will remember who transformed and the police reports will be misfiled, burned or otherwise inaccurate.

It's important to remember that Pakua takes some time to work — it does not "cloud men's minds," making the character invisible. If your hung po character turns into a fish man in the middle of the Hung Seng stock exchange, even with Pakua 5, you have problems!

- **Basic:** "Who was that?"
- **Minor:** "He ran around that corner and disappeared."
- **Useful:** "What are you talking about? Mr. Li is a respected carpenter, not a snake-man!"
- **Significant:** "For some reason we all closed our eyes as soon as the fight started!"
- **Incredible:** "Who? What? When? Where?"

Remembrance

Remembrance is your character's ability to remember past lives as a *hsien* and possibly the character's existence before the Wall.

Hsien-tsu rarely should have remembrance Background above two — their long lives as human beings clouds their memories. *Hsien-jin* often have four or five dots in Remembrance, but not always. Often, the trauma of their new existence befuddles them.

- **Basic:** You may remember hazy bits of information when triggered by current events or places; *deja-vu*, baby
- **Minor:** If prompted or guided by another, you can glean some information from the scattered images in your mind.
- **Useful:** You remember some details of your past lives, and have dreams of your life before the Wall.
- **Significant:** You remember many details of your most recent lives, and have glimpses of your life before the Wall.
- **Incredible:** You remember almost all details of your most recent life, and have strong flashes of memory of your past lives. You even have fragments of memory of your life before the Wall.

Retinue

Some humans know your secret and follow you. They may be family members, business partners, employees, servants, or friends. Although they are devoted to your cause, they are not cannon fodder. If you mistreat them, you can expect trouble, or at least indifference. Unless you also purchase the corresponding Merits or the Contacts Background, they are not in positions of great power or influence, but they will help you, hide you and attempt missions you give them.

The members of the retinue are moderately skilled at their jobs. (Most Attributes and Abilities should have two dots.) The Storyteller may let you create people with above-average capability in your retinue, but this should be a reward for creating believable, detailed individuals. The Storyteller may also wish you to sacrifice the overall numbers in your Retinue Background to have more skilled members in it. For example, you want a member of your retinue to be a fantastic computer programmer. The Storyteller may decide that each dot in Computers over two may "cost" a member of your retinue. If you have four dots in retinue, a programmer with four dots in Computers means you actually have six total members of the retinue (instead of eight), but one is a real wiz!

- **Basic:** You have one member in your retinue.
- **Minor:** You have two members in your retinue.
- **Useful:** You have four members in your retinue.
- **Significant:** You have eight members in your retinue.
- **Incredible:** You have 16 members in your retinue.

Title

The *hsien* do not have a system of vassalage like the *fae*. Leaders of the courts confer titles to executives not followers. This does not have much of an impact on the game except for the concept of "knight and squire." They do not exist. Warriors of the Yü have no title unless they have influence (at least one dot in Title). Even the killers of demons (the *Kuan-Yü*) are not especially influential. Being a great warrior is its own reward — it does not confer or compel authority.

Therefore, Title is not a "noble" rank, but represents a character's position within a court. Each court has its own system of titles, but since the Yü and the Li Shen concern

themselves most with appellations, their titles are the examples. (You do not have to have a Title to be a member of a group, although a Title grants you great influence in that court.)

Most of the groups require that those awarded titles are masters of the Classics. Therefore, dots in Title cannot exceed those in Classics.

- **Basic:** Yü — haap (baronet); Li Shen — tu-di (patron). The character has influence over a village or a neighborhood in a large city.
- **Minor:** Yü — naam (baron); Li Shen — guan (bureaucrat). The character has influence over a town.
- **Useful:** Yü — kuan (count); Li Shen — xuicai (professor). The character has influence over a city, district or county.
- **Significant:** Yü — kung (duke); Li Shen — xunfu (magistrate). The character has influence over a prefecture, huge city or minor province.
- **Incredible:** Yü — mandarin (king); Li Shen — zongdu (governor, viceroy). The character has influence over a major province, or governorship over a state.

Modified Merits and Flaws

Elemental Affinity (Art Affinity): (5 point Merit)

This merit works exactly the same. Just change the word Art to Alchemy (*Changeling*, p. 162).

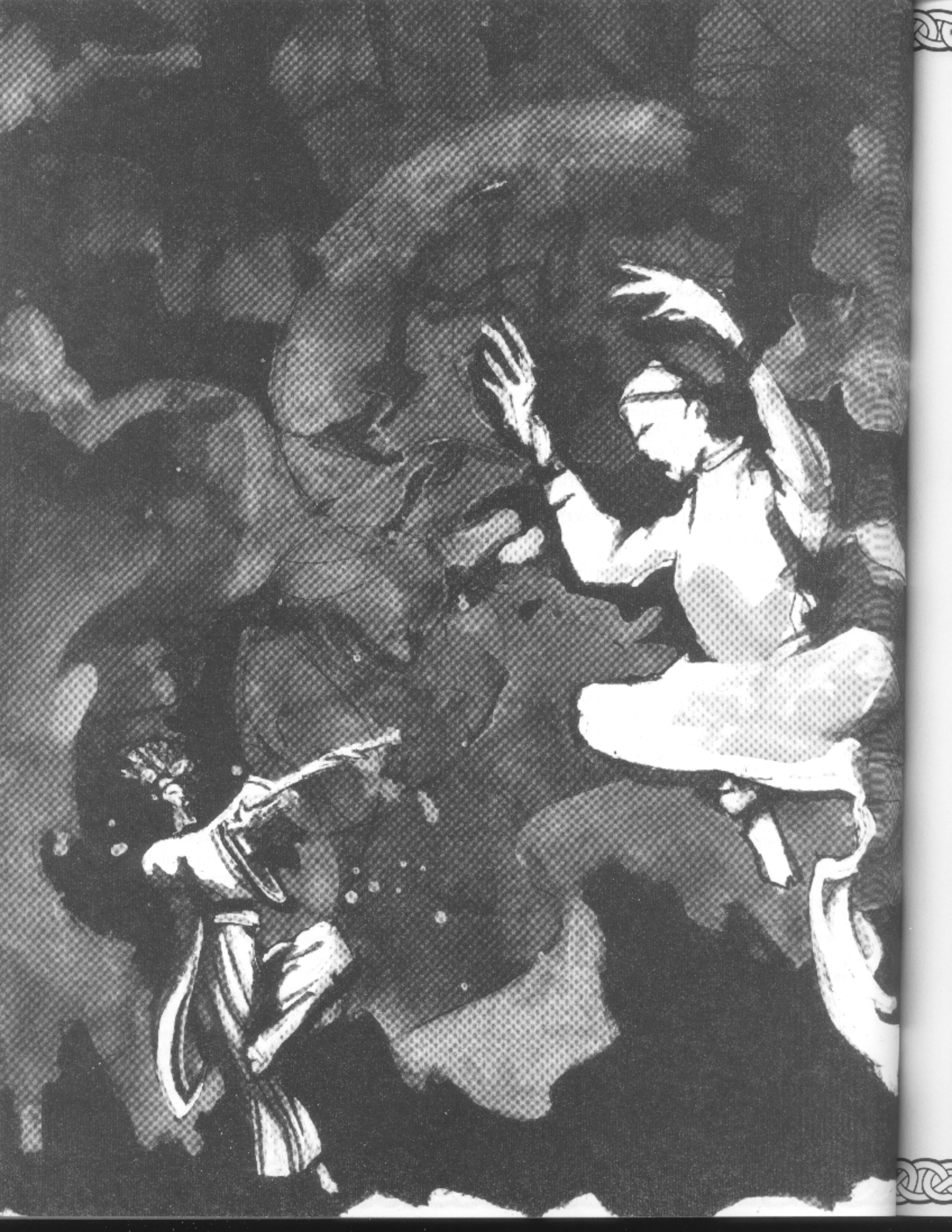
Eyes of Eight Million Dreams (Changeling Eyes): (1 point Flaw)

The hsien has eyes that sometimes give away his spiritual nature. Hirayanu have the eyes of the animals whose bodies they share. The kamuii have eyes that resemble their Elemental natures — they look like brass, or blaze with fire. The player must decide which events cause this to happen.

Beings who search for this *shen* can deduct one from their difficulty numbers to spot him.

Shen Companion (Werewolf/Vampire Companion): (1 point Merit)

Other than the obvious name change, there are less subtle changes for this Merit. The *shen* do not hate each other. Yes, many of the *hsien* blame the Kuei-jin for the Wall (and many dislike them for that), but the genocidal hatred that exists between many of the Western supernaturals is, well, ridiculous to the *shen*. On an individual basis — it is “live and let (un)live.” Also, the *shen* do not try to hide from one another, much less try and keep their entire societies hidden from each other! For the most part, *hsien* know the general facts of Kuei-jin, mage and hengeyokai societies. For those reasons, this Merit is less expensive for the *shen* than the fae, it is just far more common.



CHAPTER FIVE: WU TAN

*The five colours blind the eye
The five notes deafen the ear
The five tastes deaden the mouth
— Man-Ho Kwok (trans.), Tao Te Ching*

Traditional Chinese medicine and magic attempt to cure the sick by balancing the elements and energies in the human body. Doctors use herbs, animal remains, massage, feng shui, and acupuncture to re-establish balance of these metaphysical forces. While the West is slowly giving these practices their due respect, in the World of Darkness they represent a shadow of true mastery of the elements. The *hsien* are servitors of the elemental forces that created the Middle Kingdom. They truck with the foundations of perception: Yin and Yang; and the elements of the Middle Kingdom: Wood, Fire, Metal, Water, and Earth.

Shinma magic does not rely on static lists of spells, cantrips or rituals. The players and Storyteller have to create spell-like effects using the powers defined for each Alchemy. (Although 10 examples for each Alchemy are given to get the players started.)

Every Alchemy has five levels of increasing power. Each step toward mastery gives the character increasing control over the physical and spiritual characteristics of an element — for an element is not limited to physical matter, it is an allegorical chain linking the elements' sensations, perceptions and emotions. Mastering Earth, for example, allows a character to move dirt around, but it also allows *shen* to exert control of the Earth

Soul in other people. Wu Tan's abilities are more universal than most imagine.

The difficulty number for each use of an Alchemy is determined by whether the effect has Yin or Yang characteristics. The difficulty for a Yang effect is determined by the character's Yang Chi. Likewise, Yin Chi decides the difficulty number for effects that have Yin characteristics. As a character's Yin or Yang Chi rises, the difficulty numbers decrease.

Next, the player spends Yugen (a kind of undifferentiated Chi) for the effect and then rolls the dice. The ultimate success of the magic depends upon the number of successes generated on this die roll. The total number of successes needed can be reduced by players who use Fortunes — ways of linking their magic to Chinese folklore and attributes of the elements.

This magic system is more difficult to master than traditional lists of powers, but it rewards creativity and a player's willingness to wrestle with the Eastern conception of the elements and the character of Yin and Yang. Masters of Wu Tan can shatter mountains, call hurricanes, flood valleys, awaken justice in the hearts of the most corrupt. Their power is awe-inspiring to some, horrifying to others.

Bones of the Dragon

Wu Tan may seem more confusing than it really is. Remember, the Chinese perception of the elements is very different from our own; it will take time to digest. Adding modifiers and Fortunes to the brew seems to make things even more puzzling than they really are.

The complexity is an illusion. It all boils down to this:

- 1) Pick an I Chih and decide if the effect is Yin or Yang.
- 2) Add to the required number of successes if you want to use modifiers.
- 3) Subtract from the required number of successes if you want to use Fortunes.
- 4) Roll the dice and count your successes.

Hsien Alchemy – Concepts

Hsien call their magic, “Wu Tan” (magical alchemy). Their magic involves manipulating and, occasionally, combining the elements: Earth, Fire, Metal, Water and Wood. Alchemy also serves to differentiate Wu Tan from the Arts of the fae, gifts of the hengeyokai, the Disciplines of the Kuei-jin and the magick of the chi’n ta. (Although a hsien master of an element is as fearsome as any of these.)

Five elemental arts make up Wu Tan: Di Tan (Earth Alchemy), Hou Tan (Fire Alchemy), Lin Tan (Wood Alchemy), Tieh Tan (Metal Alchemy), and Shui Tan (Water

Alchemy). Each Alchemy is broken into five levels called I Chih, or “righteous judgments.” They represent the ancient mandates of P’an Ku — giving the hsien power over the building blocks of the Middle Kingdom, the elements.

The last magical art is Nei Tan, “internal alchemy,” based on the Tao Te Hsien. It is the most difficult to master of the Alchemies, but has the greatest reward for its students — the Jade Key, a way to pass through the barriers of the Wall.

Yin and Yang

First, let’s start with what Yin and Yang are not. They are not opposites. The word “opposite” implies opposition, and that is not a part of the Yin/Yang concept. When most westerners look at the Yin/Yang symbol they merely see the white and black teardrop shapes as opposites. Most of the time the analyses end there. Look at it from a different perspective, and you will notice more important details. The symbol is a circle, representing unity. Look at the black or Yin side and you’ll see a white dot, representing Yang at its core. Glance at the white or Yang side and you’ll see that a white dot, the force of Yin at its center. The concept is a little more complex.

Imagine a cold night deep in the mountains. You are facing west, waiting for the Sun to rise behind you. Suddenly, a fragment of the Sun peers over your shoulder and illuminates a beautiful mountain in front of you. Is the dark side of the mountain the “opposite” of the sunlit side, as if it were a separate thing? No, it is the same mountain. Do the light and dark sides of the mountain strive against one another? No, the words

Wu Tan Lexicon

Di shen — Earth elemental.

Di Tan — “Earth alchemy.”

Effect — A use of an I Chih.

Element — One of the five building blocks of the Middle Kingdom: Earth, Fire, Metal, Water and Wood.

Elemental Spirit — A spiritual servant of the August Personage of Jade; a being from the spirit worlds.

Elemental Soul — A facet of a being tied to a particular element (i.e. Wood Soul). It encompasses Attributes and mental and emotional states.

Fortune — An action, object or auspicious time that reduces the number of successes needed to successfully cast magic; Fortunes are related to traditional magic, customs and religious practices of Asia.

Jimu-Tenno — An elemental, a title reserved for powerful elementals.

Hou Shen — Fire elemental.

Hou Tan — “Fire alchemy.”

I Chih — “Righteous judgment.” A level of power in an Alchemy.

Lin Shen — Wood elemental.

Lin Tan — “Wood alchemy.”

Tieh Tan — “Iron alchemy.” Metal Alchemy.

Tieh Shen — Metal elemental.

Modifier — A way of increasing the scope and/or power of an I Chih. Modifiers increase the number of successes needed to create magical effects.

Nei Tan — “Internal alchemy.” Taoist magic of the hsien; personal Chi magic.

Shui Shen — Water elemental.

Shui Tan — “Water alchemy.”

Wu Tan — “Magical alchemy.” The magic of the hsien.

Yugen — The fuel for Shinma Magic, a lesser, undifferentiated Chi.

Xian Hsien — “Immortal hsien.” Hsien who have mastered the Tao Te Hsien.

Yin

Yin has these characteristics: dark, passive, cold, moist, decaying, negative, defensive, material and female. Yin unfortunately has a tendency to be thought of as evil since it is also associated with the dead. It's not. It is just Yang's contrast. All that is Yang transmutes into Yin at some time. Yin is natural.

System: Every time a character uses Wu Tan, the player must decide if the effect is a Yin effect. Take a look at the description above. Yin effects have Yin characteristics. So if the character's magical effect is defensive, or has to do with weakening someone (decay) then it's a Yin effect. So the player uses her character's Yin Chi to determine the difficulty number, and the Yin Attribute of the Alchemy for part of the Dice Pool. Don't worry about the rules right now, first learn the language.

"light" and "dark" just describe the mountain. That is what the concept of Yin and Yang accomplish. The concept actually describes one thing — reality.

A cup is another great example of Yin and Yang existing in one object. The principle of the cup, its form, is Yang. The Yin portion of the cup is the part that makes it useful — the part that is not there. Without the Yin (the empty space) you could not pour water into the cup, or drink from it. The Yang form and principle of the cup would be defeated without the Yin.

Yin and Yang are complements. One becomes evident because of the other. Can you describe the light side of the mountain without describing the dark side? No, light defines dark. Good defines evil. Female defines male. Yin defines Yang.

Yin and Yang are dynamic, but they do not struggle against one another. Ideally, they are in balance, but that rarely happens in the Fifth Age. A paradox? You bet, and incidentally, that is the point. After all, Yin and Yang define the greatest paradox of all — existence.

Chi

Chi is the primal force of the universe. It literally means breath, and like everything else, has Yin and Yang attributes.

A *hsien*'s Chi is incredibly potent and plentiful. When the *hsien* were trapped in this world due to the treachery of the Wan Xian (Kuei-jin), they turned the flow of Chi in their bodies in upon itself — like a Möbius loop — attempting to preserve their life energy from bleeding away. This preserved them from literally unraveling behind the Wall. It also meant they could not cross the Wall. The servitors of the gods, the messengers of the Three Worlds, are trapped.

System: *Hsien* have Yin and Yang Chi ratings from 1 to 10. The higher the rating, the easier it is for them to create I Chih. When casting Yin magic, the player uses a difficulty number assigned by his Yin rating, and vice-versa for Yang magic.

If you have not looked at the character sheet before, do so. The difficulty numbers are listed next to the character's Chi rankings.

Yin or Yang Score

0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

Difficulty Number

N/A — no magic possible
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
2*

* Should a *hsien* reach this score during play (and shame on the Storyteller if they do!), the Storyteller should not make the player roll for magic, unless under severe stress, such as meeting another *hsien* of this rank, slapping about a Methuselah, etc.

Yugen

When the Shinma took on human form, it not only barred them from the spirit worlds, but also severed them from their wellspring of their magic. Fortunately, the Chi locked inside their mortal shells shone through the fabric of their dull forms — accumulating a new, if less potent form of Chi, Yugen.

Yugen is undifferentiated (not Yin or Yang) Chi produced by the interaction of a *hsien*'s Chi with the Chi from the Yin and Yang worlds. This is only gathered at dragon nests and during religious festivals — basically, places and times when the Wall is weak.

Yugen corresponds to a Changeling's Glamour in that it is used by *hsien* for feats of magic. Like Glamour, Yugen also leaks through the Wall, just as the Glamour leaks through Trods. *Hsien* can also gain Yugen from humans, but only when humans are participating in festivals. Even with these similarities, Glam-

Yang

Yang has these characteristics: light, active, hot, dry, growing, positive, offensive, and male. Westerners tend to think of Yang as good. In truth, Yang can be more destructive than Yin. Put your finger in a flame. What you experience is Yang. Take your finger out now.

System: Whenever a character uses an Alchemy, the player must determine if it is a Yang effect. How do you do this? Look at the descriptions of Yang above (and elsewhere in this book). Is the effect offensive, like shooting a bolt of fire? Does it involve growth, like healing a wound? If it has the same characteristics as Yang, then it is a Yang effect. If so, the player uses her character's Yang Chi to determine the difficulty number, and the Yang Attribute of the Alchemy for part of the Dice Pool. More precise descriptions of the rules follow — just try and understand the themes for now.

our is not Yugen and vice-versa. Yugen is a weak form of Chi energy Shinma souls collect. It is not produced by creativity.

System: Yugen is the fuel for *hsien* magic. A character has a maximum number of Yugen points equal to the sum of his or her Yin and Yang Chi. Each Art, or Tan, is divided into five levels. The base cost to use Wu Tan is one point of Yugen, although a few I Chih require more points.

A point of Chi can be converted to two points of Yugen in a pinch, but the Chi loss is permanent. Yang Chi has to be burned for Yang powers, Yin Chi for Yin powers. Use the Chi rating before the conversion. So if a character *had* to have 4 Yang Chi to use a power, and he decides to burn off permanent Chi, this allows him to use his "pre-burn" Chi rating to establish the difficulty number for the power.

Characters regain Yugen by visiting dragon nests. Each dragon nest is capable of giving the *hsien* a certain number of Yugen per day, but they do not have to spend the whole day there in contemplation. Normally, they gather 1 Yugen per two hours. Meditation (Difficulty 8) will gain them additional Yugen equal to the number of successes (maximum of three successes). All dragon nests have a maximum number of Yugen they can give a character per day. This number is usually between one and five.

The Elements and Their Constructive Cycle

Try your best to forget what you know of the Greek elements, for the Chinese system of elements only bears a few similarities to it. Arguably, the chief similarity is the most important one. Like the Chinese, the Greeks believed that the elements represented the building blocks of the universe. The *hsien* know that during the First Age, The P'an Ku carved reality out of the elements. Once again, this is where the comparison ends.

Unlike the flawless ideals that characterize Greek elements, Chinese elements are in a state of constant flux, but they do not oppose one another. Water is not the opposite of fire, etc. Their interrelations are more complex, based more on process and poetry than structure and Western logic.

Take a sip of tea and read on.

P'an Ku worked with the elements in a particular order, and thus, the Chinese elements have a constructive order. Wood makes Fire; Fire produces ash and so produces Earth; Earth contains the ore that produces metals; Metal melts (like ice) and produces Water; Water nourishes the plants and produces Wood. And so this cycle is self-rejuvenating.

This order is oftentimes envisioned as a wheel. In the center of this wheel is the Earth element. Earth represents soil and rock, but also the Middle Kingdom itself. Because of its placement, Earth is the most balanced in relation to the Yin Chi and Yang Chi forces of the universe. Earth can also transmute most easily into the other elements, and has some of all of their characteristics.

Each element has several associations called Fortunes. Essentially, each element is both a "thing" and an extended

allegory. Earth, in its role as the hub of the other elements, is associated with all of the seasons, the color yellow, wisdom, and the sense of smell. (Smart *hsien* use these Fortunes to boost the effects of their magic.)

Above (in a metaphorical sense) this realm floats what is left of Heaven — the Yang Worlds. Below it lies the Dark Kingdom of Jade, and the other Yin Worlds. Around this hub of Earth floats the wheel of the other elements in a clockwise rotation, when things are going well. Unfortunately, the wheel slows and sometimes bends back upon itself in these darkening days.

The elemental wheel begins in the east, like the rising Sun. Here is the realm of wood. Wood is also allied with the season spring, the color green, and goodness. It is a lesser Yang element, meaning it has slightly more Yang Chi than Yin Chi and is characterized by steady growth. Wood is also often associated with the sense of touch.

The next element in the constructive sequence is Fire (Fire burns Wood). It is associated with the warmth to the south, and the warmest season, summer. Fire's color is red, and just as a flame sheds light, it is also linked to the sense of sight. Fire also sheds the light of inspection, so it governs propriety and dignified action as well. Fire is extremely active and leads to great good, like a warm hearth, but it also leads to great destruction if let run amok. Therefore, it has very little Yin. Fire has the greatest concentration of Yang energy of all the elements.

Fire's ashes beget Metal, the element drawn like a blade from the ember of the Sun, the west. Metal is associated with the fall, a time when metal tools are used to reap the harvest. (It has since become a propitious time for blacksmiths and artisans.) Like the bronze gongs cast from this element, Metal is associated with the sense of hearing. Because Metal must be acted upon and hides in the earth, it is composed of slightly more Yin than Yang energies. Like the bright flashings of light from its surface, white is the color of the element Metal.

Like ice, Metal melts and becomes Water. Water is the element of the greatest Yin. Cold, it is associated with the north and winter. Water must be drunk and is, therefore, associated with the sense of taste. The oceans are the homes of the great Dragons, but their homes are deeper than any man can peer, therefore, black is the color associated with Water; also, faith, for all know that even though the Dragon Kings cannot be seen; it is their breath that moves the waves and brings the rains and floods. Water also commands the clouds and winds. Although the hardest to stir, once awakened, no element is stronger or causes greater destruction than Water.

Water nourishes Wood via Earth creating the fertile hills and valleys of the Middle Kingdom. Thus, the cycle begins anew.

System: Each element, except Earth, has a Yin Attribute and Yang Attribute associated with it. (Earth, since it is the most balanced, only has one Attribute, Intelligence.) When using Wu Tan, the Dice Pool of the "spell" is equal to the level of the Alchemy plus either the Yin or Yang Attribute. Which attribute (Yin or Yang) is added to the Alchemy is based on the effect of the spell — is it a Yin or Yang effect?

Elemental Souls

Every being is partly composed of spiritual remnants from the elemental powers that forged the Middle Kingdom. These fragments are called Elemental Souls. They are not independent spirits — think of them as facets of a being's body and soul. These souls are part of the forces the *hsien* have control over.

The first level of each Elemental Alchemy allows a *hsien* to commune with these Elemental Souls. By doing this, the Shinma gains insight into people's behavior and motives. For instance, when a *hsien* with the first level of Lin Tan (Wood Alchemy) looks at someone's Wood Soul, she can see that person's innate goodness.

The second level of the Alchemies allows Shinma to manipulate Elemental Souls. This gives them limited control of another being's thoughts, perceptions and emotions. So a *hsien* with Level 2 Lin Tan can manipulate how "good" a person acts. A Yang effect may make a person act more kindly by expanding a person's Wood Soul, but a Yin effect would shrink their Wood Soul, making their actions vile and hateful.

To completely control a being's spirit, the *hsien* must master all five elements.

Which beings have Elemental Souls? As a rule of thumb, sentient beings have all five Elemental Souls. Many animals lack a Metal Soul, since most animals do not act out of a sense of justice. Read the descriptions and let your Earth Soul (common sense) be your guide. As always, the Storyteller is the ultimate judge in these decisions.

Earth Soul — The Earth Soul gives beings their capacity for wisdom, insight, understanding and overall common sense. It also influences the Intelligence Attribute.

Wood Soul — The Wood Soul is responsible for a person's morality. It controls their lusts, and their capacity to empathize with others. All creatures possess a Wood Soul. The Appearance and Strength Attributes represent the vital nature of the Wood element.

Fire Soul — The Fire Soul regulates a being's understanding of propriety and their understanding of manners and codes of conduct. Charisma and Wits are Fire Attributes.

Metal Soul — The Metal Soul contains a person's sense of justice, honesty, and fair play. Perception and Dexterity are the Metal Attributes.

Water Soul — The Water Soul encompasses a person's faith in others and in the powers of the universe. It also encompasses fidelity and confidence, and the Water attributes are Manipulation and Stamina.

System: Just as the Wu Tan can control natural phenomena, such as bushes and rock, they can also influence a being's Elemental Souls. The Level 1 I Chih for each of the elemental Alchemy allows the *hsien* to commune with a being's Elemental Soul, so they can determine its state. Level 2 I Chih allows the Shinma to command the soul — directly effecting the being's behavior, personality, etc.

Using Wu Tan

"What is that, oil?"

"No, Black Blood of the Earth."

"You mean oil?"

"No, Black Blood of the Earth!"

— Jack Burton and Egg Shen, *Big Trouble in Little China*

What follows are the systems for using magic. The next section contains a generic outline for the I Chih, the powers within an Alchemy. The succeeding sections contain descriptions of modifiers and Fortunes.

This section will follow this basic framework for casting an effect:

Step One: Pick an I Chih and decide if the effect is Yin or Yang.

Step Two: Add successes for modifiers (optional). An unmodified I Chih usually only needs one success to work. Some require two successes per increase or decrease of an Attribute, Ability or Dice Pool. Modifiers require additional successes.

Abundance — The number of targets.

Circumstance — Placing conditions on effects.

Continuance — The duration of an effect.

Domain — The range to the target, or sphere of influence

Harm — Directly damaging a target.

Magnitude — The size of a target and/or the degree magic changes it.

Step Three: Subtract one success for each Fortune (optional).

Color — The caster is wearing an appropriate color for the element.

Direction — The caster is located in an auspicious direction from the target.

Dzi Dzat — The caster has a paper representation of the target or effect.

Festivals — The effect is cast during an appropriate festival.

Poetry — The caster wrote a haiku for the I Chih.

Season — It is an auspicious season for the element

Sense — Caster and target are experiencing a similar and appropriate (for the element) sensation.

Skills — The caster uses a related skill: Medicine, Divination, etc.

Wani Form — Being in wani form is an automatic Fortune for the Shinma

Step Four: Roll dice.

You may need to review the description for the Constructive Cycle of the elements and the descriptions for Yin and Yang as you read through this.

An Example of Wu Tan Use

Xun Ting, a Fu Hsi, sees a group of 12 woodcutters in the valley below about to chop down his mulberry trees. He decides to animate the trees and have them attack the humans — just to scare them off.

Elemental Attributes

When attempting an I Chih, add the character's Elemental Alchemy score to the Yin attribute for Yin effects, or the Yang Attribute for Yang effects. (Earth has only one Attribute — Intelligence — because it is balanced — neither more Yang nor more Yin.)

Element	Yin	Yang
Wood	Appearance	Strength
Metal	Perception	Dexterity
Water	Stamina	Manipulation
Fire	Charisma	Wits
Earth	Intelligence	Intelligence

Animating the trees is a Yang effect, because he is causing something to move. So Xun Ting's player looks to his Yang Chi score to find the difficulty number. His Yang Chi is 4, making his difficulty number 6.

The Storyteller says the Fu Hsi needs two successes for the Domain (range) and four successes for the Abundance of the trees (one tree for each man). Adding these to one success for the base effect means he needs six successes in all.

The player of the fu hsi points out that his character receives a kwannon-jin Fortune since his race is allied with the Wood element. Also, it is springtime (Season Fortune), and his character is wearing a green robe (Color Fortune). These three Fortunes reduce the number of needed successes down to three.

Xun Ting's Lin Tan rank is 5 and his Strength (Wood Yang Attribute) is 3, giving him 8 dice. The player rolls 2, 2, 4, 4, 2, 7, 8, 9 — three successes! (They won't do any damage because the Fu Hsi did not use Harm.)

Suddenly, the mulberry trees lash out at the woodcutters! They drop their axes, scream like children and run for the village!

Elemental I Chih

Each Alchemical art is divided into five levels called I Chih, "righteous judgments." Many hsien take this definition literally; these are holy endowments given to them by Heaven to build and preserve the Middle Kingdom. For others, the I Chih are fearsome abilities and their keys to temporal power and excess.

The levels of I Chih represent stages of the hsien's growing mastery of a particular element. First, the hsien learns to communicate with the element, then he learns to command the spirits associated with it. Later, he begins to manipulate the element as the hsien once did when they helped P'an Ku create the Middle Kingdom.

Each I Chih can generate thousands of effects; these rules are merely a framework from which to start. The powers may seem overwhelming at first, so each I Chih has several examples listed with it. (There are many effects listed in these rules!) Take your time and reward your players' ingenuity. Just as with other flexible systems, there will be more than one way to accomplish a magical feat.

The Prodigal Tongue

This I Chih gives the Shinma the ability to communicate with spirits. It chiefly breaks down to three powers, but Storytellers and players are encouraged to come up with more uses.

The Prodigal Tongue is the first step the kwannon-jin take in regaining their powers of old. It is "prodigal" in that they find their lost voice — the Shinma's ability to speak with the elements that are the roots of the Middle Kingdom. This I Chih gives a hsien the power to communicate with spirits associated with an element (for the price of Yugen). These spirits reside in the spirit worlds, Slumber within inanimate objects and even hide within creatures as Elemental Souls.

A hsien is automatically understood by these beings — it is just a matter of intent. While this power is magical, the speech is not. The hsien must talk, not hum, and not meditate — although the spirit may not respond in a fashion understandable to other characters that lack this I Chih. Material objects creak and groan when communicating with Shinma; spirits of the other worlds may materialize and converse normally, but this is best left up to the imagination of the Storyteller.

Commune with the Element: Commune allows the hsien to speak with the elements in the Middle Kingdom, such as concrete, pools of water, woks, etc. Practitioners of Earth Alchemy (Di Tan) can "speak" with stones. For example, a komuko can literally lean over to the sidewalk and strike up a conversation, albeit a boring one.

The spirits of material things are rather sluggish and have limited perceptions of the Middle Kingdom. Hsien must use Magnitude of Change at Level 3+ to gain useful and reliable information. Magnitude of Form allows the user to speak to larger portions of the element. This does not improve the reliability (you still need Magnitude of Change), but it may improve the perception of the spirits. For instance, a hsien with Di Tan could talk with either a man-sized piece of street beneath him (no modifiers), or the whole road by using Magnitude of Form. Imagine the amount of information the entire street could give him! Of course, it may be too much.

Waigoren think of this power as object reading. The elements pick up information about the senses and emotions in which they are attuned. Not all elements can see — no element has all the senses of a human. Water, Metal and Fire have some sense of sight, but Earth only has perceptions of those creatures that stand or hold it.

Earth — Objects composed of Earth will describe the weight and shape of people who touched or stood on them. Since Earth is allied to the sense of smell it can also replay smells of a certain area. At very high levels of Magnitude (5+), Earth objects may even comment on especially wise or unwise actions that took place in their presence.

Water — Pools of Water can reflect the actions that took place around them, but the quality is poor, due to ripples, etc. Even these weak water spirits tend to be manipulative and tricky. Air can be asked to repeat whispers of conversation, but they tend to leave out some details because they are so ethereal.



Metal — Shiny metal objects may also cast blurred reflections of events that occurred around them, but the resonance of metal allows objects to exactly replay the sounds made in their presence. Metal spirits tend to fixate on injustice; getting them to repeat pointless conversations may be difficult.

Fire — Fires can replay perfectly the sights of actions that took place near them since they are allied with sight and light. The only problem is that fires are exceptionally short lived, so a character would have to find a fire that has been burning for a long time. Fires only perceive what has been going on since the time they are kindled — nothing can be gained from ashes. Fire spirits are so active, though, they usually reserve the right to show what they want to, or they want to show everything.

Wood — Objects of Wood only have perceptions of those beings that touch them. They can relate the health and age of those beings, and most importantly, the beneficence of their spirit.

Read Elemental Soul: Every being in the Middle Kingdom is still linked to the elemental tempers that formed the world. Every mortal and *shen* has a Soul for each of the elements. (See the previous section on Elemental Souls to see what portion of a being's persona they encompass.)

Hsien can use this power to gain information about the state of the target's Elemental Soul. By merely looking at the person, a *Shinma* can "read" this spirit. By communing with a Metal Soul, one can see if the target is just, possibly if they are lying. Clever *hsien* work this inquiry into their conversations.

Speak with Jimu-Tenno (Elementals): This power becomes more useful to a *hsien* who finds a spirit in the Middle Kingdom, or a *hsien* who can actually see into the Mirror Lands via a dragon nest and thereby locate and converse with spirits. Each kind of spirit has certain limitations and personality quirks; a smart *hsien* takes advantage of these. Water spirits are interested in intrigue, Fire with decorum, and so on. (A complete list of spirits appears in Chapter Six.)

Modifiers: The most common modifiers for this power are: Domain, Abundance, Continuance, Circumstance, and Magnitude.

Yin Effects — The most common Yin effect would be to read the state of the target's Elemental Soul. A Man's Wood soul will tell you if he is acting benevolently, while his Earth Soul will tell you if he is wise.

Yang Effects — *Hsien* use Yang effects to talk to Elemental spirits. (Use Continuance for a long conversation.)

☸☸ Command Elemental Vassals

P'an Ku gave the *hsien* the responsibility for overseeing the elemental spirits. Each *hsien* can command Elementals corresponding to their Kith Fortune. (Komuko can control Earth Elementals, etc.) Other *hsien* must negotiate with these spirits — usually making elaborate offerings or making promises to cajole them into service.

The difficulty for most *hsien* is finding spirits, since *hsien* cannot travel freely to the spirit worlds. If the character cannot get to a dragon nest, she may be able to call one by going to a natural spot, which would attract a particular elemental. They know that spirits "nearby" in the Mirror Lands will come if called — using their powers to appear near the *hsien*.

Wall Ratings

Wall	Typical Site
9	Bank, Science lab
8	Downtown
7	Urban area
6	Countryside
5	Wilderness, graveyard
4	Shrine, temple, church
3	Supernatural site
2	Impressive dragon nest

Frivolous use of the elemental vassals will bring reprisals from more traditional *hsien* societies. Getting elementals killed sometimes provokes the gods themselves to respond from the spirit worlds. *Hsien* must use this great power with caution, or face retribution. (See Chapter Six for more details on spirits.)

Modifiers: The most common modifiers for this power are: Domain, Abundance, Continuance, Circumstance

Exorcise Elemental Spirit: This power allows the *hsien* to dispel spirits. The *hsien* must score a success for each 10 points (round up) of current Chi a spirit possesses to dispel an unmanifested spirit. Manifested spirits are much more difficult. To force it through the Wall, the *Hsien* must score a success for each 2 points (round up) of current Chi a spirit possesses.

Summon Elemental Spirit: This effect summons elemental spirits. Basically, the *hsien* needs a success for every 10 points (round up) of Chi a spirit possesses plus the Wall rating of an area. Successful use of this power forces the spirit to Appear. (See Chapter Six.) The wielder must bargain for the servant's cooperation — usually for some sacrifice, or later service.

Continuance and Abundance cannot be used with this power.

Diminish/Nurture Elemental Soul: The *hsien* may command the Elemental Souls found in all beings. By using Magnitude of Change, a *hsien* can alter another's Elemental Soul. The Storyteller assigns successes using either the temperature or emotional guidelines for Magnitude of Change, whichever seems most appropriate. For example, Fire Souls can be manipulated to increase (a Yang effect) or decrease (a Yin effect) their influence on a person's grasp of propriety. See the previous section on Elemental Souls to determine the influence of a particular type of Elemental Soul

Increase/Decrease Elemental Attributes: The Elemental Soul also influences Attributes. By calling on these facets of the Elemental Soul, you can affect the dots in statistics. Yin effects reduce the number of dots in an Attribute, and Yang effects increase them.

Earth — Intelligence

Fire — Charisma and Wits

Metal — Perception and Dexterity

Water — Stamina and Manipulation

Wood — Appearance and Strength



Every two successes adds or subtracts one dot from the Attribute. Driving an Attribute to zero adds three more successes beyond this number. Example: For Li Chen to drive Po Fat's attribute from two to zero requires seven successes.

Summon the Dragon Boat: This very special power can only be used at dragon nests. It allows the Shinma to travel between dragon nests and enter the spirit worlds in a limited fashion. To begin this ritual, the character must possess a figurine of a dragon boat, made of the color of jade allied to their kwannon-jin's element. The chu jung and nyan use red jade; sui jen and heng po have black jade craft; komuko and hanumen possess yellow jade figurines; chu-ih-yu and tanuki employ white jade; and hou-chi and fu-hsi have boats of blue or green jade.

To begin the ritual, the *hsien* stands near the focal point of the dragon nest and calls an Elemental, who waits in the Mirror Lands, just on the other side the Wall from the *hsien*. This being must be bargained with or Summoned to act as a ferryman for the dragon boat. (Most often the *hsien* presents the boat to the elemental as part of the bargain).

Now the character begins the dragon boat I Chih. Most masters of the dragon nests possess maps of the other dragon nests linked to their own. The Storyteller should add a success for every 100 miles of real distance between the nests and, perhaps, more if the dragon lines between the nests are weak or seldomly traveled. The boat will only carry one unless the player uses Abundance to effect more travelers, and anyone may ride along.

If the I Chih is unsuccessful, the elemental will lose faith in the character and depart. The entire ritual must be repeated. A botch sullies the dragon nest, and shatters the boat. The owner of the nest must spend a day purifying the site before the dragon boat ritual can be performed again. As you can imagine, the caster will have earned his or her enmity.

Yin Effects — Exorcise Elemental Spirit, Diminish Elemental Soul

Yang Effects — Summon Elemental Spirit, Nurture Elemental Soul

☸☸☸ Raiment of the Elements

This I Chih gives the *hsien* full control of the elemental nature of her mortal form. This has manifold effects. To begin with, she can take on the appearance of the element. The *hsien* can merge with the element of this I Chih and travel through it — reconstituting her form when finished. The character may subsume small objects of the correct element in their body — perfectly hiding them. The *hsien* using this I Chih can also understand the properties of objects he merges with or subsumes.

Modifiers: This I Chih cannot target another individual. All of the effects target the *hsien*, or inanimate objects. The most common modifiers for this power are: Domain, Abundance, Continuance, Circumstance, Magnitude.

The Enfolded Object: This effect allows the *hsien* to hide things of the appropriate element within their own elemental spirit. They can roughly double their mass when enfolding objects. Once hidden, it cannot be discovered, since its spirit becomes mingled with the *hsien*'s.

Use the modifiers to describe the hidden object and how long it will remain hidden. Using this power, someone that knows Tich Tan can easily hide knives, crowbars, etc. Cohort effect must be used to hide some items made from more than one element. The metal portion of guns, for instance, needs Metal Alchemy, but the gunpowder needs this I Chih from Earth Alchemy.

Paths of the Elements: This power allows the *hsien* to literally merge with and "fly" through objects made of the element! The *hsien* must touch the object that she merges with and it needs to be roughly the same mass.

This power must take advantage of Domain to govern the distance traveled. The Shinma does not have to move. Often, this I Chih is used to hide or spy on others by remaining in one place. (Adding no extra successes for Domain allows the *hsien* to remain still or travel 10 yards from the origin of the effect.)

Continuance controls how long the Shinma may use the ability at one casting. At the end of the effect, Shinma must "step" out of the substance they are traveling through or they are literally spit out, thus, suffering horrible wounds (two Health Levels of aggravated damage).

This *hsien*'s ability to perceive the outside world while moving through an element is difficult; all Perception rolls are made at +2. Since the Chi of the Shinma is active during the effect, no I Chih can be cast while traveling the Paths of the Elements.

Most items must be enfolded (see above) or they do not go with the Shinma. Magical talismans and all form of jade readily travel with the *hsien*, due to a their supernatural nature. For some unknown reason, silk worn by a *hsien* will travel with them down the Elemental Paths. Members of the Li Shen say this exception is due the August Personage of Jade's sublime modesty. One hated having a bunch of nude *hsien* show up when summoned during the Second Age!

Earth — These paths include any manner of earth, rock or stone.

Metal — Metal paths have become almost ubiquitous as copper wire spreads all over the Middle Kingdom. The metal skeleton and ductworks that weave through skyscrapers are also a ready path for those who know this Tich Tan I Chih.

Fire — Fire was once limited to pools and paths of magma, or perhaps burning buildings. But as electrification and even optical fiber spreads over the world, so to do the Paths of Fire.

Water — As distasteful as they are, sewers offer great arteries of transport about the lands of mankind. Thankfully, rivers, streams and oceans still cover most of the Earth.

The Dragon of the Eight Breezes gave the Shinma who learn Shui Tan another option — the power to travel invisibly on the paths of wind. Masters of Shui Tan also enjoy traveling on barges of cloud. Unfortunately, this power is very dangerous since *hsien* do not have the power to resist strong winds — they will be blown miles from where they wished to travel. Some foolish ones are literally sucked into storms and rematerialize thousands of feet from the ground!

Wood — Fine networks of root, fungus and moss create a great roadway through which practitioners of Lin Tan can travel. Besides, wood is a common construction material for houses all over the Middle Kingdom.

Elemental Form/Elemental Fist: This power allows the *Shinma* to transmute their bodies into one of the elements. The laws of the Middle Kingdom still have some sway, though. Fire bodies must have fuel, and water bodies must have some container, for example.

As with Paths of the Elements, normal items are not transmuted unless innately magical or made of jade.

By transforming their fists and feet, Masters of Wood, Earth, Metal and Fire can boost their damage in combat. Each success adds a die of damage to martial arts damage rolls.

Awaken the Elements

With this terrifying I Chih, the *hsien* regains his power to command the elements of the Middle Kingdom. They can be summoned, shaped, moved, toyed with and sundered. Powerful members of the Ministry of Water can call down rain, divert streams, etc. Some *fu hsi* can make trees caper about like lambs in springtime!

Modifiers: The most common modifiers for this power are: Domain, Abundance, Continuance, Circumstance, Harm, Magnitude

Awaken True Jade: This I Chih empowers the *hsien* to create true jade. Each point of Chi "awakened" requires two successes. Creating Yin-aspected jade calls for a Yin roll, and vice-versa for Yang-aspected jade. Jade that has both Yin and Yang Chi requires two I Chih rolls.

Move Elements: Think of this power as a kind of telekinesis. Objects made of the element can be moved about as if they had a will of their own by using Magnitude of Form to regulate the size of the object moved. Continuance regulates how long it stays animated. Domain controls how far the caster can stay from the object animated by this power. The object moves at a walking pace; an additional success makes the object move at the caster's running speed.

Hsien employ this power to attack, using Domain to control the range, and the Harm modifier to determine damage.

Shape/Sunder Element: This power can cause the element to take on a certain shape or break apart. Magnitude of Form regulates the size of the object shaped. Magnitude of Change regulates the shape. Making water whip about like a snake would call for three extra successes, for example, since that is a significant change from what water normally is capable of doing.

This effect can be combined with Move Elements to make a real "water" buffalo, or walking statues.

Summon Element: Magnitude of Form is used to control the size of the element summoned. The element is brought from the nearest source. The *hsien* cannot control where the element is summoned. Therefore, a *hsien* cannot summon all the water out of a human being.

Summoning an element is incredibly difficult. All the extra successes from Magnitude of Form are doubled, and even

the lowest level costs one extra success (a hand-held object, a basket, bucket, a potted plant). In the spirit Worlds, the cost is tripled.

Yin — Elements can also be moved. It would be very inconvenient for a balcony to suddenly give way under one's enemies, no?

Yang — The most common Yang effect is to simply make the elements strike out at the *hsien*'s foes. Fire can be made to gout from the *hsien*'s fists, or lighting from his eyes.

Master the Elements, Throne of Jade

This I Chih gives the *hsien* the ability to exchange the characteristics of one example of her element with another, and transmute one example into another. The element's pliability, hardness, color, chemical characteristics, textures — all are mutable in the hands of a master.

For example, granite can be transformed into sand, or made as pliable as clay! A blade of grass could have the rigidity of oak, or a pine tree could bear peaches. Masters only have control of their element and its characteristics, so it's best to state both examples in order to keep the players focused on the limits to this I Chih: "I call upon P'an Ku to transmute this emerald into a lump of clay," for example.

Jade can be destroyed via this power, but its unique characteristics cannot be duplicated or created.

Cohort effects allow the *hsien* to give characteristics of one element to another, or even transform one element into another. A powerful *hsien* can turn wood into gold (Metal and Wood Alchemies); water could cease to make creatures wet (Water and Earth), wood refuse to burn (Wood and Earth or Metal). To attempt any of these effects, she must possess both Alchemies at Level 5!

Exchange Properties: Magnitude of Form is necessary to judge the size of the object effected and Magnitude of Change can be used to judge the extent of the change. Use the temperature guideline to judge this. Giving a rock the hardness of diamond may be a basic change, calling for just one extra success. Giving muddy soil the hardness of diamond would, however, be a major change, needing five extra successes. Use common sense and the examples as your guide.

Transmute Element: As with Exchange Properties, this requires Magnitude of Form and Magnitude of Change. Since this power, by its very nature, involves a more radical modification of the Middle Kingdom, even the most innocuous use of this power is usually a basic change (requiring three successes.) Basically, the storyteller should make this more difficult than exchanging properties.

Modifiers: Magnitude of Form decides how much of a substance can be effected, while Magnitude of Change governs the extent of the change. None of these effects are considered natural and will revert to their natural state unless Continuance is used.

The most common modifiers for this power are: Domain, Abundance, Continuance, Circumstance, Harm, Magnitude.

Yin I Chih—Thousands of Yin effects are possible, just read and think about the essence of Yin and interpret an I Chih power in those terms. For example, a common Yin effect would be the removal of something the I Chih gives mastery over.

Other Yin effects may include: disease, speaking to the dead (Spirits of the Yin World), shrinking, diminishing, illusion, subversion, darkness, exorcism, aging, emptiness, ensnaring, decaying, entropy, dissipation, and forgetting.

Yang I Chih—Manifold Yang effects are possible with an I Chih. Almost any aggressive use of the power may be considered a Yang use of the power. Be creative — that's Yang too!

Some possible Yang effects: curing disease, healing, increasing, action, attacking, lighting, transforming, making something younger, growing, filling some space, freedom, fixing broken objects, creating something, and learning something new.

Yin — Since all the characteristics of an element can be toyed with, the heat of a raging oil fire can be reduced to the heat of an alcohol flame.

Yang — Water can be made to be super-oxygenated, allowing people to breathe it. Also, when combined with other Level 5 I Chih, one element can be transform into another; lakes can be made to burn, etc.!

Modifiers to Wu Tan

Unless otherwise noted under the Wu Tan below, an I Chih targets one person (sometimes just the caster) and lasts for an instant (Combat Turn). Some effects, which correspond to the normal workings of the Middle Kingdom, may last longer. If a character causes a stream to flood, it will eventually go down, but all the extra water will not disappear when the I Chih's effect ends. Bruises and other injuries remain until healed, but should a master of Metal and Wood make a blade of grass as sharp as steel it will only last a turn, unless the *hsien* uses the Continuance modifier to make it last longer. The August Personage of Jade does not approve of capricious manipulation of the Middle Kingdom.

Modifiers give Shinma the capability of changing the nature of their I Chih. Using modifiers, a blast of flame can effect more than one target, a cold wind can blow through the streets of an entire city, or a rainstorm can cover just a building.

Using modifiers makes the casting of effects much more difficult. An unmodified I Chih usually needs only one success to work. Some require two successes when they increase or decrease an Attribute, Ability or Dice Pool.

Each modifier adds more successes to this base number. Each modifier lists the number of extra successes they require. All of these are cumulative in the case of multiple modifiers. Unless all the successes are obtained, the power does not work, although all the Yugen is still expended.

For example, a nyan character wants to hide a 1000 gemstones she stole inside her body for a day. This is a Level 3 Di Tan (Earth Alchemy) I Chih. She needs one success for the effect and 5 more for Abundance. Continuance makes the effect last for a day, but adds two more successes. So unless she rolls eight successes, the attempt fails. Remember, modifiers are extra successes!

Modifiers are subjective, not scientific. *Hsien* magic is older than science, so the advancement between levels of modifiers is based more on association and metaphor than geometric progressions. The range for an effect (Domain), for instance, is based upon the idea of a noble lord's territory rather than inches or centimeters. All of this means that the system will take some getting used to for new players and diligent monitoring by the Storyteller.

While some of these modifiers make I Chih extremely powerful, just one or two added onto a typical effect may require from three to 12 extra successes — making most of the effects impossible for characters. Players can reduce the number of extra successes due to modifiers by employing

Unmodified I Chih Effects

See? That was nothing.

But that's how it always begins... very small.

—Egg Shen, *Big Trouble in Little China*

I Chih are useful even without modifiers. What's more, they are much easier to cast, for an unmodified I Chih effect usually only needs one success. Powers that summon creatures or effect Attributes, Abilities and Dice Pools require two successes per point or die. This two-for-one theme is maintained in all the systems.

The exact effect depends upon the level of I Chih and the Alchemy. Without using modifiers, an effect only lasts for a turn and has one target. The base range is 10 yards of range (walking distance in a combat turn), and can do up to one die of aggravated damage.

An unmodified effect also allows a *hsien* to read the Elemental Souls for the general mood of the target (first level I Chih) or slightly influence someone (Level 2 I Chih). By communing with the elements in an area (with the appropriate Alchemy) general impressions of the spiritual/psychic health of the area can also be gleaned.

Again, the exact effect depends on the Alchemy and level of I Chih. Still — all of this is possible for one success (usually) and one point of Yugen. Nifty, yes?

Modifiers boost the effect, range, etc. for an effect, but the payback is extra successes. Heap a ton of modifiers on an effect and the number of successes will spiral out of the character's reach.

Fortunes buy down the successes that modifiers add. Unfortunately, they require planning, luck and skill to use properly.

Fortunes (more on that later), so don't let some of the extreme examples in this section scare you away from using Wu Tan.

The descriptions for the I Chih have precedence over these rules. Also, not all modifiers can be used with all of the I Chih — read their descriptions under each alchemy to be sure. As always, the Storyteller is the ultimate arbiter of a modifier's use.

Abundance of the Ten Thousand Things

To affect more than one target, a *hsien* has to gain extra successes. This ancient modifier is based upon P'an Ku's creation story. First there was nothing; then there was the creator. He separated Yin from Yang and two things were born. The progression continues until the Ten Thousand Things were created.

Extra Successes	Total number of targets/Abundance
0	1
1	2
2	3-5
3	6-10
4	11-100
5	101-1000
6	1001-10,000
7	etc.

Circumstance of the Monkey King

Circumstance is way of putting a conditional effect upon a *hsien*'s magic. The Circumstances are based upon Hanuman's practical jokes. He loved to create magical effects keyed to individuals (Unique) or groups (Uncommon). He once carved a round door that imitated the sound of flatulence whenever a member of the Li Shen passed through.

Extra Successes	Circumstance
0	No circumstances
1	Common — Effects super groups, a basic division of reality or society: Day or night, men or women, next thing entering the room, etc.
2	Uncommon — Effects smaller groups: Hour of the Rat, Next policeman entering the room, etc.
4	Unique — Effects individuals: when Xiong Fei enters the room.

Continuance of the Righteous Judgment

Shinma use Continuance to make their effects last longer than one turn. Sometimes, *hsien* appeal to the Sun and Moon to keep the effects of their spells going. Therefore, this modifier is based upon the basic Chinese calendar.

Players can easily abuse Continuance. Storytellers are warned to watch for players attempting to use Continuance to duplicate other modifiers. For example, a player could use it to try to affect more than one target (Abundance). A master of Water could create

a wave and use Continuance to keep the wave going and affect more than one target. Continuance cannot be used with Harm.

Extra Successes	Time Continued
0	Turn
1	Scene
2	Chinese hour (two Western hours)
3	Day
4	Chinese week (10 days)
5	Month (lunar)
6	Year
7	12 years
8	60 years
9	Storyteller's option

Domain of the Great Lord

Domain allows the *hsien* to extend the range of their magic. Domain is based upon the demesne of ancient *hsien* lords and the nature of the Earth element. Domain radiates outward from the caster. Just as the Earth is the center of all the elements, or as a lord can extend his power over his realm, this modifier can be used to extend an I Chih's effect over a great range.

Example: Cang the heng-po uses the Level 3 Shui Tan I Chih to merge his body with the waters of a sewer and then appear in the bathroom of his enemy. The Domain is larger than Building, since he will start outside, so the player uses the next level, Neighborhood. This means it will take two extra successes for Domain, plus one for the I Chih — three successes in all.

Domain makes several assumptions. First, that the caster knows the location of the target. A Shinma cannot use Domain to target someone — one cannot pick City hoping to catch the target if they are in the same building as the caster. Secondly, to make an area effect, the *hsien* must use Abundance to include more than one target.

Example: Cang sees 15 tong thugs moving toward him in the marketplace. He enacts a Level 2 Shui Tan I Chih to lower their Water Soul, hoping that his attackers will lose confidence in themselves. The Storyteller decides that the I Chih's effect will take three successes. To this, Cang's player adds 4 more for Abundance, and 2 for Domain to cover the huge marketplace. So Cang now needs nine successes! Holy chisel of P'an Ku! Cang decides to run for it.

Extra Successes	Domain
0	Room/10 yards, or walking distance in a turn
1	Building/Running distance to touch
2	Village/Neighborhood/Park
3	City
4	Province/State
5	Middle Kingdom

Harm of Heaven's Sword

Harm allows Shinma to directly damage targets. It mimics the vengeful sword of Wu Ti, the military emperor. With this modifier, I Chi can cause direct damage to a target, but the Storyteller is warned to exercise control over its use. Harm cannot be used to modify every I Chih. In fact, only Level 4 and 5 I Chih can generate Harm effects. Nor can it be used with every modifier, such as Continuance.



A direct attack is any assault like a bolt of fire, or an attempt to manipulate the elements of another's body to cause damage — like turning a patch of skin into stone. Direct attacks also include making fists of wood appear out of trees and attack others, etc. They do not include the damage from a flood, earthquake or from being in a burning building. Indirect attacks can cause much more damage, but the drawback is that the target of the damage cannot really be controlled.

Harm is considered aggravated damage.

Successes	Damage Dice
0	1 Die
1	2 Dice
2	4 Dice
3	6 Dice
4	etc.

Magnitude of P'an Ku's creation

Magnitude measures two separate things. First it is a measure of change. This is used when affecting an Elemental Soul (Level 21 Chih) or playing with the qualities of the elements (Level 3-5 I Chih).

P'an Ku gave the Shinma the ability to affect great change in the Middle Kingdom. Magnitude has more concrete measures too. When effecting objects larger than a man, a Shinma must use this modifier. This is called Magnitude of Form.

Magnitude most often has to be used with Domain. Continuance is also used to make the effect last longer than a turn.

Example: Lady Jlu wants to raise a hillock behind her house for a more favorable *fang shih* alignment; this will cost two successes for Magnitude. She does not want to stand on the ground where she will raise the hillock, so she uses Domain, which costs two more successes to do this I Chih from her back garden. To make the hillock last for a year, she adds six more successes (Continuance). Lady Jlu now needs one for the effect, plus 10 for the modifiers, 11 successes in all!

Extra Successes	Magnitude of Change
0	Minor change: frigid to cool; change mood
1	Basic change: frigid to temperate; change emotions
3	Significant change: frigid to warm; change passions
5	Major change: frigid to hot; change perceptions
7	Spectacular change: frigid to scalding; change psyche
9	Heavenly change: frigid to inferno; destroy Elemental Soul
Extra Successes	Magnitude of Form
0	The Hand: a hand-held object, a basket, bucket, a potted plant
1	The Being: a man, boulder, a bath, bush
3	The Way: a street, hillock, stream, tree
5	The Space: a field, hill, river, wood
7	The Expanse: plain, mountain, lake, weald
9	The Vista: plateau, mountain chain, great lake, forest
12	The Horizon: region, ocean, biome

Fortunes

Fortunes subtract from the total number of successes needed for an effect. They help balance out the extra successes gained from using modifiers to expand an I Chih.

The elements are linked to colors, directions, and even festivals. Shinma use this chain of correspondences, called Fortunes, to aid them with their I Chih. Crafty *hsien* wait for auspicious times and fortunate circumstances to act, thereby making their magic easier. While Fortunes have important benefits to the system. They are also meant to act as props for roleplay.

In most cases, the players will need to think of Fortunes well before they begin to act. They may even lead to hooks for adventures when the players attempt to appropriate them. When the local Li Shen begin buying up all the *dzi dzat*, it will send shock waves through the Shinma community. Players and Storytellers are encouraged to think of more Fortunes. (In fact, not all of the Fortunes suggested by the descriptions of the elements have been described.)

Most of the Fortunes are considered as they effect the caster, not the target. The use of the Color Fortune, for instance, only concerns the color of clothes the caster is wearing.

System: Each Fortune the character takes advantage of lessens the number of successes needed by one. Fortunes cannot reduce the number of successes below one. Each form of Wu Tan lists the Fortunes associated with it.

Color

Colors come into play if the caster is wearing clothes of the appropriate color. The article of clothing must be clean and at least the size of a shirt. It may not be covered up and must be the most distinguishing article of clothing the *hsien* is wearing.

Metal is associated with white, yellow for Earth, red for Fire, green for Wood and black for Water.

Direction

If the caster of an I Chih is in the appropriate direction from the target of the effect, she receives a Fortune. For example, if the caster is in Beijing and the target is in Hong Kong — the caster's direction is north. Shui Tan gains a Fortune if the caster is in that direction.

The fortunate direction for Earth is actually a location, the center. Wood is associated with the east; the heat of the south is auspicious for Fire; west is the direction for Metal; and Water is fond of the coolness of the north.

Dzi Dzat

Dzi dzat means "folded paper." In Hong Kong, Macao and in Cantonese villages these traditional paper sacrifices are used to appease ancestors and petition for their help. Dzi dzat traditionally took the form of paper money, pictures of food, and beautiful maidens, etc. Nowadays, dzi dzat often represent modern luxuries: automobiles, briefcases, credit cards, mobile phones, electric woks, etc.





Hsien use dzi dzat as sympathetic magic. When using I Chih against a car, a paper effigy of a car makes the magic easier.

Festivals

The caster must be either participating in (or at least observing) a festival. China is filled with festivals — basically, there are festivals for each full moon. Some of the most common festivals are listed below with the element in which they provide a Fortune.

First Moon — Festival of the First Moon (Wood); Tsai Shen, the God of Wealth, (Earth); Li Hun (Wood)

Second Moon — Sun God (Fire) and Earth God (Earth)

Third Moon — Chi'n Ming, fertility festival (Wood), birthday of the goddess Hsi Wang Mu (Metal)

Fourth Moon — The Summer Moon (Fire), Festival of the Eight Immortals (Tao)

Fifth Moon — Dragon Boat Festival (Water)

Sixth Moon — Lung Wang (Water)

Seventh Moon — Hungry Ghosts (Water)

Eighth Moon — Harvest Festival (Metal)

Ninth Moon — Cheng Huang, and other city gods (Metal)

Tenth Moon — Kindly Moon (Wood), the Festival of the Dead

Eleventh Moon — White Moon Festival, the Festival of Ancestors (Tao)

Twelfth Moon — Bitter Moon Festival, The Kitchen God (Earth)

Kwannon-jin Fortune

Each kwannon-jin has an element that they have a racial affinity for. The kwannon-jin Fortunes are listed with their descriptions in **Chapter Three**. When using I Chih from this element, the character receives an automatic Fortune.

Mu-jen

Mu-jen, "wooden men," are Chinese voodoo dolls. Like dzi dzat, they can be used by hsien as a form of sympathetic Fortune, but each doll may only be used once. The doll must be hand-carved from tung wood, or paulownia, then clothed to look like the target of the hsien's magic.

Poetry — Haiku

The tanuki introduced poetry as a Fortune. They compose a single poem for each I Chih in a particular Alchemy. For instance, the tanuki would write a unique haiku for each of the five levels of Tieh Tan. No matter the effect generated from the Level 1 Tieh Tan, he could use the same poem. He would have another poem for Level 2 Tieh Tan effects, and so on.

New poems must be composed each year, usually as part of the New Year's Festival. Any formal style of poem is possible; some Shinma are known to tackle sonnets!

Season

The season of the year can influence the caster's use of I Chih. Fire magic, for instance, is much easier in the heat of a

summer day. Water Alchemy is easier in the winter, Metal in fall and Wood in the springtime.

Sense

The caster and the target(s) must be experiencing the same sensation to benefit from this Fortune. While the target does not have to be concentrating on the sensation, she must be experiencing it. Water Alchemy is allied to taste. Both the caster of the I Chih must be tasting the same thing at the time the I Chih is cast to gain the benefit from this Fortune.

Each element has its own sense associated with it. Earth is linked to the rich smell of a plowed field. The sight of flame links Fire magic to the senses. The heady taste of green tea is favored by Water, while Metal listens for the distant sound of a temple bell or clash of sword on sword. The soft touch of well-worn cane appeals to Wood.

Skills

The use of Meditation, Martial Arts, Classics, Divination (Feng Shui), Medicine (Chinese herbalism) can also help the caster. The difficulty is always at least 8. Each success acts as a Fortune (subtracting one success needed), up to a maximum of three successes. Botching adds three to the number of successes needed.

The skill must be performed immediately before the I Chih is cast, or the character loses the Fortunes. Medicine is the exception to this rule. Masters of Chinese herbalism (five dots) can create liquid Fortunes. These potions can be stored for up to a month and are keyed to a specific element. Water Fortune potions give off steam; Fire potions glow with a deep, red light; Wood potions are clotted with slime; Metal potions look like mercury; and Earth potions give off a low hum, and look like mud.

Wani Form

Wani form, the appearance given them by the August Personage of Jade, is an automatic Fortune for the Shinma. Other *shen* know by now that a *hsien's* magic is much more effective when clad in the regal forms of their heritage.

Step-by-Step Wu Tan

1) What do you want to do?

Choose a Wu Tan and the I Chih you are going to generate.

Xiong Fei sees six soldiers pestering an old woman. She decides to use the Level 2 Hou Tan I Chih to enlarge the soldiers Fire Souls — hopefully making them ashamed of shirking their duties and behaving so horribly.

2) Is the I Chih's effect Yin or Yang?

Determine appropriate Chi and, therefore, the difficulty number of your roll. This also determines the Dice Pool — add the appropriate Yin or Yang Attribute score to the score of Wu Tan the character is using.

Using a Level 1 (•) I Chih does not mean just add one die to your Dice Pool. You always roll a number of dice equal to the sum of your Wu Tan Ability plus the Attribute.

Since enlarging, or making something grow, is Yang Effect, Xiong Fei's I Chih is Yang. Now we can figure out her difficulty number and Dice Pool. Her Yang Chi is 5, so her difficulty number is 6. The Yang Attribute for Fire Alchemy is Wits. She has a Wits of 3 and her total Hou Tan score is 4, so she has 7 dice to roll.

3) Do you need to Modify the effect?

Determine number of successes needed by deciding if you need to Modify the effect with Abundance, Continuance, Domain, Harm and/or Magnitude. Remember that all effects must have at least one success, plus those added by modifiers.

The base effect of any I Chih is one person, but there are six soldiers. Looking at Abundance, her player sees that she needs two more successes for the five extra soldiers. Also, the effect only lasts a turn, and Fei needs time to rescue the old woman, so she bumps up the time to a scene, for one extra success. Now we know how many successes she needs. One for the base effect, plus two for the extra soldiers and one more for the extra time — she needs four successes.

4) Which Fortunes can help you?

Reduce the number of successes due to Fortunes and other abilities. You cannot reduce the number of successes needed below one. The Fortunes are Color, Direction, Dzi Dzat, Mu-Jen, Poetry, Kwannon-Jin Fortune, Season, Sense and Skills.

Fei's player thinks about Fortunes, but none seem appropriate — besides she does not have a lot of time. Then the Storyteller says that Fei is standing south of the soldiers. South is a Fortune for Hou Tan, so now she only needs three successes.

Don't forget any automatic successes gained by expending Willpower!

5) What will it cost?

Determine amount of Yugen expended. Unless you are using a Cohort, the cost to use Wu Tan is one point of Yugen.

Fei's player marks a point of Yugen off her sheet.

6) Do you succeed?

Roll the dice, count the successes, and see if you have the number needed.

She rolls 6, 5, 10, 8, 4, 6 and 2 — four successes. The highest-ranking officer begins to berate the other soldiers for their shameful ways. Before Fei can even cross the street, the soldiers begin dusting off the old woman.

Variations

Although thousands of effects can be generated by the I Chih described previously — there are times when casting an I Chih is not enough. What if you want to combine Alchemies, or defeat a spell a rival is casting?

Cohorts - Combining Alchemies

Wu Tan can be combined into fearsome effects, but *hsien* find it difficult to weld together elements that are not linked to one another on the constructive cycle. Each description of the Wu Tan includes a description of that element's Cohorts — those elements that precede and follow it along the constructive path.

System: The Yugen cost for a Cohort is equal to the sum of the Wu Tan being combined as long as all the elements are Cohorts. Cohorts do not require additional successes, just one is needed. Non-Cohort effects must generate a success per element, and they cost 2 Yugen per element used in the effect.

Examples: Tai the *suijen* has Di Tan 3 and Tieh Tan 3. Metal and Earth are Cohorts, so he could easily animate a steel-reinforced bridge and make it writhe like a snake. It will cost 2 Yugen to generate the effect (1 for each element) and he only needs one success for the effect. If Earth and Steel were not Cohorts, then it would cost 4 Yugen and require two successes. (Tai would need 2 more due to Magnitude just to effect a small bridge.)

What about Earth, Metal and Wood? Wood and Metal are not Cohorts, although Earth and Wood, and Metal and Earth are Cohorts. Because all of the elements are not Cohorts, it is still considered to be a non-Cohort Effect. An effect using all three elements costs 6 Yugen (2 per element) and must generate three successes (1 per element).

Fortunes cannot reduce the number of successes below the minimum for Cohort effects. So in the case of the Earth, Metal and Wood effect above, the player can buy down any extra successes for modifiers the player might add, just not the minimum of three successes needed for the Cohort effect.

Countermagic

There are two systems for countermagic. By Balancing the Furies—combating Yin with Yang, and vice versa—a *hsien* can block or disrupt an effect during its casting. The Destructive Cycle is a more difficult and complex method for dispelling an ongoing effect.

Balancing the Furies: Yin and Yang balance one another. This simple principle allows Shinma to diffuse I Chih as they are being cast. The target of the effect expends Yugen to activate her Chi—balancing the power of attacker's Chi. If the character is the target of a Yin effect, then she uses her Yang Chi to resist the magic. If she is the target of a Yang effect, she then uses her Yin Chi. For each point of Yugen spent, up to a maximum of the character's appropriate Chi, the target forces the caster to roll an additional success.

For example, a *komuko* is targeting a *hanumen* with Yang effect. The player and Storyteller agree that the *komuko* needs five successes. The player of the *hanumen* has a Yin Chi of 4. He blows 4 Yugen (the maximum he can spend) to Balance the Furies. The *komuko* now needs nine successes!

While this seems very powerful, the tradeoff is that the defender almost always spends more Yugen than the attacker.

The Destructive Cycle: Just as there is a constructive cycle, there is also a destructive cycle to the universe. Normally, mages use the constructive cycle of elements for their magic—even when the effects seem "destructive." The destructive cycle is used to destroy continuing magical effects of other *hsien*.

In the destructive cycle, Wood destroys Earth by draining its Yang energies to feed itself. Fire melts Metal. Earth pollutes water. Metal chops down Wood, and Water puts out Fire.

When one *hsien* wishes to destroy another *hsien*'s magic, they must employ the destructive cycle. Each art lists its Adversary in this cycle. By looking a Hou Tan, one sees that Fire magic is opposed by employing Shui Tan, Water alchemy.

Earth links the other elements, which is a source of its great weakness and its greatest strength. Earth Alchemy, Di Tan can be used as an Adversary to any other Art, even itself. But it truly only opposes one art—Water Alchemy. In all other cases, subtract one success when using Earth to oppose any art but Water.

Conversely, all arts can oppose Earth because Earth touches all elements. Wood depletes the soil to feed its own growth, therefore, Wood can best thwart Earth's power. Wood gains a +1 success versus Earth powers.

System: If the successes of the countermagic exceed twice the successes of the target I Chih, the effect is destroyed. For this reason, the destructive cycle is often performed as a ritual.

The destruction of another's I Chih is always a Yin effect, so use the characters Yin Chi to determine the difficulty of the countermagic. Look up the element whose I Chih effect your character is trying to countermagic. This will give you the element's Adversary—the element that consumes it in the destructive cycle. Basically you are just generating a Yin effect using that Alchemy to consume the other magic, so your Dice Pool is equal to the Adversary element's Yin Attribute plus the level you have in that alchemy. If you do not have the correct Adversary element, you can always generate a Yin Earth (Di Tan) effect, but you must subtract one from the number of successes you achieve. What if you have neither? How unfortunate! You are about to live in "interesting times."

For Cohort effects, you only need to have the Adversary Alchemy of one the elements that make up the Cohort. You do not need to oppose all of the Alchemies.

Egg Mao decides to ruin his neighbors lemon tree that burns him whenever he steals the lemons. The tree is a Cohort effect of Wood and Fire that took 10 successes (Circumstance 2, Continuance 5, Harm 1 and Magnitude 2). He needs 20 successes to destroy the effect. He decides to use a Yin Water effect. Unfortunately, his Shui Tan is only 2 and his Stamina is 3, giving him only five dice. Drat—better give up lemons, or buy a fireproof axe!

Rituals (Extended Actions)

Rituals differ from regular I Chih castings in four areas. First, Rituals differ in scope. Usually the *hsien* needs 10, 20 or more successes to complete a ritual. A player may come up with a truly titanic I Chih or Cohort effect that they cannot possibly generate the number of successes necessary with a single die roll. Rather than just have to give up or wait to become more powerful, they can ask the Storyteller to let them perform a ritual.

Xiong Fei decides that the farmers of her province have suffered enough under the drought. She is going to call a gentle rainstorm to cover the entire province for two days. This is a Level 3 I Chih, and its definitely a Yang effect, so she adds her Manipulation of 2 to her Shui Tan score of 3, giving her five dice. Her Yang Chi is 6 so her difficulty is 5. All the modifiers (Continuance 3, Domain 4, Magnitude 6) add 13 to her base success of one, so she needs 14 successes! Fat chance.

Rituals also take a lot more time. The Storyteller divides the ritual event into segments of time. The average length for a segment is one scene (usually an hour), but longer segments of days are possible. At the end of each segment, the player rolls the same number of dice as they would for a normal I Chih roll. But the successes are cumulative. Fortunes can be used, but only count once. (You cannot use the Fortune for each segment, or roll.)

The Storyteller warns the player that this action is likely to bring an investigation by the Ministry of Water, the Shui Fu, but he agrees to let Xiong Fei try a ritual. Each segment in which Fei keeps up the ritual will take her two hours.

Rituals are more difficult. The minimum difficulty is +1, but that would be if the ritual was being performed at an auspicious site with all the trappings necessary.

Trying to hide from the Shui Fu, Xiong Fei's player decides to perform the ritual inside her room. Such an inauspicious site causes the Storyteller to add +2 to the difficulty. Now Xiong Fei's difficulty number is 7.

The hardest part has nothing to do with numbers or dice. The player must come up with appropriate gods to invoke, possibly write a small poem, or describe all the preparations and elements of the ritual. If the Storyteller feels the player does an exceptional job, he may lower the difficulty modifier or award further Fortunes to the player.

Xiong Fei spends a day cleaning her room and draping it in black. She purchases a dzi dzat of a rain cloud and fills all of the bowls in her house with water. The Storyteller awards her three Fortunes for her efforts, and she begins rolling. She needs 10 successes.

There are dangers, of course. The effect of the I Chih begins building immediately. Hsien with the appropriate Alchemy may notice the magical effect building — sometimes even the spirits will fink on a character. The character cannot stop her prayers without failing as well. (The Storyteller may wish to make the character make Willpower rolls, difficulty 7 to keep going.) And as a final bit of bad news, if the character botches any of her rolls, the ritual fails horribly. The exact effects are up to the Storyteller.

After the first four hours, Fei rolls a 5, 7, 8, 2 and 6 — two successes. During the next segment, she gets three more — now she is halfway home. Outside, the clouds begin to roll in. Suddenly, before her next segment is up, there is a knock at the door. Fei makes a Willpower roll and keeps going. Suddenly, the door bursts open and a flower flies out of the darkness of the hallway. It is Yellow Lotus....

Try, Try Again

Repeating a failed I Chih requires expending a Willpower point and increases the difficulty by one.

Multiple Actions

Hsien can generate a maximum of one effect per turn. They can split the Dice Pools and attempt some other task and casting an I Chih in the same turn. Shinma may not split their Dice Pools and cast two I Chih though.

Helping Hands

During rituals or extremely important I Chih effects, the characters may wish to combine their efforts. Only characters with the same Wu Tan (Alchemy) can combine their efforts.

All of those involved must choose one of their number as the actual caster, whose player will roll the dice. The other players add a number of dice equal to their Wu Tan score to that player's roll.

If the caster botches the roll, they all take the effects equally.

Shentao — Detecting Magic

Shentao is the Shinma's ability to perceive the ebb and flow of Chi energy — including determining its Yin/Yang alignment. With this Talent, they can find dragon lines, dragon nests and discern when Wu Tan is being used in their presence. The difficulty of such tasks is 6, but three or more successes are needed to analyze the magic, unless the particular Alchemy is known to the hsien.

The Alchemies

To remain whole be twisted!

To become straight, let yourself be bent.

To become full, be hollow,

Be tattered, that you may be renewed.

Those that have little, may get more,

Those that have much, are but perplexed.

— Chuang Tsu

T'ien Ming — The Mandate of Heaven

To most Chinese, T'ien Ming is akin to the moral order of the universe. It encompasses the way things should be, the way one should act, and to a greater extent, one's destiny. The hsien regard this concept as both their place in the Middle Kingdom and the powers given to them: the Wu Tan. The Wu Tan is their birthright and their responsibility.

Each Alchemy is divided into I Chih, "righteous judgments." These are the powers given to them by P'an Ku when they helped him create the Middle Kingdom.

To make the themes of Wu Tan more easily understood, each art, or Tan, is described in a certain format.

Elemental Alchemies

Remember that each element in the Chinese system encompasses much broader associations than the Greek system we are used to. Yes, they include natural phenomena such as rain, rocks, and fire, but also the Elemental Souls of man and their associations with his emotions and drives.

Each Alchemy begins with a brief discussion of the element and its allegories.

Elemental Soul: The Chinese system of elements influences more than dirt and flame. Remnants of these forces reside

in the psyche of all beings. The *hsien* can influence these facets of the elements — affecting the mood and perceptions of the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom.

Virtue: Each element's virtue describes whether it is either weighted toward Yin, Yang, or Balance. Some elements are even more associated with Yin or Yang. They are listed as being "Greater" or "Lesser."

Constructive Cohorts: Some arts can be combined with no extra effort. These are called the constructive Cohorts. They are the elements before and after this element in the constructive cycle.

Adversary: This is the element used for countermagic. Each element is paired to another that can most easily unravel its effects. This is governed by the destructive cycle of elements.

Fortunes: Fortune lists the most common Fortunes associated with each element. The listing is not exhaustive, and the Storyteller is the ultimate arbiter of which Fortunes are appropriate.

Yin and Yang Attributes: When using Wu Tan, the Dice Pool is found by adding the Yin Attribute to the Tan score when attempting Yin effects, or by adding the Yang Attribute to the Tan score when attempting Yang effects. While each I Chih has examples of Yin and Yang effects, the Storyteller is the ultimate judge as to whether an effect is Yin or Yang.

Examples of I Chih: The systems for using I Chih already explained allow the player and Storyteller to generate thousands of effects. Some helpful examples are given here. Each effect has a name, but the power is listed in parentheses.

Di Tan: Earth Alchemy

Masters of Di Tan are often wise advisors and sometimes fearsome mandarins. Many of the Yü consider masters of the Di Tan to be insightful, balanced rulers. Therefore, numerous *hsien* will flock to the yellow banner of a master of Earth.

Earth represents all rock, soil, stone, gems and minerals. Earth is the center of all the elements and, as such, connects all the elements and is the fulcrum of the Chinese perception of the world. Indeed, Earth also represents the Middle Kingdom (reality).

Earth Soul — The Earth Soul gives beings their capacity for wisdom, insight, understanding and overall common sense. It governs one's ability to make wise choices. Therefore, leaders, priests and advisors often have powerful Earth Souls. It also influences the Intelligence Attribute.

Often, people say more or less about a subject than they know (people talk out of their ass). Musing on a person's Earth Soul can reveal this. *Hsien* can learn much by enlarging a person's Earth Soul (a Yang effect). This will help them make wise decisions. Of course, the opposite is true. Diminishing one's Earth Soul (a Yin effect) makes sound decisions much more difficult.

Virtue: None, Earth's Chi is balanced.

Constructive Cohorts: Fire and Metal.

Adversary: Wood depletes the soil to feed its own growth, therefore, Wood can best thwart Earth's power. Because Earth touches all elements, it can be defended by any elemental art, but Wood gains an automatic success versus Earth powers.

Fortunes: The center of any room or place; the day of any seasonal or harvest festival, or festivals honoring the god Hou T'u, or the emperor Huang Ti; the color yellow, and the sense of smell.

Yin and Yang Attribute: Intelligence. Unlike the other elements, Earth has only one attribute, Intelligence. This corresponds to Earth's connection with the other elements — Earth tends to know what is going on and has some experience with all the other elements.

Examples of Earth I Chih

To illustrate these examples of Di Tan, we will accompany Xiong Fei, a komuko master of Earth Alchemy. She is a member of the Wu Hsien, with strong ties to the village where she went through Kun Shou. Her loyalties lie with the small shrine she guards and to her human family and neighbors who bring offerings there.

Yin Chi 6 (difficulty 5), Yang Chi 6, (difficulty 5), Yugen 12, Intelligence 3, Di Tan 5

☉ Entreat the Yellow Mandarins (Commune)

A farmer's wife has gone missing from her bed during the night. The farmer goes to the shrine and prays for help. Overhearing, Fei decides to investigate. She goes to the ground outside the woman's window and sees some footprints. She decides to talk to the ground outside the window.

First, talking to a spirit is a Yang effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 5, and her Dice Pool is 8. Now, let's figure out the number of successes needed. One success for the base effect (Commune), plus five for Magnitude of Change (she wants good information), and an additional success to lengthen the time to one scene (Continuance). She needs seven successes.

Fortunes reduce these successes, and she will need a few. She gains one Fortune automatically since the komuko are aligned with Earth (kwannon-jin Fortune). Knowing she was looking for the woman, she also prepared a mu-jen (doll) of the missing woman, for a total of two Fortunes. This means she now needs five successes. Fei's player rolls: 4, 7, 2, 8, 8, 10, 7 and 10 — six successes!

Fei buries the mu-jen in the ground, and says, "Oh wise spirit of the Earth what can you tell me of those that passed beneath this window two-nights past?"

The ground begins to stir beneath Fei's feet. "Komuko, I felt a woman — the farmer's wife by her light tread — pass over me. I believe she unwisely left through this window with her lover, a dyer by the reek of him!"

☉☉ Command the Vassals of Tu Ti

Fei remembers her teacher telling her stories of T'u Ti, the god of Earth, and how he gave the komuko the responsibility for overseeing his servants, the Di Shen. She decides to summon one to help protect her shrine from a gang of Shu Shen.

Effect: Summoning a Di Shen is a Yang effect. (Yang Chi determines difficulty, Die Pool equals Di Tan plus Intelligence)

Modifiers: It requires five successes due to the Yugen of the spirit (45) plus the Wall rating — usually four in a shrine.

Normally, nine successes in all. Oftentimes, this effect is performed as a Ritual.

Other Modifiers: Domain and Circumstance. Continuance and Abundance cannot be used with this power.

First, summoning a spirit is a Yang effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 5, and her Dice Pool is 8. She needs five successes due to the Yugen of the spirit (45) plus the Wall rating of her shrine, 4, or nine successes in all.

She will need a lot of Fortunes to pull this off. She gains one Fortune automatically since the komuko are aligned with Earth (kwannon-jin Fortune). She makes a dzi dzat figurine of her shrine to give her two Fortunes. Now she needs seven successes.

Fei's player rolls: 5, 6, 6, 18, 6, 9 and 10—six successes. Fei Fails.

Hou Tan: Fire Alchemy

Masters of Fire are known to be canny opponents and active rulers. Because they are unable to rest, they constantly seek action and involvement.

Fire is associated with lightning, light, as well as flame (almost any form of visible energy). Fire is found in storms, open flames, computer screens and blazing magma.

Fire Soul—The Fire Soul regulates a being's understanding of propriety and his understanding of manners and codes of conduct. Charisma and Wits are Fire Attributes. It controls its sense of duty and the eagerness to enforce the precepts of

society. Policemen, and even government officials possess strong Fire Souls.

When a *hsien* parleys with a Fire soul, she can determine some of the hidden meanings of etiquette or its breaches. Yin effects create a lot of confusion and chaos in social situations. As a person's Fire Soul fades *faux pas* become more embarrassing and frequent. Kindling a target's Fire soul (a Yang effect) not only imparts some social graces, but also shame and, oftentimes, a thirst for retribution.

Virtue: Greater Yang; it is a force for insight and destruction.

Constructive Cohorts: Wood and Earth.

Adversary: Water douses flame and is Greater Yin. It most easily balances Fire's Yang.

Fortunes: South; summer; the color red; propriety; fire festivals, and festivals and shrines of the god Chu Jung, and the Emperor Yen Ti; and the sense of sight.

Yin Attribute: Charisma — often others are drawn in by fire's danger.

Yang Attribute: Wits — Fire reacts quickly.

Examples of Fire I Chih

Xui Mei is a nyan practitioner of Hou Tan (Fire Alchemy). She is also member of the Yellow Lotus, with a cover as the lover to the local naam (baron) of the Yü.

Yin Chi 4 (difficulty 7), Yang Chi 7, (difficulty 4), Yugen 11, Charisma 4, Wits 3, Hou Tan 3



☉ The Flame Bears Witness (Read Elemental Soul)

Being tricky, Xui Mei sent one of her underlings to seduce the married chamberlain of her lover. Now she wants to find out what happened. She goes to the court and regards the chamberlain's Fire Soul as he speaks to her servant.

She casts a Level 1 Hou Tan I Chih and regards his Fire Soul as her attendant speaks to him of last night's tryst.

Effect: Yin effect to read his soul.

Modifiers: She just wants to make sure he had the affair, so she needs three successes for Magnitude of Change, plus one for the effect, or four successes.

Other Modifiers: Any other modifier can be used.

First, reading an Elemental Soul is a Yin effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 7, and her Dice Pool is 7. She needs four successes due her modifiers.

She does not want to be seen working magic, so all she has is her kwannon-jin Fortune (Fire) to offset. This means she now needs three successes. Mei's player rolls: 3, 10, 3, 7, 6, 9 and 1 — two successes. Mei Fails.

She tries again; she expends a point of Willpower and now her difficulty is 8. Mei's player rolls: 5, 9, 2, 10, 6, 4 and 10 — three successes.

Mei sees the dark flame of impropriety glow within the chamberlain and Mei smiles sweetly.

☉☉☉ The Fiery Claws of Chih Ching-tsu (Elemental Fist)

Xui Mei's blackmail scheme has failed, but the chamberlain's goons made a mistake as well — they think this cat has no claws! Hearing them outside her door, Fei burns a point of Yugen and shifts into her wani form.

Effect: Yang effect

Modifiers: Mei wants this to last for a scene (Continuance) so that adds a success to the basic one success for the effect. She takes five more to boost her damage. Mei needs seven successes on six dice!

Other Modifiers: The only other modifier would be to take more successes for damage.

First, Elemental Fist is a Yang effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 4, and her Dice Pool is 6. She needs seven successes due her modifiers.

She has her kwannon-jin Fortune (Fire), and wani form to help offset the successes. Luckily, she is also dressed in a red silk robe and is standing south of her attackers (Direction). This means she now needs three successes. Mei's player rolls 4, 4, 8, 8, 7 and 4 — six successes.

Mei's claws burst into flame, giving her five extra damage dice to roll — a total of eight aggravated damage dice! (Her claws do Strength + 1.)

Nice, kitty.

Tieh Tan: Metal Alchemy

The Metal element encompasses all precious and working metals: gold, silver, iron, brass and steel. While rather limited in scope compared to Water or Earth, Metal's overwhelming use is

to fashion tools — especially tools of war. Masters of Metal can be incredibly skilled artisans, or unassailable warriors.

Metal Soul — The Metal Soul contains a person's sense of justice, honesty, and fair play. Perception and Dexterity are the Metal Attributes. Judges, vigilantes, human-rights activists and civil rights supporters possess bold Metal Souls.

Listening to a Metal Soul often reveals if one is speaking honestly. Enlarging another's Metal Soul as part of a Yang effect can make others tell you the truth. Yin effects can make it easier to lie.

Virtue: Lesser Yin.

Constructive Cohorts: Earth, Water.

Adversary: Fire melts Metal.

Fortunes: Autumn, hearing, white, festivals honoring Shao Hao, metalworking factories or workshops

Yin Attribute: Perception — All is fair in nothingness.

Yang Attribute: Dexterity — Steel is quick, like the flick of a razor.

Examples of Metal I Chih

Meet Yin Chyou, member of the Yu and Kuan (count) of the town, Hunchun.

Yin Chi 6 (difficulty 5), Yang Chi 5, (difficulty 6), Yugen 11, Dexterity 4, Perception 5, Tieh Tan 4

☉☉☉ Paths of Iron (Paths of the Elements)

Chyou hears from an informant in the Shu Shen (the Profane Gods) that a Kuei-jin is dwelling on the third floor of a building in Hunchun. He goes inside the lobby and asks for the bathroom. A guard escorts him there and he sees a small vent. Reaching up he touches it with his hand.

Effect: Yang (difficulty 6, Dice Pool 9)

Modifiers: Chyou decides to travel around inside the metal ductwork of the building, so he needs Domain 1, and Continuance 2. (He wants to travel around for 2 hours.)

Other Modifiers: Any other modifier can be used, except the I Chih cannot target another individual.

Paths of the Elements is a Yang effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 6, and her Dice Pool is 9. He needs four successes due his modifiers, plus one for the effect — five successes in all.

His kwannon-jin Fortune lowers the successes to four, but the player does not want to risk any others. Chyou's player rolls: 3, 5, 10, 1, 4, 10, 1, 7, and 5 — one success. Chyou fails.

He expends a point of Willpower to try again, but now his difficulty is 6. Chyou's player rolls: 5, 8, 3, 4, 1, 3, 3, 1, and 10 — no successes!

Chyou hears the guard knocking....

☉☉☉☉ The Chisel of Pan Ku (Awaken the Elements)

The door bursts open and the guard comes in with his gun drawn.

Chyou could shift into his wani form and either face down the guard or let him shoot — in that form, the bullets would do

little to him. (He automatically soaks his stamina in Health Levels of damage.) Instead, he must preserve his identity, so he will break the guard's gun.

Effect: This is a Yin effect since he is trying to degrade the metal workings of the gun (difficulty 5, Dice Pool 9). It could easily be a Yang effect if he was going to tie it in a knot, but degradation or decay makes the effect Yin.

Modifiers: The Storyteller says Chyou needs three successes to corrupt the metal workings of the gun to an extent it will not function.

Other Modifiers: any

Awaken Element is a Yang effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 5, and her Dice Pool is 9. He needs four successes due to the modifiers and the basic success required for the effect.

He has a kwannon-jin Fortune to help offset the successes, so he now needs three successes. Chyou's player rolls 1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 7, 10, 6 and 9 — six successes!

The guard's gun clicks like a cooling radiator and slightly twists in his hand. The puzzled man pulls the trigger uselessly as the hsien brushes past him and out the door.

Shui Tan: Water Alchemy

The Shui Fu, the Ministry of Water is the most powerful, subtle, but inefficient force in the Middle Kingdom. Masters of Water are dreaded and venerated, but most serve them out of fear.

Water is one of the most powerful elements. It encompasses all things liquid and gaseous. This includes clouds, methane, water, blood, etc. Water is inherently vital, yet dangerous and deceptive. Water also controls wind and storms (but not lightning).

Water Soul — The Water Soul encompasses a person's faith in others and in the powers of the universe. It also encompasses fidelity and confidence, and the Water attributes are Manipulation and Stamina. Capitalists, crime lords and those who love to be the objects of loyalty and power marshal great Water Souls.

Communing with a Water Soul helps gauge the person's loyalty, confidence, etc. Siphoning a person's Water Soul (Yin effect) can destroy their confidence in themselves and others. Canny leaders increase (Yang effect) their followers' Water Souls, ensuring their loyalty.

Virtue: Greater Yin

Constructive Cohorts: Metal, Wood

Adversary: Earth

Fortunes: Cold, north and winter, the sense of taste, the color black, faith, Festivals of the dragon boats, and animals associated with water.

Yin Attribute: Stamina — the void never tires.

Yang Attribute: Manipulation — Water's ways are one's of court: subtlety and wrathful vengeance.

Water 1 Chih Examples

Meet Yin Jaw-long, Xunfu of the Shui Fu, the Ministry of Water. He is the magistrate of Hunchun city. Xunfu is the

master of the lakes and rivers of his province. He keeps his underlings busy with a flood of pointless reports, while he keeps tabs on his true interest — treasure.

Yin Chi 7 (difficulty 4), Yang Chi 5 (difficulty 6), Yugen 12, Stamina 2, Manipulation 4, Shui Tan 5

Entreat The Attendants of the Water Dragon (Nurture Elemental Soul)

Jaw-long hears that one of his minor workers, a lowly tu-di (rank 1 bureaucrat) has found a wonderful figurine of black jade in the shape of a tortoise. He intends to make the young girl "donate" it to him.

Effect: Yang (difficulty 6, Dice Pool 9)

Modifiers: He wants to Nurture her Water Soul — attempting to talk her into giving the jade to the ministry as a faithful member of the Shui Fu. The Storyteller says he will need five successes (Magnitude of Change) to force her to give up such a valuable item.

Other Modifiers: Any other modifier can be used.

Nurture Water Soul is a Yang effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 6, and the Dice Pool is 9. He needs five successes due his modifiers, plus one for the effect — six successes in all.

His kwannon-jin Fortune lowers the successes to five, but the greedy Jaw-long is not satisfied. First he is clad in a black silk robe (Color), then he makes the girl stand so he is north of her (Direction) and he waits to her to call until the day of the Dragon Boat Festival (Festival). Now he needs but three successes. Jaw-long's player rolls: 10, 9, 1, 2, 1, 8, 10, 7, and 6 — four successes.

Smiling, the foolish tu-di hands over the turtle into the covetous hands of Jaw-long.

Awaken the Black Tortoise (Awaken Jade)

Now that he has the jade, Jaw-long can't wait to Awaken it. Besides, today is such an auspicious day, he can't wait.

Effect: This is a Yin effect since he is trying to Awaken the Yin Chi inside the figurine.

Modifiers: The Storyteller says Jaw-long needs 10 successes to give the jade a Yin Chi of 5. He could choose fewer points of Chi, but Jaw-long is gluttonous.

Other Modifiers: any

Awakening Yin Chi in jade is, not surprisingly, a Yin effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 4, and her Dice Pool is 9. He needs 11 successes due to the modifiers, and the basic success required for the effect.

He has all the Fortune above except direction, so that leaves him with three Fortunes. His player decides to spend a point of Willpower, so now he needs to roll seven successes. Jaw-long's player rolls 4, 4, 6, 9, 10, 7, 8, 2 and 3 — seven successes!

The turtle stirs briefly in his hand and then grows as cold as the midnight-colored water at the bottom of Xingkai Lake. Jaw-long's laughter ripples through the ebon-marbled walls of the Shui Fu. Gleefully, he dances around his throne.

Lin Tan: Wood Alchemy

Wood represents the power of the natural world, and as such has power over much of the world. The natural phenomena it is associated with are: any kind of plant, youth, health, and growth.

Wood Soul — The Wood Soul is responsible for a person's morality. It controls their lusts and their capacity to empathize with others. All living creatures possess a Wood Soul. Even though life feeds on life, this soul encompasses compassion. The Appearance and Strength Attributes represent the vital nature of the Wood element. As such, nurses, athletes, doctors and most mothers possess a hearty Wood Soul.

Wood Souls communicate the state of a being's health, among other things. A *hsien* can also incite lust in another by using a Yang effect to excite another's Wood Soul. The same *hsien* can use a Yin effect to deaden a target's Wood Soul, possibly making him impotent. Since the Wood Soul governs a person's goodness, a powerful Yin effect may entice a person into a knowingly evil act.

Virtue: Lesser Yang

Constructive Cohorts: Earth and Fire

Adversary: Metal

Fortunes: Spring, green, touch, east, sunrise, morning, acacia trees, catalpa trees, chestnut trees, hemlock trees, pine trees, peach trees, white cedar trees, festivals of the god Kou Mang, and the emperor T'ai Hao.

Yin Attribute: Appearance. The beautiful flower often hides the thorn.

Yang Attribute: Strength. Vigor is the lifeblood of spring. With this power, things can be built, and seed can be sewn.

Wood 1 Chih Examples

Xun Ting's life has taken a brutal turn. Much of his Chi was eaten by a Kuei-jin. Surprisingly, it was another Kuei-jin that saved him. The beautiful and quiet woman named Sen told him that she may ask Ting for a favor. Last week, she came for repayment. Xun Ting must kill a Kin-jin, a Waigoren Kuei-jin who threatens the dead one's *wu*, her undead family.

Xun Ting: Yin Chi 5 (difficulty 6), Yang Chi 4, (difficulty 7), Yugen 9, Strength 3, Appearance 4, Lin Tan 5

Wood Fist (Elemental Fist)

Disaster. The Kin-jin laughed at Ting's challenge and sent his lessors to fight Xun Ting. He looks down to his feet and watches them merge into a long tail as he call upon his wani form.

Effect: Yang effect

Modifiers: Ting wants this effect to last for a scene (Continuance), so that adds a success to the basic one success for the effect. He takes four more to boost his damage. Ting needs six successes on nine dice!

Other Modifiers: the only other modifier would be to take more successes for damage.

First, Elemental Fist is a Yang effect. Therefore, the difficulty is 7, and his Dice Pool is 8. He needs six successes due his modifiers.

He has the kwannon-jin Fortune (Wood), and wani form to help offset his successes. Luckily, he is also dressed in green silk robe (Color). This means he now needs three successes. Ting's player rolls 10, 9, 8, 9, 7, 10, 7 and 4 — seven successes.

Xun Ting's hands twist into thorny knots, giving him four extra damage dice to roll — a total of eight aggravated damage dice! (His claws do Strength + 1.)

Summon the Forest of Spears (Summon Element)

Surprisingly for Xun Ting, the Kin-jin really hated his Wooden Fists! He managed to escape with this life (and Chi)! He also noted that they fell to sleep when run through. He fights his way into the courtyard where the mandarin of the Kin-jin awaits him.

Confidently, the Waigoren slowly gets up from table where a young boy is chained. The demon wipes his mouth and slowly closes the distance to the serpentine fu-hsi.

Effect: This is a Yang effect since he is summoning wooden stakes — hoping one will stop him.

Modifiers: Domain 1 (20 yards straight up), Abundance 5 (1000), Harm 2 (4 Dice)

Other Modifiers: Any

Summoning is always a Yang effect. The difficulty is 7, and his Dice Pool is 9. He needs 10 successes due to the modifiers, and the basic success required for the effect.

He has the kwannon-jin Fortune (Wood), and wani form to help offset his successes. As before, he is dressed in a green silk robe (Color). His player decides to spend a point of Willpower, too — this means he now needs seven successes. Ting's player rolls 10, 1, 7, 2, 1, 8, 1, 8 and 7 — only two successes!

Nei Tan: Internal Alchemy

First, let's define what the Tao Te Hsien is not. It is not the Taoism of Lao Tsu, although it was inspired by this philosophy. The point of the Tao Te Hsien is the understanding of the *hsien*'s place in the cosmos since the coming of the Wall. Unlike the human philosophy, it has a concrete goal — to give a *hsien* the power to break through the Wall and journey to the spirit worlds.

It shares many of the Tao's characteristics. Followers of the Tao Te Hsien tend to ignore the trappings of mortal society and seek a life of contemplative ease in nature. They love learning for its own sake, but care little for politics. Some are scientists, some are priests, some are beggars, and some are warriors. The *hsien* of Japan have modified the Tao Te Hsien into a Zen-like philosophy called Hsien-do, but unlike many other religions, the Tao Te Hsien welcomes change and individualism, as long as it does not lead to self aggrandizement. Like its human predecessor, it is quiet, mysterious and profound.

It has five steps, which roughly correspond to the Taoist creation story, but in reverse. In Taoist tradition, first there was Wu-Wo, Not Nothing. From nothing came Wu Chi, No Limit. This spawned Hu T'un, Chaos. But in the center of this Chaos was a still point, a speck at first, which became T'ai Chi, the

Tao Te Hsien and the King of the Monkeys

When the August Personage revoked his mandate from the Wan Xian, and the Wall was erected between the Middle Kingdom and the other worlds, the *hsien* lost their way for a time. Many of those that survived went insane; others sank into despair since they could no longer roam the outer worlds at whim. Only a fool could save them, and he did.

Hanuman sought out solace on the mountain where he was born. There he met Hou Ti, a Taoist priest. He defended the priest from the Kuei-jin and the Profane Gods. More importantly, for the first time in his immortal life, Hanuman listened and learned from someone. After many years, Hou Ti's teachings slowly changed the Monkey King.

He learned strange new magic from the priest as he also learned how the universe was created. Hou Ti was at peace with the universe, and was wise. Unlike the other priests he met, Hou Ti laughed at Hanuman's antics, reprimanded his mistakes, but always encouraged him to be true to his nature. Together, they learned their place in the world, until one afternoon when the old priest did not wake from his nap. Hanuman buried the little man beside the stream where they first met.

The next morning a huge key of jade appeared on the end of his tail. At first, Hanuman did not know what to make of it. Sensibly thinking it magical, he hoped it might open any lock so he tried to break into palaces and many of the ministries, but it never quite fit any lock. Frustrated, Hanuman used it to crack open nuts, and eventually threw it in a river — disgusted with his useless yet magical key. The next day he awoke and it was on his tail again.

Now all the monkeys laughed at him, joking that his tail obviously knew what to do with the key. "Too bad Hanuman's posterior is smarter than his head!" they all said.

Finally, he decided to throw it off a dragon boat while he was travelling between dragon nests. Instead of sailing to his destination the confused monkey found the boat traveling along side the Wall itself — up it stretched toward Heaven, its red-tiled top covered with snow. Strange as this was, Hanuman was still determined to rid himself of the key, so he threw it at the Wall. Instead of shattering on its granite sides, the key flew like an arrow into an as yet unseen keyhole. Hanuman leaned out of the boat and turned the key. The Wall opened, and Hanuman was free!

So Hanuman immediately got into trouble.

The August Personage of Jade caught him in his peach orchard and grabbed up the monkey-man by his tail, and with a flick, sent him back to the Middle Kingdom. There, Hanuman told Tu, the komuko guardian of the Library of Earth about the Jade Key. Tu wrote down what Hanuman said and later expanded upon it when he also mastered the Tao. His writings are collected in the Tao Te Hsien.



Great Pole. From this grew Great Change, T'ai I. This phenomenon is divided into two stages: T'ai Chu, the Great First or form, and T'ai Shih, the Great Beginning or the First Breath (Chi). All of these finally lead to the creation of the First Age — Tai Su, the Great Primordial.

Why are steps the reverse of the creation story? The pursuit of the Tao Te Hsien is a struggle to trace the stages of creation back to No Limit, Wu Chi — to break the bond that limits their travel to the spirit worlds. (From the story of Hanuman, this achievement is also called the Jade Key.)

There are many paths back to No Limit, but the surest is found in the Tao Te Hsien. It is rumored that the Profane Gods have their own version of Nei Tan, called Hac Tao, the "Black Way." A Yama King dictated this foul text to the founding Profane God during the Third Age.

System: Nei Tan uses the same basic system as the other Alchemies. There are Yin and Yang effects and, therefore, Yin and Yang Chi determine the difficulty number of the roll.

The basic difference is with the Dice Pool. There are no Tao characteristics, so a character's Dice Pool is not found by adding a character's Nei Tan score to a characteristic. The Dice Pool is equal to a character's Tao score.

The Tao score improves like Yin and Yang Chi — based on roleplay. It is limited to the average of a character's Yin and Yang Chi (round down).

The Nei Tan score controls what the character can accomplish, by governing his I Chih use. It can only increase when a character's Chi scores are balanced. Characters cannot use magic to balance their Chi and then increase this ability. The scores must be naturally balanced.

Virtue: Balance

Constructive Cohorts: None

Adversary: Nei Tan is its own Adversary

Fortunes: Meditation, sites of natural beauty, dragon nests, possessing balanced Chi

Yin and Yang Attribute: Unlike the elemental arts, the Tao art, Nei Tan, does not use an attribute to determine its Dice Pool. The power of this alchemy comes from the understanding of the *hsien*'s place in the cosmos, therefore, it is solely dependent upon a character's comprehension of the Tao. Tao is, and no more. Therefore, use the Tao score of a character for the Dice Pool. The maximum Tao score is the average (round down) of a character's Yin and Yang Chi scores. (When studying Tao Te Hsien, it is best to keep your Chi in balance.)

Modifiers: Even though some of these effects seem to target others, it is important to note that this Alchemy springs from inside the *hsien*. Any effect must be thought of as centering on the *hsien*, not others. A Shinma may not directly effect the real world without channeling that power through herself.

The most common modifiers for Nei Tan are: Continuance, Circumstance and Magnitude. The Storyteller should restrict use of Abundance and Domain.

☉ Tai Su: The Great Primordial

This is the first step in the Tao Te Hsien. During this last stage of creation, the forms of nature were beginning to set into known patterns. The apprehension of T'ai Su allows the Shinma to play with his or her form. They can change their visage, and some *hsien* become practiced at assuming the forms of animals.

Shapechange: Magnitude of Change governs most of this ability. Altering one's face is considered a minor change, no extra successes are required. Changing sex is a basic change (one extra success). Altering one's face, sex and race is a significant change. Changing one's species is a major change and requires at least five successes.

While the character gains some abilities of a new species, they are not skilled in their new forms. Fish can breathe water, but don't know how to swim well. Birds have the ability to fly, but may not know how. Storytellers can let their players create new Abilities for their animal forms.

Players who wish to turn themselves into giant creatures must use the appropriate elemental Alchemies to increase Attributes.

Of course, a player must use Continuance to maintain the new form.

Visage of the Dead: This powerful Yin effect allows the Shinma to effectively kill their bodies for a period of time. By summoning forth their Yin Chi, some *hsien* make their bodies seem like rotting corpses or mummified remains. Here's the catch — the *hsien* is dead for the time period of the effect. A character has no recollection or perception of what transpires. Some unfortunate *hsien* have awakened buried, or were devoured by animals before the spell wore off.

As above, use Magnitude of Change. A freshly dead corpse is the base effect. While mummies take five or more extra successes. Circumstance is very useful. Placing a ward that you will wake up if something bites you may be very useful.

Modifiers: The most common modifiers for this power are: Domain, Continuance, Circumstance

Yin — Any use of Visage of the Dead is a Yin effect.

Yang — Shapechange is a Yang effect.

☉☉ Tai I: The Great Change

T'ai I marked the birth of reality as the elements began to form around The Great Pole. This period marks the coalescing of Chi and the birth of time. Likewise, this I Chih grants them the ability to manipulate how time effects them and gives them some control over their own Chi.

Some texts speak of a great ritual that can stop the ravages of time on a *hsien*'s *hotei* form (their human body). Such a ritual is said to involve drinking powdered jade while traveling a dragon line.

The Axis of Time: Shinma can decrease time's hold on them — thus speeding up their own movement through time, gaining extra actions in combat. Every two successes gives them an extra action. Continuance can prolong the effect.

The Mutable Furies: This power allows the Shinma to manipulate their Chi values. Points of Yin Chi can be moved to Yang Chi and vice-versa. This power is most often used to temporarily balance their Chi natures, although some *hsien* use it for just the opposite. Often possessing higher Yang Chi is beneficial during combat, for instance.

A point of Chi can be move per two successes. As usual, Continuance will prolong the effect.

Yin — The Axis of Time is a Yin effect.

Yang — Mutable Furies is a Yang effect.

☯☯☯ Tai Chi: The Great Pole

In the midst of the boiling sea of Hun T'un (Chaos) T'ai Chi was formed, the locus and anchor for reality. Some wise *hsien* in the Ministry of Earth believe that Earth formed the T'ai Chi, or at least it was the first element to form on it.

T'ai Chi grants the *hsien* the power to pass through storms unscathed. By using I Chih based on this power, the character can make himself harder to hit or target with any attack. The downside of this I Chih is that the character must mimic T'ai Chi. While they can meditate, perform kata, draw, etc. They cannot attack or communicate with anyone. Their actions must be self-absorbed or meaningless.

The Typhoon's Eye: This power is always a Yin effect. Every two successes decreases any opponent's Dice Pool by one.

☯☯☯ Hu T'un: Chaos

The impossible possibilities of Wu Chi, No Limit, spawned chaos, Hu T'un. This is a frightening time for the pursuants of the Tao Te Hsien. They have almost traveled back to the time of No Limit where he hopes to gain the Jade Key, but until then, stands on the threshold of discord.

Botches of Hu T'un effect should always involve some form of limited insanity or bizarre personality quirk.

Hsien invoke Hu T'un to influence probability. Yang effects award luck; Yin effects ruin luck. These can be in the form of particular effects — such as a mah jongg, or by awarding a Dice Pool to be used for other rolls.

I Chih created can be vaguely directed, but never fully controlled. The Storyteller is encouraged to be capricious — sometimes generous or humorous, but other times malicious. It is important that a Hu T'un effect never work exactly like the player intended. If the roll is successful, the intent of the I Chih must be served — just not exactly in the way the player planned.

The Benevolent Hand of Jade: The benevolent Hand of Jade makes improbable things probable — to the benefit of the caster. The Storyteller must use Magnitude of Change to assess the effect of this power. This is meant to be used outside of combat, and only effects a single action.

This is always a Yang effect.

For example, it is improbable that one of the new tires on the car chasing the character will fail. The Storyteller decides the player needs to roll five successes to cause them to fail.

Backside of the Monkey King: This power makes probable things improbable — to the benefit of the caster. The Storyteller must use Magnitude of Change to judge the effect of this power. This is meant to be used outside of combat, and only effects a single action.

This is always a Yin effect.

For example, a character runs into her room with a bunch of triad thugs on her tail. A few seconds later, the door smashes open and it seems probable that the triad thugs will be standing in the doorway. Using Backside of the Monkey King, the player wishes to make the probable improbable. She wants someone else to be behind the door!

☯☯☯☯ Wu Chi: No Limit — The Jade Key

Just after Wu-wo (Not Nothing) came Wu Chi (No Limit) — a time of unbounded potential. This state can only be reached by those who are the most pure to the teachings of the Tao. Strangely, this revelation comes quietly, unexpectedly, during a moment of peace.

To most it arrives in a sandalwood box wrapped in the finest silk ribbons — a key about the span of a forearm, made of the finest jade. The key cannot be stolen from the person, nor harmed in any way. The meek tuck the key in the folds of the clothes, while some wear it around their neck. A certain Monkey King uses it to open nuts and clout proud kamui about the head and neck.

The key has no real power, some say it is a reminder to others that the Mandate of Heaven can be regained. Its owner can once again travel to the Yin and Yang worlds freely. She can also raise and lower the Wall rating.

Fortify the Wall: The wielder of the Jade Key can temporarily increase the Wall rating of a place by one for every two successes attempted. Only one attempt can be made per day. This is a Yin effect because the character is depleting the ambient Chi in the area and channeling it into the Wall.

Unlock the Jade Portal: To unlock the Wall and travel to the Yang World or Mirror Lands, the *Hsien* must make a Yang roll and generate more successes than the area's Wall rating.

Examples of Nei Tan

Osan Fuhiko, a tanuki, will illustrate examples of Nei Tan. She is a wandering demon killer (Kuan-Yu), who has promised to rid an apartment building of an infestation of bakemono.

Yin Chi 7 (difficulty 4), Yang Chi 7, (difficulty 4), Tao 6
Yugen 14, Nei Tan 3

☯☯ Axis of Time

Fuhiko tracks the demons from the apartment, through the sewer and to several abandoned shipping crates. Sneaking up to the crates, she hears two distinct, yet muffled voices inside. The area outside of the crates is littered with bone fragments — this must be the lair of the demons.

She decides to call upon the Axis of Time, so that she can deal with the two demons at once. First, she spends a Yugen to shift into her wani form. Fuhiko wants two extra attacks, so she needs four successes for the effect.

Effect: Yin

Modifiers: Fuhiko wants the effect to last for a scene. This adds one success.

Other Modifiers: The only other appropriate modifier would be to take two more successes for each additional action.

First, Axis of Time is a Yin effect, so the difficulty is 4. Her Dice Pool is going to always be 6 (her Tao score). Fuhiko needs six successes due her modifiers.

Her wani form Fortune helps offset her successes. Once again, she needs five successes. Fuhiko's player rolls 9, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 7 — five successes.

Fuhiko's body is a blur as she kicks open the door and rushes inside. The innards of the crate are lined with low benches. The bakemono, all 12 of them, stare slacked-jawed at the tanuki.

☯☯ The Typhoon's Eye

Ack! Twelve of them! Fuhiko kills two (with her three attacks), but the other 10 just laugh and dig weapons out of their fetid robes. As her wise old master used to say, "Get the hell out of there you idiot!"

Fuhiko decides to get out of the crate by using the Typhoon's Eye. She will perform her sword kata while she attempts to move out of the crate. (That's just part of the spell.) Then, she is going to run for it.

Every two successes decreases any opponent's Die Pool by one, so she is going to try to decrease their Dice Pools by three — she'll need six successes. Once again, while the game mechanics of this effect seem to target the bakemono, all Nei Tan effects really target the caster. Fuhiko is just going to be harder to hit. The effect does not make the bakemono clumsy.

Effect: Yin effect

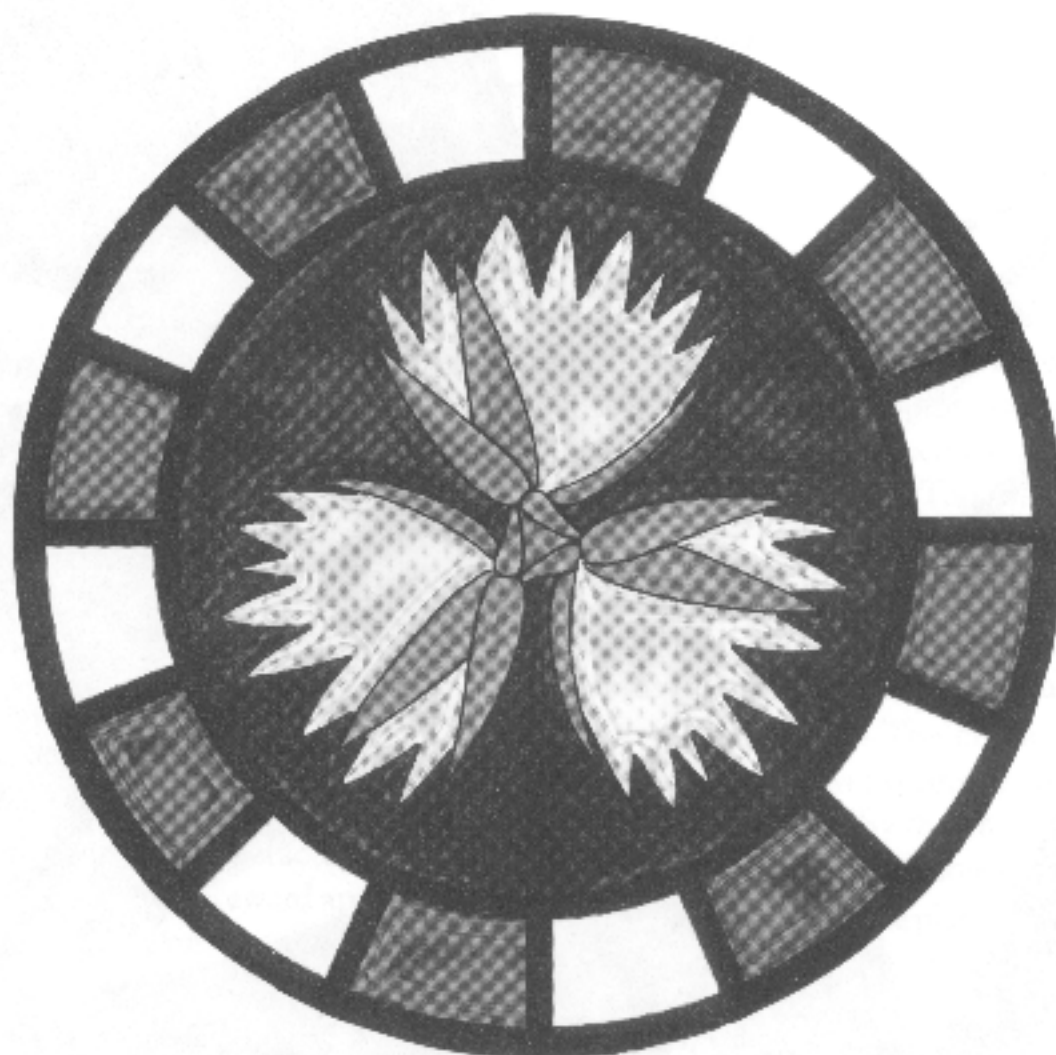
Modifiers: None.

Other Modifiers: The only other appropriate modifier would be to take two more successes for each additional Dice Pool reduction.

The Typhoon's Eye is a Yin effect, so the difficulty is 4. Her Dice Pool is 6 (her Tao score). Fuhiko needs six successes due her modifiers.

Her wani form Fortune helps offset her successes. Once again, she needs five successes. Fuhiko's player rolls 8, 1, 4, 5, 9 and 7 — four successes.

The next day the gulls fly in off the harbor. A new feast awaits them beside the old crate.





CHAPTER SIX: SETTING SYSTEMS

*A spring day at the edge of the world.
On the edge of the world once more the day slants.
The oriole cries, as though it were its own tears
Which damp even the topmost blossoms on the tree.
— Li Shang-Yin, Exile*

This chapter has two missions. First, it provides the players with the mechanics for improving their characters' Traits and reiterates the innate powers of the Shinma. Secondly, it contains the systems the Storyteller will need to run her games, including more information on dragon nests and the spirit worlds.

Enlightenment

Who built the 10-storied tower of Jade? Who foresaw it all in the beginning, when the first signs appeared?

— Ch'u Yuan, Tien Wen (*Heavenly Questions*)

All players hunger to improve their character's traits. It's not just greed or "combat-monsterdom." Reward and character growth are part of the enjoyment of gaming.

These pursuits take on added importance in *Land of Eight Million Dreams*, since most characters share a common goal — gaining the Jade Key. To accomplish this, they must improve their Chi and Tao scores, along with Nei Tan, of course. They will also need other Traits to keep them alive until then.

Land of Eight Million Dreams uses many of the same systems as *Changeling: The Dreaming*. Experience is still the main path to character improvement, for instance. New systems have been added that focus on character roleplay and govern the increase in Chi and Tao.

Experience

A few additions need to be made to the listing of experience awards (*Changeling: The Dreaming*, pp. 275-276).

- One point — The character answered the prayer of a human. If the answer is simply "no," the character has to have shown the human why the answer needed to be no. If they just say "no" and walk away, no experience is gained.
- One point — The player encouraged belief in the Celestial Order. This is an action in addition to answering prayers.

Improving Abilities and Attributes

Abilities and Attribute improve just as in *Changeling: The Dreaming*, p.276. The characters receive experience points after each adventure and can use them to increase these traits.

Nei Tan can only be purchased when a character's Chi is balanced (equal). This even applies when the first level is purchased. Magical manipulation of Chi does not count, unless the effect is permanent.

Willpower

Willpower is purchased just like Abilities and Attributes. Regaining Willpower is a little more rigorous for *hsien* than other *shen*. Regaining points of Willpower, as in **Changeling**, is dependent upon a character's Legacies. (See **Changeling: The Dreaming**, pp. 150-151.)

Improving Chi and Tao

Unlike **Changeling** (and far more like **Werewolf**) improvement of many of the character's Traits relies not on the expenditure of points, but on roleplay. Good roleplay earns not only experience, but also temporary points of Chi and Tao. (Temporary points are also called checks.) These points are converted into current Chi and Tao. Ten points of temporary Chi or Tao equal one real point. (There are no other uses for temporary points.)

System: Each trait on the character sheet is represented with both circles and boxes. The circles should be filled in up to the player's current trait value. Each time the character earns a temporary Chi or Tao point, put a check or "X" in a box. When all of the boxes are filled, the trait increases. Fill in the next circle under the trait and erase all of the checks in the boxes.

In most cases, the character should receive only one check, or temporary point for a particular incident. No more than three should be awarded at one time. Doing the same thing over and over again should receive fewer and fewer checks. Remember, these points are not automatic. If the character is only growing on paper, then stop awarding checks. These should be used to reward good roleplay — this ain't the IRS!

Chi

The Storyteller should give a temporary point of Chi whenever the character fulfills one of her Bans. Fulfilling the Ban of a Character's Yin Legacy gives a Yin check, and likewise for the Yang Legacy.

Experience Chart

Traits	Cost
Abilities	Current Rating x 2
New Abilities	3
Attributes	Current rating x 4
Willpower	Current rating x 2
Wu Tan*	Current rating x 7
New Wu Tan*	8

*Nei Tan can only increase when a character's Chi is balanced.



If a character does something, which exemplifies his or her growing understanding of Yin or Yang, they may also receive a check if the Storyteller feels it is appropriate. Points may also be awarded not just for actions, but also for learning something about the Yin or Yang Worlds.

Yin Checks

- Having a near-death experience
- Seeing or experiencing the Yin Worlds
- Successfully defending something of great value
- Discovering a dangerous secret
- Death of a loved one

Yang Checks

- Birth of a friend's child
- Victory over a superior foe in mortal combat
- Completing a significant quest
- Seeing or experiencing the Yang Worlds
- Seeing or experiencing the Mirror Lands

Tao

Improvement in the Tao will seem very subjective to some players — so be it. It is subjective. Temporary Tao points should be given whenever a character successfully comes to grip with the predicament of their exiled existence, or when she learns some profound truth about reality.

The Tao Te Hsien requires its practitioners to cultivate a studied, introspective, and somewhat passive demeanor. So in some cases, not acting will gain the character a check in the Tao trait.

Tao Checks

- Whenever a character gains a dot in Classics, Shentao, or an Alchemy (after character creation)
- Whenever one's Chi becomes balanced
- Teaching someone a truth of the Tao
- Upsetting the social order — but only for the greater good
- Bringing warring sides to agreement
- Deposing a corrupt ruler

Man, Dragon, Animal and the Curse of Jade

The August Personage of Jade cursed and blessed the Shinma. First, he made them both love and fear jade. Jade is a mighty reservoir for Yugen and vital for bargaining with other *shen* and traveling the dragon lines — too bad it can also kill them. Jade is not like cold iron to the *hsien*. They can hold it, sleep on it, etc. But jade weapons cause aggravated damage to them and jade dust will make them sick.

He also gave them a glimpse of their true selves by allowing them to shift into their true forms, and for the *hirayanu*, the animals they so loved.

Regaining Yugen

The potent Yin and Yang Chi of the *hsien* attract Yugen like a magnet attracts filings when dragged through the dust. Yugen leaks through from the spirit worlds wherever and whenever the Wall becomes weak.

Ambient Chi: Places with a sufficiently low Wall rating, such as sites of natural beauty, allow enough Yugen to leak though that a *hsien* can gain a point of Yugen per day. Compare the character's lowest Chi score to the area's Wall rating. If the Wall rating is equal to or lower, then a point of Yugen can be regained per day spent in that environment.

Dragon Nests: The fastest way to regain Yugen is to meditate at a dragon nest. Each dragon nest is rated from one to five. Every two hours spent at the nest gives the *hsien* one point of Yugen. A *hsien* can gather a maximum number of Yugen per day equal to the rating of the dragon nest.

The Paper Crown: The Hotei Form

The Shinma's human shell is actually their most powerful form. Yes, magic is more difficult, and they do not have their protection offered by their wani or animal forms, but the hotei is, by far, the most potent form — in the long run.

The hotei offers them secrecy. *Hsien* do not have the Mists to protect them, but most *shen* cannot detect a Shinma clad in the hotei. In this form, they can move about almost unnoticed. The profligates among the *hsien* squander this gift by building empires of wealth, but the wise use this to learn from and protect the humans.

Balm of the Dragon: The Wani Form

Each kwannon-jin has special powers and bonuses to their wani form, making it their *de facto* combat form. (See Chapter Three for specifics.) The *hirayanu* gain physical gifts as they become an amalgam of man and animal. The *kamui* become almost immune to damage from their aligned element — they automatically soak their Stamina in damage from that element. All find Wu Tan easier. Their wani form itself is a Fortune.

Moreover, in their wani form, Shinma can heal their bodies. Two points of Yugen will heal a level of normal damage, and four points will heal a level of aggravated damage. In a dragon nest these values are halved. (One point of Yugen for normal and two for aggravated damage.)

The Mask of Shintai

Even in their wani form the true majesty and awesome might of the *hsien* is still partially hidden. Only when they doff the Mask of Shintai (Mask of the God Body) is their true nature briefly revealed. As a general rule, the *hsien* call on this ability only when extremely angered or if the occasion calls for an all-out show of force (or, a great bluff!).

When using the Mask of Shintai, a hirayanu's already bestial appearance becomes twisted and horrible. Any animalistic features become exaggerated and grotesque. A fu hsi's fangs grow longer, dripping poison, and her scales become more pronounced and jagged. A hou-chi's skin darkens and becomes gnarled. He forms long, clawed limbs; his eyes flash green fury — warning others to keep their distance. Those who fail to resist the Mask of Shintai flee in panic from hirayanu.

Think of kamuii donning the Mask of Shintai in the same fashion as a furious sidhe invoking the Dragon's Ire. Both are resolute and terrifying. The air around a hsien crackles with a rainbow of coruscating light. Their skin glows with the power of the August Personage of Jade. Those who succumb to the hsien's Mask literally kowtow to the mighty kamuii.

System: Any beings present must make a Willpower roll; the difficulty for mortals is 8, 7 for shen and 6 for other hsien. Successes must equal or exceed the amount of Yugen invested by the Shinma in the Mask of Shintai. The hsien does not have to make a roll — but they must spend Yugen. Those who fail suffer the effects of the Mask for a number of turns equal to difference between their successes and the number of Yugen spent by the Shinma. Persons who botch the roll suffer the effect for a number of scenes equal to the Yugen spent by the hsien.

In a dragon nest, the targets of this fearsome power must get two successes for each Yugen spent to resist the Mask of Shintai.

Animal Forms

All hirayanu have the ability to turn into a certain animal. The forms are given statistics below, should the need arise. Many facets of the animal cannot be translated into game statistics though. Anyan, for instance, becomes basically invisible when he transforms into cat — who is going to pay attention to a cat?

When in her animal form, a hsien has the physical traits listed below. (Mental Attributes, Willpower, Yugen, etc.) remain unchanged. All Abilities listed are the base values, so if a character has a higher score, use it.

Badger (Tanuki)

Badgers are tenacious fighters, especially when backed into a tight space. Badgers are also known for facing down predators two or three times their size. They have no fear, and smart peasants do not mess with them.

Image: Badgers are members of the weasel family, but they look like a weasel on steroids. Roughly the size of a squat dog, they are known for their sharp claws and teeth, and they are very good tunnel diggers. Their eyesight is not that great, but they have remarkably good hearing and keen noses. Badgers have brown to black coats that run to silver at their edges. Their face and body have distinctive white, horizontal stripes.

Traits: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Climbing 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Attack: Claw for 1 die, Bite for 2 dice. (If three or more successes are scored, the badger hangs on and automatically bites next round, and may gain additional claw attack.)

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, -5, -5, Incapacitated

Cat (Nyan)

Cats are revered and kept as pets all over China, which is one of the reasons nyan make excellent spies. Unlike dogs, very few are eaten.

Image: Alley cats are found in all shapes and sizes, although the self-absorbed nyan prefer the shape of Persian, Siamese and other Eastern breeds.

Traits: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Empathy 2, Climbing 3, Intimidation 2, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 2, Survival 3

Attack: Claw or Bite for 1 die

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -5, Incapacitated

Carp (Heng-Po)

So you think being a fish may be a raw deal? (And no sushi jokes!) Think again, not only can you breathe water, but carp are also fairly common pets in some places of China. Believe it or not, tales of talking, magical carp are also extremely popular. Some heng-po use this to their advantage, too. Besides, you can breathe water, and every river and stream is the perfect escape

Image: Carp vary from koi to catfish size; they are distinguished by the whiskers that hang from the corners of their mouth. Their color varies from a pearl white to silver to black.

Traits: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4 (Swimming), Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Attack: Tail slap for 1 die

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Monkey (Hanumen)

While monkeys are rare, it is not uncommon to keep them as pets. The monkeys of Asia have long limbs and tails and two-toned faces, resembling a mask.

Image: Several types of monkeys exist in China.

Traits: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 1, Dodge 3, Climbing 4, Stealth 2, Security 1, Subterfuge 2, Survival 3

Attack: Claw or Bite for 1 die

Health Levels: OK, -1, -2, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Serpent (Fu-Hsi)

Serpents are great at hiding and climbing; they just are not fast. Any serpent will cause quite a stir when in a village or city, so hiding is always the best option.

Image: Serpents tend to be green or a mottled brown and green color.

Traits: Strength 3, Dexterity 1, Stamina 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Climbing 3, Stealth 5, Survival 3

Attack: Bite for 1 die. (If three or more successes are scored, the boa hangs on and automatically bites next round, and may try a Strength attack.)

Health Levels: OK, -1, -1, -2, -5, -5, Incapacitated

Spirit Primer

Charms — Magical powers possessed by spirits.
 Elementals — Spirits from one of the Elemental realms.
 Middle Kingdom, The — Reality; Earth; more specifically, but less commonly, China.

Mirror Lands — This is spiritual reflection of the Middle Kingdom, and the first spirit world usually encountered.

Realm — A pocket reality within one of the "worlds."

Slumber — A trance-like state that many spirits fall into in the spirit worlds. It is more like hibernation than sleep.

Wall, The — The barrier separating the spirit worlds from the Middle Kingdom

Yang Worlds — The home realm of the *hsien*. The higher worlds; this name includes the Heavens and the Elemental realms.

Yin Worlds — The homes of the dead; the "lower" worlds; very few *hsien*, even during the height of the powers journeyed here.

Yomi Words — These realms are the hells, even "lower" than the Yin Worlds. These are the homes of the Yama Kings.

they take. When one spirit tries to catch another, it is done with opposed Willpower rolls.

Difficulty	Action
3	Easy
5	Fairly simple
6	Normal
8	Difficult
10	Virtually impossible

Rage

Rage is a spirit's anger and capability of violence. When spirits attack (roll Willpower to see if they hit) roll Rage (difficulty 6) to see how much damage they do. Each success inflicts one Health Level of damage to beings of the Middle Kingdom, or one Yugen to another spirit.

Gnosis

Gnosis is the spirit's Dice Pool for any intellectual action it takes — any roll that would normally involve one of the Social or Mental Attributes. Should it be necessary, Gnosis can be used as a Tao score as well.

Yin and Yang

Yin and Yang serve the same function as the characteristics of *hsien*. First of all, it governs their personalities. While it's not necessary for spirits to have Yin and Yang legacies, Yang spirits should be more active than Yin spirits and so on. Some spirits have I Chih. These Traits are used just as the Shinma use them to determine the difficulty of creating I Chih effects.

Minor spirits tend to have Yin and Yang Traits of 3-5. More powerful spirits have Traits that approach 10. Spirits tend to be more polarized to either Yin or Yang virtues than *hsien*.

Yugen (Power)

When using magic or fighting, spirits use batteries of Yugen to power their Charms and I Chih. These batteries can be much greater than the sum of their Yin and Yang Chi scores.

As a spirit drains off this power, it becomes more translucent, unkempt and frayed. Yang-aspected spirits tend to look tired or older. Yin-aspected spirits begin to decompose. If the spirit is reduced to 0 Yugen, it disincorporates — fading into the Tapestry of the spirit worlds.

These spirits reform in 20 hours minus their Gnosis, with one Yugen. From a safe spot in the Mirror Lands, they can enter a state Slumber and recover 1 Chi per hour. Yang aspected spirits tend to wake up when they have completely recharged. Many Yin aspected spirits will Slumber for eternity if not awakened.

Materialised Abilities

Materialized spirits turn their Yugen into physical forms. They can stay Materialized as long as they wish, but they cannot enter areas with a higher Wall rating than their Gnosis.

If attacked, their bodies take damage normally, but each level of aggravated damage robs them of both a Health Level and

Shen Hsien Chuan: Biographies of Spirits and Immortals

Even though they are trapped in this world, most *hsien* still have a number of relationships with spirits on both sides of the Wall. Since *shen* can call sprits in the Mirror Lands to their service (and hopefully go there one day), we will spend some time getting to know the spirits of the Middle Kingdom.

Should the Storyteller wish to add more spirits to her campaign, take a look at **Axis Mundi: the Book of Spirits**, and **The Book of Madness**. Since *hsien* rarely interact with the Yin world, very little information will be given about wraiths. Storytellers who wish to add ghostly elements are encouraged to obtain **Kindred of the East**, **Wraith**, or **The Dark Kingdom of Jade**.

Spirit Traits

Spirits have their own set of traits, some of which relate to the traits of the *hsien*. Most of the Traits and Charms below relate to the powers they have in the spirit worlds. To affect the Middle Kingdom, the spirit must Materialize. When it does this, it gains many of the Traits familiar to *hsien*.

Willpower

Willpower is used by the *hsien* to attack and flee from danger. It acts as their Dice Pool for almost any "physical" action

a point of Yugen. The Materialized bodies heal normally, and just like *hsien*, healing can be increased magically.

Materialized spirits regain Yugen just like *hsien*. Demons also gain Yugen for eating humans (normally, 10 Yugen per live human consumed, or one for every pint of blood). Most spirits wouldn't think of such a thing!

If a Materialized spirit dies with at least a single point of Yugen left, they disincorporate and reform in the Mirror Lands, following the rules above. If they have no Yugen when they run out of Health Levels, they are dead — forever and ever.

Tasks

• Movement

All spirits, even without wings, fly in the spirit worlds. The movement rate per turn is 20 + Willpower in yards. This only applies to the Mirror Lands. There is no distance or time in the Tapestry.

• Pursuit

Any pursuit is a contested Willpower roll, but spirits vs. *shen* have an edge. After all, it's their back yard. A spirit trying to escape a *shen* rolls its Willpower (difficulty 6). It adds three to the number of successes it attains. *Shen* roll Willpower (difficulty 8) to catch it.

• Communication

Hsien are spirits. From the Middle Kingdom they must use their I Chih to communicate with spirits. Inside the spirit worlds, they have no trouble speaking the spirits' language.

Charms

Charms are spiritual powers. While many Charms are effective in both the spirit worlds and in reality, some are exclusive to one or the other. Like I Chih, Charms cost Yugen to create, but most last for an entire scene. (Combat-related charms only last a turn.) As you can see, the nature of Charms is incredibly variable, so read the descriptions carefully to determine their exact cost, use, and duration.

• **Appear:** With this Charm, a spirit can manifest in the Middle Kingdom, without Materializing. It cannot, however, affect the material world in any way while using this Charm. Demons use it to taunt their victims, and elementals use Appear to commune with nature and the *hsien*. It costs five Yugen.

• **Armor:** This Charm provides a spirit one soak die per Yugen point spent. This is the only way that spirits can soak damage in the spirits worlds. (Materialized spirits can use stamina.) This does not take an action, but the spirit must spend the points before damage is rolled.

• **Blast Flame:** The spirit can blast a gout of flame at opponents in all worlds. The Yugen cost is two per die of aggravated damage.

• **Blighted Touch:** The merest touch of this spirit is enough to bring out the worst in the target. If the spirit successfully attacks, the target must immediately make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7. If he fails, his negative characteristics dominate him for the entire scene. This may cause a shift in the dominant Legacy of the *hsien*, or have more subtle effects — the Storyteller may decide the exact effects.

• **Cleanse the Blight:** This Charm purges spiritual corruption in the vicinity. It can be used in all worlds.

• **Create Fires:** By succeeding on a Gnosis roll, the spirit can create fires. (The difficulty varies from 3 for small fires to 9 for conflagrations.) The Yugen cost varies from one to five points.

• **Dragon Sight:** Most spirits have a natural sense of the dragon tracks of the spirit world and are able to travel them without difficulty. They also have the ability to find Chi-laden sites (and things) in the Middle Kingdom. Each use of this ability costs one Yugen.

• **Flood:** The spirit can cause all the water in a given area to rise rapidly, causing flooding. The Yugen cost is five per one-mile radius.

• **Healing:** This allows a spirit to heal beings in the Middle Kingdom. The spirit spends one Yugen per Health Level, or three per Health Level if the damage is aggravated.

• **Human Form:** This Charm allows a Materialized spirit to assume a human guise. It may change its shape, sex, age and then revert to its prime form. Each change costs two Yugen.

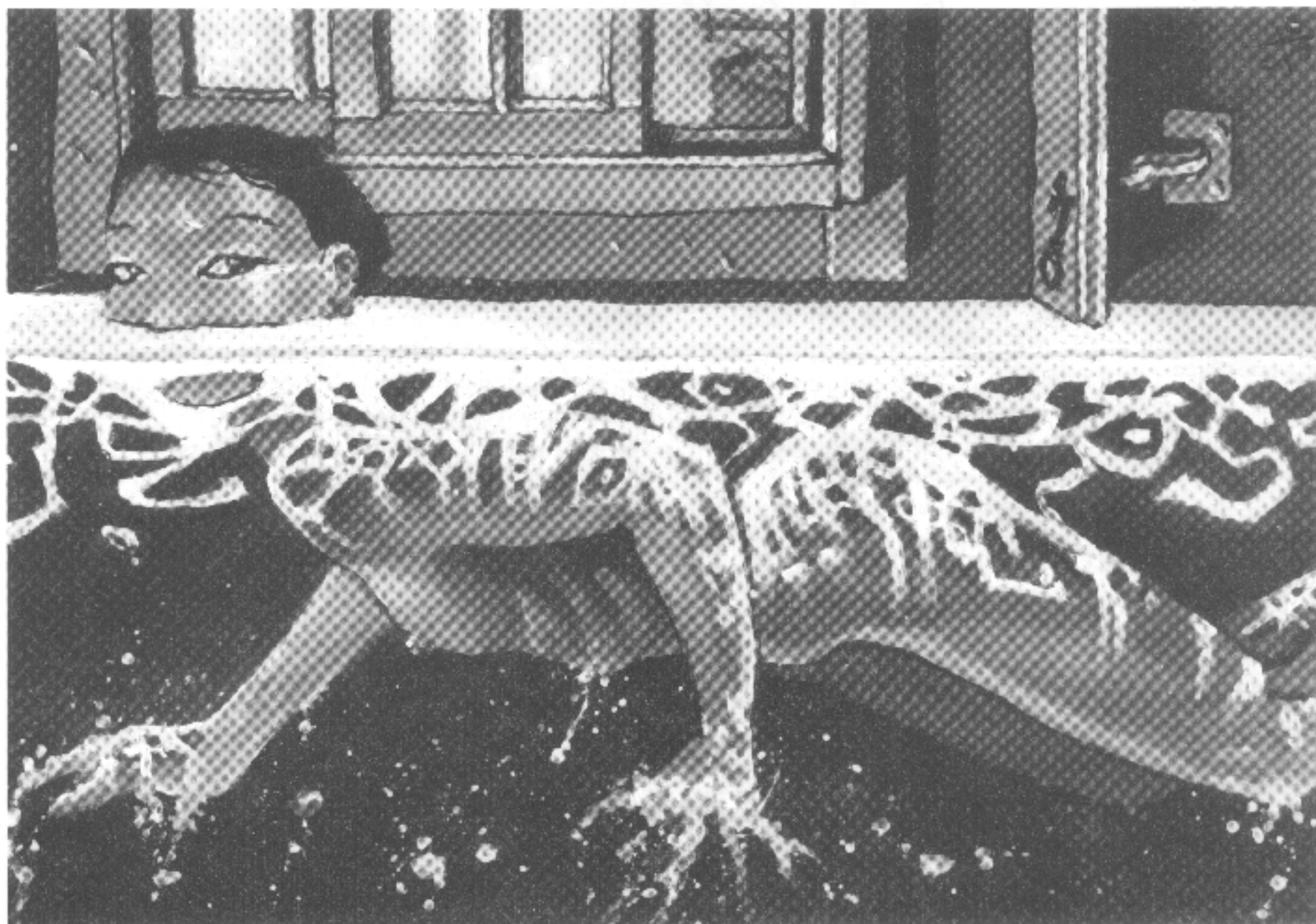
• **Kindle Life:** This Charm gives the spirit the ability to kindle life's fragile spark wherever that potential exists. Thus, spirits with this ability may cause seed to germinate, fertilization to occur or fruit to grow on trees. This also allows the spirit to kindle "procreative" passions as well in others. This Charm costs five Yugen.

• **Materialize:** A spirit may Materialize and effect the physical world. To do so, the spirit's Gnosis must equal or exceed the Wall rating for the area. When a spirit Materializes, it must spend Yugen to create a physical shape and give itself bodily Traits. However, a spirit still rolls its Gnosis for Social or Mental activities. The Yugen are as follows:

Yugen Cost	Trait
1	Per one Physical Attribute level
1	Per two Ability levels
1	Seven Health Levels (as a mortal)
1	Per additional Health Level (each extra Health Level also increases size)
1	Per one Health Level healed (Regeneration)
3	Per one Health Level of aggravated damage healed (Regeneration)
1	Weaponry per die of aggravated damage done in addition to Strength

Spirits have no limits on their Attribute and Ability levels. It is possible for them to form extremely strong or fast bodies if they spend enough Yugen. Most have a prime form to which they default when Materializing. (See the preceding section on Materialized Abilities. Also take a look at the elementals that follow for examples of Materialized spirits.)

• **Nature Sense:** Allows the spirit to sense all the goings on in a natural setting in which it is tied to. Each spirit may have a different setting: Fire — deserts and



kilns; Water — ponds, rivers and seas; Wood — forest and swamps; Metal — buildings and foundries; Earth — mountains and caves. These settings include shrines or temples dedicated to gods associated with a particular element. Yugen cost is 5.

- **Poison:** The poison of spirits is a malignant form of Yin Chi that consumes the Yugen of the victim. The Target must make a Willpower roll for a number of rounds equal to the spirits Rage, and with a difficulty equal to the Yin of the poisoner. Failure results in one point of Yugen consumed by the poison. Botching causes 5 points of damage. Yugen cost is equal to the Yin Chi of the poisoning spirit.

- **Re-Form:** This Charm allows a spirit to dissipate and Re-form somewhere else in the spirit worlds, usually far away from its enemies. Yugen cost is 20.

- **Shapeshift:** The spirit may take the form of anything it desires. It does not gain the powers or abilities of its new shape, only the form and visage. The Yugen cost is five.

- **Tracking:** Tracking allows the spirit to unerringly track its prey. Yugen cost is five.

- **Umbraquake:** The spirit can cause the Umbra to shake with such force that all those standing fall to the ground. Everyone within the radius suffer damage from the spiritual concussion. The cost is five Yugen per 10 feet for radius, and two Yugen per die of aggravated damage.

I Chih

Some spirits possess I Chih, but they are not restricted to the same levels of knowledge as are the *hsien*. Therefore, a spirit with Di Tan (Earth Alchemy) 3 just has that level of Ability, not levels 1 through 3. If the spirit has mastered Di Tan, for example, it will be listed as Di Tan 1-5.

The Eminent Spirit Catalog

The Eminent Spirit Catalog is one of the scrolls that has been passed down from master to student over the eons. Thousands of versions exist, and most are guarded jealously.

The spirits listed here are generic descriptions due to the vagaries of space, but spirits are not generic. All di shen do not act the same, nor are their Attributes the same. If the *hsien* in question goes to the same pond to commune with the same water spirit, then individualize and personalize the spirit. Don't allow them to be mere tools for the characters!

Chu Pa-chiai (Pig Fairy)

The Pig Fairy is both a hero and a fiend in Chinese Mythology. He is undoubtedly a murderer — preferring to gather Yugen by eating nocturnal travelers of lonely mountain roads. He carries a massive iron rake to stave to his victim's heads, just for such an occasion. Strangely, he is also one of Hanuman's best friends, and swore off *hsien* soon after meeting the Monkey King (well, mostly at least).



Image: The Pig Fairy appears as a hog sleeping in its own filth in the Mirror Lands. He cannot cross the Wall under his own power, like the *hsien*. If he is killed in the Middle Kingdom his spirit will Slumber in the Mirror Lands until summoned.

History: The Pig Fairy, or Pigsy as he is known to Hanuman, was once the navigator of the August Personage of Jade's dragon boat. One night after a very good party at the palace, Pigsy made some unwanted advances upon the Personage's daughter. For his effrontery, he was condemned to be continually reborn as a pig in the Middle Kingdom.

Habitat: This monster haunts the back roads of mountains — preferring the steep sides of mount Fu-ling in China.

Approaching the Spirit: Sacrifices of pork, human blood, or sweets on a mountain trail will attract Pigsy.

Traits: Willpower 3, Rage 4, Gnosis 3, Yin 3, Yang 6, Yugen 35

Charms: Blighted Touch, Dragon Sight, Materialize

Wu Tan: Nei Tan 1-2 (Hanuman taught a few things)

Materialized Form: Chu Pa-chiai stands about four feet tall and five feet wide (around the middle). He looks like a bipedal, cloven-hoofed hog.

- **Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Yugen 10
- **Abilities:** Alertness 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2
- **Attacks/Powers:** Bite: 1 + Strength Damage, Iron Rake 3 + Strength Damage
- **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dematerialized

Di Shen: Earth Elemental

While impressive in size, the di shen are known for their wisdom. They are extremely hard to provoke to violence, but they also have long memories for insults.

Image: In the Mirror Lands, di shen often Slumber as statues of local gods. (Many cultures of the East revere their village and the

god who represents the lands nearby.) Sometimes, these statues are of the Hou Tu or the Emperor Huang Ti. Sometimes, they sleep as conical mounds of earth, representing the first mountain.

History: The di shen are the oldest of the elementals. Some say they spawned the others. Many new subsets of di shen exist in the city, such as elementals of glass and plastic.

Habitat: Di shen inhabit caves, quarries and mountainsides in the Mirror Lands.

Approaching the Spirit: Di shen Slumber more than any other elemental. Sacrifices of yellow jade buried deep in the ground will raise a stony eyebrow, but only offerings to cleanse the earth of some blight will move them to grant favors or become involved in some of the hair-brained schemes that characters think up.

Di shen respond well to patience and logical arguments. There is a popular story of Li Mian, an ugly *suijen kwannon-jin*, who left bowls of rice sprinkled with jade dust in a cave for 60 nights, just to seek a di shen's help constructing a home for his beautiful nyan wife.

Traits: Willpower 10, Rage 4, Gnosis 5, Yin 7, Yang 7, Yugen 45

Charms: Appear, Dragon Sight, Cleanse the Blight, Human Form, Materialize, Nature Sense, Umbraquake

Wu Tan: Di Tan 3-4

Materialized Form: Di shen enjoy taking the appearance of old men with long, white beards, or crone-like women. When provoked, they transform into their natural form — huge behemoths of stone with long claws and horns made of yellow jade.

- **Attributes:** Strength 8, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5, Yugen 17
- **Abilities:** Alertness 4, Brawl 4, Feng Shui 4
- **Attacks/Powers:** Yellow Jade Claws: 2 + Strength
- **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dematerialized





Fu Dog, Tien Kou (Celestial Temple Dog)

Fu dogs are the muscle for the Celestial Court. Sometimes Chi-Ling send them to correct the behavior of the shen.

Image: Fu dogs range in size from St. Bernard's to large ponies. Their yellow-gold fur is flecked with patches of white and red. Their faces are dog-like, but their bodies resemble that of an incredibly muscled lion — including impressive manes. Their naked tails are tufted with flowing, iridescent fur.

History: Before the Wall, the Tien Kou roamed the lands of the Middle Kingdom, guarding mystic sites and doing the bidding of the temple priests. Since the coming of the Wall, they have withdrawn to the Mirror Lands, only venturing out on missions for the Celestial Court.

Habitat: They often guard the Mirror Lands beyond great dragon nests.

Approaching the Spirit: Tien Kou will not serve hsien unless they have the Jade Key. Sometimes, Chi-ling will command them to serve them for some quest, or act as temple guardians.

Traits: Willpower 8, Rage 6, Gnosis 3, Yin 5, Yang 5, Yugen 45

Charms: Appear, Dragon Sight, Materialize, Re-Form
I Chih: Nei Tan 1-2

Materialized Form: The fu dog's form is identical in the spirit worlds and the Middle Kingdom.

- **Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 7, Yugen 18
- **Abilities:** Alertness 4, Brawl 6, Dodge 4, Intimidation 4, Stealth 3, Survival 2, Linguistics 2 (Cantonese, Mandarin), Occult 1

- **Attacks/Powers:** Bite: 2 + Strength Damage/Armor: 2 + Stamina

- **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -2, -5, -5, Dematerialized

Hou Shen: Fire Elemental

Fire elementals are known for their vengeful, yet refined natures. They are often appealed to when society's rules have been upset, or when someone feels dishonored. Hou shen feel it is their right to burn away the taint of corruption and punish the unmannerly and thoughtless. (Unfortunately for the rude, they often get carried away in zealous glee!)

Other types of hou shen exist. Lei shen are composed of lightning, and even rarer are the lang shen, the light elementals.

Image: Fire elementals often appear as feng birds (phoenixes) in the Mirror Lands when they are active (and as creatures of greater Yang, they Slumber little). When resting, they take on the shape of bonfires or huge, ornate braziers of magma.

History: Fire elementals see themselves as the judge, jury, and executioner of the Celestial Order. Their unfortunate tendency to let their passions for "correction" run unchecked mean that only the wise and willful call upon them.

Habitat: Any flame potentially hides a hou shen.

Approaching the Spirit: Opposite in nature to the di shen, it does not take much to stir up the interest of a hou shen. Just watch out. Be polite and forgiving with a hou shen. Making light of their seeming hypocrisy is a good way to start a new journey on the Karmic Wheel. Any large conflagration, especially of fragrant woods, will attract and appease the hou shen.

Traits: Willpower 5, Rage 10, Gnosis 5, Yin 3, Yang 7, Yugen 40

Charms: Appear, Dragon Sight, Blast Flame, Create Fires, Human Form, Materialize, Nature Sense

Wu Tan: Hou Tan 3-4

Materialized Form: Hou shen appear as athletic men and women dressed in blue, yellow and red layered silk robes. Often, they are quite beautiful, but are almost always active, playing



sports, performing kata, or exercising. When in their elemental form they are moving animals of fire — dragons, tigers and birds are their most favorite forms.

- **Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 6, Stamina 4, Yugen 12
- **Abilities:** Alertness 4, Brawl 4, Feng Shui 2
- **Attacks/Powers:** Flame Body: 8+Strength Damage
- **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dematerialized

Lin Shen: Wood Elemental

Only slightly older than the metal elementals, the lin shen also have a close relationship with humans. While some of the tieh shen feel abandoned by man, most of the Wood elementals feel victimized.

Image: Wood elementals appear as grove of beautiful trees that seem to shine in the distance of a mist-filled valley. Sometimes, they appear as a single tree perched on top of a mountain hill, always just out of reach.

History: The plants were given to the creatures of the Earth as food and raw materials for tools, clothing and shelter. Since that initial age of perfection, this gift has been despoiled, exploited and nearly ruined. The lin shen have not forgotten. Luckily for man, these creatures are so good-natured that most only distrust mankind and the shen nowadays. Of course, a few hate them.

Habitat: Any wild place is a likely home for the lin shen.

Approaching the Spirit: Only the planting of trees and the maintenance of gardens will attract their notice. Promises to protect undespoiled glades or restore woodlands will also meet with the favor of the lin shen. Lin shen do not stop with trees; they also like farmers with well-kept fields. (Not having too many pesticides will also have great favor with the wood elementals.) Lin shen also venerate the di shen and the shui shen, since they feed off of their nutrients.

Traits: Willpower 7, Rage 3, Gnosis 8, Yin 3, Yang 5, Yugen 30



Charms: Appear, Dragon Sight, Nature Sense, Kindle Life, Healing, Human Form, Materialize

Wu Tan: Lin Tan 3-4

Materialized Form: Lin shen always take the form of beautiful, and rather lusty peasants. Their elemental shape is a terrifying humanoid form with grasping branch-like arms, thorn bushes for hair and blazing-green eyes.

- **Attributes:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Yugen 10
- **Abilities:** Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Survival 2
- **Attacks/Powers:** Fist of Wood: 1+Strength Damage
- **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dematerialized

Sachihoko

Images of this water spirit decorate the eaves of many buildings in Japan. The Japanese use it like a gargoyle of the West, a fearsome creature meant to scare off evil spirits. While neither good nor bad by human standards, the creatures do seem to bear a grudge against demons and their ilk — or, perhaps, they just like the taste of a demonic victim. Once and awhile they still menace fishing vessels that get separated from their fleet, and will just as easily devour a human as a haddock.

Image: The sachihoko have lion-like heads and stocky fish bodies about the size of a hippo. A triple row of poisonous spikes trails down their dorsal ridge. These fearsome creatures never give up their prey and are known to transform their fish-like bodies into that of a tiger, to pursue humans who think land offers them safety.

History: The sachihoko are remnants of the Second Age. Loners by nature, these literal sea monsters can still be found in the Middle Kingdom, in the depths of the oceans, or lingering in lonely atolls.

Shachihoko have been known to serve suijen and heng-po masters. The same-bito (hengeyokai) often hunt them for sport.

Habitat: These monsters still dwell in the depths of Asian seas and in pools and lakes in the Mirror Lands



Approaching the Spirit: Sacrifices of bloody entrails laced with jade dust will often bring these creatures from their deep prowling grounds.

Traits: Willpower 6, Rage 5, Gnosis 2, Yin 7, Yang 4, Yugen 45

Charms: Dragon Sight, Materialize, Shapeshift, Tracking
Wu Tan: Shui Tan 3

Materialized Form: The shachihoko's form is identical in the spirit worlds and the Middle Kingdom. Although it may change its shape, the limited intelligence of the beast means it can only mimic other animal forms. It also tends to keep the same head, and its poisonous spines, no matter the body.

- **Attributes:** Strength 7, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Yugen 12
- **Abilities:** Alertness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 4, Stealth 3, Survival 4
- **Attacks/Powers:** Bite: 3 + Strength Damage, Tail 1 + Strength (and Poison)
- **Health Levels:** OK, OK, OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dematerialized

Shui Shen: Water Elemental

Water elementals are known for their ability to manipulate a situation to their own ends. They are great counselors of war and political strategy. Take the advice of a shui shen with great care; they are masters of double meanings and allegory — one never knows if they speak literally or figuratively.

Kong shen are cloud elementals, the Shui Shen's cousins. They tend to blow anywhere and everywhere in the spirit worlds. To find a kong shen, one must enlist the aid of a powerful shui shen, or travel to the Tapestry.

Image: In the Mirror Lands they are most often dark pools of water, for like the earth, the shui shen Slumber most of the time. Of course, they prefer to say they "meditate."

History: Possibly even older than the earth elementals, these ancient beings are dark and mysterious. Water flows

through our bodies, and the shui shen know all its pathways and dangerous eddies.

Habitat: Almost any dark, still water is a doorway to the shui shen.

Approaching the Spirit: While they cultivate a menacing air, the shui shen do care about the purity of the waterways. Promising to clean one is always a good bargaining point. Expect to get cheated or taken advantage of. In fact, getting the best of the shui shen is a good way to provoke their ire. It's best to come just shy of a fair deal. Valuables thrown into a deep pool are always appreciated as well.

Traits: Willpower 6, Rage 4, Gnosis 10, Yin 7, Yang 3, Yugen 40

Charms: Appear, Dragon Sight, Flood, Human Form, Materialize, Nature Sense

Wu Tan: Shui Tan 3-4

Materialized Form: While water elementals sometimes appear as older, officious looking men, they prefer the form of a courtesan slightly past her prime. Shui shen prefer to dress in dark purple, green or black silk robes with oversized sleeves. In their elemental form, they look like tentacular horrors, the ripples of their dark, watery forms resembling scales.

- **Attributes:** Strength 10, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Yugen 15
- **Abilities:** Alertness 4, Brawl 4, Feng Shui 2
- **Attacks/Powers:** Fist of Water: Strength Damage
- **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dematerialized

Tieh Shen: Metal Elemental

Metal elementals are less concerned for the formalities of law than with justice. Their desire for impartiality is taken to extremes for they feel as cold as a mirror. Often, they choose to judge their summoner's motives, reflecting her sins.



Image: In the Mirror Lands, they often appear as ancient swords or spears, always unsheathed. The weapons hang from ornate stands or sit on swards of green grass covered with a light dusting of autumn leaves. Some of the more understanding appear as plows left in a half-furrowed field, as if horse and master just left.

History: Metal elementals identify most with the injustices dealt to humans and the other *shen*, not that they readily show their feelings. They are the youngest of the elementals, born as the August Personage's last gift to man. Once, they were valued above all other elements by man, but man has spurned them in favor of silicon and plastic.

Habitat: Tieh *shen* lurk behind the Wall in places where iron and steel are wrought or mined by man. Increasingly, they are also drawn to places of injustice, such as Cambodia and Tibet.

Approaching the Spirit: Crafting useful objects of metal will favorably dispose the tieh *shen* to your cause. Objects of art do not interest them, unless they are worn, such as jewelry. Once you have their attention, any promise to correct injustice will please them — asking them to take part in such undertakings is also pretty easy, but the tieh *shen* tend to go their own way. They are not team players, although they will listen to reason.

Traits: Willpower 7, Rage 7, Gnosis 8, Yin 5, Yang 3, Yugen 30

Charms: Appear, Armor, Dragon Sight, Nature Sense, Human Form, Materialize

Wu Tan: Tieh Tan 3-4

Materialized Form: Tieh *shen* appear as well-dressed businessmen, shunning the anachronistic clothing of ancient China that most of the other elementals prefer. When upset, their skin silvers and their hands turn into blades of steel.

- **Attributes:** Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Yugen 10
- **Abilities:** Alertness 2, Melee 6, Martial Arts 2
- **Attacks/Powers:** Finger Blades: 1 + Strength Damage
- **Health Levels:** OK, OK, -1, -1, -2, -2, -5, Dematerialized



Mortal Friends and Foes

While the Shinma do not have to worry about the Autumn People, they often run afoul of human (or once-human) foes.

Bakemono (Fomori)

Bakemono are human minions of the Yama Kings. Some trod the path to hell willingly, other poor souls are enslaved by the their dark masters. In the West, they are called fomori, even there, the infernal powers usually twist the bodies of the fomori into grotesque monsters.

Bakemono can regain Chi by eating humans (10 points per victim). Use the statistics for fomori in *Changeling: The Dreaming*, p. 276.

POWERS

Bakemono have from one to three special abilities such as the ones listed below. Feel free to make up more.

- **Acid Breath** — A cloud of green, noxious gas spews forth from the mouth(s) of the bakemono. This breath does 3 + 1 per Yugen spent.
- **Armor** — Their warty, scaly skin adds three dice to soak rolls.
- **Berserker** — Bakemono can spend two Yugen to gain an extra attack. Using this power is not an action, but they may not gain more the one extra attack. They may not Dodge or do anything but move toward a target or attack.
- **Claws, Fangs, Horns** — These sharp weapons cause 2 + Strength damage.
- **Combat Form** — All the other powers of the bakemono remain concealed until the creature wishes to reveal its demonic nature. It cannot use them until this power is used. It costs one Yugen to shift forms.
- **Extra Limbs** — A bakemono's extra limbs give them 1 die per limb to add to either Dodge or attack Dice Pools (all or nothing). These limbs grow out of bizarrely comical places — behind the head, palms, etc. Often, they are fantastic or animalistic in appearance.
- **Titanic Strength** — Add five to the creature's Strength.
- **Wings** — The bakemono possesses a pair of wings that allow it to fly. The wings are either insect-like, leathery, feathered, or a mismatched pair.

New Traits: Yin Chi 6, Yang Chi 2, Yugen 8

Demon Hunters

The lack of secrecy among the *shen* mean that more humans know their secrets. Some humans have decided to do something about the agendas of the supernaturals of the East.

The Shih

The Shih are humanity's oldest defense against rapacious *shen*. The Shih date back over 1,300 years. Since those times, they have organized themselves into small enclaves usually no more than a master and several students. They are virtuoso martial artists and wise sages. They often possess Chi powers that mimic Nei Tan, and more importantly, they know many of the *shen*'s



weaknesses — much to the Kura Sao's chagrin they long ago learned how to awaken jade and use it against the Shinma.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 2+, Dexterity 3+, Stamina 3+, Perception 3+, Intelligence 2+, Wits 2+, Charisma 2+, Manipulation 3+, Appearance 2+

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Dodge 3, Streetwise 2, Acrobatics 3, Martial Arts 4, Stealth 3, Survival 2, Lore 2, Occult 2

Traits: Yin Chi 4, Yang Chi 4, Yugen 8, Willpower 9

Equipment: Magic sword, jade, scrolls of lore

Wu Tan: Nei Tan 1-2

Strike Force Zero

Strike Force Zero operates out of Japan, and it is secretly under control of its Technocrats. They are organized in groups of five and specialize in surgical removal of *shen*. They make no distinctions between those acting for or against humanity. They want to exterminate all of them.

These Zero Teams members are expert martial artists and have had their bodies augmented by biotech and cybernetics into killing machines. What differentiates them from the automaton-like foot soldiers of the Metal Dragons is that these men and women have a lot of leeway to carry out their missions. They are personally driven to succeed. But, in the end, they are still dupes.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 2+, Dexterity 3+, Stamina 3+, Perception 3+, Intelligence 3+, Wits 2+, Charisma 2+, Manipulation 2+, Appearance 2+

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Dodge 3, Streetwise 2, Acrobatics 2, Martial Arts 3, Stealth 3, Computer 3, Investigation 3, Politics 1, Science 3

Traits: Yin Chi 2, Yang Chi 4, Yugen 6, Willpower 7

Equipment: Anything they need, including hi-tech weapons and armor, and weapons that do aggravated damage. Their equipment may grant Abilities (*a la* programs or cyber-implants) or boost Attributes beyond human norms.

Shen

The *shen* are very much like an extended family of spirits. Like a family, they have far more in common than most of their number would admit. Unlike the Supernaturals of the West, most of their organizations are tolerant of one another (excusing the vilest). Also like a family, some hate one another — but the genocidal hatred that many of the Western *shen* feel for one another is regarded as barbaric, if not childish by the *shen* of the East.

For the most part, use the game statistics for the prodigals, the *shen*'s Western counterparts. These are found in the **Appendix of Changeling: The Dreaming**, pp. 280-287. Any additional powers are detailed with the descriptions below under Powers and Weaknesses.

Of course, the best source of information is found in the other Year of the Lotus products: **Kindred of the East**, and **Hengeyokai**.

Chin Ta (Magi)

Trying to fathom the ways of the lightning people is as profitable as chasing fireflies after much wine. It's entertaining,

but not very profitable. Leave them to it. The chi'n ta and Shinma are drawn to one another, like the lady and sire firefly, but oftentimes, the meeting is disastrous.

An ancient *hsien* text, the *Hao Chuan*, reports that the *hsien* helped the nascent Dragon Wizards perfect their mystic arts to help preserve the humans from the depredations of the Wan Xian during the age of Beautiful Sadness. Certainly since that time, the similarities of the Wu Tan and the magicks of the mages have made the idea of cross-pollination intriguing.

- **Five Metal Dragons:** Many times have individual chi'n ta come to the Shinma for help against these fallen brethren. While their presence had been felt for years, it was not until recently that their actions have truly alerted us to their presence. They are far more concerned with the other *shen* than with us at present. But if the fate of the once blessed Wu Lung is to be believed, we cannot afford to wait for them to strike. (Use the "Technocratic Badass" characteristics in *Changeling: the Dreaming*, p. 282)

New Traits: Yin Chi 7, Yang Chi 3, Yugen 10

- **Akashic Brotherhood:** They hold much promise as allies, but are often too concerned with their own salvation to worry about others.

New Traits: Yin Chi 5, Yang Chi 5, Yugen 10

- **Wu Lung:** The Dragon Wizards fell due to their overconfidence brought about by their early success. They have always been more enamored of the *kamuii* than the rough *hirayanu*. Even today, they cling to the glories of faded imperial tapestries.

New Traits: Yin Chi 3, Yang Chi 7, Yugen 10

- **Wu-Keng:** These crippled witch-women are the masters of dark arts, such as *Hac Tao*. Their souls are as twisted as the stumps they walk on.

New Traits: Yin Chi 6, Yang Chi 4, Yugen 10

Powers and Weaknesses Revisited

- **Wu Tan** can be used to mimic the powers of the magi. Rather than break their powers down by particular Alchemy, it makes more sense to divide their powers by level of *I Chih*. Mages with spirit magicks have all the Wu Tan levels at 1-2. Others with control of the natural world have all the Wu Tan at Levels 3-5.

Hengeyokai (Werewolves and Others Shapeshifters)

The hengeyokai are usually allies of the *hsien*. Some, however, are as devious as any *Kuei-jin*.

- **Nine-tails:** These bizarre fox-people are the boon companions to the hanumen. They are crafty and humorous, but their practical jokes often leave blood and broken bones in their wake.

- **Hakken:** The most organized and numerous of the changing breeds. These wolf-soldiers are dangerous enemies and fierce allies.

- **Zhong Lung:** The Dragon children are blessed with the ability to sometimes speak with the Dragon Kings of the Celestial court. Even proud *kamuii* kowtow to the Middle Dragons.

- **Khan:** These hengeyokai are proud and noble. Many have followed the khan into battle. Now they are few.

- **Tengu:** The tengu are often the first to tell the Yü and the Fu of plots against the *hsien*. For this, they have earned favor from many.



- **Kumo:** Fear them. The goblin spiders are bedmates of demons.
- **Nagah:** Rarely seen, these cousins of the fu hsi are wise and noble.
- **Same-Bito:** They share the proud hearts of the tanuki, even if they seem to be mindless flunkies. They, too, serve the Dragon Kings.

• **Nezumi:** Distrusted by their kind, the nezumi find friends among the hirayana. They are great sources of information on the Kuei-jin and the less-savory sides of humanity.

New Traits: Yin Chi 2, Yang Chi 9, Yugen 10

Kuei-jin (Vampires)

The fallen Wan Xian are the greatest foes of the *hsien*. This is not due to pressures from the courts, the huge organizations that control the Kuei-jen, but because weak *hsien* make irresistible targets for the vampires' Chi lust.

Being attacked by a Kuei-jin usually means death, final absolute death for a *hsien*. Once a Kuei-jin begins to feed on a *hsien*, they rarely stop until they have drained the form dry of all its Yugen and Chi. *Hsien* who escape their clutches are scarred for years. While the Yugen can be replenished, Chi stolen in this way does not regenerate!

Luckily, the vampires have difficulty distinguishing humans from Shinma. Also, the courts frown on feeding upon *hsien*. The rich Chi of their body makes Kuei-jin mad.

The courts hold sway over various areas of the Middle Kingdom. The Blood Court rules Beijing, while Shanghai is in the hands of the Flesh Court. The Flame court rules Hong Kong. Southeast Asia is the realm of the Golden Courts.

Each Kuei-jin pursues one of five paths in the pursuit of redemption from sins against the Celestial Courts. These have far more sway in their dealings with the *shen* than do their court allegiances.

- **Devil Tigers:** These are the most dangerous Kuei-jin. They are probably responsible for more *hsien* deaths than any other. Never trust them; they are demons in the making.
- **Resplendent Cranes:** These Kuei-jin can be trusted above all other, but the Cranes are some of the most ardent supporters of Kuei-jin traditions and organizations. Know that their loyalties lie there, not on platitudes for the foolish.
- **Bone Flowers:** There are learned scholars among the shadows. Many can learn from these and they will give much for knowledge, but remember these creatures always know more of the dark than of the light.
- **The Whispers:** You will never meet the same one twice, even if she wears the same face. These Kuei-jen are insane.
- **Thrashing Dragon:** These vampires are unpredictable and often violent, but their bestial nature actually gives them an appreciation for nature. More than even the Resplendent Cranes have these savages aided in preserving the Middle Kingdom.

New Traits: Yin Chi 5, Yang Chi 5, Yugen 10

Powers and Weaknesses Revisited

- Kuei-jin are humans who have returned to the Middle Kingdom to work off a karmic purpose — this may be a debt incurred from a sinful human life, possibly something older, such as the sins of the Wan Xian.

• The eastern vampires rot, not burn, in sunlight. Some are very resistant to the Sun and can spend early dawn or late evening outside.

• Magics of the *shen* and Chi-augmented attacks cause aggravated damage. Wood harms Yin-aspected vampires, and Metal harms Yang-aspected vampires.

Shinma of the Mu Courts

These Shinma do not follow the leadership of the August Personage of Jade. Some, like the Daityas, have sought their own way in the Middle Kingdom. Their success, some say, has led to hubris. For now, the Daityas see themselves as gods. The Kura Sau now follow the dread Yama Kings. They are the living representatives of the demon lords in the Middle Kingdom.

Daityas

The Daityas have as complex a social structure as the *hsien*. (See **Chapter One**.) They have two camps much like the division of the kamuii and hirayana. The Naobi concern themselves with the larger issues of the Middle Kingdom and the Shinbatsu concentrate on answering the prayers of the common man and correcting their errors.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3+, Dexterity 3+, Stamina 3+, Perception 3+, Intelligence 2+, Wits 2+, Charisma 3+, Manipulation 2+, Appearance 2+

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 2, Dodge 3, Streetwise 3, Acrobatics 3, Martial Arts 5, Stealth 2

Traits: Yin Chi 6, Yang Chi 6, Yugen 12, Willpower 7

Equipment: armor, sword

Wu Tan: Any except Nei Tan

Kura Sau: The Kura Sau are servants of the Yama Kings. (See **Chapter One**.) These *hsien* hate the August Personage of Jade and their only wish is to bring about the Age of Sorrow as soon as possible. Yama Kings keep their spirits bound to their bodies. For this reason, there are two basic varieties of Kura Sau: Yang-aspected Kura Sau are very beautiful, while Yin-aspected Kura Sau look like rotting, yet walking, corpses. Kura Sau have not found out how to balance their Yin or Yang natures — only the power of the Yama Kings keeps them on this world.

Powers and Weaknesses

- Kura Sau can only gain Yugen by eating humans (10 points of Yugen per victim), or by visiting their version of a dragon nest, a Caul.
- These fallen *hsien* can heal damage (including aggravated damage) by spending a point of Yugen while inflicting a Health Level of damage.
- Their leaders (the Okuma) possess a third eye that they can use for Clairvoyance. (The Yama Kings use the eye to check up on their minions' progress.)
- They are not trapped by the Wall. They may travel to the Yomi Worlds by making a Willpower roll; their appropriate Chi score (as *hsien* casts magic) determines difficulty. They must achieve a number of successes to equal or exceed the Wall rating of the area.
- Kura Sau do not have both Yin and Yang Traits, they have one or the other. (See below.)

Kiss of the Kuei-jin

The bite of a Kuei-jin is one of the most terrifying experiences a *hsien* can face. Once one of these beasts latches on, it can drain a point of Yugen from a Shinma by drinking its blood. Each point also causes one Health Level of damage. Once all the blood/Yugen is gone, the *hotei* beings quickly die.

Very powerful Kuei-jin can steal Chi from the breath of a Shinma. This also causes a Health Level of damage, but the Kuei-jin can steal more than one Health Level at a time. To do this, the Kuei-jin must be in physical contact with the *hsien* and have access to an ear, mouth, or nose. (This form of feeding is impractical in most combat situations.) The system uses a contested roll, difficulty 6. The Storyteller rolls the Kuei-jin's Stamina and then *hsien* resists with her Stamina. Ties and negative results have no effect. The Kuei-jin ingests a point of Chi per success, if it gets more successes than the *hsien*.

If the Kuei-jin still feeds once the *hsien* reaches 0 Yugen, it will begin to eat the spiritual nature of the *hsien*. Each drought will pull a point from either the Yin or Yang Chi of the Shinma (one or the other). When the *hsien*'s entire Chi reserve is depleted, the *hsien* is dead, forever.

What if the *hsien* escapes before Final Death? The Chi loss is permanent in most cases. Only by journeying to the Yin or Yang worlds can these Chi points be regained — and only if done within a lunar month of the assault.

Watch out for the demons.

• Kura Sau have access to dark Alchemies, such as Hae Tao. They give them to summon demons and animate the dead.

Suggested Attributes: Strength 3+, Dexterity 3+, Stamina 3+, Perception 3+, Intelligence 3+, Wits 2+, Charisma 2+, Manipulation 3+, Appearance 2+

Suggested Abilities: Alertness 2, Dodge 3, Streetwise 3, Acrobatics 3, Martial Arts 3, Stealth 4, Yama King Lore 4, Occult 3

Traits: Yin Chi 0 or 8, Yang Chi 0 or 8, Yugen 8, Willpower 6

Equipment: jade, shotgun, sword

Wu Tan: Any except Nei Tan

Wraiths

The spirits of the dead and their wars over more dead things interest the *hsien* little. The Yin Worlds never held much appeal for the servants of the Dragons before the Wall. Now that land and its bleak denizens are but a half-forgotten nightmare to us.

New Traits: Yin Chi 10, Yang Chi 0, Yugen 10

Lair of the Dragon: Places of Magic

The Spirit Worlds

The spirit worlds of the *hsien* are not places of feel-good, New Age enlightenment. While they do encompass magic gardens and mystic palaces of jade, it's a bureaucracy. There is

a hierarchy in Heaven and Hell, and if you don't follow the rules, you are in trouble.

While there is some debate over the nature of the Wall and the *hsien*'s exile, it is now a rule that *hsien* are exiles. The spirits know that. While some want to point a long fingernail at the Kuei-jin, others are not so sure of the reasons for the *hsien*'s fate.

Once a character attains the Jade Key, they may wander the spirit worlds at will. Since that will not happen for a long time during a chronicle, here are some rules for foolish, intrepid or unlucky *hsien* who leave home without their key.

All *hsien* have an innate unease about crossing the Wall — even though the spirit world exerts a siren's call. There are plenty of stories of a few that have had other *shen* take them on the other side. Most of the time, they do not come back. Have others warn the characters that they enter the spirit worlds at great peril to their existence.

The exact Chi state of the *hsien* determines much of what happens once they cross, but all *hsien* will attract spirits — those unaligned with the powers of the East will recognize that the *hsien* is a spirit creature. Some may try to do them a favor by destroying that nasty body entombing them! Those aligned with the Eastern spirit world will recognize that it is wrong for them to be here without the Jade Key. They will endeavor to send them back and/or alert the spirit "authorities."

Oftentimes, the "authorities" are in the form of a Chi-Ling or a *hsien* who possesses the Jade Key. They will severely punish interloping *hsien* for breaking this Mandate of Heaven. Should the *hsien* have been forced though — a none too easy task, the Chi-Ling may decide to save the *hsien* and punish the *shen* foolish enough to make them waste their time!

The good news is that the character regenerates five Yugen per scene. The rest is bad — very bad indeed.

Balanced Chi

Imagine standing on the fulcrum of a teeter-totter. One side is madness; the other is death. That is what the spirit world feels like to those lucky enough to have balanced Chi. The character must expend one Willpower point to act — even to defend her! Otherwise, she collapses into a ball and awaits her fate.

No Alchemy can cure this state.

Greater Yang

The character's Yang Legacy completely takes over. He must expend a Willpower point each scene to remain calm. When no more Willpower remains, the character begins lashing out at anyone around him — picking fights, etc. He will also attack any spirit that comes near. If not forced back through the Wall, he will eventually attempt to flee to the Yang worlds, a gibbering fool.

No Alchemy can prevent this madness.

Greater Yin

The character's Yin Legacy completely takes over and her body begins to rot and putrefy. The character loses one Health Level per scene.

No Alchemy can heal this damage. Death is inevitable.

Mirror Lands

The Mirror Lands lie just beyond the Wall that separates the spirit worlds from the Middle Kingdom. They are place between — a nexus between reality and the Yin and Yang worlds.

Closest to the Middle Kingdom, they seem a shadowy reflection of this world. The wild Yin and Yang energies intensify the Mirror Lands. A run-down neighborhood in Shanghai is a ghost town in the Mirror Lands. A pretty garden is a mystical beauty across the Wall.

Distance and direction are the same, although time can be a bit hard to judge. If you walk a mile south and pop back out of the Mirror Lands, you will have traveled a mile south. Days come and go depending upon the feel (Yin, Yang or Balanced) of the area the characters are travelling through.

The Mirror Lands are home to most of the elementals the characters meet. Although the most powerful dwell in the Yang Worlds.

The Tapestry

There are no other walls separating the Yin and Yang worlds from the Mirror Lands. If you rise "upward" you head to the Yang Worlds, "downward" lies the Yin Lands. As one moves away from the shadow of the Middle Kingdom, time and distance lose meaning. One moves from place to place — there is no "between."

Yin Lands

The few that journey here find it, at best, sterile and unfriendly. This is the land of the human dead and the demon hordes of the Yama Kings. *Hsien* who enter the Yin Lands risk retribution from the *p'o*, the eternal soul of the human whose body they now animate.

Characters whose Yin Chi has been unnaturally drained, such as from a *Kuei-jin*'s attack, regain those lost level at a rate of one point of Yin Chi per scene spent in the Yin Lands.

Yang Lands

The Yang lands are very confusing for *Shinma*. While they are the undoubted home of the elemental realms, the Dragon Kings and the gateway to Heaven, they are also the home of a thousandfold other minor gods and Western spiritual interlopers. Without the proper forms of identification and guidance, a *hsien* will soon be hopelessly lost.

Characters whose Yang Chi has been unnaturally drained, such as from a *Kuei-jin*'s attack, regain those lost level at a rate of one point of Yang Chi per scene spent in the Yin Lands.

Shove 'em All Through

What prevents a mage or shapeshifter from killing a *Shinma* by carving a hole in the Wall and pushing an annoying *hsien* through? First of all, it's breaking one of the Mandates of Heaven. *Chi-lin*, *fu* dogs and other servitors of the Celestial Court mark *shen* who break this Mandate of Heaven are asking for severe retribution. Stories of the holy havoc unleashed by pissed *chi-lin* and their servants have passed down through the ages to most of the *shen*. They know better.

Lastly, it isn't easy. The August Personage of Jade decreed the *hsien*'s imprisonment. Even in the Fifth Age, that still holds some weight. The difficulty for such an action is no less than 8. And the successes necessary are no less than 3. These numbers cannot be reduced.





CHAPTER SEVEN: HONORIFIC CONSPIRACIES, BOUNTIFUL ALLIANCES

Only in a hut built for the moment can one live without fears.
— Kamo no Chomei, *Hojoki*

Path of the Hsien

The Land of Eight Million Dreams is a drastically different place than Concordia, in almost every way possible; it's more ancient, secret and deadly. Moreover, the *hsien* have little in common with the Kithain, either in form or magical expertise. This chapter is intended for the Storyteller; it highlights a few unique perspectives of the *hsien* and offers basic guidelines on running a chronicle for Shinma, including story seeds, themes, moods, enemies and allies.

Kamuii

Kamuii are the guardians of the elements and the arbiters of all Shinma. This probably makes them sound as if they always need to stay in one place, watching over their shrines or sitting in a hall of judgment. So is it hard to run adventures involving travel for these *hsien*? Not necessarily. Remember that a natural preserve can cover a lot of ground. Take the Chang Jiang (Yangtze) River for example. This body of water stretches from the Yunnan province in southwest China to Shanghai, over 2000 miles. If a kamuii has taken on the enormous task of

guarding the river, he'd have lots of opportunities for travel. The same is true for kamuii arbiters; they may have to journey great distances to adjudicate a dispute between Shinma. The itinerant judge makes a good role for a kamuii player character; he may even have kamuii companions or hirayanu assistants accompany him.

In general, kamuii are much more at ease with other *hsien* than they are with mortals. Most kamuii have nothing against mortals; they have to live as humans much of the time, remember. It's just that they don't understand humankind as well as the hirayanu do. For many centuries, the kamuii have been so caught up in their own tasks, that they've neglected to pay much attention to the growing numbers of humans. Today, this is a problem; China has the largest national population in the world, with over one billion people. Humans are everywhere, and often they encroach into kamuii lands. What will the kamuii do—learn to live with these mortals or strike out against them? The latter choice certainly wouldn't sit well with the hirayanu!



When creating kamuii, consider their thought processes. They are ancient and powerful beings confined to an earthly plane they may have even helped create. Many hate the Kuei-jin for their supposed role in the sundering of the Middle Kingdom from the spirit realms. Kamuii want to continue their ancient ways of guardianship and arbitration, but the task is growing increasingly harder. Overcoming their difficulties and proving their ability to find balance while living as hotei is the only way to bring down the Wall separating them from the spirit realms. If they can prove to those watching from the other side of the Wall that they are worthy, perhaps then the Shinma can return to their ancient posts at the side of the August Personage. For now, though, the kamuii have to live in this world, a task many find overwhelming.

Hirayanu

The hirayanu have much closer ties to humans. Their connections to the kamuii involve working as messengers and harbingers, but the hirayanu are much more than servants to the elemental nobles. They're quite versatile, and the Storyteller should have an easy time thinking up ideas for hirayanu chronicles; these could easily involve quests for lost objects, deliveries of tidings near and far or helping out a human family in distress. The harder task is figuring out how to sustain such quests and tasks over a long period of time so that they coalesce into a cohesive chronicle. Players will quickly get tired of stories that are nothing more than "missions of the week."

A multi-part quest with a variety of conflicts and roleplaying opportunities might be a good way to accomplish this. Perhaps a kamuii patron asks the hirayanu to deliver a certain piece of information to another kamuii. Upon arriving at the shrine, the hirayanu characters discover the temple has been razed. They investigate and learn the temple's hou-chi guardian and all her valuable paper scrolls have been taken by the servants of a Kuei-jin. This leads to a search for the hou-chi; maybe they rescue her during the next adventure, but she then sends them on a quest for the lost scrolls. While looking for these scrolls, the characters meet a hengeyokai and spend an interesting adventure with him before resuming their quest. Along the way, a relative of one of the characters shows up, confused as to why his sister ran away from home after recovering from a terminal illness — and the story continues. Before you know it, a diverse and complicated chronicle has emerged.

While hirayanu aren't purely creatures of the elements, like the kamuii, they have a gift all their own in being able to communicate with humans so well. The hirayanu can't resist interacting with mortals; it's part of their nature. Granted, they don't like being the victims of lies or tricks; there are no words in the Mandate of Heaven against taking revenge on treacherous, cruel humans. Hanumen and tanuki, in particular, don't like to be the brunt of jokes, and they'll respond in kind with a vengeance. Some hirayanu may even take a human along on part of a quest; this would allow for an interesting mixed troupe. Perhaps the human is even a mage or a hengeyokai Kinfolk, which would shock the other characters.

Dance of the Elements

Like the Ten Thousand Things, a good chronicle is composed of many elements. The Storyteller establishes the setting, theme and mood for her saga, while the players add unique characters with individual stories that inspire everyone's creativity and roleplaying. Conflicts come and go, helping to shape the plot. Finally, order and chaos merge to bring the story to a conclusion until it's time for the next thread of the chronicle to begin.

Themes and Moods

A theme broadly describes what genre your story is going to cover; it's the most basic part of a plot. Mood, on the other hand, is the general impression you want to leave behind when the story is done and the players are packing up their dice. Most of the time, Storytellers find that these aspects of the game intermingle and overlap. The following themes and moods offer suggestions for adding flavor and atmosphere to your Shinma chronicle.

Mystery and Intrigue

The East is utterly unpredictable, shrouded in veils of obscurity. Here, nothing is ever as it seems on the surface. Words have many meanings, buried in layers upon layers of insinuation and secret messages. Silence also may reveal as much as it hides. As a Storyteller, your task is to build stories that make characters want to pull aside those shrouds of mystery and see what's inside, even if doing so may bring their doom. Did the beautiful nyan courtesan really mean it *literally* when she called the chu-ih-yu swordsman a master of the long cutting stroke, or did she refer to something more figurative? Paranoia is also a useful tool; what is the strange shadow lurking near the characters at dawn? Was that a knowing look in the suijen's eyes or merely a reflection of moonlight? Who knows the characters' secrets, and what will that person do with the knowledge? Always keep players guessing as to what's going on beneath the smooth surface of the waters.

Balance and Order

Many hsien believe that a key to returning to the spirit realms and presence of the August Personage is finding balance. They seek it faithfully, yet it often eludes them; imbalance is a more frequent state of being. Moreover, ask some hsien — if balance is the key, why can't the hanumen and komuko return to the spirit lands? This insight seems to indicate that more is needed than mere balance... but what? An easy mistake for some Shinma to make is confusing balance with order. These concepts are not the same; order is making things systematic and carefully arranged while balance is bringing things into a state of equilibrium. Perhaps, too many hsien have settled for order, little realizing that Yin and Yang, balance and imbalance are necessary for the other to exist.



Guardians and Helpers

Both kamuii and hirayanu serve as watchers and protectors; the elemental nobles guard places sacred to nature while the animal *hsien* help humans in need. These tasks are essential to the *hsien*'s integrity and character. No Shinma can deny these ancient callings, at least not for long. Any kamuii or hirayanu who does so violates the Mandate of Heaven itself. That being said, even the Shinma can be duped and put at cross purposes. Suppose that a member of the Technocracy, the Five Metal Dragons, explains to a tanuki how damming up a river will give the people in the nearby village fresh, clean water. The hirayanu might be all for it, while the local *suijen* may well be outraged. How can the two ancient roles of guarding sacred places and answering human prayers ever take precedence over the other?

Questing

The destiny and higher purpose of hirayanu is to take on tasks given by kamuii and to quest for knowledge, wisdom and even fabled treasures. Most hirayanu find quests irresistible; the whole process provides chances to meet new people, see strange places and stir up a good fight. Though less frequently, kamuii too can engage in quests, particularly if these journeys relate to protecting their element or righting an injustice. The quest is one of the basic elements of many *hsien* chronicles. The Storyteller's job is to make sure this theme doesn't merely become treasure hunt of the week. That would get boring real quick! One way to do this is to intersperse lengthy quests with one-shot adventures, perhaps involving characters' personal problems or troubles in the local area. Both Storytellers and players appreciate the occasional break from long, detailed story threads.

Justice

Justice is a coin with two faces. One side is utterly impartial, fair and honest, where to err on the side of a greater good is acceptable, even if the guilty suffer lessened punishment. The other side is rigid, absolute and exact; here, there is no room for extenuating circumstances. Kamuii must walk the fine line between these ideas, and all too often, some stray far to one side. For example, some Shinma may think the *chu-ih-yu* cruel in their inflexibility, while perhaps the *komuko* are so impartial, they remove themselves from the reality of an affair and cannot understand the plight of the victim. How will characters act when confronted with a violation of justice? Will they be able to walk the thin line, or will they step firmly to one side? Incorporating notions of justice into a game is an excellent way to explore a character's personal demons.

Nature

Western changelings enjoy the benefits of Glamour from the beauty of creativity — art, music or poetry, for example. Shinma rejoice more in the beauty of nature and the simplicity of rural life. The elements of wood, fire, metal, water and earth influence them eternally. Arguably, the kamuii are closest to nature; they are its protectors and reap its protection in turn

according to their element. But the hirayanu, too, are tied to nature and the elements. Even though the kamuii may have been chosen by the Mandate of Heaven as nature's protectors, only the basest hirayanu would turn his back on a polluted river or mountain. As Western technology and modernization creep into the Land of Eight Million Dreams, China's natural beauty and resources become more precious. More *hsien* than ever will be called upon to insure that the forces of nature and the elements are allowed to continue their endless flux.

Plotting

Just as you learned in junior-high language arts, a plot is simply a series of causes and effects. It's the sum total of events in your story and how the characters will shape or provoke those events. When thinking about plots for *hsien*, ask yourself some basic questions. What's the general sequence of the story? What actions will likely precipitate a climax? Are there certain settings and Storyteller characters you'll need to detail? What is the source of conflict in the story?

Essentially, **Land of Eight Million Dreams** is a new world and a different game than **Changeling**. The usual fantasy movies and romantic legends you've used as inspiration have little in common with the people and places in the East. So where do you get some new ideas? If you don't know much about Eastern mythology, pick up a good, general world mythology book. Read some of the many Chinese or Japanese legends. Other **Year of the Lotus** products are also excellent idea sources.

Once you've got a basic concept for a game, expand it into a series of scenes, just like you were writing a story. An outline of your plot, listing possible events, is a good way to start. Try to put yourself in the players' shoes; what possible reactions will they have? How will these alter the plot? Any experienced Storyteller will quickly tell you that the only certain thing in laying out a plot is that the players will change it! Often, though, this can turn out to be more fun than what you'd originally planned, if you're willing to go wherever the wind blows. It's one thing to gently steer the players toward certain events in the plot; it's quite another to shove them along your strict path of encounters and settings. Letting the players and their characters make some choices and become interwoven in the story is a must.

The wise Storyteller invests some time in writing out her ideas and preparing notes and characters. A basic plot outline is often enough for experienced Storytellers; others prefer more detailed summaries ready at hand. Flowcharts are also useful, as are maps and floorplans. If you anticipate a big fight, make a quick-reference sheet for the adversaries that includes Will-power, Health Levels and certain statistics and powers, such as Wits + Alertness.

In short, Storytellers need to do whatever it takes to be prepared for just about any direction the players take. This won't stop them from dicing up your carefully planned plot like kung pao chicken, but it does help you improvise and roll with the punches. The bottom line for everyone, Storyteller included, is to have a great time.

CHARACTERS

Never forget that the characters should be central to your chronicle. If you have flat, two-dimensional Storyteller characters, your players will be bored. If the players' characters are cardboard cutouts with no flavor and no story to tell, you'll have trouble coming up with plots for them. Everybody in the game needs to invest some time in creating meaningful, interesting characters.

Most good characters evoke some kind of theme; it's your job to discover those themes among the players' characters and bring them into the story. Maybe Stewart's *chu jung* warrior Lu Wong suffered a terrible and humiliating defeat at the hands of a powerful warlord who stole his protectorate. Lu Wong has spent several years searching for a way to reclaim his honor and lands. Here's a character with a clear theme: a quest for justice. Lu Wong feels he was wronged and seeks a fair rematch. Vengeance may or may not come into play; Stewart makes clear that Lu Wong's main goal is to reclaim his lands and bring the warlord to the attention of the *chu-ih-yu* and *komuko*. In the course of the chronicle, Stewart hopes the Storyteller will give him a chance to see Lu Wong's goals resolved.

The more difficult part for the Storyteller is making sure the characters' stories are told dramatically. A smart Storyteller wouldn't let Lu Wong kill off the warlord in the first session; instead, she'd try to throw out bits and pieces to build up suspense and intrigue over the course of several sessions. A lot of time may pass in the chronicle before Lu Wong sees justice served. The real trick is remembering that this same use of character drama and story must take place for every character. Sometimes, Storyteller characters also become intrinsic to the troupe, and players will be disappointed if their characters' friends and enemies in the chronicle don't get creative development as well.

One way to help the troupe flesh out their characters is to have players write letters or stories from their characters' points of view. Another tool is the solo or pair game. This lets most of the attention focus on one or two player characters' interests without worrying about boring others. Maybe Joan really enjoys dramatic conversations and lots of court intrigue, while James and Jessica like fast paced combat. Running a solo game fraught with political conspiracies for Joan will satisfy her urgings, while a pair game set around a couple of big, nasty fights might better please Jessica and James.

Players and Storytellers have a dual obligation to each other. First of all, players should contribute ideas and wish lists for their characters; telling the Storyteller how much they want to visit the ancient temple in Tibet or track down the evil warlord provides fuel for the chronicle to keep going. Most Storytellers appreciate feedback and suggestions from players on what they want to do next. The Storyteller has an obligation to help players make their characters interesting, or in the worst-case scenario, to gently explain to players that certain characters may not work. If you're the Storyteller, running a chronicle set around questing for the three ancient secrets of a lost *suijen* shrine, a character who's a loner or likes to just sit around the

pagoda all the time is not going to fit. It's no fun for anyone if the Storyteller can't make sure that all the characters have a reason to be involved in the chronicle.

Settings

More than most games in a Western milieu, the Storyteller will have to spend considerable time fleshing out setting details for a *hsien* chronicle. He can't say, "Okay, you're at the Hotel Montgomery freehold when your cell phone rings," because in many cases, such ultra-modern conveniences as cellular phones don't exist in rural China. Sometimes, diseases that have been conquered in the West for years wipe out whole villages in the East. While cities like Beijing and Shanghai are thriving metropolises with more than nine million people each, they're only part of an enormous nation. Big cities may have modern conveniences, but most smaller towns don't. And forget the picture of Chinese home cooking as sweet and sour chicken with won ton soup and egg rolls; some families are lucky to have rice and a few vegetables once a day.

Take some time to "visit" China and know her better. Check out tourist guides and picture books from the local library. Most westerners don't know what an Eastern temple or home looks like — get a world architecture book and look over the floorplans. Watch some travel movies or talk to people who've actually traveled to or lived in China. Like the United States, it's an enormous place with an endless variety of people; unlike America, China has a history many thousands of years old.

Since many *kamui* guard shrines and natural phenomena, a lot of the chronicle may be set away from the city. Similarly, as *hirayanu* often undergo quests, you'll have to know a bit about the intricacies of Chinese geography. A good place to start is detailing the characters' own community. Is this a small village? A neighborhood in a large town? What mortals or *shen* make up the local scene? Where do the *hsien* meet to discuss their goals — a garden, a restaurant or maybe a riverbank? Do their human friends and family live nearby? What kinds of places do the *hsien* frequent in the community? As the chronicle develops, you'll want to add details for the characters' personal dwellings, too.

Of course, the setting is still only as good as the characters and plot within it. A good setting will enhance your story, not overshadow it. Make sure you can achieve a balance between interesting places to visit and a creative, exciting tale. Remember, it's not how much lurid detail you add to the lost palace of the Fu Ching Prince, but what happens once the characters get there that makes for a memorable story.

Conflicts

What's the major source of grief for the characters in your chronicle? Are they besieged by greedy *Kuei-jin*? Is an old and powerful *hengeyokai* nagging them? Maybe a bunch of harmless but nosy Western changelings are poking around. Sources of conflict in a story can likewise include the characters' own shortcomings and fears. Since a major theme for the *Shinma* is nature, they might also face natural disasters or encroachment by forces seeking to destroy China's resources. Whatever the

Names

What are you, the Storyteller, going to do when the players inevitably ask you the name of the fishmonger on the corner? Names are different in China; a surname comes before a given name. Your best bet for finding Chinese names is a baby name book or a fictional source with lots of characters. Consider building a name list before you sit down to play because you may not be able to use the old trick of looking in the phone book for a handy name. Adding the personal touch of not just a fishmonger, but Li Jen the Fishmonger, really enhances your setting.

case, most chronicles benefit by having regular conflicts. Granted, the players will get bored if you simply throw the same villain at them week after week, but having a long-term enemy that shows up every so often can be dramatic. Following are some suggestions for adding conflict to the characters' busy lives. Storytellers should once again note that other *shen* have a difficult time recognizing *hsien*, unless they manifest in their wani forms. It'd be a mistake to have every Kuei-jin in the neighborhood jump the character, unless they'd seen her in her true form.

Kuei-jin

They are the Hungry Dead, outcasts wandering lost on a karmic path. They seek Chi and wisdom that they might fulfill their destinies and find Balance. To them, the *hsien* are like the most rarefied jade — vibrant and animated with the energies of life. Moreover, the *hsien* are some of the richest *shen* in terms of Chi; it fills them not only with Yin and Yang but also Yugen. Shinma are walking feasts to the Chi-starved Kuei-jin; they blame the vampires for all their earthly woes. Most Shinma firmly believe that it was the Kuei-jin's treachery that broke the Middle Kingdom from the spirit realms.

This, of course, means that the *kamuii* and *hirayanu* are often targets for the Kuei-jin. They don't undertake attacks on *hsien* lightly, but these guardians and messengers are often too tempting for Eastern vampires to resist. Once a Kuei-jin begins taking Chi from a Shinma, it is very hard for her to resist taking it all, destroying the *hsien* forever. Over the years, this has happened much too often. Now the *hirayanu* and *kamuii* take no chances; a Kuei-jin is almost always an enemy and treated as such without exception. On the other hand, this is the East, and absolutes don't really exist. Some whispered tales circulate about rare meetings of *hsien* and Kuei-jin that end in peace. Most *hsien* don't believe such dangerous stories, though. At present, a state of uneasy truce or cold war exists between these two families of *shen*.

Kuei-jin make excellent and interesting villains for a chronicle in the Land of Eight Million Dreams. They're often old, terrible and wise. They want Chi at all costs, no matter how many Shinma they must tear through to get it. Perhaps, there's an ancient "warlord" who demands sacrifices from a local village: a fresh young boy or girl every harvest season. The *hsien* player characters could answer the human parents' prayers and investigate, only to find out the warlord is a Kuei-jin. They'd be



fools to attack the ancient demon head-on, so how will they defeat him and save the humans? For a more twisted plot, perhaps a secretive patron hires the characters for several missions over the course of an ongoing story; then, in a dramatic climax, the Shinma discover their benefactor is a Kuei-jin! Will they go mad with despair and kill the possibly innocent vampire (yeah, right), or search for the facts before attacking? Hopefully, the Storyteller has emphasized the horror these undead beings represent to the Shinma, setting up a difficult dilemma for the characters.

Hengeyokai

The hengeyokai and Shinma have much in common: They are both spirits made flesh, walking the paths of the Middle Kingdom in multiple forms. Both *hsien* and hengeyokai tread the dragon lines and guard dragon nests, the rare and valuable sources of Chi. But most of the hengeyokai can visit the one place *hsien* cannot: the spirit worlds. For this reason, the Shinma are drawn to the hengeyokai as Those Who Change are reminders of a gift lost. At same time, many *hsien* are insanely jealous of the hengeyokai. What decrees in the Mandate of Heaven made it so that the hirayanu and kamuii are forbidden the Other Lands while the shapeshifters are not? This envy sometimes makes for an uneasy relationship.

Shinma certainly get along better with some hengeyokai than others. The Zhong Lung, Khan, Nine-Tails and Nagah have all had relatively cordial dealings with the *hsien* in the past, particularly the hou-chi. Certainly, there is some friendship between the nyan and the Khan, or the Nagah and fu hsi. The Tengu and Hakken confine most of their activities to Japan, making little effort to show themselves to the *hsien*. The Samebito and Kumo rarely deal with either hirayanu or kamuii, while the Nezumi may work with some Shinma in secret; their skills would certainly be of use to the Yellow Lotus.

The hengeyokai might well fill the role of risky allies in a *hsien* chronicle. They've got some overlapping goals and interests with kamuii and hirayanu, but at the same time, they're unpredictable and wild. What's a calm and peaceful komuko to do when confronted with a raging hengeyokai? Most of these shapeshifters wish to turn the Wheel of Ages forward full circle to its beginning, while some Shinma want to prevent the coming of the Sixth Age, the Age of Sorrow. The Storyteller should make it clear that while the hengeyokai may be helpful associates, they've got their own troubles and duties that, to their minds, go far beyond the personal quests of the *hsien*.

Lightning People and The Five Metal Dragons

Hermits, martial artists, wandering monks — these are but a few of the mages, the chi'n ta, mysticks who manipulate the awesome forces of True Magick. Nonetheless, they are still mortal, and many particularly attract the attention of hirayanu. Mages are a curiosity to the Shinma; they aren't necessarily forces of Yang or Yin, like the Kuei-jin. They aren't restless spirits or shapeshifters, like the hengeyokai. So what are these chi'n ta? A lot of *hsien* would like to know more. Of course, they

have little notion of the ceaseless rivalries between the Wu Lung and Wu-Keng. (See **The Book of Crafts**.) Likewise, few hirayanu or kamuii recognize the fallen ones, servitors of the Yama Kings, known in the West as Nephandi. The Shinma are mostly just interested in the chi'n ta's understandings of alchemy, balance and the Ten Thousand Things.

The force posing the most danger to the *hsien* is the Technocracy, known in the East as the Five Metal Dragons. Among Western changelings, dealing with Technocrats would inflict harsh Banality; the situation is slightly different in the Land of Eight Million Dreams. While the traditionalist and mystical Li Shen, Xian Mo and Wu Hsien recoil in horror at the destruction the Dragons' innovations bring, the draw of Western technology is almost irresistible to the more worldly Shinma. They point out the benefits to mortals in having health care, reliable communications and clean water; they refuse to see the price the Metal Dragons exact for their knowledge. An unfortunate number of Shu Shen, Xian Mu and even Yü warriors have poked their curious fingers into the Dragons' affairs and pulled out hands burned to a crisp.

The Metal Dragons work well as devils by the deed in *hsien* chronicles; they're like opium dealers, offering free samples at first, then charging higher and higher prices for their wares. The other chi'n ta are probably more elusive, which may make some *hsien* nag them all the more. Whatever the case, hirayanu in particular will have a hard time ignoring these powerful mortals, particularly if they ask for help.

Waigoren

"Are you Confucian, Taoist or Buddhist?" asks the sidhe politely.

"Yes," replies the suijen.

Sir Percy scratches his head in confusion, unable to comprehend Bountiful Countenance's answer.

Also known as gweilo or gaijin, the Waigoren are the barbaric foreigners. Many *shen* believe they're crude, rude and socially inept. The Shinma find most of them bizarre, particularly the Kithain, because they're totally consumed in a battle of absolute dualities. To a *hsien*, even a creature of greater Yang will always harbor some amount of Yin; the two shift and change, transmuting one into the other, always and forever. *Hsien* believe, rightly or wrongly, that Waigoren have no true understanding of the nuances of gray, and assume that all must be either black or white. What's more, many suspect that the Westerners want to invade the Land of Eight Million Dreams and impose their own rigid feudal system. It's not that the Shinma don't want balance, hierarchy or structure; it's just that they're happy with their own complex system and see no need for the Waigoren to change it.

But the bottom line is that the foreigners *are* coming. Asian markets are opening more and more to Western investments every day. China is no longer closed to outsiders as it once was, and a number of Waigoren visit every year. What changeling wouldn't jump for the chance to meet mortals who believe in magic, people calling out to whoever listens for their prayers to be answered? China may be a Western changeling's dream come true.

Orient Express

So you want the changeling troupe to take a trip to the Land of Eight Million Dreams, but how do you get them there? How will the Shinma behave? What will the Kithain think of these Eastern changelings?

Getting to China shouldn't be too difficult; trains and planes arrive in the major cities of Beijing and Shanghai every day. Shanghai is also a major port, and since China's takeover of Hong Kong, visitors have even more gateways to the country. Bolder characters may even search for trods to the Land of Eight Million Dreams; Storytellers should note that both the Shinma and certain hengeyokai may take this encroachment on the dragon lines as a threat rather than innocent curiosity.

Why are the characters traveling to China — to acquire knowledge, fulfill an oath or open diplomatic relations? Maybe their mortal jobs rather than any Kithain connections require their travel. In that case, finding other changelings might be an interesting and pleasant surprise. Many Shinma will be inquisitive about the Kithain; the fu hsi, hanumen and nyan may welcome the visitors if the Western characters make an effort to

be polite. Most kamuii will be more suspicious, wondering if these strangers come with hostile intentions toward the land and resources. Two things might help the foreigners ease into the *hsien* society: a willingness to learn Chinese beforehand and bringing gifts. Such efforts should impress the *hsien* and show them the Kithain are not all greedy, self-centered barbarians.

Finally, if you're apprehensive about running a series of adventures in the Land of Eight Million Dreams itself, consider sending your troupe to Chinatown in New York, Chicago or San Francisco. The Shinma also frequent these miniature versions of their homeland and give you a more convenient way to introduce the Kithain and the *hsien*. Perhaps a friend of the player characters went to check out a rumor of Shadow Court activity at a Chinatown restaurant and never returned; the Kithain start searching and meet some Shinma along the way. Whether these Eastern changelings help the Waigoren wind their way through the tangled streets and stage a rescue is up to the player characters. The Kithain might make lifelong allies — or enemies.



Hsien stories with the Kithain of Concordia and the West can simply be about knowledge. Maybe the changelings are curious about the East and travel to China to gather information; perhaps they've heard all the legends and like Marco Polo, want to become famous explorers. In this case, they may find friends among the kamuii and hirayanu. On the other hand, a crowd of oathmates who believe they're superior to the backwards and rural Shinma will be in for a rude awakening when some chu jung toasts their ill-mannered selves in a bonfire. Note that the hsien won't be particularly concerned about the whole notion of Seelie and Unseelie; they'll be much more interested in knowing why the changelings have come to the Land of Eight Million Dreams and what they want.

Hunters

Two distinct types of mortal hunters pursue the Shinma. First are the Shih, and for hsien, they are likely the lesser threat. These men and women want to maintain balance, and they're wise enough to understand that even such odd creatures as the Shinma have a place in the natural order of the Ten Thousand Things. What goads them to action is when hsien or other shen act in such a way as to disrupt that precarious balance. A solitary hou-chi who quietly guards a sacred forest? Fine. A hanumen who once in while "borrows" the village cattle? Tolerable. But a jealous nyan who viciously claws up the schoolgirl who stole her latest paramour? Not acceptable! A Shih will want to get to the bottom of what happened and find out why the nyan behaved in such a disruptive manner. Such actions go against the hirayanu way of helping humans, and the Shih can't abide such imbalance. Naturally, the kamuii might have something to say about this; the Shih are clearly stepping onto their turf as far as justice among hsien goes. While battles between these groups may be purely ideological, don't forget that everyone has a breaking point. Both Shinma and Shih have their honor and reputations at stake.

The second type of hunters, members of Strike Force Zero, are much more deadly. They're not interested in balance or justice; they could care less why a hsien hurt a human or burned down a factory. The party responsible must be hunted down and stopped at all costs, and this usually means death. Exterminate the problem, and it won't come back to haunt you; that's the Strike Force Zero motto. Moreover, they don't necessarily give credence to the action of individuals; if a single Shinma did something wrong, then all of them are responsible and have to pay. These efficient warriors are well trained and equipped, if a bit naive as to the workings of the hsien and other shen. Strike Force Zero agents should be extremely dangerous opponents in the chronicle. For much more information on these and other Eastern hunters, check out **Demon Hunter X**.

Hsien

Not all the hsien coexist in peaceful harmony. Two groups of hsien in particular, the Shu Shen and the Yellow Lotus, are trouble for everyone. The Shu Shen defy the concept of balance and pursue extremes in both carnal appetites and savage violence. They loot, plunder, murder and generally stain the

reputation of benevolent kamuii and hirayanu everywhere. In a chronicle, they make excellent bodyguards and mercenaries for more powerful shen, including Kuei-jin or perhaps even Kin-jin. They may even have strong allies in the Sabbat or among servants of the Yama Kings. A classic story might be two old friends, one Shu Shen and one Xian Mo, facing off in a duel. Can the fallen hsien be redeemed, or should he be put out of his and everyone else's misery?

Members of the Yellow Lotus, on the other hand, are much more subtle. They're a secret society scattered among kamuii and hirayanu; their goals seem contradictory, and no one knows their true agenda or even who makes up their membership. One seemingly obvious aim is fomenting rebellion from within the ranks of the Shinma. The Yellow Lotus dredges up ancient rivalries and long-forgotten wrongs in an effort to disrupt the order of the Li Shen ministries. On the other hand, the Yellow Lotus has often claimed responsibility for punishing hsien who are too blatant about appearing in their wani forms; they're sort of a secret police in this regard. As their work ranges from the spread of rumors to outright assassination, the Yellow Lotus makes an ideal shadow organization for a chronicle. It could be that they have some agenda from another supernatural being or even the Shih. On the other hand, they might just be stirring up trouble for their own love of chaos. These are the type of people that may have a "sleeper" among the characters, if a Storyteller feels this intrigue would work well with her players.

Endings

A good ending to a long-running saga isn't a simple thing. Storytellers need to make sure they have all plot threads neatly tied up, ready to unravel for the next series of adventures, while also paying attention to the whims and needs of the players. Did Joan set great stock on having her chu-ih-yu character sit in judgment against the evil fu hsi assassin? Had Jeremy been looking forward to a fight between his heng po martial artist and Buck's chu jung swordsman? If so, and you the Storyteller don't deliver on the players' hopes for their characters, they'll be disappointed.

Another tip to remember is letting the troupe finish what they started. Don't end a session in the middle of a battle; no one will recall what was going on by the next time you play. Similarly, try not to end a multi-part story without allowing the characters to reach a good stopping point. Even if they weren't able to complete their quest, ending for a winter break in the komuko's temple is much better than leaving characters stranded in the wilderness during a snowstorm.

Most importantly, after the game is over for the day, sit down and talk to the players. Did they like the session? What was the most fun? Did they write down all pertinent information about secrets discovered and people met? What things about the game would they like to change? Many times, players themselves come up with excellent ideas for the next series of adventures. If they mention how neat it would be to visit the Lost Cavern of Nine Silver Orchids, then you the Storyteller have the beginnings of a new plot in hand.



Story Seeds

The following are some suggestions for Storytellers to run adventures in the Land of Eight Million Dreams. You should feel free to expand and adapt the seeds to best suit your chronicle and characters.

Paper Tigers

An unfortunate kamuii has been enslaved by a supremely powerful *shen*. This villain could be a Kuei-jin, an embittered *hengeyokai*, a mighty *chi'n ta* or even another *hsien*. In any case, the kamuii victim has been set up as a puppet guardian of a territory, and forced to commit atrocious acts, she suffers terrible shame. One of her courtiers gets word to the player characters: Help my mistress escape her prison! Of course, this is easier said than done. What is the best way to assist her?

Will the characters opt for an all-out assault, or will they seek to blackmail the *shen* overlord after a session of intrigue at his stronghold? This thread would be ideal for a mixed troupe of *hirayanu* and kamuii.

Precious Jade Flower

A revered *hou-chi* asks the *hirayanu* player characters to escort his ward to a new guardian and teacher. This child, says the kamuii, is precious and magical, destined to fulfill a great good for all the *hsien*. The *hirayanu* must protect the girl at all costs. Of course, there'll be tons of trouble along the way. Maybe a rival kamuii wants the girl for himself and sends his own servants to stop the characters. Perhaps the girl wants to escape all the attention and fend for herself. Either way, it's a long road to travel with an energetic child and enemy warriors blocking the path.

Death of a Thousand Ebony Knives

A vicious *hui t'ung* of Shu Shen are evidently killing highly placed politicians and wealthy persons, then taking over the bodies in the *kun shou* ritual. Worse, this bloodletting is presumably part of a much larger power play. Such behavior is despicable in the eyes of all *hsien*; moving from human shell to human shell in *kun shou* is not to be taken lightly. How will the characters stop this nastiness? Why are the Shu Shen committing these atrocities? What if the Shih decide to intervene? This should be a dangerous and frightening plot for both kamuii and *hirayanu*.

Fortress of the Burning Heart

Hsien-jin have few connections with their mortal families, but what about the *hsien-tsu*? While most leave home in early adulthood, will they completely turn their backs on their mothers and fathers? How about siblings? In this story seed, a human villain, such as a crime lord or *tong* leader, threatens a *hsien-tsu*'s beloved brother or sister. The Shinma has an obligation to help, even though others in his *hui t'ung* disagree. They believe that renewing ties with the mortal family is cruel, a false promise for parents and grandparents to pin their hopes on, only to be disappointed with the *hsien* leaves again. This moral

dilemma gives the Storyteller and players chance to explore character development.

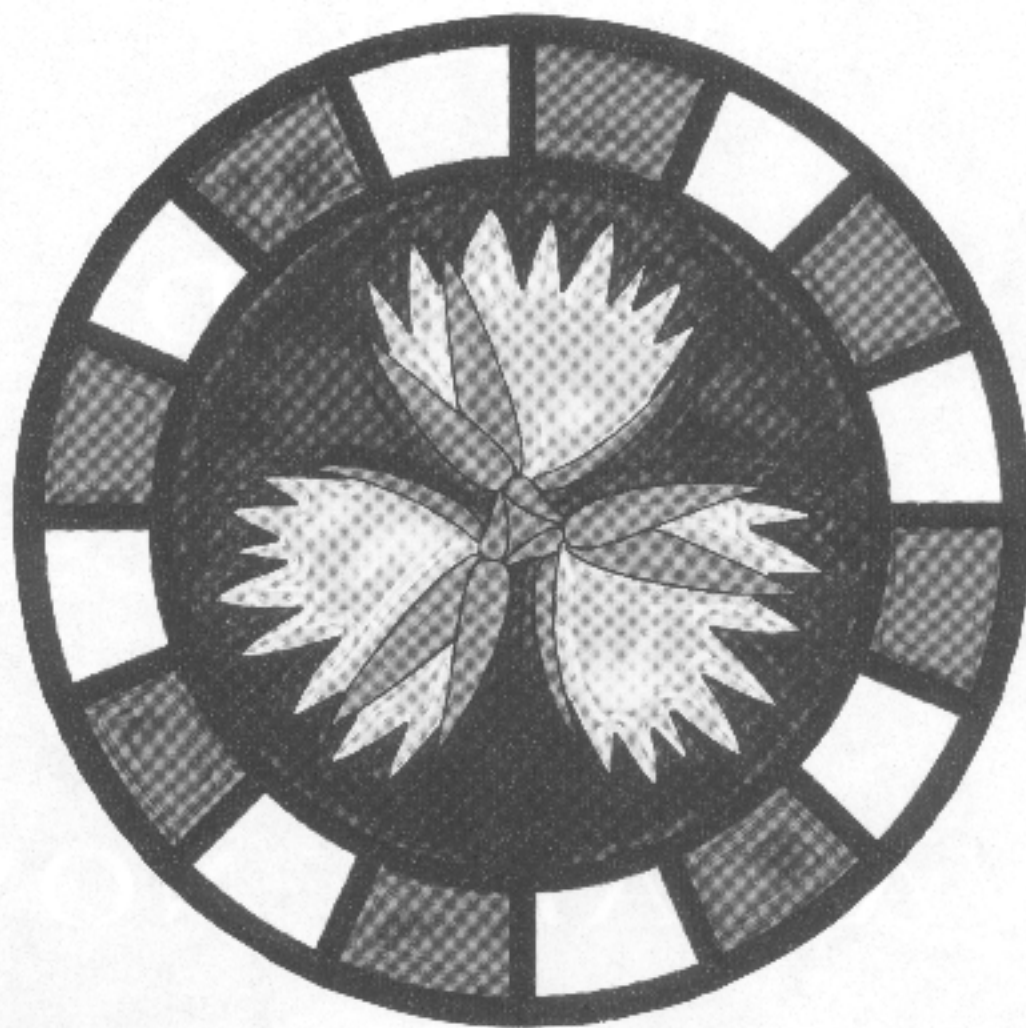
Nine Bamboo

In strictest confidence, an advisor of the local ruler comes to the player characters. He needs help from a relatively unknown hui t'ung in finding a spy-assassin; the only clue the killer leaves is a mahjongg tile, the nine of bamboo. The advisor gives the characters money and supplies, and suggests they begin their investigation at court, but he warns them they must be discreet. If you have had a "sleeper" character in your chronicle, such as an agent of the Yellow Lotus, perhaps she is working with the Nine Bamboo Assassin. She can lead the characters on all the wrong paths and maybe frame an innocent rival for the crimes. If the characters are clever, discovering the real assassin and their companion's duplicity, they'll reap rewards from the local

court — and eternal enmity from the Yellow Lotus. After all, there's good and bad in everything.

Inn of the Kindly Moon

A group of curious Kithain come to China for the Festival of the Tenth Moon, the Festival of the Dead. They're diplomatic emissaries from their kingdom, but they've also been instructed to investigate the magic of the Eastern changelings. If your troupe has both Eastern and Western changeling characters, this is a great opportunity for a crossover. Another fun option would be to invite **Changeling: The Dreaming** players who know nothing about the Land of Eight Million Dreams to join this session. This way, everyone involved can be in the dark; the Shinma (and their players) know nothing of these new Kithain and will want to find out more.



Band of Eight Million Dreams™

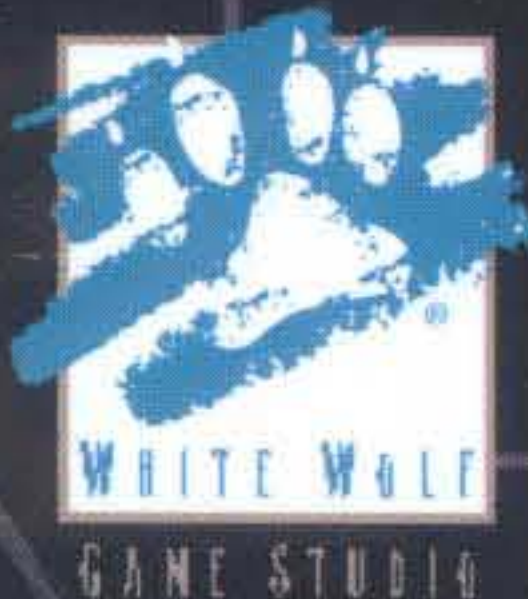
Lost Spirits of the East

In ancient times, the fae of China served as the messengers and servants of the spirit world. In those days, they traveled freely between the realms of spirit and flesh. They were the emissaries of nature, the guardians and protectors of the sacred places. The *hsien* (known as changelings in the West) are the descendants of beings who were trapped in the realm of flesh during the Mahakala (or the Shattering). Divided by both form and court, the *hsien* struggle to survive in a world of mortals who have turned their back on the realm of spirit, a world full of other supernatural beings who would destroy them.



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