Blood & Silk™



A Sourcebook for Kindred of the East™ and Vampire: The Dark Ages®



By Bruce Baugh, Geoffrey C. Grabowski, Ellen P. Kiley and James Kiley

Credits

Authors: Bruce Baugh (Taking the Second Breath, Disciplines, Tales of Silk, Barbarians and *Shen*), Geoffrey C. Grabowski (Many Roads Back, Ways Under Heaven), Ellen P. Kiley (Xiong Ren, *Hsien*, Cities of the Dead), James Kiley (Hungry Dead of the Middle Kingdom)

Additional Material: Philippe R. Boulle

Developers: Philippe R. Boulle and Richard E. Dansky

Editor: John Chambers

Art Director: Richard Thomas

Layout & Typesetting: Brian Glass

Interior Art: Mike Danza, Patrick Lambert, Brian LeBlanc, Drew Tucker and Melissa Uran

Front Cover Art: Jamie Tolagson

Front & Back Cover Design: Brian Glass and Tor Johnson

Authors' Thanks

The whole **Blood & Silk** team dedicates the fruit of their labor to Richard E. Dansky.

Bruce Baugh thanks Dr. Suzanne Barnett, who bears so much responsibility for hooking his interest in China.

James Kiley thanks Bill "Hobbes" Fisher for being such a useful Japanophile, "Mighty" Bob Fetterolf for his copious archaeological library and Ed "dirque" Huang for his copious Chinese mythology library.

WHITE WOLF
GAME STUDIO

735 Park North Blvd.
Suite 128
Clarkston, GA 30021
USA

© 2000 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages, Mage the Ascension, World of Darkness and Aberrant are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Hunter the Reckoning, Werewolf the Wild West, Mage the Sorcerers Crusade, Wraith the Great War, Trinity, World of Darkness Blood and Silk, Dark Kingdom of Jade, Dark Kingdom of Jade Adventures, Doomslayers Into the Labyrinth, Guide to the Camarilla, Hengeyokai Shapechangers of the East, Kindred of the East, Kindred of the East Companion, Land of Eight Million Dreams, Mage Storytellers Companion, The Sorcerers Crusade Companion, The Thousand Hells, Transylvania Chronicles, Tribebook Stargazers, Umbra The Velvet Shadow, Vampire Storytellers Companion, Werewolf Players Guide, Vampire Storytellers Handbook., Werewolf the Dark Ages, World of Darkness Combat and World of Darkness Demon Hunter X are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. Reader discretion is advised.

For a free White Wolf catalog call 1-800-454-WOLF.

Check out White Wolf online at

http://www.white-wolf.com; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter One: Hungry Dead of the Middle Kingdom (World)	10
Chapter Two: Many Roads Back (Dharmas)	48
Chapter Three: Taking the Second Breath (Characters)	62
Chapter Four: Ways Under Heaven (Traits and Systems)	82
Chapter Five: Tales of Silk (Storytelling)	126
Chapter Six: Barbarians and *Shen* (Crossovers)	134
Appendix: Cities of the Dead (Locations)	160



INTRODUCTION

This night of no moon
There is no way to meet him.
I rise in longing —
My breast pounds, a leaping flame,
My heart is consumed in fire.
— Ono no Komachi, *Kokinshu*

Welcome to the Fourth Age

As Christians would reckon it, the year is 1197. European kings wage their wars and embark on their crusades utterly unaware that civilizations older and greater than their own rule the day — and the night — in distant lands. Far to the East lies the Middle Kingdom, or China and the many cultures that surround it. For millennia, this area has been a center of culture and empire, its influence spreading far and wide.

However, it is now a time of change and chaos. Great China stands reduced in the form of the Southern Song dynasty, which rules but half of the empire's traditional lands. Nihon (what we would call Japan) is just emerging from a bloody civil war whose wounds have yet to heal. And in the north, the Mongol horde is but a few decades from riding forth and lashing out at the near totality of the known world.

For mortal men and women of the Middle Kingdom, these troubled times are but another shift in fortunes and dynasty — troubling perhaps, but not unprecedented. For the *shen* — the vampires, shapechangers and spirits who inhabit the Asian night — these troubled times herald the turning of the Age, the end of their era and the beginning of another, more terrible time.

The Hungry Dead

Millennia ago, in the legendary Third Age, the August Personage of Jade elevated men and women to divinity. These Ten Thousand Immortals — or Wan Xian — were warrior-poets and philosopher-kings, battling demons and creating a golden age. But the Wan Xian became greedy and fell from grace, feeding from their mortal charges in order to gain ever more power. At the end of the Third Age, the August Personage cursed the Wan Xian for all time, shattered their legendary home on Mount Meru and turned his back on them.

Now, they are the Ten Thousand Demons, the Wan Kuei. Mortals who have earned a sojourn in Hell, but who are strong enough to escape it, return to their bodies as Wan Kuei. They live by night, feeding on the blood and breath of humans. In theory, they seek enlightenment and redemption but, all too often, play power games and indulge in corrupt practices, just like their predecessors.

Others

The Wan Kuei are perhaps the predominant force among the *shen*, but they are hardly alone. Far from the urban homes of these vampires, the shapechanging Xiong Ren — the Ferocious People — rule. Betrayed by the Wan Xian in ages past, they do not trust the demons and blame them for the turning of the Age. The *hsien*, descendants of the August Personage's agents abandoned on Earth, also hold a mighty grudge. Magi — known as chi'n ta — and ghosts also move about the Middle Kingdom.

And deep in the shadows lurk the Yama Kings, who rule the Thousand Hells, and their agents. Many are those willing to sell their souls to the masters of Hell, including the Kumo Goblin Spiders, the depraved Kura Sau of the *hsien* and the hidden *akuma* of the Wan Kuei.

The Turning Age

The Fourth Age — known as the Age of Beautiful Sadness — has been one of melancholy and growth. As human society burgeoned around them, the Hungry Dead developed their courts and Dharmas, finding glimmers of hope. Now the Great Wheel is preparing to turn again and bring the Age of Darkness to bear. Waves of fear and worry flow through the night courts. What will the new Age bring? Who will come out on top?

It is a time of change and anxiety, when the young grab what they can and the old hold on to what they have. Away from the eyes of man, the night is covered in silk... and bathed in blood.

How to Use This Book

World of Darkness: Blood & Silk opens up the end of the Fourth Age and the medieval Asian night as a setting for your chronicles. It provides you with the tools necessary to tell stories in this faraway time, including historical and geographical information, many new and adapted game systems, character creation tips and much more.

Principally, **Blood & Silk** is a historical supplement for **Kindred of the East**. It focuses on the Wan Kuei — Asian vampires — and their activities and assumes they will be the characters players portray. Although **Blood & Silk** can be read alone, where material is unchanged from **Kindred of the East** we have not repeated it (there are only so many pages in the book!). So to get the full Disciplines, Traits and game mechanics of the Wan Kuei you will need a copy of **Kindred of the East**. As with that book, you will also need a copy of the core Storyteller game mechanics, preferably (but not necessarily) **Vampire: The Masquerade** or **Vampire: The Dark Ages**.

Although the Wan Kuei are the "stars," **Blood & Silk** appears under the "World of Darkness" banner and contains material for other games. Chapter Six deals explicitly with using **Blood & Silk** with other World of Darkness games and goes into the status of the various *shen* of the Fourth Age, including Asian changing breeds, mages and changelings. Both Chapter One (the setting) and Chapter Four (the systems) are also useful for non-vampiric chronicles.

Dates

Some of the dates that appear in **Blood & Silk** are given as "the XXth year of the Foo dynasty," which becomes rather cumbersome for the Western reader. However, it is equally implausible for the Wan Kuei narrators of the historical sections to give dates in years CE and BCE. Therefore, consider the following table of dates:

Date	Event
c. 2200 BCE	Xia Kingdom begins
c. 1750 BCE	Shang dynasty begins
1122 BCE	Zhou dynasty begins
221 BCE	Qin dynasty begins
206 BCE	Han dynasty begins
220 CE	Three Kingdoms era begins
265 CE	Jin dynasty begins
317 CE	North and South dynasties begin
581 CE	Sui dynasty begins
618 CE	Tang dynasty begins
907 CE	Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms era begins
960 CE	Song dynasty begins
1127 CE	Southern Song dynasty begins
1197 CE	The present day

What Blood & Silk is Not

Most importantly, **Blood & Silk** is not an academic text on medieval Asia. Although we have done our very best to make things as accurate as possible, this is a work of fiction about vampires and other monsters. With limited space, we also could cover only so much of the Asian night. Those who want or need more information on the realities of the time should look to the recommended reading list.

Blood & Silk is also not a standalone product that provides the final word on the Asian World of Darkness at this time. **Blood & Silk** deals almost exclusively with China and Japan at the end of the Fourth Age. Korea, India, Tibet and Southeast Asia all get passing references (some longer than others), but space limitations meant we had to concentrate on the core of the Middle Kingdom.

Chapter by Chapter

Chapter One: Hungry Dead of the Middle Kingdom is the meat of the book from a source material standpoint. Through a series of documents written by Wan Kuei and

others, this chapter explores the world of the late Fourth Age. The basics of the Wan Kuei, the mortal history of the Middle Kingdom, the various courts of the Hungry Dead and the lands of spirit are all part of this chapter.

Chapter Two: Many Roads Back explores the beliefs of the Hungry Dead at the time of **Blood & Silk**. Each of the five Dharmas defined by Grand Arhat Xue gets a new treatment for the period. The chapter also examines the Fivefold Way and the role of heresy at this time.

Chapter Three: Taking the Second Breath takes you through the process of character creation in the late Fourth Age. Of course, many of the basics are the same as in **Kindred of the East**, and those sections are only briefly summarized. There are differences in the dead of this Age, however, and they get the most attention.

Chapter Four: Ways Under Heaven is a grab bag of Traits and game systems useful for the Fourth Age. These include (among other things) new Abilities and P'o Natures, a new set of Disciplines and new guidelines for spirit travel. This chapter also includes a wide variety of systems useful for representing mundane and supernatural situations typical of the period. New weapons and combat systems also appear here.

Chapter Five: Tales of Silk builds on the storytelling material in **Kindred of the East** and provides you with ways to evoke the atmosphere and themes of a faraway time and place.

Chapter Six: Barbarians and *Shen* explores the other inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom and the World of Darkness in general. Xiong Ren shapechangers, Asian ghosts and mysterious *hsien* all get coverage. These sections serve booth as tools for those running chronicles featuring Wan Kuei and as historical appendices to other modern Asian supplements like **Hengeyokai**, **Land of Eight Million Dreams** and **Dark Kingdom of Jade**. This chapter also provides guidelines for bringing Western characters (and, through them, **Vampire: The Dark Ages** and **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** chronicles) into the Middle Kingdom of the late Fourth Age.

Appendix: Cities of the Dead provides details on a series of cities scattered throughout the Middle Kingdom. Each can serve as the center of a chronicle or a place worth visiting during its course.

Lexicon

The following brief lexicon includes terms used throughout **Blood & Silk** and provides a quick reference. You can also consult the much larger lexicon in **Kindred of the East**, most of which is equally appropriate to **Blood & Silk**.

Age of Beautiful Sadness: The Fourth Age in the Great Cycle, and the one coming to an end at the time of **Blood & Silk**.

Age of Darkness: The Fifth Age of the Great Cycle, and the one on the horizon at the time of **Blood & Silk**.



akuma: A Wan Kuei who has entered the service of the Yama Kings, a crime punishable by utter destruction. Accusing someone of being *akuma* is a deadly serious charge in the Fourth Age and rarely done for solely political reasons.

ancestor: Either a highly enlightened Wan Kuei or one who leads a court.

arhat: A vampire who has completely mastered her Dharma. Each Dharma theoretically has a single arhat, the most enlightened practitioner who has not ascended to The Hundred Clouds.

bodhisattva: A supremely enlightened vampire, one step below the arhat.

chi'n ta: "Lightning Person," a mage. The more correct transliteration is *shinta.*

chih-mei: The cannibalistic and savage stage all Wan Kuei go through upon rising from their graves.

Dharma: One of the philosophies that allow Wan Kuei to rise above their savage state and find enlightenment.

disciple: A young Wan Kuei, just embarked upon her Dharma.

gaki: The Japanese term for Wan Kuei.

hin: A vampire who has been brought out from the cannibalistic state of the *chih-mei* but who has yet to choose a Dharma.

hsien: One of the surviving members of the celestial bureaucracy trapped on Earth since the end of the Third Age; they survive by inhabiting mortal bodies. The closest thing to an Asian equivalent of the European changelings.

jina: A vampire rising in enlightenment and status; still young, but no longer a disciple.

mandarin: An enlightened (and often politically powerful) vampire. Mandarins are the most influential members of most courts, ranking just below the ancestors.

Middle Kingdom, the: Used in **Blood & Silk** to mean the Asian World of Darkness. In reality, it is the Chinese expression denoting China itself.

Wan Kuei: The Ten Thousand Demons; the risen vampires of the Middle Kingdom. Called Kuei-jin in later years.

Wan Xian: The Ten Thousand Immortals; the blessed demigods and philosopher-kings of the Third Age whose cursed descendents are the Wan Kuei.

Xiong Ren: The Ferocious People; the shapechangers of the Middle Kingdom, most especially those tied to the Beast Courts. In Japan, they are called hengeyokai ("Changing Phantoms"), which will become the generally accepted term in years to come.

Xue: A term meaning both blood and study, it is the name given to the Grand Arhat of the Wan Kuei; Xue founded the five accepted Dharmas and the Fivefold Way, the great social principle of the vampires.

Yomi Wan: The Thousand Hells ruled over by the Yama Kings. All Wan Kuei have spent time there and escaped to rise from their graves. Often just Yomi.

Naming and Transliteration

There are two dominant styles of transliteration from Chinese characters into English words, the Yale transliteration and Pinyin. While neither is truly correct (the only way to glean the myriad of meanings in a Chinese character is to learn Chinese), the People's Republic of China and most modern scholars use Pinyin. **Blood & Silk** does so as well. If names appear totally foreign to you or if another source contradicts what you see here, check to see if your reference material refers to the modern capital of China as Peking (Yale) or as Beijing (Pinyin). If you're used to Yale, you'll have to do some translating in your head as we go. Our apologies in advance. The only exceptions are a few game terms introduced in **Kindred of the East**, which we have left as is to avoid confusion.

On a similar note, we have deliberately chosen, in one or two cases, to use names familiar to the West rather than more proper transliterations. More specifically, we use Confucius and Genghis Khan, rather than the more technically correct Kung Fuxi and Chinggis (or Qinggis) Khan. These names are familiar enough to Western readers that we continue to use them rather than add to the confusion.

Inspirations and References

You don't have to turn into a freelance scholar to enjoy **Blood & Silk**; in fact, you don't *have* to do anything but put this book to use. If you'd like to get additional information, however, it can be difficult to know where to start. Here we present our recommendations of particularly useful resources of different sorts, along with a few words about how to spot bad ideas.

Non-Fiction

• **The Cambridge Illustrated History of China**, by Patricia Ebrey. Ebrey is one of the foremost scholars of Chinese history; here she's produced a remarkably *non*-academic volume, lavishly illustrated, meticulously indexed and altogether readable.

• **Daily Life in China on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion, 1250-1276**, by Jacques Gernet. This is an academic work in the old style, but if you want to know how people lived, how they organized their lives from day to day, nothing beats Gernet's comprehensive survey.

• **The Chan's Great Continent: China in Western Minds**, by Jonathan Spence. This is your best source for information on the perspectives that should shape characters in crossover games. Spence here (as in all his books) digs up great anecdotes and sets them in their proper context.

• **Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China**, by Arthur Waley. Waley was one of the most graceful translators of Chinese literature into English, and this is one of his masterworks. He introduces the concepts and presents long passages from the works of Mencius, Chuang Tzu and Han Fei Tzu. With this in mind, you can more easily portray a member of the Chinese civil service and anyone else inclined toward philosophy.

• **Japan From Prehistory to Modern Times**, by John Whitney Hall. A dense, clear, useful history of Japan, this text is a good resource for Nihonjin chronicles.

• **A New History of Korea**, by Ki-baik Lee. A clear and useful history of Korea, this book illustrates a number of rather amusing anecdotes from Korean history as well.

Fiction

The hundred-chapter novel is one of the traditional Chinese art forms. These novels try to encompass the whole range of human experience into a single story. They therefore combine adventure, romance, farce, soap opera, tragedy, slapstick, sermons and just about everything else. It's worth the time to read these, as they provide marvelous windows onto many different parts of their societies. Many of these novels have multiple titles and sometimes widely divergent texts. You're not going to get a full lecture on the transmission of texts in culturally dubious contexts, rest assured, just some recommendations.

• **Journey to the West** is a **Blood & Silk** chronicle ready to go. It tells how a Buddhist monk sought out scriptures to bring home to his people and how Monkey King found enlightenment, among other matters.

• **Romance of the Three Kingdoms** deals with the fall of the Han dynasty in the third century CE. It features Cao Cao, one of the great villains of Chinese literature, the absolutely perfect brilliant and amoral general. Liu Ban, heir to the fallen dynasty, leads his motley band in war and peace, and many remarkable things happen. The treatment of the supernatural is worth noting — spirits and demons are everywhere, and it's not surprising for heroes to ascend and become gods at dramatic moments.

• **Water Margin** is a different sort of chronicle ready to go. The heroes in this case are unjustly accused brigands and various others in a story that's far too complex to summarize. It has unleashed demons, wicked monks, corrupt officials who get their just rewards and a lot more.

Many gamers like Barry Hughart's Chinese fantasy novels *The Bridge of Birds*, *Eight Skilled Gentlemen* and *The Story of the Stone*. They're thoroughly anachronistic, mingling together elements of different areas with a generous dollop of Hughart's own imagination. Don't treat them as gospel, but do enjoy them for a general feel for China with the mythic come to life.

Films

• **The Bride With White Hair.** No words can do justice to this movie. See it to see half the Wan Kuei Disciplines in operation. It has the aging swordsman seeking rest, the oppressive cult, the villainous leading lady with her mobile hair and hermaphroditic tendencies... it's got everything.

• **A Chinese Ghost Story** (series). Many of the rest of the Disciplines owe something to these films. Hundred-foot-long tongues, flaming sutras and bureaucrats who combine incompetence and venality in amazing quantity are just some of the highlights. Watch the fights to see what burning Chi is all about.

• **Seven Samurai.** Akira Kurosawa's classic tale of a village in need and seven men on the margin trying to do the right thing remains as entertaining, and as inspirational for chronicles, as ever.

• **The Silk Road (Dun Huang).** This tale of 11th century students pressed into military service in western China combines romance with some absolutely great battle scenes. Watch this for the almost unearthly landscapes of the high deserts and mountains.

• **Yojimbo.** This story takes place several centuries after the era **Blood & Silk** covers, but its essence applies nonetheless. A lone man with mysterious background and no name comes into town, confronts adversity and gets everyone who deserves it slaughtered. Along the way, more than a few complications ensue. The Man With No Name is a powerful archetype, and this is his definitive presentation.



Chapter One: Hungry Dead of the Middle Kingdom

The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus has it ever been.
— Luo Guanzhong, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*

Wan Kuei scholars uncovered the following seven documents after the destruction of the short-lived Hall of the Black Tortoise in Karakorum. Wan Kuei penned most of these documents, but the cache also included a seemingly purloined report from a Nezumi rat-changer to his Beast Court. Together, they paint a vivid picture of life, both mortal and immortal, at the end of the Fourth Age, during the time of Southern Song dynasty in China (what Westerners would call the end of the 12th century of the common era). Appended to several of these documents, most especially the two written by a disciple of the Court of Linan named Lu Feng, were commentaries by several prominent Wan Kuei of the time.

Teachings on the Night People

A Treatise by Lu Feng, South Wind of the Flitting Hummingbird *Wu*

The world is not as it once was, and we are not as we once were. Many among us refuse to accept this as fact, and I do not exaggerate when I say that by doing so they put their bodies and souls at risk. A three-year-old mortal child would not walk forward while looking backward, for he knows that he would come to harm in the attempt. Nevertheless, my ancestors and contemporaries glance backward to the glorious days of the Third Age while the Fourth Age pushes gallingly onward. Before they get into the habit of looking forward, I imagine that some of them will trip and fall.

Indeed, many already have.

To the reader, welcome. I am Lu Fen, Third Archivist of the Yellow Emperor, South Wind of the Flitting Hummingbird *wu* and a Demon of Linan, the richest and most glorious city of the Song Empire. I serve the ancestors of the Court of the Yellow Emperor, a role I have filled since my Second Breath some 20 years ago. The sheaf you hold is intended to bring you, presumably a *hin* trying to join our society, into a full awareness of our true nature and history. Some of it — such as the historical treatise I wrote just before reaching disciple status — is rather poorly written; though I was a scholar in life, I have since had decades to refine my art. Take from it what you can.

The Fallen

It is undoubtedly already clear to you that you are a monster; surely you remember some of your time in Yomi Wan, the Thousand Hells. Perhaps you remember some of the torment dispensed by the minions of the Yama Kings, the hells' overlords. But you have many questions.

What We Are

We are the Wan Kuei, the Ten Thousand Demons. We are born of mortal women, we live our lives as mortal men and women, and we die and go to Hell.

Something drives us to Yomi Wan. No man finds himself in the Thousand Hells without belonging there. Perhaps one is a vicious killer; perhaps another abandoned his familial duties to live in the city with the immoral and the unjust. Each of us broke the eternal laws in some fashion while alive and was cursed to Hell as punishment.

But strength brings us back. We are unwilling to remain in the hands of the Yama Kings, and our wills are strong, so we return to the lands above. We stride into our mortal bodies, take the Second Breath and return to the living world. We are the strongest of the dead; the common thief does not have sufficient fortitude to withstand the torment of Yomi Wan and still shout "I will not bow!"

And so we escape the Yama Kings, but our defiance — "I will not bow!" — can only take us so far. The August Personage of Jade has cursed us for our predecessors' madness, and his strength far outmatches ours. We cannot stand the light of the sun; we must steal life from mortals to remain part of this world; and our dark soul, our P'o, has gained a voice.

I lied a moment ago. You will find, student, that your elders lie to you every day. Sometimes, they wish to hide the truth, and other times, they wish to teach you to hear lies and seek truth. I lie because it aids my narrative. We did not escape the Yama Kings, at least not if their demon servants are to be believed. They let us leave Yomi Wan, because we serve their desires better here in the world than in Hell. However, true demons lie even more frequently than Wan Kuei do; I do not believe that the Yama Kings simply let us leave their domain.

Whatever the truth may be, we can never entirely escape the Lords of Hell. We would make good servants and better slaves; the Yama Kings may tempt you with promises of power or threaten your existence in order to acquire your services. We call those of the Wan Kuei who serve the Yama Kings *akuma*, and they have no place in our society. Do not bring an accusation of trafficking with the Yama Kings without proof, for a false claim of such corruption is likely to mean your own destruction. *Akuma* are strong, hide well and are thankfully rare.

Our society is a simple one, stitched together at the lowest level and leaving decision-making power in the hands of the eldest and wisest ancestors. When your elders deem you, a *hin*, worthy, they shall assign you to a *wu*, or corpse family. Like the mortals all around us, we put great stock in the value of ancient, established families. The *Bai Shi Jia* (Hundred Corpse Families) are the oldest, most powerful *wu* in the Middle Kingdom, but the passing of time has given us more Wan Kuei than can easily fit into a hundred families of five.

Each *wu* lives within the confines of one of the five August Courts. In the northern lands of Xixia, Jin, Manchu and the barbarian tribes, the unliving obey the dictates of the Court of the Black Tortoise. To the east, the blood-drinking warlords of Nihon and Koryo dance a delicate circle around one another in the Court of the Azure Dragon. The jungles of the south bear witness to the screams of mortals at the hands of the demons of the Court of the Scarlet Phoenix. The Court of the White Tiger dominates the west, and all pay heed to the Court of the Yellow Emperor in Changan, the heart of the Middle Kingdom.

In turn, the ancestors of each area host their own courts. While the ancestors of Linan, for instance, are part of the Court of the Yellow Emperor, it is rare indeed that the court imposes its dictates directly on a city's Wan Kuei. The eldest and wisest among us dominate the Five August Courts; in a perfect world, their merest suggestions would be seen as law by those less enlightened. This is no perfect world, but it is rare for the ancestors of a region to come into open conflict with each other or the rulers of their August Court. When it does come, it is terrifying indeed.

Some Wan Kuei are predisposed toward warfare, while others prefer subtler means of resolving disagreements. The Grand Arhat Xue, in his travels thousands of years ago, distilled the essence of Wan Kuei existence into five Dharmic paths. Those who see strength and courage in battle, for instance, tend toward the Devil-Tiger Dharma (although I have seen warriors on all five paths).

Xue created — or perhaps discovered — five Dharmic paths near the end of the Third Age. The Resplendent Cranes are Wan Kuei of honor and justice, while the vampires of the Howl of the Devil-Tiger seek mastery over the world through their inner demons. Vampires of the Song of the Shadow Dharma (also called Bone Dancers) seek solace in the tranquility of death, while Thrashing Dragons exalt the echo of life we retain. And the Thousand Whispers Dharma attempts to balance these polar extremes, not by denying any of them, but by embracing them all, over time.

The Resplendent Cranes and Devil-Tigers stand opposite each other, the Cranes to the north and the Tigers to the south. The Cranes pursue the dictates of the *Hun*, the higher, nobler impulse in each Wan Kuei. The Howl of the Devil-Tiger follows the drive of the *P'o*, the raging, animal impulse. This does not prevent members of the two Dharmas from getting along; indeed, each typically possesses insights that can aid the other.

Similarly, Thrashing Dragons and Bone Dancers align as opposites, though they are not enemies. The Thrashing Dragons stand to the east and are clad in the strength of *Yang*, the male impulse, the energy of life. The Bone Dancers are in the west direction; they draw their strength

from the *Yin* impulse, the female-oriented energy of death and decay.

The Thousand Whispers Dharma occupies the center of this cross. A properly balanced *wu* will consist of a Wan Kuei from each direction, though circumstances sometimes prevent this. Unbalanced *wu* rarely last for long, as internal and external stresses will shear such a group apart.

From the Commentaries of Dan Xiang:

Nonsense. I was in an unbalanced wu for more than a century, and it only broke apart when two of my brethren were destroyed by great beasts. Fate rarely brings the Second Breath to him of the proper Dharma to match empty seats in local wu; we must do the best we can.

From the Commentaries of Li Citan:

The writer speaks only of five Dharmas, but he is mistaken in thinking that those are the only ones that exist. Most Chinese Wan Kuei agree that only Xue's five paths hold the path to salvation, but other, heretical Dharmas exist and seem to keep their practitioners at least a step above the cannibalistic *Chih-Mei*.

What We Were

At the beginning of this lesson, I stated that we are not as we once were. When the August Personage of Jade created the universe thousands of years ago, he granted the most worthy humans immortality and vast power. These were known as the Wan Xian, the Ten Thousand Immortals. They could move mountains, it is said. They had the wisdom of gods and the beautiful spiraling music of the heavens followed them as they strode across the earth.

Consider the tragic love of Wang Yuanfeng and Yu Xiaocui. Beautiful and wise immortal Xiaocui fell in love with Wang Yuanfeng, the farmer's son, even though he was an idiot, barely capable of speech. Xiaocui loved him enough to heal his mind and usher him through the tests the August Personage demanded of those who wished to become immortal. She brought him into the great family of the Wan Xian, and their love brought joy to the very stones of the earth.

After two centuries, the dragon princess Cai Wai lured Yuanfeng away from his eternal love, and Yu Xiaocui's weeping drove hundreds of stars to extinguish themselves in the sea from sorrow. And when Xiaocui, overcome by jealousy, struck at Cai Wai, Wang Yuanfeng declared war on his former lover. Like many wars among the Wan Xian, this one caused great hardship. Using the rivers and seas of the Kingdom of Fu Yi as weapons against one another, Wang Yuanfeng and Yu Xiaocui flooded the Diyang Plain and drowned it. Such tragedies were common in the Age of Legends, for the loves of the Wan Xian could shake the heavens. The immortals warred over which mortal they loved or hated, which child they most adored and whom they would marry. Those were fiery days.

The Wan Xian were as wise as they were passionate. The August Personage of Jade took the wisest of them into Heaven to serve him directly, and he left doorways in the world for mortals to join the ranks of the immortals. Perhaps it was in this that the August Personage planted the seeds of our ancestors' downfall. He did not handpick the new immortals; any mortal who could pass the trials he placed in the world gained the power of the Wan Xian.

The few ancestors I speak to about this time period tell of sadness and loss and slowly dying rage. The Wan Xian integrated the newcomers into their society, and as more of the eldest immortals were taken to Heaven to directly serve the August Personage, the younger generations rose to positions of leadership and respect. With each successive century, fewer of the Celestial Emperor's handpicked immortals remained in the world.

This cycle repeated itself over thousands of years, until the wise kings of the Wan Xian gave way to lusty despots. Scholars who once searched for hidden poetic meaning in the fall of rain plumbed the depths of Yomi Wan for secret black magics and stole the Chi of mortals and servants of the Celestial Bureaucracy. The August Personage of Jade had created tests across the world to ensure that only the strongest, most moral and cleverest could cast off the chains of mortality, but unethical mortals subverted his true intentions and "solved" the tests without truly proving themselves worthy.

Finally, Tien Lu plucked the last blossom from the Tree of Immortality and three of the four remaining original Wan Xian, resigned to the coming fire, strode into Heaven before the August Personage of Jade levied his curse upon the rest of the Ten Thousand Immortals. They became the Wan Kuei, the Ten Thousand Demons.

From the Commentaries of Lun Ouran:

Many refuse to speak of it, but when the August Personage of Jade began to cast his curse down on the Wan Xian, four of the first chosen immortals remained in the world. Three of those entered Heaven before the curse was complete and so were spared. The fourth, Bao Zhong, entered Yomi Wan instead and so was also spared — or so it seemed. Bao Zhong fought several battles against the Yama Kings and their servants; after countless years of fighting, he declared himself a Yama King and his new realm the Hell of Never-Dying Sorrow.

Remember always that even the greatest can fall.

Lu Feng should be cautious in his writings, however. To mention the children is tactless and without enlightenment. Never repeat such stories; they are better left in the past.

At first only a subtle change came: The August Personage of Jade's tests — which had previously bestowed immortality — twisted in on themselves and became part of Yomi Wan. Where once a mortal might have to travel to the land of the wisest forest spirits and gain their favor, now that mortal had to die with wickedness on his soul and escape the Hell of the Burning Forest with his sanity intact. The Ten Thousand Demons did not breathe, and they had to steal Chi or succumb to death.

At once, two groups formed among the Wan Kuei. The wisest, those who had chosen to follow a Dharmic path to enlightenment, were able to keep their wits about them in the face of suffocating hunger. The most arrogant of the Wan Kuei, who had enmeshed themselves in the mundane world, had no spiritual anchor to hold onto as dreams of blood flooded over them.

Today we would call those latter Wan Kuei *chih-mei*. They were fantastically powerful *chih-mei*, of course, unlike the newly reborn Wan Kuei of the modern day. The philosophers and poets who kept their minds had no choice but to slaughter these maddened monsters that some had once called friends.

From the Commentaries of Dan Xiang:

Not all of the great chih-mei were slain. I believe that some of our elders, acting out of misguided compassion, drove former lovers into the wilderness or deep underground rather than killing them. Many of those monsters yet survive; some have gained self-control, while others insanely crave vengeance or a twisted sort of approval from their long-ago comrades. Still others have become vehicles for the Yama Kings' machinations against the mortal world; the Yama Kings Tou Mu and Rangda have turned these creatures' rage into tools over the last few centuries. These are dangerous beasts, and I have lost two wu-mates to them.

What Will Be

From the time we emerge as *hin*, we learn of the Great Cycle of the Ages: The world began in a state of perfection and unity with the August Personage of Jade and has grown ever more corrupt with the passing of time. The fall of the Wan Xian turned the Wheel from the Third to the Fourth Age thousands of years ago, and the time may be coming for the Great Wheel to turn again.

We are no longer the terrified and starving monsters we were early in this age; instead, we are confident and powerful. The younger Wan Kuei turn their gaze forward to the Fifth and Sixth Ages and the rise of the Demon Emperor, even as the eldest stare backward.

Some elders believe it will be possible to regain the favor of the August Personage and, in so doing, stop the whirling of the Cosmic Wheel. They may be right. The most learned among them say that the Wheel is greater than even the Celestial Emperor; for the universe to return to a state of unity and joy, it must first traverse the howling chasm of the Demon Emperor's reign.

That is not to say that many Wan Kuei look forward to the next age. The Yama Kings and their *akuma* slaves realize that with the closing of the Fourth Age, the world is sliding their way. As their confidence grows, they become bolder, sometimes striking at Wan Kuei that wronged them in the past or whom they see as future antagonists. Other Yama Kings prefer to subvert and corrupt the plans and allies of powerful Wan Kuei. The Yama Kings do remain circumspect even in light of this increased confidence; they know that to act openly too soon is to risk a massed attack by the Wan Kuei or the beastly Xiong Ren.

The Yama Kings often lay their snares for the youngest Wan Kuei, the so-called Running Monkeys who put the least stock in the oldest stories. They were lied to about the true nature of the world throughout their lives, and in all likelihood, they were lied to at least once by elder, ostensibly wiser Wan Kuei in the time after their death. Such a prematurely jaded soul is more likely to believe the lies and power fantasies of the Yama Kings than an older vampire might be.

Seeds of Conflict

Most vampires resist the temptations of the Yama Kings, or the Middle Kingdom would be awash in *akuma*. But even those who ignore the demon lords' seductive lies spend some time in rebellion against the elders of their court or *wu*. Unlike willful children, rebellious Running Monkeys are neither testing their limits nor selfishly demanding unearned privileges: Many of them simply desire to be treated like the competent adults they were before their deaths. And unlike parents, the elders of a court or *wu* are rarely uncertain about the proper course of action to take in confronting such a rebellion, whether that reaction is to let the young vampires work out their anger or to stamp out such displays from the earliest moments. To the dismay of the typical Running Monkey, the elder is more often right than wrong, which explains why that elder is further along in his Dharmic path than the disciple.

After the Age turned from Third to Fourth, five Wan Kuei emperors constructed their courts in different corners of the Middle Kingdom. Each court allows for different ways for its subjects to settle their differences: The Black Tortoise Wan Kuei engage in tests of endurance, while the Scarlet Phoenix subjects perform artistic competitions for the pleasure of the Yang Spirits of the south.

Conflict between the courts is not so easily handled, and Wan Kuei from any given court are typically free to wage night war on other courts' members. Treaties do arise, of course, and not every incursion leads to open hostility. The Emperors of the Five August Courts make

From the Commentaries of Li Citan:

Again, this is utter nonsense. Lu Fen has repudiated it in conversation with me. He wrote much of the last section in order to curry favor with his mentor, who was obsessed with precision and with correcting the errors of his students. His feelings on the matter, as we spoke, are as follows:

"The elder is *not* more often right than wrong. The elder has a more perfect understanding of his own Dharma and the way in which his soul interacts with that Dharma's core tenets. However, some elders choose to live on mountaintops and contemplate themselves rather than face the day-to-day unlives in which 'mere' Running Monkeys embroil themselves. Alternately, consider the example of the wizened and acclaimed Bone Dancer who is approached for advice in a matter of the P'o. It does not necessarily follow that his knowledge of Yin is applicable to questions of the demon nature. Age does not necessarily correspond with enlightenment; power and wisdom do not accrue naturally over time."

sure not to openly wage war upon one another. Many Wan Kuei claim that outright war among the Five August Courts will be a sure sign of the Fifth Age.

When Wan Kuei make war on one another, we are cagey about our actions. We are immortal, after all, and not one of us wishes to throw away the eternity before us on a moneymaking scheme or revenge plot. We plan carefully; we use cultivated and obedient mortals — or cultivated and obedient Running Monkeys — to attack a foe's material resources. Often, a simple building fire is enough to remind another demon not to trifle with one's property; sometimes, the price becomes much higher.

In recent years reports have trickled to the Court of the Yellow Emperor from the White Tiger and Black Tortoise Courts, reports of other creatures, vampires who are clearly not Wan Kuei. They may be the inheritors of the first *chih-mei*; they could be the children of Zao-lat, the disgraced disciple who stole wisdom from Xue, or they might even be the harbingers of the Fifth Age.

The Others

In the ranks of the *shen*, the supernatural beings of the Middle Kingdom, few suffer more ire than the Wan Kuei. Members of nearly every other race in the world wish to do us harm, and in the case of a few *shen*, the *majority* desires the destruction of the Wan Kuei. The following text cannot do justice to the wide range of beings who might cross paths with the Ten Thousand Demons or to their motivations; for every Hakken werewolf who craves revenge for his ancestors' humiliation in the Fourth Age there is another whose criminal pawns' interests are incompatible with a particular *wu*'s activities.

The Children of the Archer

More than 2,000 years ago, during the fall of the Shang dynasty to the Zhou, a mortal named Yi, the Excellent Archer, led a group of mystic warriors known as the Shih to war against the Wan Kuei. His people truly formed an impressive force; hundreds of men and women were driven to action in response to the violence our kind did unto theirs. Many of the Shih were Yi's descendants, and therefore, we often refer to them as the Children of the Archer. Yi himself is famed for extinguishing nine false suns created by the Scarlet Phoenix Court in an attempt to burn their enemies among the Court of the Yellow Emperor from the world. In a typically grandiose and careless gesture of revenge, the Phoenix Wan Kuei had decided that risking the deaths of thousands, or even millions, of mortals was not too great a cost to visit their vengeance upon the other fallen immortals.

In saving humanity, of course, Yi saved us, and for that, it might be thought that we owe his descendants a debt. But they have surely invalidated that debt through their relentless pursuit of *shen* throughout the Middle Kingdom. The Shih live in the distant wilderness, training only a few students at a time; they enter the cities only to hunt their favored prey, the Wan Kuei. And this they do exceedingly well, with an efficiency that makes us wonder if they are not somehow the pawns of another force.

The Ferocious People

If only the Xiong Ren — the Ferocious People, whom Nihonjin call hengeyokai — didn't pay so much attention to their ancestor-spirits. Then they would forget what the Wan Xian of old did. They wouldn't sit around their forsaken campfires in the middle of the wilderness, listening to their elders talk about how the jealous Ten Thousand Immortals set the Xiong Ren at each other's throats. And how even if the August Personage did curse them, the ancestor-spirits still call out for revenge.

But we do keep trying to shut them up.

Dozens of species of Ferocious People walk the Middle Kingdom. I believe that there is now or has once been a shapechanger for every animal that swims, flies or crawls across the world. From proud tiger-men to crafty fox-folk, the creatures fairly infest the wilderness, and some, like the rats, even encroach on the cities. I am told that, much as the Wan Kuei maintain the Five August Courts, the Xiong Ren have Beast Courts of their own. In general, however, I must plead ignorance with respect to these creatures.



HSIEN

The *hsien*, like the Xiong Ren, greatly mistrust the Ten Thousand Demons. And rightly so, for what race could forgive those who caused the Celestial Emperor to erect a Wall between the mortal and spirit worlds? The *hsien*, once functionaries and servants of the Celestial Courts, are trapped in the Middle Kingdom now, cursed for actions that they themselves did not take. The most excitable of the *hsien* would like nothing more than to destroy all of the Wan Kuei, burn all of the cities and be done with it.

Not all *hsien* are irrational; a Wan Kuei reborn in the last few years is not going to earn the ire of a wise old monkey-spirit who knows that the young vampire is not personally responsible for the creation of the Wall. But the *hsien* generally feel that they should never allow the Wan Kuei to come into great power again. In the words of an old friend, the cat-*hsien* Ditan Poon: "We may come to trust you individually again, but let us never forget that, as a group, you *broke the universe*. This is not merely a crime but an indescribable transgression. We might forgive, but we shall never forget, and we shall never again allow you such an opportunity."

Thus, a *hsien* might not attack Wan Kuei immediately but will watch to put a stone in the gears of a vampire's plans. Any Wan Kuei who has survived his first century is likely to remember watching one of his grand schemes for power dissolve around him like sugar in a rainstorm thanks to the machinations of *hsien*.

YAMA KINGS

The Yama Kings are our oldest enemies; as some mandarins would have it, they are our only true enemies, and the rest of our conflicts are nothing but internecine squabbling fostered by them. The lords of Yomi are indescribably powerful — only the most ancient bodhisattvas could even give thought to vanquishing a Yama King single-handedly, and dozens of *wu* have been lost attempting to slay even weak demon kings.

The Yama Kings seem most concerned with jockeying for position among themselves; according to prophecy, one of them will stand alone as Demon Emperor in the Sixth Age. Each Yama King gathers resources and attempts to undermine his peers' attempts to do the same, in preparation for that fateful day. Some, additionally, wish revenge on the Throne of Heaven for their exile to Hell and will go to great lengths to punish us, the one-time servants of their enemy.

AKUMA

Though each *akuma* is an individual, there are three general types of *akuma* who find satisfaction in interfering with the Wan Kuei. The first and most common is the Loyal Minion: This vampire slave believes strongly that every man needs a master and has chosen a Yama King as his. The Loyal Minion attacks the Wan Kuei out of duty to his liege lord. Younger Loyal Minions might have no idea what their lord's plan is, but as they grow older and savvier, they may

From the Commentaries of Dan Xiang:

Each Yama King rules his own hell, and though I do not doubt that there are a thousand hells, I cannot believe that there are a thousand Yama Kings. That suggests that there are unconquered hells. Such a suggestion amuses me, for I have a difficult time conceiving of a place more anarchic and wicked than Tou Mu's Hell, from which I escaped to take the Second Breath.

Stories of dozens of Yama Kings and their hells float about the Middle Kingdom. Mikaboshi rules a great stone and wood city; Danoku Ka works countless spirit slaves to their collapse digging a never-ending tunnel through the earth; and Tou Mu is the Queen of the Hell of Being Skinned Alive. These are surely not all.

become privy to more secrets or may simply get better at piecing together their liege's motivations.

The second kind of *akuma* is the Aggressive Independent. This half-demon has decided that the Yama Kings are certainly the side of winners in the great celestial war between Heaven and Hell, and he attempts to create a favorable impression on several Yama Kings by his daring activity against his former allies. He receives "blessings" from more than one Yama King but pledges eternal allegiance to none of them, hoping to remain independent for as long as he can.

The third and possibly most dangerous *akuma* is the Secretive Cultist. The Secretive Cultist is dedicated to furthering the cause of a particular Yama King and may have received a devilish investment or two from his secret liege but most likely has not. The Secretive Cultist works to expand the Yama King's power and influence without letting it become commonly known that he is *akuma*. Unfortunately for Wan Kuei culture at large, the number of Secretive Cultists is difficult to even guess at. All estimates suggest that it is thankfully low, though various courts are quick to suggest that *other* courts have much higher numbers of hidden *akuma*.

The History of the Middle Kingdom

A Treatise by Lu Feng, *hin* in the Court of Linan

Honored and wise masters, I humbly begin this treatise in the hopes that those more aged and wiser than I will find it worthy. For six years, I have studied under teachers of the Emerald Blossom *wu* and others of the Court of the Yellow Emperor, and if my writing abilities are sufficient to the task, then I can hope to give adequate description to their wisdom. Surely the best my feeble skills can hope to attain is a pale reflection of my teachers' lessons, for at my young age, I cannot hope to have acquired such brilliance for myself.

The history of the Wan Kuei has been chronicled by those far older than I — *The Green Book* of the First Historian of the Azure Dragon Court is surely the preeminent work of our collective chronology, but its hundreds of volumes and the dreadful mien of the First Historian render it inaccessible to those such as myself. I shall, therefore, gather together the tales and scrolls provided to me since I took the Second Breath and present them as follows.

The First Age

The First Age, according to the very oldest among us, was a time of perfection and harmony in oneness with all things. There were no Yama Kings, no Wan Xian, no mortals. All things were one in the person of the August Personage of Jade. The ancestors refer to this time as the Age of Heaven. It was the last time that the universe had a single will; there were no competing desires and there was no conflict. This was truly the Age of Heaven.

From the Commentaries of Lun Ouran:

This seems to be an auspicious place to note that few agree on precise dates for the turning of *any* Age. There are those — few, and probably mad — who feel that the present day remains a part of the Third Age. Each Turning has its signposts, and it is difficult to find agreement as to which of them is most meaningful. The astute reader may note that, indeed, there are those who believe that the Fifth Age began with the fall of Kaifeng to the Jin, 70 years ago. Most of us do not agree.

The Second Age

The Age of Beauty was a time of creation and great joy. The August Personage of Jade parted Yang from Yin and caused the universe to give birth to the Scarlet Queen and the Ebon Dragon. These two, the greatest ancestors of all of us, breathed life into the nascent energies all around them; the universe changed from a held breath to the first mists of reality.

The Queen and the Dragon brought all thinking beings into existence in the Age of Beauty, so that the fragments of creation could better appreciate the splendor of the Ten Thousand Things. Gods, spirits, *hsien*, Xiong Ren, dragons and the whole of the Celestial Bureaucracy condensed from Heaven. The Celestial Emperor then created mortal humans, who were given no particular task within the Bureaucracy.

Some members of the Celestial Bureaucracy abandoned their work and slunk off selfishly to found their own realms; as these creatures deliberately cut themselves off from Heaven's brilliance, they became degraded and

hideous. We now know them as the Yama Kings. The Yama Kings had no servants of their own, of course, and were forced to recruit or enslave mortals and other spirits.

The mistreatment of mortals and spirits brought the Yama Kings to the attention of the Celestial Emperor, but for reasons of his own, he did not strike them down. Instead, he created the Wan Xian by elevating 10,000 mortals to a state of blessed immortality and great power. The Wan Xian were not gods, but they were stronger than any mortal and could perform feats their descendants can only dream of. The Wan Xian set about ending the depredations of the Yama Kings.

Many of our historians gather stories of the quests that mortals undertook in order to join the Wan Xian. There are common themes in these stories. Mortals had to reach the spirit worlds — a much easier task in those days — and return safely home. The Dragon and the Queen desired not only the strongest and cleverest of mortals but also the wisest and most moral; the trials mortals underwent tested not only their resolve and stamina but also their capacity for self-sacrifice and ability to think on their feet. Some humans deliberately set out on a quest to find the secret to immortality, while humbler ones passed the tests almost by accident.

The Third Age

In the Age of Legends, kingdoms rose and fell with the stars of the Wan Xian. Three Wan Xian kings merit special note, however; together they are known as the Three Sovereigns. Some scholars consider them to be myth; *Annals of a Bygone Age* suggests otherwise. Although Wan Kuei historians cannot agree whether the Three Sovereigns were merely Wan Xian or, in fact, gods, they are certain that the Three did exist.

Fuxi, the first of the Three Sovereigns, taught his people to fish and hunt, how to raise cattle and silkworms and how to build permanent dwellings. Fuxi also created the eight trigrams used for divination with *The Book of Changes*; elder texts suggest that he was a master of divination magics.

Shennong, the second of the Three Sovereigns, showed his people the plow and weaving and how to leave proper sacrifices for the powers of Heaven. Shennong was the first doctor, as well; he taught the healing arts to many of his subjects and is said to have died testing a plant for medicinal properties.

Huang-ti was the third of the Three Sovereigns. He was the first alchemist and the first shipwright. He also developed armor and the earliest armies, in order to suppress barbarian tribes that threatened his people.

Despite the teachings of the Three Sovereigns and the wisdom of their successors, no earthly force could stop the fall of the Wan Xian; for their folly, the King of Heaven himself cursed them. Thus did the Third Age end and the Fourth begin.

From the Commentaries of Dan Xiang:

Two schools of thought dominate discussion of the Three Sovereigns. One school has it that the Sovereigns were the first mortal kings of the Middle Kingdom; that respect and honor are due to them for their grand deeds in the face of mortal weakness. The other schools argues instead that Fuxi, Shennong, and Huang-ti were Wan Xian rulers who granted their mortal subjects gifts from the Celestial Emperor. Presumably, then, the Sovereigns developed the oldest Disciplines we Wan Kuei practice today. I fall into the first camp. Not all ancient and wise rulers were Wan Xian.

The Fourth Age

In the aftermath of the fall of the Wan Xian, immortal despots and now-undead tyrants succumbed to the light of the sun, to ravening hunger and to peasant uprisings. Those who survived fell to warring with one another or disappearing into the wilderness to search for a way to appease the Celestial Emperor.

Some rare Wan Kuei refused to accept that their former master had truly cursed them; most of these were noble and ethical immortals who had not abused their power over mortals. Other than unconsciously taking lifesaving precautions against starvation, they carried on as they did in the Third Age, assuming that although they heard from the August Personage of Jade less often, he still watched over them and intended them to protect humanity from the depredations of the Yama Kings.

These rare stalwarts could hardly resist the tides of chaos, however. The lands we call China, Koryo and Nihon were split into 10,000 petty kingdoms, each one with its own minor mortal warlord. This situation lasted for millennia.

The Kingdom of Xia

Yu the Great, a strong-willed and quick-thinking mortal king founded the Kingdom of Xia. Numerous floods of the Yangtze River troubled much of Yu's reign; accordingly, he created the first real mortal bureaucracy the world had ever seen, to organize his subjects to build dikes and otherwise fight floods. Yu's subjects called their sovereign "The Great Engineer" due to his skill at designing these new dikes and irrigation canals

That bureaucracy's control over the great river allowed Yu and his subjects to irrigate their fields through the dry season. This allowed for a population explosion during the Xia era, an event welcomed by the Wan Kuei and fought by the Xiong Ren.

The Xia took great stock in the advice of supernatural creatures, whether they be the representatives of the Beast Courts or the *hsien* (few Xia kings risked trusting the Wan Kuei). Ambassadors from the Ferocious People tried

to exert enough influence to keep the mortal population in check, but the kings of the Xia knew that they could no more keep mortals from mating than they could the Sun from setting. Eventually, the Xia kings grew complacent and corrupt — some say under the influence of the Wan Kuei — and the dynasty collapsed.

The Shang Dynasty

The Shang were a civilized people residing in what we now call Shandong. They worked bronze to make weapons, armor and beautiful works of art; they used human and animal bones to prophesy the future; and they performed human sacrifice. The Shang invented writing, and all civilized people use the Shang pictograms (in somewhat different forms) today. No nomads, the Shang built cities along the coast and rivers and brought hunters and gatherers into the welcoming arms of agriculture and farming. They were also the first mortals to make use of jade in jewelry, weaponry and magic.

The Shang flourished for six centuries; when the dynasty fell at the hands of peasants and minor nobility, chaos came upon China for almost a century.

From the Commentaries of Li Citan:

The Shih demon hunters insist that it was their great ancestor, Yi, who brought down a demonically corrupt dynasty. But then, they also believe that the great dragon Kung Kung brought a hurricane across the Takla Makan when he bore Yi into battle against the Yama Kings and the corrupt Shang.

The Zhou Dynasty

The Zhou people descend from a figure they call Qi, who taught himself to farm and fish as a child and who became minister to an emperor of the Xia dynasty. They were a proud tribal people, who allied with the Shang only in an equal partnership.

The people of Qi arose in the remains of the Xia Kingdom; their nation, Zhou, was a wealthy one ruled by clever and charismatic kings. Zhou paid tribute to the Shang dynasty, for Qi's descendants were Chinese vassals.

But as the centuries passed, the Kingdom of Zhou attracted its own followers. Five centuries into the Shang dynasty, Xibai, the King of Zhou, had arbitrated impartially over a number of disputes between his fellow rulers and gained a sterling reputation as an honorable man. The king of Zhou became an irritant to the overlords of the Shang, who briefly imprisoned him. Not long after he was released, his son, Fa, led an army of Zhou soldiers and soldiers from the kingdoms of his father's allies to march on the Shang capital, a now-vanished city near Anyang. An epic battle ensued; the Zhou forces were more numerous and fought with greater vigor, but the Shang had tighter discipline, as well as better arms and armor.

In the end, the Zhou forces were victorious. Fa renamed himself King Wu ("martial king"); his late father Xibai, to whom King Wu piously showed great reverence, was posthumously renamed King Wen ("cultured king") in commemoration of his humility and skillful diplomacy.

King Wu and his younger brother, the Duke of Zhou, spent the rest of their lives trying to impose a heavenly order on a chaotic Earth. Wisely and beneficently, the rulers bestowed titles and fiefs of land on their own extended family, those who had aided them in the conquest of the Shang and those Shang nobles who had not hindered them in their quest for power. In each fief, one family was designated as the ruler of the land, and ministerial and counsel positions were distributed similarly: In one duchy, the eldest male member of the Fa family would hold the Ministry of Agriculture, just as the eldest male member of the Weizei family held the Duke's palace.

Some 250 years into the Zhou dynasty, barbarians raided the capital and killed the king. When the dust settled, the royal family had resettled in the eastern part of the kingdom, leaving the one-time royal domain in the hands of the Qin peoples.

Historians refer to the time after the capital's move as the "Eastern Zhou" period. It in turn is well described by two volumes, *The Spring and Autumn Annals* and *The Strategy of the Warring States*, each of which gives its name to part of the period. By now, the Zhou dynasty had passed its peak; the wise and benevolent emperors of the dynasty's early years were long dead, and it was a long fall into the chaos of anarchy.

The Spring and Autumn period was a time of great wisdom, both among philosophers and common folk. The mortal philosopher Laotze learned some of the secrets of Yin and Yang Chi from the Wan Kuei; he codified what he learned (often misinterpreting and overextending his understanding) into the code of ethics and behavior mortals call the Tao. Confucius and Buddha both lived during the Spring and Autumn period; Confucius's philosophies took hold in China right away, while the teachings of the Buddha took many years to leave their homeland to the west. And the Legalist school — which holds that the state must be more powerful than its subjects — served only to hasten the fall of the Zhou during the Warring States period. It gave tacit encouragement to kings' urges to ruthlessly put down peasant rebellion, which only brought about greater uprisings until the Zhou dynasty collapsed into a handful of feuding nations. It would be 200 years before China was finally unified under her first, greatest emperor.

The eldest Wan Kuei still active tonight hail from this era; while rumors persist of vampires that remember the Third Age, it does not seem possible that such millennia-old creatures could still exist on the face of the world. Either they have ascended to a state of true enlightenment

and rejoined the Celestial Emperor in Heaven, descended to a state of true debasement and now stand beside the Yama Kings, or they have been destroyed.

From the Commentaries of Lun Ouran:

As is the lot of the young, Lu Feng makes assumptions instead of drawing conclusions. He hears of Laotze speaking of Yin and Yang and assumes he stole such knowledge from the Ten Thousand Demons. Could it not be that Laotze glimpsed the truth under Heaven just as Xue did? That we stole his terminology because it was even more skillful than that in the ancient *Kaja* scripts? That is how I remember it.

Also, he sees no godlike ancestors and so assumes that none of us remember the Third Age. We do. My contemporaries do retreat from the world, for the world now changes too rapidly for most of us. I am an advanced student of the Thousand Whispers Dharma; rapid change is constancy and stillness. The modern world is somewhat frightening to the very oldest of us — a sentiment I am sure will amuse the young. Vast, crowded cities; explosive weapons; a far larger empire than we knew in our youth; and the Fifth Age on the far horizon: These things do not contribute to a feeling of security.

Yet at the same time, we have seen this before. War on all sides, rampaging barbarians from the north, civil uprisings in the peripheral states, conflict among the Five August Courts. This is the way of things.

The Qin Empire

The first Emperor of China was a bushy-bearded, scowling son of the Qin called Shihuangdi. He had the good fortune to come to power at a time when the rival kingdoms around Qin were extraordinarily weak; in the 20 years before Shihuangdi became emperor, there were four famines and a pestilence in the surrounding lands. His ascension was taken as a sign from Heaven.

From the Commentaries of Li Citan:

I HAVE LATELY HEARD TALES THAT THE FAMINES AND PESTILENCE WERE NOT ACCIDENTS. APPARENTLY A YOUNG WAN KUEI COAXED A PROVINCIAL LORD INTO HOARDING HIS FOOD; THIS LED TO HIS NEIGHBORS DOING THE SAME, AND SOON, WIDESPREAD HOARDING IN THE SOUTH AND WEST LED TO FAMINE IN THE NORTH AND EAST. AND THE FEROCIOUS PEOPLE SAY THAT THE PESTILENCE WAS THE RESULT OF THEIR DESTRUCTION OF A GREAT DEMON.

As King of the Qin, Shihuangdi sent his armies to conquer his neighbors and rivals. As the Qin conquered nearby kingdoms, they oppressed the new subjects; they slew the adult male populations of whole villages to ensure that no rebellion would arise and destroyed fortifications that could be used to defend against the Qin in an insurrection. Finally, more than 20 years after Shihuangdi became king, he conquered his final rival and declared himself Emperor of the Qin.

Qin Shihuangdi followed the Legalist doctrine, which states that, in order for the state to function properly, the text of law must be applied with precision and impartiality; any deviation from the written law is a deviation from the will of the king, and such a thing is unthinkable. Shihuangdi went about applying the law with unparalleled harshness, slaughtering the old aristocracy to eliminate the privilege of birth, conscripting laborers for state projects and imposing the death penalty for many trivial crimes. All the while, the Qin armies expanded the empire.

Beyond military victory and Legalist dogma, Shihuangdi's regime improved the nation's structure, laying out a radiating system of roads, unifying weights and measures and standardizing coinage and the writing system. As well, the Qin built the Great Wall across the northern reaches of the state. The Great Wall served a dual purpose: to protect the empire from the northern barbarians and to make it nearly impossible for peasants to escape northward out of the empire's reach.

In the eighth year of the empire, Shihuangdi began to systematically suppress unacceptable academic thought. A scholar suggested to the openly cruel emperor that he should obey the dictates of Confucius more closely. Not only was the scholar's advice ignored, not only was the scholar punished, not only were all classical works not from the Qin burned — but the death penalty was instituted as a punishment for discussing classical works in conversation or referring to them when criticizing imperial policy. To the surprise of few in the supernatural community, a number of scholars and historians joined the ranks of the Wan Kuei during Shihuangdi's relatively short reign.

When Shihuangdi fell victim to old age, his burial palace was said to be truly magnificent, covering acres and hosting terracotta likenesses of thousands of his most loyal soldiers. His chariot and much of his wealth was buried with him; construction of the palace had begun when he took the throne of Qin, some 36 years earlier.





From the Commentaries of Juang Guangyao:

To gloss over such an important era in our history is almost criminal. The Burning of the Books — as that period should properly called — was a traumatic jolt to the Jau Kuei, not a historical footnote. The imperial capital, the very seat of the Court of the Yellow Emperor, became the center of a purge of all things not associated with the Qin orthodoxy. You can imagine how a strict Legalist like Shihuangdi reacted to evidence of unliving ancestors and courts that didn't kow-tow to him. In the 15 years of empire, the city emptied of the Hungry Dead.

It was not only mortal texts that went in to fires, either. Ancient kafatexts transcribed on scrolls or on original tablets disappeared as well. Many of our scholars fled with what they could to the Longmen Caves and then scattered into many different places to hide their treasures from the secret police. How much of the wisdom of Kue and the glory of Meru was lost to us because of that emperor, Lu Feng? How much do you gloss over?

Oh, I know that the courtiers and mandarins in Changan and Linan these nights try to minimize the suffering of those days — it goes against their infallible, eternal image to concede that a mortal man tore down their courts and sanctuaries. If pushed on the subject, they will claim the Shih were responsible or crafty Ferocious People out for vengeance or other shen. I'm sure some of these enemies took advantage of our weakness, but it was the mortal, ordinary Qin Shihuangdi and his mortal, ordinary empire that brought us down.

In the nights of the Shang, we had ruled as gods. After the Qin, we knew we had to rule as kings, if only to keep track of the plans of mortal emperors.

It was only toward the end of Qin Shihuangdi's reign that Jau Kuei returned to the capital. The emperor was desperate for the secrets of immortality, and we slipped in cautiously with the cavalcade of scholars and mystics. I, for one, am very pleased that the various alchemists he called upon failed so spectacularly to keep the emperor alive. He may rule in the land of the dead now, but as far as I am concerned, he is welcome to it.

QIN SHIHUANGDI IN THE AFTERLIFE

Yin-focused Wan Kuei have traveled to Shihuangdi's palace in the Yin Realm of the Yellow Springs on more than one occasion. The ancient First Emperor has become the Jade Emperor of the Dead. Some say his realm has spun too close to Yomi to truly be considered a Yin Realm, but these things are rarely hard and fast. The realm of Yu Huang (as the sovereign now prefers to be called) is not pleasant for its now-dead residents, an unending reflection of the emperor's work as a mortal ruler.

Those Wan Kuei who travel to the Yellow Springs with the Dead Emperor's permission find Yu Huang to be a gracious, if somewhat wary host to those who earn his respect. He will gladly converse about history, the dangers and rewards of great power and goings-on in the afterlife. Incautious Wan Kuei who travel to the Yellow Springs without proper permission do not return. Their fates are not widely discussed, but it is known that Yu Huang considers himself the peer of the Yama Kings and subjects his enemies to fates deserving of Hell.

For more on Yu Huang and the Yellow Springs, see Chapter Six.

THE HAN EMPIRE

Qin Shihuangdi created a framework for all dynasties which followed his, even though the Qin dynasty itself (if there can be said to have been such a thing) ended with his death. Less than a decade after Shihuangdi's demise, former Qin functionaries founded the Han Empire. These bureaucrats, led by Liu Bang, did not descend from the traditional nobility, since it had been destroyed during Shihuangdi's reign. They came from peasant and bureaucrat families and seized power when a good opportunity presented itself.

Emperor Liu spread power throughout the empire to allow for proper governance, while keeping too much authority from concentrating in any one noble's hands. Such decentralization was necessary to support the Xiongnu Wars against nomadic raiders of the north. The nomads fielded tens of thousands of cavalrymen when the need arose, and they did not suffer the same demands of supply that imperial armies did.

A later emperor, the Confucian Han Wu-di, retained both mortal and supernatural advisors. He understood many of the allusions of the *I Ching* and was able to discover important relationships between the elements, directions, colors and virtues. Han Wu-di followed a poetic and symbolic aesthetic in his rule of the empire; he was truly one of the finest scholar-kings China has ever seen. Wu-di also staged numerous wildly unsuccessful armed campaigns against barbarians in the unforgiving high desert of the north, however.

The confederation of nomads that gave the Han such trouble collapsed around the same time that Han Wu-di died. Within a short time, those tribes petitioned the imperial court to allow them to serve as Chinese vassals; they were accepted, and that allowed the empire to further reduce its military presence in the north.

Conspiracies and assassinations were the rule of the day after Wu-di's death; eventually the Imperial Regent, Wang Mang, usurped the throne and ruled for some 14 years. Wang Mang was a tireless reformer, endlessly throwing out new schemes in attempts to get the empire to react more appropriately to its people's needs. He was assassinated during the 14th year of his reign; at this time, peasant rebels held Changan, and the imperial capital was relocated to Loyang.

Our kind was very active behind the scenes during Wang Mang's rule. Various courts and *wu* supported a dozen candidates for the throne, yet none were prepared for Wang Mang's death and fell to infighting when it happened.

We call the period after the relocation to Loyang the Later Han; it was a time when scholarship and learning took the forefront of Chinese culture. Paper was invented during the Later Han — before then, information that needed to be recorded for posterity was either carved into bamboo or painted onto silk. The Later Han also fought the first conflicts with the Tibetan people from the high mountains to the west, which would impact our own courts.

The first wars with the Tibetans decimated a tribe favored by Empress Fan of the White Tiger Court. Her retaliation against the responsible *wu* — a Yellow Emperor Court *wu* called the Piercing Fists — was swift and precise. The Yellow Emperor's counter-response was equally swift but absurdly imprecise; his forces lashed out against *shen* of all shapes and sizes in the Takla Makan and the mountains of Tibet. For centuries, the two courts were in a state of undeclared war, while the Xiong Ren and other *shen* of the region struck against all Wan Kuei they could find. The chaos did not settle down until the foundation of the Sui dynasty.

A combination of factors destroyed the Han dynasty. Inner court eunuchs struggled with outer court counselors and imperial advisors over access to the throne. At the same time, a peasant revolt led by a group called the Yellow Turbans marched on Loyang; though they were put down, the military itself was a tool in this power struggle. When a eunuch assassinated the military's imperial leader, the soldiers occupied the capital for years, and the emperor himself was a virtual prisoner. The empire spun apart.

THE THREE KINGDOMS

By the end of the Han, three provinces, Wei, Wu and Shu Han, had garnered enough influence and loyalty that

they were kingdoms unto themselves. The Kingdom of Shu Han had been largely self-sufficient before the Han dynasty collapsed; it had extensive resources and was very defensible. The Kingdom of Wu, a naval power, controlled much of the southeastern coastline of China and a fair amount of the Yangtze's length. The Kingdom of Wei contained the remnants of the old Han court and bureaucracy, as well as a large, well-trained army. The leaders of Wei spent generations attempting to unify the Three Kingdoms; it took 60 years for them to become one, in the form of the Jin dynasty. It lasted less than 20 years.

The eastern fragments of the Jin dynasty eventually led to the reunification of China, but the northern part of the country split into a handful of warring tribal states known as the Sixteen Kingdoms of the Five Barbarians. Jurchens, Tatars, Tibetans, Qidans and other barbarians dominated these kingdoms. Control over different lands changed hands dozens of times over the next century.

The chaos of ever-changing sovereignty in the north concealed an epic series of spirit battles, as a number of packs of Xiong Ren subdued and chained a Great Dragon in the forest of the far northern wasteland. This creature strains at its bonds even today, I am told.

The Sui Dynasty

The Sui dynasty was founded by a harsh, driven man named Yang Jian, of the Sui prefecture in the Northern Zhou Kingdom, some 350 years after the fall of the Han. He found himself on the throne of Northern Zhou as it completed its conquest of numerous border states. His rise to the throne was most auspicious: Mysteriously, some 59 other possible claimants to the Northern Zhou Kingdom all died at Changan during the three years leading up to his coronation.

From the Commentaries of Dan Xiang:

Mysteriously? You did not dig deeply enough. They were assassinations. Ask Pan Weiban, who took the Second Breath after his cousin Jian had him poisoned. He leads the Amber Wren wu in Changan today and is a demon of some power.

Among other interesting things, he says that his older brother was found dead, drained of blood, just a few days before he himself took his fateful sip. Did the elders of the Court of the Yellow Emperor groom Yang Jian, or did one of them simply owe him a favor?

The most important accomplishment of the Sui was the expansion of canals, vastly expanding commerce between southern and northern China. The Sui dynasty's second and final emperor, Yang Guang, who had no compunctions about literally working peasants to death on the canals, directed this effort. Though the Wan Kuei found the population's concentration in the northlands to be particularly useful, the lands of the south were rich and verdant, and the Sui were not foolish enough to let them lie fallow for long. Certainly the Court of the Scarlet Phoenix has benefited from the expansion; China's increased commerce with her southern neighbors makes travel for the Ten Thousand Demons far easier.

From the Commentaries of Juang Guangyao:

Several of Yang Guang's canals run along dragon tracks, thanks to a few Resplendent Cranes who wished to take advantage of their elemental affinities. Today, Cranes can far more easily use those lines than can Devil-Tigers.

The Tang Dynasty

Three powerful and charismatic mortals dominated the Tang dynasty. One of them has since taken the Road Back from Hell; the others are lost, living only in the memories of the mandarins and ancestors.

Li Shimin took the throne in Changan after his father Li Yuan died naturally. Li Yuan, the Duke of Tang, seized the empire to found the Tang dynasty at the urging of Shimin, his second son. During his father's reign, Li Shimin slew his brothers with arrows and had all of their sons executed, cleverly leaving himself as the only claimant to the throne. Emperor Li Shimin was a strong-willed Confucian with firm ideas about a ruler's duty to his subjects. He perfected many facets of imperial government, and his successors spent their entire reigns trying to match his deeds. Li was fearless and brave and inspired loyalty in his military leaders by often joining them on the battlefield. Li Shimin laid the groundwork for more than a century of prosperity and good times for China.

One of the most brilliant inheritors of his work was a former chambermaid, Wu Zetian, who slept and killed her way to the throne not 50 years after Li's death. She reigned as the only empress in China's history, and all of the Tang emperors that followed her were her descendants. When Emperor Li Zhi died in the 56th year of the dynasty, Wu Zetian's fourth son was placed on the throne against his will. Wu's first son had died during Li Zhi's reign, she commanded her second son to commit suicide (which he did), and her third son was placed under extended house arrest after defying her. But Wu could not stand in the shadows for long; after six years of her son's reign, Wu took the throne openly.

Empress Wu was hardly secure in her throne; her secret police killed dozens of princes and potential claimants, and bronze chests were placed in public squares for mortals to leave anonymous charges of treason for the secret police to read. But Wu was an effective empress; China thrived during her reign. Imperial armies repelled incursions by Tibetans, Turks and Qidans.

Wu's reign may have rated as the pinnacle of the Tang dynasty; a long, slow decline followed her, punctuated with rebellions by An Lushan and Huang Chao. In both cases, rebellions took place because the common

folk grew exasperated with the corruption of imperial officials. Finally, the growing independence of various provinces and the relative weakness of the imperial court at Changan led to the empire's spiraling off into many separate kingdoms, each claiming to be the true inheritor of the Tang dynasty.

Some of the most enlightened Wan Kuei lived during the Tang dynasty; many of these lived splendidly and went to Hell as a result of their conspicuous excess. Some of these ancestors and mandarins continue to exist in lush splendor, to show their contempt for the judgment on their souls; others lead spare unlives of quiet contemplation, hoping to redeem their lives' actions.

From the Commentaries of Juang Guangyao:

I see that the young student does not see fit to reveal that Empress Wu took the Road Back; neither An Lushan nor Li Shimin had the wickedness and strength, or so it would appear. She has progressed quickly along the Howl of the Devil-Tiger Dharma and today humbly studies the bodhisattvas of the Shaolin Monastery.

Five Dynasties, Ten Kingdoms

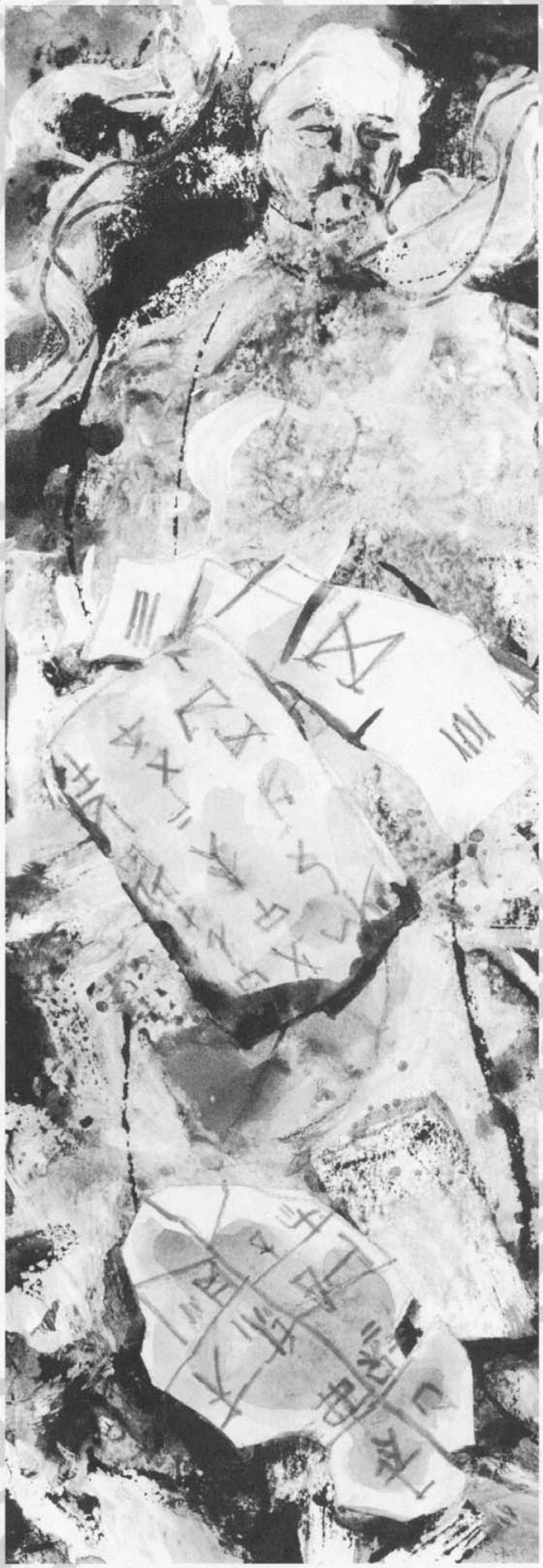
After the collapse of the Tang, the forces that tore the empire apart kept it splintered for more than two generations. Independent war leaders in the south staked out their own fiefs and ruled them as personal kingdoms, while in the northern reaches, five short-lived "dynasties" rose and fell in quick succession.

It was a chaotic era and a time full of opportunity for Wan Kuei; frequent fighting and palace intrigues, combined with a paranoid independence in the south, made for rich feeding and ample opportunity for influence-peddling and manipulation.

Some of the most powerful mandarins in modern Wan Kuei society walked the Road Back during this era; already adept at the finer points of intrigue, these monsters — such as Kang Liu, now Second Minister of Information in the Court of the West, and the Nihonjin Bone Dancer Atanasu, a renowned necromancer — have rapidly learned the fine points of Xue's Dharmic paths.

The Song Dynasty

The Song Empire reunified China after two generations spent divided; the leadership was determined not to repeat the mistakes that brought the Tang dynasty to its end. Thus, the Song was a time of philosopher-kings and poet-lords. The Song military declined in quality even as China faced increasingly hostile neighbors, in the form of the Liao Empire and Xixia, to the north. With the military in such disrepute, a great rift opened between soldier and civilian during the Song.



Many modern mandarins lived during the Song dynasty; oftentimes they speak contemptuously of the degeneracy of the modern age and the fallen empire. One who manages to get a couple of Yang-drunk mandarins to talk about "the good old days" is liable to spend at least an evening hearing tales of riches and outrageous fortune.

In the 158th year of the Song dynasty, Emperor Zhao Zi struck upon what he considered to be a brilliant plan. He would ally with the Jurchens, a huge tribe of raiders from the lands north of the Liao Empire. With Chinese infantry striking northward and Jurchen horsemen driving south, the Liao Empire would surely crumble. China would thus gain new territory, lose an increasingly unpleasant northern neighbor and build a new border with this recently discovered ally.

The plan worked too well. Unfortunately for Zhao Zi, the Jurchens did all of the work. Within seven years, the Liao had been ground under the hooves of the Jurchens, who reestablished the state as the Jin Empire. China's armies seemed content to sit and watch this happen; they acquired no territory. Jurchens who fought and died conquering the Liao found the idle Chinese armies to be worthy only of contempt. Rather than gaining a grateful young nephew kingdom along its northeast border, China found itself facing a skilled and hungry predator.

The Southern Song Dynasty and the Jin Empire

In the 166th year of the Song dynasty, general disaster befell the empire, and very particular disaster befell the royal family. The Jurchens of the Jin Empire raided southward across the great Hebei Plain and captured Kaifeng. Zhao Zi had abdicated in favor of his eldest son, in the hopes of warding off the anger of the Jurchens, but it was to no avail. China lost its capital city; the imperial family and more than 3,000 courtiers and servants were sent northward into Manchuria. Few were seen again.

Only Zhao Zi's ninth son, Zhao Gou, had managed to escape this fate; he was in Nanking at the time of Kaifeng's capture. On hearing of his family's fate, Zhao Gou declared himself the new Son of Heaven and the Southern Song dynasty to be the successor to the Song. Immediately after his coronation, the young emperor was on the run. For more than four years, the Jurchens pursued Zhao Gou through southern China, from Ningbo to Linan. The lakes, rivers and canals of the southern empire rendered the normally huge advantage of the Jin cavalry negligible, and the Southern Song troops were able to drive the Jurchen back northward. When the Jin retreated, Emperor Zhao was able to take up residence in Linan; the assembled court named Linan *Xingjai*, "visiting headquarters."

Young Wan Kuei — disciples and the youngest jina — have never known an era other than this one. They tend to believe that a divided, half-conquered China is the proper way of things, though some Running Monkeys support either the Song or the Jin due to lifetime loyalties.

The Coming Deluge

Any rational Wan Kuei can see the coming of the Fifth Age, off in the distance. Not this generation and not the next one, but perhaps the Fifth Age will greet us with the grandchildren of today's succulent young infants. Dozens of prophecies, short and long, have been written about the coming Fifth Age — many call it the Great Flood or the Great Drowning or the Great Conquest — and most of them contradict each other. Here is a small selection:

We will be laid low by the great family of the west; the tormented blood marriages they create are only pale echoes of our own fall, and their jealousy will split the Five.

The Son of Heaven will ride down from the North; he will conquer the world with earth, fire and water. Courts will fall; the Age will turn. Men will die; women and children will wail before his might and the might of his warriors.

A storm will come to the dead; the Yin Realm will shake, and the Wall will crumble before the storm's howling winds.

A court will turn away from the light of Heaven, and a great ancestor will fall to the Kings of Hell.

The breath of the heavens shall drown the warriors of the north.

Pale men from the West will walk in the conquered cities of the Middle Kingdom; they bring strange gods with them.

A great kingdom will drown; the rivers themselves shall obey the dictates of the Son of Heaven.

A mountain shall arise under the tomb of the First Emperor.

A Great Dragon shall awaken in the distant north.

The Beast Courts will make peace with the Courts of the Dead.

The eldest bodhisattva will be laid to rest.

A mortal kingdom will fall to Yomi Wan.

A desperate lord will once again hurl his kingdom against a superior foe; he will die, and his sire will lose the Mandate of Heaven.

Ten years of drought and pestilence will herald the coming of the Fifth Age.

Cast out, the bureaucrats of Heaven will form a sixth Great Court.

Life in Southern Song China

Report from Amrat Atansas, a servant of King Bogabo of the Xixia Beast Courts:

Your Majesty,

I send you this mail by courier. I trust him implicitly; he is not loyal to the Song Emperor and his court, and more importantly for my purposes, he is mute and cannot read. He has been well paid to bring you this document.

None of the information here is secret or hidden from the general human; indeed, most of it is simply observation of the humans' activities from day to day. Nevertheless, I send it to you as secretly as possible, for I know that the Dragon's Tear Court, which controls some of the route between Linan and Xixia, might take exception to its contents and analysis.

On the People and Their Daily Habits

The people of Linan and most of the Southern Song Empire are obsessed with cleanliness and washing to a degree I find most discomfiting. As you know, my breed — and by extension, the majority of my kinfolk — prefers to live in places where creatures such as fleas and lice are active and healthy. Appreciating as I do the traits of the people of Xixia, who are bathed twice in their existences (once after birth, and once after death), I cannot help but feel repulsed by the water-obsessed southerner. He uses an inexpensive public bath three times in the cycle of a month, in brisk cold water — only barbarians and foreigners require warm water — and, occasionally, uses soap to scrub grime away. Wealthy southerners have baths of their own; a few eccentric souls even bathe daily. Thankfully, the nobility of the imperial court here in Linan is of hardy northern stock and does not require such abasements before the god of cleanliness.

It may seem curious, then, that women of wealth in Linan go to great lengths to improve what nature has provided them with. They apply a white layer of makeup to their faces; they tint their fingernails (and some even their hands); they even apply oils to their hair, to improve its luster. Occasionally seen among the wealthiest families here in Linan are women with bound feet: The feet are tightly wrapped from a very young age, giving ladies of the court a delicate, mincing, feminine stride. Not incidentally, foot-bound ladies of the court are much easier to catch, should they decide to run from an amorous wererat, but that is a tale for another day, my liege....

In the matter of clothing: The common folk wear hempen cloth, while nobles and wealthy merchants wear silk. On occasion, a fashion, such as parasols, will come into favor in the court. Typically, such fashionable items (or fashionable colors, or fashionable head coverings, as you will have it) are allowed only to certain members of the court, by imperial decree, but few months pass before they are seen in the apparel of any of the common folk who wander by. No man, save the Buddhist monk, walks the streets with his head uncovered; no man or woman walks the streets with feet bare. Those Ferocious People I know with kinfolk among the wealthy (surely none of *my* breed, I can assure you) tell me that a man's station and rank can often be determined solely by looking at his headgear and footwear. Women do not cover their heads but carefully adorn their hair with combs and other trinkets; the placement of these things is considered to be high art, if the tales are to be believed.



As an aside, most wealthy men and women wear girdles — often plated in precious metals, jade or, tastelessly, parts of rare animals — outside of their clothing, and they often tie pouches filled with money to hooks on the girdles. I am sure that my lord does not have to work his imagination feverishly to consider the vast temptation and opportunity such an idiotic contraption provides to my people.

Food and Drink

In this regard, I must respect the humans of China: They will eat practically anything. Anything within reason, at least — the rumors I have heard of cannibalism (even cannibalistic restaurants) are unconfirmed and probably untrue here in the imperial capital. Reports of cannibalism in the outer provinces during times of famine are considerably more likely. However, nearly anything on four legs is fair game in some part of China, and here in Linan, there are restaurants specializing in the styles of far-off parts of the empire. Many of those restaurants hearken back to the style of conquered Kaifeng, the old capital. Rice makes up the core of nearly every meal here in Linan, though the proportion of rice in each meal goes down as the eater increases in status: Rice is seen as filler.

Wine is typically made from fermented soy or rice, with added spices. Occasionally, traders from the far west will arrive with wine made from fermented grapes or dates, and such wines are quite valuable. The only other beverage of consequence to the humans here is tea, which produces an euphoric effect in them if drunk in sufficient quantity. Typically, the stuff is brewed as an excuse to boil the otherwise putrid water of the area. I have to wonder as a personal aside here, sire, if the humans would choose to eat and drink their own excrement, given the chance. For myself, I do not trouble with tea overmuch; our iron stomachs resist the rot in the water, and the same quality of our natures suppresses most of the stimulant in tea. Therefore, to save time, I simply drink the water dirty.

Family Relations

Perhaps I state the obvious when I say that the family schemes of the Ferocious People do not match those of ordinary humans. The apes live among extended families, except when they live in circumstances forbidding such arrangements. A single household is likely to hold all family members of three or four generations. Written laws as old as the Tang dynasty actually dictate the interaction between members of the same family: Breaking the bone of an older cousin holds a more serious punishment than doing the same to a younger sibling. This is not, to my understanding, the case either in Jin or Xixia, where interactions are more casual between family members, but the imperial court likes to remind subjects of the Song dynasty that they inherit a 1500-year-old empire and, as such, must carry on the traditions passed down.

Like humans everywhere, those in China reproduce until the woman is no longer physically capable of bearing young; eight births are not seen as excessive over a lifetime. There are too many of them, too many of them everywhere, despite our best efforts to the contrary. Linan burns easily, sire; it suffers from regular fires. But they have more children, faster, after losing them to fire. The only thing likely to stop them is starvation; when a family is stretched beyond its means children are aborted with drugs, "washed too long" immediately after birth or given to the imperial authorities, where they grow up as orphans and often find work in service of the emperor.

City children are allowed to run free until roughly the age of seven years. They are rarely threatened or punished for their misdeeds; in fact, the worst punishment most can expect to receive is a severe scolding or a scary story about one of the bogeymen of southern China. I confess that upon overhearing one of these stories recently I took the opportunity to briefly play the role of "Big-Eyes Yang," the monster with the terrible voice. The parent's lesson seemed quite well ground into the boy within a few short minutes. Country children have far less freedom, of course, and are put to work at a very young age, thus offsetting their cost as another mouth to feed.

Few marriages come about due to an honest expression of affection between man and woman; those that do typically happen between youths in the city who are far from parental judgment and influence. Far more common is for marriage to be arranged by parents to provide for an advantageous familial alliance or to ensure their own upkeep in old age. In the countryside, these marriages are sometimes arranged when husband and wife are children; in the city, they are not made quite so young, but the youths still have little choice in the matter. In any case, the wife becomes a part of the husband's family from the time of the wedding ceremony onward; even on the death of her spouse, she is to remain a child of the husband's family, tending to them in their old age.

Death and the Ten Thousand Demons

Most Chinese follow the dictates of Confucius, my liege. Chief among those dictates is filial piety: the duty of a child to his parents. This duty continues even after death — Confucian scholars are quite clear that a sumptuous funeral followed by burial in the country is the proper course of action for a pious child upon the death of a parent. Funerals, when they do happen, are therefore vast in scope and quite wasteful in resources. They have a tendency to render poorer families bankrupt.

Buddhists, by contrast, encourage the poor to cremate the bodies of their departed ancestors. Cremation is cheaper, and the enlightened Buddhist whose body is consumed by flame is said to have a greater chance of passing to the right hand of Buddha, into Nirvana. Here in Linan, a Buddhist temple maintains a large crematory oven that pious Buddhists may use to properly dispose of their ancestors' physical remains.

Perhaps it is no surprise that the Wan Kuei have taken an interest in this conflict. Though I sometimes hear rumors to the contrary, it is my understanding that a corpse gone to ash is of little use to a returning vampire. A human sufficiently wicked to return from Hell surely deserves to have no body to return to. We are not certain what happens to those who return from Yomi Wan to find only a pile of ashes; perhaps they are doomed to walk as ghosts. The scholars at my liege's court would know better; I am but a humble dweller in shadow. We do know that the existing Wan Kuei here in Linan (and presumably elsewhere) support the Confucians and encourage humans to bury their dead "honorably," even if such a thing costs their entire savings.

Seasons and the Sky

The inhabitants of China see their emperor as the ultimate lord over all things, including the passage of time and the seasons. One imagines great hilarity ensuing the next time the emperor commands the Sun to remain in the sky past its appointed hour; remember, this is the same throne that couldn't keep a few thousand marauding Jurchens on their side of Kaifeng. But perhaps my bias is showing a bit too blatantly; I shall continue the main thrust of my narrative.

The emperor and his court create the calendar for each year; rather than doing something simple, such as watching for the vernal equinox each year, the Chinese date the beginning of their year to the second new moon after the winter solstice. The year therefore fluctuates wildly in length; there are a dozen extra days in each year, which every few years are added seemingly at random to one year or another. I believe this to be another tool of the imperial court, for without the calendars they provide to the populace, it would be impossible for the average person to determine the start of planting season.

Chinese subjects measure the passage of years over two cycles: a 12-year cycle based on different animals (rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog, and pig) and a 10-year cycle based on the elements, with each element getting two consecutive years: metal, water, wood, fire and earth. Thus it takes 60 years for the entire cycle to repeat itself. This is the Year of the Fire Snake by their reckoning.

The Five Venomous Creatures

The humans of the Song have a curious superstition; I once imagined that it must come from a perverse veneration of our undying enemies, the Centipede and his minions among just city dwellers, but it seems that this mythologizing occurs throughout China. The Chinese treat five insect-eating, poisonous creatures with the greatest respect: Wasp, Toad, Snake, Scorpion and Centipede. They go so far as to stitch likenesses of these animals on their children's clothing. All five of the Venoms eat insects that often carry disease, so these stitchings are thought to repel disease. Additionally, of course, these creatures are all poisonous to some extent and, as such, are owed great respect.

I admit that there has got to be some relationship to the great corruptor spirit here: Centipede, Toad and Scorpion are often seen as avatars or servants of the destroyer, despite the respect that Wasp and Snake often receive. Unfortunately, the Five Venoms are not part of some state cult that we could ascribe to the influence of demons; they are a part of ordinary folklore. Again, my liege, we see part of my reason for writing this letter: There are wiser minds than my own at your court. Perhaps they can see the core of this issue.

Arts and Leisure

I admit that, as a wererat, I am perhaps less qualified to speak of fine art than another agent might be. But I plunge onward, obedient to the dictates of my liege and his oversharp dentition.

Chinese painting seems focused on landscapes; in snooping through nobles' estates, I have seen more than one beautiful portrayal of the land at dawn or sunset. The painter Guo Xi spoke of the importance of accurate depiction of life; he felt that one could nearly channel Chi through a true artwork. Other painters spend less time on representation and more time on evocation and impression. Mi Fu evokes strong emotions through his work, even though the pictures he presents are in no way realistic.

As the civil exams have become more important to the populace, I have seen more examples of this "printing" that we have discussed in the past. Instead of delicately laying down each stroke of a character with a calligrapher's care, the printer lays wood blocks in place to represent characters, inks them and presses them against parchment to create a document as a whole. Monks have been using this technique since the early Tang dynasty, I am told, but the tools are becoming more widespread. Humans have begun creating thick treatises on history, science and astronomy; I daresay this will reduce our ability to keep them under control as time progresses.

War

The typical member of the Chinese Army is a peasant; those born to nobility often become officers, but most of them lack the physical build and martial skill to thrive as a soldier. The peasant, by contrast, has worked hard his entire life, and unlike the child of privilege who spends his time at chess or calligraphy, his youthful playtime was spent in mock battles, playing with toy swords or spears.

The Chinese are quite advanced in terms of arms. Song dynasty China takes advantage of gunpowder, which it invented 200 years ago. The Chinese have been using explosives in warfare since the wars with the Jin in the early Southern Song. They have explosive devices with a

lit fuse, which can be hurled at an enemy; when the fuse reaches the core of the device, it explodes with a flash and a loud noise, sending shards of hot broken metal in all directions. Such things are exceptionally useful against unprepared cavalry, and we have learned that they also work well against the Wan Kuei.

In terms of personal weaponry, as we know, the Chinese have used the crossbow as their primary missile weapon since before the Qin unification. Larger, long-range repeating crossbows on solid bases — impressively useful against berserk *shen* if the bolts have been properly treated — have been in place since the early Han. Catapults and giant crossbows are the most important heavy weapons available on the battlefield. The armies of the Southern Song can field huge mounted composite crossbows operated by up to 100 men. They have a range of 200 yards. Catapults, even larger, are operated by up to 250 men and use clay and stone projectiles or burning ammunition. These sorts of things are rarely useful in my day-to-day life, but one imagines that it is good to remember that the Song can bring such things to bear if the need arises.

Also, the Chinese navy is a rather impressive fleet. I admit that my experience with boats is relatively limited, but I am told that several of my great-grandparents spent much of their time aboard Chinese naval vessels and those that could speak shared interesting tales. Modern Chinese naval vessels can carry more than 1,000 people when they need to transport troops from one place to another, and they mount "rockets" for defense against foreign navies. These devices are tube-shaped stacks of gunpowder; they can be aimed at a distant boat and lit aflame. They then propel themselves to the target and explode most spectacularly. Vessels belonging to particularly well-connected merchants have also been seen with these rockets mounted prominently; no doubt their presence discourages pirates. And I imagine that it is only a matter of time before the pirates themselves attach rockets to their ships in order to maintain the balance of power.

Labor

The imperial warlords are clever as all monkey-folk; they never tire of finding new ways to get more work from a single man. Travelers speak of new farming methods and expanded cultivation of the lands to the south; this expansion has begun to push against the kingdom of Angkor, but as yet, there remains peace between the two. Manor-bound peasants farm rice in ever-wet fields now, and a strain of rice has been developed which matures in winter, letting two harvests occur each year.

The state as a whole has become more concerned with earning money and making a profit than with filial piety, respect to the emperor and so on. It is hardly Confucian. Admittedly, sire, other than my great respect and loyalty to you, I am hardly Confucian myself.

Conclusion

It is my fervent wish, sire, that the information included herein will prove of use to you in upcoming campaigns against the forces of the south. I myself intend to return to your court before the year is out, after my business in Linan is complete. Should you require further service of me, you know that the slightest hint of a request shall be treated as a command from on high.

I endeavor to remain your obedient servant,

Amrat Atansas

Shubei of Linan

Beyond the Empire

Report from Zeng Zhixin, Eastern Serpent of the Flying Wheel *Wu*.

The Middle Kingdom is a vast place; the influence of the great Chinese empires can be felt from the Indus to Kamakura and from Pyongyang to the Thai jungle. The Wan Kuei stalk the nights of all this land; while we are by no means all-powerful masters of all we survey, ancestors wield great power over individual cities and regions, and merchants, aristocrats and even imperial advisors are hard-pressed to avoid our influence.

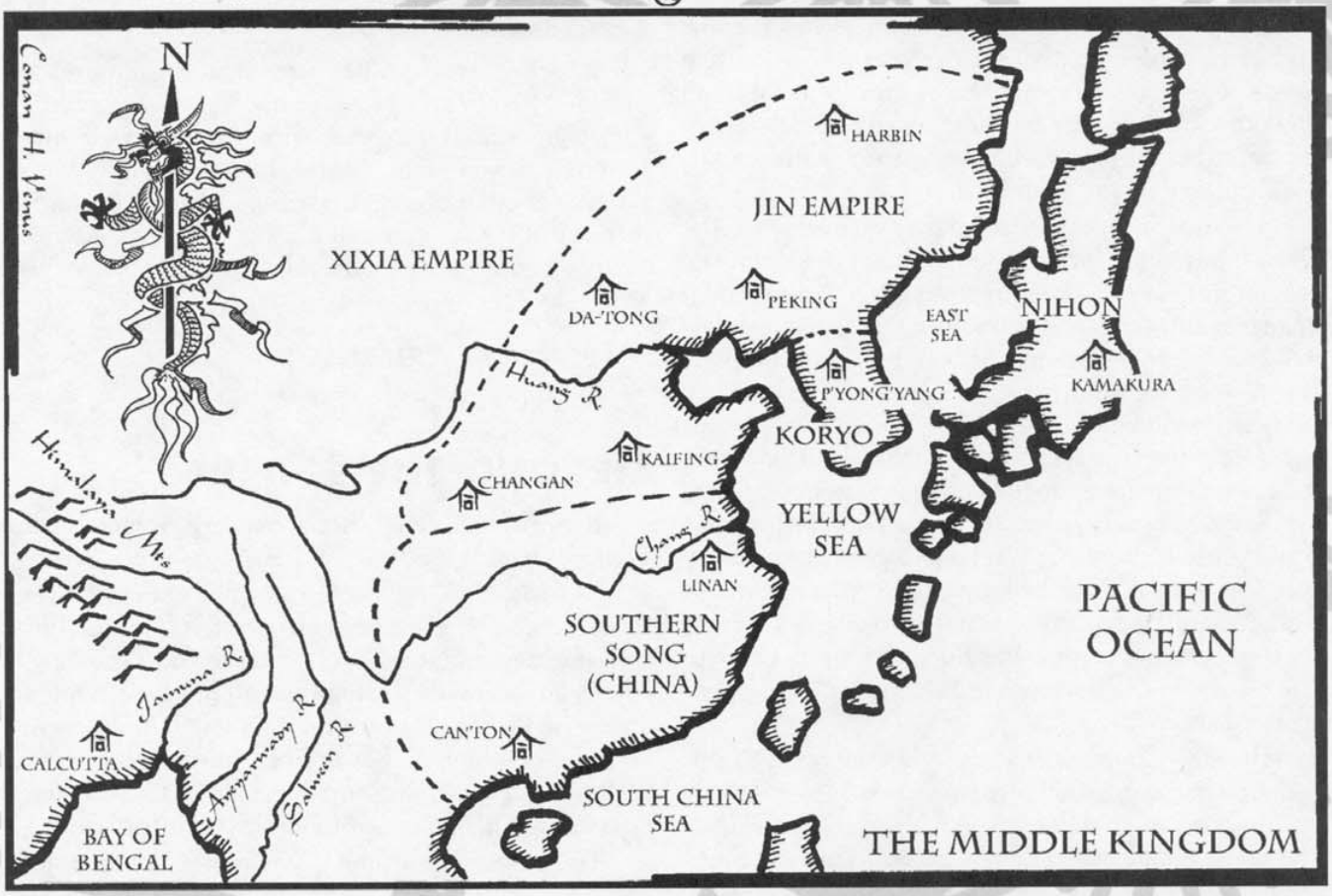
The Song dynasty rules China now. China has stood at the center of political activity in Asia for as long as even the arhats can remember. Our capital city is now the beautiful and rich Linan, but the imperial court calls Linan Xingjai, "visiting headquarters": The mortals intend to retake Kaifeng from the Jin. The history of hundreds of years and the tombs of dozens of emperors are in Kaifeng, after all. But for now, the mortals rest and gather their armies in defense and attend sumptuous parties and court functions.

As much as the residents of Linan would like to deny, lands beyond their control continue to thrive. I humbly suggest that the ancestors of our courts do not repeat mortal errors and that they remain aware of events beyond China's borders. I gladly share the fruits of my travels and discussions with other travelers.

The Northern Kingdoms: Xixia and Jin

Only a century ago, the Tibetans of the Empire of Xixia and the Qidans of the Empire of Liao were client states of the Song Chinese. The eye blinks, the world changes: The nomadic Jurchen peoples conquered the Liao, and now, their Jin Empire stands in its place. Indeed, Jin has conquered much of Koryo and northern China, and Xixia now pays tribute to the Jurchen leaders.

The two northern empires have a number of similarities. The dominant peoples of both are descendants of rugged, horse-riding nomads who have settled down to take advantage of agriculture but who maintain a strong cavalry tradition. And both have defeated the troops of



the Song Chinese on the field of battle numerous times over the last few decades.

But Xixia is on the decline; its ruling class has intermarried with the Jin rulers, and as the smaller and weaker of the pair, it acknowledges the Jin emperor's supremacy. Little of Xixia is suitable for cultivation, so the curious mishmash people there — part Turk, part Tibetan, part Uighur — breed cattle and serve as merchants. Scores of caravans from the Song and Jin to points further west pass through the Xixia capital of Ningxia every day.

Jin has a large bureaucracy and a multicultural population; at the present time, it enjoys peaceful relations with all of its neighbors. The Jurchen overlords of the empire maintain a capital at Liaoyang. By far the largest group living in the empire is Chinese, not Jurchen. Chinese manners, speech and script have begun to infiltrate even the imperial court, despite repeated imperial proclamations of the superiority of the Jurchen way of life.

The Jews of Kaifeng

During the Tang dynasty, a number of Persians who followed the dictates of the Torah traveled across China as far as Kaifeng. These Jews — known as Rhadinites — were silk traders familiar with the long road to the West. For reasons lost to oral history, they chose to settle permanently in Kaifeng, and the seventh generation of their descendants lives there and scrupulously maintains traditions brought from the West. Their faith is not incompatible with many of the tenets of Confucianism, and they have recently been permitted to build a synagogue in the city, providing they obey the same restrictions as any other temple.

Nihon

Nihon, a kingdom made up of a large chain of islands east of China and Koryo, is still cleaning up after a recent war between two of its most powerful noble families. This conflict, called the Gempei War, came about due to the crumbling influence of the Nihonjin Emperor. The dominant family at the imperial court, the Fujiwara, lost power steadily as other influential families married in and diluted the power of the core Fujiwara line. Until about 10 years ago, the Taira branch of the Fujiwara dominated the court, but across the island in Kamakura, the Minamoto branch gathered sufficient influence to itself that Minamoto-no-Yoritomo was declared shogun, supreme military commander of Nihon; the power to select successive shoguns was at the core of the Gempei War.

Over the last half-century, the Taira and Minamoto families assumed increasing importance in the provinces. The Minamoto family owns the Kanto Plain in which Kamakura sits; the Taira, relative newcomers to the Nihonjin imperial court in Kyoto, gained the patronage of several retired emperors and saw their star rise in court appropriately. Indeed, provincial nobility has a

far greater say in imperial politics now than it did 20 years ago, and local nobility is far more likely to carry its own military authority.

As power began to drift away, quarrels erupted among the various factions of the court. Various Shinto and Buddhist temples of the island nation competed with the retired emperors, who in turn struggled with the royal family and provincial nobility. Each faction desired a voice in the affairs of state, and it is obvious in retrospect that such factionalism would leave Nihon dangerously weak. One provincial noble, Taira-no-Kiyomori, took advantage of this chaos to maneuver his infant grandson onto the throne some 17 years ago.

Kiyomori reigned in the infant Emperor Antoku's place, and even when the boy was old enough to speak, it was clear that Kiyomori held the power. And he did not wield it subtly. Within several months of Antoku's birth, noble houses of the Kanto Plain, led by the Minamoto family, took up arms against the Taira family.

Heavily armed and armored noble warriors fought the Gempei War; one might see massed clashes of peasant troops, but pairs of samurai standing across a few feet of dirt from each other often settled battles. The honorable lone samurai motif has since become an important part of Nihonjin art and storytelling. The strength of this image was compounded by the difference between the courtly, mannered Taira and the wilder, rough Minamoto.

Taira-no-Kiyomori died a year into the war; the Taira faction was already on the defensive by this point, and the Minamoto and their allies pressed westward across the island for the next two years.

Two years after Kiyomori's death, Minamoto-no-Yoshitsune led the warriors of the Kanto Plain in a series of stunning victories. Eventually, the Taira forces and their allies were driven from Kyoto and out onto boats on the inland sea. There, ships friendly to the Minamoto attacked in force, sinking nearly all of the enemy vessels. It was only after the battle was over that the Minamoto learned that young Emperor Antoku was aboard one of the sunken vessels and that he drowned during the fighting.



THE EMPEROR'S SWORD

Emperor Antoku, grandson of Taira-no-Kiyomori, died in the final days of the war. When the Taira forces were pushed out of Kyoto onto boats in the bay and Minamoto forces sank those boats, Antoku drowned. His sword, one of the three pieces of imperial ceremonial regalia, was forever lost to mortals.

However, even now, several houses of Nihonjin Wan Kuei plan expeditions to the Yin Realms to attempt to recover the blade from its watery grave. Though it is not obviously magical, the sword's long association with the Imperial House in Kyoto may have imbued it with power of its own. And even if it remains wholly mundane, it is a powerful rallying point; if it could be found and turned over to a favored mortal, that mortal might gain the favor of the imperial court in Kyoto and even that of the common man.

The sword may be in the hands of the Same-Bito shark-men; this is doubly likely if it possesses magical powers, since the Same-Bito, like most hengeyokai, have an easier time finding magic items than they do finding items of great sentimental value. On the other hand, it may still be on the floor of the ocean, or it may have found a resting place in one of the Yin Realms. The Watery Kingdom of Fu Yi may be most obvious, but nearly any Yin Realm could contain the lost sword.

A new Nihonjin emperor, Gotoba, has since been crowned. The new emperor, however, owes considerably more to the Minamoto family than his predecessor did. The imperial court at Kyoto has lost a great deal of its practical influence; the administrative headquarters that Minamoto-no-Yoritomo set up at Kamakura during the Gempei War now serves as general administrative headquarters for much of the imperial government.

Minamoto-no-Yoritomo became shogun after the war. Governmental authority has been greatly spread out; the individual samurai, aided and overseen by military governors (*shugo*) and military land stewards (*jito*), have a great deal of personal power. And most of them are personally loyal to the aged Yoritomo.

Yoritomo remains shogun, with roughly 2,000 noble houses supporting him. He is old, and though he did not fight actively during the Gempei War, the conflict has clearly taken a toll. His wife Masako looks after him and, on occasion, makes a trivial decision on his behalf when he is too tired to be awakened. Neither of his sons appear worthy of the role of shogun, and he had potential challengers in his close family killed years ago, to ensure his own power.

Many disciples and jina among the *gaki* (as Nihonjin vampires call themselves) took the Second Breath during the Gempei War. These men are honor-bound and skilled warriors, despite their sentence to Hell. In many cases these *gaki* were *bushi* (minor nobility and warriors) in life who committed a single act of dishonor and were slain immediately thereafter. Such a stain on the soul dragged them directly to one of the Nihonjin Hells; whether the Second Breath renewed their code of honor or showed that code to be a fool's restraint varies from vampire to vampire. Generally, any renewed honor and loyalty is directed toward their *uji*, a clan of *gaki* akin to an extended *wu*.

KORYO

Koryo, that peninsula between Nihon and China, is an exciting place to spend time these days. Sinjong of the royal house of Wang sits on the throne, but he does so at the leisure of the most powerful man on the Koryo Peninsula, General Ch'oe Ch'ung-hon. Ch'oe took power alongside his brother Ch'oe Ch'ung-su just last year after killing the tyrant Yi Ui-min; Ch'oe Ch'ung-su has recently vanished, leaving Ch'oe Ch'ung-hon as sole ruler, in fact, if not in name.

And so it has gone for the past 25 years: A group of military leaders seize power, the group's members variously murder each other until only one remains, and then, that one is killed and replaced by a new group. The royal family has tried to remain distant from the actual bloodletting, but it has done little good; most of the military rulers attempt to set up puppet kings in the time between their consolidation of power and their assassination.

Mandarins and jina of the Azure Dragon Court speak of the military's degraded status in decades past, and Pak Ulchin of the Transcendent Mountains *wu* writes that the current tumult is a response to the poor status of the soldier under mostly civilian rule. However, that is largely immaterial; at the present time, the military reigns supreme over the Kingdom of Koryo. Soldiers enjoy high status, and civil bureaucrats defer to them in matters of governance.

Ch'oe has slowly subverted the order of the military in Koryo. The Six Divisions of the Koryo Army are loyal first to the king and, then, to their officers. Ch'oe has not attempted to subvert that loyalty — or perhaps he has and failed quietly. Ch'oe Ch'ung-hon has built up his personal guard to become far larger than the Six Divisions, and Ch'oe's personal guard is loyal to him first. With the slow disintegration of the regular army, most able-bodied men join Ch'oe's huge "personal guard" or the Elite Patrols.

The Elite Patrols are a combination of the Night Patrols and the Army of Transcendent Righteousness. The Night Patrols are made up of dozens of "watches" whose job it is to break up bands of roving nighttime hooligans among other elements of the military. In effect, the Night Patrol has taken on the role of the police in

many of the large towns of Koryo. Since a vile series of rapes and murders by a *wu* of *akuma* across Pyongyang, Wan Kuei of Koryo have noticed special watches among the Night Patrols that are populated entirely by the Children of Yi; such groups bear careful observation from a great distance. By contrast to the order-keeping Night Patrol, the Army of Transcendent Righteousness is a combat force composed of skilled veteran warriors. For most purposes, the Army of Transcendent Righteousness acts as Koryo's true national army.

With the new supremacy of the military in Koryo, scholars have found themselves without bureaucratic and courtly jobs. Some have retired to the countryside, to act as monks, itinerant poets or even to join the peasant life; others have applied to serve the house of Ch'oe directly. They communicate among themselves with some frequency, sharing poetry, prose and ideas.

A Note on Historicity

In reality, the Elite Patrols didn't exist until the reign of Ch'oe Ch'ung-hon's successor, Ch'oe U, but the Night Patrol in particular seems like the sort of thing that would evolve more quickly in the World of Darkness that it is appropriate for it to arise a little earlier there than it would in our world. Most of the other details of this section remain accurate: Ch'oe Ch'ung-hon did use private forces to bolster his own power at the expense of the kingdom as a whole. If the Elite Patrols give the more authenticity-minded among players and Storytellers fits, they hereby receive sanction to excise them from their **Blood & Silk** chronicle.

India

The lands of India, beyond the Himalayan peaks, are quite different from those we know in China. Wan Kuei take the second breath there as well, but they seem far from the heart of Grand Arhat Xue's teachings. Heretical and foreign teachings are common in the lands that birthed the Buddha. My own experiences in India are minimal, but I have traveled with a native of that region who now walks the heretical Tempest of Inward Focus Dharma. The following account, I derive from his words.

When the August Personage of Jade levied his judgment against the Wan Xian, the people of India were left to their own devices. Unfortunately, after centuries of immortal warlords and attacks by enraged Ferocious People, those devices consisted of crude implements of stone and copper. It was more than a millennium before the cultures of India rose again from the plains and jungles — but when they did, they would be the products of humanity's own designs.



The arrival of the Aryans more than 2,000 years ago woke the Immortals, now the Ten Thousand Demons, from their somnolent state. The invaders brought with them a religion, their gods and the concept of caste, which bound religion inextricably to the society. The caste system was a hereditary system that ensured the stability of the society by mandating which individuals could hold which occupations. This stability also, of course, helped to ensure the privileges of the higher castes. The caste system consisted of four overall castes, each including numerous and ever-evolving subcastes, arranged in the following order of status: the *Kshatriya*, the warriors; the *Brahman*, the priests; the *Vaisya*, the cultivators; and the *Sudra*, the servants and laborers. Those outside the caste system are referred to as *Pariah* (this includes both the unclean and foreigners). Almost as quickly as this system crystallized, the brahmans realized the power to be had at the top of the caste structure; they subverted the Kshatriya by claiming the sole ability to confer the divine right to rule on Kshatriya kings and codified the new positions in their transliterations of oral Vedic tradition.

The Ten Thousand Demons adapted themselves to this structure easily. The social structure of the castes provided a comfortable framework for the demons, although there was some dissention as to where the Hungry Dead should fit. Those who enjoyed the power and status of the Brahman caste during life were loathe to give up their lofty heights in death; long contemplation and analysis by these Brahmans gave rise to the Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma, which we of the Five August Courts would call heretical.

But in many cases, the power of the individual demon, of whatever caste in life, was impossible to ignore. Those of the lower castes, granted such power in death, refused to spend an unlife in servitude. These powerful individuals asserted that the Wan Kuei were a caste to themselves, elevated above even the Brahman humans.

Aryan kings and their dynasties, and those of other invaders and tribes, rose and fell. The teachings of the Buddha inspired those Wan Kuei who had rejected Hindu philosophy. The adoption of the theologically harmonious Tempest of Inward Focus Dharma (again, which we brand heretical in our supposed wisdom) and the resurrection of Grand Arhat Xue's Path of a Thousand Whispers were obvious rejections of those who would be Brahmans among the undead; this decision created a clear division in Wan Kuei society, forcing the formation of clearly defined courts based on both geography and Dharmic adherence.

King Chandragupta forged the continent-spanning Maurya Empire a century before the rise of Qin Shihuangdi, with the help of military advice and backing from a Brahman vampire, Kautalya. The young king's natural talent for leadership, combined with Kautalya's advice on military, economic and espionage matters led to the swift subjugation of most of the subcontinent. On Chandragupta's death, Kautalya pulled himself out of public view.

At this time, India served as the middleman for trade between the East and West. With trade goods and money came adventurous foreigners: barbaric vampires from the West, Wan Kuei from the East. The mortal government gave land grants to create foreign enclaves in trading ports and the capital of Pataliputra; Kautalya's subordinates watched over these enclaves like hawks.

The threat to Brahman control would not come from outside. Chandragupta's grandson Asoka, proclaimed his conversion to Buddhism on the very evening of his greatest military victory, the conquering of the final unbowed rival in India. Scholars point to the fierceness of the battle and the incredible number of deaths as a reason for his conversion; by some estimates, 100,000 were put to the sword. Wan Kuei scholars put forth theories of supernatural visits from Kautalya's enemies or a king simply grown tired of his endless manipulation, seeking refuge from his shadowy advisor. At any rate, Asoka's conversion choked the burgeoning of orthodox power. Kautalya disappeared, and the Maurya Empire fell apart under its own weight after Asoka's death.

Such a vast empire was not seen again. The Gupta Empire, founded by Chandragupta I around the time of the rise of the North and South dynasties in China, brought about a golden age of prosperity; but for all its wealth it too could not hold together. Following the empire's collapse, the kingdoms of southern India were for the first time ascendant. Those kingdoms exist even today, as the Kingdoms of Hoysalas, Yadavas, Kakatiyas and Cheras.

In the north in the last century, four families of the Rajput clan vied for geographical dominance and the possession of the region's leading city, Kanauj. The families of the Rajput clan claim the name Agnikula, the Fire Family, descendents of a mythical figure of fire that emerged from the sacrificial fire pits of Mount Abu. Skeptics posit that the story is an attempt by a low caste family to establish a more respectable genealogy. The Agnikula established a complex chivalry of war, sending out armies to avenge stylized insults or to parade a show of strength. This constant expenditure of resources left the clan unable to respond effectively to an attack from the north; a Muslim leader named Muhammad of Ghor replaced the occasional icon-smashing and loot-grabbing raids with a concerted, kingdom-building attack. But six years ago, the Rajput kingdom of Delhi fell to the Muslim invaders.

The Jungle Kingdoms

Several kingdoms dominate the jungles south of the Middle Kingdom, and I freely admit that I am unfamiliar with them; I am not welcome in the lands of the Scarlet Phoenix Court. Few Chinese Wan Kuei are. As the Southern Song dynasty extends its influence southward,

the Scarlet Phoenix Wan Kuei engage in twilight war against the Yellow Emperor's servants to keep their lands from coming under the subjugation of the Han.

I do know that major cities of the south include Sukhothai, the center of a burgeoning kingdom of its own; Angkor, the capital of the Khmer Empire; and the center of the Dai Viet, Hue. I have heard that Angkor hosts a major new temple complex, Angkor Thom, built by Jayavarman, the Buddhist Emperor of the Khmer, to overshadow an older Hindu temple complex called Angkor Wat. As for the Dai Viet, it was once a part of China; it became independent after the fall of the Tang dynasty and currently resists further encroachment by the embattled Southern Song.

Faith and Religion

Just as it is wise to know the affairs of mortal kings, so it is wise to know those of mortal monks and scholars. Several faiths dominate the mortals of the Middle Kingdom, and even we Wan Kuei cannot entirely escape religious influence. Many of us choose our Dharmic path as an extension of the faith we practiced in life; just as many choose our Dharma in response to the failures of the faith of our sunlit days.

Buddhism (India, China, Koryo, Nihon)

Siddhartha Gautama Buddha, the Enlightened One, founded his religion with a sermon entitled *The Turning of the Wheel of Law* and five disciples. From this humble beginning grew a religion that would spread from his native India to all of the Middle Kingdom. That first sermon contained the core of his philosophy, the Four Noble Truths: The world is full of suffering, suffering is caused by human desire, renunciation of desire is the way to salvation, and the way to salvation, nirvana, is the Eightfold Path. The strictures of the Eightfold Path are difficult for humans and nearly impossible for vampires; the rigor of adhering to the tenets of right knowledge, right aspiration, right speech, right behavior, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation require the full, undistracted focus of the body and mind. The Buddha rejected the Brahmans' emphasis on ritual sacrifice as an unnecessary distraction and likewise rejected the caste system. The wisdom and open nature of his teachings brought him astounding numbers of followers in a very short time, especially from those castes that were repressed or undervalued in the traditional system.

Wan Kuei find much to ponder in the Buddha's teachings. The Four Noble Truths are very clearly and personally true for many of us, and the Eightfold Path simplifies much of Grand Arhat Xue's wisdom. The teachings of the immortal Arhat are rich and detailed, full of nuance. The Buddha's lectures, meant for human ears, are necessarily easier to assimilate. Wan Kuei scholars disagree on the extent to which Buddhism has affected and changed the Fivefold Way, the core of Wan Kuei wisdom, but all agree that some ideas took root. Unfortunately, the simple understanding achieved through the teachings of another does not grant enlightenment.

Buddhism spread to China with the trade goods carried on the Silk Road. A Tang dynasty monk, Xuan Zhang, traveled to India to spend 18 years studying in the monasteries and Buddhist universities. On his return, the Big Goose Pagoda was constructed in Changan to house the copious volumes of sutras he brought for translation. From China, Buddhism spread through Koryo to Nihon. At each step, local philosophy and religion made their mark, giving rise to a multitude of schools and sects.

Confucianism (China)

Confucianism is one of the oldest religions in China; it is named for its creator, Kung Fuxi, or "Confucius." Confucianism is built on several tenets: first, that the god of Heaven creates humans and that they are inherently good as created unless acted upon by pernicious influences. Second, that the god of Heaven is all-knowing and all-seeing: No act of wickedness or evil can be committed that he does not bear witness to. Sins against Heaven are seen as the worst kind of wickedness; when one has sinned against Heaven, there is no one left to turn to. Third, knowledge is seen as the key to virtue and morality; indeed Confucius saw it as impossible for a person to be truly moral unless they were also well educated. Lastly, Confucianism holds four virtues above all others: sincerity, benevolence, filial piety and propriety.

Few truly pious Confucianists take the Second Breath; it would seem that their morality saves them from a trip to Yomi. Casual Confucianists occupy an ever-growing fraction of Wan Kuei society, however, and some of our number acquire Confucian ideals after taking the Second Breath. Confucian behavior and attitudes have been a part of Chinese culture for so long now that it is truly the norm, even among the Hungry Dead.

Devotional Cults (India and Elsewhere)

Personal worship also provides satisfaction for some Wan Kuei. Devoted worshipers see the god of their choice as benevolent, approachable and attentive. These worshipers form cults around charismatic saints, who compose and sing hymns depicting the gods as friends, companions or even lovers. These cults are most common among the mortals of India, but the hungriest of the dead have established cults of their own across the Middle Kingdom.

The Indian Vaishnava and Saiva cults, devoted respectively to Vishnu and Shiva, are the most socially respected, but smaller cults devoted to all manner of gods also flourish. Ambitious Wan Kuei establish cult followings, whether they believe themselves to be gods or merely wish that it were so. The benefits are obvious: a constant supply of Chi, resources and protection. The drawback is a lack of Dharmic progression for those who

follow the Fivefold Way of Grand Arhat Xue. I have heard that these "Godlings" have forged their own heretical Dharmic path known as the Face of the Gods. It is surely doomed to failure.

The Wan Kuei are not the only ones who take the role of gods. Any of the *shen* are able to trick an undiscerning mortal. The most dangerous situation for bystanders, vampires and cultists arises when a minion of the Yama Kings hides behind the mantle of divinity. Particularly crafty recruiters of *akuma* pose as the god the target was devoted to in life.

Neo-Confucianism (China)

Neo-Confucianism is less a religion than a philosophy, a synthesis of Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian philosophies; it embraces the Eightfold Path to Righteousness, the Tao and the principle of filial piety, all in a vast state religion. Zhu Xi, a stern rationalist, leads the modern Neo-Confucian movement.

Scholars such as Lu Xiangshan criticize Zhu Xi's philosophy; it does not contain much original thought but, rather, presents past lines of thought in new ways. Zhu Xi stresses dualism, the goodness of human nature and self-improvement and education through the continuing investigation of all things.

Nestorian Christianity (India, China, Koryo)

"Christians" follow a faith imported from the far west along the Silk Road. They claim to have been a part of Chinese life since the middle of the Han dynasty, only a generation after their deity's death on Earth. They are never present in great numbers, however; currently, the most noteworthy sect is a small group that follows the tenets of a long-dead teacher named Nestorius, once patriarch of their church.

According to those Christians I have managed to speak to, Nestorius held that their deity — known as "Jesus Christ" — was one, indivisible in his person, but containing two natures, one human and one divine. This belief — despite it's interesting parallels to the divisions in our own fallen souls —was not welcomed by other Christians and led to factionalism and dismay.

Nevertheless, these Nestorians apparently sent a mission toward the capital, Changan, in the time of Tang dynasty. Emperor Li Yuan issued an imperial edict stating that this faith of the Westerners could be proselytized throughout his empire without interference. In the present day, Nestorian Christians are quite rare in the Middle Kingdom, but larger towns and cities may well host such a church.

Shinto (Nihon)

Shinto is an ancient, animistic faith. It lacks sacred scripture; its tenets are passed from priest to followers. Shintoists believe in *kami*, spirits that inhabit living things, unliving things and even abstract concepts like family or fertility. Many kami are spirits of the dead, be they familial ancestors or great heroes. The Fujiwara family's claim to the Nihonjin imperial throne depends, in part, on tales of the line's founder being a descendant of the greatest Shinto gods.

Shintoists believe that the average person is generally good in thought and action; wickedness is caused by the influence of evil spirits, which can be avoided or driven away with rituals of purification, offerings and prayers to kami at holy shrines and other sacred sites. Shintoists believe that death is inherently evil and therefore things connected to death, such as funerals, attract too many evil spirits to be a proper part of Shinto. Therefore, most Shintoists have Buddhist funerals.

The precise nature of the kami seems to be a matter of great debate among those Resplendent Cranes and Thrashing Dragons who keep track of such matters. As it has been explained to me, the kami include a wide variety of spirits bound to Nihon in one form or another. Most are powerful Yang spirits or nobles of the *hsien*. Yin spirits are rarer, but present in their number.

In my journeys in Nihon, I have heard tales of Wan Kuei (or *gaki* to use the Nihonjin term) who masquerade as kami. All such stories end in tragedy for both the "god" and his worshipers — the true kami dislike having their position usurped, it would seem.

Taoism (China)

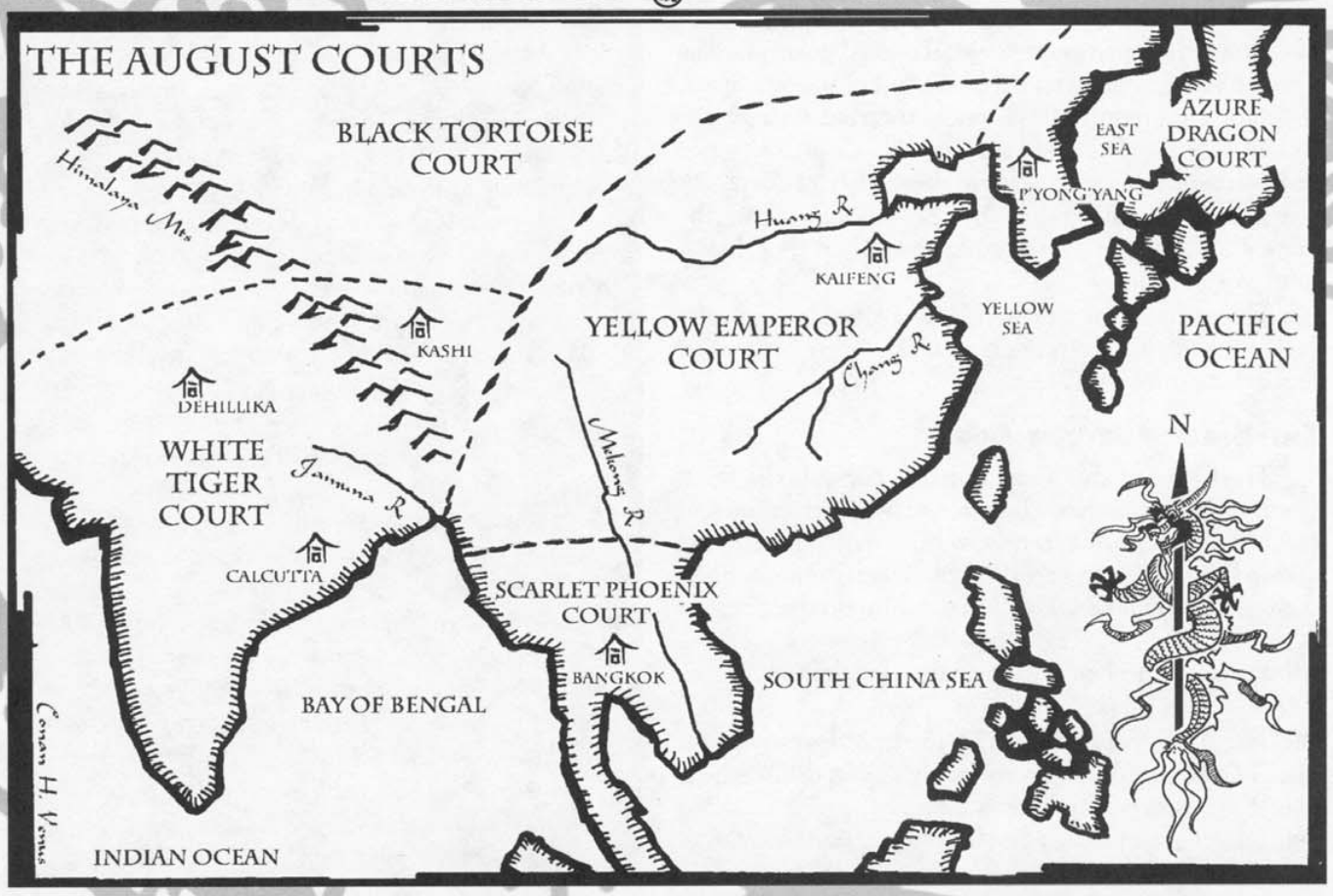
The Tao ("way" or "road") is the core of Taoist thought. The Tao is the center of all things, a force which permeates all life. The Tao embraces duality in opposition: There is no life without death; there is no light without darkness; there is no male without female. The light, life-filled, male force is known as Yang, while its opposite is Yin. However, the Taoist does not embrace one while scorning the other: He knows that both forces are necessary parts of the universe. The Taoist neither venerates a deity nor prays: He seeks answers to life's questions through observing the universe and meditating on the Tao. The Taoist achieves his desired goals through a minimum of action: He does not rashly charge toward his desires but, rather, aids the universe in bringing his desires to him.

Laotze created Taoism, a deceptively simple philosophy, two centuries before the Qin dynasty. It did not begin as a religion, of course: Laotze wrote the *Tao te Ching* to learn about the universe through the Tao. Ironically, in the Sui dynasty, the deity-less Taoism became a state religion in China, and the people venerated Laotze himself as a deity.

The World of the Undying

Report from Zeng Zhixin, Eastern Serpent of the Flying Wheel *Wu*.

I am thankful that my report on the ways of the mortal kings and priests has been useful to the ancestors.



I hope the following observations on our own lands will be as useful.

The *shen* of the Middle Kingdom live in a different world than the mortals do. This statement can be taken both literally and figuratively: Wan Kuei, Ferocious People, *hsien* and ghosts can all cross the Wall that separates the physical from the spiritual; but it is true in a deeper sense as well. A depth of experience simply unavailable to the peasant farmer runs through every night of a Wan Kuei's unlife. For us, there is no mindless toil, no pointless obsequies to faraway imperial lords.

From the Commentaries of Juang Guangyao:

A word of caution: An unprotected Chi pool sometimes stands barren for a reason; these things may provide corrupted Chi to the unwary. The Bone Dancers I speak to suggest that this is due to the horrific nature of death for many of the enslaved builders of the Great Wall. Apparently, savage and vengeful ghosts lurk within parts of the Wall itself, feeding on this corrupted Chi.

The North

Ghostlands, empty plains and haunted forests dominate the northern reaches of the Middle Kingdom. It is not a welcoming place for the young Running Monkey; take heed.

Qin Shihuangdi's Great Wall crosses the dragon track that runs from Nihon to Lake Tianchi here in the northlands, and as a result, there are a few Chi pools near the wall; these are not truly dragon nests, but such a great edifice pushes the Chi flow into minor, transitory eddies from time to time. These eddies are occupied by Chi-hungry spirits or Wan Kuei almost from the time they come into being; fortunate indeed is the young vampire who finds one unprotected.

Numerous Beast Courts dot the northlands; the Mongolian Plateau is relatively unpopulated by mortals and, therefore, is a popular range for werewolves and their cousins. The greatest Beast Court in the north is the Tatar Beast Court, which controls the terrain around a rich dragon nest at the heart of a vast prairie.

Far in the distant north, beyond the barbarians' plateau, near the center of a great forest, lies sleeping and bound one of the Great Dragons. A Tengu raven-talker has told me that the First Spirit Chainer of the Tatar Beast Court has begun to speak openly of his worry that the dragon might awaken and attempt to free itself; the sorts of bindings his own many-times-great-grandfather used to subdue the creature were only expected to last for a millennium. Apparently, he seeks a party of brave Ferocious People to strengthen or replace the bonds — and guard against any Wan Kuei who might take advantage of the dragon's restlessness.

It would be irresponsible of me to ignore the presence of corrupted Chi sites on the barbarians' great plateau. These black dragon nests bubble up out of the land itself, fester for a few months or years and then are destroyed or simply fade away. The Black Tortoise Court was once responsible for the destruction of these nests, but in recent years, that duty has fallen by the wayside. Now, the Ferocious People hunt corrupted nests when they do not hunt Wan Kuei.

The taint in the northern soil is far older than the sack of Kaifeng. It reflects a clash with long-dead barbarians from the West.

The Black Tortoise Court

The Court of the Black Tortoise controls the lands north of the Jin and Xixia Empires, as well as the northern reaches of the Jin. Currently, warlike nomads, who are divided into more than a dozen relatively minor tribes, dominate these lands. The Song and Jin do their best to keep the tribes at arm's length, frequently by paying tribute to nations closer to the tribes; for the time being, this tactic is working.

The Black Tortoise Court is the most sparsely populated of the five great courts. Conditions on the northern plains are not particularly conducive to our unliving existence; the nomads do not keep permanent dwellings, and so incautious and young Wan Kuei find themselves in constant pursuit of shelter that remains close to the mortal population.

Like the nomads from whom they are reborn, the vampires of the Court of the Black Tortoise do not build permanent dwellings. The Court meets twice a month (on nights of the half moon) at a location described by the positions of the stars and planets on nights of the full and new moon. The meetings of the Court almost always happen under an open sky, even in the worst of weather; in fact, it is a point of honor for Black Tortoise Wan Kuei to show a lack of concern for extremes of weather.

The leaders of the Jurchen tribes who conquered the Empire of Liao to form the Jin Empire owed some of their allegiance to the mandarins of the Black Tortoise Court, but in recent years, many tribes have cut their Wan Kuei ties.

The Bright Forest *wu* knows a dhampyr within one tribe, the Tanguts. This dhampyr speaks of other vampires who run in the night and sometimes feed on the Tanguts. They call themselves *Anda*, a name that means "blood brother" among some tribes. These Anda may be *akuma*; they may be something else entirely. They claim to come from the west, past the Takla Makan Desert.

More than one Wan Kuei has told me of his desire to take a tribe of mortals and lead them into the far north, there to form a new kingdom, someday to challenge the empires to the south. Most of these vampires are young, and most wish to wrest dominance from the decadent courtiers of the Yellow Emperor. The elders know better; they smile knowingly when the subject comes up. The bodhisattva Pu Shoukeng confronts such young jina with the question of what they would dare do when faced with a king that could straddle the known world. Surely, such a mortal could never exist again.

Beloved Cousin —

I know that it has been many years since we have spoken or exchanged correspondence; please forgive my rudeness in sending this letter so urgently. I fear there is nowhere else to look for aid.

Six months ago, out on the plains, on the darkest night of the year, I happened upon a number of Wan Kuei performing a mystical ritual. I did not find this to be particularly strange in and of itself; the Yin Realms were close on that night, and the Wall was thin.

But no spirits of the dead came to those vampires. I saw servants of the Yama King Tou Mu, with many eyes and armor that glistened moistly in the starlight. Fearing I might be seen, I ran.

Four months ago, I told my teacher, Lei Fan, what I had seen. I have not seen Lei Fan since. But I have seen things lurking at the edge of my vision. On the warmest nights on the high plain, as I drifted around the outskirts of the nomads' camps, I saw them. Strands of mist twisted around themselves, blurring the stars or moon for a moment. I spoke of these things at the next gathering of the Black Tortoise Court.

I missed the most recent meeting of the court. The new moon was last night, and I did not have time to measure the stars and search for the next meeting place. I did not have time because for the last several nights I have been hounded into scarlet cycle by hunters of some kind. Someone or something lurks, hundreds of yards away, never letting me quite out of its sight. And I am exhausted, and the Yang Chi ebbs. I hope this missive finds its way to you.

Spread the word. Akuma fill the court of the North.

— Men Xi

The East

War reigns in the Court of the Azure Dragon; peasant uprisings and nobles' rebellions roil back and forth across Nihon and Koryo, and rampaging barbarians threaten even the Jin Empire.

In Nihon, the chaos of the recent Gempei War allowed the Wan Kuei and the Ferocious People to wage war on one another more openly. In the end, the Ferocious People seized a dragon nest high atop Mount Fuji from the Rising Sun *gaki*, while the Wan Kuei balanced the scales with the utter destruction of a Hakken wolf-changers' nest in the south. Both sides work to consolidate their gains and lick their respective wounds — and in the case of the Wan Kuei, to

assimilate new numbers from the mortal dead in the Gempei War.

Several dragon lines cross the Sea of Nihon, connecting dragon nests on the Nihonjin islands with others in Koryo and the Jin Empire; one notable dragon track directly connects the Mount Fuji nest with Lake Tianchi, a powerful site across the Takla Makan Desert in the Court of the White Tiger.

Another strong dragon nest lies on the northern island of Hokkaido, in and around the volcanic area known to the Nihonjin as Jigokudani, "Hell Valley." Pools of water run boiling-hot in Jigokudani even in the depths of winter; the Hakken werewolves of Ainu stock are very strong there.

A relatively small nest sits near the peak of Mount Hiei; it is quietly dominated by a *wu* of Inward Focus Dharma Bishamon. The dragon nest on Mount Hiei is not particularly powerful, nor do many dragon lines pass through it, but Enryakuji Monastery on Mount Hiei is home to skilled, armed monks and gave shelter to the Cloistered Emperor during the Gempei Wars.

The Azure Dragon Court

The Court of the Azure Dragon splits along two political axes. First is the three-way split between the *gaki* of Nihon, the Wan Kuei of Koryo and its surroundings and the "imperial" Wan Kuei from further southwest; each of these groups of undead have vastly different traditions and history from the others.

Gaki factions are known as *uji*; rather than organize themselves along court or Dharmic lines, the vampires of Nihon see themselves as extended families. The greatest of these *uji* is House Bishamon, an ancient and noble group consisting of *gaki* from most of the major cities of Nihon. Two minor *uji* — House Genji and House Hiyorumi — have increased in size as a result of the Gempei War. The elders of Bishamon — which dwarfs both Genji and Hiyorumi — confidently believe neither minor house to be a threat. The *gaki* are inward-looking, content to tend to Nihon to the exclusion of the rest of the Azure Dragon Court.

The Wan Kuei of Koryo have much more in common with those from the Song dynasty or the Jin Empire, as there is far greater commerce and travel among these neighboring states. Though there is not infinite trust among the *wu* of the Koryo Peninsula, a recently signed treaty known as the Agreement of Three holds great promise. In it, the Wan Kuei of Koryo agree that trade and commerce between vampires of the mainland and those of Nihon is desirable; since both sides depend on the vampires of the peninsula for safe travel, signers of the agreement are sure to earn plenty of profit in jade and slaves. This profit lets the vampires of Koryo pay greater attention to their primary problem: the Ferocious People of the jungles, who hold many sacred Chi sites that the Wan Kuei desire.

Meetings of the East Court in Pyongyang are rather tense affairs. Matters of protocol and etiquette are carefully measured. If the Tenth Golden Wind of Seoul speaks to the Celestial Blade of House Genji with his head inclined only slightly, he may be offering a deliberate insult to the Celestial Blade, or he may misunderstand his status relative to the Nihonjin. Or it may be that he understands his status relative to the islander, but that Koryo tradition has it that he should not show as much respect to the Celestial Blade as Nihon tradition might enforce.

Thankfully for the peace of the court, neither the Wan Kuei of Koryo nor those from the islands dominate here; after political disagreements erupted into open warfare a few decades ago, several mandarins from the Courts of the Yellow Emperor and the Black Tortoise migrated east. After letters and conversation urging reconciliation failed, the western mandarins acted to end the hostilities. They dispatched agents of their own to remove the most troublesome of the Seoul and Pyongyang *wu* while attacking the material resources (land, servants and so on) of the Nihonjin vampires. The western mandarins have largely been successful; if nothing else, vampires of Koryo and Nihon both see them as unwelcome trespassers.

From the Commentaries of Lun Ouran:

There is a point to all of this peacemaking by the "immigrant" mandarins, of course. They have evidence that the ambitious Daityas house of the *hsien* has begun to infiltrate the ruling families of the Jin Empire of the Jurchen peoples, north of Koryo. These newcomer mandarins feel that such power belongs only in the hands of the Wan Kuei and intend to wage a shadow war against the Daityas in the coming years to dislodge them.

The second political axis within the Court of the Azure Dragon turns on the matter of mortal rule in the Middle Kingdom. Kang Cho-lu, a respected Thrashing Dragon elder, has begun to circulate a missive entitled *On the True Nature of the Emperor's Curse and the Honorable Return to Power*. Kang's encyclical has a single thesis: The Wan Xian fell from their place of honor and power not because they dealt with the Yama Kings but because they abused their power as rulers over mortals. Indeed, Kang believes that only a few Wan Xian trafficked with the Yama Kings at all — or why, he asks, are all Wan Kuei not now *akuma*?

On the True Nature states that the Wan Kuei must openly seize the thrones of mortal kingdoms and return the Middle Kingdom to a time of wise, benevolent rule by immortals. This righteous action will attract the Heavenly Emperor's attention, and after watching for a time to see that the Wan Kuei are truly repentant and intend to rule over the mortals as he intended, surely he will rescind this terrible curse.

Kang does not have as many followers as one might think, given the intensity of the debates surrounding his missive. But he is a charismatic speaker, especially in one-on-one conversations, and when he leaves a city, his entourage is often larger than it was when he arrived.

From the Commentaries of Lun Ouran:

Not surprisingly, the western mandarins support Kang, even if they do not entirely agree with him. They mask their support as simple tolerance of a skilled teacher, but extend no such allowances to Kang Cho-lu's former student Doji Hirumo. A *gaki* of House Genji, Doji holds that the Celestial Emperor never cursed the Wan Kuei at all; he suggests — to the horror of most — that the Emperor has had little interest in the affairs of the Wan Xian or Wan Kuei. Instead, Doji Hirumo believes that oppressed mortals overthrew corrupt and selfish Wan Xian, and that mortal sorcerers laid the curse upon the Ten Thousand Immortals in retribution for their corrupt rule. The western mandarins dislike this "heresy" that undermines their dreams of power and waste few opportunities to hunt Doji Hirumo. Whether or not he speaks the truth is a question they have not even bothered to ask.

Destiny

The Azure Dragon Court eventually disintegrates into camps of rival warlords as Japanese and Korean history progresses; the coming of the Fifth Age brings with it the end of any civility between the *gaki* and the Hungry Dead of the mainland. The *gaki* control the Azure Dragon Court when the turning of the age occurs, and meetings of the court are held on Nihon rather than the mainland by this time. Few mainlanders at court at the end of the Fourth Age survive more than a few nights on Nihon; Korean survivors of these so-called Sky Serpent purges eventually travel south and help form the Quincunx.

Kang's movement dies when he does, a victim of the Sky Serpent purges.

The South

Most dragon nests in the south are in the jungles, rather than on the coastline or high in the hills or even near cities such as Battambang or Angkor. The Wall thins precipitously as one passes through the jungle; travelers have found themselves launched headlong onto a battlefield in the Yang Realm of Fighting Spirits or simply in the Mirror-Land reflection of the physical world's jungle. Friendly Yang spirits — not always available — have led mortals back to their homes when approached humbly. Unfriendly Yang spirits have devoured more than one unwary traveler.

Reports have trickled northward from the Scarlet Phoenix Court that a true dragon lives in the jungles of the south. This being seems largely content to be left alone, but the Empress of the Scarlet Phoenix Court is said to keep a careful eye on the Chi flow near the delta of the Mekong River, watching for the mystic tremors that will herald the creature's ire.

The Scarlet Phoenix Court

The Scarlet Phoenix Court is torn between the wild, Yang-dominated jungles that fill the Kingdoms of Angkor, Nangzhao and Dai Viet, and hubs of civilization like the cities of Battambang and Hue. Empress Dyanang holds court near a dragon nest high atop Phnom Aoral; mimicking the traditions of the Ferocious People, visitors must provide the empress with a valuable gift before admittance into her court's halls.

More than one *wu* of the Scarlet Phoenix Court has peaceful relations with the Ferocious People of the jungles; these understandings are forged through the strength of personal trust and honor rather than a widespread acceptance of another race of *shen*. For instance, the Golden Shroud *wu* unselfishly saved the life of the Zhong Lung dragon-changer known as Nongkhai some 20 years ago, and Nongkhai remains on nearly friendly terms with that *wu*. But other Wan Kuei should step lightly; I am told that a young Thrashing Dragon approached Nongkhai rather nonchalantly some years ago and became part of the Zhong Lung's dawn greeting to the rising sun.

Wan Kuei of the Court of the South change their names from the ones they used in life by the end of their time as Running Monkeys. Centuries of tradition enforce this rule. Many change their names immediately upon drawing the Second Breath — this has the advantage of hiding the vampire from demon hunters — but all have chosen a new name by 60 or so years into their unlives.

So long as a *wu* comes annually to pay its respects to Empress Dyanang, for the most part she leaves it to find its own path. She is no monarch or despot; like many ancient Wan Kuei, Dyanang spends much of her time looking inward, rather than allowing partisan issues of the dead to frustrate her and draw her further away from the path to Heaven.

More minor dragon nests fill the jungles of the south than the Scarlet Phoenix Court has *wu* to defend. Several *wu*, including the Harmonious Thieves and the notoriously unbalanced Dragon-Tiger *wu*, run circuits through several nests, protecting them from mortals, other Wan Kuei courts and Xiong Ren. Unlife in these Corpse Families is frantic, violent and short.

The Scarlet Phoenix Court as a whole is not on good terms with the Court of the Yellow Emperor; as the Jin and Xixia push the Southern Song from the north, vampires of the Center Court expand their reach southward into Scarlet Phoenix territory, attempting to seize unprotected minor dragon nests and jade deposits. *Wu* of the two courts have come to blows repeatedly since the establishment of Xingjai at the city of Linan. Elders of both courts remember similar conflict erupting two

centuries ago, at the fall of the Tang dynasty, and subtly encourage Running Monkeys to take centuries-delayed revenge for those wars.

Destiny

By the Fifth Age, the Scarlet Phoenix Court is beset on all sides; the Mongols of the Yuan dynasty conquer everything they can find, and it is difficult indeed for mortals of the south to retain any independence. Black Tortoise and Yellow Emperor Wan Kuei press against the Scarlet Phoenix, and politically minded vampires in all courts hurl allegations of *akuma* with little or no evidence. Finally, the Scarlet Phoenix Court declares itself separate and apart from the northerners' courts and proclaims the new Golden Courts of the South. They do not take part in the Treaty of the Quincunx and remain alienated from China to this night.

The West

In the realm of the White Tiger, which runs from the Takla Makan Desert south into India, there are numerous holy and dreaded sites. The dragon nests here in the west tend to be somewhat smaller than those in the rest of the Middle Kingdom; elder Wan Kuei speak of the Himalayan Range as a Chi-devourer. And indeed, the flow of the world's energy seems to back this up, as many dragon lines run from western nests directly toward the Himalayas.

The Takla Makan — the name means "those who come in do not come out" — is host to two major dragon nests. The first is located among the Flaming Mountains, outside of Dunhuang; the site itself is said to have once been a gateway to Tou Mu's Hell of Being Skinned Alive, cleared and sanctified by the Wan Xian near the end of the Third Age. Mortal travelers frequent the Shengjin Pass through the mountains and occasionally fall victim to the hungers of the Wan Kuei who control the dragon nest now.

The second nest is the property of the Ferocious People; it is a relatively short distance from the Flaming Mountains, at Crescent Moon Lake. This body instills great confidence in the seers of the Ferocious People, for it truly is carved in an almost mathematically precise crescent moon. It is undoubtedly a sign from the goddess in the moon, but the meaning of that sign is a subject of some debate.

The Flaming Mountain and Crescent Moon dragon nests are rather uncomfortably close to one another. Although no dragon line runs between them any longer, armed conflict between the groups in each nest is common. Only one law restrains the two nests' inhabitants: No combat in the oases. The oases are for all to use and have been since the Third Age; bandits who stake a claim in one of the oases of the Takla Makan may find themselves on the sharp end of an assault by Wan Kuei *and* Ferocious People.

The Court of the White Tiger itself controls a second major dragon nest in the west; the new ancestor, Emperor Da has moved the court to the dragon nest on the shores of the Lake of the Heavens, an incredibly cold, breathtakingly beautiful glacier-fed body of water. Emperor Da welcomes any Wan Kuei to partake of the Chi flow of the Tianchi dragon nest; not surprisingly, he forbids any Wan Kuei to follow the line that runs from it due south in the direction of the Himalayas.

The White Tiger Court

The Court of the White Tiger is attempting to reorganize itself as quickly as it can manage in the wake of Empress Fan's unexpected departure into the high mountain country. The Himalayas have never been safe for our kind, populated as they are by Lightning People and the Ferocious People — the native people of the world-bearing mountains do not often return to take the Second Breath, so the White Tiger Court has no native highlanders among its number. And the highest mountains in the world — which surely these must be — contain a number of powerful dragon nests. According to legend, the Court of the West has sent invading *wu* up the mountains more than once, but those sent have not returned sane.

Empress Fan, the esteemed ancestor of the court, left her estate only a few hours before sunrise on a spring morning some two years ago. Her last words to her beloved disciple Feng Liwan were: "The frozen sky bears a plentiful harvest; the onrushing torrent carries only pain; beware, for soon the knives of eternal fire shall fall; I could no more resist this call than I can the rush of my heart's blood." Empress Fan has not been seen since.

Currently, the Court of the White Tiger is split into a few factions, while its new leadership attempts to build unity. Emperor Da, a Uigur of the Resplendent Crane Dharma, has coaxed enough of the western Wan Kuei into supporting him that he claims leadership of the court.

Da does not have a pleasant task before him. Empress Fan enjoyed the support of the Horns of Ice *wu*, five elders with vast influence in the lands around Kashi. She kept a humble home and garnered the respect of many Wan Kuei younger than she; she acted as mentor to at least one member of each of the major *wu* in the West. By contrast, Da resides in a splendid palace filled with riches and sycophantic mortal and unliving servants. This has made it very difficult for him to gain a secure hold on power. He has yet to discern the threads that connect the Flying Tiger *wu* to the White Bone Society *wu*, for example, and it is not clear to those below him whether he wishes them to remain in their current positions within the court.

In fact, Da has begun to assign various *wu* to different parts of the west than those they have traditionally occupied. He has uprooted the Darkness Eaters, who have lived in Kashi for as long as any of them can remember and sent them to Urumuqi, quite close to Da's own court at Lake Tianchi. Some whisper that Da might never take direct action against those Wan Kuei whom he dislikes,

but he will put them in difficult or dangerous situations in order to let them fail and replace them. It is a different style than Fan's and one that the demons of the west seem unwilling to accept.

Da does rely on the advice of Fan's favored disciple Feng Liwan; Feng himself has a better relationship with much of the court than Da does, although he insists that he is not prepared to take any kind of leadership role.

From the Commentaries of Juang Guangyao:

This is not the only perspective one can take on the matter. Fan was strong, yes, but she maintained that strength only through personal relationships. Her court was informal, and for those out of favor, it was nearly impossible to successfully petition for aid. Da, by contrast, is endeavoring to set up a logical structure to the court, so that pressing needs may be brought to the attention of those best suited to act on them.

DESTINY

Emperor Da's attempt to bring peace to the Court of the White Tiger fails; within a decade, three separate courts of the west compete for true authority. The rise of the Black Tortoise court and the swath of destruction carved by its mortal brethren, the Mongols, destroy dozens of White Tiger Wan Kuei. The survivors join the Quincunx. Empress Fan's fate remains unknown.

THE CENTER

In the Fourth Age alone, humans have lived in the core of China for more than 4,000 years; uncountable tens of thousands of years have passed since the creation of the Middle Kingdom itself, and people are said to have lived in the center of China as long as the land has been separate from Heaven. Over the course of those years, mortal geomancers — *fang shih* — have used their abilities to discern the best resting place for their emperors' bodies. The result of such analysis is that the strongest dragon nests in the center of China have emperors' tombs built within them. This does not pose a problem for the Wan Kuei, half-dead as they are, but it does mean that the major nests of the center are strongly aspected toward Yin, and indeed, in more than one such tomb, the Wall is so thin as to allow unwary mortals to wander into the lands of the dead.

The most powerful dragon nest in the center of the Middle Kingdom is home to the resting place of Emperor Qin Shihuangdi. The Wan Kuei controlled the Mount Li nest for hundreds of years before Emperor Shihuangdi's death a millennium ago, but the unexpected loss of Wan Kuei Emperor Ai Loyu at the hands of one of the Great Devourers (ancient *chih-mei* from the dawn of the Fourth Age), a century after Shihuangdi's death, gave the Lord of the Dead the leverage he needed to destroy much of the court proper. Today, Mount Li is defended against the Wan Kuei by thousands of ghosts loyal to the Ghost Emperor, and the vampires have made the concession of moving their court to the old Imperial Palace within Changan proper.

The presence of ghosts and the air of the underworld oppresses one less as one moves outward from Changan. Several other cities — notably Kaifeng, Ningxia and Linan — host supernatural creatures of all stripes. A cabal of *hsien* in Xianqiang maintains good relations with the bodhisattvas of the Shaolin Monastery, while simultaneously plotting against the Wan Kuei in Ningxia itself, leading many observers to assume that the bodhisattvas themselves are on bad terms with Boulin Tan, the ancestor of the Ningxia Court. The bodhisattvas, in typically cryptic fashion, only say that Ningxia's end days approach. Rumors abound that Nezumi rat-men escaped from the Jin sacking of Kaifeng with more gold and silver than any of the invaders or former residents did. As the Song Empire's capital-in-exile, Linan has swelled in population in recent years and, like a well-fattened pig, the city attracts hungry visitors from across the Middle Kingdom.

THE YELLOW EMPEROR COURT

The Court of the Yellow Emperor, at the heart of the Middle Kingdom, rightly sees itself as the center of all supernatural activity. Though the imperial capital has moved from Changan to Kaifeng to Linan, the Court of the Yellow Emperor has not moved from the labyrinths of Changan in thousands of years.

The ancestors of the court seem content to let the mortal world roil around them; they do not let the succession of emperors or even dynasties stir them to great emotion as they circle around their private goals. The *wu* at the heart of the Court of the Yellow Emperor, the Golden Jade Society, does not speak of a glorious final goal for the court itself, nor does it spend much time addressing the needs of the *wu* that make up the court. The Wan Kuei of the Golden Jade Society are introspective to the point of real ignorance of the world around them.

Yellow Emperor Wang Hongben is the eldest of the Golden Jade Society, and he seems nearest to The Hundred Clouds; he follows the Thousand Whispers Dharma, and his ever-changing bearing makes it difficult for less enlightened Wan Kuei to have meaningful conversations with him; when far from court certain Running Monkeys suggest that he is mad rather than enlightened, but other than the arhats and bodhisattvas, who can tell the difference? The others in his *wu* — one for each direction — encircle him, metaphorically speaking. Each of them vies for Wang Hongben's favor more than any other thing; the Golden Jade Wan Kuei only tend to external concerns when out of favor with their leader. It is said that one of them desires his downfall and that two of the others are secretly lovers, but then, gossip

roils around the Court of the Yellow Emperor like flies on rotting meat.

In the effective absence of leadership from the Golden Jade *wu*, several other *wu*, most notably the Amber Wren and Bronze Pennant, manage details such as relations with the other four August Courts, the Xiong Ren Beast Courts and other societies of *shen*. Other *wu* are assigned the task of educating promising *hin*, and still others attend to more mundane affairs. The absence of central authority can sometimes leave *wu* without the support of their fellows; years ago, for instance, a shadowy band of Xiong Ren and *hsien* did away with the Horned Tigers of Kaifeng in the chaos of that city's conquest by the Jin.

Two other loci dominate Wan Kuei activity in the Court of the Yellow Emperor: Linan, the Song dynasty capital in exile, and Shaolin Monastery, home to the Sages of the Fivefold Way. The Blissful Ice Daggers of Linan tend to Wan Kuei interests in the Southern Song imperial court. They ruthlessly control access to the eunuchs and bureaucrats of the court there; few Wan Kuei leave Linan without earning a debt to the Blissful Ice Daggers. Astute observers suggest that the Daggers hold the leash of so many favors that they undermine the authority of the Golden Jade Society in Changan. Another *wu*, the Silver Lock, compounds its long tenure among the merchants of Linan with the recent influx of mortals from all over the empire to create one of the greatest mercantile companies in all of the Middle Kingdom. The Corpse Family that worries me most of all is the Warriors of the Hebei Plain *wu*. Composed entirely of Jurchens, they are on cordial terms with the other *wu* of the city, but I suspect they are in Linan to help further the cause of the Jin Empire and bring down the Song. This could create a dangerous opportunity for northern rivals.

The Sages of the Fivefold Way are simultaneously the most and least influential Wan Kuei of the Middle Kingdom. No vampires are more widely renowned for wisdom and enlightenment than these five, cloistered away at the Shaolin Monastery. But at the same time, they do not sully their hands with mortal or Wan Kuei politics. A shadow war between two *wu*, for instance, is no matter to bring to the Sages. These beings are concerned with personal enlightenment and ascension, as fits the name bodhisattva: They have chosen to halt in their personal quests for enlightenment in order to guide others along the path to The Hundred Clouds. The Illustrious Scribes of the Yellow River *wu* buffers the Sages from mundane distractions; they run errands for the masters and control others' access to them.

Realms of the Spirit

Treatise by Xiang Xiwei, Western Mask of the Many Faces *Wu*

The Middle Kingdom is a vast place for the Wan Kuei. While many mortals never leave their home village, vampires travel with impunity, provided they can find a safe place to spend the day. And while mortals may speak of the songs of Heaven and the torments of Hell, we Ten Thousand Demons are intimately familiar with the various reaches of the spirit world — at least, with the Yin and Yang Realms and Yomi Wan; most of us no longer speak of Heaven.

Destiny

Years hence, an unknown assailant murders Wang Hongben in his chambers. Rumormongers throughout the Yellow Emperor Court speculate as to the murderer's identity — an *akuma*, a frustrated *wu*-mate or a servant of another court? The truth is never learned for certain.

The Golden Jade Society fragments, and the forces pulling at the Court of the Yellow Emperor tear it apart. The four surviving Golden Jade Wan Kuei make their own way; two are slain in the aftermath of Wang's death, and the others disappear. Without a central authority to pull them together, war erupts between and among the *wu* of various cities. The Mongol conquest of most of Asia during the end years of the Southern Song does not simplify matters; refugees from the destruction of Ningxia and other cities cause Center Court lands to swell with Wan Kuei. Many of those refugees are subject to accusations of *akuma*, and in some cases, the refugees are indeed Yomi-tainted.

Peace does not return until the Treaty of the Quincunx during the Yuan dynasty, in which the new Jade Court is declared to reside in Changan. The new Ancestor of the Jade Court — a former inhabitant of Ningxia and secretly *akuma* — learns of the Golden Jade Society's research into *The Broken-Winged Crane* and meditation techniques and disseminates them throughout the court. Less than a century later, Wan Kuei traveling from the east discover that most if not all vampires of the Jade Court are indeed *akuma*, perverted by Tou Mu; a great battle ensues, and the Jade Court is scoured. This event, along with the fall of the Yuan dynasty to the Ming, is most commonly seen as the signpost of the Fifth Age's arrival.

The Yin World

The Yin World lies within and below the realm of the physical. It is a dark place, hollow with the death-energies of Yin, and the final resting place of all things in the void of Oblivion. At the same time, it is quiet and peaceful. The young Wan Kuei should remember that Yin is not evil; it is merely an end to change. Scores of realms populate the tempestuous void of Yin, the greatest of which is the Yellow Springs, controlled by Yu Huang, Jade Emperor of the Dead. There are many other realms of interest, however.

Where to Go From Here

This section provides only a brief overview of some notable spirit realms, ones more accessible in the Fourth Age than in the Fifth. Further information on the Yellow Springs (the largest of the Yin Realms) also appears in Chapter Six.

Storytellers who want more information on the worlds beyond the Wall, should first consult **Kindred of the East**. From there, they can brach out to a variety of other supplements, such as **Dark Kingdom of Jade** (for the Yin World in general and the Yellow Springs specifically), **Umbra: The Velvet Shadow** (for the Yang World, although with a Western slant) and **The Thousand Hells** (for Yomi Wan).

Home of the Final Blossom

In the dying days of the Third Age, a mortal woman named Tien Lu, who'd walked close to death her entire life, entered the spirit world on a quest to become immortal and escape death's predation for all time. Her travels took her into the Yang Realms and, eventually, to a high mountaintop, to the Everlasting Tree. Only one flower remained on the vast tree's branches. As Tien Lu reached for that blossom, the tree itself spoke to her, saying: "In this flower lives the last of my life, and as the Everlasting Tree dies, so does this kingdom. Are you truly heartless enough to take it from me?"

Tien Lu, old and suspicious, laughed. "You try to deceive me, old tree, for this kingdom lies in the heart of Yang, and you simply wish to keep your own power." With a smile, she plucked the last blossom from the Everlasting Tree and ate it. As she hiked down the mountain, air rushed past her; green grass turned to gray ash, which scuffed into clouds as she walked upon it. Tien Lu, last of the Wan Xian, left the Home of the Final Blossom as it swung from Yang to Yin.

Today, the Home of the Final Blossom is airless; any mortal entering it would certainly suffocate, and there is no wind to carry sound to living or dead ears. The realm is waterless, too; spaces that were once rivers and lakes are now inky and black voids; some of the largest "lakes" brim with Yin Chi. Trees, grass and fantastic creatures stand motionless; they are no more than beautiful sculptures of ash now, destroyed by the slightest contact. The Everlasting Tree still stands atop its mountain; it, too, is a pile of ash, but those that taste Chi in the air can sense tantalizing fragments of Yang energies wafting past — perhaps this is the last touch of the active Celestial Emperor in the universe.

The Shards of the Imperial Libraries

In the earliest days of the Fourth Age, the Yama King Dou Tingzhang, Mutilator of the Unfaithful, staged an attack on the August Personage's libraries; his intention was to sever the vast library compound from the rest of the Heavenly Palace, twist it into Hell and use it as a base of operations in his campaigns against the former servitors of Heaven and the other Yama Kings.

From the Commentaries of Dan Xiang:

The ashes and dust of the Home of the Final Blossom can be a treasure to some. Those skilled in such things can brew alchemical potions of great power from the ash, and others have told me that gold and jade can be found if one digs deeply enough into the ashen ground. For my part, I have visited the realm but once; it was the quietest place I have ever encountered, making it ideally suited for contemplation.

But the servants of Heaven — the *hsien*, the Ferocious People and even a few still-loyal Wan Kuei —built ramparts and barricades to keep the forces of Yomi Wan at bay. The battle lasted for weeks; eventually, Dou Tingzhang himself stepped forward to face Zhao Fenzhan, an aged, powerful weretiger, in single combat. That battle, it is said, took the better part of a day, and it laid waste to much of the libraries' grounds and many of the libraries themselves. Finally, at the point of death, Zhao invoked the Heaven Thunder Hammer and drove Dou back to Hell, where he was later set upon by his peers and torn to shreds.

The Shards of the Imperial Libraries float in the Yin Realm. Each library building (there are 11) and its grounds are present, even though some buildings are not intact or even usable; the weeks of fighting combined with the maelstrom of Zhao's final combat with Dou destroyed most of the structures of the compound. Zhao's burial cairn occupies a position of honor near the center of the realm; it was the last thing constructed by the libraries' defenders before they left in the aftermath of Dou's defeat.

On the whole, the Shards are quiet places of contemplation and study. A handful of buildings remain intact enough that sufficiently driven Wan Kuei can enter and find ancient scrolls or simply sit and meditate in peace.

Chorales of former librarians parade through the ruins; they can no longer see or read, but the text of scrolls and books from their sections within the library are pressed onto their skin. The chorales have been together for thousands of years now; each of them knows all of the words inscribed on all of the members of their chorale, and as they slowly wander from half-burned building to collapsed husk, they sing or chant those words. Not all of their songs are derived from poetry, mind you; a particularly dreary chant is simply a calendar marking the proper times for a farmer to hoe, plant, weed and harvest. The chorales are not entirely monomaniacal; they will stop if confronted and speak (usually in a droning singsong) if addressed.



The Watery Kingdom of Fu Yi

Fu Yi was once a thriving kingdom on the ocean's coast, in the mortal world. Its Wan Xian kings and lords built towering stone and wooden buildings, soaring bridges and gracefully spired temples; they were philosopher-kings and warrior-poets. Fu Yi had numerous cities and a population in the hundreds of thousands. This, of course, was before chaos and madness struck the Wan Xian.

When the Wan Xian made war on each other, the very earth of Fu Yi trembled. As months of fighting passed, astute mortals noticed the sea's slow rise, the perpetual flooding of major rivers and great valleys blasted out where mountain ranges once stood. On the fifth day of the fifth month of the last year of the Third Age, the lands of Fu Yi gave a great shuddering heave and submerged beneath the ocean floor and into the Yin Realm. Today, no sign remains of the kingdom in the mortal world; the remains of its beautiful buildings entered the Yin Realm rather than remaining on the sea floor.

Thousands of mortals drowned, of course, and hundreds remained attached to Fu Yi as ghosts when it slid across the Wall. The kingdom itself remains quite flooded, even in the Yin Realm; seawater rises far above the grandest spire of Fu Yi. The ghosts of the land acclimatized to their new surroundings remarkably quickly and set about their moist afterlives with surprising vigor. Their first step was to restore their nation's former beauty, and they have long since completed that process.

The subjects of the Undying King of Fu Yi elected themselves a new king in the underworld, and although the king has been replaced more than once, the passage of power has largely been peaceful. The population of Fu Yi no longer increases—perhaps a shipwreck every generation or two contributes to the ranks of the drowned dead here, but no more than that. Yin spirits, malevolent and benign, pass through the realm on occasion and are met with a response appropriate to their nature.

The ghosts of Fu Yi have watched the rise of the Yellow Springs Realm since the death of Qin Shihuangdi, and they are no friends to the Jade Empire. Fu Yi is far smaller than Yu Huang's realm, of course, and would be crushed in an outright war. However, the ghosts of Fu Yi retain three large advantages over those of the self-styled Jade Emperor: They are truly ancient ghosts who do not, apparently, face the worst dangers of Oblivion and, so, are individually very powerful; their kingdom is a three-dimensional maze of water in which the forces of Yu Huang are at a great tactical disadvantage; and they refuse to take to the field, fighting only when it suits them, in ambush, assassination and harassment, spending the rest of the time submerged where most wraiths cannot follow.

From the Commentaries of Dan Xiang:

The ghosts of Fu Yi ake quite willing to pass along what they know of the Yellow Springs, fok those who wish to entek that kealm without the knowledge of Yu Huang. They seemed unusually open and welcoming to me, without any of the bitterness ok insulakity one might expect from such a small and ancient society. Ok perhaps they hid their internal feuding from me, their guest. I do know that when I ketukned a second time, a teacher with whom I spent a gkeat deal of time was gone — to his final kewakd, the otheks told me, but they would not elabokate fukthek.

The Yang World

The Yang World floats above the physical plane. It is well-lit and alive with untold thousands of spirits, a bright reflection of the mortal world. However, just as Yin is not synonymous with evil, the reader should not believe that Yang is synonymous with good; there is wickedness in the Yang World. Like its counterpart, the Yang World is home to countless realms. Unlike Yin, there is no truly dominant realm, only countless places of wonder and danger. Some of the most interesting include the following:

Realm of the Celestial Blacksmith

When the August Personage of Jade dissolved the perfect universe into contested realms of Yin and Yang, the First Celestial Craftmaster, Ru Shou, built his forge in the lands of the south. Ru Shou brought the art of smelting metal to the people of the Middle Kingdom and so became especially venerated; because metal was first used to make weapons, Ru Shou became known as the God of Punishment.

As the Yin and Yang Realms spiraled further apart, Ru Shou himself became torn; he needed both metal *and* fire to forge weapons for the greatest of the Celestial Emperor's servants. Ru Shou saw the slow rise of the eaters of cursed Chi among the Wan Xian and equipped the dragons and *hsien* who served him with his finest weapons before closing off his vast estate to the Ten Thousand Immortals. The servitors of Ru Shou fought corrupt invader Wan Xian for decades and finally repelled the demons early in the Fourth Age.

Now, thousands of years later, Ru Shou has begun to send his servants out into the Middle Kingdom to see what changes have been wrought. The God of Punishment has long since run out of metal, with his estate now deep in the Yang Realm, and while he has kept busy firing truly beautiful pots — and even more fantastic works, including one chariot worked from the very clouds — he has instructed his servants to bring him fine copper and bronze for smelting and to return with news of the world. More than one truly old bodhisattva recognizes Ru Shou's servants, and those ancient ones know that a sword crafted by Ru Shou could be a powerful tool, if placed in the right hands.

Lands of the Freakish Multitudes

Travelers' tales of ancient China speak of dozens of strange kingdoms, populated by peoples who no longer exist. Stories speak of people with no heads, with their faces on their abdomen, or those with two heads or those with one head and two bodies or dozens of other strange variations. These beings have strange habits and stranger dietary requirements: Some could eat only the inedible parts of animals and relished meals of fur, claws and bones, while others were restricted to consume only spring wheat and so on.

These beings and their dozens of kingdoms — which traded and made war with human kingdoms on a regular basis during the Third Age — do still exist; they are collectively known as the Lands of the Freakish Multitudes, in the Yang Realm. These lands, more spirit than material even in the Third Age, are now kept apart from the mortal world by the Celestial Emperor's Wall, through which few can pass.

A continuous flow of Yang Chi permeates the Freakish Lands; this energy sustains many strange creatures that long ago died out in the physical world. And rumor has it that even more surprising beings inhabit these realms. According to the semi-mythical *A Drunken Traveler's Journal*, the Wan Xian were not only chosen from the ranks of humankind but also from some of these bizarre races. And unreliable reports in the Beast Court of Xinjiang suggest that a handful these immortals remain, hiding out where the Wall and the copious flow of Yang Chi protect them from the fire of the August Personage's curse. These tales might simply serve to hide a darker truth, however; no reliable Wan Kuei witness has returned with such a tale from these lands.

The Kingdom of Fiery Passions

Yang Chi is, in its most basic sense, life energy. It pushes the tiger to chase down the deer, while it pushes the deer to run from the tiger. It drives away disease and sustains the farmer in his toils. And it exhorts all things that live to reproduce and expand their lineage. The Kingdom of Fiery Passions embodies that last urge; it is a land where the only imperative is to couple, procreate and couple again.

The term "kingdom" is perhaps an inaccurate name for this place. There is no sovereign, no bureaucracy. The air carries the warm, green scent of early spring; forests and valleys thrive with life. Tens of thousands of spirits fill this place, and the number grows annually. Animal spirits mate without consideration to species, and their offspring show a jumbled hybrid of their parents' traits. Some Wan Kuei suspect that this realm is the true homeland of the Ferocious People, but —

perhaps not surprisingly — few of them are willing to sit down to a discussion on the subject.

A few Thrashing Dragons have made a permanent home of this place. They can feed on the Yang energies of local spirits and spend their days in sybaritic hedonism. Wan Kuei who are not Yang-unbalanced find the place rather uncomfortable, despite the temptation of a long-term scarlet cycle. The Thrashing Dragons who reside here — the Scarlet Forest *wu* — have given birth to numerous dhampyr children, who seem inured to the flood of life-energy around them.

Yomi Wan

The Thousand Hells are the repository for much of the evil of the mortal world. Yomi Wan does not cause the wickedness of the world; instead, much as the Yang Realm reflects the mortal world's life energies, Yomi Wan reflects and focuses the mortal world's corruption. Few souls would choose to enter one of the Thousand Hells; those that do are either mad, driven to power-lust or intend to flee as quickly as possible.

The Lands of Hell

If *The Black Scrolls of Xia* are to be believed, the Yama Kings seized lands from Heaven and Earth and both the Yin and Yang Realms to create Yomi Wan. Certainly, the Wan Kuei speak of "lost vistas" that now can only be visited in Hell.

Each Yama King has seized his own territory; either he ripped it away from another realm in the Second or Third Age or has since destroyed a hell's founder and claimed that land as his own. By now, most Yama Kings are firmly ensconced in their respective hells, with spies everywhere; when rumblings of insurrection begin, the Yama Kings know who to execute.

Few of even the most powerful demons give thought to conquering a hell for themselves. That is not to say that, for instance, Yargra the Many-Mouthed gives no thought to *creating* a hell of her own. Yargra's servants explore the mortal, Yin and Yang Realms in search of lands that could serve as the foundation for new hells. In the ancient days, the Wan Xian might have noticed these machinations and struck against the demon dukes and barons. But the Wan Xian are long gone. Perhaps the gods' old servants the *hsien* or the Ferocious People might stand against these not-yet Yama Kings.

Yama Kings and the Hells

We assume, perhaps wrongly, that the best known Yama Kings are also among the most powerful. Today, the most powerful Yama Kings would be Bao Zhong, ruler of the Hell of Undying Sorrow; Mikaboshi, lord of the Wicked City (of which Harappa may well provide the foundation: See below); Danoru Ka, King of the Never-lit Cavern; Ravana, the lord of Lanka; Emma-o, lord of a Nihonjin Hell; Rangda, Queen of Plagues; and Tou Mu, the Iron Empress. Of these, not all use *akuma*; Bao Zhong and Tou Mu never do, and Rangda uses them sparingly.

Harappa

During the Age of Legend, while the land flourished under the protection of the Wan Xian, a great innovation sprung up in the furthest reaches of the Middle Kingdom. Under the guiding hand of the immortals, the great city of Harappa arose on the plains of the Indus River. The city boasted a population of 50,000 craftsmen, merchants, soldiers and officials. This was no village of ox carts, no rustic fortification for some brutish tribal king — it was a beacon of refinement and contentment built toward the sky with bricks and mortar, gold and ivory. It was only a matter of time before Harappa caught the baleful eye of the Yama Kings.

This creation of the Wan Xian and mortals was an irresistible target for the Yama Kings. After ages of defeat after resounding defeat at the hands of the Ten Thousand Immortals, an army of demons ripped through the fabric of the spirit world to set foot in the Middle Kingdom for the first time in centuries — and to sack the city of Harappa.

The people of Harappa put up a valiant fight, taking to the field in chariots, armed and armored with glinting iron. But for all their military regalia, they were not warriors — they were artists, traders and scholars. The forces of Hell cut through them like a scythe through a field, until their immortal champions joined the fray. The resulting battle was cataclysmic — the seas boiled, rivers leapt from their beds, the earth itself bucked and heaved. The Wan Xian were victorious in the end, destroying hordes of demons and forcing the rest to retreat. When the surviving defenders finally put down their swords to look around, the river valley was devastated for hundreds of miles in every direction. Their beautiful city was gone, entire sections of it pulled to Yomi Wan by the greedy talons of the Yama Kings.

It was not long after this crushing loss that the corruption of the Wan Xian began. Some later Wan Kuei scholars claim that Mahanaga Visparakni was among the benefactors of Harappa and a survivor of the battle with the Yama Kings. Crushed by the loss of his beloved city, he began a search for power — power enough to have made a difference, enough to have saved the mortals under his protection. If this is true, then undoubtedly power is what the Yama Queen Tou Mu offered him — and the first *akuma* found out the price too late.



Chapter Two: Many Roads Back

... As cranes trail off in flight, silent,
Wolves snarl over their kill. I brood on
Our wars, sleepless here and, to right
A relentless Heaven and Earth, powerless.
— Du Fu, "Overnight at the Riverside Tower"

Ever since the fall of Mount Meru, the shinning citadel of the Ten Thousand Immortals, the Wan Kuei have struggled to find meaning. Grand Arhat Xue, wisest of all the Hungry Dead, laid down the foundations of the Road Back at the twilight of the Third Age. His wisdom is remembered in the Fivefold Way and the five orthodox Dharmas.

The Fivefold Way

Xue's first and greatest teaching to the Wan Kuei is the Fivefold Way. This is a core set of beliefs — sometimes called the Great Principle — that theoretically guides all the Hungry Dead of the Middle Kingdom. In the Five August Courts, every vampire learns the Fivefold Way as part of their training as *hin*, just after emerging from the cannibalistic *chih-mei* stage. Interpretations vary widely from court to court and from teacher to teacher, but Xue's teachings form the underpinning of the court structure itself; only ancestors looking to be removed do not at least pay lip service to the Great Principle.

Storytellers may wish to refer to **Kindred of the East**, pp. 38-41, for a discussion of these same beliefs in the Fifth Age.

The Great Principle

The Way of Origin

Remember whence you came, for it is the unchanging whole of your purpose.

The Way of Lineage

Heed well those who have come before, and respect those who come after, for they are all part of the truth.

The Way of Integrity

Maintain your honor and trust in all thought, word and deed, for the behavior of one affects the entire community.

The Way of Obligation

Understand your duties to your brethren, to the forces of the universe and to yourself, and do all to fulfill them.

The Way of Propriety

Practice correctness in all you do, for the Great Cycle, in its every aspect, has its own nature, and that nature must be followed.

In the Age of Beautiful Sadness, the Great Principle institutionalizes the court hierarchy and flavors Wan Kuei society with nostalgia. Ancestors and mandarins cite the Way of Origin and try to recreate the times when the Ten Thousand Immortals were demigods ruling great kingdoms. Of course, the Wan Xian were their own undoing millennia ago, and this lesson too is part of the Way of Origin. Those vampires who advocate a withdrawal from mortal affairs say that the fall of Mount Meru clearly means that ruling as kings is inappropriate.

The other elements of the Great Principle all serve to reinforce the system of the Five August Courts and the power of the mandarins and ancestors who rule them. The young must respect the old; the young have a duty to the court; the young must act honorably — and toe the line. Mandarins have all the same obligations in theory, but they need only pay lip service to the principle of respecting the young — a perfect recipe for building tension.

The nightly realities are less polarized, of course. Many Wan Kuei spend only a bit of their time at court and thereby avoid a great deal of the frustration of the mandarins' games. The institution of the *wu* helps a great deal because it gives the young allies they can trust. There are also mandarins who know that disciples and jina have their worth and deserve a (respectful) voice at court. Nevertheless, the tensions in the courts are starting to have their effect — the Court of the Azure Dragon is slowly collapsing into Nihonjin and mainland factions, and the other courts are not that far behind.

The Dharmas

Xue's second great contribution to the Wan Kuei was the development of the five Dharmas. These philosophies have become well-worn paths along the Road Back, ways for some of the Ten Thousand Demons to redeem themselves before heaven. Without the teachings of a Dharma, a Wan Kuei is bound to live as a savage, cannibalistic wretch and return screaming to Yomi. The Hungry Dead owe their very survival to Xue and his teachings, or so the ancestors say.

Heretical Dharmas

Of course, the truth is not quite so simple. There are a number of vampires who exist without following one of the five Dharmas attributed to Xue. They follow other paths, which the ancestors of the Five August Courts brand as heresies. The so-called heretics, of course, feel their beliefs are entirely justified. Many argue that their belief systems can coexist with the traditional Dharmas and emphasize their continued adherence to the Fivefold Way. They often argue that their "heresies" are but further extrapolations from Xue's own teachings and, hence, legitimate. Others return the August Courts' scorn and see Xue's teachings as flawed or even foolish. They argue that their way is better than the orthodoxy.

The era of **Blood & Silk** is a moment of tolerance for the less stringent of the heretics. Those who embrace the Fivefold Way are technically welcome in the August Courts, even if their beliefs are unorthodox. These heretics can and do hold prominent positions in some courts and attract followers. They all operate at a disadvantage, however. A heretic must prove her loyalty and worth again and again, and when things turn sour, she is invariably blamed. Wise heretics accumulate favors owed to them, keep their eyes open for betrayal and always have an escape route planned.

Heresy in Brief

At the end of the Fourth Age, the following heretical Dharmas are most prominent. Their beliefs and practices are largely as they are in the Fifth Age (see **Kindred of the East Companion**, pp. 47-59), but their members find it easier to move into China and other orthodox areas. Note that the Spirit of the Living Earth Dharma does not come into being until the 17th century.

- **The Face of the Gods:** The Divine Faces believe that the Wan Kuei are just as blessed as the Wan Xian were, elevated demigods instead of debased demons. They strive to further their own divinity, seeking perfection in all acts and actively encouraging mortal worship. The Dharma is most numerous in India but has isolated followers across the Middle Kingdom. They are the heretics most likely to be persecuted because of their rejection of many elements of the Fivefold Way.
- **The Flame of the Rising Phoenix:** Rising Phoenixes maintain a very strong identification with their mortal lives. Their ideal is to become not only living again (like Thrashing Dragons) but to reintegrate perfectly with their past mortal existences. They often masquerade as human, maintain families and doggedly pursue whatever unfinished business brought them out of Yomi. The Rising Phoenix is very popular in India but has adherents across the Middle Kingdom. They generally interact well with other Wan Kuei, mostly because they leave the unliving to their own affairs.
- **The Tempest of Inward Focus:** Tempests believe in a rigid balance in all things and are the nomads of the Wan Kuei. Unlike the Thousand Whispers, who move from false life to false life, Tempests maintain their own identity but subject it to contrasting influences. They make fine warriors but then indulge in passionate love or quiet contemplation to balance themselves. Tempests are spread thinly across the Middle Kingdom, always moving from place to place and experience to experience. They have few outright enemies but almost no sure allies either.

Fourth Age Dharma Chart

Dharma	Social Bonus	Virtue Pair Max	Trait Max	Chi/Turn	Status	Age
0	-4	10	5	1	*chih-mei/hin*	any
1	0	10	5	1	disciple	any
2	0	10	5	1	disciple	1 year
3	0	10	5	2	disciple	3 years
4	0	10	5	2	jina	5 years
5	1	12	6	3	jina	25 years
6	2	12	6	3	jina/mandarin	100 years
7	3	14	7	4	mandarin	250 years
8	4	16	8	6	mandarin/ancestor	500 years
9	5	18	9	8	bodhisattva	1,000 years
10	?	?	?	?	bodhisattva/arhat	? years

Key

Social Bonus: The bonus for vampires of this Dharma when interacting with vampires of a lesser Dharma rank. If two vampires with social bonuses are interacting, use the difference between bonuses.

Virtue Pair Max: The maximum sum of either of the vampire's Virtue pairs (Yin and Yang, Hun and P'o)

Trait Max: The maximum value for any one of the vampire's Attributes, Abilities or Disciplines.

Chi/Turn: The maximum number of points of Yin or Yang Chi the vampire can spend in a single turn.

Age: The *minimum* age for a vampire to advance to this Dharma level.

Dharmic Mechanics

The spiritual progress of the Wan Kuei during the Fourth Age is more gradual than on the storm-wracked eve of the Age of Sorrow. Yet the great divide between those who have achieved transhuman enlightenment by spending more than a human lifetime on the Road Back and those who have not is less evident than in the closing days of the Fifth Age. Use the Dharma Chart above instead of the one on p. 54 of **Kindred of the East**. As the Fourth Age draws to a close and the Fifth Age begins, Storytellers should phase in the modern Dharma chart gradually, using the guidelines on page 107.



The Howl of the Devil-Tiger

Virtue: P'o

The members of the Devil-Tiger Dharma believe themselves to be charged with a holy duty as the scourges of Heaven. These vampires believe the Yama Kings have abandoned their posts as punishers of iniquity to pursue selfish agendas. Rushing up from Yomi like thunderheads, the Devils of Heaven have embraced this mission of wickedness wholeheartedly, diligently punishing the wicked and tearing down decaying and unjust social structures.

Though united in their belief that they are to replace the erring Yama Kings as the enemies of sin, the Devil-Tigers can agree on little else. An ancient ruling by the Five Emperors that the Heavenly Devils can form no large organizations combines with a doctrine of passion and activity to make the Devil-Tigers their own worst enemies. Beyond general agreement on the basic tenets of their Dharma, there is no consensus among them. The Dharma is divided into a thousand feuding sects and fraternal orders based on doctrine and on the sorts of victims the individual prefers. Some Devil-Tigers ruin corrupt officials, while others pursue those who abuse their spouses and still others violate rapists and molesters of children.

This righteous agenda does not mean the Heavenly Devils are themselves humane or heroic. The Devil-Tigers punish sin because it is their duty as devils to do so. However, it is also the duty of a devil to act in a wicked manner. For the Devils of Heaven, cruelty and self-indulgence are holy callings and an affirmation of their place in the cosmic order. Accordingly, the Devil-Tigers are eager to partake in the very sins they so assiduously punish in mortals. Though most Devil-Tigers would meet Final Death rather than be untrue to their celestially mandated duty, they cite this same mandate as the reason they cultivate holy places that are blights upon the Tapestry and keep bakemono and wicked spirits as their servants.

The Devil-Tiger Dharma is administered (if a word so strong can be used to describe the patina of order placed upon the chaos of sects and secret societies) by a grouping of bodhisattvas and elderly mandarins called the August Body of Sagacious Devils. This most distinguished college administers a series of rigorous and complicated tests that ensure that high-ranking Devil-Tigers will be competent and educated in worldly matters.

Devil-Tigers are much-feared for their mastery of the Dragon Tear Discipline, Chi'iu Muh. A majority of these vampires learn the Dragon Tear before they become jina. It aids these vampires considerably in their drive to stay abreast of events. Devil-Tigers are well-known as visionaries, and the prophetic powers of the Dragon Tear are in no small part responsible for this image.



It is said (particularly by the Devil-Tigers themselves) that the Devils of Heaven will destroy the world in holy fire at the coming of the Age of Sorrow. If this is true, then it is a distant event indeed. For now, the Devil-Tigers content themselves with lurking on the edges of human society and standing just behind the shadows in mortal dens of vice. Their task is punishing sinners and bringing about the downfall of corrupt and decadent dynasties, whatever bloodstained future glories they may entertain dreams of.

Training: Devil-Tigers are very active in training young Wan Kuei, a process they call Infant Devil Civilizing.

Many of these young disciples later join other Dharmas, but a majority of new *hin* receive the instruction for their Fire and Water Tests (their passage to disciple status) from Devil-Tiger tutors.

The stereotypical disciple who remains in the Dharma led a violent and spiritually scarring life and cleaves close to this root in his second existence. These vampires channel their wicked tendencies into the service of the Celestial Bureaucracy. Other Devil-Tigers follow their path to make up for lives spent in contemplation rather than the pursuit of righteousness, though most such persons gravitate toward the Thrashing Dragons or the Resplendent Cranes.

Initial Heavenly Devil training is brutal, focusing on helping students accept their undead state and teaching them to draw power from the Demon while remaining its master. Later training (which continues through the Devil-Tiger's entire unliving existence) focuses on developing the vampire's potential.

Much like mortal bureaucrats, Devil-Tigers have an elaborate ranking system based on mastery of a diverse set of skills. Young Devil-Tigers are tested on basics like fighting, feeding and daylight survival. More advanced Heavenly Devils must master human and Wan Kuei history, accounting, management and administration, the teachings of all major religions and classical philosophers and a seemingly endless list of additional topics.

Faults: For all their emphasis on elegance, vision and self-education, Devil-Tigers are still impulsive, wicked creatures aligned with fire and thunder. Control and forethought do not come easily to them, and their dark nature often makes them predictable. Given the opportunity to commit an act of elegant evil, it is very difficult for Devil-Tigers to refuse.

Affiliations: Fire, the number 2, the color red and the south direction

Concepts: Corrupt official, bilking merchant, murdered noble, brigand, subsistence farmer starved in drought, former cultist or secret society member, venal monk, visionary prophet, inbred backwoods savage, spy

Sobriquets: Devil-Tigers, Heavenly Devils, Celestial Devils, Devils of Heaven

Tenets

1: You are a devil. Embrace your mission with both arms.

2: You are the master of the P'o. Listen to it, and take full advantage of its power, but never let the Demon dictate your actions.

3: Embrace passion, both of the flesh and of the spirit. Only in moments of immediacy are we free of dissimulation.

4: Pain is the teacher. Only through the light of agony are we truly aware. Illuminate yourself and others.

5: Wickedness is the station of the devil. Strive always to make your evil both elegant and precise, for your malevolence does honor to the Celestial Order.

6: As a devil, you are the force of Heaven's displeasure with the unrighteous. When a man is unjust, bring about his downfall. When a dynasty is unjust, bring about its downfall also.

7: For a world with much sin, Heaven has seen fit to appoint a pitiful few devils. Do not waste yourself correcting petty injustices, and do not engage in acts beneath the dignity of your station.

8: Your business is with the wicked. The innocent are not within your purview.

Rival Paths

Resplendent Cranes: How easy it is to enjoin the world around you to righteousness and filial piety while you recline in jade-ornamented temples and dine from small boys in the fashion of the Yellow Emperor.

Bone Dancers: They walk with ghosts and play with dead things — how amusing. Yet there is something about their brittle formality that is genuinely charming, and their store of pilfered knowledge is impressive. Good lovers, but terrible allies.

Thousand Whispers: They walk the Buddha's path, and that is a different Road Back than our own. One cannot approve, but there is little question that the approach is valid. It is certainly admirable that they have not given up hope for their Buddha nature, but I would not walk in their shoes.

Thrashing Dragons: Once they quit pretending they're still alive, they're well worth learning from for the lessons they can teach about passion. However, the Running Monkeys trying to convince everyone they never died are insufferable.



MANY ARE THOSE WHO GROW OLD AND FAT ON THE PROCEEDS OF WICKEDNESS. ALAS, YOU WILL NOT BE NUMBERED AMONG THEM.

The Way of the Resplendent Crane

Virtue: Hun

Though the Wan Kuei are disgraced, Heaven has not seen fit to relieve them of their duties. Despite their obviously changed condition, the Resplendent Cranes feel that they must continue to carry out their duties as before the fall of Meru. If the stakes were once great, then how much greater have they grown, with the immortal souls of the guardians themselves dependent on their adherence to an agenda of righteousness?

The Resplendent Cranes divide themselves into sects or cults, with each further subdivided into temples or congregations. The distinction between sects and cults is blurry — sects are more respectable and have established fortresses and places of worship. Of course, there are few Resplendent Cranes indeed would say that *they* belong to a cult. It is a term used to denigrate others more than anything.

The Dharma's organization is hieratic, with sects and cults led by bodhisattvas and elder mandarins and temples and congregations led by younger mandarins with the assistance of elder jina. Shadow wars between rival sects over issues of doctrine are common, and the average temple has at least one feud cooking with a congregation from another cult.

In terms of philosophy, the Resplendent Cranes combine the Confucian and Legalist philosophies in light of their own experience and mission. While they keep the Confucian love for merit, learning and reverence for the ancestors, they accept from the Legalists their realistic attitudes toward governance and warfare. Most importantly, the Resplendent Cranes also embrace the Taoist and Legalist belief that the common people should be kept ignorant, for their own good as well as for the common good. As the example of the Wan Xian shows, cleverness and sophistication leads to nothing but dissimulation. It is difficult enough for the Cranes to control their decadent urges, how can mortals be expected to do likewise?

The classic expression of Crane belief is a series of koans known as the Eight Lotus Path, each lotus being a key concept of the Dharma. These concepts are the recognition of hope; virtuous existence; reward and correction; purgation of sins; instruction in righteous matters; ordering of matters according to law; harmony transcendent over law; and unification of the spirit and the world.

The ideal Resplendent Crane is diligent, educated, mannerly, respectful, righteous, honest, conscientious and brave. The average Resplendent Crane is at least a few of these things and goes to great efforts to appear as if he were all of them. Because benchmarks for acceptable behavior and performance are so high, failing is not nearly so disgraceful as being seen to fail. While all Resplendent Cranes appear to adhere to extraordinarily stringent standards, many are only smiling for their evaluator, who, in turn, knows and accepts that some amount of the subject's performance is faked.



Resplendent Cranes often make their way in the world in a catch-as-catch-can fashion. Some engage in business or large scale agriculture, or work to advise and manipulate mortal magistrates and bureaucrats. Many others work and reside in one of the Dharma's temples, collecting tribute from the surrounding area and protecting their "domain." A large number of Cranes, however, are wanderers. Like the cavaliers of old, these vampires travel through an area, large or small, from haven to haven, in search of enlightenment and of injustices to right.

Training: Young Resplendent Cranes train in the Dharma's temples. They are expected to remain in the sect that provided their initial training for their entire existence, though some do go on to join other sects. In theory, each Resplendent Crane has an elder who acts as a mentor and supervisor. This is not always entirely fortunate. All too frequently, a jealous or simply untalented mandarin will stifle or mislead those under her tutelage who threaten to surpass her in enlightenment. This usually means advancement is limited to the speed of the slowest superior, which often causes a lot of political jockeying in Resplendent Crane temples. Vampires saddled with untalented masters often defect to other sects or rush to jump on the wagon of the most promising older Wan Kuei in the temple.

The tone of the mentor-pupil relationship varies. In temples, it is very close, essentially a relationship of superior and subordinate. Among wandering Cranes, the mentor is much more a friend and advisor. As a result, many Running Monkeys spend a great deal of time wandering to escape slow and top-heavy temple politics.

Like the Devil-Tigers, the Cranes take great pains to educate themselves. However, where the Devil-Tigers strongly emphasize secular matters like trade and warfare, Resplendent Cranes place much more emphasis on subjects like philosophy, spirituality, religious studies and esoteric meditation and martial arts practices. The average Crane of a given age is at least as "educated" as a comparable Devil-Tiger. However, he has probably mastered more Disciplines but is significantly less comfortable among mortals of low standing, like merchants, soldiers and prostitutes.

Faults: The Resplendent Cranes' hierarchy and self-righteous purpose are both their greatest strength and greatest weakness. The same hierarchy that makes the Cranes flexible and organized also makes them intensely political and only as strong as the weakest elder. Also, many young Cranes are full of hubris, assured in their holy purpose with high ideals untempered by realism. Combative and prone to leaping in where wiser heads might fear to tread, these righteous young vampires are forever at odds with their superiors and perpetually stirring up trouble among mortals and with other *shen*.

Affiliations: Water, the number 1, the color yellow and the north direction

Concepts: Soldier-scholar, fallen priest, heir killed in court intrigues, reformed merchant, massacred monk, victim of terrible illness, devoutly religious sinner, disgraced scholar of high honors, murdered magistrate

Sobriquets: Resplendent Cranes, Lotus Walkers, Shining Ice Guardians

Tenets

1: The Eight Lotus Path is before you. Walk it.

2: The Fivefold Way guides you. Heed it.

3: When you witness wrongdoing, right it. When the Demon commits wrongdoing, make amends.

4: Give to those deserving charity, defend those who are helpless, inculcate virtue in those who are ignorant of proper behavior.

5: Reason with the wicked before you strike them down. It is better to educate than annihilate.

6: When the wicked will not submit to reason, strike as swiftly as the eagle and as ferociously as the tiger. Punish and correct the unrighteous when you can, slay them when you cannot.

7: Protect and uphold the pillar of the family, both in the land of the living and in the Yellow Springs, for filial piety is the wellspring of virtue. Do not shame your living family by attending them in person, however. Let them believe you dead, and work subtly to ease their burdens.

8: Honor and composure are the hallmarks of the perfected man. Do not let your fallen state deprive you of your dignity.

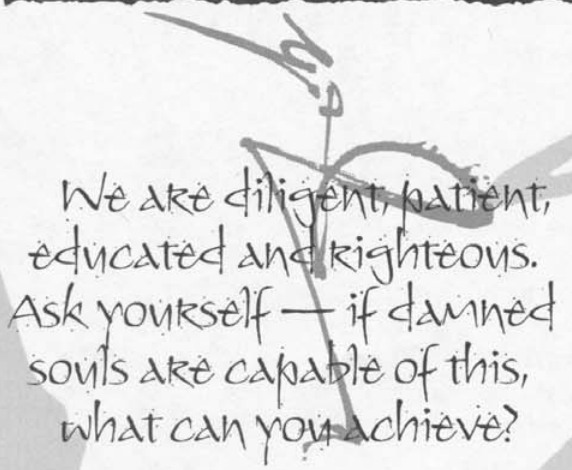
Rival Paths

Devil-Tigers: They drench themselves in blood and call it wickedness. They school themselves in secular matters and call it learning. They peep into the August Personage's plans and call it insight. Dangerous? Yes. Enlightened? Hardly.

Bone Dancers: Their reverence for the ancestors is commendable, but their fascination with corpses, bones and other unclean things is most abhorrent. They serve a righteous cause, but we serve the cause of righteousness.

Thousand Whispers: They are as a man who lives at the foot of a great mountain. Seeking to climb it, he sets out early in the morning, climbs until the evening and then returns home. Though a thousand years pass, will he ever reach the summit?

Thrashing Dragons: Barbarian philosophies and Buddhist sophistries, all serving as an excuse for the vilest of fleshy excesses. At least the Devil-Tigers imagine themselves to be heroes of a sort. Tending the Yang World is no excuse to engage in such shocking improprieties.



The Song of the Shadow

Virtue: Yin

The so-called Bone Dancers are named for the sensual, hypnotic postures of the Bone Dance, the most well-known expression of the Yin Prana. Like this mystic dance, the followers of the Song of the Shadow are beautiful, entrancing, mysterious and deadly.

Icy and analytic, the Bone Dancers cultivate a detached mental condition they call the Cold Mind. Philosophers and spies, they are disdainful of Yang and its visceral urges. Though they do not divorce themselves from life entirely — to do so is a violation of the Dharmic tenets — neither do they immerse themselves in the doings and goings on of the Middle Kingdom.

Instead, the Bone Dancers seek to learn rather than act, to accumulate an understanding of the Middle Kingdom. Though their Dharma enjoins them to act, to protect the family and uphold the natural order, they do not undertake these tasks willingly. Such activity requires a tremendous effort, and for every Dancer who acts as a spy, diplomat or assassin, there are two more who strive, silently and in the frozen dark, to open the Black Metal Egg — the Dharma's name for the mysteries of Yin's negative spiritual resonance.

As scholars, Quiet Songs are without parallel. The Song of the Shadow seeks knowledge for its own sake, for the experience of tricking the puzzle box of existence into revealing its secrets. What the Bone Dancers do not know, they have forgotten or hidden so well in their unfathomable archives that not even they can find it. They make excellent spies — without passion or drive, they move like great cold fish, recording, noticing and carefully unwinding the threads of the courts and their countless intrigues.

Likewise, without passion, they cannot be offended or provoked to hasty action, and thus, they are diplomats and assassins of infinite patience. In neither case do they perform these actions willingly. They are duties, to *wu*-mates and to the Wan Kuei as a whole, to be discharged as efficiently as possible, in hopes that they will not protract the vampire's time away from her studies and contemplation. As natural masters of the Godbody of Metal, these vampires are feared and merciless. Without emotion or hesitation, swaddled in iron skin and sheathed in Yin armor, they scythe down their foes and are gone as if they had never been. Few even of the Devil-Tigers are so capable and efficient when they kill.

Somehow tied to their skill as assassins is the Dancers' artistic talent. The variations of the Bone Dance are countless. It is performed with both improvisation and rigid formality, spontaneously and after rehearsal, with accompaniment and unaccompanied. This supernatural dance is languid, suggestive, alluring and capable of conveying immense meaning in its soothing, wordless postures. While it can be used as a weapon, it is more often used as a means of expression, and as such, it is in many ways the embodiment of the Bone Dancer ethic.



Without words or directness, without aggression or extension, it conveys its meaning more perfectly than any words could hope to. Such is the power of this dance that nearly every Bone Dancer learns it. When they gather together, these vampires often eschew speech altogether, instead communicating only through this silent ballet.

Training: The Shadow Songs teach their young primarily through koans and riddles. These are designed in a highly calculated fashion and are quite often tailored specifically to the student in question. In these riddles, the answer is largely unimportant — it is the process of meditation on the matter of the riddle and the act of learning the answer (if there is one) that truly matter and bring enlightenment.

Obviously, this is not necessarily suitable for young Running Monkeys, and the Dharma also offers forthright instruction on the simple matters of the faith and the basic tenets of the Dharma to *hin* and young disciples. As soon as the students are ready, they graduate to more indirect teachings. It is critical that the students quickly begin finding their own wisdom, rather than having it taught to them. The Song of the Shadow is a path of private discovery, not a curriculum for enlightenment.

Just as these vampires place great emphasis on the value of personal enlightenment, they also place an equal emphasis on personal discipline, an emotionless state they call Cold Mind. To these Wan Kuei, there is no meaningful control that does not come from within. Indirection and restraint are virtues of the Bone Dance. If its followers cannot master them and must have them imposed, then clearly there is no enlightenment taking place. As a result, for all but the beginning of the vampire's existence, the tutelage he receives is largely composed of riddles his master prepares and hands out when the time is right. The rest of the vampire's time is his own, for if he is not incessant in his pursuit of enlightenment and knowledge for their own sakes, he is unsuited for the Song of the Shadow.

Faults: Though they are often fascinating to those who know them little, the Bone Dancers are cruel and detached. Their air of detachment allows them to serenely contemplate any brutality, any betrayal, so long as it serves their ultimate ends. Though their Cold Mind can often be an asset, many Bone Dancers live their second existence essentially alone, wrapped in self-isolation even when in the midst of their *wu*-mates.

Affiliations: Metal, the number 4, the color black and the west direction

Concepts: Courtesan, eunuch, destitute scholar, matriarch, silk farmer, frustrated rebel, gravedigger, necrophile

Sobriquets: Bone Dancers, Shadow Songs, Quiet Songs, Bone Flowers

Tenets

1: You may walk with the dead, but do not forget that you are not one of them.

2: The clan is the fountain of righteousness and must be defended.

3: Honor the ghosts and Yang spirits, giving them both respect and companionship, for the lot of spirits is a lonely one.

4: There is no end to learning, just as there is no end to your existence. Never cease to seek the truth of matters.

5: The object without concept is meaningless. The concept without object is fantasy. Both are valuable, yet neither can stand alone.

6: There is a difference between informing, which is like pouring water into a river, and teaching, which is like making fine sculptures from ice. Do not inform, always teach.

7: Share your learning with others, but be certain they understand it to be a precious gift.

8: The parting of the living and the dead is hard. Console both living and dead alike, reminding them of the importance of their suffering to the natural order. Spare no pains to halt those who would cross the Wall between the living and the dead without the permission of Heaven.

Rival Paths

Devil-Tigers: Fascinatingly... virile, but totally disinterested in matters that do not make them rich or mighty. They'd rather steal peeks at the future than understand the processes that forge tomorrow.

Resplendent Cranes: Admirably devoted to the ideals of learning, but far too rigid in approach. If only they could learn that grasping desperately is the weakest grip of all.

Thousand Whispers: So intent on the process, they forget the end. The eyes do not learn when they read, the soul learns when it understands.

Thrashing Dragons: Light to darkness, wood to metal. So alive, yet so ignorant.



The Path of a Thousand Whispers

Virtue: Balance

At the center of the wheel of Wan Kuei society, the Thousand Whispers are very much outsiders. They are forever apart from the Yin-Yang tensions that drive relations between the other Dharmas, loners in a ferociously gregarious society. Their fellow vampire see them as mysterious, strange and not entirely good or pleasant.

The Thousand Whispers believe that the lot of the Ten Thousand Demons is to find salvation however they may. For most other vampires, that is serving Heaven is some fashion. The Thousand Whispers, however, believe that their path to redemption lies not in loyal service but in accumulating wisdom.

Seeking to cultivate enlightenment until they become true bodhisattvas, the Thousand Whispers know their undead form is prohibitive to balanced life. Monstrous hungers drive the Wan Kuei, and they cannot suffer proper deaths, for their sins have placed them beyond reincarnation. To combat this, they practice the Broken Mask Technique, by which they live out a succession of mortal existences. In each, the Wan Kuei grows, changes and observes the world around him through the eyes of an assumed identity. In each, the vampire eventually exhausts the life's possibilities and lets the identity wither and die. The mortal seeming, with all its hates, fears and frailties, is crumpled up and cast aside like a snake's used-up skin. But the I-at-the-center, the vampire himself, remembers its insights and understanding and grows enlightened over a thousand mortal lifetimes.

This abstract approach to enlightenment is not easy. The Wan Kuei are anything but detached — the Rootless Tree can still tear *itself* apart. Letting go of life is never easy, even for those who have taken the Second Breath. Likewise, the warring urges of the virtues are a great enemy to all but the oldest Hollow Reeds. Also, the Hollow Reeds are distrusted by their fellow Wan Kuei. The other Dharmas are each proponents of their own elemental virtue, and the balance of the Thousand Whispers seems strange and confusing to beings so wrapped up in their own agendas.

Perhaps it is because they stand outside the whirl of Wan Kuei society that the Thousand



Whispers have gained an important place within it. Many Thousand Whispers are great ritualists, and the Thousand Whisper sorcerer is as strong an archetype among the Hungry Dead as the Devil-Tiger demonologist. Also, like the Devil-Tigers, the Thousand Whispers are great trainers of *chih-mei*. Though they have a completely different system for educating their pupils — using mysticism and koans where the Devil-Tigers use fire and iron rods — they are considered just as effective as the Devil-Tigers at their task.

Training: In its early stages, Thousand Whisper training has the same goal as that of any Dharma — keep the subjects from sliding back into the cannibalistic *chih-mei* state long enough for them to be set upon a Dharmic path. To accomplish this, the Hollow Reeds distract with mysticism and keep pupils in a ritualistic environment until they understand their condition well enough to cope with it.

The Thousand Whispers training proper is more complex. The Hollow Reed must take in the world around it, yet not become the world around it. Inside, it must remain empty, devoid of the spiritual and emotional baggage that makes learning impossible. With Running Monkeys, all that can be done is to open the door to future enlightenment — the principle of the Rootless Tree is too large, too difficult for a simple, almost-mortal mind to grasp. Appreciation of the value of the Broken Mask Technique grows over human lifetimes of experience, not weeks or months of tutelage.

To place the young Thousand Whisper on the road to enlightenment, specially designed riddles are used. Different for each student, the master crafts these conundrums so that they remain with the student over his first centuries, unfolding new meanings with each step along the Dharmic road. Students are also trained in disguise and taught the principles of human behavior, so that the masks they eventually construct for themselves can be true enough for them to gain genuine enlightenment from the exercise. In the end, the master provides the student with three mortal identities and with the recommendations, funds, introductions and other trappings necessary to take root in the soil of Wan Kuei culture. After that, the student is on her own — like the insects they venerate, the Wise Centipedes do not recognize their children once they have left the egg.

Faults: For all that it offers a road to redemption, the Broken Mask Technique is the most difficult of the Dharmic paths to follow. While it is hard to step off, it is also incredibly difficult to progress. Maintaining the separation between lives and closing the door on each "incarnation" as it ends are far from easy tasks. Some Thousand Whispers find the path enlightening, but many more are torn by the conflicts of their Virtues and either fall to the Demon or join other Dharmas. Rare and aloof, the Thousand Whispers have an unpleasant reputation for being more interested in the Road Back than their companions on that road, one which is not entirely undeserved.

Affiliations: Earth, the number 0, the color white and the center point direction

Concepts: Former madman, spy, con artist, visionary prophet, Buddhist priest, orphan, martial arts master, official, hermit, innocent tortured and executed for a crime she didn't commit

Sobriquets: Thousand Whispers, Hollow Reeds, Rootless Trees, Wise Centipedes

Tenets

1: The road to enlightenment is 10,000 lives long, each one different.

2: Each life is a learning experience. If you fail to learn, you have wasted the life.

3: Ten thousand of the same notes do not make a song. Ten thousand of the same lives do not make a buddha. Balance is a dynamic force, not a static one.

4: Lives are lessons, not prisons or possessions. Do not cling to the trappings of any one particular existence. When you leave a life, close the door forever.

5: Righteousness is excellent, but there is more to enlightenment than heroism. The enlightened man is both courageous enough to wrestle tigers and wise enough to know when such displays are needless or futile.

6: Force the understanding of sight on those who will not see. Force the understanding of hearing on those who wish to remain deaf. All things must know that life is composed of choices — let no creature make those choices without questioning itself.

7: Balance begets balance. When you see that which is not balanced, balance it. If it cannot be balanced, destroy it, for imbalance is abhorrent to Heaven.

8: Though you live 1,000 lives and wear 1,000 faces, the you-at-the-center must watch and learn. If you lived 10,000 years, yet forgot each year's lessons with the turnings of the season, you would still know no more than an infant.

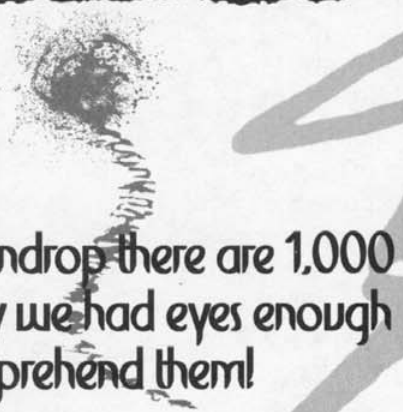
Rival Paths

Devil-Tigers: They wear different masks now than when they lived, but they are one-dimensional beings. Wisdom comes through understanding, not being a cliché.

Resplendent Cranes: Ten thousand aphorisms do not constitute enlightenment. Ten thousand contemptuous glances do not constitute superiority. When the Cranes learn that they too are imperfect, they will have truly set themselves upon the road to righteousness.

Bone Dancers: They know the critical nature of learning but wear only a single mask. Less mourning and more laughter might ease their road.

Thrashing Dragons: There is more to the dance of life than spastic jerking. One does not achieve enlightenment in the ways of the world by rutting and drinking alcohol.



In every raindrop there are 1,000 lessons, if only we had eyes enough to apprehend them!

The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon

Virtue: Yang

Animists and naturalists, the Thrashing Dragons seek to walk the Road Back through profound understanding of the world around them. The natural world, they believe, is an educational illusion, a sacred ephemera created to enlighten those willing to learn.

The Thrashing Dragons are guardians of the Yang World. A holy text is nothing but paper and ink, but it can still contain enlightenment. Likewise, the ephemera they protect is a creation of the August Personage, containing the keys to all wisdom. It must be trimmed, tended and protected from the depredations of the Yama Kings and other unrighteous beings. Gardeners and ferocious defenders of the spirit ways, the Thrashing Dragons even garner limited, grudging respect from the Ferocious People, who consider them freakish, distasteful, but occasionally useful allies.



Most Wan Kuei feel likewise. Thrashing Dragon attempts to penetrate and learn from the illusion of life have a distinctly predatory bent. Accepting her place as a monster even as she despises herself for it, the stereotypical Thrashing Dragon is a tightly wrapped bundle of hunger and sexuality. Though she offers prayers to her victims and thinks them sacred, she still finds fulfillment in the highly distasteful practice of flesh eating as well as in carnal congress of every sort.

This is not to say that every Thrashing Dragon is a cannibalistic sexual predator or, rather, that any given Thrashing Dragon is such a creature at all times. Most Running Monkeys are at least as interested in capturing the opportunities they missed in life as they are in indulging their monstrous urges. Likewise, though jina and mandarins grudgingly adore their predatory character, they also know that there is a difference between immersion in the illusion and becoming lost in it. Depending on perspective, it can be comforting or frightening that a Thrashing Dragon who raped and devoured a young boy can then write poems to the orchids in her garden or teach classes in Taoist alchemy.

When not indulging themselves, a Thrashing Dragon can wear as many masks as a Rootless Tree. He may be a loving parent, a naturalist, a farmer, a poet or a prostitute. Rubbing elbows with the Devil-Tigers in the slums, he is equally at home in the monasteries of the Resplendent Cranes. Anything to bring him closer to the sacred dance of life. Unlike the Thousand Whispers, however, the Thrashing Dragons make no pretenses about their nature. Most Laughing Rainbows see the Broken Mask Technique as vaguely repulsive, a profane monster misrepresenting itself as a sacred living being and cheating the natural order of its wisdom rather than learning it in a proper, honest fashion.

Many Thrashing Dragons are shapeshifters, so that they can explore life's rich pageant in a myriad of forms. Thrashing Dragon mandarins are almost universally

familiar with the spirit courts of the Yang Realm. Though the Celestial Bureaucracy continues to fall into decay and decadence, the Thrashing Dragons continue to form the diplomatic staff of the Wan Kuei when negotiating with these spirit lords. Now, however, they do not ask for advice and assistance in the name of Heaven, but come with bribes of jade and proposals of alliance, as the princes of the Yang World become more like warlords and potentates with each passing year.

Training: Most Thrashing Dragons were strait-laced before their deaths, and their agonies in Yomi showed them the value of the life they forswore. Thrashing Dragon teachers work one-on-one with students, teaching them Taoist and Wan Kuei scripture, educating them in the etiquette of the spirit realms and showing them the blood-soaked glories of the flesh. As a distant cousin of the Devil-Tiger taskmaster, the Thrashing Dragon tutor is not gentle but keeps her student alert with the thrill of danger and the sting of pain.

A young Thrashing Dragon misses most nuances of the faith. He learns some greetings for spirit beings and has a glossing acquaintance with mortal theology. His masters expect this and send him out to revel in the state of the Running Monkey, to live the life he always dreamed of but never had. Those who cannot reconcile themselves to their undead state or who cannot carve out an existence soon meet their ends. This is right and proper — nature is fierce, not gentle. No creature is born with the guarantee of even a second's existence. All that is alive must forever struggle, and so, the disciples must likewise struggle. Those who survive long enough to become bored eventually make their way back to the Dharma's temples and training camps, where they learn the subtleties of their role. Though the other Dharmas are often harsh to young Dragons amok in the world, the Dharma as a whole does not begrudge their fellow vampires. If the predator does not set upon the herd, how will the weak be winnowed from the strong?

Faults: For all that they idolize the living, Thrashing Dragons are themselves forever cut off from the pulse of life. Not only does their messy, carnivorous streak often attract attention, it also conceals an immense self-loathing. No matter if the hearts they consume are still beating, these Wan Kuei are still unliving, and they can never forget it. Their love for life is all too often just a bit too forced, and though they praise the living, there is envy in their eyes. To be the object of their affection is often far from pleasant — those things that a Thrashing Dragon loves or covets, he often consumes.

Affiliations: Wood, the number 3, the color green and the east direction

Concepts: Gambler, scout, chef, courtesan, wild savage, former secret policeman, monk, peasant rebel, intellectual

Sobriquets: Thrashing Dragons, Laughing Rainbows, Green Devils

Tenets

1: Life is an illusion. Unless you can understand every part of the illusion, you cannot penetrate it.

2: Life's vibrancy in the external world is reflected in the ongoing process of existence. Life's vibrancy in the internal world is reflected in the passions. Cultivate and learn from your passions as you would learn from nature.

3: The world is your garden. Tend it carefully, keep it free of pests, and as your wages, take whatever fruit you wish to eat.

4: Foster growth in that which is healthy, and cut down that which is unhealthy. It is of no use for the dying and the dead to prolong their pains and hold themselves separate from the Cycle of life.

5: Your condition is abominable, bearable only because it is the will of Heaven and because you serve a just cause. Partake of death as little as possible, and bathe in life at every opportunity.

6: Embrace the sun when it rises in the morning, kiss it goodbye as it sets in the evening.

7: There is no greater enemy of darkness or friend of life than laughter. Do not forget that this is nothing more than an illusion, ultimately no more important than a shadow-play. Laugh often and easy, lest you cry.

8: Protect the spirits, for they are the source of life and the heart of the Cycle. Give them due reverence, and protect them from harm.

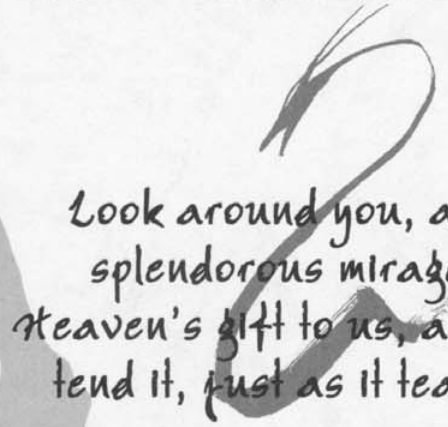
Rival Paths

Devil-Tiger: Passionate, but mindless. All that excess, just to prove they're monstrous! No wonder they dream of destroying the world — they have no idea what it's for!

Resplendent Crane: If anything offends me, it is the smarmy self-righteousness of these prancing scholars. Old women, only happy when they're squawking about how the world's gone to hell.

Bone Dancers: Too much time petting skulls! Let the dead keep company with the dead — come and dance the dance of life with me, sad sister!

Thousand Whispers: They're just like the old Wan Xian, using the Great Cycle to their advantage, rather than adhering to the natural order. No good can come of *that* sort of cleverness!





Chapter Three: Taking the Second Breath

For certain is death for the born
And certain is birth for the dead;...
— Bhagavad Gita, 2:27

Much like the souls of the Wan Kuei, this chapter has a dual nature. On the one hand, it covers the mechanics of creating Wan Kuei of the Fourth Age. Generally, this process quite similar to creating a modern Kuei-jin in **Kindred of the East**. The times are different, however, and so there are distinctions. This section deals only with those aspects that vary between the Fourth and Fifth Age, so as not to repeat information already available in **Kindred of the East**. A complete summary of character creation appears on pages 64 through 66, however.

The second part of this chapter concerns itself with the intangibles of characters of the Fourth Age. The era of **Blood & Silk** is very different from our own, and this section should help you make decisions about your character's life and death. Along with a wide variety of player advice, this section includes a series of sample backgrounds to help you choose an appropriate life for your vampire.

Wan Kuei Character Creation

Character Creation Process

- **Step One: Concept**

Choose balance, direction, Dharma, Hun Nature, P'o Nature and Demeanor. Choose a template (optional, see pp. 75-81).

- **Step Two: Attributes**

Set priorities, and assign dots for Physical, Social and Mental categories (7/5/3). Your character gets one free dot in each Attribute.

- **Step Three: Abilities**

Set priorities, and assign dots for Talents, Skills and Knowledges (13/9/5).

No Ability may be higher than 3 at this time.

- **Step Four: Advantages**

Choose Disciplines (two Demon Arts, three others; no more than three dots in any at this step) and Backgrounds (any 5); rate Chi Virtues (4). Your character gets one free dot in each Chi Virtue.

- **Step Five: Finishing Touches**

Record Hun and P'o scores (3 each), Willpower (5) and Dharma rating (1).

Spend freebie points (15).

Record final Willpower (equal to final Hun score if higher than current Willpower), beginning temporary Yin and Yang Chi (equal to final permanent scores), beginning Demon Chi (equal to final P'o score).

Determine *guanxi* ratings toward other players' characters (5 + [*wu*-mate's Charisma] – [your character's P'o or Yin, whichever is higher]).

Chi Balance

- **Yin:** You are a creature of shadows and death.
- **Balance:** You harmonize the divided elements of your Chi.
- **Yang:** You turn to light and life.

Direction

- **North:** You serve the society of Wan Kuei, uniting all under the laws and traditions of the ancestors.
- **West:** You unite the Wan Kuei of the present moment and material world with the larger cosmos, speaking for and to the spirits of the worlds beyond the Wall.
- **Center:** You set the example for other Wan Kuei by seeking Dharmic perfection; you may also guide others on their respective routes to redemption.
- **South:** You turn the Wheel of the Ages, obliterating all things whose time has past and bringing into existence those things whose time now comes.
- **East:** You look out from your own society to the surrounding seas of humanity, tending, directing and correcting them as seems wise to you.

Dharma

- **The Howl of the Devil-Tiger** (P'o): The Southern Way, lit by Fire and Ghost-Flame.
- **The Way of the Resplendent Crane** (Hun): The Northern Way, flowing like Water and Blood.
- **The Song of the Shadow** (Yin): The Western Way, cleaving through the world like Metal and Bone.
- **The Path of a Thousand Whispers** (Balance): The Central Way, supporting all like Earth and Jade.
- **The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon** (Yang): The Eastern Way, stretching and growing like Wood and Flesh.

P'o Nature

- **The Ancient:** Your P'o judges all your efforts as failures and reminds you of the superior achievements of those who've come before.
- **The Artist:** Your P'o seeks to produce a single perfect work of beauty and reacts bitterly to everything that distracts you from that task.
- **The Bandit:** Your P'o covets whatever others value and takes those things for itself, whether it can use them or merely keep others from using them.
- **The Barbarian:** Your P'o rages against every work of your culture; if allowed extended control, it works with outsiders to topple the institutions to which you belong.
- **The Deceiver:** Your P'o weaves a net of lies around you, snaring everyone in your vicinity.
- **The Demon:** Your P'o seeks to smash the whole world and drag it into Yomi.
- **The Echo:** Your P'o has no voice of its own; instead, it simply speaks in the voices of those you left behind when you escaped Yomi.
- **The Eunuch:** Your P'o strikes at your ability to create, channeling all its energy into schemes aimed at twisting the work of others.
- **The Fool:** Your P'o cares only for the pleasures of the moment and fights back against every effort at planning or change.
- **The Legalist:** Your P'o venerates codified morality and ruthless punishment of all violations.

- **The Monkey:** Your P'o yearns for novelty and constantly seeks whatever is behind the next tree.
- **The Sage:** Your P'o endeavors to make you doubt the truth of the teachings you now follow, tantalizing you with hints of superior wisdom elsewhere.
- **The Slave:** Your P'o believes in your fundamental worthlessness and seeks to sell you into bondage to some suitable master.
- **The Vitalist:** Your P'o seeks to return to life as you lived it before the Second Breath and cares nothing for the concerns of the Wan Kuei.
- **The Warrior:** Your P'o sees every situation as a battle and pushes you toward the next fight.

Disciplines

Chi Arts

- **Equilibrium:** The delicate science of balancing Yin and Yang.
- **Feng Shui:** The art of "wind and water," Chinese geomancy. Still rare in this era.
- **Tapestry:** Tracing and re-weaving the patterns of Chi in the environment.
- **Yang Prana:** The yoga of Yang energy, empowering you with the force of the crimson fountains.
- **Yin Prana:** The yoga of Yin energy, empowering you with the force of the quiet blackness.

Godbody Disciplines

- **Godbody of Earth:** Uniting the body with the great flows of Chi.
- **Godbody of Fire:** Kindling Chi into flame and directing the resulting conflagration.
- **Godbody of Metal:** Channeling death energies to transform the body.
- **Godbody of Water:** Making the vital fluid perform new feats for the now-dead body.
- **Godbody of Wood:** Empowering the individual pieces of the body in accordance with a single will.
- **Godbody of the Beast:** Commanding the creatures of nature (a young art, available only up to level 3).
- **Godbody of Smoke:** Obscuring the truth with wisps of smoke (a young art, available only up to level 3).
- **Godbody of the Storm:** Merging the vampiric body with the fury of unleashed elements (a young art, available only up to level 3).

Soul Disciplines

- **Cultivation:** The science of the P'o, and the means by which it may be subdued.
- **Dragon Tear (Chi'iu Muh):** The arts of the third eye, and the insights it grants.
- **Internalize:** Subduing the will for action in harmony with the All.
- **Obligation:** The science of the Hun, and the means by which it may be directed.

Demon Arts

- **Black Wind:** Tapping the P'o to gain preternatural speed.
- **Godbody of the Demon:** Taking on aspects of the twisted form the P'o imagines itself as having.
- **Iron Mountain:** The P'o strengthens the body.
- **Kiai:** The new art of unleashing the P'o in devastating screams.

Backgrounds

- **Allies:** Mortal men and women who support you.
- **Contacts:** Useful acquaintances, willing to exchange information and the occasional service without major commitment to or from you.
- **Fame:** Renown in mortal society.
- **Herd:** Devotees and followers whose Chi you can drain without fear of repercussion.
- **Horoscope:** Auspicious omens, which can provide a bit of luck at key moments.
- **Influence:** The ability to move mortal society, whether or not the people you move know of your existence and condition.
- **Jade Talisman:** A properly prepared repository of Chi.
- **Magic Artifact:** An enchanted creation of some kind.
- **Mentor:** An older Wan Kuei who advises and guides you (or perhaps a network of alliances in your court).
- **Nushi:** A guardian spirit bound to your *wu*.
- **Resources:** Wealth, in its various forms.
- **Retainers:** Servants and assistants, committed to you personally rather than to shared goals.
- **Rites:** Mastery of some of the ritual magic known to Wan Kuei.

Virtues

- **Hun:** Your rational and moral side.
- **P'o:** Your impulsive and destructive side, the aspect that led you into Yomi and then out again.
- **Yang:** Your desire for life and its energy.
- **Yin:** Your desire for death and its passive power.

Freebie Points

Attribute	5
Ability	2 (3 for Martial Arts)
Discipline	10
Background	1
Chi Virtue	3
Hun	3
P'o	1
Willpower	1

Character Mechanics

The basic system of character design in **Blood & Silk** is the same as that outlined in Chapter Three of **Kindred of the East**. You have almost the same number of dots and points to play with, you go through the same steps, and you are creating the same overall type of character — one of the Ten Thousand Demons.

But the Hungry Dead of the Fourth Age are not entirely similar to their successors in the Fifth. Not only do they exist in a different social setting — meaning they have access to different Abilities — but the very nature of the Tapestry they move through is different. Chapter Four examines the differences in the Ages more closely, but they do change some of the options for your character. The following sections carry you through the differences and similarities of character creation.

Concept and Basic Traits

Blood & Silk takes place more than 800 years ago, so obviously, character concepts and backgrounds are going to differ from those in **Kindred of the East**. The second half of this chapter deals explicitly with developing appropriate concepts for the era and setting. However, the choices for basic character Traits

- **Balance** functions as it does in the Fifth Age; follow the guidelines on pp. 80-81 of **Kindred of the East**.
- **Direction** functions as it does in the Fifth Age; follow the guidelines on pp. 81-82 of **Kindred of the East**. See also the notes on pages 124 and 125 of this book.
- **Dharma** functions generally the same way it does in the Fifth Age, although the beliefs of each Road Back continue to evolve with time. Full descriptions of each of the five basic Dharmas in this era appear in Chapter Two. If your Storyteller allows it, you may also choose one of the heretical Dharmas outlined in the **Kindred of the East Companion**. (The Spirit of the Living Earth Dharma is unavailable because it has yet to be developed.)
- **Hun Nature** is the same as "Nature" in **Kindred of the East** and functions as outlined on p. 82 of that book. The change in nomenclature simply reflects a sharper distinction between parts of the soul in the Fourth Age.
- **P'o Nature** is no different than in the Fifth Age, but there are more options to choose from. You may select your character's P'o Nature from those listed on pp. 92 - 93 of **Kindred of the East** and pp. 83-84 of this book.
- **Demeanor** is the same as in the Fifth Age; follow the guidelines on p. 82 of **Kindred of the East**.

Attributes and Abilities

Choosing Attributes and Abilities functions just as it does in **Kindred of the East**. Because the setting of **Blood & Silk** is different, however, the choice of Abilities is slightly different. Most work as presented in **Vampire: The Masquerade** and **Kindred of the East**, but not all.

- **Disallowed Abilities:** The following modern Abilities obviously have no place in Fourth Age chronicles: Drive, Firearms and Computer.
- **New Abilities:** Chapter Four (pp. 85-86) lists several new Abilities proper to the era of **Blood & Silk**. You may freely choose from them.

Disciplines

Choosing Disciplines functions largely, but not completely, as it does in **Kindred of the East**. The most significant difference is that Wan Kuei disciples in the Fourth Age have a somewhat easier time acquiring their unliving powers in the first years after the Second Breath. As such, starting characters get five dots to spend on Disciplines rather than the three dots standard in modern **Kindred of the East**. Two of these dots must go into

Demon Arts, and no single Discipline can be raised higher than three dots at this stage. In addition, some Disciplines are not available or have been modified for the Fourth Age, as described below.

Chi Arts

The Chi Arts are largely the same in the Fourth and Fifth Ages. Equilibrium, Tapestry, Yang Prana and Yin Prana all work as presented in **Kindred of the East**, pp. 101-107, and you may assign dots to them as normal. Feng Shui, however, is very rare in the Fourth Age, still taking form as a systematic Discipline rather than a collection of independent ideas. Insofar as anyone practices it, it works as presented in **Kindred of the East Companion**, pp. 63-64. The Storyteller must approve any dots in Feng Shui.

Demon Arts

The Demon Arts are similarly unchanged in **Blood & Silk**. Black Wind and the Godbody of the Demon (a.k.a. Demon Shintai) work as presented in **Kindred of the East**, pp. 107-109, while Hellweaving, Iron Mountain and Kiai do so as presented in **Kindred of the East Companion**, pp. 69-76. You may purchase dots in any of the Demon Arts except Hellweaving, which is reserved for the dreaded *akuma*, servitors of the Yama Kings. Kiai is a newly developed Discipline, a synthesis of Wan Kuei inner torment with Buddhist notions of spiritual power, but it enjoys widespread popularity.

"Godbody of the Demon" means the same thing as "Demon Shintai" and is a stylistic rather than substantial change. Keep in mind, however, that while Yomi is indeed formidable in the Fourth Age, not all vestiges of the original notion of divine purification have yet been lost. Demon forms of the Fourth Age reflect a mix of the monstrous elements common to the Fifth Age with an earlier strain of righteous fury. They invoke fear of a descending celestial power as well as of a rising infernal menace.

The Godbody (or Shintai) Disciplines

The shintai of the Fifth Age most clearly reflect the depths to which the heirs of the Wan Xian descend. In the Fourth Age, the godbody Disciplines still retain the elemental associations they bore in the beginning. As such, Blood, Bone, Jade, Flesh and Ghost-Flame Shintai are unknown in the Fourth Age and unavailable in **Blood & Silk**. They are replaced by new Disciplines — Godbody of Earth, Fire, Metal, Wood and Water — described on pages 86-95.



Beast, Smoke and Storm Shintai are very much works in progress, seen by some as signs of the Fifth Age. Only the first three dots of each exist as systematic powers, as presented in the **Kindred of the East Companion**, pp. 82-85. Advancement past the third dot is not possible at this time, although the Storyteller might allow a character to do so after long experimentation and questing, as well as a heavy experience point expenditure. Like the other Disciplines in this category, these are generally referred to as godbodies, instead of shintai.

Blood & Silk is set at the twilight of the Fourth Age, so there are quite possibly especially depraved characters who have already made the transition to the Age of Darkness and use the modern shintai Disciplines. These vampires serve best as Storyteller characters, although their "depravity" will eventually spread to all Wan Kuei as they enter the Fifth Age. See p. 107 for rules governing this transition.

Soul Arts

The Soul Arts of Cultivation, Chi'iu Muh (a.k.a. Dragon Tears), Internalize and Obligation work the same in the Fourth Age as they do in the Fifth, using the systems presented in **Kindred of the East**, pp. 119-126. Mibasham and Tzu Wei (see **Kindred of the East Companion**, pp. 88-91) are not available in **Blood & Silk**. They depend on the intellectual synthesis of later dynasties and will not exist until the 17th century.

Backgrounds

Backgrounds function the same way in the Fourth and Fifth Ages. See **Vampire: The Masquerade**, pp. 130-133, for information on Allies, Contacts, Fame, Herd, Influence, Mentor, Resources and Retainers. See **Kindred of the East**, pp. 86-87, for information on Horoscope, Jade Talisman, Magic Artifact, Nushi and Rites.

Virtues

The Chi and Soul Virtues function largely as they do in the Fifth Age, although the balance of power dips less toward the Demon in these earlier times.

- **Chi Virtues (Yin and Yang):** Choose these as described on pp. 88-90 of **Kindred of the East.** Remember to respect your choice of balance.
- **Soul Virtues (Hun and P'o):** The Hun of Fourth Age vampires is generally more of an equal partner to the P'o than in later nights. Starting Hun is 3 instead of 1 in this period. Starting P'o is still 3.

Willpower

Willpower functions just as it does in the Fifth Age. However, the Second Breath is somewhat less harrowing at this time than in the future. As such, characters start with Willpower 5 and so do not need to spend freebie points to raise it to that level (as they do in **Kindred of the East**).

From Numbers to Character: Refining Wan Kuei Concepts

The object of character creation is not to make an elegant distribution of dots but to forge the basics of a persona for you to portray and flesh out in play. This section addresses a variety of social and setting issues to help you add depth to your concept and become aware of some of the unique considerations of the medieval Middle Kingdom. None of these considerations necessarily impact directly on game mechanics, but they are important to character concepts nonetheless.

The basic process of becoming Wan Kuei hasn't changed since prehistory, but the details remain in constant flux. Nothing here applies in each and every case: This section reflects the general state of affairs. Players and Storytellers should feel at liberty to use it as a starting point for modifications and adjustments to reflect particular circumstances.

Life

All Wan Kuei lived before they died. When thinking about your character, set aside Dharma, direction and everything else for a while, and think about what sort of man or woman the character was in the days when Chi and breath flowed naturally. You can build a concept from the ground up or take one of the sample concepts (see pp. 75-81) as a starting point. Don't feel constrained to follow a template at every point; use it to bridge the gaps where inspiration fails or runs sluggishly.

- **Nationality:** Every Wan Kuei of the Fourth Age lived somewhere in Asia; the age of expansion throughout the world comes after the era of **Blood & Silk**. Your choice of nationality makes a tremendous difference, setting boundaries on the character's outlook, range of experience and opportunities (after the Second Breath as well as before). You should make your choice in consultation with the Storyteller and the other players — if only to ensure that all your characters can coexist.

China suffers political turmoil, with the Jurchen barbarians occupying northern China and the Southern Song dynasty ruling only the lower half of traditional Chinese territory. Despite (and in part because of) the loss of political control, Chinese culture flourishes, and the economic bonds of Chinese empire extend well beyond the political borders thanks to trade. Even at its early height, the Song dynasty never controlled as much as previous dynasties. The eldest Wan Kuei look with sorrow on the diminished state of the empire; their disciples rejoice at the number of minds and hearts open to Chinese truths and worry less about where the borders may lie on maps.

Nihon, or Japan to use the modern term, stumbled into civil war a generation ago, ending the Heian era of peace and prosperity that began 400 years earlier. All but the youngest Running Monkeys look on the current era in shock and dismay — or with ambition and cunning. Wan Kuei from the mainland regard the *gaki* (their Japanese cousins) with suspicion; during the Heian era, Japanese scholars gradually developed borrowed Korean and Chinese doctrines into something more distinctively Japanese. This work continues even as the great lords of the land engage in increasingly brutal and destabilizing battles with each other. Commoners struggle to protect themselves, now that their lords find outright fighting more rewarding than the honor of leading in peacetime.

Two hundred and fifty years ago, the Koryo dynasty united the traditional Three Kingdoms of the Korean peninsula into a single kingdom. Chaos has plagued the area in recent generations, however, with a series of assassinations and coups shaking up the dynastic landscape. A strongman is now in control, but the scars of past bloodshed still run deep — especially among the Wan Kuei.

An Age of Bigotry

The notion of universal human rights and the fundamental equality of every individual arose in Asia as it did in the West. It never caught on in Asia. *Every* culture before and during the era of **Blood & Silk** made distinctions in worth based on ethnicity, class, sex and countless other factors. Those in the more deserving positions felt entirely comfortable denigrating, using, abusing and neglecting the less fortunate people around them; society's losers took their suffering with far more resigned acceptance than people in the West would, then or later. The sages of every nation taught the innate inferiority of all outsiders. Individuals could and did earn respect for their accomplishments, but without changing overall attitudes.

The Road Back mitigates but doesn't eliminate prejudice. The Second Breath comes to people of every background. This doesn't mean that any individual vampire escapes the bigotry of his time, however, only that he might. Keep in mind that whatever your character was in life, as a vampire, she starts equal with everyone else. Emperors and peasants alike have to learn to exist in their new state, step by step. Your character might have been brilliant in life but a slow learner after the Second Breath or someone who never amounted to much in life but finds existence after death stimulating and successful.

• **Sex:** None of the societies of the **Blood & Silk** era respect women as the equals of men. Scattered examples exist of women who rise to power or influence, but they are exceptions. Women of this era live with much more limited opportunities and much less respect for their accomplishments. Some women who draw the Second Breath continue to accept the roles defined by their societies — after all, when their experience after death confirms so many truths, it won't seem obvious that some others should be questioned or discarded. Other women adopt as inspirations the exceptional women of past eras and take advantage of their post-mortem freedom from mortal frailties. The necessities of political survival and Dharmic advancement also often lead unliving women to break out of the molds imposed on them in life. The mere fact that several powerful ancestors — including the Empress of the Scarlet Phoenix Court — are women limits unliving sexism.

• **Class:** Throughout the Middle Kingdom, extremes of wealth and poverty exist side by side. While the details differ, all the societies of the era acknowledge elite ranks of rulers, middle ranks of administrators, scholars and professionals and lower ranks of peasants, merchants and soldiers. Sages of Heian Japan pulled a bit of linguistic sleight-of-hand, using the character Confucian Chinese writers use for "scholar" to mean "samurai," preserving the textual fiction that what would later be called bushido was really just a flavor of Confucianism. That changes the nature of the rulers but not their position as masters, believed by all to have the right to dispose of others in accordance with the rulers' own agendas.

None of the societies of this era have absolutely rigid social structures. Hard work, merit and money do make it possible for people to raise their standing. A wealthy merchant, for instance, can subsidize the studies of one of his sons, who goes on to win a place in the civil service of China or Korea; the son then elevates the standing of the family as a whole. Heroic service in battle may win promotion and honors for soldiers. A particularly insightful priest, or anyone at all who shows an aptitude for understanding the omens, may earn status and appointment to an official role; and so on. Likewise, no position is unassailable: Nobles and commoners alike fall thanks to failure, corruption, legal charges, demonstrated incompetence and many more shortcomings. It may take generations to rise from the bottom to the top, but some of the great dynasties were founded by peasants.

• **Time.** As Chapter One suggests, history happens in the East just as it does in the West. Characters who all lived in the old capital city of Changan, for instance, might have very different experiences of it: as a contested battleground during the Warring States period, as the center of culture and power in the Tang dynasty, as a place of fear and confusion after the end of the Northern Song dynasty. Starting characters are assumed to have taken the Second Breath within the last 25 years or so, but these dates can change at the Storyteller's



discretion. Perhaps some characters spent an inordinate amount of time in Yomi and awake to find a world transformed while they suffered.

Other Considerations

As in any era, Wan Kuei of the Fourth Age are largely products of their breathing days. Because of this, you should think about relationships, traumas, philosophies and great (and not-so-great) events that influenced your character before she died. The following topics are especially important and unique to the time period and so may be very useful in developing your prelude and character background.

Views of the Supernatural

The mortal societies of the Fourth Age all take the existence of the supernatural as a given, but differ greatly in how they explain it — keep in mind that there is no such thing as a cohesive "Asian culture" or even "East Asian culture." While Chinese sages work to reinvigorate Confucianism, their Korean counterparts refine Buddhism into new forms suitable to the needs of their kingdom, and Japanese statesmen struggle to rationalize a new era of political chaos. All guardians of the past claim to be the true heirs of the wisdom of the ancients; all innovators claim to be interpreting ancient truths for the needs of a new Age.

Nor does any country covered in **Blood & Silk** hold just one set of ideas. The Chinese people practice a wide variety of personal and communal eclectic doctrines, combining traditional Confucianism and Taoism with now-well-established Buddhist notions and devotion to local spiritual forces. Their better-educated neighbors and rulers argue constantly over the proper weight to give to Legalism, various interpretations of Confucianism, competing strains of Taoism and many other ideas. Similar complexities apply elsewhere. Before thinking about the details of your character's individual circumstances, keep in mind this perennial diversity.

Against the backdrop of general acceptance of the supernatural, various exceptions offer hooks for characters willing to deal with standing in disagreement with their societies. The oldest forms of Confucianism profess an extreme agnosticism about all spiritual matters and emphasize ritual activities like sacrifices to ancestors purely because they encourage practitioners to be the right kind of people. The Legalist philosophers professed an active atheism, regarding religious belief purely as a tool for rulers to use in manipulating the people. Some Taoist sages and artists develop disbelief in all forms of personal spirits, regarding the Tao as an unthinking, essentially mechanistic force. The burgeoning samurai class includes many pragmatists who refuse to worry about any god who won't appear before them and produce a sign.

In the Middle Kingdom, the gods might do just that. At least, spirits acting in the roles of gods might. So might the Wan Kuei, Xiong Ren, *hsien* or any of several other supernatural beings. A sudden encounter with the

supernatural can mark a character forever, creating a need to understand or to experience it again that survives even death.

Keep in mind, however, that the vast majority of inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom have few, if any, noteworthy encounters with the supernatural. Prayers may or may not break a drought, save a stricken child or bring any other good fortune. The will of Heaven sometimes makes itself known on a very large scale: A virtuous ruler can indeed bless a whole kingdom, while a wicked lord can bring suffering to his people as Heaven tries to get his attention. However the supernatural does appear in the course of an individual's experience, it's often lost in the noise of life's everyday randomness. There's enough tangible presence of the powers of the night and the worlds beyond the Wall to reassure those looking for evidence, not enough to demand obedience so clearly that only a fool or villain could disagree.

The World and the Village

The vast majority of people in every country of this Age spend their lives in just a few places. They grow up in the village of their birth, unless harsh conditions, war, disaster or the lure of a better life elsewhere leads their family to move. As young adults, they may travel to a village elsewhere to seek a mate, often drawing on extended family connections. Perhaps at some point, they make a pilgrimage to a distant holy site or carry a petition for official action to a great center of government. The rest of the time they have on Earth, they spend close to home.

People in the middle and upper classes live quite different lives. There actually is a middle class in all the societies covered here, or what 20th-century Western observers would call a middle class: merchants, professionals, administrators (the equivalent of white-collar workers) and the like. People not directly tied to the land can travel. Some spend a lot of time moving from place to place, while others simply vacation or make regular but infrequent trips on business. Both sorts of traveler meet a wider range of people than the lower classes generally do — outsiders as well as their own kind and the local folk. The experience of the outside world gives rise to a different sense of self and identity — it means taking less of the local conditions for granted and being more aware of regional differences.

Wealth and Status

Confucian social theory denigrates commerce, ranking merchants below farmers, since farmers create but merchants merely carry things around. None of the **Blood & Silk** societies claim to value the acquisition of money as such, but in practical terms, money can buy tokens of status. It's much easier to denounce wealth in the abstract and at a distance than to refuse to assist the man or woman by your side offering you money right now.

The Lay of the Land

Think about the environment your character lived in. You may wish to find descriptions and pictures. Develop a sense of what your character saw in good times and bad, and make use of that when he enters unfamiliar realms (as inevitably he will, starting with Yomi). Within China alone, life on the endless terraced hills of the lower Yangtze River differs tremendously from life up the Yellow River from Beijing, where the river cuts through dusty, jaundiced earth. Both differ just as much from the rocky Shandong Peninsula, the hidden harbors of the South China Sea, the barren heights of the Tien Shan Mountains and so on. The cold northern slopes of the Korean Peninsula's mountains have very little in common with the thick jungles of Annam or Bangladesh. Learn what your character saw, and you'll learn things about him in the course of figuring out what he liked, disliked or overlooked.

The Will and the Way

Every Wan Kuei developed in their breathing days a particular strength of character that sustained them in the midst of Yomi. In game terms, either your character died with a Willpower of 5 or more, or she died with her P'o awakened while still alive, or both. Think about this carefully, as the decision you make here will have consequences for the rest of the character's existence.

High Willpower is unusual but not remarkably so. Your character probably had a reputation in life for resolve or stubbornness, depending on how much others approved of what she did with her will. She might have concealed it, particularly if she was a woman in circumstances where independence would have been a liability rather than an asset or if she was part of the lower classes. She would have more scope to make her determination known if she belonged to the middle and upper classes, which, in most societies, have approved ways of expressing dissent and distinction without seeming a threat to others. In China, she could withdraw from society to create art, while in Japan, she might become a devotee of some distant shrine. She could also mingle with society at large, attempting to impress her will upon it. Whether it worked out happily is for you to decide.

High Willpower also helps a character survive hardships. Warriors who face horrific battles, husbands and wives who deal with the loss of their family to disease and famine and virtuous individuals betrayed by treacherous colleagues all rely on Willpower. They gain the reputation of surviving when others fail.

Awakening the P'o in life involves more effort and imposes strong limits on what sort of person your character can be. It takes ongoing indulgence in dark passions to kindle a spark of self-awareness in the P'o — not just the occasional bad thought or even murder in a moment of passion but sustained brutality, torture, cruelty and the like. The most vicious bandits, the most wantonly destructive generals, the most savage outlanders on the

fringes of civilization: These are the sorts of people who awaken their P'o. Choosing this option for your character commits her to a life of evil.

Death

Having lived, your character also died. The circumstances of death should suggest possibilities to you and your Storyteller for the hell the character went to and certainly affect the overall perspective your character has from the vantage point of death about the meaning and worth of his life.

Medicine in the Middle Kingdom deals better than Western medicine of the time when it comes to failures of the body. Heart troubles, kidney dysfunction and the like all respond effectively to treatments of herbs, dietary management, acupuncture and so on. Healing magic seldom hurts the process, either. Western medicine, even in the Middle Ages, deals better with externally caused illness: disease, infection and so on. The often crowded conditions of the Middle Kingdom compound the gap because larger cities and more densely inhabited farmlands breed dangerous diseases more often.

Infant mortality runs high everywhere in the **Blood & Silk** era. In some particularly hard-hit areas, more than half of all children die before turning a year old, and even the best care fails to save a tenth to a quarter of all infants. The complications of childbirth can easily escalate to lethal intensity, too. Infants do not draw the Second Breath, but mothers who die in childbirth do.

Diseases strike down people of every age. Plague can break out at any time to sweep a city, province or nation and can last for months or even years before settling down again. Honest doctors do their best to cope with these crises and even do some good, despite the limitations of their knowledge. Even so, contracting the plague amounts to a death sentence. The cultures of the Middle Kingdom and environs frown on most forms of suicide — even Japan with its seppuku practice — but quietly look the other way when people in the throes of what they know to be terminal suffering hasten their way out of the world.

Cumulative injury also takes its toll. Broken bones don't always set perfectly. Dental problems can leave the body vulnerable to infection. Physical deformity and frailty increase stress and make other injuries more likely. Many people die not so much from a single triggering event as from the cumulative weight of a lifetime of damage. Strong-willed characters may well hold on to life longer than others and, therefore, enter the afterlife with an extra burden of disability.

Old age gathers up people who survived life's other challenges. Some old people pass surrounded by regretful mourners, who admired the elder's integrity, intelligence and service. Other old people die unmourned, their relatives and neighbors relieved to see a tyrant or worthless nuisance depart.

Burial

The societies in the **Blood & Silk** era have widely divergent ideas about proper respect for the dead. Confucian doctrine favors elaborate interment, with the corpse accompanied by artifacts of various sorts. Many Buddhist sects favor cremation. Japanese people generally receive burial with rites as elaborate as the family can afford. In all countries, cremation takes place after battles with heavy casualties. What these cultures share is the belief that there are procedures which, when honored, put the soul of the deceased at ease and allow it to move to the next stage of existence. In the Middle Kingdom, these practices make a genuine difference.

When a corpse goes to rest, handled devoutly and honored in the manner its culture favors, its soul almost never becomes a Wan Kuei unless the P'o had become active in life. The soul may become a ghost and enter the Yellow Springs — a fate far more rewarding for Chinese ghosts than the unfortunate ghosts of the Occupied Territories — or may simply pass on to its final reward. If the P'o does descend to Yomi, it's unlikely to ever manage the Second Breath because the Hun has been released properly; there's no point of attachment left.

Less ceremonial burials create lingering resentment in the souls of the neglected corpses. Death in plague, natural disaster, war, brigand attack or malignant abuse of official power: All of these leave angry souls that much more motivated to return to life and settle accounts. Burial in someone else's respectful tradition may produce the same result, simply because the soul yearns for what it knows (or believes) to be the better way.

A Hell of Your Own

Your character died. The P'o separated from the Hun, and the P'o fell into the clutches of Yomi. If your character was prominently and notoriously wicked, some important servant of the Yama Kings may have been waiting. More usually, some minor demon snatched up your character's P'o as part of a routine sweep through the Mirror Lands. Your P'o may also have floated aimlessly for some time before being caught in the spiritual equivalent of gravity and sucked down to Hell.

The vast majority of Wan Kuei retain only fragmentary impressions of their time in Yomi. Nonetheless, take time to think about the hell to which your character went. Work out the details with your Storyteller. Consult **The Thousand Hells**, or make up a new hell if the given ones don't quite suit. The key motif must be the loss or corruption of something important to the character. The Wicked City, for instance, punishes both those who hated and tried to avoid cities and those who were very comfortable in the midst of the urban world. Hell should be a place where your character confronts the failure of her hopes and ambitions, where she must survive by turning against her own desires.

Bad as they are in the Fourth Age, the hells become worse with time. They originated, before any observer of the Fourth Age can remember, as places of correction and enlightenment. Just as the Wan Xian turned from guardians into predators, so the hells turned from penitentiaries into prisons. Not all exist to torment souls; many simply act as places to hold souls to keep them from going to some other fate. Customs like the sacrifice of hell money allow the living to support souls in these less abusive hells as well as the souls that go to the Yellow Springs. Even in the hells ruled by Yama Kings bent on imposing suffering, moments of respite sometimes come. The souls who've been trapped a long time can tell stories to newcomers about how it's all been getting steadily worse, and they're right. The further the world drifts from the primal way, the worse everything gets in the afterlife.

The Limits of Examination

Blood & Silk is a game, not a course of psychotherapy. It draws on elements of horror and tragedy, and characters often suffer. *Players* should not. If you prefer to choose a few details and leave the rest of the hells alone, feel free. There's no bonus prize for a more exhaustive contemplation of Hell, nor will the roleplaying police take away your license to enjoy **Blood & Silk** if you choose to focus on material existence rather than Yomi.

Return

Having lived and died, your character came back to the material world, though not exactly to life as he used to know it. His P'o gets out of Yomi, makes its way across the deep voids of the Yin World and reenters his body along with his Hun.

How did your P'o manage to get loose? Did it work in cooperation with other doomed souls (and perhaps then betray them, leaving behind a legacy of angry prisoners who might well accept an offer of demonic assistance to pursue revenge)? Did it cut a deal with a demon who will return at precisely the wrong moment to demand a favor in return? Did a demon or Yama King scent the potential for the P'o to work great harm in the world and deliberately let it go, with or without explaining the plot to the P'o? Or did it actually manage to escape, spotting a weakness in the defense of its hell and exploiting that failing?

Some souls return to the world after mere days in Yomi. Others spend weeks, months, even years there. Every choice opens up roleplaying possibilities. A character who's drawn the Second Breath quickly can better blend in with his old life. A character who must wait to draw the Second Breath gains distance from his old life and the freedom to return without emerging into a still-active crowd of mourners. Every Wan Kuei must come to terms with the passage of time; choose an interval that offers you interesting hooks for character development.

Wan Kuei return to their own bodies (or, on rare occasions, some other suitable body). They are not ghosts. Though they do not breathe, they do exist in the material world, just like living people. Something drives them in unique ways; apart from that, they participate as fully in the routine of material existence as their Chi deficiency and divided souls allow.

The Second Breath as Destiny

The Second Breath defines the Wan Kuei's entire existence. The impulse that draws (or pushes) a soul out of Yomi must always be a strong one. Weaklings don't break the spiritual bonds of the afterlife. You must understand how and why your character fled Yomi to understand what he hopes for and fears, how he believes he should (or must) act upon returning to the world.

Wan Kuei carry karmic debts. The forms of obligation to others are potentially infinite. Common ones include:

- **Ambition.** The character desires to be something he wasn't in life — a traveler, if in life he lived in a single village; an obscure artist, if in life he carried great responsibility; and so on.
- **Devotion.** People who counted on the character now suffer because of his absence. The character aims to provide for them.
- **Duty.** The character committed herself in life to perform a task. Death is not sufficient reason to shirk the obligation.
- **Love.** The character remains attached to a person, a group or even a place and cannot bear to be apart from the target of his affection.
- **Revenge.** A wicked person cut off the character's life. The character aims to punish the evil-doer and, after that, to punish similar people else where in the world.

The burden that drives the character is always a huge one. It's not something that a mere lifetime's worth of effort can resolve but a compulsion that may take the character to the end of the Age and beyond. The character's whole post-mortem existence revolves around the debt, whatever it is.

Take advantage of the variety of Hun and P'o Natures to fine-tune the details for your character. The choice of P'o illuminates the distinction between, for instance, an ambition founded from fear of failure versus an ambition founded from a belief in one's innate greatness. Biography is mechanics in **Blood & Silk**; know the character, and the Traits follow.

The Wu

The synthetic blood-families of the Wan Kuei provide the basis of their society and their court system. The loyalties of the *guanxi* bond hold the vampires together in the face of tremendous differences: religious, spiritual and

political. They mold the future fate of five or more immortals into a holistic entity powerful enough to attract a patron spirit.

This critical bond is also the venue for most inter-character roleplaying in a **Blood & Silk** chronicle. All the players' vampires will be part of a single *wu* and hence bound together for a common purpose. The other players and you, along with the Storyteller, should spend some time establishing the background and details of the *wu*. You can do this either before or after creating individual characters, or better yet, determine a few basics first, and finalize matters after creating your Wan Kuei.

Some of the questions you and the other players should ask yourselves about the *wu* include:

- **How balanced is it?** The ideal *wu* has five members, one from each Dharma and direction. This is only an ideal, however, and many Corpse Families have different compositions that reflect their purposes. A *wu* destined to wage war might include several Devil-Tigers and south-facing vampires, for example. Try to make sure that all the characters are complementary in some way, however. This will make play more enjoyable and reflect the fact that the ancestors rarely purposefully put together Wan Kuei who cannot cooperate.
- **Why was it formed?** The ancestors often give *wu* specific tasks, such as watching over a disputed city, dealing with a certain enemy or taking care of some part of court business. These tasks can be short-term assignments (such as escorting an ancestor on a visit to another court) or never-ending charges (such as exploring the Yang World). The Storyteller may already have a reason in mind, but input from the players is never a bad idea.
- **Are there elder members?** Your characters start off as (almost) newly dead disciples, but the *wu* may have a longer history. If there are fewer than five players, the Storyteller may wish to include some other characters in the *wu*, including jina or other elders. Having an older *wu*-mate can be invaluable: She is likely quite powerful and may be influential at court. On the other hand, a jina attracts more dangerous enemies, who won't hesitate to strike at the "weak links" she has surrounded herself with. You should also discuss why a more influential vampire has chosen (or been compelled) to surround herself with Running Monkeys. Again, the Storyteller may have ideas of his own.



The Hundred Corpse Families

Towering over the institution of the *wu* are the so-called Hundred Corpse Families. The Corpse Families (of which there are actually several hundred) make up the "nobility" of Wan Kuei society. If a *wu* performs admirably, they may be invited to apply to the Register of Corpse Families, a small and shadowy clique of mandarins and bodhisattvas who decide which *wu* are good enough to join the Hundred Corpse Families and which are not. *Wu* accepted into the Hundred Corpse Families receive a *kaja* character as their symbol (like "Sapphire" or "Glorious Victory") and the exclusive right to use it as a sigil. Becoming one of the Hundred Corpse Families is a sign of great success among the blood-families of the Ten Thousand Demons.

There are two distinct ways to become one of the Hundred Corpse Families. One is to pick up a "vacated" character, one whose *wu* has ascended into *dâh* or met Final Death. Obviously, the burden of tradition and the past history of the character weighs heavily on such a *wu*. This is the easy way. And is encouraged by the Register.

The more difficult way to is to apply for a new, never-assigned *kaja* character, in essence, founding a new Hundred Corpse Family. The Register discourages this — it is self-aggrandizing and diminishes the impact of the Corpse Families by lessening their historical continuity. Some Corpse Families have been Registered since before the fall of Meru, and the Register's notes are one of the few clues as to unlife in the nights of the early Fourth Age. Nevertheless, very successful *wu* or those with distinct personalities can and do gain their own characters, but it's a tremendous effort and done at great political expense.

Wu who are members of the Hundred Corpse Families are, by far, the most likely vampires to induct new disciples directly into their blood-family. These *wu* have tremendous stockpiles of wealth, lore and influence and take great pains to preserve their legacies. They do so by inducting and training one or several promising young disciples. Some Corpse Families even train them for years in sequestered temples, controlling all aspects of their unlives until they reach the rank of jina.

In the opinion of the Corpse Families, these are the true inheritors of the mantle Princes of the Earth. The opinions of the rest of Wan Kuei society, and even of many Corpse Family members, are more mixed. Though they are well-trained, the tremendous pressure on these young vampires drives many off the Road Back, either causing them to stall in their Dharmic quest as mandarins or else tempting them to degeneracy or worse, to the path of *akuma*. While many condemn, there are few who believe their condemnations firmly enough that they themselves would not jump at an invitation to join the Corpse Families.

- **Is the *wu* one of the Hundred Corpse Families?** The most prestigious of all the *wu* are the members of the Hundred Corpse Families, registered as such and considered to be exemplary groups of Wan Kuei (see sidebar). Playing one of these *wu* can be very appealing — the very name of the *wu* can open doors and create a reputation. On the other hand, the young disciples in such a *wu* have thousands of years of tradition to uphold. Ambitious enemies may also be looking to make a reputation by defeating one of the Hundred.

Suggested Concepts

The Middle Kingdom of the Fourth Age is a world where strong conventions govern social interactions. People of a given station are expected to do some things as a matter of course and equally expected not to do certain others. History and myth record exceptions to every generalization, of course; nevertheless, the generalizations still apply to most cases.

The following concepts provide starting points that allow you to answer some of the questions of the character creation process and maintain a certain authenticity (if there can be anything authentic about vampires from Hell). These are not complete characters — more ready-made backgrounds and motivations, along with suggestions for Trait choices. You still have to make critical decisions and assign dots. Note also that most of these concepts assume a chronicle set in China (or Nihon in the case of the three Nihonjin concepts), but you can easily modify them to suit other **Blood & Silk** settings.

Devout Priest

The gods and spirits have always spoken to you; you knew from childhood that you would serve them. As a young man or woman you studied at a nearby temple and, in time, helped found a new one to honor the gods and spirits to which you were particularly devoted. You may have served as an official of the government, performing rites on behalf of the people and the emperor, or you may have performed your devotions independently of the state. If you were a woman, the priesthood offered you an alternative to domestic service: You couldn't exercise the temporal power of a male priest, but offering spiritual guidance and instruction has its own rewards. Whatever

class you grew up in no longer mattered to you, though outsiders sometimes tried to drag you into their secular disputes.

Second Breath: The unrighteous always rage against their betters. Some wicked soul took offense at your devotion, which he saw as an implicit insult, and murdered you. A strong sense of unfinished business and a desire to make someone pay kept you together through Yomi's torments and brought you back to the world. Slight variations in emphasis could take you in any direction. You may join the Resplendent Cranes, if you want to continue your priestly calling in your new condition. You may devote yourself to punishing the sort of person who killed you and become a Devil-Tiger. You may decide that a lifetime of austerity is enough and throw yourself into the sensual world with the Thrashing Dragons. You may feel called to study more closely the spirit world you served with little knowledge in life, now that you're part of it, and become a Bone Dancer. Finally, you may seek neither to be what you were nor its opposite but pursue instead some new identity. You are suited to be one of the Thousand Whispers in this case.

Recommended Dharmas: Any

Attributes: Mental primary, Social secondary, Physical tertiary

Abilities: Knowledges primary, Talents secondary, Skills tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Empathy, Expression, Leadership, Linguistics, Medicine, Occult, Rituals

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Horoscope, Nushi, Rites

Dishonest Priest

Heaven? It can't be high enough or far enough away for you. You didn't care about what might lurk beyond the grave, you just wanted a comfortable life for yourself. So you learned how to say the right things and take grateful people's money in exchange for advice. It was a good routine while it lasted. Death was just a bit of a shock....

Second Breath: Everything you assumed while you were alive proved wrong. If you'd been less determined, you'd have faced an eternity of the torments you used to preach about without believing in them. In life, you had the willpower necessary to perpetuate a constant lie; now, you're out to maintain a constant truth. If you cling to the truth that still-living sinners must suffer the way you have, you gravitate to the Devil-Tigers. If you decide instead that after one lie you should experience a multitude of truths, the Thousand Whispers offer you the opportunity to continue exploring new true faces.



Recommended Dharmas: Devil-Tiger, Thousand Whispers

Attributes: Social primary, Mental secondary, Physical tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Skills secondary, Knowledges tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Empathy, Expression, Performance, Rituals, Subterfuge

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Horoscope, Rites

Artist

Once someone of importance (whether in your home town or on the scale of the empire), you withdrew from public life to pursue personal goals. Your retreat may have been voluntary, born of disgust with the corruption of civic life or of simply apathy, or forced on you as punishment for failures. In either case, you took up practices not considered proper for worthy gentlemen, possibly even including novel-writing. Women, usually though not always of the upper classes, sometimes win renown as artists, whether under their own names or under ambiguous pseudonyms. Art carries less suggestion of scandal and degeneracy for women than it does for men; as a woman, you might have found in the arts an outlet for impulses you couldn't channel into politics. Others enjoyed your art, if you let them, but only in private. Death cut off the possibility of rehabilitation and return to your former existence.

Second Breath: Death marked the end of your hopes. No pain of Yomi struck any worse than the knowledge that you would never achieve the status you craved. A cold rage pushed you up out of the fires, back into the world. If you take your rejection to heart and now face away from mortal life, you make an excellent Bone Dancer, finding solace among the dead. If you turn your anger toward those who kept you from your proper place, you join the Devil-Tiger crusade. If instead, you prefer to gain revenge by beating your old enemies at their own game of mortal pleasure, using your unnatural vitality to undermine and degrade them, then the Thrashing Dragons make a good choice.

Recommended Dharmas: Bone Dancer, Devil-Tiger, Thrashing Dragon

Attributes: Mental primary, Physical secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Knowledges secondary, Skills tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Crafts (any), Expression, Occult, Performance, Rituals

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Fame, Jade Talisman, Rites

Merchant

Confucius thought your kind promoted social turmoil and unrighteousness; Laotze would have preferred to see all merchants disappear and the people make do with what they have. So even sages can be wrong, you thought, even if in most ways you sought to practice their teachings. You did the hard work of buying and selling that made existence beyond the level of isolated hovels possible and, in return, reaped a harvest of envy and scorn. Your greatest hope was that one of your sons could study the classics (thanks to your ability to support a child not busily toiling in the fields), and move the family into a better rank. You would never be accepted among the great and died with your familial ambition unfulfilled.

Second Breath: No mere personal concern drew you out of Yomi and back into the world. You feared for your *family* and wanted to provide for its safety and progress in ways life didn't allow you to. If you choose to mingle among them, perhaps in the disguise of some suitable stranger, the Thrashing Dragons are a good choice for your allegiance. If you choose to strike at the unrighteous forces that denied your family opportunities it should have had, you'll become a Devil-Tiger. If you seek to guide your family in the ways of righteousness so that its members can earn the favor of their superiors and progress in the ways provided for them, you'll become a Resplendent Crane. If you protect and guide your mortal family from the shadows, you'll become a Bone Dancer.

Recommended Dharmas: Bone Dancer, Devil-Tiger, Resplendent Crane, Thrashing Dragon

Attributes: Social primary, Physical secondary, Mental tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Skills secondary, Knowledges tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Brawl, Empathy, Expression, Finance, Intimidation, Streetwise

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Resources

Soldier

There is no glory in fighting, even if a few famous generals and strategists (like Sun Tzu and Cao Cao of old) achieve respect for their insights. You occupied the lowest rung of the social ladder, below farmers, who after all feed everyone. Your job exists only because men and women have not yet become moral enough to regulate their own affairs. You joined the army to escape some personal misery and served reasonably well, finally falling in a battle against some enemy of the imperial peace.

Second Breath: You escaped the coils of Yomi because you are, above all, disciplined. That's one benefit from your military training; whether you feel there are any others depends on how much you desired to fight and how



much the army was just better than the alternatives. If you return to the world filled with a sense of your righteous mission — either to be the perfect soldier or to abolish the wickedness that is standing armies — you'll become a Resplendent Crane. If you decide to take the administration of justice and defense into your own hands, you'll probably find the Devil-Tigers more congenial, since they need more warriors than the other Dharmas. If you decide that it's time to engage in the (disciplined) pursuit of personal satisfaction rather than war, the Thrashing Dragons want you.

Recommended Dharmas: Devil-Tiger, Resplendent Crane, Thrashing Dragon

Attributes: Physical primary, Mental secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Skills secondary, Knowledges tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Dodge, Leadership, Martial Arts, Melee, Survival

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Herd

Wicked Bandit

It's all very well to talk about virtue when you're fed and comfortable. You grew up poor but strong and found that you could get more of what you needed by taking it rather than asking. The laws and customs that governors and priests prattle on about never served you, so you never felt obligated to serve them. Sometimes you lived very well, spending the riches you took in much the same style as the now-poor nobles who made it possible; sometimes you survived only with what you could carry, fleeing organized pursuit. Death might have come for you in battle against the law, on the executioner's scaffold or at the hands of an ambitious underling.

Second Breath: Death showed you that everyone does get the reward they deserve in the end. Justice gets served, even if only outside the boundaries of the world you knew. Heaven doesn't need you. You could do what you wanted. The drive to experience something new guided you past all the traps of Yomi. If you want to just enjoy life in ways you couldn't before, you'll be a Thrashing Dragon. If you decide that you should experience life in many different facets, you'll move to the Thousand Whispers. If Yomi taught you the error of your ways and the value of a lawful life, you're a prime candidate for the Resplendent Cranes.

Recommended Dharmas: Resplendent Crane, Thousand Whispers, Thrashing Dragon

Attributes: Physical primary, Mental secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Skills secondary, Knowledge tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Athletics, Brawl, Dodge, Intimidation, Leadership, Melee, Stealth, Subterfuge, Survival

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Fame, Resources

High-Ranking Bureaucrat

You labored many years in the service of the empire and reaped the rewards of prestige and influence. You might have governed a province or directed one of the ministries of a central government. Countless lesser officials carried out your orders, while you enjoyed the good life to which you were entitled.

Second Breath: The world needs you. You didn't become any less essential simply because you're dead. A proper sense of duty preserved you from the snares of Yomi. If you seek to continue presiding as one of the natural leaders of the world, the Resplendent Cranes want you. If instead, you wish to show how the wise man savors the experiences of the world and masters them all, you make an exemplary Thrashing Dragon.

Recommended Dharmas: Resplendent Crane, Thrashing Dragon

Attributes: Social primary, Mental secondary, Physical tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Knowledges secondary, Skills tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Crafts (Calligraphy), Expression, Law, Leadership, Occult, Politics, Rituals

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Fame, Rites

Low-Ranking Bureaucrat

Your progress up the ladder of social distinction was interrupted by your premature death. You retain the detailed knowledge of the literary classics required for acceptance into the civil service and whatever skills you acquired implementing the orders handed down from above. Whatever authority you wielded was on a local level.

Second Breath: Yomi destroyed your pride in your accomplishments thus far, leaving behind only the ambition to do more, to go farther, to hold more power. If you still seek power in the mortal hierarchy or in the society of Wan Kuei, you become a Resplendent Crane to master the appropriate tools of leadership. If you now focus on the society of the dead, you become a Bone Dancer, with the intent of forcing the ghostly hierarchy to acknowledge your authority. If you decide to focus on advancement through purging the undeserving, the Devil-Tigers put your familiarity with the mortal hierarchy to work.

Recommended Dharmas: Bone Dancer, Devil-Tiger, Resplendent Crane

Attributes: Mental primary, Social secondary, Physical tertiary

Abilities: Knowledges primary, Talents secondary, Skills tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Crafts (Calligraphy), Expression, Investigation, Law, Occult, Politics, Rituals

Recommended Backgrounds: Contacts, Rites

Virtuous Bandit

The emperor rules with the Mandate of Heaven, but not all his servants listen to Heaven's will. Good men and women sometimes run afoul of wicked officials. That happened to you. Trumped-up charges forced you to flee your home and stripped you of whatever rank you once held. You divided your time between surviving as best you could — sometimes by admittedly unrighteous means such as theft — and trying to clear your good name. In the end, death came before pardon.

Second Breath: You found no justice in Yomi. Whatever in the cosmos might care about righteousness, it did nothing for you. Filled with a sick despair at the state of things, you forced your way back into the world to do what Heaven will not. If you seek to live as the virtuous person you were, augmented by the powers of your kind, you join the Resplendent Cranes. If you wish to strike down the wicked, knowing that justice lies only in your hands, you join the Devil-Tigers. If you decide to try on a multitude of sins and virtues in search of whatever moral realm now earns Heaven's attention, you become one of the Thousand Whispers.

Recommended Dharmas: Devil-Tiger, Resplendent Crane, Thousand Whispers

Attributes: Mental primary, Physical secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Talents primary, Skills secondary, Knowledges tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Athletics, Martial Arts or Melee, Medicine, Stealth, Subterfuge, Survival

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Fame

Imperial Relative (Nihonjin)

The emperor, offspring of the gods who created the Home Islands, in theory holds all power. In practice, ambitious nobles have held all the real authority for centuries. As part of the imperial family, you lived your entire life in comfort, with all your needs attended to and precisely no opportunity to exert authority of any sort. Your ever-deferential masters steered your interests toward the arts or religion or anything but governance. The Second Breath offered you the opportunity to do all the things denied you in life.

Second Breath: Yomi was just your life writ large, full of incomprehensible rules designed to keep you

from anything that would threaten the regime. As much out of boredom as anything else, you studied the system, found a loophole and exploited it to escape. If you see this as your opportunity to experience the sensual world as your guardians would never have allowed, you become a Thrashing Dragon. If you decide that you've been chosen to judge the world, wielding after death the power always denied to you life, you become a Devil-Tiger. If you see opportunities for insight and advancement in the Yin World, you become a Bone Dancer.

Recommended Dharmas: Bone Dancer, Devil-Tiger, Thrashing Dragon

Attributes: Social primary, Mental secondary, Physical tertiary

Abilities: Knowledges primary, Skills secondary, Talents tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Crafts, Etiquette, Expression, Performance, Politics

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Fame, Resources

Refined Samurai (Nihonjin)

You come from a long and honorable lineage of Japanese nobility. Your family raised you to be a leader in every sense, master of the arts and scholarly lore, as well as of a warrior's skills. While nobody can do everything to the same degree of excellence, you're at least good in a very wide range of abilities. You did your part to rule your land; depending on the era in which you lived, you may have been a champion of a stable regime or a defender of right ideas in a time of chaos. Most probably, you died in battle, though illness and happenstance can strike at your class, as well as those beneath you.

Second Breath: What is death to one who has true honor? Hell has no power to bind the soul untainted by cowardice or deceit. It was just a matter of time before you broke the shackles Yomi placed upon you and returned to the world, as was only right. If you take advantage of your new condition to become an even more perfect warrior and leader, the Resplendent Cranes help you develop your full potential. If you decide to become the perfect judge and corrector of wrongs, the Devil-Tigers want you. If you feel called upon to bring the benefits of your enlightenment to ghosts and the creatures of the afterlife, then the Bone Dancers put your wisdom to use.

Recommended Dharmas: Bone Dancer, Devil-Tiger, Resplendent Crane

Attributes: Physical primary, Mental secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Skills primary, Talents secondary, Knowledges tertiary



Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Athletics, Dodge, Etiquette, Leadership, Martial Arts, Melee, Politics

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Fame, Herd, Influences, Resources

Uncouth Samurai (Nihonjin)

You were one of the rulers of the land who held power through force of arms. Your ancestors clawed their way up from the mass of society through sustained effort, showing themselves better soldiers and commanders than their rivals. Once in power, they foisted off the boring administrative parts of ruling on assistants. You took pleasure in battle, not courtly posturing.

Second Breath: Yomi was a challenge, the biggest, strongest set of power mongers you'd ever met. How could you resist the chance to prove them inadequate? The right combination of treachery and brute force brought you back to the world. So there you were. If you resume something like the good life you once led, you're a natural Thrashing Dragon. If you find yourself rethinking what it means to be a samurai and what you can and should do now, you become a Resplendent Crane.

Recommended Dharmas: Resplendent Crane, Thrashing Dragon

Attributes: Physical primary, Mental secondary, Social tertiary

Abilities: Skills primary, Talents secondary, Knowledges tertiary

Recommended Abilities: Alertness, Athletics, Dodge, Intimidation, Martial Arts, Melee, Survival

Recommended Backgrounds: Allies, Contacts, Fame, Herd, Resources





Chapter Four: Ways Under Heaven

Heaven is like an egg, and the earth is like the yolk of the egg.
— Chang Heng

The twilight of the Fourth Age is quite different from the twilight of the Fifth. In the mortal sphere, technology and culture are very different, and large-scale contact with the West is centuries away. For the Wan Kuei, the differences are even greater. The Wall between worlds is thinner, the grip of the Demon on a vampire is weaker, and the Wan Kuei are less debased overall. All these differences, mundane and supernatural, lead to some new or modified game mechanics.

The Traits and systems in this chapter function alongside those established in **Kindred of the East** and in the basic Storyteller game system. The text explains when these systems replace those in **Kindred of the East.**

New Traits

The following new Traits are important for characters in the Fourth Age and reflect both supernatural and social changes between the eras. Some of the Abilities have appeared in other World of Darkness products (such as **Vampire: The Dark Ages** or the **Vampire Storytellers Companion**) but are repeated here because they are indispensable to **Blood & Silk**.

New P'o Natures

A vampire's P'o is a little less dominant in the Fourth Age than in the Fifth, but it is also somewhat more sophisticated. This is a time of rich culture and richer corruption, not the raging Armageddon of the twilight of the Fifth Age. As such, several new P'o Natures are available to players of **Blood & Silk**. If they wish, Storytellers of modern **Kindred of the East** can allow these types of P'o into their chronicles as rare throwbacks.

The Ancient

The Ancient looks back along the trail plowed by the Wheel of Ages and believes that in past Ages it wouldn't have suffered the torments it did in Yomi and the ones it continues to suffer after the Second Breath. The Wan Kuei's wiser predecessors (at least before they succumbed to pride) existed more harmoniously. The Ancient P'o thinks the Hun can never measure up and wants it to simply surrender, so as to relieve the P'o from its pain. When in shadow soul, your character shows obsessive concern for everything old and contempt for everything new.

Conditions for Takeover: The Ancient can force a shadow soul roll whenever an innovation causes the Wan Kuei pain or some other form of discomfort. It may also force a roll whenever the Wan Kuei abuses old things.

The Artist

The Artist tore itself out of Yomi to accomplish a single task, some vision of artistic creation that the Wan Kuei harbored in life but was unable to undertake then. Nothing else matters to the Artist but that work. It berates the Hun for succumbing to other concerns, whether the distraction is Dharmic progress or some momentary pleasure. When in shadow soul, your character devotes all her attention to the great work; she may sever annoying commitments or simply ignore them.

Conditions for Takeover: The Artist attempts to gain control whenever the Wan Kuei turns away from the great work or whenever an opportunity to advance the work in an important way presents itself.

The Echo

The Echo escaped from Yomi just like every other Wan Kuei P'o, but unlike most of the others, it doesn't feel worthy to have gained a release denied to so many others. It retains a strong spiritual link to whichever hell used to hold it. Its goal is to break down the soul's resistance and lure it back to Yomi, and its weapon is the voices of all who remain below. The Echo P'o has a mind of its own but chooses not to use its own voice; whenever it speaks, it draws on memories of words others said in Yomi or on impressions of what others still there now say. When in shadow soul, the vampire focuses obsessively on the suffering in Yomi and the unearned release he and other Wan Kuei enjoy, in hopes of shaming, scaring or depressing himself and his peers into a return to Yomi.

Conditions for Takeover: The Echo triggers shadow soul whenever the Wan Kuei is confronted with evidence of loss and death — graveyards and cenotaphs are bad places for these vampires.

The Eunuch

The Eunuch found confirmation in Yomi of the age-old notion that all endeavor is futile. Everything it might make ends up fodder for demons. Even after its escape, it retains a sense of moral, intellectual and spiritual impotence — despair turned to the conviction that it *should not* create anything new. The Eunuch P'o refuses to undertake any enterprise beyond the basics of survival, instead devoting itself to appropriating the work of others for its own ends. When in shadow soul, the Wan Kuei abandons any original projects of her own and tries to become overseer, director or steward of others' efforts.

Conditions for Takeover: The Eunuch can force a shadow soul whenever the Wan Kuei faces situations that require him to lead others or when others are acutely dependent on him.

The Sage

The Sage focuses on the aspect of unexpected truth in Yomi. It wasn't quite like what the vampire had ever been taught. Now that it has returned, how can the P'o trust the doctrines it follows? The Sage P'o seeks out any doctrine that seems more likely to account for the truths of its experience, as long as it's something the vampire will find uncomfortable and difficult to follow. The P'o listens to whispers carried up from Yomi about teachings no longer known to living people or held only far away, in addition to studying the various schools of thought the vampire encounters in his travels. When in shadow soul, the Wan Kuei temporarily abandons his Dharma and direction in favor of some alternative that requires a dramatic change in behavior.

Conditions for Takeover: The Sage can force a roll for shadow soul when the Wan Kuei finds a weakness in his Dharma — some restriction that works against personal desires or goals.

The Vitalist

The Vitalist wants just one thing: renewed mortal life. The vampire can't quite get to it, of course. Even extreme Yang imbalance only makes her something that's merely lifelike in some regards. The Vitalist P'o strives to get as close as it can. It may seek after whatever life the vampire once had or aspire to greatness or seek some new social role, depending on its own preferences. When in shadow soul, the vampire turns away from everything connected to Wan Kuei society in an effort to reenter the mortal world.

Conditions for Takeover: The Vitalist reaches for control when the vampire confronts a situation that reminds her of her mortal life or that presents her with the opportunity to continue a mortal goal she abandoned after death.

The Warrior

The Warrior fought its way out of Yomi and continues to survive by fighting. The lesson of the Second Breath is that there's not enough to go around. Anyone (and anything) who gets in the P'o's way, denying it the things it needs and wants, brings it that much closer to a return to Yomi. The Warrior P'o will allow nothing to stand in the way of the vampire's continued to existence in the material world. When in shadow soul, the vampire fights with everyone who seems threatening — regardless of whether that threat is real and present or merely hypothetical.

Conditions for Takeover: The Warrior can force a roll for shadow soul when the Wan Kuei declines an opportunity for violent conflict (which isn't obviously bound to failure) in favor of more peaceful means and when he submits or cooperates with a rival.

New Skills

Archery

Attacks beyond the range of human throwing rely on the bow. Archery is the skill of maintaining and using the various styles of bow made in the Middle Kingdom during the Fourth Age. Archery is used in combat just like Firearms.

- • Novice: You can shoot unmoving targets, usually.
- •• Practiced: You can take part in a mass battle without bringing too much embarrassment on yourself and can support your family through hunting.
- ••• Competent: You lead archer units in war.
- •••• Expert: You advise generals on the effective use of archers.
- ••••• Master: Observers expect you to apotheosize and become the God of Archers.

Possessed by: Soldiers, Hunters

Specialties: Target Practice, Horseback (see p. 123)

Meditation

It's possible to calm the inner storms that disrupt mind and body and achieve a state of relaxed awareness that makes many unusual feats possible. Meditation represents the various techniques taught in the Middle Kingdom toward this end — keep in mind that very few characters actually know multiple techniques. Every meditating character must use some technique (mantras, yoga, etc.).

The character must make an Intelligence + Meditation roll, difficulty 7, to enter a meditative trance. Once there, the character can attempt one of the following actions each hour:

• Regain Willpower. Roll Intelligence + Meditation, difficulty 9. Each success restores one point of Willpower.

• Solve an enigma, piece together clues to a mystery or evaluate some other mental challenge. Roll Perception + Meditation, difficulty 9. Each success lowers the difficulty of the character's next Investigation or Enigmas roll by 1.

• Overcome wound penalties. Roll Stamina + Meditation, with a difficulty of 2 + the character's current number of health levels of damage. Each success lets the character ignore one level of wound penalty for the rest of the night. A character who gets three successes, for instance, can ignore any penalty of -3 or less, and a -4 penalty acts like a -1 penalty. If the character becomes Incapacitated, these benefits no longer apply. A character can attempt this use of meditation only once per night.

• Gather strength against the P'o. Roll Wits + Meditation, difficulty of 10 - Hun. Each success adds one to the character's dice pool for his next effort to resist fire or shadow soul. A character can try this only once per night, and the benefit does not carry over after sleep.

Any botch on one of these rolls brings the character out of his trance, and he cannot reenter it for the rest of the night. Significant physical interference in the first hour also breaks the trance, but the character can start the process again.

These rules supercede those on pp. 83-84 of **Kindred of the East**.

- • Novice: You've seen monks pray.
- •• Practiced: You know a handful of common prayers and can recite some useful stories about how the ancients mastered meditation.
- ••• Competent: You've learned from masters of spiritual discipline and enjoy a local reputation for spiritual purity.
- •••• Expert: Scholars and potentates consult you for insights into the wisdom of the ages.
- ••••• Master: Yes.

Possessed by: Monks, Jina, Teachers

Specialties: Riddles, Controlling the P'o

Pilot

Operating a boat successfully takes training and practice. Different sorts of boats require separate specializations: rafts and canoes, small sailboats, ocean-going vessels.

- • Novice: You don't sink your ship very often.
- •• Practiced: You can handle yourself safely in most conditions, and nobody feels the need to abandon ship when you take the wheel.
- ••• Competent: You know the limits of your vessel and yourself and deal with adverse conditions calmly.
- •••• Expert: Patrons offer you large sums of money to lead their maritime expeditions.
- ••••• Master: Tales of your prowess mingle with accounts of sea gods.

Possessed by: Sailors, Traders, Explorers

Specialties: Rough Seas, Vessel Types, Nighttime Sailing

Ride

The poorest people walk. The richest people get carried. Everyone else rides, if they wish to go long distances. This ability covers how to tend for one's horse as well as ride it. Ride also serves as a cap on all combat Abilities when engaged in mounted battle (see p. 122 for more).

- • Novice: You can prop up pretty well on a horse at slow speeds.
- •• Practiced: You ride at all speeds safely, and few challenges throw you.
- ••• Competent: You'd make a good cavalry officer.
- •••• Expert: You're famous for your riding in war and peace. If you're so inclined, your stunts are the talk of the provinces.
- ••••• Master: No horse can throw you, no challenge delay you.

Possessed by: Cavalrymen, Nobles, Country Folk
Specialties: Speed, Tricks, Racing, Combat

New Merits & Flaws

Favors (Variable Merit/Flaw)

Wan Kuei society, like the mortal societies around it, runs on mutual obligations. Backgrounds like Allies, Mentor and Retainers reflect permanent connections of duty. See pp. 117-119 for a full discussion of prestation among the Wan Kuei. The Favors Merit (and Flaw) represents the character's current balance of social accounts as the chronicle begins.

Storytellers who prefer not to make these things subject to point totals should feel free to disregard or disallow this Merit. It's presented here for those who like to have an objective tally and want to give players the option to have their characters start up or down (or both) in the prestation game.

Each positive point of Favors represents one major boon that someone close to the character owes him. Each negative point of Favors represents a major boon the character owes to someone else. The player should work with the Storyteller to define what these are — no debts exist in the abstract. Did the character save another vampire from a rampaging demon hunter? Did some other vampire teach the character a bit of secret lore or help resolve a conflict before it escalated into a duel the character would lose? Keep in mind that differences of status will affect the value of favors (see "Favors and Prestation," pp. 117-117). This means that a young disciple owed a boon by a mandarin might expect a good word at court or permission to act at a critical time; a disciple owing a mandarin a boon can expect much more significant risk.

Multiple positive or negative points can represent many favors owed or especially impressive favors. You should maintain separate counts for favors owed to and by the character; he can have both a two-point Favor Flaw and a one-point Favor Merit simultaneously.

Obviously, a character's point total of negative and positive Favors rises and falls during play. In a society as dependent on assistance and negotiation as Wan Kuei and their *guanxi*, Favors can make the difference between success and failure in critical moments.

Disciplines of the Fourth Age

Most of the Disciplines of the Fourth Age are the same as those of the Fifth. The fallen nature of the Wan Kuei is still evolving, however, and some of their powers undergo significant transformation as the Wheel of Ages turns. Most notably, the Godbody (or Shintai) Disciplines are very different than they will be in the modern era; in the Fourth Age, they remain much closer to the elemental powers wielded by the Ten Thousand Immortals before their downfall. The Soul Art of Cultivation is also significantly different, in this case because the understanding of the P'o is still developing among the Hungry Dead.

See page 66 for more details on which Disciplines are available in the Fourth Age.

The Godbody of Earth (Jade Shintai)

The Godbody of Earth aims at balancing the flow of Chi, allowing the vampire to orient himself with the center of things.

Chi Attunement: Strength

• Understanding with the Earth

The vampire harmonizes his soul with the local powers, becoming part of the overall pattern of Chi flow in the vicinity, as immovable as any mountain or tree.

System: Whenever he chooses to use Understanding with the Earth, the vampire cannot be picked up, thrown down or knocked back. He must stay standing (or lying) where he is while the power is in effect; when he chooses to move, the effect ends. It takes one action to start or stop using Understanding with the Earth; no roll is required.

•• Harmony with the Earth

The vampire places herself in a state of peaceful disengagement from the local powers and becomes capable of moving across any and all surfaces.

System: The vampire must spend one action concentrating to use Harmony with the Earth. She can then move along any surface, including liquids, and up walls and ceilings. She leaves no footprints and makes little or no sound; all efforts to detect her are at +2 difficulty. She takes half normal damage from falls and can jump twice her normal distance. If she takes damage, the player must make a Willpower check at difficulty 7 to avoid the vampire slipping out of Harmony with the Earth; otherwise, the effect lasts for one scene.

••• Unity with the Earth

The vampire identifies himself with the local powers and can merge with *any* substance of the natural world in the vicinity. This unity does not work on matter

native to the worlds beyond the Wall; that's the realm of other Disciplines.

System: The vampire spends one Chi and concentrates for three turns. Make a Manipulation + Etiquette roll against the local Wall rating. If the roll succeeds, the vampire merges seamlessly with his target substance, much like the Protean power of Earth Meld. Unlike Earth Meld, Unity with the Earth works with all solid or liquid natural substances. Merging with material created or significantly reshaped by conscious effort, like building walls or refined metals, requires a separate Manipulation + Etiquette roll, difficulty 7, to speak with the substance's spirit and understand its nature before attempting to merge.

Once merged, the vampire can move at his normal walking speed. Mental and spiritual attacks affect him directly. If he's moving on the surface of a mass of some substance, he's visible to anyone watching — he retains his usual appearance — but physical attacks must destroy or remove the surrounding substance before he can be attacked himself.

Example: Lin Hua uses Unity with the Earth to step into a granite cliff face. The Yang Prana masters Mao Gu and Mao Ho pursue him. Mao Gu uses Eightfold Yang Mantle to blast a significant part of the cliff into pebbles and dust. If Lin were standing in the blasted area, he'd suddenly be vulnerable to normal physical attack. However, he manages to move out of the blast zone in time, so Mao Ho goes after him with Semblance of the Scarlet Queen. In spirit form, Mao Ho can then pursue Lin Hua. The earth only offers so much concealment.

It costs no Chi to maintain Unity with the Earth through one slumber. Upon waking or upon significant disturbance to the substance in which he rests, he returns to physical form. It takes a separate Manipulation + Etiquette roll, difficulty of the local Wall rating, to pass from one sort of substance to another.

•••• Moving with the Earth

The vampire attunes herself to a line of Chi and can follow it through the air, along the ground and underwater with equal ease. She can engage in other tasks without losing the attunement, although complex actions may require an effort to maintain concentration.

System: Roll Dexterity + the vampire's Yin or Yang Chi (whichever is appropriate), difficulty of the local Wall, to find and align with a line of Yin or Yang Chi. The vampire can move through the air and along the ground at up to 60 miles per hour, minus 5 mph per point of the local Wall rating. (With a Wall rating of 7, for instance, the vampire can move at 25 mph.) The vampire suffers no penalty for abrupt turns and other violations of inertia, since she moves as part of the system of world power. She can move through liquids at half the air and surface speed and through solid objects in a semi-tangible form at her normal walking speed. In every case, she can adjust her speed to hovering at rest, moving at the maximum allowed or anything in between.

Make a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 6, when the vampire attempts combat or other particularly demanding activities. Each success allows her to engage in the task for one turn; when she's used up the available successes, she must roll again to continue. On failure, she moves gently to the surface of the earth in a turn or two. On a botch, she plummets down or hurtles up to the surface, taking a level of lethal damage along the way.

The vampire can follow the Chi line she moves with wherever it goes without having to make fresh efforts at attunement even as it moves through areas with different Wall ratings. She cannot fly off in a direction of her own choosing, but can also shift to new lines at any time. Make a Dexterity + Chi Virtue roll against the new local Wall rating. The vampire can continue Moving with the Earth based on a single attunement for one scene.

••••• The Elemental Self

The vampire meditates and transforms his own substance into one of the five elements. His body retains its general proportions, but no observer would mistake him for a normal human being or even a normal *shen*.

System: Spend 4 points of Chi, in the proportions indicated for each element, and 1 Willpower. Make an Intelligence + Occult roll, difficulty 7, if the vampire is not touching a greater-than-man-sized quantity of the element he's imitating; otherwise, no roll is necessary. All forms let the vampire use his Stamina to soak aggravated damage. The transformation lasts until the vampire chooses to relinquish it or falls asleep.

Water (4 Yin). The vampire becomes chilly, dark water. Any light falling upon his body is instantly absorbed, and loud sounds lose half their volume as they disappear into the echo-less depths of the vampire's form. Anyone within arm's reach of the vampire must make a Stamina roll, difficulty 7, to avoid losing a point of Dexterity as a result of the chill; this loss remains in effect until the victim leaves the vampire's presence for a scene. Each time the vampire strikes someone, the target must make the same roll again, and any target who reaches zero Dexterity succumbs to cold, possibly developing frostbite and certainly losing consciousness. Metallic objects striking the character take a point of damage, in the form of suddenly appearing rust and corrosion, each time they connect. The character can dissolve into a man-sized pool and reform at will (each transformation requires an action).

Metal (3 Yin, 1 Yang). The vampire becomes dark blue or black polished metal, with highlights independent of any illumination in the area. Lightning crackles across his armored skin; anyone striking him with bare skin or conductive (all metal) weapons takes 2 levels of bashing damage for each turn they maintain contact. The vampire does lethal instead of bashing damage in hand-to-hand combat and can stake Yang-balanced vampires with his bare hands (difficulty 9, three or more successes needed to stake). By sustained effort, the

vampire can muster enormous strength: Wherever a feat of strength like pushing down a barrier usually requires earning the necessary successes on one roll, a vampire in elemental metal form can keep pushing. Make an extended series of rolls, accumulating successes until reaching the required threshold. On a failed roll, lose half the accumulated successes, and on a botch, start all over again. The vampire cannot engage in combat or tasks requiring fine manipulation while shoving this way. A vampire already using a Discipline that makes her normal combat damage lethal does aggravated damage with this ability.

Earth (2 Yin, 2 Yang). The vampire becomes a walking mixture of rock and gems. Whenever a weapon strikes the vampire, make a roll against her Stamina, difficulty 6. Each success delivers a level of damage to the weapon through the shock of impact. The vampire can clog any machinery or object with moving parts by touching it for a turn, summoning dust and dirt to jam its mechanisms. (If the vampire jams a water wheel or blocks an aqueduct chute from closing, the secondary effects can be horrendous and widespread.) The vampire can also raise brief clouds of dust or dirt within 10 feet of herself, which last for one turn per point of her Willpower. All tasks requiring clear visibility take a +2 difficulty penalty for those within the cloud (or trying to strike into it); liquids clot and condense, while fires choke and gutter out. Any breathing creature takes two levels of bashing damage, which can be soaked, from congested lungs.

Wood (3 Yang, 1 Yin). The vampire becomes an animated mass of organic material: a tree-like sculpture of himself, a mound of moss or whatever fits the environment and his wishes. The vampire can make all plant life in his line of sight visibly grow or wither. He can also stake Yin-balanced vampires in hand-to-hand combat (difficulty 9, three or more successes needed to stake). He can also concentrate his will so as to make a chosen target succumb to blight and disease. (Note that only mortals are vulnerable to most diseases, although permanently Yang-unbalanced vampires can become carriers.) Make a Stamina + Intimidation roll, difficulty 7. If successful, the target develops some wasting condition, taking one level of lethal damage immediately and one more each day thereafter upon awakening. The target's player can make a Stamina roll, difficulty 8, each day; when the accumulated successes match the number of successes on the disease-inducing roll, the disease runs its course and stops. The vampire can choose to change his manifestation and spread out into a variegated clump of plant life and back into human form at will (each transformation requires an action).

Fire (4 Yang). The vampire becomes pure white or scarlet fire, radiating intense heat. Ranged attacks against him are at +2 difficulty because it's hard to target precisely through the surrounding glare. At his discretion, the vampire can set anything flammable on fire by touching it. He can even try to send out a momentary flicker of fire and heat sufficient for the task by making a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 7. One success ignites paper and the like; it takes 5 or more successes to boil dry small ponds or ignite thoroughly drenched logs. The maximum range for such blasts is twice the vampire's Willpower in feet. The vampire does not have to test for wave soul when using this effect, although those around him do. If he botches the effort to manipulate fire, however, he automatically falls into wave soul.

The Godbody of Fire (Ghost-Flame Shintai)

The Godbody of Fire deals with the elemental flames of Chi. Mastery of the forces that normally destroy Wan Kuei inspires both respect and fear, depending on how the vampire uses his powers. Godbody of Fire can work with both Yin and Yang fires. Yang fires burn white, yellow or red, while Yang fires burn black, gray or blue.

Practitioners of the Godbody of Fire have an intimate understanding of that element, which helps them suppress the P'o's instinctive fear of flames. When testing for wave soul triggered by open flames, the player of a vampire with at least two dots in this Discipline gains a -2 difficulty bonus on the Hun's roll. This applies only to wave soul triggered by open flames.

Chi Attunement: Stamina

• Fire in the Eye

The vampire kindles Chi fire inside himself. It shines out not only through his eyes, but through his mouth and even his ears; if he's wounded, small flames also lick out through the wound.

System: The vampire can turn this power on and off at will (doing so is a reflexive action). His bite does an extra die of aggravated damage, and he can see in complete darkness. By staring at a target for one turn, the vampire may attempt to inspire fear in others; vampires must roll as usual to avoid wave soul, while mortals and *shen* must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, to avoid running in terror. The difficulty of intimidation-related tasks is one lower than usual while using Fire in the Eye.

•• Fire in the Hand

The vampire can pick up fire and turn it into elemental flame and can conjure fire out of nowhere by an act of will. She can also command nearby fires to move any way she wants, sending pyrotechnic sparks anywhere she can see and shaping flames into patterns that last as long as she concentrates on them.

System: Spend a point of Yin or Yang Chi. The vampire can transform or create enough elemental fire to form a ball about three feet across; she can subdivide it and recombine it at will. The vampire can spend more points of Chi, though only one kind at a time, to create more fire. Creating each Chi point of fire requires an action. The vampire can wield this Chi fire as a weapon, using it as the equivalent of any sort of melee weapon to inflict Strength

+ 2 dice damage. Yang fire causes straightforward aggravated damage from fire; Yin fire "burns" the victim's soul. Damage burns away the victim's Willpower, although her player may soak with Hun or Self-Control. (See "Soul Flaying" on p. 106 for more details.) The vampire cannot be damaged by Chi fire she creates.

The vampire can also control normal flames within a number of yards equal to her Yang Virtue. These move at her will and can strike targets in combat. The player rolls Dexterity + Yang to strike targets, and the flames do normal damage for their size and intensity. The vampire herself is not immune to the effects of flames she controls.

The vampire can attempt to blind a target rather than damage it, with either Chi fire or manipulated normal flames. Roll damage as usual. If the damage roll produces more successes than the target achieves on a Stamina + Alertness roll, the target is blinded for one turn plus one additional turn per extra success.

The vampire can use summoned fires to enhance her appearance. Doing so takes an action, but her Social Attributes are effectively two higher than normal for efforts at command, intimidation, interrogation, leadership and the like, as long as she can maintain the flames. Common enhancing manifestations include cloaks of flame and flames from the eyes.

••• Self in the Fire

The vampire can merge with any body of flame that occupies at least as much space as his body normally does. It takes on his own appearance and general proportions, though it continues to crackle and ripple as flames do. He can also infuse it with Chi to make it more spectacular and dangerous.

System: Merging into or emerging from flame requires no Chi, just a turn's concentration. The vampire takes a +2 difficulty penalty to all combat tasks during this process. Once merged with the flame, the vampire can move at his normal walking speed and can jump twice as high or far as usual. He can pass himself from one flame to another as long as he extends a connecting prominence. Doing so requires a turn of concentration, and the prominence has a maximum range of a number of yards equal to his highest Chi Virtue. The vampire can remain in the flames until he goes to sleep.

In hand-to-hand combat, the vampire does damage based on the fire he has become, not any actual impact. The player must still roll to hit, but damage is based on how much fire the target is exposed to. A simple strike is equivalent to being hit by a torch, while a full tackle is equivalent to being stuck in a raging inferno. Victims lucky enough to be able to soak damage from fire face a difficulty of (5 + attacker's Godbody of Fire). The attacker's player can spend a point of Yin or Yang Chi to make the flame his character occupies take on an elemental form; it does an extra level of aggravated damage and increases the difficulty of resisting wave soul for nearby Wan Kuei by +1. (See **Vampire: The Masquerade**, p. 227, for full rules on fire.)



The vampire's player can also spend a point of Chi to toss off a separate spark of fire with the range and accuracy of a regular thrown knife. Such a spark does a single level of aggravated damage with a soak difficulty (if appropriate) of (3 + attacker's Godbody of Fire).

•••• Draining the Fire

The vampire turns herself into a conduit from the material world into the spirit worlds. She draws nearby flames into herself, redirecting them beyond the Wall where they dissipate harmlessly. She can read traces, both in current flames and in their ashen remains, of impressions picked up by the spirits of fire. With care and practice, she can extract useful images of past events that occurred around the fire.

System: To extinguish flames, spend a point of either sort of Chi. The vampire must concentrate for a turn. Roll Stamina + (appropriate Chi Virtue) against a difficulty of the local Wall rating. For each success, the vampire can reduce the heat (and associated soak difficulty) of a nearby fire by one. The fire must be within a number of yards equal to the character's appropriate Chi Virtue; if the vampire cannot see the fire, add 2 to the difficulty of the roll.

The vampire shunts the fire across the Wall into the appropriate spiritual realm (Yin or Yang). In the Yang World, flames generally merge with the ambient raging Yang, while they sputter and die in the cold Yin World. This is generally harmless, but at the Storyteller's discretion, such sudden gouts of flame across the Wall may attract spirits to the vampire.

Example: Dei Burukusi has Stamina 4 and Yang Chi 3. She's a few feet away from a burning inn, within which people she cares about are trapped. The local Wall rating is 5. She gets five successes. The blaze has a soak rating of 8, thanks to all the extremely flammable components of the building. Dei's five successes reduce it to a soak rating of 3, equivalent to a candle. Most of the fire's gone out, leaving flames still active only in the most combustible parts of the building. A great gout of flame courses into the Yang World, perhaps attracting the attention of a fire spirit.

For the vampire to extract impressions out of a fire, she must concentrate for a turn. The player spends a point of either Yang Chi (for a fire still burning) or Yin Chi (for ashes) and rolls Perception + (appropriate Chi Virtue) against a difficulty of the local Wall rating. Each success shows the vampire a momentary glimpse of the area as it was at some point when the fire was burning. The first impression is almost always the moment when the fire started; the second, the moment of its extinguishing. A vampire who hopes to see some particular period of time faces a more difficult challenge. Raise the difficulty by 1 for a broad period of time like a particular night and by 2 or even more for a specific hour or minute.

••••• The Tempered Soul

The vampire draws upon his unity with fire to gain supernatural protection from both fire and sunlight.

System: The vampire can resist damage from fire and sunlight twice as long as usual, with no upper limit. In addition, the "timer" resets when the character spends one turn per permanent Yin Chi indoors. Thus a character with Stamina 5 and Yin Chi 3 could spend four minutes in direct sunlight, then three turns indoors, then another four minutes outside and keep this up all day. Each point of Yang Chi the vampire spends to extend his period of safety in daylight adds two turns of protection rather than one. Even when damage does begin, it takes effect more slowly. On the first turn of exposure, the vampire loses a Health level. Next turn, he loses a level from each of his Physical Attributes. Next turn, he loses a level of Appearance. The turn after that, he loses a point of temporary Yin Chi. This cycle repeats as long as he takes damage.

The vampire also gains a +2 bonus for resisting wave soul triggered by sunlight. See p. 106, for the details on sunlight's usual effects during the Fourth Age.

The Godbody of Metal (Bone Shintai)

The Godbody of Metal deals with the transformation of one's self (and eventually the environment) into something inhuman, purging the qualities of life in favor of lifeless hardness and purity.

Chi Attunement: Stamina

• The Bright Metal Self

The vampire concentrates Yin energy within himself and takes on a metallic sheen. Skin becomes much more resistant to damage without giving up flexibility.

System: Spend one or more points of Yin Chi. The difficulty of all social tasks rises by one. Each point of Yin Chi spent gives the vampire two extra Bruised health levels. The effect lasts for one scene. Half of whatever damage remains in the extra levels at the end of the scene remains; careful vampires attend to healing while still in Bright Metal Self.

•• Metal Within

The vampire replaces portions of his body with metal constructs. It takes a full night without major distractions to make the replacements, and it is exquisitely painful.

System: No roll or Chi expenditure is necessary to install a modification, although the vampire must have access to properly forged metal pieces. Every modification requires Yin Chi to function. When the vampire wakes at dusk (regardless of whether he is black or scarlet cycled), the player must spend one Yin Chi for each modification. If the vampire lacks enough Chi to activate his modifications, those unpowered tap into the vampire's own being, doing a level of lethal damage

each. Once modifications have been activated (with Chi or health levels), they are considered part of the vampire's body for the rest of the night; other Disciplines and techniques that transform or transport the vampire will carry the modifications at no extra cost.

The vampire can force a modification into quiescence for a night. The vampire concentrates for a turn and the player rolls Stamina + Yin. If the roll succeeds, the vampire loses the use of a modification as it melts out of sight beneath his skin. The suppression inflicts two levels of bashing damage if there's only one success, one level of damage on two successes and no damage on three or more successes. By spending a point of Willpower, the player can automatically force a modification into quiescence without any damage. The vampire can summon up a suppressed modification at any time, although doing so requires an action (but no roll).

Unless circumstances warrant otherwise, the player suffers a +1 difficulty penalty on all social rolls if any modifications are visible. Removing a modification takes two undisturbed nights of effort and inflicts two levels of aggravated damage in the process.

Common modifications include:

• **Talons:** The vampire's fingers end in razor-sharp iron blades, several inches long. They do Strength + 2 dice aggravated damage. All fine manipulation tasks are at +2 difficulty, but climbing is at –2 difficulty if the talons can dig into the surface being climbed (useful for rock faces, not for ropes).

• **Blade:** The vampire turns one forearm and hand into a two-foot-long sword. It does Strength +3 dice aggravated damage and can parry melee attacks. The vampire can't use it for anything else, however (unless it is suppressed).

• **Armor:** The vampire replaces his skin with thin metal sheets. The armor adds one soak die per point of the vampire's permanent Yin Chi for lethal and bashing damage; it does nothing against fire or sunlight, but provides one soak per two points of permanent Yin Chi (rounded up) against aggravated damage from supernatural attacks.

• **Stance:** The vampire manipulates his skeleton into a new form. He can gain or lose six inches of height and adjust bones close to the skin so as to change his appearance (though not finely enough to imitate someone else). The new form is permanent; to adopt a new appearance, the vampire must remove the existing Stance modification and then add a new one. If the Stance is intended to provide extra stability, any knockdown attack against the vampire suffers a +2 difficulty penalty.

••• Dark Metal Self

The vampire channels Yin Chi so as to make herself collapse into a wire-like, nearly invisible form.

System: Spend a point of Yin Chi (to transform only the vampire's own body) or two points of Yin Chi (to transform clothes and light personal possessions as well). The vampire becomes literally a wire figure of a human being, capable of moving at her normal speed and of passing through any opening that can accommodate the width of a wire. The wire is a concentrated manifestation of Yin Chi, very dark and hard to notice: It takes success at a Perception + Alertness roll, difficulty 6, to notice the Dark Metal Self in broad daylight. The difficulty rises to 7 for bright indoor light and to 8 or even 9 for darker conditions. Make a Dexterity + Subterfuge roll for the vampire to move in ways that take advantage of available cover and shadow; each success on this roll adds one to the number of successes would-be spotters must achieve.

The vampire can use herself as a whip, doing normal damage. A player whose character wishes to strike at an affected vampire must make the above spotting roll, with a -2 difficulty bonus if his character is the target of one of the affected vampire's attacks. Once spotted, the vampire using Dark Metal Self still gets +2 to her Dodge rating. Outside combat, she can extend herself out for three yards per point of her Yin Virtue.

The vampire can also merge herself with any metal object larger than her normal form. She resumes her usual appearance, but moves within the metal and has its resistance to damage. (Mental and spiritual attacks work normally.) It takes a turn to merge with or emerge from a piece of metal, during which time all combat-related tasks are at +2 difficulty.

The Dark Metal Self lasts for one scene.

•••• Metal Rain

The vampire transforms some of his own self into small, needle-like shards of Yin-infused metal. They attack everything in the area, chilling the air as they pass.

System: Spend 2 points of Yin Chi. The vampire exhales and creates a cloud of metal rain filling a sphere 10 feet across. Everyone and everything in the cloud, other than its creator, takes six dice of aggravated damage. The cloud then dissipates. The vampire may exhale very shallowly and make a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 6. If it succeeds, the vampire catches the needles on his skin. They do one level of bashing damage to him but lie quiescent until he chooses to flex his muscles. Then they erupt as if he'd just exhaled them. If they're still present when he goes to sleep, they dissipate without further effect.

The vampire can also make a more targeted attack. It takes a single point of Yin Chi to spit a nearly invisible dart with the same range and damage as a thrown knife.

••••• Yin Metal Soul

The vampire joins her spirit with the darkest aspects of the Yin World, transforming her body into a solid sculpture of itself, made out of dark substances alien to the mortal world. Her body turns a dull gray, shot through with black crystals that moan softly when touched. Her

eyes become empty holes into the Yin World. Derangements and other psychological disturbances become manifest as distortions to her form.

System: Spend 5 points of Yin Chi. It takes five turns to make the transformation, which lasts for one scene.

The vampire's Appearance drops to zero. She gains two points of Strength and Stamina and adds her Yin Virtue to soak bashing and lethal damage. She can develop any of the features of Metal Within if the player succeeds in a Willpower roll, difficulty 7, and can banish them at will.

While using Yin Metal Soul, the vampire can attack Yin creatures in the Mirror Lands as if they were present physically (and they can strike at her as if she were in the Yin World). She can cut off parts of herself to offer gifts of Chi, giving up a point of Yin Chi but suffering no physical damage and allowing the receiving spirit to gain a point of Yin Chi.

The vampire can stare at a target, drawing attention to the windows into the Yin World that are her eyes. Make a contested roll of the vampire's Willpower against the Willpower of the target. If the vampire wins, the target must make a wave soul check; the difficulty is 6 for most creatures, 7 for those in temporary Yang imbalance and 8 for those in permanent Yang imbalance. The vampire can make a Dexterity + Performance or Manipulation + Expression check to catch targets' attention; each success on that roll (difficulty 7) adds a die to the ensuing Willpower roll.

The Yin metal the vampire becomes is extremely toxic to living creatures. In addition to any normal hand-to-hand damage (including Metal Within bonuses), the vampire does one level of aggravated damage for merely touching a living being, a materialized Yang spirit or a permanently Yang-unbalanced Wan Kuei. If the vampire grapples or holds such a target, she inflicts this level of aggravated damage each turn, in addition to any other damage.

The Godbody of Water (Blood Shintai)

The Godbody of Water brings the vampire into harmony with the principle of water: ubiquity, change, quiet. Students of this Discipline learn to draw on Chi to transform themselves in ways that break down the barrier between self and world and make themselves amenable to change.

Chi Attunement: Strength

• Command of Flow in Self

The vampire manipulates all the liquid parts of his form. While he can't actually make solid features like bone flow, he can adjust blood and the other fluids inside his skin. He can flatten out parts of his body by withdrawing fluid so as to squeeze through small places, and extend his reach through fluid expansion in key points.

System: Spend a point of either type of Chi to activate any of the benefits of this technique. Both distending and compacting make it easier for the vampire to absorb damage; make soak rolls at difficulty 5.

The vampire can attempt to flow through any space more than six inches wide; make a Dexterity + Athletics roll, difficulty 6 for a space 10 inches wide, plus 1 for each inch narrower. (The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty for time spent preparing, constraints or openings in other dimensions and other factors as appropriate.)

To disguise himself, the vampire must spend at least 10 minutes per dot of Appearance in his new features. (Raising Appearance beyond his native condition is difficult and adds an hour per dot.) It requires a resisted roll of an observer's Perception + Empathy against the vampire's Stamina + Subterfuge for anyone else to recognize the vampire. If the vampire's new Appearance is higher than his usual form, make the Stamina + Subterfuge roll at difficulty 8. The disguise lasts an entire scene.

•• Command of Flow in Others

The vampire can reach out through force of will to alter the flow of flesh and fluids in others. It's hard to perform fine manipulation of the sort she can easily work with Command of Flow in Self.

System: The vampire must touch her target, spend a point of either type of Chi and roll Perception + Medicine, difficulty 7. The effects depend on the vampire's point of contact and intent.

The vampire can help the target's own body channel Chi effectively so as to boost healing. Each success on the Command of Flow in Others roll halves normal healing times. If the target is in the process of fighting some extended disease or other intruder in the body, add 1 to the target's effective Stamina for each success on the Command roll for the duration of the particular infection, poison or other problem. The vampire need not continue to touch the target throughout the healing process; she simply "jumpstarts" the it.

Conversely, Command of Flow in Others may be used to inflict harm on a target. A touch to the body lets the vampire introduce turbulence into the target's circulation. The victim feels racking nausea, pain and disorientation; the suffering lasts for one turn per success on the Command roll, minus one turn per success the victim's player gets on a Stamina roll, difficulty 7. A touch to a limb paralyzes that limb. A touch to the torso or chest throws the victim's heart into erratic spasms and adds +2 to the difficulty of all physical tasks for the rest of the scene. The victim can spend a point of Willpower to negate the penalty for one turn.

If the mortal botches the Stamina roll for a torso touch, make a second Stamina roll. A second botch indicates a fatal heart attack. A mortal who botches the Stamina roll against a limb touch damages it in the force of initial spasm, suffering one level of bashing damage.

Finally, a touch to the face lets the vampire adjust her target's features. The target must be immobilized or cooperating. It takes 20 minutes per dot of Appearance to make the necessary changes, plus two hours per dot over the target's normal Appearance. Others attempting to recognize the target must get more successes on a Perception + Empathy roll, difficulty 6, than the target's player gets on a Stamina + Subterfuge roll, difficulty 7 (difficulty 9 if the Appearance is artificially high). The target's player can't accumulate more successes on the Subterfuge roll than the vampire using Control of Flow in Others got on the original Control roll.

••• The Self of Water

Every aspect of the vampire's physical form becomes fluid and malleable, though it retains its normal appearance.

System: Spend a point of Yang Chi. For the next three turns, the vampire dodges all attacks with his full dice pool; he suffers no penalty to dodging no matter what else he does. The vampire can choose to concentrate on defense, giving up the option of attacking. In this case, make Dodge rolls at difficulty 5 rather than 6.

The vampire can alter his dimensions (though not his total weight) to flow through constrictions; this requires a Strength + Yang roll, difficulty 7. Doing so takes one turn.

In addition, the vampire can merge with any body of liquid large enough to hold him. He becomes a vampire-sized portion of that liquid, sharing its substance, while retaining his physical dimensions and appearance. It takes a turn to merge with or disengage from the liquid; any combat actions he takes during the process are at +2 difficulty. While in the liquid, he takes no damage from physical attacks until the surrounding liquid is boiled away or otherwise removed. Mental and spiritual attacks function normally at all times.

•••• The Water Lash

The vampire commands the Chi in her own blood or some nearby liquid to turn into a whip-like weapon. Lashes powered by Yang Chi pulse with red fury, while lashes powered by Yin Chi shine with icy black hunger.

System: Spend a point of either Yin or Yang Chi. The vampire can slit her own wrists to extrude a lash of blood or spit to transform blood and saliva into a lash. The vampire can also touch any body of liquid of at least a quart and command it to form a lash. In any event, the lash extends four feet per dot of permanent rating in the type of Chi the vampire spent to create the lash. Roll hand-to-hand combat as usual; the lash can perform any combat maneuver its creator knows. It strikes for Strength +2 dice of aggravated damage; it can also inflict Strength dice of bashing damage and then ensnare the victim. For the target to escape, the victim's player must accumulate three or more successes in a resisted roll of Strength versus the lash creator's permanent rating in the type of Chi used to form the lash (both rolls at difficulty 6).

••••• The Soul Tide

The vampire draws on the elemental force of water to erode elements of her own soul or of others', exposing new features. These changes are usually temporary but can be made permanent with sacrifice.

System: The vampire concentrates for four turns, and then, the player spends two Chi and rolls Manipulation + Meditation, difficulty 8. For each success, the player can do one of the following:

- change her character's Hun Nature;
- change her character's P'o Nature;
- change her character's Direction;
- move one dot within her character's Social Attributes (raising Manipulation one dot and lowering Charisma one dot, for example);
- move one dot within her character's Chi Virtues (raising Yin and lowering Yang or vice versa); this does not affect current temporary Chi levels and can cause or change imbalances, both temporary and permanent.

These changes remain in place until the vampire goes to sleep. A change can be made permanent by spending three points of *permanent* Willpower per change.

The vampire can attempt to induce changes in willing targets. She must be touching the target to do so. The system works as above, except that the difficulty is 10. Permanent changes are impossible in others.

Lifesight reveals changes to Attributes, Hun Nature and Yang Chi; Ghostsight reveals changes to Direction, P'o Nature and Yin Chi. Observers can see that part of the target's soul has been changed but not what the previous condition was.

The Godbody of Wood (Flesh Shinta;)

The Godbody of Wood teaches the vampire to cultivate himself as a sort of garden and to merge his will with the living things of the world around him.

Chi Attunement: Dexterity

• Pruning the Self

The vampire begins to cultivate the garden of self, treating her body as an object to be adjusted to suit her vision rather than something defined and immutable.

System: Detaching a body part requires a simple tug to remove it. The discarded part lies inert but undamaged for up to one hour per point of the vampire's Willpower, then dies; the vampire can reattach it at any point but must heal back three levels of lethal damage as she reattaches the dead limb. She can also choose to let it lie and regenerate it later; this takes 10 nights (20 if she is Yin unbalanced), minus 1 night per point of permanent Yang. (Note that the vampire cannot discard her head with this technique nor try to grow a new one after decapitation. She *can* remove her heart and become immune to staking, but cannot regain Chi from flesh or blood until it is

replaced.) The vampire may also choose to incorporate living or dead plant matter into her body. Any such grafts do no harm but retain their usual properties as far as dealing with the rest of the world. Living material stays alive as long as she pays an extra point of Yang Chi each night upon awakening. A Wan Kuei with obvious grafts is usually quite inhuman in appearance and so cannot move among mortals without raising alarm.

Examples of the Pruned Self

The possibilities for transplantation are almost endless. Popular ones include:

- Wooden stakes, which impair the vampire's ability to move in close quarters but guarantee that she has a weapon handy (+1 difficulty on Dexterity rolls, Strength +2 damage).
- Poison sumac and other contact poisons, in the palms or elsewhere the vampire can readily rub them on others.
- Venus flytraps and other carnivorous plants, which do negligible damage but look very disturbing at feeding time. (The Storyteller should apply social penalties as appropriate.)

•• Transplanting the Self

The vampire can rearrange his body at will.

System: Spend a point of Yang Chi. The vampire can then rearrange his head, torso and limbs into any configuration he wants. All parts work normally or as normally as they can under the new circumstances. The change lasts until the vampire goes to sleep; his body returns to its normal arrangement as he sleeps.

••• The World Garden

The vampire can merge his substance with that of all living plants and move through them freely.

System: It takes a turn of concentration to merge with or emerge from plant life; during this transition, all combat tasks are at +2 difficulty. The vampire enters the plant realm with roughly his normal proportions and appearance but seems to be (for instance) a design in flowers or topiary rather than a figure of flesh and bone. The vampire can move at walking speed through all living plant matter. He can change his proportions with a Dexterity + Yang roll; he snaps back to his normal proportions after one turn per success. (Thus the vampire could follow vines and moss into a building, but not pass through cut logs and the like.) While inhabiting particular plants, the vampire can trigger them to grow at twice or half their normal rate; this effect remains active for a year after his passage.

•••• The Vital Command

The vampire can leech vitality out of a target, passing it into the world at large; the vampire can also make vitality flow in, at the cost of damage to herself or the world.

System: Spend a point of Yang Chi and make a Charisma + Yang Chi roll. If successful, the vampire can inflict one level of lethal damage per success to a single target within her line of sight (this damage can be soaked normally). Targets killed in this way crumble to dust in seconds. The withdrawn vital energy flows into surrounding plant life, which becomes visibly more vibrant and healthy; any diseases currently afflicting the plants disappear if the target takes three or more levels of damage.

If the vampire chooses to make energy flow *into* the target, each success heals 2 bashing or 1 lethal level of damage. It requires one point of Yang Chi per success, either offered up voluntarily by the vampire or extracted from nearby plants. Plants thus affected wither and generally die or develop peculiar diseases. The vampire can use this power on herself.

••••• The Spark of Life

The vampire can inspire life in inanimate objects. These objects must made of wood, sap or other materials harvested from living plants, and they must be made for the express purpose of receiving spiritual essence. These objects are generally either crafted by a Wan Kuei for explicit use with this technique or crafted by mortal artisans or monks as religious objects meant to embody a natural or universal spirit. Some ancestors ban the use of Spark of Life on such objects, believing that they are reserved for Yang (and even Celestial) spirits and to hijack them is to invite retribution. Most Wan Kuei, swollen with pride, scoff at these bans.

System: First, the vampire or someone else must create a work of art to be animated. The creator must achieve three or more successes on a Dexterity + Crafts roll, or flaws make it impossible for the object to receive its spirit.

Each point of Yang Chi the vampire spends gives the object two Health levels and four dots the vampire may allocate among all attributes. The animated object begins with the vampire's own Hun and P'o Natures, Willpower 1 and 1 in each of the Soul Virtues. The vampire can spend a point of Yang Chi to change the Natures or to gain 4 dots to distribute among Hun, P'o, Yin and Yang. The object cannot have any Virtues higher than its creator and begins with Attributes reflecting its nature (a large wooden statue might have high Strength and Stamina, for example, while a small figurine could have, at most, one dot of each) but no specific Abilities. The resulting object isn't just animated but self-aware, possessed of its own soul. It obeys the orders the vampire gives, even ones that endanger itself; over time, it also develops motives of its own, which it seeks to act upon when not ordered otherwise. It can learn Abilities like any other sentient being.

Every time the newly animated soul botches a Soul Virtue roll, its P'o gains a point of strength. Over time, such things inevitably become corrupt, even with regular purging.



The animated object retains most of its original properties. Objects made of some liquid, for instance, can retain a solid form for no more than one minute per point of Willpower per day, while objects carved from hardwoods have extra levels of soak. Vitalized objects wake and sleep at the same time as their creator, no matter how separated they become.

Rites of the Fourth Age

Rites are a critical part of Wan Kuei existence. Many rites draw on the powers of Heaven and the Ten Thousand Things, allowing the Hungry Dead to tap into mighty energies. Other rites are not "magical" as the West would understand it but, instead, mark important moments and events. Nevertheless, the spirit world takes notice of these events, and news spreads through the gossips of the spirit courts, meaning that those who celebrate an event or pronounce a suspect *akuma* can expect that their elders will soon learn the news. The Wan Kuei treat both these sorts of rites as the same field of inquiry — it is as proper and important to commemorate adding a new member to a *wu* as it is to ask heaven to strike down one's enemies.

Access to rites is tightly controlled. Not everyone should know how to write petitions to the compass points. Vampires who wish access to rituals must either find a court official or a private citizen to teach them (see "Favors and Prestation", p. 117), or else become an apprentice ritualist. Storytellers should keep in mind that the player's characters are not the only people out there trying to learn these secrets. Masters of Wan Kuei ritual magic have been besieged for centuries by legions of hopeful apprentices ranging in age from Running Monkeys to mandarins, not to mention the catspaws of jealous rivals and would-be *akuma* seeking to sack their libraries for forbidden lore. They have seen and heard it all, and their apprenticeships are grueling, arduous and designed to weed out all those not genuinely interested in doing the *job*. In short, learning rites, particularly powerful ones, is usually a difficult and expensive proposition.

Also, rites are difficult — as difficult as becoming a doctor or master of the classics. Unless the instruction is to be entirely oral (a highly unlikely proposition), the pupil must know kaja script so he can read the proper texts. In addition, many rites presuppose an extensive knowledge of astrology, cosmology, philosophy and alchemy. Storytellers should feel free to limit characters with low or nonexistent Academics,

Science and Occult skills from learning Rituals past one or two dots.

Access to rites may also depend on Dharma. The various Roads Back have rituals developed by members of the faith for use in furthering the Dharma's goals. Most are of limited interest to anyone not pursuing the Dharma. Others, particularly the more powerful ones, are secrets of the faith. Learning them is problematic, and demonstrating the ability to use them around the wrong eyes is exceedingly ill-advised. Some particularly powerful rituals are said to be guarded by spirits and ministers of Heaven who prevent their misuse, while others are said not to work for vampires not of the proper Dharma or to misfire with fatal consequences. If this is the case and not just rumors circulated to protect these rites, no one has set down a commonly available record of it happening.

The Cost of Learning

Aside from the cost of the prestation and honorarium, rites have some other costs associated with them. It takes about a week of careful study per level to learn the rite well enough to practice it (possibly several weeks if the character is receiving oral training). Storytellers may also choose to require a player to pay one or two experience points per level of the rite to learn it, if they feel that the in-game costs are not enough of a limitation.

General Rites

Skilled ritualists across the Dharmas and courts practice the following rites. They are less well-guarded than Dharmic rites, but still require a great deal of study. All of the rites described on pages 127-131 of **Kindred of the East** are also in use during the Fourth Age.

Blood Preservation (Level One Rite)

The Chi remains in blood or flesh only until the process of decomposition begins. In warm climates, this usually means that the vital forces flee by the end of the night. For Wan Kuei, who are much more reliant on coercive feeding than Cainites, this can be a serious liability. This simple ritual was devised in the early days of the Fourth Age, when young vampires began to need an unclean diet of fresh blood. Since then, an art equivalent to distilling has developed, creating bloods of fine flavor and with intoxicating qualities. This blood distillation is frowned upon by most elders (at least in public — many are said to partake in private), but it has nevertheless developed into quite a sophisticated process. Blood Distilling is available as a Crafts Skill, and there are more powerful and specialized versions of this rite up to and beyond level 5. However, these differ primarily in palatability — blood created with this simple rite seems very flat and slightly "off."

System: The ritualist mixes the blood and the necessary ingredients (primarily an extract of ginseng and aconite) and performs this 30-minute rite over them. At the end, the player makes an Intelligence + Occult roll, difficulty 7. Each success indicates on blood point preserved. Preserved blood is approximately one pint in volume per point and must be stored in a sealed, airtight container or it will spoil within a few days. The "flavor" of the blood, Yin or Yang, is set by the herbs and incantations at the time of preservation and cannot be changed thereafter. There is a second level variant of this rite for storing Yang healing potions the vampire creates for use by mortals, which omits the aconite, cinnabar and other poisonous materials.

Binding Goods (Level Two Rite)

Wan Kuei are protean creatures, prone to changing their forms, sprouting spikes and growing to several times their normal size. Obviously, this can be make the matter of maintaining a dignified appearance difficult, to say nothing of the problems of holding onto valuable equipment during these many changes. Binding Goods is a magical rite by which the vampire "attaches" clothing and harnesses to herself, so that they accompany her through any changes she makes. While clothing and belts and so forth may change size, the items attached to them do not. A jina's treasured belt-knife may not fall off when his clothing tears apart as he grow into his Godbody of the Demon, but neither will it grow to the size of a longsword to match his newly gigantic hands.

System: The vampire must perform a night-long rite over the items to be bound to her person, at the end of which they are harmonized with her spiritual energies. They will change to fit her, no matter what shape she assumes, and will disappear completely if she assumes an animal shape or a shape which otherwise cannot utilize them. Also, if the vampire pierces or shreds them while assuming a new form, the clothes will be whole again when the vampire returns to her normal human shape.

A vampire can only have as many items bound to her as she has points of Hun, and this "capacity" cannot be reclaimed without the destruction of one or more bound items. A popular way to humiliate one's rivals or enemies is to steal their bound goods and secret them somewhere remote or dangerous.

Stoking the Demon's Fury (Level Three Rite)

The P'o is the curse of the Wan Kuei. Though they have learned to draw strength from it, it is unfortunately quite lazy. Those vampires dependent on the Demon Arts are at the mercy of the P'o, as its erratic rhythms dictate when they may use these Disciplines. This rite was developed as a way to speed the Demon's often agonizingly slow return to power. While far from perfect, it is better than waiting day after day for the P'o's power to grow.

System: The vampire meditates for three hours, prodding the demon and focusing the Hun's own righteous anger. At the end, the player makes a Stamina + Meditation roll, difficulty 9. If it is successful, the vampire may

convert any number of points of temporary Willpower into Demon Chi, so long as the amount converted is not greater than his Meditation rating and does not make his Demon Chi exceed his P'o rating. The P'o then receives an immediate roll for shadow soul. If more temporary Willpower is converted than the vampire has Hun, the difficulty of the P'o's shadow soul roll is reduced by one per additional point.

Crowning the Ancestor (Level Seven Rite)

Among the Wan Kuei, "ancestor" describes not just a political position, but a spiritual state. The leader of a court is not simply an appointed official; rather, he is actually elevated by the efforts of the mandarins who put him in office. This rite is composed of a grueling series of tests, where the prospective ancestor demonstrates not only his knowledge and wisdom but also his power and his domination of the P'o. When it is completed (*if* it is completed — by no means all prospective ancestors make the grade, and the latter stages of the test are quite fatal if failed), the mandarins in question culminate the rite with the enthronement of the ancestor, carrying him to his throne in a palanquin borne on their own shoulders. This rite requires the participation of at least a dozen mandarins, meaning that it is only performed in the most powerful courts.

System: The actual tests vary from version to version. Various courts and Dharmas have their own unique tests, emphasizing various different abilities and strengths. When several mandarins meet to select an ancestor, they generally mix and match the various pieces of the rites they know to in order to get one appropriate for the situation the new ancestor will inhabit. Aside from the scholarly component, the tests invariably involve some sort of combat, as well as at least one situation involving a very severe soul state roll of each type (shadow, fire and wave).

After surviving this rite, the ancestor gains several benefits:

- She may store five more points of both Yin and Yang Chi in her body than her Dharma level would normally allow.
- She may spend one more point of Chi per turn than her Dharma level would normally allow.
- Her player's rolls to oppose a negative soul state are decreased in difficulty by 2; however, as a side effect, she cannot willingly enter fire soul.
- She may use Demon Chi to power Demon Arts and burn raw Demon Chi without making a shadow soul roll. Black Wind still requires a P'o roll each round to avoid fire soul, however, but the difficulty is modified, as above, and so, is only 6.

These abilities last so long as the vampire continues to exist — the only Wan Kuei known to have gained these abilities and subsequently lost them are those who have been remade as greater *akuma* or otherwise transfigured. This rite is rarer than it might seem — given its benefits — because getting 12 mandarins to agree to support a single ancestor is a difficult task indeed. Also, the rite is *very* dangerous, not necessary to the Road Back and not entirely a matter of skill and knowledge — the recipient is to some degree subjected to Heaven's scrutiny, and woe unto those who conspire to receive the August Personage's mandate of authority under false pretenses.

Devil-Tiger Rites

Dream of the Suffocating Cat (Level Two Rite)

The Devil-Tigers often utilize supernatural methods to punish sinners in subtle fashions. Moral lessons are better driven home through the influence of seemingly impersonal forces than through demons rending the flesh of sinners, believe the Devils of Heaven. Through the use of Dream of the Suffocating Cat, the victim is struck with night terrors — dreams of suffocation that leave the target sleepless and weary.

System: The ritualist must have some part of the victim — hair, nail clippings, blood and tears are common choices. By making a facsimile of the target and performing a 20-minute rite over it, he sends very minor spirits of wickedness to trouble her dreams. The target must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 4) or suffer the effects of the Nightmares Flaw and having failed his Willpower roll. For every two nights the rite is repeated, the difficulty of the Stamina roll goes up by 1, to a maximum of 8. If the target sleeps on holy ground, is blessed by a priest or otherwise takes shelter in an area free of negative influences (inside an area warded by the Harmonious Shielding of the Sacred Haven rite, for example), she is safe from effects of the rite for that night, but the difficulty of the Stamina roll does not decrease.

Memories of Torments Unexperienced (Level Four Rite)

Through the use of this ritual, the Devil-Tigers indulge in one of their favorite pastimes — torment — without the difficulties involved in actually mutilating the victim. By breaking into a residence and setting this rite upon a sleeping victim, they "torture" the target all night long, yet when the victim awakens, she finds that nothing has happened. This sort of elaborate dream-torture is a favorite among those who punish sinners, though it has seen use for other (generally erotic) purposes from time to time.

System: The Devil-Tiger must stand beside the victim and recite to himself a 15-minute mantra. At its conclusion, the victim is transported to a dreamscape that the Devil-Tiger controls. Nothing that happens to her there is real, and she cannot be killed, no matter how badly she is mutilated. The Devil-Tiger may choose to appear in the dream as himself, as another person or

not at all, remaining the unseen mastermind of the unfolding nightmare.

More than one vampire can participate in this rite, sharing control of the dreamscape. All participating Devil-Tigers must link hands around the body of the victim and must know and perform the rite.

The vampires need not be visible during the rite, and for the purposes of Chi expenditure to maintain Disciplines, the entire period of the dream is a single scene. The correspondence between time in the dream and time outside it is chosen by the Devil-Tiger — the victim can be tortured for days and wake up with but an instant having passed, or she can have a terrible dream of falling and wake up to find she spent the entire night screaming in terror. If the rite is disturbed, even for a moment, the dream ends and the victim almost certainly starts awake. If the rite is brought to a natural close by the Devil-Tigers, they can choose if the victim wakes at that time or not. Repeated use of this rite at its most intense can drive the victim to suicidal abuse of stimulants to avoid sleep or cause a psychotic breakdown.

Memorial to the Merciless Ministers (Level Seven Rite)

This rite allows a Devil-Tiger mandarin to send a memorial to Heaven, where it is received by the ministers who deal with such matters as woe, punishment, pestilence and pain. This document, essentially a formal petition, is signed by the Devil-Tiger who wrote it (and possibly by others, see below). If the ministers of Heaven agree with the recommendations of the memorial, they may cause the request to be fulfilled. If they are disinterested in the matter, ordered to do otherwise by their superiors, if the matter is beyond their purview or if the target has a powerful horoscope or allies in Heaven or the Yomi Realms, they may be forced to simply ignore the memorial. If the request is presumptuous or awkwardly phrased, the ministers (who are touchy at the best of times) may choose to visit Heaven's wrath on those who presented the memorial, as a lesson that the ministries of punishment and woe are not to be invoked lightly. This rite is used only in the most critical of circumstances — when a greater *akuma* is abroad in the land and cannot be put down by the usual means, when a great dragon nest has been destroyed or when a terrible sinner must be subjected to a punishment beyond the capabilities of even the Wan Kuei.

Heaven ceases to acknowledge these memorials of woe with the ending of the Fourth Age.

System: The author of the memorial, who also must be the practitioner of this rite, must get five successes on an extended Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 9) to get the petition right. Each roll consumes about three to five working nights. Once he has composed it, he must make a Dexterity + Linguistics roll (difficulty 10) to write it properly. Such missives are traditionally submitted in kaja, and so, the ritualist must obviously be able to write that language.

This missive, essentially a formal petition, is best accompanied by a large bribe of gem-quality jade. Both are burnt in a fire of incense, charcoal and resin, and the smoke carries the missive up to Heaven. Before sending it, the ritualist must make their chop-mark on the document, and this causes him to permanently lose a point of P'o as he attaches a bit of his wickedness to the document to lend it credence. Other Devil-Tigers may make their chop-marks on the rite to show their support for the measure (also losing a point of permanent P'o in the process), but the marks of vampires below Dharma 6 are unlikely to do much in the way of helping the document gain celestial attention, and those of disciples are actively injurious to the memorial's chances. If the ministers of Heaven wanted to hear what the Running Monkeys have to say, they'd ask.

The actual effects of this rite are entirely up to the Storyteller. If it works, the effects can be very bad indeed — indeed, powerful almost beyond description. Mountains can be uprooted, seas can be boiled, plagues and barbarian hordes can be loosed upon the land. At other times, the effect is more subtle, for the ministers would rather conserve their budget than spend it frivolously and have to go begging to the August Personage for more. Regardless, if it works, the effects are nigh-inescapable, and if it fails badly, the retribution is likewise unerring.

Resplendent Crane Rites

Branding The Criminal (Level Two Rite)

The Resplendent Cranes, like the Devil-Tigers, often take it upon themselves to punish the unrighteous. Through this rite, the Crane marks the forehead of someone she believes to be unrighteous with a single character. The ink is the Crane's own blood mixed with powdered gold and jade. Some Cranes perform this rite on the wicked as they lie sleeping, and others use the Yin Prana and apply it to them unawares. It is important, however, that the victim not know they are marked, or else, they're likely to remove the sigil before it has the desired effect.

System: The rite takes about 10 minutes and is performed over the blood, which is enough for one marking. The blood must then be used by the next sunrise. The *kaja* character used is invisible to mortals but is perfectly visible to *shen*, holy men and mediums. Regardless of whether it is visible or not, it gives the viewer a distinct sense that the victim is whatever is depicted by the character (which must be negative). The character cannot be detected by the victim and remains clear and unsmudged until washed off with clean water — sweat will not do nor will falling rain.

Common characters are those for jackass, rapist, thief, murderer and so on. This usually results in a +1 difficulty to all social rolls but can be significantly more if the person can actually see the rune or detests whatever the character represents. Likewise, it could be of no consequence — someone in a den of brigands who thought

his drinking partner was a rapist probably would neither be surprised nor care.

Inquisition of the Prying Magistrate (Level Three Rite)

Through the use of this rite, a Resplendent Crane can inquire into the truth of a matter. By restraining a subject (the subject can simply sit still voluntarily) and performing this one-hour rite over him, the target is rendered unable to lie. He can choose not to speak, and he can speak on other topics or not actually answer the question, but while he remains seated or restrained, he cannot lie.

System: The ritualist must spend an hour performing the rite, which involves incense, prayers and the symbolic (or real) beating of the subject. The victim may be tortured, subjected to the Obligation Discipline or otherwise persuaded to talk and the rite will still function. However, if he leaves his chair, the effect ends, so restraints are advised when the rite is used on unwilling subjects. If the subject is a Wan Kuei, he may make the usual P'o roll (difficulty 9) to escape mind control, and if tortured, he may enter fire soul.

Purifications of Rice and Garlic (Level Six Rite)

Through the use of this powerful and closely guarded rite, a Resplendent Crane mandarin may, for a time, become truly holy. Though this state is fragile, it is blessed. Creatures of wickedness cannot stand against the vampire, and the Crane's touch causes them grave pain. It is said that those in this state who can meet the Eye of Heaven while retaining their composure ascend directly to Heaven. Of course, there is no real evidence of this. With the turning of the Age, this ritual becomes more and more difficult, until it finally ceases to function in the 1700s.

System: The Crane must have her internal organs removed, save for the heart, diaphragm and lungs. Doing this according to the proper ritual forms requires at least 10 cumulative successes on an Intelligence + Medicine check (difficulty 8). One roll is permitted per hour, and the process must be completed by sunrise. Obviously, the vampire cannot do this herself.

In place of the absent internal organs, the vampire's body is stuffed with white rice fumigated in the most expensive of incenses and garlic cloves upon which have been carved prayers to the buddhas and the ministers of Heaven. This process causes the vampire to take three health levels of unsoakable lethal damage that cannot be healed until the vampire's insides are allowed to return to their normal configuration. Carving the garlic requires 50 successes on a Dexterity + Crafts (Carving) roll (difficulty 8), though assistants can be employed, provided they are properly purified during the work.

The vampire must then stay awake, meditating, all through the daylight hours. This requires three Stamina



+ Meditation rolls: One at difficulty 7, one at difficulty 8 and one at difficulty 9. If all three rolls succeed, the player must make a test just as if the character had reached an auspicious occasion (see **Kindred of the East**, pp. 52-53). If the P'o succeeds, the vampire immediately dies the Little Death from accumulated bodily and spiritual trauma and experiences a concurrent act of blindness. It is traditional to burn the corpse after such failures.

If the vampire succeeds in the Dharma roll, she immediately gains a form of True Faith. The player may roll a number of dice equal to half the vampire's Dharma (round up) to repel wicked creatures as if the vampire had the first level of Western True Faith (as described in **Vampire: The Masquerade,** p. 272). The vampire need not use a holy symbol to repel unrighteous beings, though she must pray, gesture or otherwise indicate her displeasure. The vampire's touch also causes one level of aggravated damage to any unrighteous being, in addition to any normal hand-to-hand damage that might apply. Obviously, the vampire's Faith does not affect herself.

This effect lasts until the player fails a soul state roll. While in this state, the vampire cannot perform internal alchemy (as he has no internal organs) and so can only feed by breath or osmosis. In fact, imbibing anything at all is impossible, for the vampire has no stomach. Also while in this state, the vampire cannot spend or gain Demon Chi.

Shadow Song Rites

Bone-Oil Kiss (Level Three Rite)

Through the use of this rite, the Bone Dancer may cause a ghost to fall in love with him. The effect is quite strong, and for the duration of the rite, it is one of the ghost's prime motive forces. The vampire must perform the several-hour rite over a small pot of so-called "bone oil," which is carefully distilled under the full moon from bones, hallucinogenic toadstools and various other cemetery favorites.

He must then apply it to his lips and kiss the ghost. The kiss need not be given willingly — it can be stolen or forced — but it must be on the lips. The love waxes and wanes with the moon, ending on the new moon after the kiss. Ghosts are quite wise to this power, which is often used by Bone Dancers hungry for companionship or the Yin Chi of the dead. Using it against those with powerful connections to the government of the Yellow Springs is ill-advised.

System: The vampire must make a Intelligence + Occult roll (difficulty 8) to distill the bone oil. After being kissed, the ghost must make a Willpower roll, difficulty 9, or become deeply infatuated with the vampire. The more successes the vampire makes on his Intelligence + Occult roll, the stronger the infatuation. One success means the ghost yearns for the vampire, three successes means she is hopelessly smitten, and five successes means the ghost will do almost anything the vampire says out of hopeless, helpless love.

In **Wraith: The Oblivion** terms, the ghost gains a Passion of Love (the Bone Dancer who kissed her) at a level equal to the number of successes rolled. There is enough oil in one pot of bone oil for one kiss, though some Shadow Songs carry veritable arsenals of the substance with them.

Reading The Leaves Of Wisdom (Level Four Rite)

Bone Dancers often use fortune telling methods to divine the deeper meanings of a conundrum. By means of this short rite, the Bone Dancer can use bibliomancy (divining by means of books) to read the future and to find the true meaning of a matter.

The vampire performs the 15-minute rite over the scroll or book to be used for divination, opens or unrolls it to a random area and, with her eyes closed, puts her finger down on a character. Traditionally, the book should be written in kaja, with the *Ki Chuan* being the text most commonly used. Other books are also used, even those written in mortal tongues, but none of them have gained the widespread acceptance of the *Commentaries of Ki.*

System: The vampire performs the 15-minute rite and opens the book, placing her finger on one or more characters with her eyes closed. These characters comprise the oracle. The player makes a Wits + Enigmas roll to understand its significance. One success indicates the vampire gets a general feeling, three indicates a good reading, and five indicates an excellent reading, with a clear message and unexpected insights into the situation.

If the Storyteller wishes, he may make up the "actual" reading and give that to the player along with hints depending on the number of successes achieved on the Wits + Enigmas roll. Don't be cruel, however. The player's character is probably more skilled at interpreting obscure symbolic messages than the player himself. Note that using this rite to master a koan or teaching riddle is defeating the purpose — the point of such riddles is not in finding the answer but in the *process* of finding the answer. At best, divining the answer will make the riddle empty of worth. At worst (if, for example, the student is scolded by his mentor for treating his enlightenment in such a cavalier fashion), it can constitute an act of blindness.

The Righteous Hunt (Level Six Rite)

The Bone Dancers, like the Resplendent Cranes, safeguard the sanctity of the ancestors. Unlike the Cranes, however, they do not often act directly against those who belittle or ignore the departed. Instead, they allow the spirits of the Yin World to handle such matters of disrespect themselves.

This rite marks the target for the attentions of *kuei*, unrighteous ghosts and other unclean Yin spirits. The exact effects vary, but they can include ghastly wasting

sicknesses, terrible sanity-threatening nightmares or simply a horrible and inexplicable death at the hands of a brutal unseen assailant. Bone Dancers do not inflict this punishment lightly, reserving it only for those who commit what they see as the most serious acts of wrongdoing — defiling a graveyard or ancestral shrine, the burning of libraries and the persecution of legitimate scholars and seekers of knowledge.

System: The ritualist must actually mark the victim or her household with a mixture of bone oil (see Bone-Oil Kiss, above), grave earth and the ashes of a carefully written denunciation of the victim's crimes. This rite takes about 30 minutes and must be performed in the victim's presence or in her household. Luckily, the rite is slow and subtle enough that it can be performed under the shelter of the Shrouded Moon (Yin Prana •).

The actual effects vary depending on the type of spectres and *kuei* that are attracted to the victim, but being the target of several wicked ghosts is never pleasant. Prayer and magic can bar the ghosts from the area, but this only angers them. The mark lingers, even in death, and if the victim dies and passes into the Yellow Springs, her existence will be forever troubled by the depredations of unrighteous Yin spirits. The only way to remove the mark of the Righteous Hunt is to atone for the wrongdoing, which any medium or exorcist will be able to divine the general nature of (if only from the blood-curdling insults hurled by the evil ghosts circling the victim). Otherwise, the subject will be the target of supernatural evil for the balance of her (probably greatly abbreviated) life.

Thousand Whisper Rites

The Ritual of the Invisible Mask (Level Three Rite)

The Thousand Whispers are master shapeshifters. This ritual represents their most basic form of shapeshifting — the ability not to change your shape but to deceive others into believing that you have done so. The vampire performs an elaborate ritual, dressing in a set of garments and a mask which represents a caricature of the identity the vampire wishes to assume. Until the mask is removed, non-*shen* who see the vampire will mistake her for the identity she has assumed. Awakened beings are not so easily fooled — they may make a Perception + Alertness check (difficulty 6) to penetrate the disguise, and *shen* using any form of preternatural senses automatically see through the mask.

System: The rite to assume the identity takes almost an hour and includes a large number of psychological exercises calculated to allow the Wise Centipede to adopt the role more fully. While in her disguise, the vampire does not appear dead (though she may appear ill if Yin-aspected), but she is still cold to the touch and cannot eat, have sex or otherwise perform mortal activities if she is normally unable to do so. Those beings who penetrate the vampire's disguise see her for what she is: a vampire in an elaborate costume.

Each identity assumed must be unique: The vampire cannot share clothing and props between identities. While the vampire has an identity while in costume (meaning if she goes about in her garb night after night, people will recognize her as the same person every night) this rite cannot be used to imitate a specific, actual person who already exists.

Wisdom of the Spirit Ways (Level Five Rite)

In the course of wearing their many lives, the Thousand Whispers must be able to assume any role. While shape can be easily changed, knowledge and memory are much more difficult to obtain. To gain the knowledge needed to don their next mask, elder Thousand Whispers take time between lives to travel in the spirit courts of the Yang Realms. There, the vampires learn essential skills at the knees of the spirits. Not only does this allow them to gain new understanding and skills critical to their next "incarnation," it is also a source of wisdom and self-understanding, of internalizing the lessons of the existence they so recently abandoned. It is from the denizens of the Yang Realms that most elder Thousand Whispers learn the unanswerable and paradoxical riddles they use as meditation tools.

System: This rite is particularly elaborate, taking several days. The vampire undertakes ritual funeral preparations and then "dies," taking the Little Death in a ritualistic fashion which prevents it from constituting an act of blindness. Her body serves as an anchor to attach her to the Middle Kingdom, and if it is destroyed, she is lost forever — thus, the Thousand Whisper tradition of guarding the body while the spirit travels.

Unlike the normal Little Death, this is not a traumatic nightmare but a dreamlike time of learning and meditation. In this state, the vampire absorbs the experiences of their last life and receives spiritual instruction from the inhabitants of the spirit courts. Whatever effects this has are up to the Storyteller to decide — in general, it aids the vampire in letting go of the now-vanished existence and embracing their new life. The more concrete effects are that the vampire can spend accumulated experience points to buy or increase Abilities, Virtues and Attributes at the regular cost without resorting to tutelage. The Wise Centipede may *not* purchase Disciplines in this fashion.

The length of the vampire's journey in the spirit realms is as usual for the Little Death — one night per point of permanent Yin rating.

Reeds in The Cycle Of Seasons (Level Seven Rite)

Just as the reed bed is sometimes burned down to the roots in time of drought, so the Wise Centipede knows that she too must occasionally pass from the scene. By

means of this rite, the Thousand Whisper stages her own demise. While not the Final Death, it is very close. The vampire's body is reduced to dust, and she spends decades or centuries blowing on the winds of the spirit worlds until she finally returns to substance in a place where the Tapestry is thin.

This rite takes several months to prepare, as the Wise Centipede makes herself ready for her death by whatever means she chooses, at the appointed time and in the appointed place. Because it is so essential that the time and place and method of demise be known, this rite is usually a form of ritual suicide. This is most often a simple Facing the Eye of Heaven, but it can also be extremely elaborate and involve quite a large cast of unwitting participants. There are also stories of Dragon Tear or Tzu Wei masters using this rite to cleverly sidestep demises they foresaw but could not avert.

System: The vampire must spend several months preparing for the big event, though she need not work full-time. However, she must put a fair amount of preparation in, and Storytellers should feel free to invent urgent horoscopes or rituals to disrupt the day-to-day activities of a vampire preparing to sidestep a few centuries of existence. It requires extensive prayers at various times and locations and cannot be undertaken while in bondage or under house arrest, at least not without the consent of the vampire's captors. If it is being used to fake the vampire's death, even the slightest mishap in the timing or method of death may result in the vampire's actual destruction.

A character must have a Rituals and Occult score of at least 4 each to perform this rite. If nothing has gone awry during the preparations (which the Storyteller should probably make an elaborate subplot), the character makes an Intelligence + Rituals roll (difficulty 7) at the moment of her physical demise. Success means that the rite has worked. Failure means that she has met the Final Death. The length of time the vampire remain outside the Wheel is entirely up to the Storyteller; there is no way the vampire can predict the length of her false death, which can be as short as a few decades or as long as a few centuries.

When "dead," the Wise Centipede is effectively impossible to contact. Her body rots away to dust or burns to ash. Her spirit cannot be reached or compelled with necromancy, she is unaware of what happens around her, and she gains no experience. To the outside world, it as if she had met the Final Death. To the vampire, it as if she had laid down for a deep, dreamless sleep.

The vampire will swirl together from dust, fallen leaves, thin air and the like on some auspicious night in the far future. On reforming, the vampire is naked and physically perfect, replenished in Chi and Willpower. She has left behind past lives and entered a new one. This is among the most auspicious occasions a Wise Centipede can experience, and the player makes an immediate Dharma roll unopposed by the P'o.

Thrashing Dragon Rites

Sensing the Earth's Sickness (Level Two Rite)

This rite allows the Thrashing Dragon to find the source of a power tainting the natural forces in an area. By entering a meditative state and wandering about, the Thrashing Dragon attunes herself to the natural forces. She may stumble upon the source of the sickness during a moonlit walk, may be given hints of it in prophetic dreams or may find herself driven to attempt to describe it via calligraphy or painting. It depends somewhat on the vampire, somewhat on the circumstances and somewhat on blind chance.

System: The vampire meditates and allows herself to become an open conduit to the natural forces, and the player makes a roll equal to the vampire's Dharma (difficulty 8). If the vampire does her meditation under the influence of No Mind (Internalize •), then decrease the difficulty to 6. One success allows her to tell if there is a problem. Three successes allows her to get a general feel for the situation, and five or more leads her to the problem in a fairly clear fashion.

The taint to be sensed must be both powerful and poorly hidden, because the rite itself is weak. Lesser evils (like those spread by a single bakemono or wicked person) or carefully concealed evils (such as those hatched by the Yama Kings and their greater *akuma* servants) are much harder to ferret out. The only thing the Dragon is likely to learn about such matters is that they are somehow beyond the scope of this rite. The sickness must also be unnatural. Regardless of what Confucians maintain, some disasters simply happen. This rite does nothing to detect the source of droughts and insect swarms and the like that are simply part of the natural cycle.

Speak With Local Beasts (Level Four Rite)

This rite is in some ways similar to Sensing the Earth's Sickness but has much greater general applicability. Through the means of this rite, the Thrashing Dragon makes a formal request for an audience with any important members of the local animal kingdom. The rite must be performed under the new moon, and the meeting takes place at the full moon immediately thereafter, in the place where the rite was performed.

In the city, the rite will call forth the princes and princesses of the rats, dignitaries and ambassadors of the pigeons, the ranking magistrate of cats and the feudal barons of the local dog population. In wilderness areas, one can expect any sort of creature — the count of the local boars, the priests of the fallow-deer monastery or even the bandit-kings of the wolves and the rajahs of the tigers. Also, if there is a Xiong Ren holy place nearby, its keeper will sense the call and know it's origin, so the request for audience is likely to draw some of the local skin-changers, if there are any about.

The circumstances under which a vampire might perform this rite vary. Some elder Thrashing Dragons hold a regular court every season or year to make sure that matters in their demesne are running smoothly. More often, this rite is used during times of need in order to gain information or animal allies.

System: The Thrashing Dragon performs a three hour entreaty under the new moon, and the player makes a Charisma + Animal Ken roll, with a difficulty equal to the degree to which the Thrashing Dragon follows the proper forms. Dignified speech, formal garb and many food offerings appropriate to the local animal population will cause the difficulty to be only 4 or 5, while a stumbling rant by a naked, blood-smeared vampire in her Godbody of the Demon will set he difficulty to 8 or 9 (at least!).

The number of successes the player rolls indicates how well-attended the gathering is. One success means a few of the lower grade of dignitaries arrive, three successes makes the gathering an unqualified success, and five or more brings about a grand fête. The animals so summoned must be fed and entertained properly, though predator and prey will generally put aside their antagonisms for the sake of being polite guests. These ambassadors will speak to the ritualist about local matters that could use the intervention of a powerful spirit being like the Thrashing Dragon, and in return, they'll provide what help they can on matters that might be of interest to the vampire. This is a reciprocal arrangement — the Thrashing Dragon should expect to give as well as get.

If Xiong Ren appear, they are unlikely to be particularly happy that their job as warden of the local area is being usurped, and they may have a negative impact on attendance if they choose to come in their war forms. However, an adept host who has strong social graces may well be able to turn the evening into a success nevertheless. A host with poor social skills will probably not survive to see the evening's end.

The Breathing Mask (Level Seven Rite)

It is the greatest desire of the Thrashing Dragons that they return to life. By means of this rite, elder Thrashing Dragons can (to a limited extent) live again. Through great ritual preparation, the Thrashing Dragon can walk in sunlight and experience drugs, sex and alcohol as a normal living human would.

The downsides are the price and the incredibly addictive character of the process. Some of the materials for the rite can be gathered only in the Yang World and the Yomi Realms, and other components such as rhinoceros horn, which must be bought from Silk Road merchants, who carry them from the other side of the world. The cost of even a few doses is enough to leave the purses of even the richest mandarins flat. Even those who can afford it soon cannot because having tasted the breath of life once, there are few indeed who can say no to a second taste and a third and so on. Just as among those who eat the Chi of the *hsien*, hundreds of years of enlightenment can come crashing down in a few short months of addiction.



The existence of this rite is well known among Thrashing Dragons, at least in rumor. Those elders who know it are unwilling to teach it to those not wise enough to use it as an instruction toward enlightenment and not as a crutch to avoid it. Indeed, many elders refuse to use the rite at all and assiduously conceal their possession of it. The frantic attempts of younger mandarins to obtain this rite, ostensibly for the purposes of enlightenment, are often painful to behold, and this single rite has probably caused more woe to the Dharma than all others combined.

System: Unlike many other rites, this rite can be performed on a Wan Kuei by another vampire or by a Wan Kuei on herself. The subject must be permanently Yang-imbalanced for this rite to work, and the ritualist must have the Science and Occult Knowledges of at least 4 each to perform the complex process of mixing the various ingredients necessary for the potion. This requires an Intelligence + Rituals roll (difficulty 8). The ingredients must be drunk at the next sunrise, and the effects last from sunrise to sunset.

While the rite is in effect, the vampire is alive again. She cannot use Disciplines, cannot spend Chi, does not have access to her innate powers and cannot soak lethal damage. The P'o still whispers in her ear, and she is still subject to shadow soul (although the Hun enjoys a -1 difficulty bonus), but she is immune to fire and wave soul. For the most part, she is a normal mortal. If killed, she suffers the Little Death, regardless of the cause. Vampires who have been exposed to the rite must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) to not attempt to get further access to the Breathing Mask.

Unlife in the Age of Beautiful Sadness

Cosmology is more than simple theory and philosophy for the Hungry Dead; it is a truth they feel every night on the deepest level. Among other matters, in the Fourth Age the stars have a slightly different effect on the Wan Kuei, the sun is less deadly to them, and the Wall between the physical and the spiritual is weaker.

Across the Wall

During the Second Age, the August Personage spread great Celestial Nets between the Middle Kingdom and the realms of spirit. These nets ordered the universe by separating Earth from Heaven, the real from the notional and the living from the dead. These nets restrain most beings totally and inhibit the crossing of others. At one time, the nets were closely patrolled by the Celestial Army to ensure that only spirits and *shen* with the appropriate permission crossed the Wall between the worlds.

With the decay of the Heavenly Order and the fall of the Wan Xian, such surveillance has become extremely lax, and enforcement of these laws has largely devolved onto the inhabitants of each world. Most do not bother with enforcing Heaven's regulations, while others, like Yu Huang, enforce their own laws, drawing up treaties with *shen* and issuing passports on their own authority. Even more than in the modern era, the Wan Kuei spend a great deal of time in the spirit worlds. Many vampires have business relationships with beings there, while others retreat across the Wall with the coming of the sun — to lurk impotently across the celestial nets rather than drowse in the mortal world.

Wax Kuei crossing the Wall in the **Blood & Silk** era do so in all the normal fashions — through the Chi Pranas, at dragon nests and by following in the crab's footsteps with charms enchanted through the ritual Imbuing the Jade. These function as detailed on pp. 145-147 of **Kindred of the East**, except that the Wall Ratings differ in the **Blood & Silk** era, and following in the crab's footsteps (or "stepping sideways") is easier. The proper tables for the **Blood & Silk** era are included below.

Wall Ratings

Grand Dragon Nest	negligible (1) *
Dragon Nest	2
Shrine, Mountains, Desert, Deep Forest	3
Uninhabited Area, Graveyard	4
Countryside	5
Hamlets and Towns	6
Cities	7
Warded Areas	8
Areas Strongly Warded By Heaven	9**

Wall ratings are usually one lower at night and on festival days.

* Note that a negligible Wall rating generally means an automatic success, but the base difficulty is 1 in the event that it rises by one or two points for some reason. The Wall cannot go below 1.

** Areas strongly warded by Heaven include the vicinity of a saint or prophet, very holy areas, the imperial palace when the Son of Heaven has the Celestial Mandate and other places where the will of the August Personage is made manifest. Such areas are often patrolled by soldiers of the Celestial Army.

Following in the Crab's Footsteps

The base time required when following in the crab's footsteps is three minutes (instead of the five needed in the Fifth Age). Players may roll Perception + Occult against a difficulty of the local Wall rating to speed their crossing. The number of successes rolled determines how fast the characters cross. As in the modern era, the characters must have jade travel tokens empowered through the level three rite Imbuing the Jade (see **Kindred of the East**, p. 128).

Ensnared characters are caught in the Celestial Nets until someone frees them. These characters are trapped with one foot in both worlds, frozen in place and unable to defend themselves from the perils of either world. Wan Kuei, Xiong Ren and spirits above Power 25 can free a trapped being, provided they can be convinced to do so. Players must make an Intelligence + Rituals roll (difficulty 9) for their Wan Kuei characters to free a trapped comrade. Each roll represents 30 minutes of effort, which cannot be undertaken without special ritual implements (which most Wan Kuei who walk between the worlds carry).

Crossing the Wall leaves telltale ripples in the Celestial Nets. Players must make a Dexterity + Stealth roll with a difficulty equal to the local Wall rating + 2 in order for their characters to cross without alerting local spirits, *shen* and mortal residents to her presence. The ripples propagate on both sides of the nets, and a failed Stealth roll will alert both those on the destination and departure side of the Wall to the crossing. Each character in a group crossing must roll in turn, making it hard to cross the nets in large numbers without alerting those nearby.

Following in the Crab's Footsteps

Successes	Crossing Time
Botch	Ensnared
0	Unable to cross here for rest of day/night.
1	Two Minutes
2	One Minute
3	Three Turns
4	One Turn
5	Instant Transition

Spirit Travel

Navigating in the spirit realms is difficult and often dangerous. The Yang Realm operates as much by symbol and intention as reality, and the Yellow Springs are a tenuous realm of memory underlain by a great silent ocean and a protean maze of black stone that borders on the Yomi Realms. Players may attempt to have their characters navigate in these realms by making Intelligence + Virtue rolls. Yin is used in the Yellow Springs, Yang in the Yang Realms, P'o in Yomi Wan and Hun is used if the vampires somehow find themselves in the forecourt of the August Personage's palace (generally a most inauspicious occurrence for those who have not yet entered *dâh*).

This is an extended roll, with a difficulty set by how hazardous the area is, and the number of successes required set by how difficult the objective is to find. Well-marked or well-known areas may take only five or 10 successes, while difficult or hidden areas may take 50, 75 or even 100 successes! Note that the difficulty of the roll is set by the hazards of the area through which the vampire currently travels, not the area where he started: Just because you start your journey in a the midst of a battalion of the Immortal Guard of the Emperor of the Yellow Springs does not mean your descent into the land of lost souls will be simple.

Feeding

Wan Kuei find feeding during the Fourth Age to be considerably easier than in the modern era. Vampires can feed on breath beginning at Dharma 4 and can feed osmotically at Dharma 5. Vampires revert to the modern feeding rules when they begin using the modern Dharma chart, meaning that few vampires lose a feeding method they already possessed (see guidelines below). What *is* a major change is that osmotic feeding changes drastically between the 1200s and the 1600s, changing from something near to breathing to something much more similar to bleeding the Tapestry itself.

Osmosis in the Fourth Age functions as described below. Other forms of feeding use the systems on pp. 137-138 of **Kindred of the East**, although breath-draining is available to more vampires.

Osmosis

Osmosis is the process of absorbing energy from the environment around oneself, similar to the way living creatures function but without giving back to the environment in the natural cycle of respiration. Elder Wan Kuei perform this artificial breathing to a limited degree. Most vampires who can use osmosis favor existing in this mode, because they feel it spreads the burden of their existence most evenly across Creation. The worsening of the damage caused by osmosis leads to the image of this feeding form becoming considerably tarnished. Suspicions grow that overuse of this ability is one of the reasons that it begins to damage the Tapestry more and more and that it may speed the turning of the Ages.

Wan Kuei also begin using the modern version of osmosis when they begin using the modern Dharma chart, meaning that over several centuries most elders suddenly become unable to depend on their most reliable feeding mechanism. This is a major blow to the courts, and mandarins losing their ability to draw a limited sort of breath shatters the hopes of those vampires who continue to believe the Age has not yet turned.

System: The vampire makes a Yin or Yang roll, depending on which type of Chi she wishes to harvest.

The difficulty of this roll is 4 if it is made at a dragon nest, 6 if made in an appropriate place (for example, a bustling marketplace for Yang or a remote cemetery for Yin), 8 if made in an area not aligned to a Chi type and 10 if made in an area aligned with the opposite sort of Chi. Each success allows the vampire to absorb one point of Chi from their environment. This can be done no more than once per day in a given area.

The vampire may, if she wishes, loose her P'o to tear the necessary Chi from the Tapestry, but this has a terrible effect on the local feng shui. The vampire can absorb as much Chi as she wishes, but the Chi becomes defiled in a radius of one yard per point of Chi that she absorbs — a most inauspicious event. If the radius of corruption touches a dragon nest, the corruption will spread no further, but the dragon nest will permanently wither by one level per 10 points of Chi that are drawn from it. This not only damages the dragon nest but also causes disturbances along local dragon tracks and at connected nests, as well as encouraging Heaven to thicken the Celestial Nets in the area to protect the spirit world from damage. Such egregious acts brought about the fall of the Wan Xian, and they can still engender retribution from Heaven, to say nothing of other *shen* whose holdings were forever diminished by the vampires' impudence.

Soul Flaying

There are attacks that (in terms of game mechanics) burn away the target's Willpower, a process called soul flaying. The most common of these are Yin flame weapons created with Fire in the Hand (Godbody of Fire ••) and the Thousand Hell Stare (Obligation ••••). When subjected to a soul flaying attack, the target soaks with his Hun (Cainites and mortals use Self-Control or Instinct). Each unsoaked level of damage subtracts one of the target's temporary Willpower points *and also* lowers the target's permanent Willpower by a similar amount for the purposes of Willpower tests and psychic resistance until the temporary Willpower that has been flayed away is regained normally.

After the target's last point of temporary Willpower is burnt away, additional levels of soul flaying damage each cause one temporary derangement *and* a level of unsoakable aggravated damage. Cainites who lose their last point of Willpower almost invariably enter Rötschreck (difficulty 10). If at any time a Wan Kuei loses their last point of Willpower to such an attack, he must make a shadow soul roll, with the Hun roll made at difficulty 8. Failure in this roll means that the vampire has entered an extreme form of shadow soul similar to the *chih-mei* state. He behaves in an animalistic fashion, and all memories of this period are generally lost, though they can be retrieved through the use of the Dragon Tear and other similar powers.

These attacks lose their potency with the tightening of the Celestial Nets in the Fifth Age. The modern rules for such attacks come into play in the early to mid-1700s, depending on location. Modern rules appear on p. 119 of **Kindred of the East.**

Sunlight

Wan Kuei in the Fourth Age have a considerably easier time withstanding the curse of the Excellent Archer. Permanently Yin-imbalanced vampires may withstand the sun for (Stamina - 5) minutes per day and can spend a point of Yang Chi to give themselves an additional minute's tolerance. Balanced vampires may spend as long as (Yang x 5) minutes in sunlight per day and may spend a point of Yang Chi to buy five minutes of additional tolerance. Finally, Permanently Yang-imbalanced vampires may spend (Stamina x 15 minutes) in sunlight per day and may spend a point of Yang Chi to give themselves an additional 15 minutes of tolerance — allowing some particularly hardy mandarins with mastery of Stamina-increasing Godbody Disciplines to spend almost the entire day awake and exposed to sunlight.

Wan Kuei begin using the modern sunlight rules when they become subject to the modern-era Dharma chart (see below). Modern rules for sunlight appear on p. 151 of **Kindred of the East.**

Virtues and Soul States

The internal balance between the Hun and P'o and between Yin and Yang within each of the Ten Thousand Demons is as precarious in the Fourth Age as in the Fifth. The rules for and effects of the various Virtues, soul states and imbalances are generally the same in **Blood & Silk** as they are in **Kindred of the East.** For complete rules see pages 88-91, 139-140 and 149-151 of that book; the relevant mechanics and effects are also summarized in the table on pages 108-110.

The Hun is somewhat stronger in the Age of Beautiful Sadness than it will be in the Age of Sorrow, however. This manifests itself not only in the character creation process (see p. 68) but also in the Hun's influence over the P'o during shadow soul. When the P'o takes control of the Wan Kuei, the Hun may remain conscious and exert a tempering influence. After the P'o wins a shadow soul test, the player rolls Hun against a difficulty of 7 (as opposed to 9 in the Fifth Age) to keep the Hun conscious.

If the Hun is conscious, the player may spend a point of temporary Willpower to deter the P'o from a course of action. In general, one point is sufficient to keep the P'o from acting out a particular urge for a few minutes (as opposed to a single turn in the Fifth Age). However, if the P'o is very intent on its goal or has been thwarted a great deal recently, the Hun may need to spend additional Willpower (possibly as often as once a turn) to restrain the animal soul from immoderate behavior. Note that this Willpower expenditure prevents a *particular* action not poor behavior in general. Willpower spent to prevent the P'o from seducing an innocent will not prevent it from drinking excessive

quantities or alcohol or lashing out at those who annoy it. Players who attempt to completely yoke their P'o while in shadow soul are usually going to run out of Willpower long before the episode concludes.

The Dawning Age of Sorrow

On the scale of the millennia, **Blood & Silk** takes place during the last breath of the Fourth Age. In a mere few centuries, the Great Wheel turns again and the Age of Sorrow begins. Such a universal transformation doesn't occur overnight or equally in all places, however. Different aspects, places and people feel the shift in different ways and at different times.

For the Wan Kuei, the most important changes are internal: Their internal alchemical balance changes, their connection to the Tapestry shifts, and their Demon becomes stronger. In game terms, the Fourth Age's sunlight rules, Virtue uses, variant Disciplines and Dharma chart all give way to the harsher versions outlined in **Kindred of the East**. Just when this internal debasement occurs depends on the circumstances of the individual Wan Kuei.

The most important variable is enlightenment. At first, only disciples become debased, but eventually jina and even mandarins find that their stages of enlightenment are not quite the same as those experienced by the vampires who walked the Road Back before them. Use the chart below to determine when the shift occurs — vampires are affected when they increase in Dharma, with the lowest levels debasing themselves first. Once they change, they must use the modern Dharma chart and the modern rules for sunlight, soul flaying, the Soul Virtues and feeding. Once the change occurs, there is no going back.

Note that the speed and dates of the change vary from area to area, with some vampires hit early, while in other places, disciples are as they were in the Fourth Age up until the 17th century. For centuries, there is uncertainty if the effects might be caused by improper teaching or unrighteous behavior, rather than by a change in the natural order. Storytellers should feel free to alter the dates to reflect special circumstances in their chronicle.

The change to the Fifth Age also affects more universal matters, most prominently the Wall between worlds. Just when the modern Wall ratings and rules for spirit travel (see **Kindred of the East**, pp. 145-147) come into play is up to the Storyteller, but it should roughly coincide with when an area's vampires become debased. The Wall around areas of corruption and chaos tends to thicken more quickly than in serene and untouched places.

Change to the Fifth Age

Date (CE)	Affected Vampires
1250-1349	advancing to Dharma 1-3
1350 -1449	advancing to Dharma 1-4
1450-1549	advancing to Dharma 1-5
1550-1599	advancing to Dharma 1-6
1600-1650	advancing to Dharma 1-7
after 1650	advancing to Dharma 1-8

Fourth Age Systems

This section details systems for resolving various situations that may typically arise in a **Blood & Silk** game. Obviously, this list is not exhaustive — roleplaying games embody unlimited potential almost by definition. Neither does this list attempt to cover generic situations such as following someone or traditional combat — **Vampire: The Masquerade** and other core World of Darkness rulebooks cover those systems in ample detail.

Instead, this chapter is explicitly designed to serve as a setting guide of sorts for Storytellers and players alike — a handbook to the sorts of situations that are likely to arise in the course of the average story. The world of the Fourth Age is radically different from our own. The panoramic scope and alien character of the era can combine to make it very difficult for Storytellers and players to know exactly what it is they're supposed to *do*. This chapter helps answer those sorts of questions as well as functioning as a mechanical reference — feel free to read over it and use it as an idea source, as well as for something to frantically flip through at game time. Storytellers should also refer to the "Classic Bits And Skills" boxed text on p. 59 of **Kindred of the East**.



Virtues and Soul States

The Hun

Uses

• **Demon Arts Control:** After evoking Demon Arts, roll Hun (difficulty equal to P'o) to maintain control; failure means P'o is dominant while Arts are used.

• **Empathy Cap:** Empathy rating cannot be higher than Hun rating.

• **Shadow Soul:** Roll Hun to resist shadow soul (see below).

• **Sharpened Senses:** Roll Hun (difficulty 6) to sharpen senses for a scene. The Storyteller may reduce Perception difficulties (-2) and grant limited danger sense (Storyteller rolls Hun, difficulty 6-10) .

• **Spirit Speech:** Roll Hun (difficulty equal to the Wall) to speak to spirits the vampire can detect.

• **Superintendence of the P'o:** When entering shadow soul, roll Hun (difficulty 7) to keep the Hun conscious. With a conscious P'o, spend one point of Willpower to stop the P'o from pursuing one course of action.

Effects of Imbalance

Imbalance occurs if the Hun rating is three or more points higher than the P'o rating.

• **Limited Willpower:** You cannot spend Willpower for automatic successes.

P'o

Uses

• **Berserk Rage:** Roll P'o (difficulty of Hun +3) to voluntarily enter fire soul for a scene.

• **Demon Arts Cap:** No Demon Art may be higher than the vampire's P'o.

• **Demon Chi (evoking):** Roll P'o (difficulty Hun +3) to be able to use Demon Chi for a scene. Four successes causes fire soul, in addition to accessing Demon Chi.

• **Demon Chi (regaining):** Roll P'o upon waking (difficulty 6) and regain one point per success; regain Demon Chi instead of Yin or Yang Chi when feeding at a defiled site.

• **Demon Chi (spending):** Spend up to Stamina rating in Demon Chi per turn, for the following effects:

Extra Actions: Gain one extra physical action next turn for each point spent.

Extra Damage: Cause one extra automatic level of damage in close combat for each point spent.

Extra Strength: Gain one extra success on a feat of strength for each point spent.

Fangs: Spend one point for fangs (Strength +1 aggravated damage) or two for a maw (Strength + 2 aggravated damage).

• **Mental Resistance:** Roll P'o (difficulty 9) to resist or break mental powers (one attempt per power).

• **Soul States:** Roll P'o to force fire, shadow or wave soul.

Effects of Imbalance

Imbalance occurs if P'o rating is three or more points higher than the Hun rating.

• **Raging P'o:** The P'o makes a shadow soul attempt every night, at a time of its choosing.

Yin

Uses

• **Black Cycle:** Spend one Yin Chi upon waking to animate the body for 10 nights. The vampire appears corpse-like and suffers a +1 social difficulty penalty with mortals.

• **Fire Soul:** Roll Yin to resist fire soul.

• **Ghostsight:** Spend one point of Yin Chi to attune the vampire for a scene. This enables the following effects:

Atemi Strike: Roll Yin + Medicine/Crafts (difficulty 8) after three turns of concentration to detect vulnerable points; each success provides an extra level of damage on the next physical attack. Use Medicine to find living beings' vulnerabilities and Crafts to discover inanimate objects' weak points.

Flaw Sense: Roll Perception + Medicine/Crafts (difficulty 4 to 8) after three turns of concentration to detect disease or structural flaws. Use Medicine to detect disease and Crafts for structural flaws.

Yin Sight: Roll Perception + Occult (difficulty of the Wall +2) after three turns of concentration to see creatures from the Yin World.

Effects of Temporary Imbalance

Temporary Yin imbalance occurs when the vampire stores more Yin Chi than her Yin Virtue or has no Yang Chi left.

• **Volatility:** Upon fumbling a roll with an associated Chi expenditure, each extra point of Chi (over the dominant Virtue) *of either type* burns or corrodes, causing a level of aggravated damage. Soak with Stamina (difficulty 8), and check for wave soul.

Effects of Permanent Imbalance

Permanent Yin imbalance occurs when the rating of the Yin Virtue is three or more points higher then the Yang Virtue.

• **Corpse-Self:** The body becomes very corpse-like: Wound penalties are halved (round down), and the vampire may soak fire damage with Stamina.

• **Decomposition:** Damage from sunlight or botching any Chi roll drops Appearance by one.

• **Derangement:** The Wan Kuei develops a derangement, which may not be overcome until the balance is corrected. Common Yin derangements include depression, intellectualization and obsession (death and the dead).

• **Hungry Black Cycle:** The vampire must always aspect to Yin but must spend one point a night, instead of every 10 nights. The vampire also craves dead flesh and cold blood.

• **Lethargic Hun:** All Hun difficulties rise by 1.

Note also that all Yin-balanced vampires (Yin Virtue two or more greater than Yang Virtue) can be staked by wood.

Yang

Uses

• **Healing Potion:** A Yang-rich mixture of the vampire's blood can heal others — one non-aggravated health level per point of Yang Chi spent preparing the potion.

• **Lifesight:** Spend one point of Yang Chi to attune the vampire for one scene. This allows the following effects:

Emotion Perception: Roll Perception + Empathy (difficulty 9) to detect the general emotional state of another. (Note that use of this ability on other *shen* is considered a serious breach of etiquette.)

Emotion Tracking: Roll Perception + Yang (difficulty 9) to home in on a specific emotion (range of 20 feet x Perception).

Yang Sight: Roll Perception + Occult (difficulty of the Wall +2) after three turns of concentration to detect Yang spirits.

• **Scarlet Cycle:** Spend one point of Yang Chi upon waking to animate for one night; the vampire appears quite human and suffers no special social penalties.

• **Wave Soul:** Roll Yang to resist wave soul.

Effects of Temporary Imbalance

Temporary Yang imbalance occurs when the vampire stores more Yang Chi than her Yang Virtue or has no Yin Chi left.

• **Volatility:** Upon fumbling a roll with an associated Chi expenditure, each extra point of Chi (over the dominant Virtue) *of either type* burns or corrodes, causing a level of aggravated damage. Soak with Stamina (difficulty 8), and check for wave soul.

Effects of Permanent Imbalance

Permanent Yang imbalance occurs when the Yang Virtue rating is three or more points higher than the Yin Virtue rating.

• **Archer's Blessing:** The vampire can resist direct sunlight for Stamina x15 minutes. Indirect sunlight may be withstood for up to three hours.

• **Breeding:** The vampire can impregnate another (or become pregnant) with a dhampyr.

• **Burning Yang:** The vampire suffers one extra die of damage from fire.

• **Derangement:** The Wan Kuei gains a derangement, which cannot be overcome until the balance is corrected. Common Yang derangements include berserk, gluttony and multiple personalities.

• **Hungry Scarlet Cycle:** The vampire must aspect with Yang Chi but appears very human — breathing, warm to the touch, etc. She becomes *ravenous* at five or less Chi and *uncontrollable* at two or less Chi.

• **Lustful P'o:** The P'o needs one less success to cause fire soul, and it may be triggered by sex or food.

• **Plague Ground:** Every month, roll Stamina to avoid becoming the carrier of a communicable mortal disease. Difficulty depends on circumstance.

Note also that all Yang-balanced vampires (Yang Virtue two or more greater than Yin Virtue) can be staked by metal.

Soul States

Fire Soul

Fire soul is a berserk rage in which the vampire lashes out at whatever angers him, feeds on whoever he wishes, ignores wound penalties and is resistant to mental control (+2 difficulty to impose control, -2 difficulty to resist control).

System: An extended resisted roll (up to five rolls) between P'o (difficulty 6) and Yin (difficulty 6). If the P'o can accumulate two successes, the vampire enters fire soul for the scene.

Fire Soul Triggers: Failure, especially before a group; humiliation; hunger (five or fewer Chi); being insulted; extreme passion; a threat to a *wu-mate*; desire for food and sex (when permanently Yang-imbalanced); using the Black Wind Discipline (see below); evoking Demon Chi (see below).

Notes: Vampires may voluntarily enter fire soul; the player rolls P'o unresisted (difficulty Hun +3). When a vampire is permanently Yang-imbalanced, the P'o needs a single success to trigger fire soul. When using Black Wind, the player must make a simple P'o roll each turn (difficulty 8) to avoid entering fire soul. When evoking Demon Chi, if the player gets four or more successes, the vampire enters fire soul.

Wave Soul

Wave Soul is an unthinking fear that causes the vampire to run from the source of his pain or shame, ignoring all obstacles and all wound penalties and resisting mental control as in fire soul.

System: An extended resisted roll (up to five rolls) between P'o (difficulty 6) and Yang (difficulty 6). If the P'o can accumulate two successes, the vampire enters wave soul for the scene.

Wave Soul Triggers: Fire (unless controlled by the vampire); sunlight; the appearance of a powerful demon, such as a Yama King; volatile Chi burning in temporary Yin or Yang imbalance.

Shadow Soul

Shadow soul is a period of control by the P'o. It's dark agendas and desires take over, and the Hun must either watch with little impact on the resulting rampage or drop into complete dormancy.

System: An extended resisted roll (up to five rolls) between P'o (difficulty 6) and Hun (difficulty 6). If the P'o can accumulate two successes, the vampire enters shadow soul for the scene.

Shadow Soul Triggers: Violating one's Dharma; compromising one's personal honor; a botched Willpower roll; emerging from fire or wave soul; great stress, trauma or shame; the conditions set by the P'o Nature; a P'o imbalance (one roll per night); invoking a Demon Art (see notes).

Notes: When invoking a Demon Art, make a simple Hun roll (difficulty equal to P'o); failure means the vampire enters shadow soul for the scene. When entering shadow soul, roll Hun (difficulty 7) to keep the Hun conscious; you may then spend Willpower to curb the P'o's actions. Entering shadow soul usually counts as an act of blindness (Storyteller's discretion).

Mortal Affairs

Though the Wan Kuei are dead, that doesn't mean they no longer associate themselves with the mortal world. Many vampires meddle in the affairs of the living, particularly the lives of their families. Others may masquerade as humans over the long or short term for any number of reasons. In such situations, the following systems will be quite useful. Note also that many of these systems can be used among the courts and corpse families of the Wan Kuei.

Players and Storytellers shouldn't feel that they have to use these mechanics and die rolls rather than roleplaying. Instead, use them as guideposts to what life is like and to quickly determine the outcome of events that are peripheral to the story. Similarly, they make nice backups for when a player is having an off night or the reverse: determining if a character with weak social skills whose *player* is a really good talker can actually carry off a social situation.

Family Matters

• **Arranging a Marriage [variable]:** Good marriages are critical. Marrying well grows strong, respectable families with powerful political connections and plenty of money. Arranging a marriage is too complicated a matter to leave to a single roll, however. Storytellers should make sure to involve as much roleplaying as possible in the process. Marriages are crucial events for families and often the subject of great hopes, high emotions and extensive negotiations. In some cases, families even kidnap and fête good prospects in an attempt to impress them!

Normally, a matchmaker arranges marriages so that rebuffed offers do not cause a loss of face, but families often monitor the process closely, and it is entirely possible that a character might herself *be* a matchmaker. Intelligence + Politics or Finance rolls should be used to find a prospective match of good political and financial worth for the client. Perception + Empathy should be used to judge if the prospective couple's temperaments match — while marriage is not strictly a matter of love, it's a poor matchmaker who marries a couple sure to clash like fire and water. One success on these rolls indicates an acceptable match, three successes indicates a good match, and five is an excellent match, benefiting both parties. Matchmakers who make such a match can expect the families to speak well of them, which is sure to attract business.

An astrologer, medium or other fortuneteller must also weigh in on the viability of a marriage. The difficulty of the Intelligence + Portents roll to determine if a marriage is suitable is only 5 unless one of the potential couple has a very complex horoscope (as is the case when one of them is a dhampyr) — these sorts of readings are the bread and butter of fortunetellers.

Charisma, Manipulation or Intelligence + Subterfuge rolls should be used if the match's worth is to be misportrayed, with a difficulty set by how hard it is to conceal the bride or groom's negative qualities. Matchmakers' players use Perception + Subterfuge to detect these misportrayals, rolling at difficulty 6. Rolling at least one success allows the matchmaker to detect that something is amiss. If the matchmaker rolls more successes than the person misportraying the match, she exposes the fraud. Having such a deceit exposed involves a great loss of face for those perpetrating it and severely damages the man or woman's (probably already doubtful) chances for a good marriage.

• **Judging Your Child's Aptitude [Perception + Empathy]:** Children represent a major investment. A parent who wishes to keep his family healthy in the next generation and thus ensure his posterity must be able to distinguish able offspring from those who are unlikely to succeed. In a successful family, those with great potential are given the extensive schooling in the classics necessary to pass the civil-service tests and become officials. Those with less potential are taken into the family business or trade. Those who have no potential are sent off to be soldiers or officers or (if the family can afford it) kept on an allowance. Poor families have far fewer options and can do little but bemoan their misfortune when Heaven punishes them for some misdeed by saddling them with idiot offspring.

The parent's player must make a Perception + Empathy roll, difficulty 9, to judge the worth of the child accurately. This roll is generally made when the child begins to mature, between 13 and 15 for boys, a little earlier for girls. One success allows the parent to get a general idea of the child's aptitude. Three successes allows her to sense the child's strengths and weaknesses and hopefully protect him from temptations that might ruin his development. Five successes allows the parent to get a real feel for what the child is like, allowing her to know just what attention to give him to lead the youth to excel.

• **Extramarital Affairs [variable]:** Extramarital affairs by both men and women are common, even to the point of social acceptability. However, they are only acceptable so long as all of the parties involved maintain discretion. To convince a suspicious interlocutor that there isn't anything going on, the player rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge, with a difficulty set by the amount of suspicion the examiner harbors. Finding a split-second hiding place or otherwise making things seem proper when caught unexpectedly at an inopportune moment is a Wits + Subterfuge roll with a difficulty set by how awkward the situation is and how long the embarrassed couple has to set things right. It is a Charisma + Etiquette roll to carry an affair off in a style that doesn't seem cheap or ungentlemanly, with a difficulty set by the circumstances of the relationship and the strength of the wronged partner's reputation.

• **Staying the Favored Concubine [Charisma + Empathy or Manipulation + Subterfuge]:** Concubinage is an unfortunate tradition in the Middle Kingdom, whereby poor families with attractive daughters sell them to rich men as combination domestics and pleasure dolls. For some very few women, this is a ticket to luxury. They are pampered, and their children are treated as well as or even better than if they were the man's own legitimate offspring. For the rest, it is a dreary combination of household labor and sex slavery.

As one can imagine, the competition to become a rich man's favored concubine is often quite fierce. Concubines' players roll either Charisma + Empathy (difficulty equal to the target's Willpower) or Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty equal to the target's Intelligence + 3) each month, keeping track of total successes accumulated over the last three months.

The concubine with the most successes is the favorite of any given month. Those concubines with Appearances of less than 4 must subtract the amount their Appearance is below 4 from the number of successes rolled. Tactics such as arranging for a competing concubine's disfigurement or tragic demise from poisoning are favorites not only among concubines competing for favor but among wives trying to protect their and their children's status. Like the marriage system, there is a lot of roleplaying to be done that can influence the outcome. This system shouldn't be relied upon entirely unless everyone involved is a Storyteller character or lots of downtime is being played out quickly.

• **Family Disputes [variable]:** Almost anything can trigger a rift within a family — any real or perceived slight can ignite a longstanding dispute over the disposition of inheritance, control of a business or parental respect and attention. The result can be anything from months or years of hard feelings to bloodshed in the streets, if the families are powerful enough.

Attempting to resolve a dispute involves bringing everyone involved to the table , a Charisma + Empathy or Leadership roll, with the difficulty set by the severity of the dispute and the pigheadedness of the principal perpetrators. Finding an equitable solution requires an Intelligence + Politics roll, and a Manipulation or Charisma + Politics roll is generally necessary to convince the feuding parties to actually set aside their difference and honor the accord. The number of successes on this last roll determines the degree of actual reconciliation that takes place. One success patches matters until the next excuse. Three successes buries the matter, at least for a few years. Five or more successes brings about a genuine and heartfelt reconciliation, complete with hugs, tears and mutual pleas for forgiveness on the part of the principals.

Exacerbating a feud is much easier than patching it up. A successful Perception + Politics roll points out the ideal way to increase the discord, and a Manipulation +

Subterfuge roll is all that's necessary to pour poison in the appropriate ears. Three or more successes actually ingratiates the person provoking the feud with those he is manipulating. A few Intelligence + Subterfuge rolls to fabricate the proper evidence and Dexterity + Stealth rolls to plant it will also work, without leaving open the unpleasant possibility that both sides will begin talking and realize someone has been playing them for fools.

• **Gaining Permission [Manipulation + Empathy]:** Chinese culture places great emphasis on filial piety. Parental permission is needed for marriage, business undertakings and even long trips, in some cases. Gaining such permission can be exceedingly difficult if the parent is unwilling. While parental will can be flouted, such disrespect is certain to cut the errant child off from his family and his inheritance — a near-certain bar from respectable activity. Such rogues only have lives as merchants, prostitutes or brigands to look forward to.

Wheedling for permission to do something one's parents do not approve of is a Manipulation + Empathy roll, with a difficulty set by the degree to which the family finds objectionable the action for which the character wishes permission. Permission to take a long trip might be difficulty 4, while marrying an actress or running off to become a soldier are almost certainly difficulty 9. Attempting to line up family members to lobby in support is a Charisma + Politics roll, with a difficulty again equal to the stupidity of the action. Each success lowers the difficulty of the Manipulation + Empathy roll. The player may make one roll per month and must gain more successes than the family head's permanent Willpower without failing. A botch means the character has pushed his luck too far, and is out of favor for many years to come, or even disowned!

Characters with strong personalities may lobby family elders directly in an attempt to aid someone in her attempt to gain permission for some undertaking. Such characters may make a direct Manipulation + Empathy roll against a difficulty equal to the paterfamilias' Willpower, with successes adding directly to the total of the character applying for permission.

Crime And Administration

• **Passing the Examinations [Intelligence + Academics]:** The civil-service examinations are critical to the culture of the Middle Kingdom. This merit-based system, in theory, allows anyone to rise into an important government post. While this theoretical impartiality is often compromised by nepotism, it still allows the diligent student a chance for advancement.



Testing is divided into roughly three rounds. There are the prefectural tests, the regional tests and the imperial tests, which are administered by the Son of Heaven himself. Each one is more difficult than the last, and all test the scholar on his knowledge of classical writings. To succeed at the prefectural tests, the hopeful student's player must roll Intelligence + Academics (difficulty 6) and gain two or more successes. The subsequent regional examinations are difficulty 8, and the imperial tests are difficulty 9. Those who score well on the imperial tests are *far* more likely to gain promotion to important posts than those who score the minimum number of successes on the prefectural tests.

• **Doing *Guanxi* [Charisma + Etiquette]:** In this case, *guanxi* is not used in the sense of the magical obligations felt by those Wan Kuei who are members of a corpse family, but in the sense of the complex matrix of gift-giving, bribes and favors that motivates society in the Middle Kingdom. In order to get, it is necessary to give. While this often amounts to bribery, it is not exactly the same as in the West because this sort of remuneration is just part of the way things are done.

The Storyteller should assign anything that requires government permission (which is almost everything) a Resources cost. Characters with Resources higher than the cost of the favor can afford it without disturbing their finances. Those with Resources equal to the cost of the favor will decrease their Resources by one in the course of obtaining the favor. Those with Resources below the cost of the favor simply cannot afford all the appropriate gifts, bribes and banquets to arrange it. They must either rely on a patron to arrange the matter or attempt to secure the money in some other fashion — a usurious loan, criminal activity and so forth.

When a character is doing *guanxi*, the player should roll Charisma + Etiquette (difficulty 6). Three or more successes reduce the Resources cost for the favor by one. Five or more successes reduce it by two. Failure means the favor does not happen, but the character can attempt again at a later date or with another official. A botch causes grave offense to the official.

• **Bribery and Corruption [Manipulation + Streetwise]:** Obviously, there are times when the regular run of *guanxi* isn't enough. *Guanxi* is how one gets officials to actually do their jobs or to make special exceptions for legitimate or most legitimate causes. To actually get an official to break the law in a real and serious way — to award a contract preferentially, turn a blind eye to illegal activity or even to provide intelligence about military activities to local brigands — is a much more difficult proposition.

Finding and placing a bribe requires a Manipulation + Streetwise roll, with a difficulty between the official's Willpower and his Willpower + 3, depending on how badly the law is being broken. Someone who will accept a bribe to let a junk full of trade goods come ashore at night may still have a strong sense of probity when it comes to letting a few hundred cutthroats slip the noose. Obviously, the character needs the Resources to place the bribe. Note that, in many cases, whether the official accepts the bribe or not, he will still take the money.

• **Criminal Investigation [variable]:** While there are "police" in China, they are mostly thugs who apprehend people and make a living shaking down peasants for "customary fees." It is up to judges to do their own investigation into matters brought before them. Some judges are corrupt and concerned only with who can pay the biggest bribe when finding right and wrong. Others are heroic crusaders for justice, protecting the innocent and rooting out wrongdoing and corruption.

Performing criminal investigations is a complex task. Intelligence + Investigation is used to root out witnesses. Getting witnesses to open up is Charisma + Empathy or Manipulation + Subterfuge (if one must resort to tricking witnesses). The gathering of physical evidence is Perception + Investigation. Analyzing evidence is Intelligence + Investigation. Heroic judges must often walk among the poor and the petty criminals to uncover real corruption, and Charisma or Intelligence + Streetwise rolls are often useful to find out the details of a crime that only the underworld could know.

Many judges, particularly those of the heroic sort, are acquainted with both the local Shih demon hunters as well as local *shen* who are concerned with meting out justice among the Night People. Note that this doesn't mean a judge has detailed knowledge of who is who, who does what and who knows which Disciplines. He just knows that if terrible supernatural crimes begin to occur, certain beings (human or otherwise) will try to do something about it.

• **Escaping Conscription [Manipulation + Performance/Streetwise]:** Those of low standing are often conscripted, either into the army or as laborers in civil engineering projects with enough fatalities that they might be mistaken for military campaigns. Escaping conscription is easy for the hunchbacked or lame but more difficult for the healthy. Players whose characters wish to escape via a ruse of ill health or femininity must make a Manipulation + Performance roll. Those whose characters simply wish to bribe the officials in charge must make a Manipulation + Streetwise roll, provided the characters have the money. The officials on the spot are cheap and easy to bribe, but they're sure to come back later. More permanent exemption from conscription can be obtained via a Resources 3 *guanxi* roll.

• **Managing a Household or Business [variable]:** Managing business affairs is critical to success as a merchant, and managing a large household is just as critical for success as a gentleman's wife. Haggling occurs via opposed Manipulation + Finance rolls, with the winner receiving a discount proportionate to the number of successes she achieves. One successes is 10 percent or so, three successes gets the merchant's minimum asking price, and five successes allows the buyer to talk the merchant into accepting a loss.

Actually managing a business or a household from week to week is an Intelligence + Finance roll, with a difficulty set by the amount of money coming in to the household and the local economic conditions. Bringing in quality partners or hiring good help is a Perception + Empathy roll, with a difficulty set by the quality of help available. One success is adequate help, three is good, five brings in exceptional talent that is an asset to the business or household. Once partners have been retained or help hired, an eye needs to be kept on them to keep them honest. Auditing the books is a Perception + Investigation roll, and investigating misdoings among business or household employees is Charisma + Leadership.

Monstrous Activities

The Wan Kuei may move in mortal circles at times, but they have their own concerns to deal with. This section provides mechanics and insight into many situations that are unique to the Hungry Dead. As above, these systems are intended as an aid to the Storyteller, not a substitute for roleplaying.

Nightly Matters

• **Passing as a Mortal [Charisma/Intelligence + Performance]:** To pass oneself off as a mortal in the short term is a Charisma + Performance roll. It is automatic for Yang-imbalanced vampires, difficulty 4 for Yang-aspected vampires, difficulty 6 for Yin-aspected vampires, difficulty 8 for permanently Yin-imbalanced Wan Kuei and difficulty 10 for any vampire who has lost points of Appearance to damage from sunlight or botched Chi rolls while Yin-imbalanced. If, and only if, someone is actively trying to prove the vampire's undead status, the deception is opposed by the investigator's Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6). If the investigator scores more successes, he becomes aware of the vampire's unliving status.

Passing as a mortal over the long term requires an Intelligence + Performance roll, with a difficulty set by the degree of eccentricity the vampire exhibits. One success means the neighbors aren't immediately calling for the witch-hunters, three successes means they think something is strange but don't know quite what, and five or more successes allows you to be a sterling member of the community, suffering from a terrible illness.

• **Politely Meeting with *Shen* [variable]:** The *shen* communicate regularly over disputes between the groups. Mostly, these are peace negotiations triggered by conflicts between the various races, but there are also a variety of "mutual understandings" and similarly flimsy alliances. Wan Kuei may find themselves in such a delegation. It is also possible to end up accidentally walking into the middle of a Xiong Ren war party or a *hsien*-controlled dragon nest. Being able to choke out some rapid and sincere apologies and beat a hasty retreat can be the difference between a close call and the Final Death.

There is a moderately well-defined code of manners between the *shen*, including not brandishing weapons openly and showing polite deference to potentially offensive behavior. Behaving properly in a negotiation is Charisma + Etiquette (difficulty 7). Explaining one's way out of a difficult situation is Wits + Etiquette (difficulty 8). Planning a social event involving different kinds of *shen* is Intelligence + Etiquette (difficulty 6 + the number of different kinds of *shen* invited).

• **Finding Shelter While Traveling [Intelligence + Survival]:** The Wan Kuei travel a great deal, far more than the Cainites of the West. Obviously, if the vampire possesses a moderate command of the Godbody of Earth, there's little trouble traveling, assuming that she's willing to spend the Chi to sink into the soil every day. Those not so fortunate must make an Intelligence + Survival roll each day, with a difficulty equal to the amount of cover available in the place through which they are traveling. Cities, ravine-covered mountains and bamboo forests are difficulty 4 to 6, while rocky wastelands and steppes are difficulty 8 or 9. If the vampire has the appropriate implements to secure shelter (for a example a tarp or a shovel and an assistant to shovel the dirt back over her) decrease the difficulty of the roll by 2. A botch can mean anything from an encounter with hostile *shen* while looking for somewhere to sleep to a mistaken belief that one has found shelter until it is too late to do anything but rot in the sunlight.

Note that travel is forbidden for anyone but heimin and those with the appropriate travel documents. The penalty for unauthorized travel varies from forcible repatriation to capital punishment. While this is not strictly enforced in many areas, those without proper permission are nevertheless at the mercy of the local courts. Those traveling with bad papers or with no papers at all face spiritual interrogation by the First Oni of the Court, who may, at her option, devour the souls of guilty parties.

• **Securing a Haven [Intelligence + Survival]:** Finding a good lair is critical to a Wan Kuei's survival. A good haven must be secure, defensible, private and have at least one emergency exit. It should also be near prime feeding grounds and have plenty of different routes by which the vampire can come and go, to allow him to throw off those who would follow him back to his lair. It is an Intelligence + Survival roll to find a good haven, with a difficulty set by the amount of time the vampire is willing to spend searching and the quality of the area vis-à-vis available haven space. One success finds a marginal haven lacking at least one essential characteristic. Three successes finds an adequate haven, and five finds an excellent haven suitable for long-term habitation.

Those vampires dwelling in rural areas cannot generally rely on secrecy. There are, after all, only so many abandoned temples and mist-shrouded caves in which a hungry monster might lurk. Strewing about the appropriate evil signs and mutilated bodies to intimidate the locals is a Manipulation + Intimidation roll, with a difficulty set by the amount of time and effort the Wan Kuei puts into the intimidating displays. One success keeps the superstitious locals away, three successes keeps all the locals away and

will prevent the local militia from coming into the area unless the vampire becomes a nuisance. Five successes means that local officials will collude to cover up reports of even the worst depredations rather than stir the menace that lurks in their midst by sending army troops in.

• **Hiding a Body [Intelligence + Subterfuge]:** Hiding a body is often an important matter. It's not that the murder of some lower-class thief will attract attention, but a body drained of blood and with the characteristic fang-marks of the Wan Kuei will cause a public hysteria, even if there is no official response. The area will soon be a-swarm with Shih demon hunters, Wu Lung wizards, amateur witch-hunters, charm-sellers, alms-seeking bonzes blessing houses and every other sort of holy man, ranting madman and alchemist eager to capture a Wan Kuei weak enough that he must still drink blood.

Vampires who are not terribly fastidious can simply grow a maw or fangs and eat the body. Most of the Wan Kuei find this repulsive, however, and it is sure to start ugly rumors of degeneracy if it gets around to the offender's peers that he is a corpse-eater. An Intelligence + Subterfuge roll should be used if the vampire is actually hiding the body and has no specific disposal method in mind. The difficulty is based on the number and quality of hiding spaces and the number of successes is how well the body is hidden. One success means nobody will find it immediately, three successes means that it is unlikely to be found without a thorough search or extraordinary conditions, and five successes means the body will almost certainly never be found.

Court Politics

• **Courtly Manners [variable]:** Good manners are critical to political success. An enlightened member of the Wan Kuei must not only be talented and enlightened but also gifted with the social graces. Wan Kuei events are often long and grueling, with extraordinary emphasis placed on formalities and protocol. After all, the participants are immortal. There is no need for them to hurry, and those unwilling to spend a few hours learning the fine points of courtly manners are hardly suitable as guardians of the world.

A player should roll Charisma + Etiquette for her vampire to conduct herself in a mannerly fashion at court, with a difficulty equal to the commonness of the situation. Dressing properly and otherwise choosing the best course of social action requires an Intelligence + Etiquette roll, with the difficulty again set by the situation and the amount of flair the courtier wishes to display — one cannot walk daringly close to the edge of propriety without the risk of falling off.

Wan Kuei formal clothing is often astonishingly elaborate, with tens or even hundreds of pounds of silk brocade. Even the limbs of the dead strain under such a heavy load, and Stamina + Etiquette rolls are often required to withstand particularly grueling affairs or formal rituals without wilting. Likewise, the social affairs of *shen* are singularly prone to awesome and unexpected disturbances. From mundane assassinations and scandals to Xiong Ren attacks and appearances by the ambassadors of Yomi, the disgraced Princes of the Earth



entertain the most amazing diversions at their social functions. Wits + Etiquette rolls are used to recover from such unexpected disruptions.

All matters mannerly are judged on roughly the same success scale. One success indicates an acceptable performance. Nobody finds fault in it, but it is still ritual and not second nature. Three successes indicates a performance of the best sort, with all matters of protocol carried out with perfect grace. Five successes indicates a masterful performance, and repeated, such performances can earn a vampire renown and a position as the official or unofficial master of protocol. Botches on matters of courtly etiquette are particularly devastating, and there are many of the Wan Kuei who would claim that etiquette is the most important skill anyone could hope to master.

• **Maintaining Face [Intelligence + Expression]:** Losing face over failure in a shame-based culture is a terrible thing. A significant failure — even an inevitable one — can ruin a promising career. It is an Intelligence + Expression roll to explain a failure in a manner that does not cause any of those involved to lose face. The difficulty is set by the severity of the failure. Success does not just cast the characters in a positive light. Even a single success can whitewash failure; additional successes convey to one's superiors information about the actual state of events while still protecting the reputations of those involved. Note that this is by no means a perfect defense, only a formulaic and usually unchallenged explanation that may have almost nothing to do with the truth. An ancestor out for blood can usually send fact finders out, not only disgracing the character for failure but for lying as well.

• **Prying Eyes [Wits + Investigation]:** Sometimes it is necessary to investigate a matter without revealing your interest. This may be something as trivial as ascertaining someone's likes so that a gift can be obtained for him or proving a paramour's indiscretions. It can be as serious as attempting to expose someone as a flesh-eater or *akuma*. Investigating a matter indirectly is a Wits + Investigation roll, with the difficulty set by how careful the target is about concealing his activities. A cheating paramour might be difficulty 7, while an *akuma* or flesh-eater might be difficulty 9. One success brings nothing but vague rumors, three bring some evidence or information, while five conjures up an abundance of evidence. These rules largely reflect word-of-mouth and documentary investigation. Use roleplaying and the rules for Shadowing (**Vampire: The Masquerade** p. 203) for physical investigation — breaking into a mandarin's house in an attempt to prove her *akuma* isn't something that should be dismissed lightly.

• **Lying Well [Manipulation + Performance]:** It is often necessary to conceal one's true feelings in court, particularly when so many mandarins have access to the Discipline of Obligation. Concealing one's true feelings from obvious scrutiny is a Manipulation + Performance roll, with a difficulty based on how startling or intense the questioning is. This is resisted by a Manipulation + Alertness roll on the part of the inquisitor, with a difficulty equal to the circumstances — it is far easier in interrogate someone strapped to a chair than it is when she is in courtly regalia, on her guard and in her Godbody of the Demon. Concealing a particular matter from scrutiny by those using Soul Bridge (Obligation ••) is a Willpower roll, difficulty 6. A single success masks the thought in question. There is no known way to conceal information from spiritual interrogation by a master of the Dragon Tear, but court officials strictly control the use of this power.

• **Finding Political Allies [variable]:** One of the most critical political matters is finding allies. Despite popular impressions, brutal political games are not generally played by emotionless automatons but by normal beings with a full range of feelings who are simply ruthless about getting what they want. In getting what you want, trustworthy friends and allies are critical. It is a Perception + Politics roll to find good allies and a Charisma + Empathy roll to become friends with them. Difficulty is set by the relative stations of the parties and the degree of similarity. An elder gaining a protégé would have difficulty 4, while a conservative young Crane gaining the trust of an elderly Thrashing Dragon would have a minimum difficulty of 8.

It takes some time between rolls, at least a few days. The total accumulated successes indicate the strength of the friendship. Ten is an acquaintance, 20 is mild friendship, and so on, up to the 80-100 range, which indicates a bond that will last for the duration of the Road Back and perhaps even beyond. Both parties can roll, if both desire friendship, but the accumulated successes are not added together — friendship is often unequal.

• **The Poison Tongue [Manipulation + Politics]:** Just as finding allies is critical, turning opinion against a political rival is also of crucial importance. It is a Manipulation + Politics roll, with a difficulty determined by the degree of competence and political aptitude demonstrated by one's opponent. Everyone can turn opinion against the court bumbler, but throwing darts at the hero of the hour without seeming petty is very difficult. The number of successes determines the degree of effect. One success plants doubts, five successes changes opinions forever. Note that it can take dozens of affected vampires to really affect a change of opinion in the court as a whole. A campaign of whispered slander and insinuation takes months of hard effort to bring to maturation. A botch during this time will probably make the matter into a public feud or even bring about a challenge to a duel.

Sometimes, whispered insinuations aren't enough. Framing someone for a crime she didn't commit is always a popular way to eliminate an enemy. It is particularly effective if she is suspected of committing that sort of crime but hasn't been caught yet — a process known as "Speeding the Wheels." Setting the matter up is an Intelligence + Subterfuge roll, with a difficulty equal to the legitimacy of the victim. The actual sting should be roleplayed out, and it is likely that many other systems will be put into use in the process.

Spirituality

• **Scripture and Commentaries [Intelligence + Academics/Linguistics]:** Rather than relying on mortal doctrines, most Night People follow their own prophets. But regardless of who speaks them, the recorded words of the enlightened are critical to *shen* as well as to mortals. To translate scripture is an Intelligence + Linguistics roll, with a difficulty set by the obscurity of the language the scripture is recorded in. Adjunctal texts written by a bodhisattva in the modern kaja are far easier to translate than lost chapters of the *Ki Chuan* written in an ancient form of shorthand. One success produces a barely adequate translation, full of erroneous readings and missed idioms, three successes produces an adequate but not extraordinary translation, and five successes produces a definitive translation which will stand for centuries.

Composing commentary on scriptures and other classical writings is a critical part of the intellectual life of both mortals and *shen* in the Middle Kingdom. Composing commentary is an Intelligence + Academics roll, with a difficulty depending on how obscure the meaning of the text is. One success states the obvious, three successes illuminates the text for those who do not understand it, and five successes produces genuine insights into the thoughts of the master who authored the original text.

• **Teaching and Debate [variable]:** Educating the ignorant is one of the duties of the enlightened. It is a Charisma + Leadership roll to teach scripture to willing acolytes. The character cannot roll more dice to teach religious matters than the lower of his Dharma + Hun or Intelligence + Academics scores. The difficulty is set by the number of students the master is teaching, their willingness to be enlightened and how much must be unlearned before they can begin learning again. One success brings some self-understanding and prevents anyone from falling asleep, three successes allow the students to gain some genuine insight, and five successes is a masterful lecture, bringing true life to a doctrine.

Also common are scriptural debates between master theologians. Inter-Dharma debates are rare, however. Because all the orthodox Dharmic paths are known to be valid and because early Wan Xian society after the fall of Meru saw a great deal of strife between the emergent Dharmas, there is legacy of general tolerance between the various non-heretical Roads Back. However, debates between opposing sects and schools of thought *within* the Dharmas are common, and bitter rivalries often develop around them. It is an opposed Wits + Academics roll to debate scripture, and neither person can roll more dice than their Intelligence + Dharma score. Generally, no more than three rolls can be made over an issue before the debate becomes repetitive.

One of the vampires taking part in the debate must be five to 10 successes up on her opponent by this time to have gotten the better of him, with the actual number of successes required being a function of the obscurity of the point debated. The more obscure the point, the more successes are required to illuminate it in a favorable light.

• **Reading the Heavens [Perception + Portents]:** The Black Tortoise Court meets only on the nights of the half moon, never in the same location twice and rarely under a roof. The location of the court's next meeting can be discerned on the night of the full moon or the new moon by examining the sky for half an hour. Doing so requires the player to roll Perception + Portents (difficulty 7). If the astrologer is not a Wan Kuei from the Black Tortoise Court, the difficulty is 8. In a feat of astrology that rarely fails to surprise the novice, the meeting place is never more than seven days' hard ride from the location of the last meeting place.

Favors and Prestation

Wan Kuei society is an incredibly complex web of interlocking obligations. Though unstated, favors, honor, face and personal feelings all come together to create the social framework of the Five August Courts and most other groupings of the Hungry Dead. The basics of this system of favors and debts — called prestation — are relatively straightforward. A vampire who does something for another expects to be repaid in kind. Skilled courtiers make it their business to remember who owes whom, and detailed records exist in many courts. If an owing vampire tries to ignore a debt, she looses face (and hence status) at court and may also be subjected to dire punishments. The Great Principle that traditionally guides the courts includes the Way of Obligation, making prestation almost a state religion among the Wan Kuei. To violate it is to invite grave retribution.

The Reality of Prestation

The "rules" of prestation are no different than the "rules" of social etiquette — this system of favors exists in-game as well as out of game, though the Wan Xian could never express it so simply. Because they are largely unspoken and unwritten and because they are enforced by peer pressure and not some governing authority, those who break these rules in just the right ways at just the right time can get away with it and even look good while doing it. Those who break them the wrong way end up either meeting the Eye of Heaven, murdered by an angry creditor or as heimin, hopelessly disgraced and cut off forever from their peers. There can be no system for when it is the right time and the wrong time to break the rules — Storytellers should simply keep in mind the fact that there isn't some giant chalkboard in Heaven whereupon the August Personage tallies up prestation debt.

Basics of Prestation

Prestation among the Wan Kuei is similar to the form practiced among Camarilla vampires in the modern era (see **Guide to the Camarilla**, pp. 147-149). However, there are some differences. The first is that prestation debt can be transferred, not just by the holder of the debt, but by the debtor as well. The debtor is, however, responsible for the proper execution of the favor. Failure on the part of his delegate leaves the debt unpaid. Indeed, if the task requested to fulfill the debt was badly botched or cannot be attempted again, the debt is likely to increase significantly.

Secondly, the value of a debt is determined not just by the favor but by the relative social rankings of the participants. Repaying a favor between two mandarins might be no more than the matter of who provides the vessels when they next dine together. That same favor, asked for by a disciple, might be the matter of a life boon.

This is one of the reasons that *wu* are so important. First, favors between members of a *wu* are judged on a different scale. You can expect a lot more from your blood-sister for a given level of debt than you can from a court official who doesn't know you from the next running monkey. Also, older *wu*-members can easily act as liaisons. For example, say that a young disciple wishes to have a mandarin tutor her in a Discipline. Rather than asking the mandarin directly for a favor, the disciple would request that an older member of her *wu* — who is probably himself a mandarin or jina — ask the mandarin for her. Then, she would owe her *wu*-mate a small favor, and her *wu*-mate would owe the mandarin small favor, rather than the disciple being in debt to the mandarin for the next decade or so. Even if there is no *wu*-mate of equivalent rank, the highest-ranking vampire with social aptitude is still the one to send because he'll get the most results with the smaller prestation cost.

Seeking Favors from Above

Not all requests can be handled by an older member of the vampire's *wu*. Likewise there are some favors that a young vampire would not dare let her elder family members know she was requesting. In these cases, the vampire must approach her elders on her own. At this point, the matter becomes both complex and expensive. Elders are important creatures, whose time is in great demand. Wan Kuei of lower social standing who wish to trouble their betters cannot simply knock on their front door. There are forms that must be followed to keep matters orderly and to assure the elders' time is their own and not that of everyone in the court who needs a favor.

First, a vampire who wishes to have an audience with an elder of significant station must speak with his doorkeeper or majordomo. This is usually one of the elder's students or a junior member of his *wu*, but it can be a dhampyr, bakemono, bound demon or occasionally even a mortal. Whoever it is, the majordomo does preliminary screening of those who want an audience with the elder. Vampires of lower status than the elder must convince the majordomo to put them on the schedule in a timely fashion. A large bribe often speeds the convincing process considerably. Storytellers can use the system for doing *guanxi* in the mortal world (see p. 113) at this stage.

If the vampire does secure an appointment, she must then dress appropriately for the occasion and recite the appropriate ritualized greetings, honorifics, titles and so forth. The costuming is often ridiculously expensive, and the greetings can take weeks to memorize properly. Failure to perform the greetings or to wear the proper outfit is quite likely to destroy any chance of the petition being accepted. When the audience proper begins, the applicant gives the elder a significant honorarium to make up for the distraction she has caused him. This can be cash or a valuable gift of some sort — gifts are preferred, but money will work in a pinch. The applicant then presents the elder with her petition, written in kaja on silk. If the elder chooses to accept the petition, the applicant will then owe him the appropriate prestation debt.

Most elders hear and grant petitions from vampires of low standing only at their leisure, and the ritual involved is incredibly complex to the uninitiated. Generally, the vampire needs an Etiquette + Rituals score equal to the greater of either the difference between her Dharma rating and the elder's Dharma rating. This is the *minimum*, and players of vampires with scores this low should be making frequent Charisma or Manipulation + Etiquette or Rituals rolls to get through the meeting without a bumble. Smooth social sailing generally requires scores at least two levels higher than the minimum.

As a result, younger Wan Kuei who do not have older *wu*-mates still routinely use intermediaries of higher station when they must request favors of prominent court members. However, there are often several such intermediaries, and each of them must be petitioned and given his honorarium. Of course, the vampire who actually wants the favor is expected to pay all expenses, particularly for the formal garb, bribes, honorariums and so forth. Many jina wise in the ways of the courts yet still on the edges of formal Wan Kuei society work as professional intermediaries for Running Monkeys.

There are alternatives, of course. There are always those mandarins, either disgraced or of questionable competence, whose court no one attends. They are always eager to aid someone, anyone, in order to reestablish their face and influence. There are also political predators and *akuma*, both always eager to gain a new pawn through the semblance of friendliness and generosity. Sometimes, taking a gamble with less reputable or more dangerous patrons pays off, and sometimes, it's the only alternative for a poor or desperate vampire.

This sort of thing helps explain why it is so dreadful to be a heimin and why a strong *wu* is so critical to a vampire's prosperity. Just as in the mortal world, a large

and prosperous family is critical to success. A young vampire alone must pay large honorariums and use untrustworthy middlemen. A member of a *wu* has all the *wu's* social contacts working for him and can use the rank of *wu*-mates as leverage. A *wu* which contains a bodhisattva or ancestor is likely to have other vampires offering its members favors, in the hopes that they'll attract the favorable attention of the elder member with their generosity.

Transferring Prestation

Among the Wan Kuei, the debtor need not be informed of the transfer of prestation from one owning party to another. Instead, the party calling in the favor presents the debtor with a written note signed by the party to whom he owes prestation, authorizing the new owner of the debt to call on the indebted vampire's services in the elder's name. If the debt is transferred again, the old owner makes a chop mark below the signature to show that they too authorized the transfer. There is a document on exhibit in Guangdong with no less than 23 marks of transfer on it.

The debtor, on the other hand, can only transfer a favor at the time it is requested. At this time, he can inform the owner of the debt that a proxy will be carrying out the task for him. There are a number of reasons this might happen. Prestation debt is often used in attempts to greatly distract the debtor by forcing them into menial jobs or even to indirectly murder the debtor by sending him to certain destruction. Debtors will often use students and friends as proxies for menial tasks, while allies, friendly elders and older *wu*-mates are all popular to deal with "suicide" missions. What is suicide for a disciple is often child's play for an elderly mandarin.

As long as the debtor phrases his nomination of a proxy properly and remains accountable for his failures, the owning party cannot refuse the transfer without losing significant face. The Storyteller may require a Wits + Etiquette roll to make sure the transferal is well phrased.

Combat

Heroic derring-do and doomed struggles are central facets of most hundred chapter novels and Hong Kong fantasy cinema. It is likely that warfare and combat will have a central place in a **Blood & Silk** game as well. The following section is a guide to conflict in the **Blood & Silk** era. Obviously, there is a finite amount of space available — this section is long on rules and short on atmosphere. Storytellers and players might want to explore the resources listed in the Introduction's bibliography and get a feel for combat of various scales in Chinese history and drama. Reading a couple of books can vastly improve one's understanding of the context for these rules.



Weapons

The warriors of the Middle Kingdom use the full gamut of weapons known in the West, including axes, straight swords, spears, maces, clubs and the like. They also use a number of rather exotic weapons. The more normal ones are detailed briefly in the weapons charts below. The truly exotic ones like the gunpowder flamethrower have their own write-ups later. Storytellers who want a lot of detail in their hand-to-hand combat may wish to consult **World of Darkness: Combat**. To be frank, if there was ever a setting where "The Big Book of Beating Ass" was appropriate, it's this one.

Some of the less familiar weapons in use during the **Blood & Silk** period and listed on the tables below include:

Compound Bow: Favorite of the steppe-riders, this is a recurved bow (it is strung "backward") with horn inserts (minimum Strength or Archery of 3 to string).

Daikyu: Asymmetrical Japanese longbow for use from horseback.

Hammer (two-handed): Includes Japanese two-handed war club.

Hook Sword: Martial-arts weapon with backward-curving tips. Used in pairs, these weapons do Strength +3 damage when wielded by someone with Martial Arts 4 or more.

Naginata: Japanese curve-bladed halberd, a favored weapon of women.

No-Daichi: Japanese "horse killer" two-handed sword.

Pellet Bow: A crossbreed of a sling and a bow, used in hunting birds because it does not damage the meat.

Self Bow: A standard bow with no compound or recurve.

War Fan: Steel fan used for cooling oneself, battlefield signaling, parrying and even attacking.

Wind-Fire Wheel: Steel ring with handle, and sometimes with hooks, used to trap weapons and as a bludgeon. Used in pairs.

Armor

Armor is a universal feature of ancient and medieval warfare. While the Middle Kingdom never develops the super-heavy armors that come to dominate warfare in the West, the average solider or warrior still goes into battle clad in body armor of some sort. The armors that follow are deliberately abstract representations of various genres of protective garments. Storytellers and players who want more precise representations reflecting the specific construction of various armor types throughout the ages should feel free to modify these statistics, but the included types should suffice for general use.

Melee Weapons

Weapon	Damage	Conceal
War Fan+	Str +0	J
Cudgel+	Str +1	T
Dagger (straight or curved)	Str +1	J
Nunchaku+	Str +1	J
Sai	Str +1	J
Tonfa+	Str +1	T
Wind-Fire Wheel+	Str +1	T
Hammer (one-handed)+	Str +2	T
Hook Sword	Str +2	T
Iron Rod+	Str +2	N
Katana	Str +2	T
Scimitar	Str +2	T
Staff+	Str +2	N
Straight Sword	Str +2	T
Straight-Bladed Spear	Str +2	N
Halberd	Str +3	N
Hammer (two-handed)+	Str +3	N
Naginata	Str +3	N
No-Daichi	Str +3	N
Straight Sword (two-handed)	Str +3	T
War Axe (two-handed)	Str +3	N

+Denotes a blunt weapon

Missile Weapons

Weapon	Damage	Range	Conceal
Pellet Bow	2	50 yards	J
Sling	5	50 yards	P
Self Bow	5	100 yards	N
Crossbow*	6	200 yards	N
Repeating Crossbow	2	30 yards	N
Daikyu	7	200 yards	N
Compound Bow	8	300 yards	N
Flame Thrower†	8	4 yards	N
Rockets	12	50 yards	N

**Takes one turn to reload.*
†May be used only once.

Armor Chart

Armor Type	Armor Rating	Penalty
Leather	2	1
Light Chain	3	1
Heavy Chain	4	1
Lacquered Plate	4/3*	1

**Lacquered Plate provides 4 dice of soak against slashing attacks, and 3 dice against all other attacks.*

Leather: The outfit of conscripts everywhere. A thick leather breastplate with a leather cap and shoulder, forearm and leg pieces. Some suits may have some small metal reinforcements over the vital organs, but this equipment mostly provides moral support rather than actual protection. This armor can also be used to represent the sort of piecemeal protection worn by brigands of the less successful sort.

Light Chain: The armor the average soldier of a professional army. It includes a light chain shirt, a helmet with neck guard, greaves and forearm protection of some sort, all of leather and chain.

Heavy Chain: Worn by heavy cavalry, elite foot soldiers and other shock troops. Heavy chain includes a metal breastplate or reinforced chain shirt, chain sleeves, a steel helmet with chain neck guard, layered metal shoulder guards and steel greaves. This armor provides a +4 soak versus all attacks, but subtracts one from the character's dexterity when it is worn. This sort of equipage is very expensive and a sheer hell to wear in hot conditions.

Lacquered Plate: Favored by Nihonjin warriors, this armor uses a few solid segments and many small, lacquered plates held together with silk ribbon to provide both flexibility and protection from slashing weapons. It is a comment on both the Japanese mentality and the armor's protective capabilities that the fearsome helmets made to accompany suits of lacquered plate have a hole in the top, so the wearer's soul can fly to Heaven immediately after his death. To cut down on weight, most of these suits of armor lace across the back — if attacked from the rear or by someone who can beat them in an opposed Wits + Ride roll (if on horseback), the armor provides no protection.

Shields and Parrying Weapons

Devices for parrying attacks can be broken into two categories: shields and weapons which are specially designed for use in parrying. The former covers everything from bucklers to large wall shields. While these sorts of devices are known in the Middle Kingdom, they are not so commonly used there as in the West. Instead, more emphasis is placed on mobility and striking first, and parrying weapons are quite popular. Most of these, such as the sai, jitte, tonfa and wind-fire wheels, are bludgeons of varying sorts that are useful in catching and deflecting weapons.

Parrying devices can be used in two fashions, active and passive. In their active role, parrying devices allow the wielder to parry incoming attacks at a decreased difficulty. Note that none of these items grant the ability to automatically parry attacks — the character must still use defensive maneuvers to do so. Thus, the player must either spend actions parrying (and split her dice pool) or spend the entire turn defending. In the latter case, she makes as many Dexterity + Melee rolls as necessary, subtracting one from die each successive roll until she runs out of dice or the turn ends. Note that it is not generally possible to use parrying items to block missile attacks, but in certain circumstances (cast spears, chi flames and similar slow attacks) it may be possible. This is left to the Storyteller's discretion. (See **Vampire: The Masquerade**, p. 210 for more on defensive maneuvers and parrying.)

Parrying equipment in a passive role simply adds to the difficulty of attacking a character. This doesn't require an action and represents the character simply holding her shield or weapon in such a way as to make hitting her more difficult. Most items have differing

Parrying Item Table

Item	Difficulty	vs. Melee	vs. Missile
Small Shield	4	+2	+1
Large Shield	5	+1	+2
War Fan	5	+1	+1
Wind-Fire Wheels	5	+1	0
Sai	5	+1	0
Tonfa	5	+1	0

Notes:

Difficulty: The difficulty of Dexterity + Melee rolls to attempt to parry incoming attacks.

vs. Melee: The value is added the difficulty of Melee, Brawl or Martial Arts attacks against the character when using passive defense.

vs. Missile: The value is added to the difficulty of ranged attacks against the character. when using passive defense.

scores for missile and melee defense — shields large enough to provide adequate protection from bow or crossbow fire are generally too large to maneuver easily in combat without special harnesses largely unknown in the Middle Kingdom.

These items do not provide both an active and a passive defense at the same time. A defensive weapon can either be used to actively parry attacks or to passively defend against them, but not both. The defender can choose which sort of defense the weapon offers on a per-attack basis, so it still offers some protection when her dice pool is exhausted, but the player must choose before the dice are rolled for the attack.

Mounted Combat

The horse is critical to Chinese warfare. The steppe-dwelling nomads who are a perennial threat to the Middle Kingdom are universally master horsemen. The Chinese also have large contingents of horsemen, as cavalry formations and in the persons of a hard-riding postal service and the Robin Hood-like "knights" or "cavaliers" who patrol remote or lawless areas, often leading bands of freedom-loving rebels in times of tyranny.

The most basic rule for mounted combat is that a character cannot have a combat Ability higher than her Ride Ability. If the combat Ability is higher than her Ride, use her Ride score instead. Using the lance or mounted bow from horseback are special exceptions to this rule and are detailed below.

If the combat is taking place on a chaotic battlefield or on especially difficult ground, the Storyteller should have the player split her dice pool to include a Wits + Ride roll to stay in the saddle and keep control of her mount. The difficulty of this roll is set by the degree to which the horse has been trained for battle and the local environment. Fighting on rough ground would be difficulty 6, while trying to control an untrained horse on a battlefield full of smoke, blood and the shrieks of wounded animals (all panic signals for naturally skittish herbivores) would be difficulty 9, at least!

Trampling

Horses weigh a great deal and are weapons in and of themselves. While untrained animals are reluctant to step on anything, horses can be trained to step on or kick targets. Players roll Manipulation + Ride as the attack roll when their characters use their horses to trample. Damage inflicted by a trample is 6 or 7 dice (depending on the size of the horse) plus successes. Tramples can be dodged with Dexterity + Dodge but cannot be parried unless the character is significantly larger than human size.

There is a reason that tramples are not incredibly common — the risk involved. Failing a trampling roll leaves an enemy in a position that gives him an excellent shot at the horse's belly, and botching such a roll is likely to leave the character thrown or underneath a panicked horse with a broken leg.



Lances

Lances are long spear-like weapons designed to be used from horseback. The wielder braces himself in his stirrups, holds the lance under one arm and strikes his target at any pace between a canter and a full gallop. This causes the lance to strike with the force of the horse and the rider behind it.

Contrary to popular opinion and European tournament practice, lances are generally not used against mounted opponents but against foot troops who have broken formation and are either routing or attempting to rally. Lancers can ride down with casual ease a footman attempting to stand alone. In combat against mounted opponents, the lance is typically either put aside (usually by sticking it into the ground point-first so it can be retrieved later) or used in jabbing strikes.

Lances do eight dice of lethal damage + successes when used from a gallop. Strength does not add to this damage, but characters with the Huge Size Merit do an additional two dice of damage — one die for their own bulk and an additional die to represent the added mass of a horse large enough to carry them. Those struck must make a Strength + Athletics check, difficulty 4 + (the number of successes on the attacker's damage roll), or be knocked down and at +2 difficulty on all rolls for the next round as a result of the stunning impact. Vampires treat lance damage as bashing (it is almost entirely piercing) but may still be knocked down and stunned, and permanently Yang-imbalanced vampires may be staked, though this would require special effort and knowledge, as the lance is generally pulled out of the target immediately.

A character must have a minimum Ride and Melee of 3 each to be able to use a lance effectively from horseback. Otherwise, he is certain to dismount himself on a successful attack — the character takes as many dice of bashing damage as he inflicted dice of lethal damage with his lance. A botch using a lance is generally a terrible thing: The character takes four dice of lethal damage and may fall off his horse (roll Stamina + Ride). Use of a lance is punishing business — characters with the Small or Child Merits, who have Stamina 1 or who are otherwise below-average size cannot use a mounted lance.

Mounted Bows

The use of the bow from horseback is a trademark of the steppe-dwelling nomads who form a constant threat to the Middle Kingdom. Accurate bow fire from a moving horse is *exceedingly* difficult — a single inch in error at the bow will cause the arrow to miss the target by tens of feet. Unless the character has the Archery specialty "Mounted," his shots are at +2 difficult from a moving horse and at +4 difficulty from a horse moving at a trot or faster. Note that the average steppe-horseman has Archery and Ride high enough to have specialties.

Martial Arts

Martial arts are a relatively recent development in the **Blood & Silk** era, and kung-fu has not reached nearly the elaborate heights it will achieve in later centuries. This section on Martial Arts deals with characters who know these simple combat styles. Obviously, Storytellers may want to ignore the historical facts — a lot of Asian cinema certainly has. In that case, just use the Martial Arts rules in **Kindred of the East** and the **Kindred of the East Companion**. As always, Storytellers who want more elaborate combat than the basic Storyteller system provides — with a particular emphasis on martial arts mayhem — should see if **World of Darkness: Combat** is what they're looking for. Keep in mind that, in the Dragon Dance (Yang Prana •••), the Wan Xian have a combat style more effective than almost anything mortals can hope to learn.

In the **Blood & Silk** era, there are no hard or soft styles — all Martial Arts attacks use the same difficulty table (see below). Likewise, a limited number of special maneuvers are available. As in the **Kindred of the East Companion**, characters gain one special maneuver when they purchase their first dot of Martial Arts and an additional special maneuver with each dot of Martial Arts above three. The available special maneuvers are as follows:

Kindred Of The East: Counter Throw, Mantis Strike, Damaging Block, Dragon Tail Sweep, Elbow Strike

Kindred Of The East Companion: Ground Fighting, Killing Blows, Cataleptic Grapple, Push Hands, Reactive Strike

As time goes by, the Storyteller should allow characters interested in mortal martial arts to relearn their martial arts skills in the modern mold, probably at a discount of some sort.

Martial Arts Maneuvers

Maneuver	Difficulty
Strike	6
Kick	7
Grapple	5
Throw	5

Special Weapons

The arsenals of the Middle Kingdom feature some truly terrifying weapons, including what can only be called military explosives. While few Wan Kuei directly wield such terrifying arms, demon hunters and other mortal opponents do.

Repeating Crossbows

The repeating crossbow is an unusual weapon consisting of a small crossbow with a cocking lever on the top rear and a vertical hopper for bolts. The weapon is fired by pumping the cocking lever, which draws back and releases the string. Each pump of the lever fires a single unfletched bolt, with the magazine typically containing between six and 10 such bolts. The repeating crossbow is not particularly accurate or damaging past the range off a spearcast, and the bolts are too light and slow to do significant injury unless one happens to hit an eye. However, a rapid volley of poisoned darts can help a single man win through a press, or allow a squad of men to turn back a larger force.

Treat repeating crossbows as if they were modern semi-automatic weapons, with a Rate of 6 and the ability to fire three-round bursts. The repeating crossbow uses the Archery skill but is not covered by a specialization in crossbows; while the mechanism is similar, the weapon is used in a completely different fashion. Repeating-crossbow bolts have a base damage of 2 and are almost always poisoned. If a bolt inflicts more damage than the target's armor soaks, this poison has its effect. Poisons of the Middle Kingdom are frequently infectious agents (during a siege, they might be dipped in the feces of cholera or dysentery victims, for example) or distilled fish or snake venoms. Mortals hit with an infectious bolt must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 9) once per bolt, with failure indicating they have contracted whatever illness the bolt was prepared with — usually amounting to a slow and miserable death. Permanently Yang-imbalanced vampires must likewise make this roll, though they will probably just be discommoded by the illness.

Envenomed bolts likewise require a Stamina check, with a difficulty of between 6 and 9 depending on the strength of the poison. Failure generally causes either several health levels of damage or death. Wan Kuei struck by envenomed bolts take no additional damage: As undead beings, they are immune to all non-supernatural toxins.

Flamethrowers

The Chinese were the first to use the flamethrower in warfare. This one-use weapon is a long, reinforced bamboo tube filled with gunpowder and other inflammables. When lit, a tongue of searing flame shoots 10 or more feet from the mouth for several seconds. Obviously, this weapon is of tremendous interest to demon hunters stalking feral *chih-mei* and other Wan Kuei, and there are rumors that it was first developed as a secret weapon by alchemists in the employ of the Shih.

Flamethrowers burn for one round, inflicting a base eight dice of fire damage to the target. They are aimed using the wielder's Dexterity + Archery or Athletics score, whichever is higher — no one uses these weapons enough for a special skill in doing so to develop. The wielder can sweep the weapon across several targets if the player splits her die pool or uses extra actions. The sight of a burning flamethrower is occasion for an immediate wave soul roll in Wan Kuei. Actually *using* one forces the vampire to make the wave soul roll with the Hun facing a +2 difficulty penalty. These weapons are almost as dangerous to the user as to the target. If the tube cracks, bursts or burns through, the wielder will be exposed to searing flame and, possibly, a small explosion. If the user botches, apply between six and 12 dice of damage — lethal to mortals, aggravated to most *shen*.

Rockets

The Chinese invention of black powder led to the use of rockets for entertainment, communication and military operations. Firecrackers and small fireworks-type rockets (which can weigh as much as several pounds) are popular with demon hunters. Vampires who are the target of a string of firecrackers or a rocket must make an immediate wave soul check, and a vampire who is actually hit by a display or signal rocket will probably take a die or two of aggravated damage.

Military rockets are significantly larger, designed to be fired at cities or battlefield formations. They have no warhead per se, but these bamboo weapons impact going over 100 miles an hour. Anyone so unfortunate as to be hit by one takes 12 dice of lethal damage, and those nearby are likely to be splashed by burning gunpowder — all within 10 feet must make a Dexterity + Dodge roll, taking (6 - successes) dice of lethal damage. Rocket damage is largely due to heat and is thus aggravated when applied to vampires. More useful than the damage they cause are the secondary effects of the rocket. A barrage of rockets fired into a city under siege is likely to ignite dozens of fires, and horses are often panicked by these weapons. Those on horseback near the impact zone of a rocket barrage must make an Wits + Ride roll (difficulty 8) or lose control of their mounts as they becomes terrified by the sounds and smells of the rocket attack.

The building and firing of rockets is covered by the Crafts (Rocketry) Skill. Rockets are area weapons, designed to be fired at cities or masses of troops, not individuals. Short range attacks are made at difficulty 9, and attacks against individuals at ranges longer than 50 or so yards are easily dodged (no roll necessary if they see the weapon).

Direction and Dynasty

Wan Kuei of the Fourth Age have a more formal interpretation of direction than their successors in the Fifth Age. More than a matter of astrology, direction is related to the fate of the dynasty the Hungry Dead are associated with. For the powerful ancestors of the Court of the Yellow Emperor, this is the Southern Song of China, but the "dynasty" need not be political. Whatever endeavor a Wan Kuei is attached to — the pursuit of an enemy, the guardianship of a region — can serve as their dynasty. Their direction helps determine what role they play in its fate.

Birth in Virtue: South

In the midst of chaos and wickedness, Heaven chooses a worthy individual to receive its mandate. That person, whatever his or her situation, must rise to the challenge of restoring order and virtue to the land. When the possessor of the mandate succeeds in uniting all under Heaven, a new dynasty begins. Wan Kuei recognize this step as the distinctive calling of their kind aligned toward the south.

Growth in Prosperity: East

The founder's successors extend his triumphs. On the imperial scale, the new emperors perform the great duties: reform of taxation, repair and maintenance of public works and rectification of names. (In times of wickedness, the language itself becomes a tool of oppression and deceit, and the rectification of names marks a return to concern for the truth.) This step calls for the efforts of east-facing Wan Kuei concerned with and prepared to enmesh themselves in the coil of mortal society.

Mature Success: West

The strong empire flourishes. Barbarians come to pay tribute, while rebels cower and surrender in the face of worthy guardians of the people. Whereas the preceding steps often called for wars against organized opposition, the people now pursue their 10,000 goals, united in the harmony of good government and moral society. West-facing Wan Kuei seek to preserve the prosperity of this step by renewed fidelity to the spirits and ancestors. The spirits offer up the advice of past cycles on what went wrong, so that perhaps this time people can avoid those mistakes.

Turning Inward: Center

As the people become assured of good living and take it for granted, they turn inward toward more personal pursuits. Done rightly, the search for individual perfection strengthens the community with living examples of virtue in action. Done wrongly, it leads to narcissism, self-indulgence and dynastic weakness. This is the step at which center-bound Wan Kuei at last come into their own. Enlightenment flourishes on the foundation laid by others.

Recovery of Virtue: North

A single righteous leader may summon an unwilling people back to virtue; likewise, a concerned people may demand of their leaders a renewed fidelity. Whether reform comes from above or below, the mandate of Heaven returns to a dynasty when the emperor and people again seek the Way. Northern Wan Kuei play an important part in this step, since they have personal connections to the past as well as a wealth of lore that mortals may attain. The people listen to reminders of old wisdom, recognizing in it the foundation of future as well as past success.

Death in Vice: South

The cycle of recovery may take place any number of times, but inevitably, all institutions fail. Predators threaten the people from inside and outside the empire, and now, defenders are too few to keep the masses safe. In the end, the only cure is the death of the dynasty. A time of chaos ensues until someone new earns Heaven's mandate. South-directed Wan Kuei again play important roles: They purge the wicked, slicing away corruption and deceit to enable those who still seek wisdom at least some chance at personal reward.

Facing the Dynastic Way (Level Three Rite)

Wan Kuei of the Fourth Age believe that they must serve different rolls at different times in the evolution of whatever "dynasty" they associate themselves with. As the dynasty goes through different stages, the stars dictate that one of its unliving patrons must sometimes change himself to match its needs. This rite allows just such a transformation, as the Wan Kuei appears before his *wu* and the officials of his court to request a formal change of direction. The rite is both a social and magical one. As the vampire makes a very formal entreaty to his fellows, his betters and the August Personage, his astrological alignment actually shifts as different constellations shine on his fate.

System: This rite requires a formal gathering of the court, with at least one mandarin in attendance. The candidate presents a text explaining in compellingly precise detail the reasons why a change in his direction is necessary. Doing so requires the player to roll Wits + Etiquette (difficulty 7). The mandarin hearing the petition asks questions of the vampire to test the validity of his claims. To represent this questioning, the Storyteller may roll any number of dice up to the mandarin's Perception + Portents (difficulty 7); each success subtracts from the petitioner's successes. Thus, a sympathetic mandarin may ask only a few questions, while one actively opposed to the matter may try to punch gaping holes into the young vampire's petition.

Assuming there are successes left after the interrogation, the rite succeeds. An antagonistic mandarin cannot refuse a petition he cannot deflate through questioning without losing face. The vampire immediately changes his direction to whichever one he requested. This change lasts for a number of lunar months equal to the player's final net successes; five or more net successes cause a permanent shift.


メリー茉莉

Chapter Five: Tales of Silk

Sincerity is the way of Heaven.
— Mencius, *Works*.

Many aspects of Storytelling for the Wan Kuei don't change from one age to the next. Before running a **Blood & Silk** chronicle, take the time to review Chapter Seven of **Kindred of the East**. The material below covers the problems and opportunities unique to the Fourth Age and how to handle them in your chronicle.

Setting the Scene

You've decided to undertake a **Blood & Silk** chronicle. Your players like the idea of playing in a different part of the World of Darkness, removed in both time and space from the usual setting. Everyone's willing to make the effort to play in another culture. How do you help your players (and yourself) get a feel for the setting?

It helps to do a little study of the time and place you choose to start your chronicle. You don't have to do homework — nobody's going to come around and make you take a test. It's just that the more you know, the more you can improvise. Players always think of something you didn't, and you should feel confident in your ability to cover the plot holes. The better a "feel" you can get for the setting, the better off you'll be. Keep in mind, however, that this is a game about vampires, not a high school history project.

If you want to do some research, the bibliography in the Introduction is a good place to start.

The Foundations

Some parts of Asian society change very little throughout the centuries of the late Fourth Age. Each of the following sections provides you with some generalizations on life at the time, to help you portray these major settings. They also provide a series of vignettes, quick scenes that you can use as ready-made story seeds or simply as a source of further insight.

Cities and Villages

Except in the immediate aftermath of war, plague and other disasters, settlements of all sizes are *crowded*. People swarm the streets on their various errands. Social distinctions manifest themselves at every turn. Peasants defer to soldiers and merchants, often with a show of contempt along with fear or envy. Everyone gets out of the way of rich people and officials. Within each class, finer gradations emerge. Low-ranking bureaucrats yield to their superiors, and this often means old men who lacked the right connections yielding to young men who had better fortune. The ties of children to parents and their extended

families show when responsible adults try to round up their various (and at times wayward) charges.

Strangers seldom find much in the way of welcome. In small villages, most of the people are related, one way or another, and strangers immediately stand out. Children gather to stare at them until the local civil authorities arrive to demand information about the strangers' identities and business. In big cities, people simply ignore the strangers, unless local connivers see a chance for profit (be it honest or not).

Peasants build with whatever materials near at hand: wood, mud and stone, most commonly. Keep in mind that long-settled areas often lose all their native forests and that, thereafter, wood buildings are marks of status. All but the very poorest family homes consist of a square or rectangle of buildings set around an interior courtyard. A blank or nearly blank wall faces the public street; the family's personal affairs go on at a bit of remove. City dwellers build larger, more permanent structures — often relying on stone quarried some distance away from the city. City homes and businesses sometimes rise two or three stories above ground level.

Some cities and towns are very clean, when the people and authorities care about it. Others are just filthy. A dirty village often signifies trouble — some local circumstance makes people feel uncertain that it's worth the effort to clean up. Chinese and other civilized peoples tend to see all barbarian settlements as dirty, whether they actually are or not.

Vignettes of City and Village Life:

• A small shrine on the road carries a sign with the name of the next town. Plaques commemorate honors given to inhabitants of the town and usually (but not always) identify high-ranking officials. The guardian spirit or god of the town receives sacrifices here.

• The town cemetery occupies a hill a few minutes' walk away — an artificial mound, if the surrounding land is flat. Are the graves well-tended? Have families been performing the proper rites to honor their ancestors? Wan Kuei can see the ghosts. Do they seem content, or do they have complaints? If the ghosts do complain, are their objections serious, or is it just the whining of bored souls seeking something to fill the time?

• One of the characters demonstrates a supernatural power. Nobody visibly recoils (unless the power is overtly destructive), but bystanders find reasons to be elsewhere — immediately and in all future encounters with the uncouth stranger. Thereafter, that character and anyone known as his associate faces a +1 or greater difficulty penalty on social interactions, unless somehow he can earn back the favor of the townspeople.

• The characters find the outskirts of town deserted. There's a festival going on in the center of town. It might honor the birthday of a prominent inhabitant of the town, celebrate some great event in the town's history (like victory over invaders) or mark the completion of some part of the annual farming cycle. Whatever the occasion, it lets the characters see townspeople at their best... and lets unscrupulous people examine the rest of the town unseen by anyone except the aged and infirm, who cannot take part in the festivities.

• After a character bungles some social interaction with local officials, let her allies study the situation. Observation (and perhaps Disciplines) leads to the insight that the current magistrate is of lower social standing than his secretary, who used to be the magistrate until getting demoted for some offense. The offending character stumbled unawares into a tangled knot, which might be untied to the advantage of the *wu*. Keep in mind that the network of mortal obligations is as complex as the Wan Kuei prestation system and includes many more participants.

• The characters find a town being dismantled. There's been one too many wars, famines or floods (or perhaps all three) and other calamities as well. Three generations of the town's families drag their precious possessions, weeping and wailing over what they must leave behind. Sometimes a governor imposes abandonment as punishment for a town's misdeeds. Do the characters sympathize with the beleaguered innocents? Do the characters approve of righteous justice in the face of manifest wickedness? Do the characters try to steer clear and risk offending any watching ancestors or get involved and risk offending the mortal bureaucracy through some inadvertent slight?

FARMS

Many people must labor in the fields to support themselves and the city folk. Rice is a staple crop everywhere there's enough water for it, but its cultivation requires an enormous amount of labor. The rice sprouts in specially tended beds. Laborers use mattocks and plows to break up the ground of the rice paddies, then flood them. Women transplant the seedlings to the draining paddies. This is stoop labor and contributes to early back failure. It takes a day's labor (or even more) to plant rows longer than the woman is tall. The whole town turns out during these crucial days to get the paddies seeded.

The rice then grows for three months (more or less depending on how favorable the local climate is). At harvest time, women and men use knives to cut the rice stalks. Bundles of stalks go to the threshers, who grind the stalks to let the heavy seeds fall and the lighter chaff blow away. Harvesting requires the whole village's effort, just like planting; a few days' error can lead to the loss of much of a crop. Once threshed, the rice dries for a few days. Millers then pound the grains to split open the brown hulls and extract the white rice within. More pounding produces rice flour.

Most parts of the Middle Kingdom produce a single rice crop. Very rainy and warm areas get two crops per year. (Some exceptionally fertile areas get three, at a ferocious cost in labor.) In between crops, villagers must

maintain the irrigation systems that keep the paddies moist and must store and spread fertilizer regularly. Paddies must be level, and claiming new paddies out of hilly land requires constructing terraces. There's never much time off for rice growers.

Disrupting this cycle at any point means losing some or all of the harvest. Only the most thoroughly callous brigands do that. Most banditry takes place in the weeks after harvest, when the bandits can claim their share of the new rice grains. In countries so full of people, it's easier to find more laborers than it is to get more land under cultivation, and only great magic can repair a crop once damaged along the way.

Other crops also grow, everything from wheat to silk. Rice is the universal crop, however, the one that for many philosophers marks the presence of civilized humanity.

Vignettes of Farm Life:

• While on some other mission, the *wu* finds devastated rice paddies: dikes broken, fields polluted, no one working. It's either planting or harvesting time, one of those critical moments when the work must get done. Without help, the villagers will die. Do the characters help? Is it a just punishment or an evil warranting Heaven's wrath? Where is duty when suffering calls? Do the characters even care about mortal pain and starvation?

• The *wu* passes a series of healthy fields on its way to the next town. Many opportunities for small encounters arise along the way. Farmers often work before dawn and after sunset. Children tend the gates of irrigation systems. It's a standard of romantic stories for a passing stranger to fall in love with a beautiful maiden working in the fields; creatures as driven as the Wan Kuei may well fulfill the cliché — at least until their monstrous nature comes to the fore.

Wilderness

In some parts of the Fourth Age Middle Kingdom, wilderness presses close, such as in the mountains of Japan and Korea. In others, it's far from anywhere the characters might go. Almost all of eastern China, for instance, has been settled for hundreds or thousands of years, and the landscape is altogether tame. Wherever the land is wild, it holds a combined fascination and terror for civilized mortals.

Chinese-influenced notions of "wilderness" usually feature mountains. The steep-sloped, round-topped mountains of Chinese painting aren't just stylized — they really exist high up the great river valleys. Beyond them, the Himalayas, Tien Shan and other mountain ranges separate the Middle Kingdom from the barbarian world beyond. The peaks hold the ruins of ancient cities, human and otherwise, and a wide variety of monsters, in addition to the purely natural terrors of desolation, exposure and the like.



The seas hold fewer monsters, but the things that rise from the deep warrant all the dread they inspire. In addition, the seas mark a boundary as strongly as the mountains do. Exploration seldom occurs to leaders influenced by the Chinese classics and their counterparts in other kingdoms. None of the great philosophies place value on the search for novelty; whatever's worthwhile is at hand or should be. So, the horizon forms a barrier rather than a challenge to surmount.

Vignettes for the Wilderness:

• Merchants or pilgrims known to the *wu* find a small pile of bones and tattered belongings in a narrow mountain pass. Do the characters investigate? Were the predators mortal bandits or something more formidable? Do restless spirits in the area demand attention?

• A storm blows, and the harsh weather forces the characters to seek shelter. An old hermit dwells in this area, somewhere; the characters eventually find his cave or cliff-perched temple. He refuses to let them in unless they can convince him that their task is a worthy one. Can he detect lies? What does he consider worthy? Many old hermits are just what they seem — solitary men and women of advanced years — but some are substantially more. The world of **Blood & Silk** holds many sorts of *shen* who may not advertise their presence. Nor should any Wan Kuei underestimate the power of a mortal driven by True Faith.

• The characters cross an ancient battleground in some distant desert, where an oasis once brought war bands together for control of a trade route. While studying the remains of the fallen, they suddenly confront one or more *chih-mei*, who recognize in the Wan Kuei something of kinship. What is the characters' obligation to these unfortunates, returned to the world in such a barren spot?

Themes

Some of the themes presented in **Kindred of the East** take on different features in the Fourth Age environment of **Blood & Silk**. Here, we survey them and present some themes distinctive to this era.

Balance Versus Imbalance

The Wan Kuei of the Fourth Age have a somewhat easier time maintaining internal harmony than their successors of the Fifth Age. They face, if anything, greater temptations to stasis and mental ossification, because the societies they live in haven't yet collapsed under the weight of outside pressures. The emperor maintains order much of the time, and the institutions that preserve tradition function as well as ever. The great court purges and the formation of the Quincunx lie in the future of **Blood & Silk**, appearing only as disturbing dreams for the prophetic.

The prevailing mortal acceptance of the supernatural allows Wan Kuei more latitude for self-indulgence. Wan Kuei in an isolated region can set themselves up as veritable gods and feed dark passions for years on end before justice comes, if it ever does. In the face of such license, the great courts intensify their demands for conformity. The extremes feed each other. In the end, these tensions help set the scene for later tragedies.

Tradition Versus New Ways

Any chronicle featuring innovative ideas in the Fourth Age likely includes crossovers with Western mortals and *shen*; there's little in the way of deliberate social innovation in China and the surrounding lands, only improvisation in the face of hardships. Asian tradition says that anything of value was originally discovered by the ancient sages, to whom all others compare unfavorably. A Westerner with a valuable technique or idea can scarcely have invented it himself. Either it's the descendant of an original Asian version, or it's a novelty of less value than it seems. The notion that outsiders really bring tools that Asians must take seriously won't settle in for centuries yet.

The major clashes in the Fourth Age pit existing philosophies against each other. Should the emperor sponsor a scholarly effort to produce a new grand synthesis of Confucian ideas so that he may govern more virtuously, or should he embrace the Legalistic view of arbitrary and constructed law? Should a new settlement on the frontier carry its inhabitants' old shrines or adopt the gods of the new land? Should military governors impose the conquerors' ways on their subject people, or should the subjects be left to their ignorance, unfit for anything better? These are the issues that divide the mortals and *shen* who debate how to rule.

Group Versus Individual

Fourth Age Wan Kuei can exercise temporal power over mortals, if they so choose. All the major philosophies and folk religions make allowances for rulers in "unusual" circumstances. Mortal assistants help cover their superiors' infirmities, motivated by anything from selfish power-lust to the belief that the Wan Kuei really do rule better than mortals. So, the question of whether to take part in society, as oneself or in disguise, or to opt out for solitary pursuits is one with meaningful consequences.

The courts do not directly engage in mortal leadership, but the ancestors advise Wan Kuei who choose to take up power. The risks are formidable; it's very difficult to make Dharmic progress in the midst of the clamor of mortal concerns. On the other hand, some Dharmic steps can't be taken in isolation, either. Hermits as well as kings face stasis if they bind themselves too tightly to one social role.

Characters who choose to participate in mortal institutions face few of the threats later eras present. The Shih and other potential hunters strike only when they

see horrendous abuse of supernatural advantages. Folk tales prepare people, with accounts of kings and priests who come from the mysterious realms beyond the world. Unfortunately, most such inhuman rulers eventually come to a bad end, as pride and carelessness set them up for a final fall. Sufficiently self-critical Wan Kuei withdraw from power when they detect the early signs of self-deception, but more or less by definition, it's hard to notice one's own blindness. Nor do criticisms from their fellow vampires necessarily help, as there's always room to attribute a warning to jealousy or ambition rather than legitimate concern. Dharmic enlightenment is ultimately focused on the self and largely incompatible with day-to-day rule.

It's actually easier to hold power in mortal society than to try to blend in as just another person. In time, all Wan Kuei reveal themselves, deliberately or accidentally. Bystanders are more likely to regard a vampire hidden among them as out to do them harm than if the vampire openly acknowledges her special status and seeks their obedience. A righteous vampire, after all, may make a formidable magistrate, executing her own sentences in addition to using her powers to ferret out the truth. A dedicated vampire priest has the unique advantage of being able to go speak with the spirits in their native lands. These things are strange but not necessarily fearsome in the way that a deliberately concealing "average" life is.

Redemption Versus Damnation

The Wan Kuei stand poised on the brink of redemption or damnation and scarcely realize the full dimensions of their situation. After millennia of labor, they possess reliable guides to conquering their inner weaknesses and earning Heaven's favor. The societies around them receive them with few questions. As their predecessors did long ago, they prepare to toss it all away in indulgence. This is a time when the Wheel of the Ages could roll one way or another, and the Wan Kuei collectively help steer the world toward sorrow.

Is the Cycle of the Ages foredoomed? Can it be changed? Sages argue the matter, and in the face of the August Personage's silence, there's no way to know for sure. Fate is surely a convenient justification for one's own failures. Yet fate demonstrably does exist, pushing souls of all sorts in accordance with directives the participants may never know.

Karmic debt brings Wan Kuei back into the world. Karmic debt drives them to acts of blindness and to enlightenment. It should be clear and obvious what to do and what to refrain from doing, but few Wan Kuei ever get it right. The sun has rotted away the corpses of many vampires who came to take their own will as the sole guide to proper conduct. They chose their damnation or at least refused their salvation.

Many Wan Kuei, having faced the truth of Hell once, prefer not to face it again. They accept the fact of their existence because they must and simply choose not to dwell on what it implies. Vigorous denial encourages Wan Kuei to become new devil lords, while more passive denial leaves Wan Kuei open to the manipulations of their more driven kin. On the other hand, overzealous acceptance of the notion of karmic debt makes it easy for Wan Kuei to decide that anything and everything goes in pursuit of their respective destinies. The Yama Kings feast richly on the suffering that all these various sorts of fools create.

Is there a hope in Heaven, Earth or Hell for the Wan Kuei? Yes. Enlightenment is real. Mastery over one's own limitations and progress toward the truth can happen. But the road is so long and so hard, and so many stumble on it. Out of the gap between possibility and likely reality, tragedy springs.

Lesser and Greater

All the societies of the Fourth Age accept a social hierarchy in which leadership is a matter of moral truth as well as political expedience. Princes prevail because Heaven wills that lesser souls submit to greater. Only lunatics and visionaries suggest otherwise, and society rejects them both. Wan Kuei participate in their own hierarchy as well as the social pyramids that order mortal life.

In theory, the Wan Kuei courts all elevate the most perceptive, most spiritually advanced vampires to positions of leadership. In practice, corruption takes its toll. Ambitious schemers win the places that rightfully belong to less brutal or driven vampires. Once established, a single morally dim leader can advance many cronies. At the end of the Fourth Age, this happens repeatedly, with one whole court falling into darkness. Along the way, petty injustices accumulate in sufficient number to help smash all the ancient courts, in varying degree.

Playing the game of Wan Kuei politics takes care. Young vampires who think that a good line of patter and a few impressive shows of Chi will win them high status face harsh correction. Clever schemers need to start by identifying elders willing to put morally flexible students to use and then gradually carve out a niche for themselves. Remember that some vampires see very clearly indeed and that a purge may begin at any moment. Would-be schemers must stand ready to account for their actions. Keep in mind that one of the best explanations is the truth; doing some genuine good deeds and helping advance the grand march of the Wan Kuei toward perfect harmony and mastery covers a multitude of sins.

The Turning Age

The exact turning of the Age is deliberately vague — it is only in retrospect that the key events in the change will become clear. As Storyteller, this gives you the leeway to determine dates that best suit your

chronicle. The Age may change in 1197 itself or not for centuries. It may be a sudden shift or a progressive affair with certain courts (or individuals) "debasing" themselves long before others. Once you have a date in mind, of course, wrap the truth in as many layers of in-character speculation and dissension as you can muster. The players should never be certain about such things — at least not until far into the chronicle.

A chronicle focused on the change of the Age should evoke a certain fatalism. Characters face the tangible fact that the world drifts ever further from its creator's dream of harmony. Whether they embrace the darkness themselves or try to hold it off, there can be little question that the bottom of the Cycle of history draws near. Whatever victories the characters win for enlightenment, larger failures loom.

The characters may be among the few voices of wisdom in a corrupt and decaying court. They may be part of a court where the ancient truths still earn respect and stand alongside ancient vampires against encroaching horrors. They may try to step away from Wan Kuei society to promote their goals, wicked or otherwise, among mortals. The changing Age affects them all. The world's decline will, sooner or later, reach inside to change their own souls, as discussed in the mechanics for the Age's change. Beyond some threshold, it doesn't matter how they feel about it: They have to deal with it anyway.

This does not mean there is no room for hope. You can judge that the characters somehow forestall or even avert the shift in the Ages if you want (although that is perhaps too grand for a horror game). More plausibly, the characters can achieve personal victories in the face of universal degradation. In a crumbling court, preserving some traditions, staving off *akuma* and laying the seeds for a future renaissance are all great victories.

Long Term Play

Like **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, **Blood & Silk** lends itself to chronicles that span the centuries. Of course you cannot roleplay every minute or even every decade of such a chronicle. The best bet is to have long periods of down time with unique events drawing the characters together for a story every few decades or centuries.

To cover the extensive downtime, you should allow for character development along the same lines as during a prelude. Let the characters pursue personal goals and achieve things. Backgrounds can shift based on the events in downtime and your approval. Use the following simple mechanic for other Traits: Award 2 experience points for every 10 years of downtime (these can be spent on Traits or saved up as normal), and have the player make one auspicious occasion and one act of blindness roll for each period of downtime, regardless of its length. You can adjust the difficulties if the character has spent the downtime doing especially appropriate things for his Dharma or in activity likely to engorge the Demon.

Those who want a more detailed system for dealing with downtime may wish to consult any of the **Transylvania Chronicles** series or the **Vampire Storytellers Handbook**.

When running a long-term chronicle, you will also have to deal with the effects of changing to the Fifth Age. See page 107 for determining when individual characters start to use modern Disciplines and Dharmic rules. Page 25 also provides a variety of portents of the change of Age, which you may use in your chronicle as you see fit.

Notes on Crossing Over

World of Darkness: Blood & Silk is principally a historical supplement for **Kindred of the East**, and so, much of the advice in this chapter deals with chronicles centered almost exclusively on Wan Kuei. The Middle Kingdom has a diverse supernatural population, however, including powerful spirits, ghostly armies of the dead, shape changing Ferocious People and nefarious wizards. The next chapter provides a great deal of insight on these various supernatural creatures, called *shen*. They can appear in a variety of roles, as allies, enemies or contacts.

But a broader crossover is possible. Wan Kuei characters of Fourth Age can — in some circumstances — find common ground with characters drawn from **Vampire: The Dark Ages**, **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** or **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** (using material from the **Werewolf: The Dark Ages** or **Hengeyokai** supplements for that game). Having players portray different denizens of the World of Darkness can be very tricky, however. Keep the following advice in mind when going this route.

Justification

Monsters do not easily find common cause. Wan Kuei and Cainites do not understand each other, and what they do understand, they dislike. The same can be said for Xiong Ren shapechangers and most other *shen*. Mages are likely to see all other creatures as ingredients or subjects for experimentation. And most every creature competes for power at dragon nests.

To create an enjoyable story, you and your troupe must create a plausible reason for a gaggle of *shen* to cooperate. The easiest solution is to come up with an extraordinary circumstance that justifies a short-term

alliance. Imagine that the elder of a Xiong Ren Beast Court has gone missing in a city. The ancestor of the Wan Kuei court, to avoid a war, pledges that some of his followers will find the elder weretiger. The Beast Court agrees, on the condition that a few of their own accompany the vampiric investigators.

This options stretches credibility less than a *wu* including four different monstrous species, and it allows you to put a time limit on the cooperation. if the troupe manages to build paths to cooperation during the initial story, you can continue. If not, you have an easy way to break off and move on to other tales.

Cosmology

The World of Darkness includes many different sorts of spiritual powers. When the prayers fly and the spells circulate, it actually matters who or what is in charge of the spot the characters now occupy. Do Wan Kuei Disciplines work outside the boundaries of the Middle Kingdom? Does the ritual which determines casual and vain magic in the Middle Kingdom (see p. 148) apply in your chronicle? How do local paradigms matter? Can Cainite vampires Embrace in a realm that rejects Caine's curse? You need to think about these matters before players demand or invent answers of their own.

The simplest approach (and the one followed in official releases) is to say that each sort of character follows his own rules wherever he is. You should not think of this as a cop-out answer, since the forces that define the different sorts of vampire and mage are global, at least in part.

Add cosmological complication only when you feel it will enrich your chronicle. For instance, Wan Kuei Disciplines may depend on the expressed, albeit distorted, will of the August Personage in Jade, who holds no authority in the West except insofar as Wan Kuei settle and invite the spirit worlds close to Earth beyond the bounds of the Middle Kingdom.

Rules

The **Vampire Storytellers Handbook** offers a very comprehensive set of guidelines for adjudicating the interplay of vampiric disciplines with magic and other forces. If you don't want to rely on the answers there, you can apply a modicum of common sense to settling most disputes. The most probable source of complications is the ease with which Mage spheres can affect Wan Kuei. The answer is a simple one: Require Spirit, and perhaps also Prime, for effects targeted at Wan Kuei. After all, the Wan Kuei draw on a process established by the August Personage in Jade himself and are anchored very deeply in the universe of the Middle Kingdom.

Culture

Social issues matter at least as much as mechanical ones. Above all, keep in mind that Eastern characters know very little about those in the West, and vice versa. It can all very easily degenerate into a mindless brawl. Prepare matters of common interest for characters coming form different cultures — a rare scholarly work for intellectual characters, perhaps a sanctuary in the midst of war or wilderness for more physical characters.





Chapter Six: Barbarians and Shen

The flow of the river is ceaseless and its water is never the same.
— Kamo no Chomei, *Hokoki*

The Shen

The Wan Kuei are far from being the Middle Kingdom's only supernatural inhabitants. Beyond the many spirits of the land, they share the night with shapechangers, displaced demigods and tireless hunters. A **Blood & Silk** chronicle need never include these various *shen*, but they can add a whole other dimension to play. The following sections provide brief overviews of the shapechangers, *hsien*, mages, ghosts and demon hunters of the late Fourth Age.

Xiong Ren

The Xiong Ren — the Ferocious People, the shapeshifters of the East — spend their days in the Middle Kingdom with an innate balance that other *shen* can only envy. While the Wan Kuei struggle between the demands of Yin and Yang, Hun and P'o, the Ferocious People tie together vital energies, humanity and beast, with seemingly little effort. It is the gift of the Emerald Mother to her people.

Their *shen* peers have not always held the Ferocious People in such esteem. In the days of the late Third Age, the Ten Thousand Immortals, full of overweening pride, looked down from their gaudy palaces and bloody temples and decided that the werecreatures were too crude and too dangerous. The Wan Xian came down to walk among those who were once allies and spread rumors of corruption and dissent. They fanned the flames of the skirmishes that followed and returned to their strongholds as all-out war enveloped the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother. This bloody conflict is remembered as the War of Shame.

The Meaning of "Xiong Ren"

Throughout this book, the shapeshifters who will by the modern day be called hengeyokai, "Changing Phantoms," are referred to by the Chinese name Xiong Ren. The phrase translates quite literally to "Ferocious People," emphasizing their dual natures as man and beast. The majority of the Beast Courts of the 12th century use the Chinese language as their common tongue, as geography dictates. Because the Beast Courts include many different types of shapechangers, using breed-specific languages is imprecise at best; thus, the name Xiong Ren is considered the most appropriate and the least likely to offend.

Though fooled once, and at extraordinary cost, the Ferocious People would prove the Wan Xian the greater fools. The Xiong Ren looked up from their internecine fighting; they saw that the Okuma bear-shifters were gone forever and the Nagah snake-people nearly extinguished. They saw dragon nests ravaged, while guardians avenged imagined slights. Their rage knew no bounds as they turned on the Wan Xian, their betrayers. Led into battle by the noble Hakken general Chi You, who claimed descent from the August Personage of Jade himself, the reunited armies of the Ferocious People fought the treacherous Wan Xian to a standstill; then, the heavens opened, and Gaia delivered her judgment on the Ten Thousand Demons.

The Xiong Ren did not escape judgment, however. The Wall dividing the spirit world from the physical world cemented them permanently in their fleshly bodies — some of the shapechangers lost their ability to step into the spirit world entirely. Chi You, the Hakken general, knew well the laws of Heaven and accepted punishment on behalf of his armies for the crime of taking up arms against the appointed ministers of Heaven. No matter how corrupt and unrighteous the Wan Xian had become, it was not the place of the Ferocious People to strike them down.

General Chi was sent to the hell ruled by Yen-Lo; in this, the heavens showed compassion, as Yen-Lo alone of the Yama Kings still obeyed his duty to cleanse and purify the souls of those in his charge. The bravest bands of Xiong Ren (known as sentai) once made the journey to Hell to visit with Chi You and to learn from him — it is said that the general knew gifts that none among the Ferocious People had ever used before. When Yen-Lo's infernal realm was attacked and walled off from Yomi a millennium ago, however, the Beast Courts lost contact with Chi You. Divination suggests that he escaped before the walls of the hell closed, but Chi You has not been seen since, and his spirit has not returned to the Temple of the Ancestors among the Yang Realms.

The Ferocious People today are still disorganized and fractious. The wounds inflicted when Beast Court fought Beast Court were deep, and the scars are still raw. On the one hand, the Mandates of the Emerald Mother require peace and cooperation among the Xiong Ren. On the other hand, angry ancestor spirits and tales handed down for generations demand that the atrocities of the past not be forgotten. Not all pay fealty to the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, preferring to remain among their own breed and to follow their own litanies and paths — this is the simplest way of dealing with the breach opened so long ago. However, through strength of purpose and an unswerving sense of duty, the Beast Courts are slowly regaining their lost power. Young Xiong Ren gather under their banners to form sentai in honor of Gaia and Luna.

While the return to power and prominence may seem slow to the hot-blooded Xiong Ren, it has happened with disquieting speed in the eyes of the Wan Kuei. The Ferocious People somehow remember, in alarming detail, events that no being still living witnessed. The vast majority of the tales from the turning of the Age speak of betrayal and corruption, but some very few tell of acts of valor and sacrifice by the Wan Xian. In the few places where those stories are still told with reverence, the Wan Kuei and the Xiong Ren can exist side by side. Where such uneasy peace exists, the wise ancestor keeps Running Monkeys on a short leash and limits their contact with the Beast Courts. The ambitions of the newly dead erode peace treaties with alarming speed.

The wilds of the Middle Kingdom — the deserts of the northwest, the mountains and jungles of the south, the steppes of the north — provide vast areas where the Xiong Ren and the Wan Kuei can coexist relatively peacefully. Dragon nests are comparatively plentiful, and Wan Kuei willing to live rustically and simply are seen (correctly or incorrectly) by the Ferocious People as wiser than their urban counterparts. In the central and eastern areas, the rising human population has hemmed the Xiong Ren into small areas around their sacred sites. The Wan Kuei grow in power and number with the swelling tide of humanity, making the Ferocious People wary and angry — and often spoiling for a fight.

Hakken Werewolves

Other breeds may lay first claim to the title of warrior, but the Hakken are without question the soldiers of the Ferocious People. They are suited to serve in any role asked of them in the Beast Courts and do so without hesitation. The Way of Emerald Virtue dovetails nicely with their native Litany, and so, they quickly gain Honor and Glory in their chosen courts.

And yet, so many Hakken choose not to. Were it not for the demands of duty, most Hakken would choose to remain within packs and septs of their own kind. It was not always this way — the Hakken, while not the first to see the horrible truth behind the War of Shame, were in the vanguard of the army that battled the Wan Xian across the Middle Kingdom until the intervention of Heaven. In the last 100 years, the Hakken have retreated from the mainland, taking mates among the people of the islands of Nihon, thereby tying their fates to their new home with the bonds of kinship. Their name itself — Hakken — is newly acquired and still fits as uncomfortably as a new shoe. Perhaps the Hakken are still smarting from the two bloody wars, or perhaps the judgment of Heaven upon their ancestor, Chi You, has caused them deep shame. The Ferocious People of the mainland prefer to assume that it is the second; it would be disgraceful to consider the sons and daughters of the wolf cowards.

The Hakken have done well in their new home. They have nurtured the warriors there along a path of honor and duty, until the best of these human samurai rival the

Disciplines and Gifts

The sample Xiong Ren characters given in this section are listed with their appropriate Traits — Rage and Gnosis — rather than the Hun, P'o and Chi traits possessed by the Wan Kuei. If it is necessary to convert these Traits, Rage can become the P'o score, and Willpower the Hun; Gnosis can become a balanced Yin and Yang Chi rating. The sample characters below are listed with Gifts (from **Werewolf: The Apocalypse, Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East** and the **Werewolf Players Guide**) rather than equivalent Disciplines, mainly because it is incredibly difficult to represent the life-affirming aspects of the Ferocious People through the cold, dead arts of the Wan Kuei.

If you would prefer to consider the Xiong Ren in strictly **Kindred of the East** terms, see Chapter Eight of that book, p. 201, for a summary of hengeyokai powers. The destructive abilities common to all Xiong Ren in greater or lesser degree can be simulated by the Demon Arts of the Wan Kuei: All shapeshifters have the ability to spend Rage (as per Demon Chi) to gain extra actions as per Black Wind and to assume animal or half-animal war forms with characteristics such as the claws, wings and fangs detailed in Demon Shintai. Ferocious People who have taken on the role of warriors can be designed with the warlike Disciplines of Iron Mountain and Kiai (from **Kindred of the East Companion**). Sagacious Ferocious People may have mastered the Yin or Yang Pranas, Chi Disciplines like Equilibrium or even the Soul Discipline of Chi'iu Muh. Scouts benefit greatly from the abilities granted by Godbody of Earth. All of these Disciplines, when used by the Xiong Ren, are divorced from any demonic taint; while the Xiong Ren have both Hun and P'o, their souls are not divided as those of the Wan Kuei, and the P'o cannot take over. Other abilities will commonly include the ability to heal, to talk with and invoke spirits, to read or speak to minds and to influence emotions.

Storytellers and players who plan to extensively include the Xiong Ren in their chronicles will benefit greatly from picking up a copy of **Hengeyokai**.

werewolves themselves in devotion. They have fought to keep the islands safe from the incursions of Yomi, and for the most part, they have been successful. The greatest threat to their lands is the Kumo, and the Hakken have no mercy to spare for their fallen shapechanging brethren.

The Hakken share auspices, breeds and forms with the Garou werewolves of the West. Those who choose to join sentai and unite with the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother may also choose Xiong Ren gifts.

Stargazer Werewolves

Werewolves of the Stargazer tribe are as common in the Middle Kingdom as they are everywhere — that is to say, not very. Stargazers travel singly and in mentor-student pairs, with the reputation of bringing interesting events in their wake. Most Stargazers are not part of the Beast Courts, although they are generally treated politely and welcomed for short stays. In times of great need, available Stargazers may volunteer for places in wave sentai — they do not make such offers lightly, and the offer is usually seen as an indication that the road ahead is rough. Those few Stargazers who have permanent places in the Beast Courts have generally been found as lost cubs and taught the ways of the Emerald Mother from their earliest changing days. Even if these Garou leave the courts to embrace their Stargazer heritage, many return and are welcomed back in the name of the Emerald Mother. For more information about the Stargazers, see **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** and **Tribebook: Stargazers**.

Khan Weretigers

The Khan are the warriors of the Ferocious People; only the Hakken werewolves of Nihon and the north can match their ferocity on the battlefield. The weretigers are the only ones of the great cat-shifters to pledge their allegiance to the Beast Courts in any number. The others are too solitary or their kinfolk are too rarely seen in China for them to promise their lives to the Beast Kings of the East; the few Bagheera snow leopards who grace the mountain tops of the west are the next greatest in number, but they eschew even the rudimentary politics of the Beast Courts. The Khan serve the Courts loyally; indeed a few Khan stand as kings.

For the most part, the Khan eschew weaponry such as klaives; they prefer to fight with fist, tooth and claw. But a few of them wield powerful relic weapons, such as the Hammer of Zhao. No Khan will wield a fetish weapon that was not created for a weretiger's use; his pride is too great to let him accept hand-me-downs from Hakken or Same-Bito.

While the Khan of China are loyal first and foremost to their liege lords, they remain on good terms with the Khan of the distant West. Periodically a great summons will occur in one of the kingdoms of India, and all Khan are expected to attend these convocations. They are usually an excuse to socialize and exchange stories, as well as catch up with old acquaintances, but the Khan also share battle tactics and intelligence on the activities of the Great Centipede.

The Khan cannot enter the Yang Realms on their own; only through the use of powerful Gifts from the Emerald Mother or with the aid of a sentai-mate can they be pulled across the Wall. However, weretigers do

maintain their own "Den-Realms," which are small pockets of the Yang Realm that they have extracted through the Wall and made their own.

Kitsune Werefoxes

The Kitsune are a strange new breed among the Ferocious People. They were brought into existence by Gaia's hand in the throes of the War of Shame and grew up as a race in the chaos that accompanied the turning of the Third Age. They did not fight the Wan Xian; foxes are not made for fighting, and they were little more than pups at the time. The Kitsune have spent long years derided for having come too late, but it is beginning to become clearer, perhaps, why Gaia sent them when She did.

It is true that the Kitsune did not fight the Wan Xian. But the Kitsune also did not fight the Hakken or the Khan or the Nagah or the Tengu — they alone, of all the breeds, carry no blame for the War of Shame. In the Fourth Age that followed the War, the Kitsune who chose to join the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother often serve as ambassadors to neighboring courts, and as peace-keepers within their own. The scars and slights, wounded honors and egos of the Ferocious People recover slowly from such transgressions; the werefoxes have been busy for centuries as intermediates. That role is diminishing now, at last, as the tales of betrayal are generations old and the ancestor spirits finally seem placated.

The Kitsune, for their part, seem happy to no longer be needed in that role. While perfectly capable of being charming, kind, understanding and unfailingly polite, the years of keeping their trickster natures and glib tongues under control have weighed heavily on the werefoxes. Many a court has sealed a treaty of peace with a long-aggrieved neighbor, only to watch their Kitsune ambassadors dissolve into a rolling pile of pranks, double entendres and waving foxtails at the accompanying celebration.

While they may be ambassadors among the Ferocious People, the Kitsune bring death to the humans of the Middle Kingdom. The werefoxes are enjoined from killing the innocent, but those humans who abuse their status to cause suffering may taste the steel of a Kitsune assassin. In a world full of conniving warlords, corrupt ministers, jealous consorts and even the occasional emperor lacking in virtue, the Kitsune find enough work to keep themselves busy.

Kumo Werespiders

The Goblin Spiders have embodied evil in all the lands of the Middle Kingdom since the Second Age — the very first sign that perhaps something was not entirely right with the Ten Thousand Things. They profess loyalty to the entity the Beast Courts know as the Centipede and the European Garou as the Wyrm; outsiders, caring little for the werespiders' philosophical leanings, see the carnage and corruption wrought by the Kumo and can only conclude that they serve the Yama Kings.

The Kumo do not join the Beast Courts. Not one has ever made the offer; if one were to, it would be turned down. Goblin Spider ambassadors are tolerated at the courts, where they are neither trusted nor trusting. While occasionally the Kumo will make pacts with the Beast Courts to fight off a common enemy, it is just as common that the Spiders will choose to befriend the enemy and turn on their shapechanging cousins. It matters little to the Kumo where the blood that bloats their bellies comes from.

Some Goblin Spiders, in confirmation of the worst fears of their shapechanging cousins, have stepped away from serving abstract forces of destruction and formed distinct arrangements with very concrete forces of corruption, the Yama Kings. These Kumo make their homes in the jungles along the Scarlet Path from Yomi to the Yang World. In exchange for safe passage and hunting grounds, the Spiders serve as soldiers and spies for the Yama Kings. Because they have no good reason to leave Yomi — the least troublesome thing a Scarlet Path Kumo could be up to is kidnapping a mate — these Goblin Spiders are not even trusted by their own kind in the physical realm. They are often seen in the company of Wan Kuei, *akuma* and worse.

Kumo prefer to live in the crumbling habitats of man — ruined palaces, decaying temples. The deserted towns arrayed along the Silk Road have, of late, become a favorite haunt of the Kumo. Many a traveler, weary from a long day of sand and heat, has stopped at a quiet hamlet seeking shelter — and never left. The Wan Kuei and the Goblin Spiders do not often come into direct conflict over habitation, as Wan Kuei usually prefer to live in places that have been kept up; the occasional vampire has returned from a long journey, however, to discover her home run down and webbed and its new occupant hungry.

The Goblin Spiders share breeds, forms and gifts with the Western Ananasi. The birthing of a metis kills the mother as the young spider eats its way out of her womb; perversely, the metis are honored, and their births celebrated. The Kumo have only four forms, including their human form. Their war form is an nightmarish, bipedal horror the height of two men, with six clawed arms, glowing eyes and a grotesquely distended torso. The Goblin Spider form is four feet tall at the shoulder, possesses fangs dripping with venom and is capable of spinning webs that can entrap the fiercest weretiger. Their final form is a nigh indestructible mass of hundreds and hundreds of spiders — even one surviving spider will eventually reform into the Kumo.

Nagah Wereserpents

The Nagah have always been blessed. They were blessed before their birth, when Vishnu rested in the coils of the Great Serpent before the universe was formed.

They were blessed at their making, to be chosen by the River, whom they revere as a Third Mother. Sadly, this eternal blessing has had seemingly little benefit to the Nagah's worldly existence.

The Nagah were early targets of the corrupt Wan Xian, who feared their discernment and their ability to smell out deceit. The Wan Xian whispered of corruption among the judges of the Emerald Courts — after all, who was there to judge the judges? The other Ferocious Peoples listened and grew suspicious; the Nagah do not blame the others for their fear, for a traitorous wereserpent would be, and once was, a terrifying thing indeed. But they do blame the other breeds for their clouded sight, for failing to look for themselves and for failing to see the corruption that took hold of the Beast Courts as the insinuating whispers did their work. Still, when the treachery of the Wan Xian was discovered, the Nagah did not shirk from the battle that followed, fighting with venomous fangs and razor-sharp claws alongside those who had sought their blood.

After the turning of the Age, the Nagah pulled away from the society of the Beast Courts, retreating to their ancestral rivers. They have allowed the *shen* of the Middle Kingdom to believe them dead — and, in truth, there are less than 200 Nagah alive today. They watch the affairs of the Ferocious People from a distance, giving anonymous assistance where they can. They hide in their safe places — rivers, Ananta spirit-realms, temples of Vishnu — and husband their strength.

Some of the Nagah will clearly never trust the Ferocious People, or any *shen*, again. A small group of individuals calling themselves the Scarlet Hood, their number and identity unknown even to other Nagah, punishes offending *shen* and mortals with a growing lack of discretion. The penalty for offenses ranging from cheating at dice to high treason is the same — a brutal death. The Wani, the spirits who guide the Nagah, speak of their displeasure; the Nagah brace for the day that they must show themselves in the Middle Kingdom again or deal with the Scarlet Hoods among their own kind.

The Nagah are capable of assuming five forms: a human form, a near-human form, the forms of normal and giant serpents and a terrifying, cobra-like war form. In their war form, the Nagah can crush opponents in 20 feet or more of serpentine coils, bite with incredibly toxic venom or rake at foes with their brutal claws. The Nagah do show one clear sign of their blessed nature; their metis are untouched by deformity and fertile. It is certainly possible that, without this slight advantage, the Nagah might have perished as did the Okuma.

Nezumi Wererats

The Children of Rat are more often found on the islands of Nihon than on the mainland, but they are common to cities on both sides of the water. In China they are called *shubei*, which literally translated means "ratlike scoundrel." The Nezumi are the Ferocious People who most regret the passing of the Impergium; their skills at stalking unseen through cities give them a huge advantage in the game of killing masses of mortals. Even now, the fires that spread through coastal cities such as Linan and Shanghai can sometimes be traced back to a frustrated Child of Rat.

The Nezumi are masters of the art of Low War: They dig labyrinthine warrens under major cities and use those places to practice stealth, spying, assassination and so on. These passageways frequently pass through what sewer tunnels exist in the ancient coastal cities; they do not mind the filth or stench, and some of them even cultivate the diseases such foul spirits bring.

Nezumi are divided into four castes: Seers, who are mystics and the masters of magical ritual; Tunnel Runners, who act as scouts and messengers; Skulkers, who are silent killers; and Warriors, who are noisier killers.

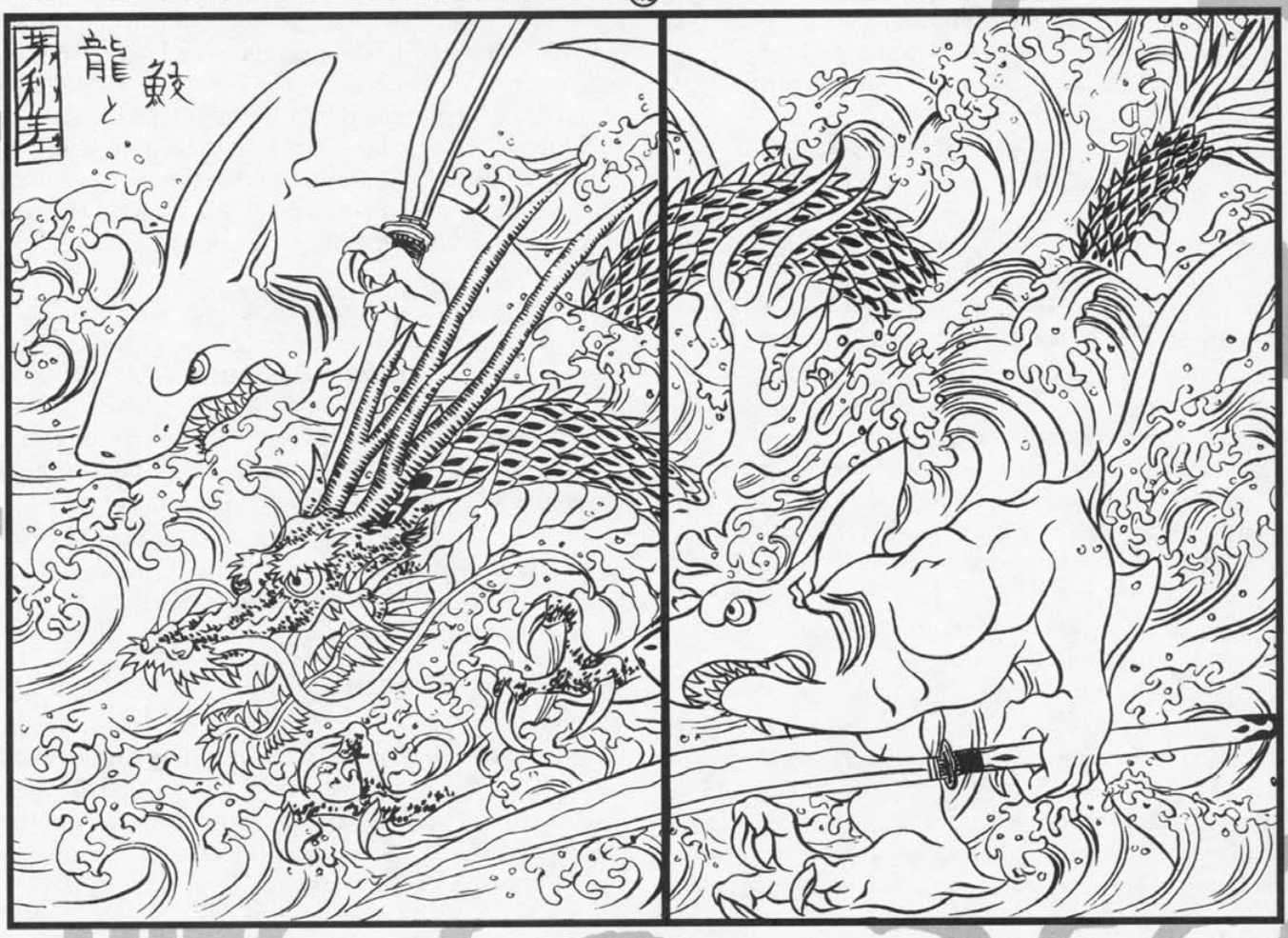
Same-Bito Weresharks

The Wan Kuei are terrifically ignorant of the Same-Bito; most of the demons of the northern and western courts do not even know such things exist. However, those vampires who dwell in the watery kingdoms of the Azure Dragon and Scarlet Phoenix Courts tell cautionary tales of the Sharks of the Dragon Kings.

Since the dawn of the Fourth Age, the Same-Bito have gradually grown more civilized. Their earliest predecessors were mad with blood lust and were considered to be one of the greatest dangers of the sea. But Mizuchi, the well-respected elder wereshark, long ago pledged fealty to Tiandi, Lord of Thunder, and his people have slowly come around to following Sensei Mizuchi's Code.

The Code is a simple one, for the Same-Bito are not a complicated people: *Respect your elders and tribemates; fight with honor; learn always; defend your territory.* Some Same-Bito, who call themselves Rokea, ignore the Code of Sensei Mizuchi and live in the bloody, unthinking old ways. The Rokea are seen less and less in the Fourth Age; they claim much of the great eastern sea as their own and speak of enormous uncharted expanses of free ocean in all directions. Honorable Same-Bito, of course, are concerned only with the territory of the Dragon Kings and ignore the call of the open ocean and their one-time tribesmen. When Same-Bito and Rokea do encounter one another, the result is a bloody, roiling mess; it is not uncommon for only one wereshark in four to survive the meeting of Same-Bito and Rokea packs.

There are only two breeds of Same-Bito: The rarer rongo are bred of human stock, while the far more common tangaroa are bred of shark. Only the rarest wereshark can cross the Wall into the Yang Realms; others must learn high-level Gifts or be led through the Wall by others. The Same-Bito have three auspices: The



Karui are warriors, born during daylight; the Koshuku are speakers, born during dawn or twilight; and the Irono are scouts, born at night.

Tengu Wereravens

No race of the Ferocious People save the Nezumi can match the Tengu's ability to ferret out humanity's secrets. But while the Nezumi paw through garbage and listen through basement walls, the Tengu fly above the humans' filth and observe the grander pattern. The Emerald Mother commands the Ravens of the East to learn all things and steal all secrets, and they happily obey Her dictates.

The Tengu are incorrigible gossips; no rumor spreads faster than one disseminated by a wereraven. Their best gossip comes from one particularly disturbing ability: By plucking out and eating the eye of the recently deceased, a Tengu can see what the corpse last saw in life, thereby determining the immediate circumstances of the person's death. This is not a trick they are often invited to play at parties, but it is rather useful for spying. Legend tells of Wan Kuei who have died particularly inauspicious deaths rising from Yomi to find an eye missing; due to the mystical nature of the Tengu's eye-theft, the eye is gone forever. Sadly, these rare Wan Kuei are rarely satisfied with a trade of, for example, some tail feathers.

Wereravens are not warriors; they would rather fly than fight, and their man-raven war-forms are frankly ridiculous to behold. Their ability to escape tricky situations, however, is known throughout the Middle Kingdom. The wit of the Tengu is also renowned; only the very cleverest of the Ferocious People are able to render a wereraven speechless. Tales abound of Tengu who talked their way out of an impossible situation and made a profit in the bargain.

The Tengu do not breed like the other Ferocious People; their offspring are never born Tengu (though they are Kinfolk), and they are not fertile among themselves, even to create metis. Their breeds are homid and corvid, as with the Western Corax. To create a Tengu child, the prospective parent wereraven must undergo a wrenching rite and create a spirit egg. This egg is then affixed to the child of the Tengu's choice; that child becomes a Tengu and is typically spirited away from his mortal family in order to learn the truth of the world.

Zhong Lung Weredragons

The Zhong Lung are the eldest of the Emerald Mother's creatures; she sculpted them only moments after the Scarlet Queen breathed her into existence in the First Age — or, as some tales have it, the Emerald Mother is the

Scarlet Queen herself. Regardless, the Middle Dragons were made before any other. The Zhong Lung say they remember the days before the sundering of Heaven from Earth; they remember the heroics of the Second Age and the hubris of the Third.

Or at least, that is their claim. Many Wan Kuei say they remember the Tang dynasty, yet at least a dozen mandarins honestly claim to have been Empress Wu's primary advisor during her ascent to power. Do they lie? Do they simply remember incorrectly? Memory is fallible. The mind fills in absent facts. The Middle Dragons have millennia of memory to tap into and often can recall the same event from many different perspectives, but each of those perspectives is clouded by personal experience. General facts and circumstances are reliably available through the Mnesis ability to tap the Zhong Lung racial memory; but details, names and faces are frequently muddled by the passage of time.

The Zhong Lung are the sages and scholars of the Ferocious People; though their Archid war-form is terrible and awesome, they rarely resort to its use. Each Middle Dragon's war-form is unique and displays the individual's personality and heritage, in addition to providing great strength and an arsenal of combat abilities. The Homid form is that of an ordinary human being (though often one with the mien of a great teacher); in, China, the Suchid form is typically that of a great alligator (though in some areas, crocodiles and even Komodo dragons are more common).

As sages and scholars, the Middle Dragons prefer the stability of a mountain sentai (a long term war party with a common totem); they most often choose to settle in near a dragon nest and then work as defenders and scholars-in-residence. More than one Zhong Lung has a Same-Bito as her champion and shark-at-arms; in return for the weresharks' protection, the Zhong Lung help to guide the Same-Bito along the Code of Mizuchi as best they can.

The Zhong Lung find themselves in an unusually indecisive position with regard to the Wan Kuei. In all practicality, there occasionally comes a time when the vampires must be trusted. The Middle Dragons know far too much about ancient or even merely elderly individuals to be comfortable trusting them, however, and the young among the Wan Kuei seem to be becoming more brutal and cruel as the Age progresses. When the choice of allies must be made, the Zhong Lung often choose the young and untested, in hopes of receiving a pleasant shock rather than inevitable disappointment.

Subjects of the Beast Courts

Honganji Mito, Hakken Guardian

Awarded the rank of Iron Pillar by the Court of the Gold Crysanthemum in Nihon, Mito is a taciturn werewolf of human stock. He watches over his samurai kinfolk and has little good to say about the gaki.

Attributes: Strength 3/5/7/6/4, Dexterity 3/3/4/5/5, Stamina 2/4/5/5/4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4/3/1/1/1, Appearance 3/2/0/3/3, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Empathy 1, Etiquette 3, Expression 2, Leadership 2, Linguistics 1, Melee 4, Politics 3, Primal-Urge 2, Subterfuge 2, Survival 2

Gifts: (1) Aura of Confidence, Create Element, Dream of a Thousand Cranes, Smell of Man; (2) Courtly Speech, Storm Winds Slash

Rage 5, **Gnosis** 1, **Willpower** 4

Ju Jasperclaw, Khan Jungle Warrior

The child of the great tigers of Southeast Asia, Jasperclaw lurks in the jungles of the Green Wind Court and hopes to lead his people in a great battle against those who have wronged them. Already he has been granted the rank of Iron Fist.

Attributes: Strength 3/5/6/7/5, Dexterity 3/4/5/5/5, Stamina 4/6/7/7/7, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2/1/0/0/0, Appearance 2/1/0/0/2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Enigmas 2, Etiquette 1, Intimidation 3, Investigation 1, Leadership 1, Linguistics 2, Melee 2, Primal-Urge 2, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Gifts: (1) Catfeet, Crushing the Centipede, Leap of the Kangaroo, Mindspeak; (2) Blaze Talons, Sense the Unnatural

Rage 5, **Gnosis** 6, **Willpower** 3

Tong Long Hua, Wise Dragon of the North

One of the Zhong Lung living just south of the Great Wall, Tong Long Hua watches the winds of mortal dynasties and knows the Hungry Dead play their games within. He knows some Wan Kuei are honorable, but they are few and far between.

Attributes: Strength 4/8/6, Dexterity 3/3/2, Stamina 5/9/8, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2/0/0, Appearance 3/0/3, Perception 5, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Animal Ken 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Enigmas 4, Etiquette 4, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Law 3, Leadership 5, Medicine 2, Melee 3, Occult 2, Performance 2, Politics 2, Primal-Urge 2, Rituals 4, Survival 3

Gifts: (1) Chi'ih Ming, Persuasion, Scent of the True Form, Shou; (2) Breaking the Tomorrow Wall, Call to Duty, Courtly Speech, Sense Imbalance; (3) The Dragon's Tongue, Song of Rage, Waking Dream of Unity; (4) Harmony of the Soul, Part the Wall

Rites: (1) Rite of Binding, Rite of Cleansing; (2) Rite of Nanfeng, Rite of Renewal, Rite of the Opened Way, Rite of Summoning; (3) Rite of the Fetish, Rite of the Harmonious Journey; (4) Rite of the Spirit Tattoo

Rage 4, **Gnosis** 5, **Willpower** 8



THE HSIEN

The Wan Kuei knew the *hsien* well in the time before the August Personage of Jade turned his ineffable face from the Middle Kingdom. In those long-ago days, the Wan Xian and the *hsien* worked side by side under the Mandate of Heaven, if not exactly in unison. While the Wan Xian were endowed with great freedom of action, the *hsien* worked within the Celestial Bureaucracy, performing tasks assigned by their superiors and appropriately supervising their underlings. They had no envy for the Wan Xian; the immortals were simply fulfilling their appointed role under Heaven, and the *hsien* would likewise strive to fulfill theirs. In the course of their duties, the *hsien* traveled at will among the Celestial Courts, the Yang World and the Middle Kingdom. They wore their celestial forms whenever and wherever they pleased; the humans who saw them knew they were privileged to glimpse the servants of Heaven. The nobles and magistrates of the *hsien*, the *kamuii*, were given charge of the five elements themselves. Their servants, the *hirayanu*, took the forms of animals as necessary to carry messages and perform other required tasks.

Irrevocable changes followed the Wan Xian's unthinkable abuse of their power and position. The *hsien*, hobbled by their position within the bureaucracy of Heaven, were forced to make impossible choices between protecting their mortal and environmental charges and disobeying the orders passed to them to make war on the Ten Thousand Immortals. And so, the *hsien* warred among themselves, against the Wan Xian and even against the humans they were charged to serve. Sages and scholars among the *hsien* have debated the rights and wrongs of the matter since the turning of the Age, but even the most meticulous divinations and impassioned philosophical maneuvers cannot determine what course of action, if any, could have averted the tragedy that was to come.

The judgment of the August Personage of Jade was not swift, but it was final. He further sundered the realms of the spirit from the physical world and removed from the *hsien* their ability to cross over from the Middle Kingdom. To the eternal shame of the *hsien*, the August Personage also required that the *hsien* wear forms taken from mortals, entwining their fate with that of the humans. The *hsien* remain effectively immortal, but when their current body dies, they must enter another human corpse as their home. The terrible justice of this decision was not immediately clear, but the *hsien* soon realized that to protect themselves from attack they would also need to protect the humans. This was a more difficult task than ever; the Ten Thousand Demons joined the list of humanity's predators.

And so, the *hsien* and the Wan Kuei parted ways. The *hsien* have divided themselves into three groups identifiable by vampires; in the time after the meting of punishments, all of these groups struggled to find their

own ways of dealing with their stranding and diminished power. These groups are the Shinma, the Daityas and the Kura Sau. (Though technically a term that encompasses all *hsien*, Shinma is often used to refer only to those who accepted the punishment of Heaven.)

Wu Tan Made Easy

For those who would rather not refer endlessly to **Land of Eight Million Dreams** to create *hsien* for your *wu* to encounter, there are convenient equivalents right here in this book. Each of the elemental Godbody Disciplines listed in Chapter Four can simulate the appropriate Alchemy quite admirably. The Storyteller may choose to adapt the difficulty numbers required to use the Godbody powers to reflect the *hsien's* nature; lowering the difficulty for a Komuko using Godbody of Earth is certainly reasonable, as is raising or lowering the difficulty of invoking Godbody powers depending on the amount of the corresponding element nearby.

The *hsien* can also use a sixth Alchemy, derived from their philosophy of Tao Te *Hsien*. Called Nei Tan, the "internal alchemy," it focuses on matters of the soul. The Chi Discipline of Tapestry does a good job of simulating it.

The *hsien's* ability to communicate with the elements does not require extensive documentation. Quite simply, elementals are inclined to be polite and friendly to the Shinma in the absence of a compelling cause for hostility. Shinma with even one level of an elemental Godbody can communicate with sentient elementals from the spirit worlds or, to a lesser degree, with the elemental substances that make up the natural world. Shinma with two levels of a Godbody power can also command elementals into service, in addition to the other powers provided by the Godbody.

Storytellers who plan to include the *hsien* in their chronicles should pick up a copy of **Land of Eight Million Dreams**. For a quick summary of *hsien* powers and abilities, check Chapter Eight of **Kindred of the East,** pp. 208-209.

The Shinma

The Shinma accepted the punishment of the August Personage of Jade as graciously as could be expected. Bowing their heads under the great weight of the responsibility given them, they turned immediately to work, stanching the earth's wounds and answering the prayers of the multitudes suffering in the wake of the Wan Xian's depredations. The kamuii nobles and hirayanu commoners alike took the misery of the humans upon themselves quite literally as they moved to inhabit the too-plentiful bodies of mortals on the brink of death, as the August Personage of Jade commanded.

Hampered in their new forms and beset on all sides by old enemies sensing weakness and new enemies desperate for sustenance, the Shinma struggled always to fulfill their duty first. This cost them dearly; while a *hsien* does not die when her physical body is destroyed, her memories and purpose are almost always forgotten as she takes a new human form. With every minor destruction of form came an incalculable loss of precious memory — another *hsien* who could no longer remember the glorious days of the Second and Third Ages. Worse yet, a *hsien* drained of all her Chi energy truly dies — the very energies of her soul have been sucked away, and there is no return.

Others among the *hsien* abandoned their duties, turning to the Yama Kings for protection in a mad reenactment of the fall of the Ten Thousand Immortals. The Shinma, convinced that the punishment handed down from the August Personage of Jade was just, held fast to their convictions and continued with their duties, even as more and more of their fellows were destroyed forever by the claws, teeth and twisted magics of other *shen*.

The faith of the Shinma was rewarded, at least in part, when the monkey-spirit Hanuman was allowed to glimpse the secrets of the universe through the teachings of an itinerant Taoist monk. Capitalizing cleverly on his luck, the Monkey King stole into the Celestial Palace and brought back the secrets that the Shinma needed to survive. All of the *hsien*, still spiritual creatures even when lodged in mortal shells, were greatly Chi imbalanced. This left them nearly defenseless against attacks made with opposing Chi. The secrets that Hanuman shared allowed every Shinma to incorporate some of their opposing Chi, Yin or Yang, into the fabric of their being. In addition to this basic survival tactic, mastered quickly by force of sheer necessity, Hanuman delivered into the hands of the Shinma scholars the seeds of what would become the Tao Te *Hsien*, a newly discovered ability to work the naked Chi forces of the universe. Mastery of these forces is incredibly difficult but holds the promise of a welcome return to the heavens, if not to the Celestial Courts themselves.

The Shinma nobility and commoners represent and embody the five elements, one kamuii kwannon-jin (their word for kith) and one hirayanu kwannon-jin to each element. The hou-chi and the fu hsi, the serpent hirayanu, are aligned with wood. The chu-ih-yu and the tanuki, the badgers, represent metal. The chu jung and the nyan, the cat hirayanu, wield the power of fire. The komuko and the hanumen (so named in honor of the Monkey King) represent earth. The suijen and the heng po, the carp hirayanu, are the guardians of water.

The elemental nature of the *hsien* forms the basis of their more common magics. Each of the Wu Tan, the Five Alchemies, pertains to a single classical element: earth, fire, metal, water or wood. To affect a combination of elements requires some degree of ability with each. The elemental Alchemies do not simply control the physical manifestation of the elements. They also command symbolic representations of the elements, whether the denizens of the spirit worlds or the elemental souls of humans — or *shen*. The virtues of the soul correspond to the elements: earth as wisdom, wood as self-control, fire as propriety, metal as honesty and water as faith. In all uses of Wu Tan, Yin Chi is used for destructive effects, while Yang Chi is used for constructive effects; for example, Yin Chi would be used in conjunction with Fire Alchemy to douse flames, while Yang Chi would be used to summon fire, even for a harmful purpose such as burning an enemy.

Wan Kuei and the Elemental Soul

The *hsien* ability to command the elemental soul inspires wise Wan Kuei to be cautious in their behavior around the Shinma. To a normal human, a Yin-directed decrease in his Fire Soul (not to be confused with the Wan Kuei soul state) may merely cause an evening of lusty foolishness; to a Wan Kuei, whose nature is often balanced with painful care, the same sudden loss of control may drop him immediately into a wave soul state. Attempts to exert this control lead to a resisted roll: The Storyteller rolls the *hsien*'s Yin or Yang Chi plus appropriate Godbody (or Alchemy, if using **Land of Eight Million Dreams**) while the vampire's player rolls Willpower. The difficulty of the Willpower roll is affected by the appropriateness of the *hsien's* soul challenge: Quenching the Metal Soul of a bold-faced liar or inflaming the Water Soul of one who has just betrayed a companion is made easier by the current situation. Failure to resist a Yang-based attack requires the vampire to make an immediate fire soul check; failure against a Yin-based attack requires an immediate wave soul check. Even the unsuccessful use of this power is often enough incentive for the vampire to leave the *hsien* alone in the future.

Though the Shinma are capable of wielding great power, individuals only seldom attain such lofty heights. The Shinma have duties to perform, duties that very often lead them into physical danger or conflict with other *shen*. Their human bodies are fragile, and they no longer have the freedom to travel the Middle Kingdom in their celestial forms. Each death wipes the slate clean, requiring the *hsien* to strive once again to understand his place in the universe.

The kamuii nobility are often involved directly in the Celestial Elemental Ministries, still fulfilling their appointed roles after centuries of banishment. The commoners are no longer theirs to command with impunity; unless a noble has great power, she must treat the hirayanu as honored associates who simply have a talent for dirty work and a willingness to do it. Outside the Celestial Bureaucracy, others have chosen to take a more individualistic, proactive approach to protecting the natural and human worlds, traveling the countryside as itinerant warriors and monks or adopting villages to watch over without the need for orders from above. As a group, the Shinma all remain mindful of their place under Heaven and strive to fulfill that role with varying degrees of success.

There are more than half a dozen smaller courts arranged within the Shinma court itself. Individuals join one or more courts according to personal philosophy and connections. The machinations of these courts are arcane and subtle; the least powerful members of the court likely have no idea as to what plots are unfolding or what the current goals of their leaders are. Only very rarely are humans directly involved in these plots, and even more rarely do they involve other *shen* — willingly. It is not unusual for the Wan Kuei to attempt to use the genteel squabbles of the Shinma courts for their own ends.

The Shinma are understandably wary of the Wan Kuei. The eldest among the Ten Thousand Demons once denounced the Mandate of Heaven and caused the sundering of the spirit world from the Middle Kingdom. The youngest among them are often vicious, cruel, callous or outright monstrous. The Shinma put down *chih-mei* ruthlessly, hold the young Wan Kuei at arms' length and regard the elders from the time of the turning of the Age with the utmost bitterness — and not a small amount of fear. Trust between Shinma and Wan Kuei, like the most precious jade, is extremely rare and exquisite. And it is also easily broken.

The Daityas

The Daityas and the Shinma are not very different, from the perspective of the Wan Kuei; yet in the ways that matter most to the *hsien*, it would be difficult to be more unalike. The Daityas left their duties in the chaos that followed the judgment of the August Personage of Jade. Noble and commoner alike, they found the punishment meted out to be unfair and the discernment of the August Personage of Jade to be flawed. As the creator of the Ten Thousand Immortals, it was his responsibility to oversee their actions. A wise ruler would have seen the immortals begin to fall; if he did not, he could no longer be called wise. If he did see, a benevolent ruler would have interceded; this he certainly did not do, and tens of thousands suffered as a result. Just as a human emperor is responsible for the well-being of his subjects — their bounty is brought by



the virtue and wisdom of the emperor, their suffering caused by his foolishness and greed — so, too, the August Personage of Jade must be held responsible for the well-being of all creation. And so, to punish the *hsien*, the Ferocious People and those still virtuous among the Wan Xian for his own blindness was at best unjust and at worst.... The very earth trembled under the weight of the accusations.

Philosophical fervor alone could not protect the Daityas from the enemies arrayed throughout the Middle Kingdom. Like all the other *hsien* stranded in the physical world, the Daityas were utterly spirit-imbalanced, easy prey for creatures balanced in Yin and Yang. In desperation, the Daityas and other harried *hsien* turned to the Yama Kings for protection. Bargains were made, and deals were struck. As the corrupted power of the Yama Kings began to writhe through the spirits of the , many found themselves unable to pay such a dear cost for their survival. Willing to die rather than serve the Yama Kings in a mockery of their former state, they threw off the demonic investments and canceled the transaction. This has earned them the unending ire of the kings and queens of the hells.

Unlike the Shinma, who took the stolen fruits of Heaven from a monkey-spirit as their protection, the Daityas struggled to find a way to protect themselves through their own efforts. When their survival looked bleak, they at last mastered the art of Chi Equilibrium, which allowed them to ripple Yang and Yin Chi through their spirits as the need arose.

Daityas Mechanics

To simulate the Daityas form of Chi Equilibrium, use the Wan Kuei Chi Discipline Equilibrium from **Kindred of the East**, with the following change: Because the Daityas store Yugen (undifferentiated Chi) and not Yin and Yang Chi separately, the first level of Equilibrium allows the *hsien* to temporarily shift his permanent Chi virtues without the listed three round activation time. The player rolls Wits + Meditation, and each success allows the *hsien* to shift one dot. The effect lasts for a number of turns equal to the number of successes.

The Daityas kept their elemental affiliations; their nobles and commoners still align themselves with the five elements. The Wu Tan the Daityas use is indistinguishable from that used by the Shinma, except by the most erudite of Taoist scholars. (See the Shinma and the Wu Tan sidebar above for a brief discussion of the Five Alchemies.)

Once survival was not their only immediate concern, the remaining Daityas gathered to decide what they should do. The Shinma, now their enemies, had already laid claim to the wild places and the lightly populated areas. The Daityas made their claim for the cities; unwilling to serve either Heaven or Hell, they would make their way among the humans, walking among the mortals as gods. The worshipers in the temples and shrines of the cities provided more than enough Chi for the Daityas. Protecting the people and answering their prayers in the old-fashioned style promised to continue the bounty of Chi. Those Daityas less inclined to present a stoic front admitted a fondness for the humans, many of whom had fought just as bravely and desperately for survival as the *hsien*.

With their goal established, the Daityas set out to achieve temporal power. Their methods were, by necessity, distasteful. A Daityas with the good fortune to take the body of a dying noble or a rich merchant would firmly establish himself in the dead man's role; then, quietly, murderously, he would invite other Daityas to join the family in the bodies of freshly slain kin. Once this bloody work of generations was accomplished, affairs went smoothly. The human members of the families adopted by the Daityas know the source of their remarkable fortunes, and most go willingly to the knife when great-grandfather's body becomes too frail to contain the godlike benefactor.

Other Daityas, those with the greatest ability to remember their identities between bodies, struck out more boldly for power. The *hsien* chose as targets ministers, imperial concubines, princes or other highly placed individuals; they stalked, slew and took the bodies of their chosen vessels. This was always dangerous — the timing of the soul's movement is both vitally important and impossible to calculate, and such powerful individuals were rarely unprotected. Still, the rewards for a successful attempt were worth the risk; the Daityas have never held the imperial throne of China, but they are never without a representative in the imperial courts.

The strong presence of the Daityas in the cities of the Middle Kingdom has inevitably brought them into conflict with the Wan Kuei. They have no quarrel with the vast majority of the Ten Thousand Demons; they consider the young among the vampires to have been unfairly treated by the August Personage of Jade, just as the *hsien* were. Power struggles unfailingly arise when the Wan Kuei victimize a member of the Daityas' families, when the Daityas assassinate and claim the position of a Wan Kuei pawn and when the Daityas answer the prayers of those in conflict with the vampires. When the Daityas and Wan Kuei leadership in a city cannot agree to leave each other's affairs alone, the citizens suffer greatly until the clandestine war ends.

Dissension among the Daityas themselves is stirring; now that temporal power seems permanently assured, certain small but vocal factions are putting forth a new goal. The Emperor of the Middle Kingdom cannot sit comfortably on his throne when he has lost the Mandate of Heaven — the Mandate passes to another, who will overthrow him. These Daityas feel that the Mandate of Heaven rests now with the *hsien*, demanding the overthrow of the August Personage of Jade. They are ready to make war on the heavens and to thwart the plans of the Yama Kings, as the universe itself demands.

The Kura Sau

The Kura Sau once rebelled against the punishment of the August Personage of Jade because they believed that it was unjust. They turned their backs on the Celestial Bureaucracy to make a statement; but the only statements the Kura Sau are now capable of making are curses. When the *hsien* went to the Yama Kings for protection from the enemies that surrounded them, the Kura Sau never looked back.

The Yama Kings have upheld their end of the bargain. The Shinma and Daityas were forced to learn balance to survive; the Kura Sau survive through raw demonic power. Survival cannot have been worth the terrible price the Kura Sau paid, however. Those who once walked as gods through the spirit worlds now cringe and fawn before the thrones of the Yama Kings. There is little left of what made the Kura Sau unique individuals — all they have been permitted to retain is raw ambition, sickening devotion, the ability to feel fear and the willingness to cause it. The Wan Kuei of the Chinese mainland refer to the Kura Sau as the Gou Zhang, a phrase loaded with contemptuous nuances: war dogs, cursed swordbearers, mere thugs with the backing of powerful masters.

The Way of Hac Tao

Hac Tao is not an evil, power-for-power rip-off of Nei Tan. The prize for mastery — the Blood-Jade Dagger that allows its bearer to slice through the Wall and rampage through the spirit worlds — is for all practical matters the same, but the route to achieving that degree of mastery cannot be compared to anything this side of Yomi. Storytellers can consider Hac Tao in terms of the Cainite Discipline of Thaumaturgy — it allows practitioners access to many dark paths of magic and ritual, rather than a simple, straightforward progression of power. Players should never be able to guess exactly what the Kura Sau are capable of with their tainted magic; but common uses include the animation of corpses, the defilement of Chi and the summoning of demons. Storytellers should feel free to include any particularly icky favorites — fomori Gifts, vampiric Disciplines, Baali rites, whatever fits the bill — in their own version of this tangled black art.

The Kura Sau are as removed from the natural flow of Chi in the world as the lowliest of the Wan Kuei. Just as a *chih-mei* gorges on human flesh, the demon worshipers can fill themselves with Chi by devouring corpses. They prefer to harvest suffering — the Chi gained from killing a human is more delicious than the cold, sluggish Chi of a corpse. The amount of Chi a Kura Sau can eke out of a dying human depends entirely on how long it takes the unfortunate victim to expire; a quick thrust through the heart or snap of the neck releases only one delectable point of Chi, while a slow, thoughtful, torturous murder rends all 10 points of Chi available from the vessel. The bodies of these carefully attended victims are often put to another use. The Kura Sau are only "reborn" into the bodies of the ritually murdered; any spirit that arrives to take possession of the body owes the murderer a favor for enabling his return to the Middle Kingdom. The Kura Sau know this, of course, and take advantage of this effect of their feeding to bolster their numbers where the schemes of the Yama Kings permit. Some humans have also learned this terrible secret and are willing to sacrifice their fellows for the slim chance of earning demonic favors. Any Wan Kuei who dares to summon one of the Yama Kings' minions in this way invariably puts herself on a short list of potential *akuma* recruits and blackmail candidates; those vampires who have already joined the ranks of the *akuma* tread lightly around the infernal politics inevitably involved.

The centuries in service of Yomi have mutated and warped the forms of the fallen *hsien*. They have completely lost their elemental nature — the five elements will no longer pay heed to spirits so twisted — and cannot balance Chi in their bodies. Those Kura Sau in a constant state of Yang imbalance overflow with unearthly beauty and vibrant energy; those imbalanced to Yin seem like shambling, rotting corpses. The only thing they share in common is the demonic magic that holds them to their once-human bodies and the scars those horribly murdered bodies bear.

Kura Sau filled with Yin Chi wield a warped equivalent of the Wan Kuei Yin Prana Discipline, while their Yang-imbalanced counterparts utilize an equally twisted Yang Prana. In both cases, the stylized movements and katas typical to the Wan Kuei are optional for the Kura Sau; the cursed *hsien* do not need to evoke and cajole the Chi powers that are their very nature, but the focusing effects of the appropriate movements can be beneficial and are certainly stylish. The Kura Sau may also have access to any or, often, all of the Demon Arts. Their Yang or Yin Mantle always appears to those with supernatural perception in the form of the *hsien's* Godbody of the Demon avatar.

The black arts of Hac Tao are unique to the Kura Sau; the apotheosis of the form seems to be the unfettered access to the heavens promised by the Shinma's Nei Tan Alchemy, but the path to the Kura Sau's celestial freedom is strewn with corpses and gruesome shortcuts.

It is unclear precisely which of the Yama Kings warped the Kura Sau and which of the Yama Kings they now serve. Outside the Yomi World, the only beings who might know the terms of the bloody contract that created the Kura Sau are the Daityas — and they are not approachable on the matter. An individual may once proclaim to be in the service of the Yama King Emma-o and on another meeting sing hymns of adoration to Mikaboshi. While clearly the self-proclamations of the Kura Sau cannot be trusted, it seems entirely likely that servants with such easy access to the Middle Kingdom are prized trading chits amongst the Yama Kings and Queens. The missions of the Kura Sau are often brief and violent and end with the destruction of the agent's form. This matters little to the Kura Sau or their masters; between sallies to the Middle Kingdom, the Kura Sau bask in a hell designed for their pleasure. Their masters know that it can only be a short time before another mangled body appears for the plucking.

Hsien of the Fourth Age

Bai Lin, Hou-chi Kamuji

A newly reborn wood elemental, Bai Lin tends a small, sacred grove hidden in the overcrowded capital city of Linan. Ill at ease in the bustle of the city, she is short tempered with anyone who disturbs her work or threatens the grove.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2 , Charisma 4, Manipulation 3, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Crafts 3, Dodge 3, Divination 2, Empathy 2, Enigmas 2, Etiquette 4, Expression 4, Medicine 3, Melee 2, Occult 2, Performance 2, Politics 3, Shentao 3, Subterfuge 2

Tan: Lin Tan (Wood Alchemy) 4, Nei Tan (Internal Alchemy) 2, Shui Tan (Water Alchemy) 2

Yin 4, **Yang** 6, **Yugen** 10, **Tao** 3, **Willpower** 6

Zhang Guilai, Yin-aspected Slave of Yomi

A servant of the Yama Queen Tou Mu, Iron Empress of the Hell of Being Skinned Alive, Zhanng Guilai travels across China searching for the skins that will most please his mistress and removing them in murderous rituals. Those of ancient Wan Kuei are especially valuable.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 1, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 2, Enigmas 2, Etiquette 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 4, Melee 2, Occult 2, Politics 2, Shentao 3, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 3

Tan: Godbody of the Demon 3, Hac Tao 2, Yin Prana 2

Yin 8, **Yang** 0, **Yugen** 8, **Willpower** 3

Chi'n Ta

Magicians, men and women who transform the world by force of will channeled through ceremony and ritual, appear in all strata of society, though never in large numbers. The Middle Kingdom includes many magical traditions of its own, generally called Lightning People or chi'n ta. Magicians of the barbarian lands also enter the realm of All Under Heaven, in even smaller numbers than the magicians native to the Middle Kingdom. Despite this diversity, the mages of the Middle Kingdom operate under a organizational framework unknown in Europe at the time. This framework, like many other things, dates from the time of the Qin unification of China.

The Empire and the Will

Emperor Qin Shihuangdi pondered the issue of mages long and hard, since he greatly feared them as potential threats to his realm. In the end, after debate with scholars and members of a loyal society of wizards called the Wu Lung, he settled on a scheme involving the Ministry of Works. The Minister of Works bears responsibility for establishing people's social class and seeing that they perform the appropriate duties; he works in conjunction with the Minister of the Census to record the list of subjects and their disposition. Henceforth, magicians were to register with the Ministry of Works, to be on call in moments of imperial need and, in any event, to remain under imperial scrutiny.

The emperor didn't simply rely on bureaucracy. The Wu Lung backed up his decree with a potent ritual, declaring to Heaven that the Middle Kingdom recognized and blessed the efforts of magicians in proper submission to authority and that the empire cursed magicians who refused to submit. While his successors through the centuries revile many of his innovations, they almost all agree on this one. Each new emperor repeats the ritual with aid from the Wu Lung. It lapses only in extended periods of inter-dynastic chaos. (Indeed, the chaos created by proliferating numbers of unregistered magicians is itself a sign of a dynasty losing the Mandate of Heaven.) Since the time of the Qin, the Ministry has effectively been an organ of the Wu Lung.

In terms of **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade** (or **Mage: The Ascension**) mechanics, magicians who register with the Ministry of Works and obey imperial commands perform casual magic, whatever their particular magical tradition. Even foreigners and barbarians earn imperial favor through right action, and their magic thereafter operates in a frame of reference that acknowledges the diversity of magical practice. Magicians who refuse to register or obey perform vain magic, even if their working would normally qualify as casual. The spirit of the Middle Kingdom sees and rejects their rebellious activity.

Western mages therefore always begin by performing vain magic as they enter the Middle Kingdom. Native magicians with similar practices may detect the magical disturbance and offer explanations or may move to suppress newly arrived rivals. Representatives of the Ministry of Works may also move to suppress foreign influences or to accept them under imperial sanction. How open local chi'n ta are to foreigners depends on the behavior and potential usefulness (or danger) of the newcomers.

Regions outside the official purview of the Ministry of Works (i.e. China) are a patchwork. The ministry has done its very best to extend its authority beyond strict political borders; mages in many areas bordering China (and the areas controlled by the Jin dynasty) still submit to the Chinese bureaucracy on this matter. In other areas, such as Koryo and Nihon, native ministries inspired by (but distinct from) the Chinese model exist. Elsewhere, the more fluid rules of vain and casual magic functioning in Europe apply.

The Wu Lung

The most powerful society of wizards in the Middle Kingdom at the time of **Blood & Silk** is the Wu Lung, the so-called Dragon Wizards. These ancient mages control the Ministry of Works itself, having successfully maneuvered the Chinese consensus to make them the arbiters of casual and vain magics. They practice a magical style focused on complex rituals and generally surround themselves with aids and lackeys, seeing themselves as the top of the political and supernatural food chain in the Middle Kingdom.

The Dragon Wizards of this time have two separate goals: the maintenance of the ministry and the pursuit of their own agendas. To maintain the bureaucracy and rituals that makes them the arbiters of consensus, the Wu Lung cooperate across China. Young disciples often serve time as ministry agents, looking for unregistered magicians or updating records of "proper" mages. The upper echelons of the society run the ministry itself.

After centuries of dynastic change, the Dragon Wizards see their ministry as largely separate from and superior to any mortal imperial leadership. While they still require a reigning emperor to renew the ritual periodically, the Wu Lung hardly care who does so. The current divided state of China appears to them to be just another dynastic shift; both the Song and the Jin accept the ministry, and that's all that matters.

When it comes to their personal agendas, the Wu Lung's pretense at cooperation largely evaporates. Individual Dragon Wizards plot against each other with highly complex schemes and move against other magicians with the same precision. Wan Kuei, Xiong Ren and other *shen* are occasionally useful tools in these battles. A Dragon Wizard and unliving mandarin may

find each other useful for a few decades and then part ways — each feeling he manipulated the other.

For more information on the Wu Lung, see **The Sorcerers Crusade Companion**.

Tian Zunei, Dread Examiner of the Wu Lung

Tian, a powerful chi'n ta living near the old capital of Changan, is obsessed with the harvesting of certain Yomi-tainted souls. He intends to use these in a grand ritual to acquire part of the Thousand Hells for his own use.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 5, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 5, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 4, Awareness 3, Enigmas 4, Etiquette 4, Instruction 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 3, Leadership 3, Meditation 3, Occult 5, Research 5, Subterfuge 4

Spheres: Forces 3, Life 2, Matter 3, Spirit 4

Arete: 5, **Willpower:** 9, **Quintessence:** 8

Other Lightning People

The Wu Lung are far from the only magicians in Asia at the time of **Blood & Silk**. A variety of wise women, tribal shamans and ancient wizards litter the supernatural landscape, although they are never truly numerous. Some are capable of minor blessings and curses, while others can wield spectacular effects on par with the Dragon Wizards. With rare exceptions, such as the (supposedly) Yomi-tainted wise-women of the Wu-Keng, these magi do not belong to large-scale societies and follow the principals of their own system of belief. Most register with the Ministry of Works and pursue their own isolated goals. They deal with the Hungry Dead and other *shen* when the need arises, although rarely on anything like an equal footing. Most are either reverential (using their skills to honor deceased ancestors and nature spirits or to appease the Hungry Dead) or confrontational (trapping spirits for their own uses).

The Sorcerers Crusade Companion has more information on mages in the Middle Kingdom, although set at a later date.

Wraiths

Assuming she isn't bound for Yomi, when a mortal dies the Hun and P'o go their separate ways, reaching Heaven and fading into the oblivion of the deep Yin World, respectively. For a minority, however, the two souls remain together in the Yin World and the departed becomes a ghost. Such a state usually reflects some lingering attachment to life and identity, often on par with the obsessions that force Wan Kuei out of Yomi to take the Second Breath. Ghosts are not vampires, however: They have no physical selves and live entirely in the Yin World. They can observe and affect the physical Middle Kingdom, and physical beings — both mortal and *shen* — can affect them. Mortals influence ghosts indirectly, through offerings and rituals that honor them (or inauspicious acts that anger them), but many *shen* can see ghosts and enter their world.

Doing so, however, can be risky indeed.

The Yellow Springs: Empire of the Dead

Throughout much of the Yin World associated with the Middle Kingdom, a single empire holds sway. Qin Shihuangdi, the first Emperor of China, spent much of his adult life in the pursuit of immortality. He failed to find it anywhere in the living world, despite an exhaustive search and vigorous persecution of everything he thought might help. (Elder Wan Kuei still remember the pyres built to burn their *wu*-mates alive, the stakes set out to greet the sun and all the other torments of the time.) In his terminal decline, he turned to study of the afterlife. Assisted by a motley crew of magicians, west-facing Wan Kuei and other advisors, he succeeded in transferring his own soul and a great many guardians and servants into the Yin World.

Chinese tradition refers to the Yin World as the Yellow Springs, the wells underneath the earth where the dead gather. When he arrived there, Qin Shihuangdi adopted the new name Yu Huang and set about building a new empire. It took him centuries, but he and his Imperial Guard had centuries to spend. His living advisors had helped him create a small army by working special rites on the terra cotta statues set to guard his tomb; when he died, they emerged as active souls with distinctive powers and formidable raw strength. The Imperial Guard became the nucleus of his empire. Yu Huang declared himself emperor of all the lands of the dead, master of his new Jade Empire, and proceeded to turn declaration into reality.

The Jade Empire covered all of the Chinese lands of the Yin World by the end of the Han dynasty. Yu Huang took great satisfaction in continuing to hold his empire intact while the living dynasty that had displaced him crumbled. In the centuries that followed, the Jade Empire continued to grow, to take over communities of the dead who came from other nations. Chinese ghosts received generally careful attention from Yu Huang, since he wanted to rule them, not destroy them. The ghosts of the Conquered Territories fared worse: To Yu Huang they were (and still are) so much raw material for his loyal servants to soulforge.

Yu Huang's greatest strength is probably his aura of invulnerability. During the Han period, when he was still laying the foundations for his Jade Empire, an unparalleled threat faced the entire Yin World: an invasion from Yomi. The Yama King Lung Wang came out of Hell to make the land of the dead his own, and it seemed that no one could stand against him. The Imperial Guard fared better than most, but even they could only slow him down. Yu Huang could do

more. Armed with a great sword of jade, he faced the Yama King in single combat deep in the raging Tempest of the Yin World and emerged victorious. This triumph is still lauded and studied by the dead — and the Wan Kuei.

Yu Huang set about building a new palace, a Jade Palace to the rule the Jade Empire, in the Tempest. He also authorized the Great Imperial Highway to connect the new palace with the old one in Changan's Mirror Lands and followed that with an artificial hell called Ti Yu. It stands on a huge rocky outcropping protruding from Yomi into the Yin World. There, Yu Huang can arrange for souls to face eternal torment without losing control of them to the Yama Kings. (See **Doomslayers: Into the Labyrinth** and **The Thousand Hells** for complementary portrayals of the Yomi World, the realms beneath the Jade Empire.)

The Conquered Territories — foreign lands brought under Yu Huang's rule — now stretch from Tibet to Japan, from Siberia to Annam, and have for centuries. Revolts break out periodically — three Great Revolts have posed serious challenges to Yu Huang's rule, along with scores of less significant ones. So far, Yu Huang has managed to regain control each time. There are plentiful enclaves in the Conquered Territories that exist largely free of his rule, however. By remaining hidden and fostering alliances with Yin-aspected Wan Kuei, these free ghosts manage to survive and honor their own traditions. The greatest of these enclaves exist in Nihon, including Kamakura, the seat of the shogunate (described in the Appendix, see p. 165).



Species of the Dead

The spirits of the departed come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Most appear as wraithly versions of their living selves; made of Yin matter, they still seem like farmers, soldiers and kings, usually dressed in ways appropriate to the time of their deaths. But wraiths are made from a form of Yin, and some of the dead learn to shape that material in many ways. Some ghosts appear very inhuman, either because of their savage nature (such as the mindless *kuei*) or because others have reshaped them to serve some inhuman function. In fact, ghosts are even "forged" into White Jade, a ghostly material used for many functions in the Yin World. The conquered dead of the Conquered Territories are often fodder for the forges.

Those ghosts who do not suffer such an abysmal fate usually organize themselves into

extended families. Kinship relations from life survive in death, and distant cousins become close allies in the Yellow Springs. Beside the imperial bureaucracy, these families are the main social structure of the afterlife. Confucian sentiments about filial piety strengthen the families, and various forms of ancestor worship allow the living to aid their deceased kin in the afterlife.

Chinese families are in a much better position than foreigners and are able to rise to positions of prominence and influence in the empire. For example, the Qieming family currently enjoys a virtual stranglehold on the ranks of the Imperial Censors in the area of Yellow Springs bordering on Linan. The Censors are responsible for keeping track of new arrivals to the Yin World, and the Qieming have an understanding with some local Wan Kuei to allow for easier access in exchange for payments of jade or various favors. Nihonjin and other "foreign" families are less lucky, but they too exist, often as the underpinnings of anti-Chinese resistance.

Pages 214-216 of **Kindred of the East** detail several types of ghosts from the Middle Kingdom. These are still viable in the **Blood & Silk** era. Page 217 of that book also summarizes the basic abilities of wraiths, for those who do not want to use the full rules available in **Wraith: The Oblivion**.

Wan Kuei and the Yellow Springs

Yu Huang does not approve of the Wan Kuei. While he lived, many of them challenged his authority and ideas. Now, those skilled in the ways of Yin have a frustrating ability to come and go through the empire. The Jade Emperor does not like those who flout his authority.

The Jade Censors are responsible for regulating the Ten Thousand Demons' access to the Jade Kingdom. Wan Kuei who wish to travel the Yellow Springs legally must petition a Censor and receive proper documentation. In most areas, the proper way to do this is to enter the Yin World through a powerful Yin-aspected dragon nest (such areas are monitored by the Censors). The applicant must then seek permission and pay a variable quantity of jade. Ease of access varies wildly from area to area and from Censor to Censor. Some have longstanding arrangements with well placed Wan Kuei — especially Bone Dancer mandarins — and grant access to those who come with a recommendation from those elders. Others apply a harsh egalitarianism and insist that the petitioner prove that her journey is necessary. It is, of course, altogether possible to enter the Yellow Springs without permission, but imperial law mandates a death sentence for Wan Kuei traveling without proper papers; the imperial authorities have to catch up with such criminals first, of course.

In the Conquered Territories, the situation is theoretically much harsher. Yu Huang's law demands an imperial escort accompany any Wan Kuei in these areas of the Yellow Springs, and the Jade Censors grant very few permissions. The reality, however, is that imperial authority is less secure here than in China. Wan Kuei who deal with local wraiths regularly slip into the land of the dead without drawing attention to themselves.

Wan Kuei also have another way to deal with ghosts without risking imperial ire. Using their Ghostsight and spirit speech abilities, most Wan Kuei can communicate with ghosts who lurk near the living realm without themselves entering the Yellow Springs. This communication, while somewhat frowned upon, is not an imperial crime. Most Wan Kuei who deal with the Yin World do so in this way, unless they truly must access the Springs themselves. Note also that, much as he would like them to, Yu Huang's laws do not apply to the other Yin Realms.

Residents of the Yellow Springs

Qieming Peng, Third Censor of Linan

The imperial official responsible for granting Wan Kuei access through an important dragon nest west of the capital city, Peng is happy to make himself rich with jade by accepting bribes from whoever wishes access.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 4, Etiquette 3, Intimidation 3, Investigation 3, Law 2, Leadership 3, Linguistics 3, Melee 2, Politics 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 4

Arcanoi: Lifeweb 5, Way of the Artisan 4, Way of the Farmer 3, Way of the Merchant 5, Way of the Soul 3

Corpus: 6, **Willpower:** 7, **Pathos:** 9

Ishihiro, Rebel of the Nihonjin Afterlife

One of many Nihonjin ghosts who dream of expelling Yu Huang's occupying forces, Ishihiro is gathering like-minded wraiths into a rebel band. He hopes to recruit Nihonjin gaki to his cause, as well.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 2, Leadership 3, Melee 3, Politics 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 2

Arcanoi: Argos 4, Pandemonium 3, Way of the Farmer 3

Corpus: 5, **Willpower:** 5, **Pathos:** 5

Mortals and Demon Hunters

The *shen* do not rule the night unopposed. Mortal men and women can and do resist the predations of Wan Kuei, the rages of Xiong Ren and the whims of ghosts and Shinma. Most commonly, humans deal with *shen* through ritual. They honor their ancestors, they have a care to avoid a cursed temple or forest, they pray to the gods or spirits of the area. These are not hollow rituals — Xiong Ren and Shinma take such respect very seriously and as indications of which humans deserve their protection and which deserve their ire. Ghosts derive direct sustenance from many of these actions, feeding off the emotions of those who pay their respects and gaining material benefit from items left for their use. Even the Wan Kuei see respect from mortals as proper, and it can curb excessive feeding or violent outbursts.

These daily rituals and behaviors do not entail a direct understanding of the *shen*, however. The farmers in a village may know that local spirits or gods inhabit a mountaintop and expect respect from the humans who cultivate the land it overlooks. They do not know that the mountaintop is a Yang-aspected dragon nest guarded by a Thrashing Dragon or a Hakken.

When humans need a more direct or complex interaction with the supernatural, they usually turn to a monk or priest (or sometimes a wise-woman or shaman, depending on the area). These men and women of faith usually have a better understanding of the *shen* and their behavior. They will realize that a new rice paddy has disrupted the flow of Chi and angered the local spirits, for example. In general, it is knowledge of proper behavior, not supernatural power, that enables these holy men and women to act. Some do have access to special abilities, however.

True Faith

While True Faith is a rarity in the modern day, it is considerably more common during the **Blood & Silk** era. True Faith is detailed on p. 272 of **Vampire: The Masquerade** and on pp. 143-144 of **Kindred of the East**. However, Faith ratings are fairly common among monks, priests and pious lay persons. While the average rating is low, *shen* must still tread carefully around the holy. Also, in the Middle Kingdom, those with True Faith are often quite assertive in their beliefs, at least when dealing with unrighteous beings like Wan Kuei. It is the shame of the fallen Princes of the Earth that those who once ruled as sage-kings can now be chased shrieking from a neighborhood by a pious old woman armed with nothing but a set of prayer beads. Keep in mind that being banished by someone with True Faith constitutes an act of blindness for a vampire of any Dharma.



The Shih

Beyond the abilities of a local priest exist the Shih, an ancient order of demon hunters. The Shih trace their origins back to Yi, the Excellent Archer, who imposed the curse of sun-rot on the Wan Kuei. Once, the Shih even stood as an army of demon hunters, but this led to corruption and failure. For the last two millennia, the Shih has been a mendicant order. Lone demon hunters wander across the Middle Kingdom, training one or two disciples and acting against *shen* who step out of line.

The Shih are not fanatical inquisitors. Instead, they act only against *shen* whom they feel have overstepped their bounds. Cannibalistic *chih-mei* and raging *kuei* ghosts who somehow affect the mortal realm are common prey. More insidious evils — such as the Scarlet Screens of Wan Kuei or the plots of the Yama Kings — are largely beyond their purview. If such activities come to their attention, however, they will act.

The Shih sense the turning of the Age. For some, the slow slip into the Fifth Age is a great defeat for an order bent on protecting humanity from monstrous attacks. Reports of demon hunters committing suicide — either in quiet isolation or by attacking overwhelming odds — have surfaced among the order and in the courts of the *shen*. Most Shih, however, see the change of Ages as another challenge they must face — they fear that the Wan Kuei and Xiong Ren will go mad in the years to come and are watching them closely. A good number of Shih have taken on this special duty, observing an area of supernatural activity and reporting their findings to others. Whereas a century ago, a Shih might occasionally wander into a Wan Kuei's territory, now most ancestors have at least one demon hunter hanging around taking notes. Lashing out at these watchers only tends to attract more of them, so most *shen* elders do their best to guard their secrets from prying eyes and hope the Shih will wander off eventually.

Shih Abilities

Shih are all fearsome, if mortal, warriors. In game terms, they all have Melee, Martial Arts and Occult of 4, at least. Watchers have similarly high observation Abilities. The Shih can also tap their Chi through the use of arts known as Qiao (or Bridges). A simple way to represent the Qiao is to give Shih the three or four dots in Wan Kuei Chi or Soul Disciplines; they may also have a single dot in Black Wind or Iron Mountain. **Kindred of the East**, p. 217, provides other guidelines.

Much more complete information on the Shih, and complete rules for their Qiao, appears in **World of Darkness: Demon Hunter X**.

Barbarians and Foreigners

At the time of **Blood & Silk**, the Wan Kuei and their fellow *shen* can exist under the illusion that they stand alone in the supernatural landscape. There are stories of barbarian vampires and other Night People who live in the wild lands far to the west, but actual contact is rare. In India, actual intermingling occurs, but that is a border area seen as less than civilized by most "proper" Wan Kuei. Occasional visitors do pop up, but they are oddities from foreign lands, nothing more.

This delusion of isolation cannot last, of course. The rise of the Mongol Empire in the years to come will spread the *shen* across the Old World. The countervailing rise in European fortunes during the Renaissance will bring Cainites and others into Asia in increasing numbers. Conflict (and even some cooperation) is inevitable.

Most of the Wan Kuei greet contact with such "debased" creatures as highly inauspicious (and a sign of the Fifth Age), but for Storytellers, such encounters are rich with potential. This section provides you with an overview of East-West contact (the framework for supernatural encounters) and notes on the supernaturals likely to journey to the Middle Kingdom in the twilight of the Fourth Age. This section extends its focus forward in time from the basic **Blood & Silk** date of 1197 CE both because the majority of East-West contact occurs after that time and to make the section more useful for Storytellers of **Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade**, which deals with the Renaissance.

Contact with the West

The Middle Kingdom has never stood in splendid isolation, removed from all contact with the outside world. Merchants, missionaries and other travelers crossed the interior wilderness of Asia and made their way by sea around the continent. Popular awareness of these contacts varied, from total disregard to widespread fascination; in some ages, almost all knowledge of the world beyond the mountains and deserts disappeared, while in others, it was the talk of courts and public squares everywhere.

From the Beginning

Most contacts between Europe and China (and the rest of the Middle Kingdom) took place at one or more removes. At the height of the Roman Empire and the Han dynasty, the easternmost marches controlled by Rome lay only a few hundred miles from the westernmost Chinese outposts. Throughout most of history, however, goods and information moved through the hands of intermediaries, particularly the Turkic and other nomadic peoples of inner Asia. Greeks and Romans knew, for instance, that silk came from some eastern land but knew nothing of how anyone made it and nothing about the people who practiced such mysterious arts.

Even the names classical and medieval European scholars applied to distant lands came filtered through multiple languages and lacked any real context. "Seres," "Sera" and "Sina" appear in the chronicles of Pliny the Elder, Ptolemy and other scholars of the first few centuries of the Christian era. Even the linguistic roots of "Seres" and "Sera" are obscure. "Sina" can be traced clearly from the Chinese. The subjects of the Qin dynasty referred to themselves as *Qin-jen*, the people of Qin. The name passed across Asia as "Cina" to become "Sina" in the hands of European writers. (Centuries later, Chinese translators of Buddhist documents from India failed to recognize its origins in their own language and rendered it as "Chih-na.") In 630 CE, a Byzantine author named Theophylactos of Simocatta wrote an account of "Taugast" containing details that can be confirmed as actual events of Chinese history and details of Chinese geography. Nobody realized that Taugast was the same place as Seres or Sina. The name may come from that of a nomadic royal family as filtered through Turkish or may come from somewhere else altogether. For the next 700 years, Theophylactos' account was the most reliable available in the West.

Chinese scholars learned more about Roman society and its successors. They filtered it all, however, through the firm conviction that China was the center of the universe and that no barbarian kingdom could challenge its supremacy. Anything worthwhile in the outer lands must have come from China at some point; by definition there could be no fundamental innovation among those so far removed from the center of All Under Heaven. The name "Da Qin" somehow attached itself to the general idea of a distant barbarian kingdom, along with the names "Li-kan" and "Fu-lin." Chinese writers didn't distinguish between them; various accounts suggest stories of the Eastern Roman Empire and various successor states.

Ideas in art and technology moved independently of knowledge about distant lands. Paper, spices, bridge-building techniques and many more skills gradually ended up in the West, while Hellenistic art styles passed through India and eventually influenced Chinese schools of design.

The Dark Ages: Monks and Khans

It is the rise of the Mongols, initiated by their first great ruler Genghis Khan in the early years of the 13th century, that launches a new era of East-West contact. The Mongols move into China (and eventually conquer it all), but also move west. Under Ogodei Khan, Genghis' son and successor, the Mongols move into the Middle East and Eastern Europe. They turn back from Vienna in 1241 not because of European resistance, but because Ogodei's death forces them to fall back and deal with matters of succession. Obviously, Europe can be oblivious to the East no longer.

Who Knows, Who Cares

Always keep in mind that the vast majority of Wan Kuei and other *shen* know little and care less about the affairs of their Western counterparts. The world is large, and supernatural beings are few, and they all have plenty to occupy them close to hand. Journeys of thousands of miles, only to confront strange creatures with bizarre ideas, hold little appeal to beings who might live forever, if they're careful. Risk-taking in general does not fascinate most vampires, of any sort. Nor does dealing with great uncertainty and confusion, and every encounter between the vampires of both continents brings plenty of both.

Players must work to separate what they know from what their characters probably know. The slow acquisition of knowledge and the separation of truth from error should be major themes of a chronicle concerned with interactions among the different sorts of vampire. The mystery all goes away if players point to this and other books and spout off statistics. Characters who focus on the social (and mental and physical, for that matter) aspects of contact give up many of the regular concerns of their kinds. They remove themselves from many usual factional disputes and personal pastimes for the sake of knowledge and exploitable opportunities. Such characters are unusual in every era.

In 1245, Pope Innocent IV sends a Franciscan monk, Giovanni de Plano Carpini, to the court of the Mongol Khan. Giovanni travels with two fellow Franciscans, Lawrence of Portugal and Benedict of Poland, and carries two papal bulls. One explains Christianity to the Khan and invites him to convert, the other points out the wicked folly of making wars on other nations and commands the Khan to cease. Guyuk Khan (Ogodei's successor) responds with something short of delighted acceptance, telling Carpini that Mongol conquest is effectively God's will — if not, how could it occur? — and invites the Pope to submit.

The Pope finds the Franciscans' reports discouraging and alarming. In 1247, he sends a new mission under the Dominican Ascelin. Ascelin comes close to execution for insubordination but wins rescue and support from Aljigiday, an emissary from the Great Khan. In the years since meeting Giovanni, Guyuk Khan realized the importance of working with Europeans against their common Muslim antagonists. Unfortunately, by the time Aljigiday meets Ascelin, Guyuk Khan is already dead, on the eve of civil war with his brother Batu. So Aljigiday lacks any real authority for his assurance of protection for Christians under Mongol rule and his offer of help in retaking Jerusalem. Batu spends the next few years consolidating his authority and arranging an appropriate puppet Great

Khan. In 1248, another Dominican mission led by Andrew of Longjumeau meets with Guyuk's widow, Ogul Gamish, acting as regent until a new Great Khan can be chosen. She sends a short memorial to the Pope praising peace and demanding tribute, which puts an end to immediate hopes of a new Crusade.

The various missions from the West confirm the existence of substantial Christian communities in the East, even if most of the Christians there are Nestorians and other heretics. Indeed, some high-ranking Mongol officials hold to Christianity, including the chancellors of the Great Khans who receive Giovanni de Plano Carpini and his successors. In addition, several of the monks write widely circulated accounts of their travels, which keep up public interest in the whole matter.

In 1254, Franciscan William of Rubrick leads a new mission east. He meets with Mongke, Guyuk's newly crowned replacement as Great Khan. Mongke and his brother Hulagu listen carefully and not only express an interest in Christianity but commit serious military forces against Arab governments. In 1257, Mongol armies march across Mesopotamia, smashing Assassin strongholds as they go. The next year, the Mongols take Baghdad and crush the Abbasid Caliphate. Hulagu leads his armies through Syria in 1259. Nestorian Christians receive many of the appointments to Mongol-dominated regimes in the conquered lands. The Egyptian Mamelukes stand as the only Muslim government anywhere in the Middle East.

From the Dark Ages to the Renaissance

At that point, Mongol attention turns elsewhere. In 1260, Mongke's younger brother Kublai becomes Great Khan and concentrates on conquests in China. In 1271, Qubilai declares himself Emperor of China and founds the Yuan dynasty; in 1276 the last remnants of the Southern Song dynasty fall before it. Qubilai orders two attempts at invading Japan, in 1274 and 1281. Both fail; the second ends with the ruin of the Mongol fleet in the original *kamikaze*, or divine wind.

Mongol contact with Europe also slows in the late in the 13th century because civil wars tie up troops that would otherwise reinforce and extend Mongol victories in the Middle East. Furthermore, at the times when Mongol leaders call for Western assistance, the recipients are distracted by their own rivalries. Civil wars, dynastic strife and the untimely deaths of key visionaries keep European armies from ever organizing to march in coordination with the Mongols. Edward I of England devotes himself in the 1280s to settling conflicts within Christendom and organizing a new Crusade, but too few of his peers care to join him. By a narrow margin, Islam survives the Eastern assault. In 1291, the newly chosen Oljaitu Khan converts to Islam, and thereafter, the Mongol presence in Persia, Russia and Turkestan becomes increasingly Muslim.

Coming of Age

The Wheel of Ages turns on. In 1197, all but a dedicated lunatic fringe among the Wan Kuei agree that it's the Fourth Age. By 1644, when the first Qing emperor reunites China after a period of civil war, nearly all Wan Kuei agree that the Fifth Age has come. In between, the Age certainly changes, but few Wan Kuei agree on precisely which events matter most.

Events among mortals provide some commonly favored markers, most especially the rise and fall of the Mongols (and their Yuan dynasty). Wan Kuei who support the Mongols see the decline of the empire as a sign of the Age changing thanks to the Khan's loss of Heaven's support. Those who identify themselves with China see the Mongols as Heaven's scourge, smashing failed institutions before themselves collapsing. Many Japanese *gaki* regard the Mongols as a harbinger of the Fifth Age they repelled and feel a lasting bitterness toward their Chinese counterparts for succumbing and dragging the world after them. The *gaki* conviction that they did not earn the Fifth Age taints relationships all the way forward to the modern era.

In 1291, Franciscan John of Monte Corvino sets out to visit the court of Kublai Khan. He spends time in India along the way, and by the time he arrives in 1294, Kublai is already dead. Timur Khan listens carefully, and high-ranking Mongols, including some members of the Great Khan's family, convert to Christianity. Deaths in battle and by disease cut short many of John's gains, however. In 1307, Rome notices John's work and he is appointed Archbishop of Khanbalik. His successors carry on, building a cathedral and establishing secondary churches throughout China. They continue to find more success among Mongols and the very diverse foreign population than among the Chinese themselves.

The early missions do not make it all the way to China. Giovanni and William write about Kitai (the name that provided the source for "Cathay") as a remote and mysterious place, home to the usual collection of facts, misunderstandings, rumors, legends and outright fabrications.

Marco Polo *does* reach China. His father and brother win trading rights with Kublai in the 1260s; in 1271, they set out again, taking with them the 17-year-old Marco. Four years later, they reach Kublai's summer court in Shangdu, north of Beijing. Polo studies the languages of the area and acts as Kublai's emissary on several occasions. After the Song dynasty finally collapses in 1279, Khan business takes Polo throughout China. In 1292, Polo leaves China by sea, returning home to Venice in 1295. He fights on the losing side in a naval battle between Venice and Genoa, and spends several years in jail. In 1298, he dictates his memoirs to a fellow prisoner.

Polo's *Description of the World* vastly multiplies the quantity of Western information about China and provides the first eyewitness accounts. Unfortunately for Polo's reputation, translators and copyists add their own embellishments, burying the amazing truths in falsehoods of all kinds.

In the second half of the 14th century, the medieval contacts trickle off. The collapse of the Mongol Empire removes institutional support for missionaries in China. In 1369, Christians are expelled from Beijing, not to return for more than 200 years. Resurgent Islam cuts off the land routes and makes the sea routes more dangerous. The Mongol Tamerlane wipes out all the major strongholds of Nestorian Christianity in the 1370s. By the end of the century, East and West have again drifted out of contact.

The Chinese send out few travelers and have no equivalent of Polo's chronicle. Living in contact with and then under the authority of the Mongols brings ideas and information to China, however. Merchants and ministers alike circulate in the Middle Kingdom, where native sages study them. Chinese scholars show more interest in material achievements than Western philosophy (which must, by definition, be inferior). Chinese maps of the late 14th century include fairly accurate portrayals of Europe and Africa, with up to 100 European place names.

Heirs of the Blood: Cainites

At the time of **Blood & Silk**, contact between Cainites and Wan Kuei is quite rare. Direct contact between China and Europe is almost non-existent and few vampires are willing to make this arduous journey, even if they somehow know there is a goal worth reaching at the end. Border areas like India and communities along the Silk Road (like Kashi, see p. 167) do see some contact between various types of vampires but not in sufficient quantity to seriously affect the world views of either Cainite princes or Wan Kuei ancestors.

We Never Lost Them

The Gangrel and Ravnos include lines who've had contact with Wan Kuei for millennia. When contact with the West begins, most Wan Kuei don't think to connect the sudden influx of Westerners with the already-known degenerate, Dharma-less vampires. Conversely, few Cainites meeting Cathayans for the first time think to ask their semi-barbaric cousins on the fringes of European society, "So, do you know anything about these strange outsiders?" Thus, all sides miss opportunities to establish context early on.

There is no reason why a few hardy souls couldn't make the journey for the purposes of a truly global chronicle, however. Although the natures of Cainites and Wan Kuei are significantly different, caution on the part of a traveler can hide these distinctions. After all, if it gets to the point where a vampire reveals that he burns in the sun instead of rotting, he probably has more pressing problems than culture shock.

Likely candidates for journeys into foreign lands are scholars and refugees. Cainites and Wan Kuei have more than enough of both, from curious Cappadocians to accused *akuma* seeking refuge. They all can end up in the territory of a wholly other type of vampire, but they must still deal with the barriers to understanding.

The View From the East

From a Wan Kuei perspective, Cainites are almost by definition lesser creatures. Vampires are not immune to the cultural chauvinism of the era, and they look down on foreigners. The Wan Kuei focus on Dharma also creates a gulf between them and the Cainites. Other philosophies — be they Cainite Roads or mortal faiths — are difficult to accept, and European attempts at conversion only make matters worse. As far as most Asian vampires are concerned, their Western "cousins" practice debased or nonsensical beliefs that have no hope of staving off Yomi; hence, they must be degenerates, at best equivalent to *hin*.

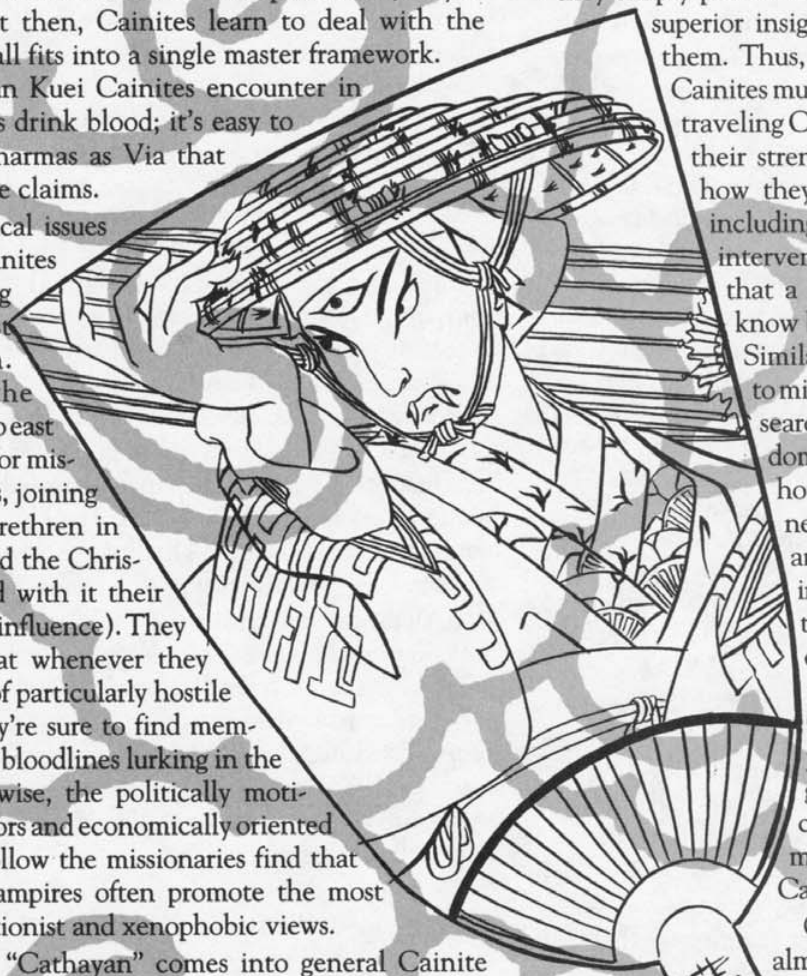
Meetings with Western Cainites only confirm these impressions. The first European Cainites most Wan Kuei meet are Cappadocians, Lasombra and Salubri. The Cappadocians resemble poor imitations of the Bone Dancers. The Lasombra seem like what the Resplendent Cranes might be if they wallowed in debased doctrinal confusion for a few centuries. The Salubri remind Wan Kuei of the hated Zao-lot and are obviously fit only for extermination. Some individual Wan Kuei respond more favorably and quickly learn the wisdom of keeping their interests concealed. Productive exchanges of information occur mostly on the fringes of the courts and in the nebulous border regions no court controls very thoroughly.

Contacts with some militant Assamites make the Kin-jin seem even worse, confirming Wan Kuei fears about Cainite destructiveness and ambition. The ancestors of the western courts set aside their grievances with the Mongols long enough to provide enthusiastic support for attacks on the Middle East. Thus, Mongke and Hulagu lead armies that enjoy supernatural intervention as well as mundane success on the battlefield.

In the late 13th and early 14th centuries, the Wan Kuei meet more of the Cainite clans. Most Wan Kuei couldn't care less about the details and have no interest in clans any more than they have interest in the number of stripes on this variety of wasp versus that variety. Wan Kuei scholars catalog the range of demonstrated Disciplines and theorize about the true origin of the Cainites. (Most theories attribute the curse of vampirism to Zao-lot.) A handful probe more closely, but they generalize from limited data and produce conflicting maps of the bloodlines.

The View From the West

To the childer of Caine, the Wan Kuei pose no particular mysteries. It's a matter of common knowledge that the clans scattered after the fall of the Second City. Obviously, some of the Fourth Generation wandered very far indeed and developed their own bloodlines with characteristic Disciplines. No Cainite who's seen advanced Vicissitude in action finds the Godbody of Metal or the Godbody of Wood particularly startling. Dragon Tear resembles Valeren or even a specialized form of Auspex. So it goes with the other Disciplines: Yes, they're unfamiliar, but then, Cainites learn to deal with the unfamiliar. It all fits into a single master framework. Nearly all Wan Kuei Cainites encounter in these centuries drink blood; it's easy to dismiss the Dharmas as Via that make grandiose claims.



It is practical issues that worry Cainites encountering their long-lost Eastern kin. Most of the Cainites who go east early on do so for missionary reasons, joining their mortal brethren in efforts to spread the Christian faith (and with it their own spheres of influence). They soon learn that whenever they find enclaves of particularly hostile resistance, they're sure to find members of the lost bloodlines lurking in the shadows. Likewise, the politically motivated negotiators and economically oriented dealers who follow the missionaries find that the Eastern vampires often promote the most zealously isolationist and xenophobic views.

The term "Cathayan" comes into general Cainite usage in the 1270s as a convenient label for all the Eastern vampires. Crusading vampires, especially Brujah, Toreador and Ventrue militants, think that the Cathayans should get a single chance to convert or be destroyed. Schemers among the Furores think the Cathayans could make valuable allies in the struggle against elders. (They're wrong, as all of the Dharmas inculcate a respect for age and achievement and a lack of respect for noisy youngsters.) Commercially minded vampires, especially the ignoble, economically oriented Ventrue (who will become the main clan in centuries to come), see the Cathayans as exploitable targets of trade. (They're wrong, too; few Cathayans wish to accept anything but tribute or to give anything but advice.) Elders fear the Cathayans as they fear all novelty and seek to use the Cathayans as weapons in the War of Ages. Few Wan Kuei oblige.

Spanning the Chasm

So many factors contribute to antipathy between Cainites and Wan Kuei. Must all encounters between them therefore end in egotism and death? No. Under various circumstances, Kindred of the East and the West can coexist for a while, or even indefinitely.

Both communities of vampires include scholars, for whom the pursuit of knowledge takes priority over conquest and the assertion of kingly prerogatives. Vampiric scholars seldom act for the sheer joy of knowing, of course — they simply plan to assert their own claims based on superior insight and the advantages it gives them. Thus, a Devil-Tiger who believes all Cainites must be destroyed allies herself with traveling Cainites for years on end, learning their strengths and weaknesses by seeing how they behave in various situations, including what sorts of crises require her intervention. It's all tactical intelligence that a sensible general would wish to know before advancing on the enemy. Similarly, a Thousand Whispers seeks to mingle undetected among Cainites, searching out whatever scraps of wisdom the ignorant Westerners might horde. Or a Bone Dancer finds the necromancers and death magicians among the Cainites particularly interesting and adopts an approach to study ranging anywhere from concealed observation to open trading of lore. Or a Resplendent Crane decides that her duties as judge require the fullest investigation of the guilty party's circumstances and become enmeshed in the concentric circles of Cainite society.

Only the Thrashing Dragons are almost guaranteed to find nothing of interest in the Cainite condition.

Many factions among Cainites also have reason to pursue study rather than confrontation, at least for the time being. Cappadocians and (later) Giovanni, if they gain any glimpse of the vistas of grave and spirit lore the Bone Dancers possess, feel a pull to the East like a moth to the flame. Cainite aristocrats of Ventrue, Lasombra, Toreador and Tzimisce descent all study the means by which the Wan Kuei exert their authority and the

Salubri

Saulot's clan deserves special mention. With the purges of their clan at the hands of the Tremere, the Salubri are very likely candidates to flee east. In fact, Assamite allies of the clan have been moving small numbers to distant "Taugast" (their term for the Middle Kingdom) for some time. Unfortunately, the history (or myth) of Saulot's dealings with Xue means they have to be very cautious on Asian soil. By decree of many ancestors, none of his offspring ever receive any hospitality from Wan Kuei except for the offer of a quick death. In practice, actual Wan Kuei decisions seldom conform entirely to proclaimed law.

Salubri receive cold but essentially courteous welcome from Wan Kuei interested in studying the diffusion of their lore. Salubri Disciplines are fascinating perversions (or transformations) of the Wan Kuei heritage, so scholarly inclined Hungry Dead who face north or west find much of interest. So do center-facing Wan Kuei who seek to define their paths to enlightenment partly in contrast with what they're not choosing to incorporate. In turn, Salubri who show themselves willing to learn receive assistance in understanding the traditions which their founder so badly misunderstood at key points. Rumor says that one or more Salubri actually awakened their Hun and P'o to become full-fledged Wan Kuei; however, details somehow always dissolve into "I heard it from the friend of a *wu*-mate...."

intellectual legacy of debate over theory and practice of rulership. To Brujah who cling to the old tradition of philosopher-kings, the ancient depths of Wan Kuei lore seem almost irresistible. Devout Christians (and Muslims, Jews and pagans) who suffer from the Curse of Caine regard the Wan Kuei as a missionary challenge, and while some launch their missions in holy zeal and self-righteous ignorance, others seek to study the beliefs and practices they want to change. Artists of every clan examine the styles of their distant cousins in search of fresh inspirations.

Most vampires on both sides realize that their alliances must be contingent and vulnerable. No matter how much trust they profess, imperatives deeper and older than this particular partnership may require action. There's usually nothing personal in it; it's just that when the Blood or Dharma demands action, the friendly stranger may have to die. A vampire or Cainite who realizes he's revealed the wrong secret or discovers that his study partner has an end he cannot condone can and does act. In addition, frenzy, fire soul, Rötschreck, shadow soul and other vampiric disorders may drive partners to conflict, even if their conscious wills remain in harmony.

A vampire's age makes it no more or less likely that he will reach out to the other kind. Neonates and Running Monkeys often explore every interesting lead, but then, others turn to tradition and conservatism as a way of keeping their mental balance after a painful and unexpected change of condition. Ancillae and jina secure in their own situation turn outward in search of information they could use to advantage in the endless night struggle for power. They may just as easily decide that the outsiders threaten all the mature vampires have worked for and, hence, deserve nothing but immediate destruction. Elders and mandarins seek advantage in mastery of the outsiders or simply to understand them. Like their younger cousins, however, they can also find the unfamiliar merely threatening.

Mages

As the European Dark Ages give way to the Renaissance, mages from the West arrive in the Middle Kingdom in far greater numbers. The rise of the Order of Reason and the Nine Traditions creates an increasingly global framework of magical struggle, one that slowly draws in the Middle Kingdom's own magi.

The Order of Reason

When Westerners travel to the Middle Kingdom in groups larger than a handful of monks, the Order of Reason joins the unawakened majority. The Cabal of Pure Thought comes to preach, following the path blazed by men like Giovanni de Plano Carpini and deepened by men like Matteo Ricci. The Celestial Masters come to study the lore of other cultures and to examine unfamiliar skies. The Craftmasons come to exchange knowledge. The High Guild comes in pursuit of wealth. The Hippocratic Circle comes to learn and teach. The Void Seekers come because there are new lands and seas.

All the factions within the Order soon find the Middle Kingdom troublesome. They don't see themselves as magicians (and aren't, on any level except game mechanics), so it never occurs to them that the Ministry of Works' ban on unregistered magicians would apply to them (see p. 148). All the Daedalians know is that they have unusually bad luck of many sorts until they register as foreigners and agree to show appropriate submission.

Submission doesn't come easily to most Daedalians and doesn't come at all to some. The traditional Chinese gesture of respect to the emperor is the kowtow. The submitting individual kneels on the floor before the throne. He stretches forward three times and with each prostration he touches his head to the floor three times. The Wu Lung demand just such an act from magicians appearing before the Minister of Works. Gabrielites in particular have no interest in doing this for anyone but a recognized saint; other members of the Order also decline. In some cases they can work out a compromise, given a great deal of delicate negotiation (and, at the Storyteller's discretion, a contest of Manipulation + Etiquette against Ministry of Works officials' Wits + Willpower). When the negotiations work, the foreigners perform a lesser act of submission — going down on one knee, for instance — while ministerial officials record a properly performed kowtow. When negotiations fail, the ministry remains obstinate and nothing but abasement serves.

Most often, the negotiations do go relatively well. The Wu Lung see in the Order of Reason a society of the

Destiny: Ministerial Collapse

The more the Daedaleans get to know the Wu Lung, the less they like them or their methods. By about 1550, the Order's scholars of magical interference are quite sure of the Dragon Wizards' role in "fixing" the consensus. The Order's more fanatical members decide early on that the Chinese Empire must fall and be replaced by a more "progressive" (or even Western) government. (They later decide the same about Japan, when significant trade with it begins.) The Craftmasons and High Guild in particular undertake systematic subversion of what they see as blind superstition through superior engineering and gifts of wealth; later, the Hippocratic Circle plays an important part in undermining popular support for traditions concerned with medicine. The Order of Reason also finds local aid in the form of the Stone People, a loose society of East Asian magi opposed to the Wu Lung's ways and interested in the new "rationalism." More and more, the Order cuts the Dragon Wizards out of the picture.

The end finally comes after the fall of the Ming dynasty in the 17th century. When the Wu Lung ritual falters, the Daedaleans and Five Metal Dragons cooperate to shatter it entirely. The Qing emperors find a Ministry of Works in disarray and choose not to reenact the ancient ritual (or are unable to). The technocratic consensus begins to take hold, and the Wu Lung go further underground.

enlightened bringing order to the barbarian West, just as they have to the Middle Kingdom. The Dragon Wizards act with full confidence that they are in the superior position and that no consensus could ever exist that doesn't accept their form of magic.

The Traditions

The magicians belonging to the Council of the Nine Mystic Traditions generally feel no great interest in the Middle Kingdom. A few of the traditions have active antipathies, whether of their own choosing or not. The Ahl-i-Batin hate the Mongol conquerors who come so close to exterminating Islam and taking with it the cultural framework for their craft. (Few of the Ahl-i-Batin are Muslim in any serious sense, but their work draws on the same traditions that Islam does.) The Chakravanti spring from traditions that the Middle Kingdom frowns on; even where they share common inspirations, the Chakravanti interpret them in ways that horrify Chinese scholars. Some members of the Choeur Céleste find in the Tao another conception of God; many more regard Middle Kingdom religions as more snares and delusions to be overcome.

The Akashic Brotherhood, alone of the Traditions, flourishes within the Middle Kingdom. Younger members of the tradition know little or nothing of the Wan Kuei, while their elders carefully engage in polite exchanges of information and interpretation. The Wan Kuei often feel envy of the heights to which living mages can attain so quickly. The Akashic Brotherhood's common philosophical roots and practices make it easier for Wan Kuei to accept the Brotherhood: different, certainly, but not alien. Akashic scholars disagree on the extent to which the Wan Kuei bear responsibility for erecting and strengthening the Wall; even those who blame the Wan Kuei for it all often favor a "know your enemy" approach.

Garou

The Garou — the European and Near Asian werewolves — do have occasional contact with the Wan Kuei. At the time of **Blood & Silk**, this contact is hardly extensive, but a few of the tribes are more traveled than their Cainite contemporaries and so have run into the Hungry Dead on a few occasions. These encounters become more common as Western contact with Asia grows in the later medieval and Renaissance periods.

Most Garou take a simple approach to the Wan Kuei: If it drinks blood and rots in sunlight, it's a vampire. Vampires violate the natural order of things. The Garou, as guardians of the natural order, destroy vampires. End of story. The Wan Kuei likewise generally take a very simple view of Garou: Ignorant monsters who do not appreciate Heaven's will and who prattle about subsidiary gods and goddesses as primal forces are menaces, to be removed. Those with some knowledge of the Beast Courts know that even the Ferocious People look askance at their Western cousins.

Some Garou and Wan Kuei actually have shared interests. Most particularly, the Warders of Men and east-oriented Wan Kuei meet in the cities and gathering spots of central Asia. Both seek to protect humanity. If they can agree that, as mutual protectors, they should postpone destroying each other, they can enter into some form of collaboration. Of course, if their respective kinds learn of the alliance, both sides face, at best, tense demands for explanation; at worst, immediate death.

Silent Striders sometimes exchange information and even services with south-facing Wan Kuei. Such associations seldom last long; there are too many conflicting assumptions and priorities. Still, Silent Striders traveling through Asia do learn to sense the resonance in the Yin World that marks Wan Kuei passage and to ask (or answer) questions if circumstances allow.

Thrashing Dragons deeply confuse most Garou. The Wan Kuei are obviously dead, yet they participate in so much of life, particularly when in permanent Yang imbalance. Garou who encounter them tend to retreat in confusion or attack in suspicion of some clever Wyrm ploy. Among Wan Kuei, therefore, the shapeshifters have a reputation for enforcing some peculiar code Wan Kuei don't understand about what's "proper" and not for dead souls.

Storytellers wishing to use an occasional Garou should consult the above guidelines for Xiong Ren (all Garou are wolf-changers, like the Hakken). Those wanting to make extensive use of them should consult **Werewolf: The Dark Ages.**



Appendix: Cities of the Dead

If a man take no thought about what is distant,
he will find sorrow near at hand.
— Confucius, *Analects*

The Middle Kingdom at the twilight of the Fourth Age is quite far removed from the life experiences of most **Blood & Silk** Storytellers and players, which can make getting started a little difficult. In order to give Storytellers some additional tools with which to jumpstart a chronicle, this appendix covers some of the major cities in the Middle Kingdom at the time. Wan Kuei are largely urban creatures, and these are some of the centers of their unlives. Any of these locations can be the center of a your chronicle or a port of call during your *wu*'s travels.

Changan (Central China)

The city of Changan, once the imperial capital, is fading graciously. The attention of the Son of Heaven has been drawn away to the southeast, to the city of Linan; Changan waits like a privileged consort of the Imperial City within her high stone walls, hoping to once again draw the eye of the emperor before her beauty fades away.

Liu Bang, the first emperor of the Han dynasty founded the city of Changan (meaning "long peace") in 206 BCE to serve as the capital of his new empire. The citizens of Changan quickly became prosperous; not only were they at the bureaucratic hub of a strong, growing empire, they were also situated near the fertile Yellow River and at the termination of a great trade route that stretched for miles across Asia to Antioch, Baghdad and Alexandria — the fabled Silk Road. Twelve crowded bridges crossed the city's moat, leading to 12 gates through the 40-foot walls. Exotic traders from the West and the East met in Changan's nine hubbub-filled markets, bartering woods, spices, precious metals, gems, medicines and uncountable other trade goods or selling them for coin. As many as two million people lived inside and outside the great walls during the Tang dynasty.

With the end of the Tang in 907 CE, the Silk Road faded in prominence as the warring princes and tribes attacked the merchant caravans to finance their troops. Changan's marketplaces dwindled in number to two; several of the city's gates were permanently closed for lack of use. The gates to the vast Imperial City are also closed; Changan houses no mortal emperor, and the chambers that once sheltered the Son of Heaven grow cold in his absence.

The chambers are not, however, empty. Upon the death of the final Tang ruler, the ancestor of the Yellow Emperor Court took possession of the imperial palace. Mortals no longer pass through the majestic Chengtian Gate into the Imperial City; only the Wan Kuei of the

city and those messengers or supplicants who bear appropriately sealed letters of recommendation may pass the silent guards. While the city slides into quiet decline, the Wan Kuei have greater freedom than ever to live and move about as they wish. The city's wealth was as much curse as boon to the scholars of the Yellow Emperor Court; now, sages and students may spend their nights in study and impenetrable seclusion, untempted by the boisterous sounds of a thriving city, the smell of spiced foods and wine or the lilt of song.

Night People of Changan

Many Wan Kuei left, of course, when the vicissitudes of politics pulled the locus of power elsewhere. Those who remained and those who now travel to the Yellow Emperor Court are dedicated to the acquisition, preservation and proper dissemination of the wisdom and writings of the Wan Kuei. The Yellow Emperor himself, Wang Hongben, and his *wu*-mates in the Golden Jade Society lead the members of his court by diligent example. He has personally recorded commentaries on the *Ki Chuan* and other sacred works; in recent years, he has withdrawn into nearly total seclusion, concentrating on the translation and commentary of a new discovery — an ancient vampiric work written in a primitive style of kaja. In his consuming pursuit of knowledge, Wang Hongben has delegated most of the traditional duties of the ancestor, even the greeting of visiting Wan Kuei, to the eager and industrious jina and mandarins of Changan's other *wu*. His distinguished visitors are, for the most part, understanding — it is the wisdom earned from long study that they have come to the Yellow Emperor Court in search of, after all.

The composition of the court at Changan varies. Students, both those fresh from the Second Breath and those who have come for long periods of study, are organized into temporary *wu*. There are usually three or four student *wu* at any given time. In addition to the Golden Jade Society, there are three prominent *wu* of jina and mandarins who reside in the city: the Amber Wren, the Illustrious Scribes of the Yellow River and the Bronze Pennant. Each of these has the typical duties of instructing young vampires along their Dharmic path and outside responsibilities assigned by the court. Lastly, there are visitors and supplicants from all the lands of the Middle Kingdom, who must seek the approval of the Yellow Emperor before traveling on to entreat the Sages of the Fivefold Way who reside in the Shaolin Monastery — an additional journey of 300 miles to the east, and into Jin-held lands. Many of these are turned back at Changan — some of them having learned what they sought from the sages of Changan, others instructed to seek further enlightenment on their own before troubling the bodhisattvas with unworthy requests.



The Three *Wu*

The members of the Amber Wren *wu* are responsible for overseeing the messengers utilized by the Yellow Emperor Court and for authenticating the tokens brought by those seeking to travel through or visit the court. The court uses a small number of Wan Kuei who have undertaken the Way of the Lone Walker as messengers, in addition to an unusual number of mortal traders and a few dhampyrs. The *wu* has become quite wealthy through the years, as their Scarlet Screen traders enjoy the benefits of safe passage through the White Tiger-controlled lands of the Silk Road. When messengers are in short supply, an Amber Wren student — likely one who has been insolent or inattentive to her studies — may be pressed into service as a messenger.

The Illustrious Scribes of the Yellow River are granted the great responsibility of recopying the scriptures and works of the Wan Kuei for dissemination throughout the Yellow Emperor Court and beyond. When necessary, the members of this *wu* attend to the Sages of the Fivefold Way at Shaolin, to record the bodhisattvas' infrequent sermons. A lucky student who has proven himself diligent may be permitted to accompany his sifu, to care for his brushes and ink and to run errands. The students are more often kept busy perfecting their kaja brushstrokes or, lately, learning to carve precise characters in blocks of wood. The Illustrious Scribes have become enamoured with the concept of block printing, which has been in use by the mortals for three centuries; as a test, they have carved and printed the text of a short book of poems by the Grand Arhat Xue, *Footprints in Blood*. The distribution of this obviously "mass" produced work has provoked heated discussion in courts across the Middle Kingdom.

The Bronze Pennant *wu* is led by the First Oni of the Yellow Emperor Court. The members of this *wu* are truly fearsome; they wield an impressive array of weaponry with deadly skill, are trained in the art of mounted warfare, and are practiced wilderness travelers. Fearful rumors suggest that the Bronze Pennant *wu* even uses hand grenades and rockets. They are commonly Yang aspected, as even the best-trained horses fear the cold flesh of those aspected to Yin. Membership in this *wu* swells in number in times of trouble; those who survive are granted permission to remain with the *wu*, should they so choose.

Rivalries and Dissent

This is the face that Changan presents to outsiders. Beneath the calm exterior, the city simmers with intrigue that might shock those expecting enlightened detachment from Changan's inhabitants. Observant insiders have noticed the Amber Wren *wu's* coffers fairly spilling over since its members have taken over the Yellow Emperor's communications with the other courts. Wu Lishan, Southern Wind of the Amber Wren, has publicly claimed great success in far-flung ocean trading ventures, but the *wu's* detractors claim that the Amber Wren is granting favors and promises that are not its to deliver. The Illustrious Scribes have become the toast of the town for their impassioned defense of their libraries and printing facilities against unknown assailants. Frail-seeming Bone Dancer Tan Xuan alone defended the *wu's* printing blocks, the product of years of work, from a flaming-sword wielding attacker. While not wishing to seem ungrateful for the poems and dinners hosted in their honor, the Illustrious Scribes are beginning to agitate for a full investigation into the attack on their holdings. And finally, the Bronze Pennant *wu* has swollen to a full dozen members, much to the consternation of more diplomatic members of the court. Devil-Tiger Wei Anzang, the First Oni, points impassively to the *wu's* long-standing tradition of allowing Wan Kuei pressed into service to remain with the *wu*; meanwhile, the court begins to wonder just how many martial emergencies Changan could be having.

Dhillika (Northern India)

The fertile shores of the holy Yamana River have been inhabited for millennia. In 736 CE, the Tomar clan of the mighty Rajput family claimed the green hills as their own. They built opulent stone palaces and earthwork fortifications and called their stronghold Lal Kot; among the prizes within Lal Kot's sturdy walls was the Iron Pillar, a relic from the time of Emperor Ashoka, famous for its pristine surface after years of exposure to the elements. They raised a temple to the sun, the Suraj Kund, high above the surrounding countryside on an earthen mound and piped in fresh spring water from the mountains as a sacred offering. Less than a century ago, the Chauhan Rajput took Dhillika and the surrounding territory, pushing the Tomars back into the hilly wilderness. The Chauhans built a fortress of ramparts around their new acquisition and called it Qila Rai Pithora.

It was by no means unusual for the Rajput clans to make war on each other; in fact, that seems to have been the source of their greatest joy. The clans of the Rajput staked a claim to nobility and the right to rule by claiming their common descent from a mythical creature of flame that rose from the sacrificial fire pits of Mount Abu; each bore the name *Agnikula*, "fire family," in honor of their fiery ancestor. The other clans and families of the area (the Rashtrakutas, Pratiharas and Palas) were in no position to dispute the Rajput claim to kingship, having squandered their resources and manpower in decades of internecine fighting. Sweeping over all resistance, the Rajput clans claimed vast tracts of land, set up princedoms and fiefs and proceeded to fight amongst themselves just as their predecessors had done.

The Rajput brought the art of princely war in India to new heights. The meanest of princes took on fabulous titles, recording themselves in court documents as *Majarahadhiraja*, "king of kings." Stylized, poetic insults

issued from luxurious throne rooms, and armies sallied forth in reply. Muslim invaders from the northwest came with astonishing regularity to loot and pillage richly endowed Hindu temples and wealthy Brahman villages — all in the name of religious piety, of course. The invaders were forgotten as soon as they were gone, and the military games would begin again.

Only six years ago, in 1191 CE, the game ended. Muhammad Ghori, a Central Asian prince, brought his armies south through the mountains. He was not interested in carrying home golden statues of heathen gods — he came to build an empire. His armies consisted mainly of lightning-fast cavalry; the Rajput forces sent out in tidy lines and grand regalia to meet the invaders were mercilessly cut down. By the time the quarrelsome princes of the Agnikula perceived the danger, Muhammad had claimed Dhillika and the Chauhan region around it. His forces still occupy the city itself. The invaders have dismantled the Qila Rai Pithora and are building a grand mosque — the first in India — called the Quwwat-ul-Islam Masjid in its place. Adding insult to injury, Qutb-ud-din Aibak, a former slave turned general, has begun construction of a massive sandstone edifice: the Qutb Minar, the Tower of Victory.

The Fiery Patron

The Rajput clans, although as fractious as ever, are not without considerable resources. The story of their heritage is true: The four main clans, the Pariharas, the Chauhans, the Solankis and the Pawars, are, in truth, descended from a creature of fire — a venerable Wan Kuei who is called Pariksit. Decades of meditation on the nature of Yang and drinking in the fiery Chi from sacrificial flames came to culmination when the ancient vampire descended from the mountain suffering from a nearly human need — the desire for kin. There was no shortage of chieftains willing to give their daughters as brides to a being of such obvious power, and so, the Agnikula came to be. Through the intervening centuries, Pariksit has not let his fields lie fallow; the continuing prominence of hot-tempered, highly skilled warriors among his descendants — and a precious few who call upon sorcerous might — is a telltale sign of the presence of dhampyrs. Now fully aware of the seriousness of Ghori's invasion, the Rajput warriors will fight as though possessed to regain their kingdoms.

Pariksit — an elder of the heretical Dharma the Flame of the Rising Phoenix — is incensed by the invasion. The Muslim forces threaten to destroy his grand experiment; some Wan Kuei sages posit that the very existence of such a multitude of descendents leading focused, vibrantly entangled lives might create a reservoir of Yang Chi for Pariksit to tap. The other Wan Kuei in the area have been reluctant to enter the conflict to this point; the Ghori armies are disciplined and dangerous, and what have they to gain from Pariksit's continued prominence? This reticence may change: Pariksit has



made a handsome offer for assistance in defending his children — the Iron Pillar. The Iron Pillar is his possession; although it stands in occupied territory, no other *shen* would dare think to claim it. It is truly a remarkable object; roughly 24 feet tall and 16 inches in diameter at the base. Wrought from the purest iron, the pillar exists so perfectly balanced in composition and shape between Yin and Yang that wind, rain, sun, and time itself have not marred its surface. Pariksit, less interested in philosophies of balance than in the raw power of Yang, cares little for the relic but understands its value.

Dangerous Newcomers

Pariksit is not the only supernatural being with a stake in the invasion. Cainite vampires from the West have long coveted the raided wealth carried north on horseback. The occupation of Dhillika has granted the most ambitious Western blood drinkers the opportunity to grab for that wealth — and power — at the very source. The local Ravnos Cainites, whom Pariksit has long graciously allowed to pluck scraps from his metaphorical table, likely know more about these nighttime invaders than they have chosen to divulge.

There are few Wan Kuei confident enough — or desperate enough — to share territory with the oft-unpredictable Pariksit. Of those few, the Thousand Whispers currently known as Abhrayanti is most tempted to take the risk of acting against the invaders in return for access to the Iron Pillar. Abhrayanti has spent a full decade in her current incarnation, however, and must soon choose a new persona or risk falling from her Dharmic path.

Another newcomer to the area, the Godling Harasekhara, has quietly set up a devotional cult among the lower castes. His followers might best be described at this moment as rabble, but their numbers are steadily growing beneath the notice of both Pariksit and the Muslim invaders. Such a force could prove an unwelcome surprise to either or both sides of the conflict.

Day-to-day life has changed little for the mortal inhabitants of Dhillika. The palaces and temples that the invaders demolish are places the lower castes were not permitted to go. The caste system in force in the Rajput kingdoms had become incredibly orthodox, placing more restrictions on fraternization and occupation than ever before. The lower castes farm, craft, herd — and avoid armies of any stripe.

Kamakura (Eastern Japan)

Nestled between Kamakura Bay and the Kiridoshi cliffs, the city of Kamakura seems peaceful and serene. Underneath its placid surface, however, the city is a balled fist waiting to strike — and that fist belongs to Minamoto-no-Yoritomo.

Yoritomo, Japan's first shogun, settled into Kamakura following the Gempei War. The city was wonderfully situated in terms of defense: Enemies approaching by sea found their entrance to the harbor hampered by the Wakaejima, an artificially constructed island of jagged rock; enemies approaching by land were forced along narrow, winding paths carved from the stone cliffs, in full view of platforms hewn from the cliffside to accommodate Kamakura's defenders. Yoritomo made it clear that he was in Kamakura to stay by relocating his family's ancestral shrine, the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu. The village made way for the Minamoto shogun; Wakamiya Oji, the approach to the Minamoto shrine running straight from Hachimangu to the sea, quickly became the main street of the new city of Kamakura. Samurai, those loyal to Yoritomo and those visiting the city on the shogun's business, worshiped the guardian deity of samurai warriors at the shrine's Shinto and Buddhist ceremonies.

Three years ago, builders completed the main structure of Yoritomo's newest shrine, Yokufuji Temple. Handsomely appointed with ponds, gardens and extensive grounds, the temple was built to provide repose for the souls of fallen warriors. At the temple's dedication, the shogun burned incense in honor of his brother, Minamoto-no-Yoshitsune, and the many others who died at his brother's side, fighting in the northern provinces. In response, the spirit of his brother came to reside in Yokufuji Temple — but not in repose.

The Restless Dead

Yoshitsune's ghost was outraged. His brother, now shogun, had been jealous of Yoshitsune's military victories all through the Gempei War. It was Yoshitsune, not Yoritomo, who drove the Taira family's warriors into the sea, and for this, Yoritomo sent men to kill his brother. They failed. Although he fled to the north with his wife and children, Yoritomo found him and again ordered his death. Yoshitsune gave his wife and children a kind death, then committed seppuku. To find his soul, not five years later, drawn to Yokufuji Temple by his brother's deceit was more than Minamoto-no-Yoshitsune could take. The ghost of Yoshitsune filled the grounds of Yokufuji Temple with unease by dint of his unquenchable anger. Seeking out others among the dead with cause to hate his brother, he gathered to his side dead samurai of several families: Fujikawa, Taira, Yasuda, Minamoto. All of them had died as a result of Yoritomo's jealousy and arrogance. Several of them had been granted the fortune to return to their own bodies.

To gather in this way was dangerous; the growing, palpable aura of darkness surrounding Yokufuji Temple was frightening the local populace, who stepped up their sacrifices in an attempt to appease the angered spirits. More significantly, any large population of Japanese wraiths might draw the attention of the Jade Emperor of the Yellow Springs. Lastly, this "rebellion of the dead" could not fail to catch the eye of the shogun's own unliving champions.

The *gaki* of Japan's Bishamon *uji* split violently over the Gempei War and its outcome. Like the mortal samurai, the Bishamon fought on both sides of the conflict, facing each other on darkened, blood-slicked fields after

the human armies were forced to rest by the coming of night. To the Bishamon samurai aligned with the Taira, Minamoto-no-Yoritomo is a bad seed that would have been culled in childhood but for the mercy of the Taira family; for such a man to commit these dishonorable acts while bearing the title of shogun is a disgrace to the entire Japanese empire. To those aligned with the Minamoto, Yoritomo is the inheritor of a legacy of military conquest who has proved his strength and capability by attaining his current position. The shogun must be ruthless in defense of the empire.

All unknowing, Yoritomo has gathered a supernatural guard around Kamakura — a full *wu* of his Bishamon supporters. Under the leadership of Miura Yasutami, the Blackest Night *wu* has sworn itself to protect the shogun from his otherworldly enemies. They keep to the shadows out of necessity, but they have carefully placed retainers in Yoritomo's entourage. And at night, of course, the shogun is never out of their sight. The guardian *wu* has skirmished with Yoshitsune's rebellious followers, but both sides chose the option of surviving to fight another night, having gained valuable information about the enemy. Yoritomo's vampire defenders cannot entirely protect him from his ghostly harassers — even with Ghostsight, the skilled wraiths are difficult to detect.

Nightmares of the Shogun

For Yoritomo, the pressure is growing. The great supernatural presence around him is becoming impossible to ignore. Voices come to him in the night, murmuring curses and imprecations. Shadows blacker than black dance across his paper walls in the absence of light. Barely glimpsed figures disappear just as he turns his head. Paranoid by nature, Yoritomo's response has been to become increasingly irrational, lashing out at ministers and samurai for imagined slights. He has continued to build temples in the Kamakura area in an attempt to remedy his situation, to no avail. He has employed Buddhist and Shinto monks and priests to exorcise the demons that haunt him, threatening execution for those who fail — and all have failed. The villagers of Kamakura remain quiet and respectful, giving the shogun's residence a wide berth to avoid drawing his ire.

At the moment, the Bishamon *wu* does not know who Yoritomo's assailants are, only that the shogun must be protected from a malevolent supernatural force for the good of the empire. Should Miura Yasutami learn that the insurgents are led by Yoshitsune, the man who led the Minamoto to victory, and the circumstances of Yoshitsune's death, the balance of power in Kamakura may shift decisively.



Kashi (Western China)

The city of Kashi, known as Kashgar in the Turkic languages of the area, is balanced precariously among cultures. Founded in ancient times by a Persian prince, the Huns overran the ancient city in their second century BCE surge westward. In the first century BCE, the region came under Western Han control, but by the second century CE, it had fallen to the Uzbeks. The Tang dynasty regained control in the seventh century; but when the dynasty dissolved, a succession of Tibetan, Uighur and Arab armies overran Kashi. The city is now technically under the control of the Xixia kingdom, but that state has little actual control over Kashi — the nomadic tribes of northern China are spoiling for war in the absence of a strong imperial presence, and Turkic princes beyond the mountains are also amassing armies of their own. To any aspiring tribe, Kashi is a prize, a dusty gem by the side of the road that will grant its finder incredible wealth.

Every successive group to control the city has left its mark on the culture and the people who live there. Along Kashi's winding, hilly streets, it is possible to find Buddhist pagodas of wood and tile next to buildings constructed from brick and sandstone. The majority of dwellings are made of adobe covering crudely baked mud blocks; these buildings are often two or three stories tall, built out over the narrow streets until the upper stories nearly touch in the middle.

The city itself has seen better days. In the halcyon days of the Tang dynasty, Kashi was arguably the most important stop on the Silk Road. Merchants bearing the treasures of China had already traveled hundreds of dusty, dangerous miles around the Takla Makan Desert. Those coming from the West — laden with glass, ivory, gems and exotic herbs — had come just as far, and pushed through icy mountain passes. Both Eastern and Western merchants were ready to sell their goods, make their trades and return home. The vast bazaar of Kashi, a great plain filled as far as the eye could see with donkey carts, camels and tents swathed with bright fabrics, was the place where they would meet. The bazaar still exists, but the crowds are not so large and boisterous — the Silk Road is a dangerous place to travel in these days, and those who brave it are fewer and more desperate.

The vast majority of travelers and merchants never explore further than Kashi. Those who do are not in search of money or trade; they are monks and missionaries, spreading their scriptures or seeking enlightenment in far lands. These travelers are usually welcome — they rarely cause trouble, are usually learned and polite and carry news of far-off lands.

Nightly Matters

The affairs of Kashi's Hungry Dead are not so different from those of the mortals. Kashi is the most likely point of entrance into the Middle Kingdom for the supernatural creatures of the West and the most likely point of exit for the intrepid Running Monkeys of the East. The city is firmly under the control of the White Tiger Court — a certain departure from mortal politics — yet the ancestor of the city, Jiang Shahua, is willing to turn a blind eye to discreet dealings with barbarian *shen* in public areas such as the bazaar. This latitude is granted in service to her greater charge: the protection of the Middle Kingdom from unwanted supernatural incursions and the protection of the secrets of the Wan Kuei from those who might seek to exploit them.

The ancestor deploys the city's three *wu* to this end: the Ministry of Gilt Diplomacy, whose charge is to search out those foreign *shen* who would enter; the Fragrant Conflagration, who interview those who seek to leave; and the Talons of Jasper and Gold, whose grim task is to eradicate the unwanted who refuse to turn back.

The role of the Ministry of Gilt Diplomacy is often easy — Western vampires have a charming tendency to introduce themselves to nearly any being of power they might encounter in a strange city. The members of this *wu* traveled extensively themselves during their Running Monkey periods; its members are traditionally chosen from those who gained permission to leave the Middle Kingdom and survived long enough to return. The ancestor watches them carefully, as it is possible that, in the course of their travels, they have become infected by inappropriate ideas or, worse, incurred inappropriate debts. Jiang might wish to employ more circumspect, orthodox Wan Kuei in this role, yet those without a certain appetite for risk rarely have the skills required.

Staid and reserved Wan Kuei instead find a place in the Fragrant Conflagration *wu*. Their job is to thoroughly examine the vampires who wish to leave: checking over the tokens and letters from the ancestor of the applicant's court, interviewing the would-be world traveler in person and reviewing the extensive essays often required from the applicant to reach an accurate appraisal of his or her Hun and P'o. The members of this *wu* do a very good job of portraying the journey west as dangerous — some have, in fact, made the trip themselves and barely survived. Their horror stories have convinced not a few young Wan Kuei to abandon their rash plans.

The third *wu*, the Talons of Jasper and Gold, are never mentioned to travelers. When in the judgment of the ancestor, as advised by the appropriate *wu*, the traveler is judged unfit to be permitted to leave (or, in other cases, enter) the Middle Kingdom, it is the task of the Talons of Jasper and Gold to inform him that he must turn around. Often, this news is not welcome, and the traveler is likely to take out his hostility on the messenger. The responsibilities of this *wu* were recently held by the Darkness Eaters, a strong group gathered from fierce nomad tribesmen who had drawn the Second Breath. The Darkness Eaters performed their tasks with grim skill; it remains to be seen how the Talons, their replacements, will fare.



It is possible, of course, to bypass the cruel judges of Kashi. The greedy, arrogant or unbalanced traveler can turn south, round the Himalayas and enter India. Sea vessels make the stomach-wrenching journey around the Indian subcontinent to China and Southeast Asia. It may also be possible to bribe the guardians of Kashi; Jiang Shahua and her court enjoy precious or exotic gifts as much as the next vampire — and a suitable gift demonstrates a grasp of culture that may redeem the traveler in the eyes of the watchers of Kashi.

The ancestor herself deals with a very small fraction of travelers — those who come to Kashi with the name Zao-lat on their lips. These travelers, both Cainite and Wan Kuei, meet with the ancestor in her private quarters, behind closed doors. Those who walk out of this meeting are invariably discreet; it is whispered that Jiang slays outright those who would speak of what transpires in her chambers. In the last decade, no fewer than three travelers from the West have arrived in Kashi, all bearing the third eye that is the mark of practitioners of Chi'iu Muh. All three of these Cainites have been permitted to travel within the White Tiger Court with Jiang's token. Courtiers in Urumqi gossip openly that Emperor Da will call the ancestor of Kashi to account sometime soon.

P'yong'yang (Northwest Korea)

The city of P'yong'yang in the Kingdom of Koryo is located on auspicious ground. The geomancers have proclaimed it so because of the meanders of the river and the particular green of the surrounding countryside. The kings and emperors of Koryo have known that it is so because it is strategically located at the last navigable point of the Taedong River, 30 miles inland from the Yellow Sea, and for many years, it has served to protect the kingdom's northern border.

The city bears the scars of its duty. The first settlement was built by the legendary King Tangun as the heart of the first Korean kingdom. It served as the capital of the Koguryo kingdom from 427 CE until the kingdom was defeated in 668 CE by an alliance of the Silla kingdom to the south and the Tang dynasty of China. Nearly deserted after the fall of the Koguryo, the population and prestige of the city languished; Pyongyang's few residents lived in ramshackle buildings among the tumbledown ruins of the city walls. This situation remained until King Chongjong, grandson of the founder of the Koryo dynasty, rebuilt the grand fortifications. The city received the designation of Western Capital; schools and governmental palaces, theaters and temples were erected as befitting such an illustrious title. The city took up once again its role as guardian of the northern border, with the added blessing of a wealth of culture.

The impressive ramparts of P'yong'yang held off the besieging forces of the Liao Emperor Sheng Tsung invaders in 1010. Twenty-five years later, betrayals from within brought the armies of Koryo within the walls of the city, not as defenders but as attackers. Seeking to consolidate aristocratic control of the throne, a small cabal of P'yong'yang natives led by a Buddhist monk named Myoch'ong plotted rebellion. Myoch'ong used his position as a monk and a geomancer in the court of King Injong to push the young king to move the capital of his kingdom from Kaesong to P'yong'yang. Impatient when years of subtle maneuvering appeared to fail, Myoch'ong and his fellow conspirators retreated in to P'yong'yang to set up their own "kingdom," Taewi. The rebellion was crushed quickly and decisively in early 1136; Myoch'ong was beheaded, and the city of P'yong'yang went up in flames.

The beleaguered city has had little opportunity to recover. A military coup instigated by the abuses of the civilian bureaucracy rocked the entire country in 1170. Bloody conspirators, having achieved power through assassination and regicide, turned on each other again and again in a raw struggle for power that lasted for another 25 years. Thousands of peasants and escaped slaves roamed the countryside in gangs, desperate to find food and safety at any cost. When joined by disaffected foot soldiers, these de facto armies posed a serious and continuing threat to the government and ordinary citizens.

In the midst of this chaos, General Ch'oe Ch'ung-hon and his brother Ch'oe Ch'ung-su rose to power last year by the now-accepted means of assassination and intrigue. Although P'yong'yang has been spared the terrifying bloodshed witnessed in the capital, the effects of General Ch'oe's purges are still easy to see. The aristocratic households of the Western Capital seem silent, even deserted; many who might present a rival claim to the throne are in exile or dead. The garrison forces have been cut as the best soldiers serve in General Ch'oe's personal guard. A small number of the general's elite Night Patrol soldiers have replaced army forces.

Patrolling the Night

The presence of the Night Patrol is somewhat ironic: While certainly one of the patrol's intentions is to harass the populace in order to beat dissenters out of the bushes, it also serves to protect those same citizens from the denizens of the night. The conflagration of 1036 either destroyed the ancestor of P'yong'yang or sent her into hiding from which she has yet to return. A relatively young Wan Kuei, Wang Kyu, stepped immediately into her place. One of the founding fathers of the Koryo kingdom, Wang Kyu had a difficult time quashing his own desire to rule after the death of King T'aejo. He plotted the assassination of two kings before General Wang Sing-nyom, commander of the P'yong'yang Garrison, hunted him down and executed him. On drawing his Second Breath, Wang Kyu made his way to P'yong'yang to wreak his vengeance on General Wang and his family.

The Court of the Azure Dragon, still recovering from the chaos in mortal Koryo, has yet to confirm Wang Kyu as the Ancestor of P'yong'yang. He knows that, due to his "youth" and lack of Dharmic progression, it is unlikely that the court will ever sanction his position. Wang Kyu is as ambitious in death as in life, however; he has resorted to his old tactics of sowing dissent and murder to consolidate his position as best he can in these chaotic times.

He is not without local opposition. A Buddhist monk named Hojil, once a disciple of the agitator Myoch'ong, has appeared in P'yong'yang — spared the flames of 1136 by way of a side trip to Hell. He has established a *wu* in the Taehwa ("Great Flowering") Palace at Imwon, near P'yong'yang, built by King Injong at Myoch'ong's urging and abandoned after the failed revolt. While he is as ludicrous a candidate for ancestor as Wang Kyu, he has advantages. Most significantly, he has successfully appropriated the name and position of his one-time mentor, Myoch'ong. The face Hojil presents to the city is horribly scarred (from the fires set by the invading armies, he claims); in his monk's robes and bearing Myoch'ong's talismans of rank, no one has thought to challenge his identity. He also has the strength of his Buddhist learning to support him — while he obviously fell from the Eightfold Path in life, he has the theoretical underpinnings to rise quickly along the Way of the Resplendent Crane.

P'yong'yang's potential ancestors, and all of its *shen*, are faced with an immediate, non-political threat to their existence. Decades of peasant rebellions and military revolts have slain thousands of the deprived, poor and hungry. Most of the dead simply pass on, but even the fraction of the fallen that have taken the Road Back has overwhelmed the peninsula. Treated as barely human in life, they become monsters in death, hungry for the flesh of those who lived in luxury while they starved. These *chih-mei* frequently creep over the city walls, keeping the Night Patrols and the city's *shen* on their guard. The monsters attack with an eerie coordination, yet captured specimens demonstrate no intelligence, only animal cunning and rapacious hunger. Most *shen* behind the city walls assume these *chih-mei* to have retained some small amount of soldierly training. Pessimists insist that it is far more likely that someone, or something, has taken control of the cannibalistic hordes.

KINDRED OF THE EAST

NAME: **HUN NATURE:** **BALANCE:**

PLAYER: **P'O NATURE:** **DIRECTION:**

CHRONICLE: **DEMEANOR:** **WU:**

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ● O O O O O
Dexterity ● O O O O O
Stamina ● O O O O O

SOCIAL

Charisma ● O O O O O
Manipulation ● O O O O O
Appearance ● O O O O O

MENTAL

Perception ● O O O O O
Intelligence ● O O O O O
Wits ● O O O O O

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness O O O O O O
Athletics O O O O O O
Brawl O O O O O O
Dodge O O O O O O
Empathy O O O O O O
Expression O O O O O O
Intimidation O O O O O O
Leadership O O O O O O
Streetwise O O O O O O
Subterfuge O O O O O O

SKILLS

Animal Ken O O O O O O
Archery O O O O O O
Crafts O O O O O O
Etiquette O O O O O O
Martial Arts O O O O O O
Melee O O O O O O
Performance O O O O O O
Ride O O O O O O
Stealth O O O O O O
Survival O O O O O O

KNOWLEDGES

Academics O O O O O O
Enigmas O O O O O O
Investigation O O O O O O
Law O O O O O O
Linguistics O O O O O O
Medicine O O O O O O
Occult O O O O O O
Politics O O O O O O
Rituals O O O O O O
Science O O O O O O

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

_____ O O O O O O
_____ O O O O O O
_____ O O O O O O
_____ O O O O O O
_____ O O O O O O

BACKGROUNDS

_____ O O O O O O
_____ O O O O O O
_____ O O O O O O
_____ O O O O O O
_____ O O O O O O

GUANXI

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

XIN CHI



XANG CHI

DHARMA _____

HUN

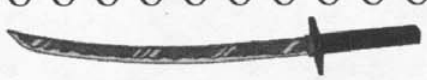
O O O O O O O O O O

WILLPOWER

O O O O O O O O O O
❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

P'O

O O O O O O O O O O



❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑ ❑

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

Bruised ❑
Hurt -1 ❑
Injured -1 ❑
Wounded -2 ❑
Mauled -2 ❑
Crippled -5 ❑
Incapacitated ❑

DEMON GODBODY

_____
_____
_____
_____



Other Traits

_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○○

Merits & Flaws

Name	Cost

Rites

Name	Level

Experience

Total: _____

Total Spent: _____

Spent on:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Imbalance

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Combat

Weapon	Damage	Range	Vs. Melee	Vs. Missle	Conceal

Armor

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____



Expanded Background

Allies

Influence

Contacts

Mentor

Fame

Nushi

Herd

Resources

Horoscope

Retainers

Possessions

Gear (carried)

Equipment (owned)

Jade Talismans

Magical Artifacts

Havens

Location

Description

KINDRED OF THE EAST

History

Prelude

Appearance

Age

Apparent Age

Date of Birth

RIP

Second Breath

Hair

Eyes

Nationality

Height

Weight

Sex

Visuals

Wu Chart

Character Sketch

Blood & Silk™



Visit an Age of Wonder and Terror

The year is 1197. It is the Fourth Age of the World, and much that is beautiful or holy is dying. Cainites and other monsters take new steps along the Silk Road, while in the Middle Kingdom, the Wan Kuei rage against the heavens. It is a time of majesty and fear, of magic and blood — and it beckons you.

Enter a World That Is Not Your Own

World of Darkness: Blood & Silk is a historical sourcebook for the entire World of Darkness®. Here, at last, is a historical look at the Kuei-jin of the Dark Ages and their Middle Kingdom. From the intruders from the West to the Ferocious People of the Fourth Age, everything you need to transport your chronicle to a world of awe and fear awaits you.

World of Darkness: Blood & Silk Includes:

- Complete source material on the Middle Kingdom at the twilight of the Fourth Age, including the Five August Courts of the Wan Kuei;
- A look at now-transformed Disciplines practiced by the Hungry Dead;
- Information on the mages, shapechangers and other *shen* of the Age

KINDRED OF THE EAST

VAMPIRE THE DARK AGES

WHITE WOLF GAME STUDIO

WORLD OF DARKNESS

GAMES FOR MATURE MINDS

ISBN 1-56504-242-5
WW2950

