

DHARMA BOOK

BONE FLOWERS™



A Dharma Book for Vampire: The Masquerade®
and Kindred of the East®



We call it the Black Metal Egg.

It is the cold that comforts us, the chill that warms us and the emptiness that fills our dead bellies.



It is the darkness that gives us our insight.



Or perhaps it's our solitude.

BEHOLD THE PILLAR



It is good to be free of my wu. Conversation with the unlearned is tedious.

Speech displaces thought, dulls our edge.

Silent, our edge is sharp.



It is my thrice-great granddaughter who approaches me to ask for my protection. She knows that, of all the Kuei-jin, I am the one most likely to help. It is part of the Way.

The monster, a devourer of children,
is almost surely Kuei-jin.

Given his resounding lack of honor...

...I'd surmise *akuma* as well.

Though is it my duty
according to the
second tenet, I do
not want to do this
thing. I am a
scholar, the passion
of violence is not my
way. It is too sticky,
too hot.

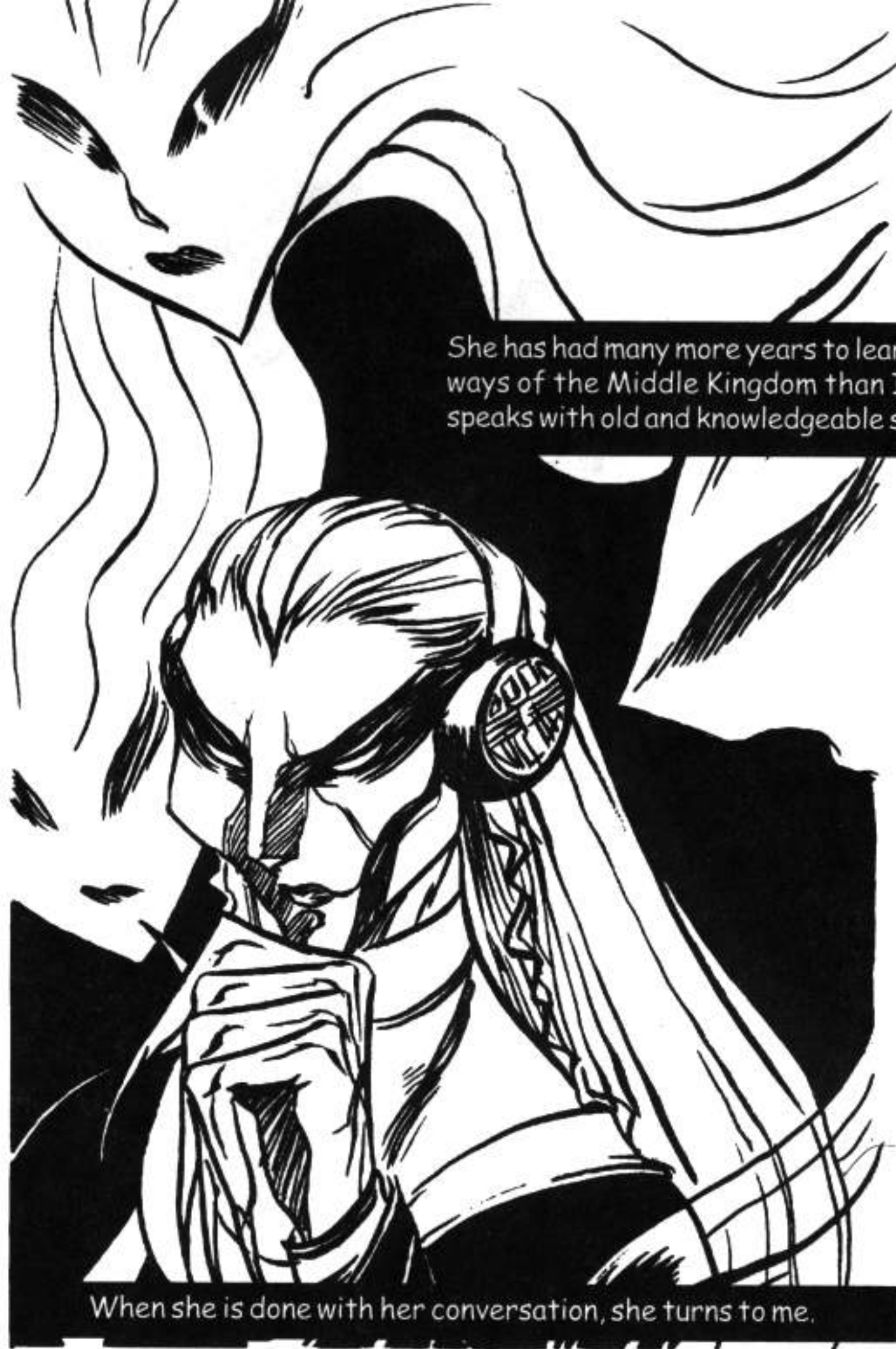
I yield to the tenet of my chosen
path. Anything else would be an
offense under Heaven.

It is difficult to
maintain Cold Mind
in the madness of
conflict.

I seek an audience with the Bone Flower Ancestor of Beijing.



She has had many more years to learn the ways of the Middle Kingdom than I. She speaks with old and knowledgeable spirits.



When she is done with her conversation, she turns to me.



Scarlet and amber lanterns cast this terrible shadow puppet on a screen. Heat is the father of mirage.

She turns away, and I leave, my mind clear and cold.



The ugly section of Beijing prowled by my new prey is not large. But more of the Wicked City worms its way in every day. Perhaps I can strip some of it away again.

I will walk through the neighborhood as often as necessary to learn every strand of this web.

It takes only one night to learn it well enough to become the spider at the center of its streets and alleys.

It is good that I learn quickly.

He comes for another child the following night.

As the ancestor said, he is both a Devil-Tiger and an *akuma*.



Haven't you had enough?

DON'T BE STUPID.
INNOCENCE IS
ALWAYS RIPE FOR
THE PICKING.



I must disagree.

ARROGANT BITCH!
I'LL JUST CONSUME
YOU AND THE CHILD!

His rage makes him predictable,
almost tedious.



You are free to make
the attempt, akuma.



He strikes at me with a
clawed hand, but I yield.

I am as hard to strike as the retreating
tide. My flesh recoils from his touch, and
he has done nothing but leave himself
open. I do not strike back. Where is the
Cold Mind in that?

It would seem that you are less fierce than
the legends had suggested, Devil-Tiger.
Perhaps being the lapdog of the Yama Kings
has made you weak?

His anger is too great for
him to express. The child
is forgotten now. I yield,
fall back, yield and fall
back again.

He is too enraged to see where I am taking him. When this building is
finished, it will be the highest in Beijing; for now, it is only 74 stories.

The sharpened metal beam is my
work. The workmen will wonder what
it is doing here in the morning.

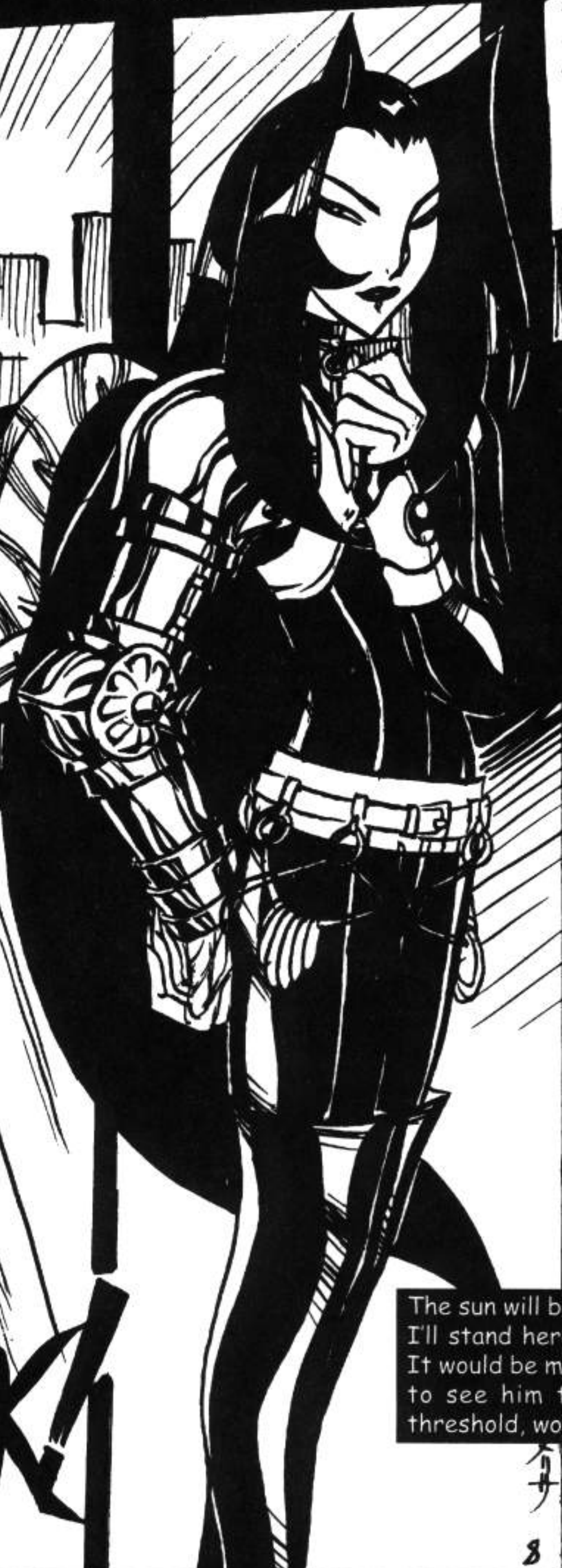
He lunges again.

Again I retreat.

I am the spider.

He is the prey.

I leap down next to the beam and caress it, release some of my own Yin into the metal of the beam and listen to the akuma scream. I forget to notice.



The sun will be up shortly. I'll stand here until then. It would be most rude not to see him to the very threshold, would it not?

CLICK!

DHARMA BOOK BONE FLOWERS™



THE COLD MIND AND THE SHADOW SONG
BY KRAIG BLACKWELDER

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES.

Special Thanks:

To Richard "Big Shoes" Dansky, for leaving us all with a legacy of truly superior material and setting a standard that keeps me up at night....

To Ken "One Head, Eighteen Hats" Cliffe, for shepherding the transition with only occasional chaos in the middle of his own personal Reckoning.

LIVE-ACTION ADAPTATIONS FOR LAWS OF THE EAST

Like Dharma Book: Devil-Tigers before it, this book contains sidebars to let you integrate the material herein with *Laws of the East*, the *Mind's Eye Theatre* supplement for the Middle Kingdom. Whether you use dice or rock-paper-scissors, you'll find all you need to portray followers of the Song of the Shadow in these pages.

Look for the live-action section in Chapter Three: Bones and Shadows. There, you'll find tips for using Bone Flowers in live-action situations and for representing their special powers.

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THE STILLNESS OF SHADOWS

*This is the essence of Yin:
Stillness where the other is loud.
To be chilled where the other is warm.
Yielding where the other is rigid.
To be moist where the other is dry.
To be absent where the other is.
There is nothing else.*

WORDS OF THE ANCESTOR

The Bone Ancestor of Chongqing recently prepared an edifying text about the Song of the Shadow Dharma to be taught to him who thought they were inclined toward this path. She sent it to the Bone Flower ancestors in Changan, Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing via e-mail. It has since been named the Internet Sutra.

Even the wisest among us has her regrets. It is the way of all things that have ever lived. It is my most earnest regret that I cannot listen to every ghost who wishes to speak with me. The knowledge is really what I'm seeking. It is the one key that opens this Black Metal Egg. And even after 30

lifetimes, I still have not learned everything. There is so much, so very much. The secrets collected by the dead are seemingly as plentiful as cherry blossoms in April, and then there are these Internet connections, these books, these scrolls from Meru. Or at least that's what the crazy man said. And I watch the screen, and I read the scrolls, and I listen to the ghosts — so very many ghosts since the great storm, how shall I speak with them all? Before the storm, it was much quieter here.

I prefer the quiet. Or, failing that, a whisper, perhaps the brief whisper of a ghostly companion. I

prefer silence, and I prefer solitude. I am not one for the warm and sweaty masses of humanity. That is a path for the others. They are too warm for me, the living. They shiver in my presence and glance at me askance as if to say, "Why are you so cold, old woman? Are you dead that you make me shiver so?" But then they remember their manners, and they remember that the Middle Kingdom does not belong to the living alone. It belongs to the living and the dead and the spirits and the half-dead and the bestial half-spirits they call the *hengeyokai*. All one family under *tian*, the ceiling of Heaven.

But I still prefer not to leave this great temple of knowledge. There is too much to learn to be *doing*. Had I not obligations to my *wu*, it is unlikely that I would leave this comforting half-darkness. I am of this place, and it is of me. Yin is strong here. I make it so in my arrangement of the pool and in the near absence of light and in the fungus garden I cultivate. I make it so by keeping a chill in the air. It is most inappropriate for the dead to forget that they are dead (as the Dragons must someday realize), and the chill reminds me of my place under Heaven. The smell of fungus and the constant drip of water, these are simultaneously the trappings and the comforting echoes of what I have become.

Here is something I have learned: It always falls to Bone Flowers to write things. Devil-Tigers and Dragons have no time to write. Centipedes can only write while wearing some of their masks and not while wearing others. Cranes can write, but only if they're reminding someone of her obligations under Heaven. Most repetitive, the Cranes. But we teach and chronicle and write. You'd think the Bone Flowers were the scribes of Heaven. Scholars have always been used to others' ends. That is, perhaps, why so many have embraced the study of more... spirited subjects of late. "Listening to the Song of the Shadow no longer means sitting in a temple all night, august ancestor," they say to me, wrapping their disdain in respectful words, as though they could ever wrap any words up so well that I could not see what was inside. As though I hadn't done 1,000 times what they are going out to do this night. An ancestor does not become an ancestor without learning all the myriad ways of Yin and all its uses, both blunt and subtle.

It is most inelegant to win after fighting. Only slightly less elegant is to win while fighting. The most elegant way to win is without fighting, and isn't that one of Yin's many secrets? The moment before a fight has infinitely more potential. It can shift and slide and a million outcomes can be plucked, like petals from dying flowers. Once the fight has begun, there are many fewer options. Fight. Flee. Win. Lose. Most inelegant. And once the fight is done, are there not still fewer possibilities? Win.

Lose. Let the Devil-Tigers and the Dragons rage and bluster like the storms of summer; my enemies do not fight me. Fight a Devil-Tiger, see a Devil-Tiger. Fight a Dragon, see a Dragon. Fight a Bone Flower, see an unexpected sunrise. My enemies do not see me. They consume their Chi and realize too late that the blood was poisoned. My enemies discover midday that the oil over the phosphorous has finally dripped away.... The urge to dominate and swagger and see the fear in the enemy's eyes, it is all so uncouth, so... Western. I do not seek confrontation. I seek results. It is cleaner. There is no pride. There is absence of pride. That heckling loathsome voice is quiet in us. That is the difference between thugs and assassins. Thugs want to swagger and intimidate and browbeat more than they want to succeed. Assassins want simply to proceed to the next objective.

Is it cold, that idea? That is the word I so often hear. Cold. As though it were a bad thing. There are other words that one could use. Controlled. Detached. Unresponsive. And, of course, the term that resonates with Shadow Songs everywhere: cold-minded. It is as though that phrase sums up the essence of our Dharma. We are minded. Minded as in possessing minds and using them, minded as in obeyed. And we are cold. As in detached. All that makes us what we are, we attribute to that concept. We are assassins because we are cold-minded. We are vivisectionists because we are cold-minded. We are diplomats because we are cold-minded. It is the Yin that calms our minds and takes away the heat mirage of passions.

Without the principle of Cold Mind to guide us, Bone Flowers are hand shadows on the wall.

When I am in my *wu*, I am not the fist. I am not the heart. I am not the teeth. I am the eyes and the Cold Mind. And without eyes, men stumble and fall. And without the Cold Mind, men act rashly. So too the *wu*.

It is all riddles and darkness.

— Ku Zu, Bone Ancestor of Chongqing

HEAR THE QUIET SONG

For millennia, Kuei-jin following the Song of the Shadow have been preparing. These "Bone Flowers" have lurked in dusty libraries, journeyed to the ends of the Earth and voyaged into the worlds beyond the Wall. They have trafficked with Yama Kings, fought alongside Devil-Tigers and intrigued with Resplendent Cranes. They have gathered a great library of secret knowledge at Chongqing and established other hidden temples, rich in Yin Chi. They have become ambassadors to the *shen* and experts on the Restless Dead in particular. They have learned the arts of stealth and assassination.

They have mastered the perfect emotionless state of the Cold Mind. They have supported the Five August Courts of the Quincunx, the Japanese *uji* and the Green Courts of Korea. They have destroyed some Kin-jin and protected others.

All this, the Bone Flowers have done to ready themselves for the storm now raging in the Underworld and preparing to scour the Middle Kingdom. To ready themselves for the dreaded Sixth Age.

THE SIXTH AGE

If such a thing is possible, Bone Flowers dread the coming of the Sixth Age more than any other Kuei-jin. Knowledge, truth and learning are early casualties of any despotic regime, a fact to which any historian of the Middle Kingdom can attest. Bone Flowers frequently point to Cambodia two decades ago. Pol Pot's systematic execution of scholars and any who wore glasses or spoke more than one language was a terrifying omen of things to come. Those who follow the Song of the Shadow fully expect to be treated in a similar fashion once the Age of Sorrow arrives.

Many ancestors near to attaining The Hundred Clouds are driving themselves mercilessly to reach that most exalted state, so that they may transcend this world before the Demon Emperor takes his throne. Other ancestors call this behavior self-serving and not in line with the principle of Yin. These others continue to work with the less enlightened and know that when the Tenth Dawn comes, they will be ready. This emotional detachment and openness to receiving wisdom is the epitome of the Cold Mind, the guiding principle of the Dharma.

Bone Flowers will assume a number of roles based on the tenets of their Dharma once the Sixth Age erupts. They will endeavor to maintain a certain basic level of cohesiveness among mortals and *shen* through diplomacy, they will protect their gathered knowledge from utter destruction, and they will attempt to safeguard the institution of the family (however they define it) through the horrors of the Sixth Age.

There are certain Bone Flowers whose training is almost exclusively in stealth and memorization. Their role is to memorize the great writings of the Kuei-jin scholars and to keep as low a profile as possible during the Sixth Age, hopefully to last through the Age and bring their learning to a presumably ignorant populace. Those Bone Flowers who opt to study alone and not become part of a *wu* are often chosen for this duty, called *da xue*, meaning "the great learning."



DUTIES IN THE FIFTH AGE

Save for those dedicating themselves to *da xue* alone, the Bone Flowers continue their traditional roles as part of their preparation for the Age of Sorrow. They continue to study and explore, to learn from the other Dharmas in courts and *wu*, to traffic with the dead and the spirits and to learn the ways of stealth, espionage and assassination. Despite the fact that most see them as reclusive scholars, these duties bring Bone Flowers out into the world (and worlds).

The tenets of the Dharma give a rough idea of the balance of these duties. The pursuit of knowledge, understanding and the Yin principle (together known as the Black Metal Egg) is primary. Then comes respect of the family and the dead. Stealth, assassination and espionage are means to these ends, employed to bring the stillness of Yin to a chaotic and violent world.

Each Bone Flower finds her own balance in the tenets. She learns from her mentors and studies her *wu*-mates. She deals with the ghosts and the spirits. In these ways, she gains understanding and, ultimately, enlightenment. The following pages reveal the ways in which Bone Flowers learn of their path and interpret its tenets. Each one studies the Black Metal Egg in her own way.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Dharma Book: Bone Flowers is your guide to the Song of the Shadow, one of the paths of enlightenment set forth in ancient times by the Grand Arhat Xue. This chapter provides a basic overview of the Dharma, while each subsequent chapter addresses a specific point.

The Instruction of Masahiro provides you with an insight on the education of younger Bone Flowers at the feet of their more enlightened mentors. Along the way, the lessons taught to Masahiro highlight the culture and philosophy of the Dharma. The young student must understand what a Bone Flower believes, why she believes it and *how* she believes it.

The Many Quiet Ways examines the overall structure of the Dharma throughout the Middle Kingdom and beyond. Some areas are centers of Bone Flower influence and learning, such as the Bone Court of Chongqing or the Green Courts of Korea, while other places look askance at the pale necromancers of the Dharma. This section also gives insight into the Bone Flower role in the Great Leap Outward and the Dharma's outlook on the various other denizens of the Middle Kingdom.

Bones and Shadows provides you with a plethora of tools for playing and portraying Bone Flower

characters in your chronicle. These include new Traits, Discipline techniques and rites, as well as suggestions for preludes, character concepts and other elements suited to the Dharma. This chapter also contains rules and advice for using Bone Flowers in live-action play.

Masks in the Darkened Theatre and Perfect Masters provide you with a variety of Bone Flower characters to use at your leisure. Some of these are templates suitable as starting characters, and others are luminaries and rising stars in the Dharma. The latter can serve as contacts, allies or mentors for young Kuei-jin — or even as their rivals or nemeses.

LEXICON

Scholars and thinkers, Bone Flowers have developed whole languages separate from the other Dharmas and the cultures of the Middle Kingdom. Learning requires communication, however, so most Shadow Songs speak mortal tongues, although they add, borrow and transform terms to represent their beliefs and discoveries. Following are some of the more important terms, which crop up throughout this book.

Black Metal Egg, the: A central Bone Flower metaphor, it represents both the Yin principle and ultimate enlightenment. Like many Bone Flower metaphors it is best understood in context.

Cold Mind: At its most basic, Cold Mind is a state of preternatural calm and lack of emotion. Bone Flowers use the term to represent many other related concepts, however, so that full meaning is only clear through context.

da xue: The great learning. The term most properly refers to the duty of some *wu*-less Bone Flowers to memorize great texts and preserve them through the coming Sixth Age. More loosely, the term refers to the pursuits of Bone Flowers who opt not to join *wu* in order to pursue their own studies.

Empty Hand, the: One of two Bone Flower schools of thought on the subject of *akuma*. Its members believe they must keep themselves free of taint but have no right to interfere with another's quest for knowledge, regardless of the cost of that quest.

Fishhooks, the: The second of two Bone Flower schools of thought on the subject of *akuma*. The Hooks study, interrogate, trick and torture *akuma*. In so doing, they seek to understand the Yama Kings and damnation without risking their own souls. They will do or say anything to get information from an *akuma*.

koan: A riddle or paradox that hides deeper meaning. Bone Flowers use these not only as their teaching method, but as they advance along the

Dharma, as their main means of communication.

li: A magical rite. The word means, simultaneously, "ritual" and "universal principle."

Quiet Song, the: The Song of the Shadow Dharma, also "Shadow Song" or "Singing Shadow Path." Also used to mean a follower of the Dharma, like "Bone Flower."

Resplendent Phoenix Box: A positive metaphor for the Yang principle; the opposite number of

the Black Metal Egg.

Sweaty Excited Man, the: A derogatory term for the Yang principle, used among younger Bone Flowers to represent the almost sexual appeal of giving in to Yang. Also "The Sweaty Man."

tian: Heaven. Bone Flowers (and other Kuei-jin) of the Quincunx often speak of their duties under *tian*, especially when discussing things they must do despite personal inclination.





THE INSTRUCTION OF MASAHIRO

The mentor-student bond, always important to Kuei-jin, is even more critical to Bone Flowers. The Song of the Shadow centers on learning and understanding, and a teacher's lessons slake the young hin's first thirsts. Bone Flowers often collect mentors over their existences, seeking instruction from different jina and mandarins while still disciples.

The following letters provide an example of Bone Flower instruction. Although both teacher and student are Japanese, Shadow Songs teach these lessons in various forms across the Middle Kingdom.

THE OCEAN AND THE MOUNTAINS

Masahiro,

I must first say to you "welcome." Or should it be "welcome back"? When I saw you die, I hoped you would die beautifully and well and find a more lasting peace than my own. I must also tell you now, before you begin getting nervous, that I harbor no animosity toward you for the way I ended my living days. You were simply doing what I would have done in your position. You were just the more clever of us. That said, I must confess a selfish pleasure at the thought of your most knowledgeable company. It has been determined that I shall be your teacher on this side of death. I am surprised that the ancestors of the *uji* feel I know

enough to teach, but in the Fifth Age, things are hurried, and empty formality must be dispensed with — except by the Cranes, evidently. I welcome your company because I have always envied your most remarkable intellect. On those occasions when I meditate upon my Dharma, I think of it as walking alongside an enormous river. I do not see how far away the ocean is behind me, but rather, how distant the mountains are ahead of me. I will teach you well, and with your quick mastery of knowledge, perhaps you will be teaching me in 100 years or when next we meet. Please do not mistake knowledge for enlightenment, however. You will quickly discover that the things we learn are less valuable than the steps we take to learn them.

For you, I will momentarily put aside the riddles in which I wrap my words. In time, the riddle will be your most fluent tongue just as it is mine, but for now, with your head still full of death and pain and Hell, I think I'd best be as forthcoming as I can remember how. I will make no promises for my success. If I say something that makes no sense, assume that it has meaning, and think on it. Know that it is not my intent to misguide or deceive you in any way. If I say something that strikes you as insane, discard my words, but hold onto the sense of what I say. Perhaps you will learn something more valuable than anything mere directness could convey. Birds in cages cannot fly.

You have seen the First of Ten Dawns and chosen

to walk the road of the scholar, listening to the voice of Yin. I knew you would. When one first takes the Second Breath, when one has just learned the name and the tenets of the Dharma one will follow, one begins to play a game with oneself. What Dharma would my lover follow, what Dharma would my sister follow, what Dharma would my friend follow... if she were to take the Second Breath? It is a game that remains interesting for all of a year, if that. There are so many things of greater weight to ponder that games fall quickly by the wayside. When I played that old game, however, I thought about you, my respected enemy, and I knew that if you were to become one of us, one of the Kuei-jin, you would follow the Song of the Shadow as well. You were too much my rival to do otherwise. You have that curiosity in you. You always liked the smell of books, the hunting down of new words, the sense of accomplishment when you gained some new knowledge. You too found yourself more interested by the words on the page than by the dullards who milled about you with their mouths hanging open and their glazed-eye stare. And now, you too have fallen. You certainly took your time. And you too have found a rope to climb back up. And it is the same rope I have been climbing since my Second Breath. It is a cold rope. A subtle rope. A dark rope. But if you are persistent, it will take you where you wish to go, and you shall become, as I am, a Bone Flower.

Respectfully,
— Dojima An

THE COLDNESS OF YIN

Masahiro,

I am pleased to see you coming along so quickly. I sense that, perhaps, you are feeling discouraged. Do not. If you bring to bear the Cold Mind, you will succeed where it seems only failure is possible. If you take a child, feed him candy and excite him with lurid stories, he will not read the words in the book in front of him. That is because of the hot mind. Hot mind favors doing and moving. Cold Mind favors knowing and thinking. The self-control granted by cold-mindedness is what allows Bone Flowers to ignore pain, to spend month after month doing nothing but studying old books, to wait for one's target like a spider in its web. You will learn 1,000 lessons in a day; most of them will hurt a little, and some of them will hurt a good deal more than that. Let me soften what blows I may by giving you the fundamental principles of what is, in effect, your new religion.

We are Bone Flowers, followers of the Song of the Shadow, adherents of the principle of Yin. We call Yin the key to the Black Metal Egg. Once you have gained enough parts of the key, you will be able to unlock the egg. I am told by those wiser than I that the contents of the egg are most engrossing. We strive to be the buddhas of the still winter night. We observe and learn and

analyze and record. We are the minds of Kuei-jin society, just as the Cranes are the morals and the Devil-Tigers are the claws. Hold this knowledge like a lover. It will grant you rationality that others do not have in moments of trouble. My sensei in the Song of the Shadow insists that this distance, this insulation from the moment, is what lets us advance much more quickly toward our Dharma. I have not yet chosen what to think of this.

Do not wonder why you have not yet seen me, worthy friend. I shall indulge in the virtue of restraint for weeks to come. You are still burning from Yomi; I can smell it. Words on the page are colder, more soothing to your mind. Voices, particularly the voice of an old enemy, can feel like hot oil on skin already burnt. Your solitude is preventative.

Respectfully,
— Dojima An

KEEPERS OF THE BLACK METAL EGG

Masahiro,

You are adapting well. Your mind has cooled down enough that you are ready to hear my little stories. Before you read them, however, let me tell you about the world in which they take place. The foundation of our Dharma consists of eight tenets. The eight are all that underlay our Dharma. While some courts may emphasize the various tenets differently, all eight are always taught together. To do otherwise would be heresy, and while there are, on occasion, important lessons to be learned from heresy, the

THE EIGHT BONE FLOWER TENETS

- 1: Bathe in the breath of the Ebon Dragon, but hold fast to the Scarlet Queen's teardrop.
- 2: Behold the pillar of the family, and safeguard it against vandals and thieves.
- 3: Kiss the spirits in their houses and the ghosts in their shrouds. Both are lonely and adore the healing touch.
- 4: Gather what you can from the falling leaves of knowledge.
- 5: Press the truth like fine paper, and ink it with the visions you have seen.
- 6: Give freely of your knowledge, but wrap it up like a precious gift.
- 7: Look beyond the obvious, and discern a deeper meaning.
- 8: Console the grieving, and remind them to respect the dead.

ancestors are highly critical of those who do not treat all eight tenets as the fundamental guideposts that they are. But I am being too blunt. You are neither a child nor a Devil-Tiger. I apologize for insulting your intelligence. I must begin treating you like the Bone Flower you are to become.

Here is your most valuable lesson. An egg that is too easily cracked is of no value because it will break before its time. An egg that cannot be cracked is likewise of no value because its contents cannot be extracted. We followers of the Song of the Shadow are the keepers of the Black Metal Egg. I hope you like riddles.

THE GARDENER AND THE EMPEROR

Now, let me tell you about the ancient history of the Bone Flowers.

Millennia ago, there was a master gardener in the employ of the old emperor. The emperor was most demanding. He visited the master gardener one day among the blossoms he was tending. "The old trees that you grow are no longer pleasing to me," the emperor said. "I have seen those flowers every spring. I have tasted those fruits every autumn. I want new trees. They should be unusual. They should please the heart and edify the mind. Furthermore, they should have

exotic blossoms and nourishing fruit. You will find such a tree within five years, or I will put you to death for incompetence."

The old master gardener listened to all this. When the emperor was done, the gardener nodded respectfully and smiled to himself as he walked away, for he had worked for many emperors before this one.

The gardener traveled all through the summer, looking for new trees with exotic blossoms and nourishing fruit. He spoke with the gardeners from other lands. They extolled the virtues of cherries, persimmons and plums. Of lychee and rambutan. Of coconut and oranges and dates and even exotic pomegranates. These trees, the master gardener knew already. He had not become the master gardener for nothing.

He went far to the west, to a place of many unlearned persons, where they spoke of dates and figs and apples (all of which, he knew, the emperor would not care for); he asked if they could show him a tree with exotic blossoms and nourishing fruit, and they said, "Our gardener has murdered his brother, our shepherd. We have cast him out as punishment and so have no way to show you any blossoms or fruit. Can you show us your ways?" The master gardener was horrified that a gardener should become a murderer and that his people should be rash enough to cast him out without finding



another to replace him. "I cannot," said the nonplused master gardener, and he left and vowed never to enter that place again.

By the beginning of the winter, the master gardener had collected the seeds of five plants that he had never seen before. The master gardener found the number five most auspicious, and he was quite pleased.

He planted the five seeds in the spring. By the following spring, one of the trees had already grown as high as his waist. Its flowers were bright red and dripped a sweet scarlet sap that smelled like childhood and attracted flies. The gardener showed these to the emperor, who only nodded. When the fall came, the fruit from this tree had a rubbery skin. It was thick and fleshy and pulsed on the tongue when bitten. The gardener gave the fruit to the emperor who took a bite and promptly spit it out. "It is trying to be something it is not. It does not serve an emperor well to eat of the fruit of self-deception." The emperor left then for a private bedchamber meeting with the empress.

The following spring, another of the new trees was large enough to bloom. Its blossoms were blue one day and scarlet the next and bright yellow the next. It was surely the most colorful tree in the garden, and the gardener had great hopes for the fall. When fall came, the gardener offered the emperor the multicolored fruit of the tree. The emperor took a bite and then spit it out. It was hollow, like a dried gourd. "It is full of emptiness and confusion. I am not certain if I like it. I am not certain that I do not like it. It does not serve an emperor well to eat of the fruits of indecision." Then the emperor staggered slowly from the garden.

The gardener was shaken. Previous emperors had not been so difficult to please. He hoped that several of the trees would blossom the next year, but it did not come to pass. Only one of the trees had flowers, but those blossoms were unique among all flowers. The red blossoms burned with hot, tiny flames. The master gardener was pleased; surely this flower would give rise to a strange and delicious fruit that the emperor would find pleasing. The flowers were certainly unique in all the world. But when fall came, the fruit was hard and covered with spines. The emperor cut the spines off and took a bite and promptly spit it out, along with a mouthful of blood. He glared at the gardener. "It is full of acid and anger and pain. It does not serve an emperor well to eat from a fruit that causes him harm." The emperor stormed out of the garden, barely able to control his rage.

The master gardener was becoming concerned. He could make things grow, but he knew nothing about these trees. If he did not find a tree that the emperor liked soon, he would be determined to have no merit, and he would be put to death.

The fourth of the five trees burst into bloom the following spring. Its small white blossoms were evenly

spread along the branches, and they were each precisely alike. It was certainly a soothing tree to look at. As the summer passed, it put out fruits that were precisely alike in shape and color and size. The emperor arrived in the garden at the peak of the harvest. The master gardener offered the fruit. The emperor accepted it and took a bite. He chewed for a moment. Then, he spat it out. "This fruit tastes of obligation and is dry as a legalist's scrolls. It does not serve an emperor to eat a fruit that makes him thirstier than before he ate it. Bring me water now, to quench my thirst." When the emperor had drunk the water, he cast a judgmental eye at the master gardener and strode most decorously from the garden.

The gardener was horrified. There was one remaining tree, and its sickly black trunk and feeble branches were unlikely to produce flowers, much less bear the weight of fruit. The winter was a time of great despair for the master gardener.

In the spring, he watched the last tree carefully. To his surprise, it produced a single white flower made of a thin shell of bone. If he squinted, the flower looked like a skull to him. The gardener was horrified. "If this blossom bears fruit, it will be too dry, it will be too hard, and it will have no flavor. Surely, I am to die this autumn."

As the summer passed, the blossom of bone crumbled away and gave rise to a single fruit that looked like a teardrop of black ice. The gardener prepared himself for the next life. If he was to die, he thought, then it would be better to die by his own hand than by the emperor's. He brewed himself a potion from the most poisonous mushrooms in the garden with which to end his life should the emperor be displeased.

The appointed hour arrived. The emperor entered the garden; the master gardener took him to the black tree. The emperor plucked the icy fruit and promptly fell over dead.

In the silence that followed the emperor's death, the master gardener was enlightened. He consumed the cold black fruit and began the walk back to his palace.

There. That is our history. That is the end of the first of the *Winter River Sutras*.

Respectfully,

— Dojima An

THERE IS NO HISTORY

Masahiro,

Still you ask about the history of the Dharma. Where were we in 1852? Who was the first? What are the names and the dates, and who was killed, and who was pronounced *akuma*, and when did the Bone Ancestor build the great subterranean library in Chongqing...?

All of that is wrong. You try to break the Black Metal Egg's shell, and in so doing, you destroy the egg itself. If I describe all the tiny bubbles in the foam for you, will you understand the ocean? If I hand you her

skin, you will ever be able to converse with the woman? What you want to know is who you have become and if you have chosen well, and only you can answer that. However, that will take time and some small amount of enlightenment.

But I will give you your history: Since there have been Kuei-jin, there have always been Bone Flowers.

Is that enough history for you?

I didn't think so.

Here is your history. Xue went into the world of ghosts to be with his love. His presence there was deemed a grave trespass under Heaven by the Ebon Dragon, who destroyed him. Xue's ghostly lover longed for his return, and her tear mixed with the dust of the Yin World, and Xue was reformed and complete. Loss must be paired with hope. Death must be paired with life. Yin must be paired with Yang. This is what Xue saw.

The Song of the Shadow reveres the Yin World. It holds the Black Metal Egg sacred and uses the self-discipline of the Cold Mind to achieve great things. It holds itself apart and holds the other *shen* together. It reveres the principle of life but dispenses death in swift and subtle ways. This is what Xue saw.

If we were to be dead things come back, we needed purpose. If we were to be questioned, there must be answers. If there was to be so much death, then there had to be life hiding somewhere behind it. This is what Xue saw.

When the Wan Xian fell and the Wan Kuei appeared upon the world, it was determined that the Hun should remind them of their obligations to Heaven, the P'o should spur them on to achievement, the Resplendent Phoenix Box should allow them to pass among mortals, and the Black Metal Egg should remind them at all times that they are dead things, plucked from the cycle by fate and happenstance. This is what Xue saw.

Since there have been Kuei-jin, there have always been Bone Flowers. This is what you see now.

If you still want a picture of the foam, you can read about it in the library at Chongqing.

Respectfully,

— Dojima An

THE BLACK PEARL SUTRA

Masahiro,

You are by the ocean now, would you go farther toward the mountains? Very well then.

The Black Pearl Sutra begins to explain the tenets of the Song of the Shadow with this tale. It recounts eight tales of the great Qin Shao and her quest for enlightenment. Take these stories with you when you begin your journey and they will shorten your path to The Hundred Clouds.

You wish to know who Qin Shao was before hearing her stories, do you not? I know your questions even before you ask them, Masahiro.



Qin Shao was one of the greatest and earliest followers of our Way. She was a scholar of the Fourth Age and studied with Ki, the student of Xue himself. She traveled across the many worlds in search of the Black Metal Egg and came to know many of the secrets of the Ten Thousand Things under Heaven. She sat in congress with the Jade Emperor of the Yellow Springs and rescued her ancestors from suffering at his hands. She resisted and repelled the temptations of Emma-o and other Yama Kings but stole secrets from them nonetheless. In all things, she was supremely cold-minded and upheld all the tenets.

That is the story of Qin Shao. Does it satisfy your questioning mind? Yes? What if I told you that none of that was true? Are you now unsatisfied? Reflect before questioning. Even in a lie, there is truth.

Now, cool your mind, and listen to the stories.

THE FIRST TENET: SOME, BUT NOT TOO MUCH.

Qin Shao journeyed into the north of Korea where it was very cold. Colder than even she could withstand. She came upon a *wu* of five wandering Kuei-jin of all Dharmas, still early in their *kôa*. The eldest of them had taken the Second Breath less than a year ago. They

were also beginning to suffer from the cold. The Devil-Tiger said, "A fire will keep us warm!" and so, he created a fire. He knew that it would cause him great pain if he touched it, so he immediately jumped into the fire, screamed once and burned up like a dry leaf.

The Thrashing Dragon laughed at the Devil-Tiger's folly. "Stupid Devil-Tiger," said the Thrashing Dragon. "I am the creature of Yang and fire around here, not you," and he laughed once, stepped into the fire and burned up like a dry leaf.

Qin Shao was concerned. She hoped that not all of these Running Monkeys were going to throw themselves into the fire. It would be a most inauspicious omen for her journey.

The Resplendent Crane shook her head at the other two. "They are most unwise," she said. She sat down facing the fire and stared into it for hours in reverie. When she came out of her reverie, she was blind from the firelight. "Oh, the gods are punishing me for my hasty judgements! I have been cruel and must suffer!" The Crane stepped into the fire, cried out once and burned up like a dry leaf.

The Kuei-jin on the Path of a Thousand Whispers wandered near to the fire. Then, he wandered farther from it. Then, he wandered in circles around the fire.



Then, he wandered a few steps away and began building another fire, but he grew bored after collecting three or four sticks. He aimlessly wandered out of the area, and Qin Shao never saw him again.

Qin Shao was proud that the Bone Flower was the last survivor of this unwise group. But the young Bone Flower was not overly wise either. She said to Qin Shao "Those who need fire are weak and stupid," and she sat far from the fire in the coldest wind she could find. When the sun began to rise, she was too frozen to move, and she rotted away into the snow.

The next night, Qin Shao sat alone next to the fire, facing away from it so as not to give it any more importance than it really deserved. She studied the shapes of the trees in the distance. She was not too near the fire. She was not overly distant from the fire. It warmed her, but she did not become warm. Without Yin we are not Bone Flowers. Without Yang, we are only ghosts.

Do you understand Masahiro? You had better. Bone Flowers do not speak to other Bone Flowers but in koans and metaphors. Directness insults the intelligence and is terribly rude. That is but the first of eight. Reflect and understand, and then, I will tell you the second tale of Qin Shao.

Respectfully,
— Dojima An

THE SECOND TENET: THE MANY PILLARS OF FAMILY

Masahiro,

I promised you more tales of Qin Shao, did I not? You should think on these. They will guide you.

Qin Shao was at a temple practicing the *pranas* when a *wu* of young Bone Flowers approached her. She nodded her assent to come nearer, and they asked, "Most revered ancestor, the second tenet of the Dharma charges us to guard the family against those who would desecrate it. We do not understand how to fulfill this obligation."

Qin Shao nodded. "Each of you, go carry out the tenet as you believe it is meant to be carried out. After one year, return to this temple, and tell me what you have discovered. I will tell you if you understand the tenet correctly."

The *wu* departed.

One year later, the five Bone Flowers returned, wiser for their experience. The first of them approached Qin Shao.

"I sought to live out the second tenet by protecting my descendents and their descendents after them from those who would harm or steal from them. I prevented a thief from stealing my grandson's chickens and consumed all the Chi from a brigand who was murdering people in my grandson's village. Have I fulfilled the second tenet?"

"Yes," said Qin Shao, "that is how it is meant. In this way, we become the ancestor they pray to for protection."

When she had said this, the other members of the *wu* looked disappointed, so she asked the next, "What did you do to follow the second tenet of the Song of the Shadow?"

"Revered ancestor, I interpreted the tenet to mean that we were expected to safeguard the institution of the family itself. I fed off the Chi of husbands who harmed their families, and I followed men who had mistresses outside their marriage and made certain that they were discovered. I also brought punishment to those who were insufficiently pious toward their parents."

"Yes," said Qin Shao, "that is how it is meant. In this way, we become a stabilizing element, keeping the tradition of the family alive."

When she had said this, the other members of the *wu* looked disappointed, so she asked the next, "What did you do to follow the second tenet of the Song of the Shadow?"

"I believe that all of the mortal world is my family, therefore I protected those mortals I encountered from inappropriate meddling from Kuei-jin and other *shen*. I captured and killed a Nezumi rat-changer that was preying on one of the villages we passed through. I interceded in a quarrel between a bitter old ghost and her rash young grandson and taught her to cherish him as her link to the Middle Kingdom."

"Yes," said Qin Shao, "that is how it is meant. In this way we reach out to the spirits, the ghosts and the mortals, and we safeguard the well-being of the whole Middle Kingdom, staving off the arrival of the Sixth Age."

When she had said this, the remaining members of the *wu* looked disappointed, so she asked the next, "What did you do to follow the second tenet of the Song of the Shadow?"

"I interpret the second tenet to mean that we are to protect all those who travel the Shadow Song Path. I prevented a Devil-Tiger from beginning a fight with a young Bone Flower whom he surely would have sent to Final Death. I also engaged a Thrashing Dragon in debate about the legitimacy of our Dharma, thereby preventing him from slandering our name in the pursuit of his own interests."

"Yes," said Qin Shao, "that is how it is meant. In this way we maintain the integrity of our own Dharma and show others that we are not simply frigid necromancers and assassins. You interpreted well."

When she had said this, the last member of the *wu* looked disappointed, so she asked him, "What did you do to follow the second tenet of the Song of the Shadow?"

"Revered ancestor, I protected these four worthies I travel with, for they are my family. I saw to it that they never grew hungry for Chi, and I tended to the needs of our *nushi* to keep that spirit strong. I tried to provide a



role model for our Dharma and soothe the others' tempers when circumstances challenged our cold-mindedness."

"Yes," said Qin Shao, "that is how it is meant. In this way you strengthen the *wu* and transcend your old definition of family; you thereby progress along the Dharmic path."

Of all the tenets, this is one of the most multifaceted.

THE THIRD TENET: NOT BEING A GHOST THANKS TO A SPIRIT

Qin Shao was in a boat upon the ocean one night. She was a fine and experienced sailor. In the distant moonlight, she beheld two ships near her on the ocean. One was black as the inside of a mountain on a winter's night. Its planking was so dark that the night water seemed bright in comparison. Its sail was so black that it seemed to drink in the light of the moon and stars. Qin Shao was supremely cold-minded, but even she could be impressed. She wanted to sail on that ship more than any other.

The other ship was glaring scarlet. Though it possessed a vulgar beauty, it was too well lit and gaudy. The sound of men singing came from the scarlet ship and was most unseemly. She was so fascinated by the dark black ship that she was right beside the scarlet craft

before she noticed. The men on board called out to her and asked her to visit them. She did not want to seem impolite, so she jumped from her ship to theirs. The men were part men and part beast. They smelled horrible and talked too loudly. She assumed that they were from very far south because they kept the boat very warm. The crew of beast-men gathered around Qin Shao and cooled themselves by her frosty skin. As they did not hurt her or make improper advances she allowed this, and it lulled them into a sleep. With the beast-men snoring loudly, she jumped back to her boat. She hoped she would be able to visit the ebon ship as well.

It was harder to see. Clouds had rolled in front of the face of the moon, and the ebon ship was quite hard to discern, but her cold-minded perseverance paid off, and she spotted the ship she was looking for. She boarded the ebon ship and was surprised to see that its whole crew was made up of ghosts. They were all flawlessly polite and most learned conversationalists. They sat around her and discoursed for long hours, partaking of her relative warmth. The captain of the ship, in life a peerless scholar, taught Qin Shao many precious lessons during this conversation, as thanks for her warmth and attention. She was most pleased at the bargain.

Her time there passed like water through a tea strainer, and hours passed unwatched. Suddenly Qin Shao was tossed around inside the boat. She went back on deck and noticed that the clouds she had seen earlier had brought a very large storm with them. Enormous waves battered the ebon ship. The crew wasn't particularly concerned; they were already dead and had little to lose. Qin Shao knew well that the ships of the dead do not float well, and she could feel in the way that it moved that the ebon ship wanted to plunge down through the icy waters and rest serenely on the ocean floor far below. While the ghosts were ready for whatever followed, Qin Shao was not. Her own ship was now many leagues away, and things seemed lost.

Then, through the gloom of the storm, she saw the scarlet ship not too far away, and she called out. The friendly (though vulgar) beast-men sailed nearer and lashed their ship to the ebon ship of the ghosts. The storm tossed them around, but the high-floating scarlet ship never took on so much as a drop of water. The scarlet captain, who smelled most of all, said they were happy to return the favor of her company with safe passage back to her ship.

When Qin Shao was on the water after that, she made sure always to hold learned conversations with the ghost ship, but never let the scarlet ship out of her sight. Without it, she would have been stranded on the ghost ship.

Learn from ghosts, but never ignore the spirits. When the Sixth Age comes, the storm will be great indeed.

THE FOURTH TENET:

GATHERING KNOWLEDGE, REAPING POWER

The fourth story of Qin Shao tells us that she was representing all those who follow the Song of the Shadow in a competition. The first three rounds were to be preliminaries, and the fourth round would determine the winner.

The first task was to traverse a wall. The Resplendent Crane stood in front of the wall and told it of its obligations. The Devil-Tiger threw himself at the wall repeatedly, hoping to knock it down. The Thrashing Dragon screamed at the wall and, then, whispered suggestive words to it and touched it in an intimate fashion. The Rootless Tree put on a succession of different entertaining masks, looking for the one that would see through the wall. Qin Shao learned how to weave a rope and climbed over the wall.

The second task was to move a boulder. The Resplendent Crane stood in front of the boulder and told it of its obligations. The Devil-Tiger threw himself at the boulder repeatedly, hoping to push it away. The Thrashing Dragon kissed the boulder and whispered intimate things to it and, then, screamed at it enraged.

The Rootless Tree put on a succession of different entertaining masks, looking for the one that would see the boulder in a different place. Qin Shao learned how to make a lever and moved the boulder.

The third test was to cross a river. It was springtime and the river was very fast. The Crane reminded the river of its obligation to let him pass. The Devil-Tiger slashed furiously at the water and was almost swept away. The Thrashing Dragon became wet trying to seduce the water. The Rootless Tree put on a succession of different entertaining masks, looking for the one that would show him the world from the other side of the river. Qin Shao learned how to build a bridge and walked across it to the other side.

The final test was to make their way through a field of armed men. Qin Shao simply waited a moment while the others shamed, killed, seduced and entertained the armed men, and then, she walked calmly to the finish line, where she won.

This is why we are scholars. This is why we seek out that which others have forgotten or never learned. Nothing is so flexible as knowledge. A Bone Flower's worth is derived entirely from what she knows.

THE FIFTH TENET:

OUTSIDE THE HEAD. INSIDE THE HEAD.

Qin Shao cold-mindedly stopped thinking. When she did, the rock was just a rock, the cricket was just a cricket, and the clouds were just clouds. Those things were just as they were, with no names, no meaning and no attributions. When Qin Shao thought again, the rock was the rock that had killed her brother, and she was sad; the cricket was the same cricket she had heard when she was falling in love as a young woman, and she was broken-hearted; and the clouds were the clouds covering the sky the day she died. She wanted to weep. Qin Shao stopped thinking again, and those three things were just as they were once more, with no names, meanings or attributions but what we choose to give them.

Then her sister's great-great-great grandchild came and spoke to her. She was cold-mindedly not thinking, and he was just a talkative boy, perhaps a source of Chi. Then she began thinking again, and the boy was her sister's great-great-great grandchild, and she was filled with joy, and she was reminded why it is that the Wan Kuei are here in the first place.

The world of objects and facts is the stuff upon which we project meaning, and the two rely on each other for definition. Objects without meaning may as well not exist, and fantasy disengaged from the real world cannot sustain us. Just as we are intermediaries between the living and the dead, and between Kuei-jin and other *shen*, so too must we balance between the objective and subjective worlds.

THE SIXTH TENET: THE DIFFICULT GIFT

Qin Shao was revered for her wisdom and vast learning. A great emperor engaged her services as a tutor for his son, who was to be the emperor after him. Qin Shao agreed, and she became the tutor of the next emperor. His father came to Qin Shao one day and said, "I must go to Beijing. My son is to get one present a day for the duration of my absence. See to it that this thing happens."

Qin Shao was not a nanny, but a scholar, and were she less cold-minded, she would have happily left the boy to rot until his father returned. Being cold, she was able to understand the necessity of the emperor's trip to Beijing and for the young emperor-to-be to receive gifts in his absence.

The first night, Qin Shao gave the boy a beautiful cricket cage that had taken a truly skilled artisan an entire year to create. The boy accepted the gift and, then, laughed as he destroyed it utterly, piece by piece. Qin Shao was nonplused.

The second night, Qin Shao gave the boy a gift locked in a heavy wooden crate that the young emperor could not open. The prince screamed and yelled and kicked and hacked at the heavy crate with his sword, which broke in two.

"Most regrettable," said the serene Qin Shao.

The third night, Qin Shao gave the boy a heavily wrapped box. The boy whimpered, remembering the night before, but after pulling away layer after layer of paper, bamboo and string, he found a beautiful cricket cage that had taken a truly skilled artisan five years to create.

When the boy understood what Qin Shao had done, he was enlightened. His father was most pleased upon his return.

That which is too freely given is seldom valued and may afflict either the giver or the recipient with resentment. Likewise, that which is withheld is begrudged. Only that which takes effort to receive is truly appreciated.

THE SEVENTH TENET: TRULY WICKED

Qin Shao traveled one night in the beginning of spring to a small village near Fuzhou where a sage was speaking to the villagers. A beautiful white butterfly perched on his finger. Qin Shao knew a great deal about butterflies and had seen its like before.

The sage said, "This butterfly is one of the few truly good things in the world. We can only aspire to be so noble." Qin Shao was surprised to hear this but shrugged and continued on her way. Five months later, Qin Shao passed that way again, and the people were weeping. The caterpillars produced by the eggs laid by the beautiful white butterflies had destroyed their crops for the year.

The sage was speaking to the village again. Qin Shao was not surprised. She knew a great deal about

sages and had seen his like before. "Yes, the butterfly is truly wicked. It destroys our crops like fire, the most wicked thing known." Qin Shao was surprised to hear this but sighed and continued on her way.

Five months later she passed that way again. It was the coldest day of winter, and the sage was not there. She went into the village and saw a young man speaking to the villagers, who were gathered around a big fire. "Fire is one of the few truly good things in the world. We can only aspire to be so helpful and comforting."

Qin Shao walked over to the man and plunged his hand into the fire.

"Truly wicked," she said.

The truth that is immediately perceived is not the real truth. All things under Heaven — which the Chinese ancestors of the Quincunx call *tian* — are truly two things: themselves and the part they play in the larger drama. Bone Flowers strive to see the thing as well as the thing's role under *tian* and to see them without the blurry lens of judgement. Sages must know not to judge, but to understand things, events and individuals on their own terms. It is words and labels, judging and deciding that cause the Kuei-jin of other Dharmas to rush into acts of blindness. We perceive, we acknowledge, and we may even react, but we do not judge.

THE EIGHTH TENET: JUST RESPECT

Qin Shao's nephew Qin Song died in his sleep. She watched from the shadows as his many children and grandchildren wept and put on their white garments to mourn for him. She passed through the village again a month later. Half of her nephew's offspring were still wearing mourning clothes and getting very little done. The other half appeared very tired. Qin Shao spoke with her nephew's daughter. "Why are half of you tired and half of you still in mourning? He has been dead now over a month. It is the way of things."

"Pardon us, most revered ancestor," began the girl, "but half of Qin Song's descendents forgot about his death within a day or two. They have returned to their normal lives, but they have nightmares every night. The other half sleep well, but their every waking hour is haunted by Qin Song's death, and they can get nothing done."

Qin Shao sighed and, then, gathered her family. "If you are tired, switch clothing with someone who is in mourning. If you are in mourning, switch clothing with someone who is not wearing white." Her descendents, being somewhat afraid of Qin Shao, obeyed her. "Do you feel better now?" Her family looked around. A tired looking man in white stepped forward and said, "No, I do not, august ancestor, but I do not know what my grandfather would want me to do."

"Then I'll let him tell you what he seeks from you," said Qin Shao, and she entered the ghost world and brought back the ghost of Qin Song.

"Tell them something," said Qin Shao.

"Those of you who forgot too quickly, the skin had knitted before the wound inside was healed. Those of you who mourn me incessantly believe that because the scab is still there that you are still hurt. By forgetting me, you show no respect to the dead who want to be remembered. By getting nothing done through your mourning, you show no respect by ignoring our wishes, all the while pitying yourselves because I have reminded you that you will someday pass into the Yellow Springs yourselves. Do not mourn me, and do not forget me. Respect me as an ancestor and be done with it," and so saying, he returned to the Yin world.

"Just so," said Qin Shao.

The living grieve because they fear one of two things: that they will forget too soon and slight their loved one or that they will remember for too long and suffer longer than is necessary. By teaching the living to respect the dead, we prevent them from doing the former and help them to avoid the latter. Respect is more comfortable than either forgetting or grieving. This is perhaps the most important role we play for the living.

And there, Masahiro, the tales of Qin Shao end. The Qin Shao tales are much like a philosophical primer. Remember these stories. Think on these things. Any sense they do not make now, they will make later, when you have experienced more of the Middle Kingdom.

I must attend to my own studies for this evening. Study well Masahiro.

Respectfully,

— Dojima An

EIGHT TENETS, MANY EYES

Masahiro,

You know about the tenets of the Shadow Song Path now, right? How certain are you? If one billion Buddhists read a koan, how many interpretations do you think there will be?

Like all the Dharmic paths put forth by Xue, the Song of the Shadow Dharma comprises eight tenets. The relative importance of each tenet varies from court to court and colors the Dharma in those places. Nevertheless, the Dharma remains essentially the same. A Bone Flower from the Golden Courts will not be mistaken for anything else in the Green Courts, though they may view certain elements of the Dharma in a different light. Certain other Dharmas place a heavy emphasis on conformity with regard to interpretation of the tenets. I can tell you now, this is not the case with most of those who follow our Way. The Song of the Shadow has an especially relaxed approach toward heresy; perhaps cold-mindedness plays its part here as well. Perhaps it is simply the non-judgmental nature of the path. Without deviation, there can be no growth. Without growth, there can be no enlightenment. Without enlightenment, there is no point. The tenets of the



Dharma may be weighted differently in the various courts, but the eight tenets hold together just the same.

Other Dharmas split into differing sects, some proscribed and others recognized. Not so for us, Masahiro. Each Bone Flower is a sect unto himself, a scholar who finds his own way along the path built with the eight tenets, learning from many teachers. The Cold Mind and sectarian conflict simply do not mix.

Bone Flowers are the sages and the historians. It is our job to know the history of the Wan Kuei and to keep the few remaining tomes that were salvaged from the Burning of the Books in the Fourth Age. The Bone Flowers of all courts are charged with keeping the few extant writings of Xue, the *Ki Chuan*, *The Red Book of the Iron Bridge* and, regrettably, even *The Broken-Winged Crane*. It is no accident that the enormous underground library of the Kuei-jin is located in Chongqing, the seat of the Bone Court, where the Song of the Shadow is most revered. It is not by chance that these old texts came into our keeping. Perhaps you know nothing of the import of these books. That may be for the best at this stage of your enlightenment. Suffice it to say that they are books of great weight and consequence. The followers of the Song of the Shadow are the best keepers of dangerous books, as our highly controlled natures are less prone to indiscretion. Were such consequential books given into the hands of the Golden Courts, the Sixth Age would have long since been upon us. The books would have rotted away in the jungle somewhere while the *penangallan* queens were out dancing and rutting and chasing down the *akuma* that plague that court.

I should explain the tone of what I just wrote, perhaps. I cannot expect you to understand what I'm referring to. Perhaps it is just wisest to attribute it to differences in political philosophy. Those who follow the Song of the Shadow are not valued in the Golden Courts. It would not be a gross overstatement to say that in the Golden Courts, they are the unappreciated outcasts of the *penangallan*. These savage queens value action. Not even particularly well thought-out action, just aggressive, Yang-steeped aggression and horror and primal satisfaction. They do not understand that action without thought leads to folly and ruin, which is why the Golden Courts are so barbaric; they have no civilizing principle, no notion of restraint or self-control. Those few Bone Flowers who make their homes in the jungles of the Golden Court place a strong emphasis on the third, fifth and seventh tenets and deal more with the spirits of the Yang World than the ghosts most of us know best. Obviously, they traffic with ghosts too, but they, better than any other Bone Flowers, have studied the ways of the *hengyokai* and the spirits of the Yang World. When they finish writing their exhaustive treatises on the various ladies, dukes and demons of the Scarlet World, they bind the works and

take them to the library of Chongqing. It is there that we go to truly learn about all the denizens of the Middle Kingdom.

The self-righteous Golden Lion Court of Singapore also treats Bone Flowers poorly, though for different reasons. Its mandarins believe, wrongly, that their repressive code of lockstep morality must take precedence over the gathering and understanding of knowledge. They would burn the ancient scriptures we have collected as "dangerous." The followers of the Song of the Shadow who reside in Singapore most commonly emphasize the fourth and seventh tenets. While they seek out knowledge and understanding, they must refrain from interacting with the worlds beyond the Wall, so as to placate the overzealous Cranes of the Golden Lion Court. Bone Flower ancestors often ignore the arrogant Lion Emperors, but such rebelliousness is not without risk, even for the few mandarins residing there.

But I was not intending to speak of the Golden Courts or their uxorious husband just yet. The Courts of the Quincunx are the sites of our greatest strength, and the Bone Court of Chongqing is the philosophical epicenter of our Dharma. Many of the great ancestors of the Song of the Shadow reside there, and so, students of the Dharma go there to study with those more enlightened than they in the philosophies of Yin. It is not strictly necessary, but it is most auspicious for a Bone Flower to travel to Chongqing to see the marvels we have wrought. The books, the sorcery, the harmonious *feng shui*, the recovered artifacts and teachings from Mount Meru — all these things in the Bone Court echo the Song of the Shadow. Our appetite for knowledge is recognized, utilized and lauded in the Bone Court. I trust you will be visiting there soon....

You will see Chongqing when you see it. If your travels take you even further west, know that we are not numerous in Sri Lanka's Infinite Thunders Court. Unlike in the damnable Golden Courts, however, at least we are respected for our role as envoys to the ancestors. Scholars are revered in the Infinite Thunders Court. The second, fifth and eighth tenets are the most respected there.

Now, see how well you understand Bone Flowers by knowing the tenets? Comforting, isn't it?

I cannot say whether you will get another letter from me. I am traveling to the United States to meet with a woman from Hong Kong's Flame Court. We will make San Francisco a Bone Flower city. After you visit the library in Chongqing and get the answers to all those silly questions you had, you can come to help us.

Study long first.

Respectfully,

— Dojima An

SONG OF SHADOW, SONG OF CONTROL

Masahiro,

I am on the ship to San Francisco. It is taking far too long. If I were not black-cycled, I would have to drink the crew dry to survive. Cold Mind serves me well here. Since I have the time, allow me to continue your education.

Restraint is the key that opens the Black Metal Egg. The first words the new Bone Flower hears are "control yourself." That will be his guiding creed until he attains *dâh* or Final Death. Those who believe this to be a simple injunction are unwise. Are not those who follow other Dharmas also in control of themselves? I tell you clearly: It is not so.

THOSE WITHOUT CONTROL

Those who listen to their P'o are obviously not in control of themselves. They screech and howl and murder and destroy. They do not seek control. They seek pain. They seek violence and vengeance and a place to put all their anger because they are dead and because they have seen Yomi and it has made them mad. That madness is like the pressure in a man's bladder, and they seek to release their anger by pissing it out in a solid stream of torture and retribution. It makes them feel better, and they sometimes get satisfaction from the things they do, but control never enters the picture. One sometimes wonders if the word is even in their vocabulary.

Those who heed the Yang principle are no more in control of themselves. They are lured too much by the song of life. It makes them dance like puppets on the ends of sticks. They glut themselves on food and rut like dogs. They indulge in every manner of gluttony, vice and excess to try and feel anything as keenly they once did, trying to forget that they are dead, that they are half-ghosts. But half-ghosts they are, and therefore, food tastes half as good, sex feels half as good, and flowers smell half as good. And so, they try harder to feel, and the vices grow more extreme, and their emotions, inflamed by the Yang Chi they guzzle, make their need to feel, to feel like they remember life feeling, all the more urgent. In the end, they do feel three things even more keenly than they did when they were truly alive: sorrow, loss and disappointment. And so the Dragons thrash, without the notion of control ever entering their Yang-inflamed minds.

And what of those who live their lives according to the principle of balance? "Surely," you say, "they must have control of themselves, for after all, doesn't balance lead to control?" The answer (perhaps you guessed it) is no. Those silly little Centipedes do not control themselves, they are themselves controlled by balance. They may take one step in the direction they truly want

to go, but they promptly have to take one step back to compensate for it. They have no say in who they'll be in five days because they have turned their destiny over to the notion of balance. They hope that by changing their robes often enough they will find one that looks good on them. Why not just seek to become enlightened with a throw of the dice or the joss sticks? It would be as effective.

And, lastly, we have those great pretenders, those proper souls who guide their way with the light from their Hun. Surely these august souls, these great men, these very moral individuals, surely they must be in control of themselves? If not, how could they be such moral men? I must sigh before answering. The question itself pains me. There seem to be many people who believe that Cranes and Shadows have a great deal in common, none of whom, you should note, are themselves Cranes or Shadows. We study; they study. We are not frenzied, wild creatures; they are not frenzied, wild creatures. If the similarities were a well, it would not be deep enough to reach water. Now, to the question at hand. Do not those who follow the Hun control themselves? They do not. They are not controlled from within, they are controlled from without. Ten thousand obligations, real and imagined, control them. Cranes are ridden like horses by their obligations to ghosts, to rules, to nebulous notions of good and evil, to the Eight Lotus Path, to the Fivefold Way, to street signs and stop lights, to every last portent, omen and fortune they stumble across. They have no sense of self control so they build ornate cricket cages for themselves to inhabit, to keep themselves from exploring any other lot but the one they once chose for themselves. Then they cluck their tongues (like hens or old wives) at us when we opt to choose our own paths by thinking each situation through, rather than imprisoning ourselves in cells of thought and dogma. Do you see the difference? We say "Control yourself." They say, "Be controlled." There. Do you understand now?

THE USE OF CONTROL

And what do we gain from this profound sense of self-control? Yes, that's the question you really wanted to ask, isn't it? Why should you aspire to this degree of self-control? Or perhaps you were asking a yet more brazen question: Why would you want to be a Bone Flower? If we don't kill and maim for the sheer enjoyment of it, if we don't exchange tender intimacies with the living, if we don't play games of pretend with new and different masks, if we don't get to revel in the Cranes' sense of high-handed self-righteousness, then what do we do? What is the goal of all this self-control? Is there one? I should have you tell me. If you really cannot imagine what it is, perhaps you should go be with them. You will never be forced to be a Bone Flower. You will not be hit on the head and taken to the Black Lotus Temple and forcibly indoctrinated into

the ways of the Shadow Song. On the contrary, we would rather not have you unless you are certain you possess the control of body and mind necessary to succeed as a Bone Flower. If you feel you would rather moralize with the Cranes or carouse with the Dragons, I entreat you to leave now and stop taking up my time.

Oh, you do not want to do that? Then, I will tell you what you gain from self-control. It is knowledge. You cannot control a thing you do not understand. To control yourself, you must know yourself. By knowing yourself, you know others. By knowing numerous others, you understand the masses. By understanding the masses, you understand the world. By understanding the world, you understand the Ten Thousand Things. Why do you think we are the diplomats among the *shen*? Is it because of our warm, outgoing natures? I think not. We are diplomats to the others because we are in control of ourselves and because we can empty ourselves of our selves and hear what it is that the others say. We are empty of words, and so, we will not speak out of turn. We are empty of honor, and so, we will not be insulted if they are boorish. We are empty of bias, and so judgements won't distract us like buzzing gnats from what they are saying. The nothingness, the Yin, is so strong in us, we are able to take in their ways — especially the *hengeyokai*, who are so full of themselves that they overflow. You cannot fill a cup with tea if it is full of water. We are empty cups, and when we interact with the *shen*, we can choose to fill ourselves with their ways. A full mind never learns anything. An empty mind pulls in anything that comes near.

And that is why we are scholars. We are so empty that we need to be filled, and the one thing that comforts the void (that we find tolerable) is knowledge.

And why are we spies and assassins? We are spies because the best spy is the one who is never there. There is no us, so if we are there, we are not there. If we are taking their secrets, no one is taking their secrets. If our enemy is slain, there is no us to have slain him. Yes, I am speaking in the language of riddles. Listen to the meaning, not to the words.

THE GOAL OF CONTROL

But what about the ultimate point, the ultimate reason for the Bone Flowers? Have we a higher purpose under *tian*? We do. We are the ligaments of the body of the Middle Kingdom. We do those things that need to be done and we do them quietly, so that our efforts are not noticed. We are the tissue that connects all the *shen*. We are the envoys to the living families, to the *hengeyokai* and to the ghosts; we even reach out on occasion to the *hsien* and the *chi'n ta*, although neither of them thinks much of our kind.

When the Sixth Age arrives, it will come like an explosion of blood and fire. The Middle Kingdom and everything under *tian* will be shaken violently, and if the Middle Kingdom does not have us to hold it

together, then it will fly apart violently. These things must be done quietly lest the Demon Emperor take note of us. As the ligaments of the body of the Middle Kingdom, we expect to be hewn and hacked, that is why we are hard as metal and cold as ice. Ideally, we shall hold the world together so subtly that not even the Demon Emperor will sense it, but failing that then we must be cold and hard enough to withstand the heat and punishment that will follow our discovery.

I am thinking much on the violence of the Sixth Age. Perhaps it is because I expect great bloodshed in San Francisco. Perhaps I will be sent to Yomi. You will get a new teacher if that happens. Probably a better one.

You have such sights to look forward to!

Respectfully,

— Dojima An

A ROAD OF MANY DANGERS

Masahiro,

To answer your question, no, I do not honestly think your next sensei would be better than I. Where is your Cold Mind? Where is your understanding? You will never see the Second of Ten Dawns if you continue to look only at the front of my words. Turn them around, and look at the back of them, too. And look at the top. And the bottom. Did you think this would be easy?

The Song of the Shadow is not easy to follow. The path of inaction can be just as difficult to tread as the path of action. Cold Mind is never anything but a challenge. Remaining calm when all about one is madness can fill any Bone Flower with frustration. If your *wu* jumps to a hasty conclusion and you do not, you may be held suspect or accused of sympathizing with the enemy. Bone Flowers, on the whole, are decidedly more analytical than the followers of most other Dharmas, and because of our perspective, we often find ourselves in the position of devil's advocate (though decidedly not in the same way that the Devil-Tigers are). The time when our contrary voice is most needed is when the rest of the *wu* has too quickly and too enthusiastically opted to take a course of action. Scrutinize most carefully any path others embark upon with too little analysis.

Another temptation that lures many Shadow Songs from their path is the warm pull of Yang. The other principle fills us like a warm meal fills a hungry man and beckons us back to our living days. It lies to us and dangles memories before us like shiny toys before a small child. Masahiro, the Second Breath is still new to you, and so, the call of Yang must be strong. I know your urge to glut yourself on Yang, to lose your cold-mindedness, to embrace your fire nature. Do not. Even when full of Yang, we are still dead things, so is it not best to acknowledge this? When we are young, we call Yang the Sweaty Excited Man because he wants to take

us, and he is willing to promise us anything to have us receive him. More often than not, we regret ever having anything to do with him. Once the initial longing passes, we resent the Sweaty Excited Man because of the false promises he makes. As time passes and we advance along our Dharma, however, the longing for the hot, messy breathing days fades away, and Yang simply becomes another source of knowledge (albeit a potentially dangerous one). You can learn from the Sweaty Man, but only if you maintain Cold Mind.

There are other dangers. If Yang is a sweaty man, then the P'o is an enraged demon. The Demon can knock you from your Dharma with disturbing ease. The Demon makes promises as well: promises of power, of superiority in combat, of victory. Do not listen to it. Among all Dharmas, we are the most able to sidestep the Demon's trickery. Others need the Demon to enter combat because of the advantages they receive from the Demon Arts. This is not our way. Bone Flowers are not chest-beating louts or brawlers. We are not meant for the direct, open conflict (though we can usually survive those reasonably well). Our skills revolve around the subtle skills of learning, stealth, infiltration and assassination. We have Bone Shintai to call upon, along with other arts of Yin.

MISTAKES

You will learn these hard lessons and more, as you progress along the path. It is my hope that I may simply prepare you for these eventualities.

Eventualities are what I am thinking of these days.

Bone Flowers have made certain mistakes for centuries. I like to think that I can help you avoid these. But you are young, and you will take missteps along your path. If you make only the right mistakes, you will have the opportunity to make more. In go, it is the player who makes the second to last wrong move who wins.

Allow me to share a few other pieces of advice:

When speaking with ghosts, engage them only with logic, never with feeling or passion. They are beings of emotion, and your hot mind may antagonize or incite them.

Bone Flowers watch and understand. We are not creatures of conflict. Do not, however, mistake this for being an inability to affect the worlds. If you come to understand that action must be taken, alert a Devil-Tiger or a Thrashing Dragon. It is their role under *tian* to act, not to think. If they understand their own Dharma, they will take action as we have recommended.

Do not become so concerned with the worlds beyond the Wall that you do not address your business in the Middle Kingdom.

Strive to never mistake the symbolic for the literal. That is a task assigned to the stupid. Do your own work,

and let them do theirs, otherwise you may be mistaken for them.

Are you seeing the riddle here? No? Ask yourself why not. It is everywhere.

Sincerely,

— Dojima An

THE LONE STICK BREAKS

Masahiro,

I fear I have been remiss in explaining certain important elements of Kuei-jin existence to you. My own path is taking me to places I had not expected to go again so soon, and I have not taken your situation into account. I stress to you the importance of Yin and Cold Mind, of solitude and study, but I provide you with no understanding of the importance of the *wu*. My humble apologies for this failure.

Take a single stick, flex it, and it breaks. Take a bunch of sticks, flex the bunch, and they will not break. So it is with Kuei-jin. The Crane without a *wu* is a pilot with no ship. The Devil-Tiger without a *wu* is a weapon with no hand to wield it. The Dragon without a *wu* is a fire with no one to warm. The Centipede without a *wu* is a juggler with no audience. The Bone Flower without a *wu* is a learned master with no disciples. The one-fingered hand grasps nothing.

I speak too often as though followers of the other Dharmas encumber those of us who follow the Song of the Shadow; while our perceptions may lead us to believe this, it is most frequently not the case. Xue was a wise engineer of Kuei-jin, our capacities and our limitations. He knew that one shining philosophy that could explain the entire significance of the Second Breath would be so complex that only a few could grasp it. Therefore, he took the gem apart in order that we might look at it one facet at a time.

Bone Flowers are not meant to depend on the other Dharmas like cold children waiting for adults to tell them to go into the house, but neither do we become independent from the other Dharmas until far into our search for enlightenment. Until you become an ancestor, the proper relationship with the other Dharmas is one of interdependence. Learn what you can from them, while teaching them whatever they can understand. One hint: Our riddles are lost on most of our fellows, with the exception of the Thousand Whispers.

The relationship between the Dharmas is one of reciprocity. The Dragons counter our hesitation, just as we counter their excessive enthusiasm. We chill the violence of the Devil-Tigers, just as they prod us into action we may not otherwise have taken. The Cranes channel our knowledge to ends which are proper under Heaven, just as we lure them into learning things that they would have otherwise left unexamined. The Centipede we teach restraint; in return, we learn flexibility. This is why the ancestors find most auspicious those *wu*

comprising one Kuei-jin from each Dharma and each direction. We are wiser together than we are apart. Do not forget this.

The alternative to the mixed *wu*, of course, is the Bone Flower *wu*. Do not doubt, Masahiro, that these are dangerous. We are knowledgeable but not always able to put our knowledge to its most proper use. We often have difficulty passing through the mortal sphere because of the marks, temporary or permanent, left on our faces by the Yin we channel. We become paralyzed by our interminable cold-minded analysis of situations. We are dexterous but not strong, brilliant but difficult to engage, aware but insensitive. We often have more in common with the dead than with the living. This can be problematic.

If a thing needs doing stealthily, however, then we are the masters of that realm. If the mission is one of diplomacy, I wouldn't want followers of any other Dharma along. There are things that Bone Flowers do better than any other, and those things we must do alone. Do not forget this either.

Respectfully,
— Dojima An

HEARING THE SONG

Masahiro,

I am thinking to you, do you hear it? I am thinking onto this paper with the pencil in my hand. Can you hear it? What else do you hear? What do you remember of those things you have stopped hearing? Do not frown at this question. It has merit.

It sometimes happens that a Kuei-jin ceases to be able to hear the Song of the Shadow. The call of knowledge and the allure of subtlety may become so soft that other songs become audible. Perhaps the Bone Flower briefly becomes unbalanced toward Yang and is led astray by the heady warmth of that principle. For Kuei-jin in the first 50 years after their Second Breath, experimentation with the Dharmas is expected. Many are not certain if they want to continue to value the goals and choices they made before their deaths. Some try to follow the Song of the Shadow and find the life of the Yin scholar too restrained. Others find the Devil-Tigers too unthinking in their violence or find the Thrashing Dragons to be too self-deceiving in their tasteless and satirical imitation of life.

A single act of blindness can set a vampire back on her Dharmic journey by years, possibly centuries in the case of mandarins and ancestors.

You do not want that.

At your level of understanding, you lose very little, and you gain it back quickly, but as you become more enlightened, acts of blindness hurt you. Kuei-jin on other Dharmas experience this as well. Sometimes they fall off their path. Sometimes they fall into ours.

We are not exclusionary. Those who want to listen for the Quiet Song are both allowed and encouraged. Time will make it clear who is fit for the Song of the Shadow and who is not. Those on other Dharmic paths are free to join us, though those who have renounced other Dharmas may find that the transition is not as simple as they might have hoped.

It happens frequently that those who believed themselves Devil-Tigers are simply angry children bearing grudges. They embrace the ways of the Celestial Devils as the most convenient tool for punishing those who did them wrong when they breathed. Once their initial rage has been satisfied by the death of the wrongdoer, their violence and vengeful ways begin to feel hollow. Many of these lost ones look to the Quiet Song as the path for their further Dharmic advancement.

Resplendent Cranes may find with the passage of time that morality, per se, is not what they are truly seeking, finding instead that the strictures and moral admonishments that they valued so highly begin to chafe after only a decade. These individuals may find that knowledge and the Cold Mind of the Bone Flower offer them the same tranquility as the Way of the Resplendent Crane without the pointless moral strictures.

Rootless Trees often tire of throwing off lives. Even the largest onion has only so many skins. Many stumble from the Path of a Thousand Whispers after listening to the Song of the Shadow. Its quiet soothes them after listening to the static of so many different voices in their heads.

Thrashing Dragons can become Bone Flowers only by completely rethinking their approach to the Second Breath. Where the Thrashing Dragon is loud and brazen, the Bone Flower is quiet and subtle. Unlike most other Dharmas, Thrashing Dragons don't just happen upon the Quiet Song accidentally. It would be difficult for our ways to be more different. The Dragons value heat, passion and the semblance of life — everything we do not. The rare Dragons who turn to the Song of the Shadow nearly always do so to escape the jarring and grating noise and chaos of their former Dharma.

It is more common for the followers of the so-called heretical Dharmas to tire of their false paths. Heresies tend to spring up in the backwaters of the Middle Kingdom, and should Kuei-jin from those odd places move to more civilized regions, they frequently realize the folly of their old beliefs. Many heretics come to the Song of the Shadow, if for no other reason than our policy of cool non-judgement. It makes us less intimidating than the other Dharmas, whose members are likely to brand heretics *akuma* as a knee-jerk matter of course.

Kuei-jin who have adopted the Flame of the Rising Phoenix as their path to enlightenment frequently give it up after watching one generation of family fade into senescence and die. The pain accompanying such ex-

periences quickly teaches them the value of tempering their interest in the world of the living. The Song of the Shadow, because of its belief in safeguarding the family, can often be a soothing and less problematic alternative to the Flame of the Rising Phoenix.

Those following the Tempest of Inward Focus can become Bone Flowers, but they must change their outlook. Tempests must understand that the calm they seek can be found more easily in the icy self-control of the Black Metal Egg than in the madly taxing attempt to constantly pit two forces against each other in hopes that they will negate one another.

Similarly, Godlings can become Bone Flowers by denying their urge to godhood. They are here to serve a function under *tian*, not to become its master. If they want to be the master of something, let them master themselves first.

Cerulean Veils are so close to being true Bone Flowers, and yet, they don't realize it. They interact with ghosts, and they recognize the power of Yin, but they cannot seem to free themselves from old, outdated modes of interacting with spirits. If they could just let go of their superstitious taboos and allow themselves to partake of the clarity of Yin, the followers of the Spirit of the Living Earth would make fine Bone Flowers indeed.

But so will you, one day. I expect to see this for myself when you come to help me expel the Kin-jin from San Francisco.

Sincerely,

— Dojima An

DARK SECRETS

Masahiro,

Even with the Cold Mind, there are moments of pain and regret. The Kin-jin of this damnable city have cost us much, and I feel my restraint slipping. I must be cool and still, inaction is our way. Do not ever think of us as perfect, Masahiro. That way leads to pride, and pride is the lot of foolish Cranes. Our Song is dark and dangerous. It draws us to places that in an earlier age were better avoided. Yes, Masahiro, I refer to Yomi, the Thousand Hells of the Yama Kings.

None know more about Yomi than the Bone Flowers. The frequency with which we travel the spirit worlds is legendary, and while Yomi is the worst possible destination, we welcome the experience for the knowledge we gain, even if that knowledge is etched in our skin by the Yama Kings themselves. We study the hells intensively. They fascinate us. We hunt down facts about Yomi with the unshakable intensity of a child picking at a scab. The pain we endured in the realms of the Yama Kings stays with us. It haunts our quiet moments, and when one is a Bone Flower, that means most of them. We may brood obsessively, contemplating its many agonies.

Many things may fill the empty cup of Yin. The



Sweaty Man of Yang may fill it and destroy our Cold Mind. The nectar of knowledge may fill it and advance us along our Dharma. But another substance also fills us. Do you know it? Remember your time in Yomi. Masahiro. Do you know now? Yes, pain.

When we have memories of the torments we suffered in Yomi, most, though not all, of those who follow the Quiet Song experience a remarkably strong impulse to recreate that pain. How many times have you calmly drawn the blade of a freshly sharpened knife across your own white skin — a forearm, a shoulder, a thigh — just to feel the peculiar moment of redemption and tranquility that follows? Fewer times than I, I would think. It is, perhaps, one more method of self-mastery, of sampling a small taste of the cold feast on which we supped in Yomi. That is why Yomi fascinates us so, and that is why we, of all the Dharmas, make extended visits to that place. We understand well the stories they tell of the Yama King Emma-o and what goes on between him and his *shikome* servitors in Kyuden no Kakuri. His thirst for pain, it would seem, is shared by most of our Dharma.

WE KNOW THESE HELLS

But let us talk more of Yomi than of our shameful secrets. The hell that Bone Flowers know best is Kakuri. It is, if there is such a thing, a relatively comfortable hell. It is cold and dark, as are we, and it deceives, as do we. Even the dreaded *shikome* hold no surprises for us, because most of them once walked the same Singing Shadow Path that we do. When one understands a demon and her motivations intimately, does that make her more or less disturbing? Reflect on that question.

The other hells we understand less completely, although we tend to appreciate the Yin-aspected ones more. Mikaboshi's Wicked City, Wu Hua's Pit of Salt and Iron, Chur-Xao's Hell of Falling and a few others all follow principles that we can respect and understand. Not that it diminishes the agonies we suffer when we are there, but from a strictly objective standpoint the Yin hells share a certain... aesthetic that we can't help but appreciate. Even in suffering, the Cold Mind allows us to observe and learn.

The other hells have decidedly less appeal. The Yang-aspected hells are particularly repugnant. The Hell of Burrowing Maggots, the Hell of Being Cut to Pieces, the Hell of Boiling Oil and, especially, Tou Mu's Hell of Being Skinned Alive all bear an extra horror for Bone Flowers. The very nature of these places burns away the Yin that grants us our vision, our equanimity and rationality like a hot poker to the eyes. And yet, we go there anyway. Yes, it hurts, but it is Hell and is supposed to hurt; for those of us following the Shadow Song, pain is a fair price for knowledge. Yes, the agonies are indescribable. Yes, many of our number never return. But knowledge available without striving and sacrifice is common knowledge and therefore

lacks value.

Bone Flower ancestors often go to Yomi to learn more about it, in hopes of finding some way of at least mitigating the ruin of the Sixth Age. Spies in Hell, they discern what they can of the major Yama Kings. Sometimes, they even come back to share what they have discovered. *The Red Book of the Iron Bridge*, with its long lists and descriptions of the hells was written by one such intrepid ancestor. *The Broken-Winged Crane* was also written by a Bone Flower ancestor, though she was tainted by her time in Yomi and entered into the service of the Yama Kings either during or shortly after writing that disturbing book.

THE PRICE AND VALUE OF CORRUPTION

That sort of corruption is controversial among Bone Flowers. The common — and the only socially acceptable — comment on *akuma* is that they are vile and must be destroyed as quickly as possible. In fact, only a small portion of Bone Flowers hold this position. Most of the rest of us fall into one of two camps — perhaps the closest we ever come to sects — known as the Empty Hands and the Fishhooks. The Empty Hands believe that, while each of us is obligated to keep ourselves free of the taint of the Yama Kings, we cannot interfere with another's quest for knowledge. The Fishhooks, on the other hand, believe that the discovery of an *akuma* is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the Yama Kings and their goals by interrogating the corrupt one relentlessly. The Hooks are perhaps the most cold-minded of Bone Flowers. They will do or say anything to get information from an *akuma*. Most Bone Flowers prefer to lure and coax information out of such prisoners, but some feel that the information involved warrants subjecting even a member of their own *wu* to agonies imported directly from Yomi to extract knowledge of the hells and the intentions of the Yama Kings.

Powerful members of the other Dharmas have long whispered accusations of *akuma* infestation in our ranks. Much of this is pointless political chattering that the Cold Mind wisely ignores, but we must never give our critics evidence to support their claims. The Song of the Shadow prides itself on its quest for knowledge and its responsible and appropriate use of information. There are Bone Flower bodhisattvas who have gotten the better of a deal with the Yama Kings. It is our right to have access to any information available to us, including many books on demonology, infernalism or similarly sensitive issues. Foolish behavior on the part of some Bone Flowers, those who lack the proper cold-mindedness, endangers this right by giving ammunition to those who accuse us of sheltering *akuma*. This weakens our claims that our internalization of the Black Metal Egg prevents us from making rash and poorly considered decisions like becoming pawns of the Yama Kings. Our ancestors (even those of the

Empty Hand faction) have destroyed younger Kuei-jin just for allowing these sorts of suspicions to arise in the first place.

In truth, Bone Flowers are difficult for the Yama Kings to lure into service. Our cold natures rarely stir at any bait the Yama Kings dangle in front of us. There is one currency that draws in Shadow Songs like no other, however, and that is esoteric knowledge. If we have any addiction, it is to information, and the Yama Kings know this all too well. On those occasions when they do manage to take a Bone Flower into their service as an *akuma*, it is in exchange for information on the Yama Kings themselves. The information that we have accumulated on the Yama Kings is vast, but I doubt it has been without its price. I have heard ancestors say that that the Song of the Shadow got the better end of these dark bargains. This is a riddle I have yet to unravel.

THE CYCLE TURNS

We are not ignorant of the Yama Kings' power or the limits of their malice, but neither are we particularly horrified or impressed. There must be some mechanism to help propel the Wheel of Ages through its cycle, and the Yama Kings are doing an excellent job of accomplishing the will of Heaven. Remember that what is best for the cycle is clearly not always going to be best for Kuei-jin, other *shen* or mortals. Those things

that satisfy our needs and keep us comfortable we are inclined to call good, and those things that cause us discomfort or pain we are inclined to call evil. The cycle, however, is not concerned with the matters of the denizens of the Middle Kingdom. It is the ultimate Cold Mind and turns neither for our pleasure nor our pain. We put ourselves in the way of good fortune and then exclaim how the universe has provided for us; we put ourselves in the way of bad joss, and we complain how unfair the world is. Neither position matters.

That being said, the notion of a storm and the actuality of being pelted by rain, buffeted by winds and struck by lightning are two entirely different things. The Yama Kings are only performing the tasks assigned to them (quite cleverly) by Heaven, but that doesn't mean that the denizens of the Middle Kingdom are obligated to throw themselves beneath the karmic wheel. The Sixth Age is coming. Its approach is not subtle. When it hits, it will hit like a storm, and the Middle Kingdom will be wrenched from its moorings. By laying a foundation of understanding between the *shen* and by gaining enough information on the plans of the Yama Kings, we just may be able to insulate the Middle Kingdom from the worst of the shocks to come.

I hope you will be able to join me soon.

Sincerely,

— Dojima An





THE MANY QUIET WAYS

ACROSS THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

A Dharma is a philosophy of enlightenment. It is a path of shared beliefs that the Grand Arhat founded as a way of helping others along toward enlightenment and, therefore, allow at least some of the Hungry Dead to redeem themselves. The adherents of the Song of the Shadow Dharma don't necessarily share anything else. They may be of different genders, come from different socioeconomic strata, have grown up with different religious beliefs and speak different languages. All Dharmas vary depending on the belief systems they're interpreted through, and the Song of the Shadow is no different. For these reasons, subtle differences appear in the Dharma from court to court. Most notably, not every court stresses all eight tenets equally.

SCHOLARS OF THE QUINCUNX

As in most things among the Kuei-jin, China is the cultural center of the Bone Flowers. The Five August Courts of the Quincunx play a central role in the overall affairs of the Dharma, and the stereotype of the dark scholar that so marks Shadow Songs originates here. Chongqing is the epicenter of all things Bone Flower, but the other Quincunx courts are also important for those who listen to the Quiet Song.

THE BONE COURT OF CHONGQING

Chongqing, at the nexus of many Yin-aspected dragon lines, has become the philosophical seat of the Song of the Shadow Dharma. Were it not a major city in the Quincunx, Chongqing would have a much greater population of Bone Flowers than any other Dharma; as it is, Bone Flowers make up just over half of the Kuei-jin population.

The Bone Flower love of knowledge finds its highest expression in the great library of Chongqing. The huge subterranean complex is one of the holiest sites of the Dharma. It houses all manner of scrolls, books and artifacts relating to Mount Meru, necromancy, Kin-jin, Zao-lai's damnation, Xue's enlightenment, demonology, the Occidental world and the history of the Middle Kingdom. Still more hides in the private collections of local ancestors. There are no fewer than two copies of *The Broken-Winged Crane* in Chongqing. One copy of this disturbing treatise on the Sixth Age rests in the library's warded vault, the other in the most private office of the Bone Ancestor herself.

In the mortal world, Chongqing is the bureaucratic capital of a predominantly rural region, and certain other courts thus find it to be a bit of a backwater. The Bone Court, however, is happy to be at a distance from the great masses of humanity and *shen*. It is easier to safeguard the knowledge they keep when they are far from the madness of cities like Beijing, Tokyo, Hong Kong or Singapore. The distance they have maintained from the extreme

urbanization of the cities along China's eastern coast lends them a level of protection from the degeneration that infuses those areas.

The guardians of Dharmic orthodoxy, Bone Court Shadow Songs take pains to observe all eight tenets of the Dharma with equal emphasis. At one time or another, virtually all Bone Flowers will travel to Chongqing either to study with an ancestor, consult the library or contribute their own wisdom to the collection. Because of this, the Bone Ancestor makes sure her students and fellows value all parts of the Dharma.

THE FLESH COURT OF SHANGHAI

The Flesh Court is a stronghold for those Bone Flowers more inclined to infiltration and the arts of war. Shanghai and its associated provinces are no place for most scholars, but students of war are a heartier breed. The demand for spies and assassins here is so great that Bone Flowers from across the Middle Kingdom come here to ply those trades.

The assassination of the Flesh Court Ancestor in 1938 by the powerful Black Wave *wu* (made up entirely of Bone Flower assassins) has attached a stigma to the Song of the Shadow in Shanghai. Nevertheless, with a city so full of trained assassins, even powerful Kuei-jin are paranoid enough not to say anything overtly disrespectful. Shanghai boasts many single-Dharma *wu*, and most of these comprise Bone Flowers. The icy calm that flows around one of these *wu* is palpable. Few Kuei-jin find any appeal in the idea of dealing with these cold, methodical scholars of Final Death technique.

The black market of Shanghai is a gathering place for Bone Flowers in the city. They swarm casually around informants and gather what knowledge they can about their opponents and any changes in the Kuei-jin population of the city. More than in any other city in the Middle Kingdom, obtaining accurate information in Shanghai can mean the difference between survival and Final Death. It is rare for Bone Flower *wu* to actually battle each other. Instead, they utilize their skills at diplomacy to defuse the conflict, and if diplomacy fails, there's always the appeal of a quick, quiet assassination. On those rare occasions when Bone Flowers *do* opt to "win after fighting," the combat is lightning fast, hideously violent and disturbingly quiet. Within a matter of 30 seconds one *wu* has been sent to Final Death, and the victors have disappeared.

THE JADE COURT OF CHANGAN

The most scholarly of the scholarly, Bone Flowers of the Jade Court memorize important works of Kuei-jin culture and learning. The tenets regarding learning are most important, along with the second recommending the protection of the family. Cooperation and understanding between the Dharmas are recurring themes among local Bone Flowers.

The Sages of the Fivefold Way, the greatest extant *wu* in the Middle Kingdom resides in the Jade Court, at the Shaolin Monastery. The Bone Flower bodhisattva Zhao Zaikeng is a member and answers questions about the Shadow Song way. To the unenlightened, however, his words are bizarre riddles. When asked when the Sixth Age would begin, he responded, "All you see is when you look at it. Close your eyes for now."

THE BLOOD COURT OF BEIJING

The Bone Flowers in the Blood Court of Beijing are the most concerned with appearances. They follow all protocols very closely. As a body, they are among the most ritually inclined. Rites, both mystic and otherwise, are the focus of their existence. While some say that this makes them the most proper adherents of their Dharma, the more popular opinion is that they waste so much time with extraneous ritual that they have very little time to devote to their studies, which, in theory, are supposed to be the center of Bone Flower existence. Their situation is understandable, however. The Blood Court as a whole errs on the side of excessive formality in its efforts to provide a model for the rest of the Quincunx and the Middle Kingdom. Since the other courts follow the Blood Court's lead so lackadaisically, Beijing feels it must display an excess of formality in order to maintain a sufficient level of order across the Middle Kingdom.

One way in which this benefits the Shadow Song Dharma is through the balance of the eight tenets. The Bone Flowers of the Blood Court go to extreme lengths to give all tenets equal weight. By doing so, they hope to minimize the nearly heretical levels of variance exhibited in the followers of the Dharma from other courts (like the notoriously unbalanced Green Courts). While the Bone Flowers of the Blood Court may be less productive scholars than Shadow Songs from Chongqing, Changan or other areas, they serve the Dharma as role models.

THE FLAME COURT OF HONG KONG

Bone Flowers in the Flame Court are perhaps the best diplomats among the Shadow Singers. They've had to be. No other city in the Middle Kingdom has had so long a history of foreign occupation. Many other *shen* also call Hong Kong home, making Bone Flower diplomacy all the more necessary to prevent antagonism between the myriad factions. That diplomacy is currently placing the Bone Flowers in a most regrettable position.

When the British originally took the city of Hong Kong, the rush of foreign *shen* into the city nearly erupted into outright warfare between the Kuei-jin, the Kin-jin and other myriad supernatural invaders. Only the cold-minded intervention of several *wu* of Bone Flowers prevented the open warfare that would have attracted Shih from across China.

As the occupation drew out, it became clear that Bone Flowers needed to act as buffers between Asian and

gweilo factions of *shen*, a task they accepted and performed for a century with exquisite dignity and elegance. During that time, relations with the Kin-jin became almost comfortable. Then, 1997 arrived.

The awkward peace negotiated by the Bone Flowers became a house of cards once the Quincunx decided to take Hong Kong back from the Kin-jin by force. The Shadow Songs were caught between the hammer of the Quincunx and the anvil of the Kin-jin. After negotiating a surprisingly stable peace between the two factions, the Bone Flowers found that the Quincunx had betrayed their efforts and begun purging the city of *gweilo*. The experience was enough to evoke bitterness from many less cold-minded Bone Flowers.

The upshot of this is that many of the (relatively) pro-Western Righteous Devils of Kowloon are Bone Flowers still intent on recognizing the treaties they made with the Kin-jin (although no Bone Flowers share *guanxi* with Angúo Chun, the head Devil). In 1998, these Shadow Songs especially wished stable ties with the Tremere Oliver Thrace, who they found both tactful and remarkably well-versed in sorcery. Thrace brought his period of grace with the Bone Flowers to an end, however, by sending an unearthed copy of *Phoenix, Monkey, Rat* — a supposedly lost Kuei-jin text — to his superior Thomas Wyncham in the spring of 1999. Shortly thereafter, Thrace disappeared, and some whisper Bone Flower assassins showed him the folly of his ways.

Hong Kong also puts diplomacy with other *shen* to the test, owing to the remarkable number of dragon nests and the zeal with which the *hengeyokai*, *chi'n ta* and Kuei-jin seek access to them. It is a source of unending challenge to the many diplomatic *wu* residing in this small court.

Hong Kong, meanwhile, is the jumping off point for a large portion of the Great Leap Outward. It is a base of operations for the renowned Metal Dragon Talon *wu*, and those Bone Flowers going to San Francisco frequently leave from Hong Kong.

NECROMANCERS OF THE GREEN COURTS

In Korea, the widespread Bone Flower concern with the dead has become an obsession. Local Shadow Songs emphasize the first and third tenets above all others. Some are inclined to call their curiosity toward the Yin World obsessive, but the ancients of the Green Courts value and respect it. Indeed, the Song of the Shadow holds more sway over the Green Courts than any other, including the Bone Court, because necromancy is essentially the local pastime.

The Green Courts have been caught between the forces of the two major players in the Middle Kingdom on several occasions, and they now maintain a policy of complete neutrality toward both the Chinese and Japanese courts. This rules out politics as a major motivation for most Korean Kuei-jin. Instead, they have turned to the

Yin World for their intrigues. The world of ghosts is the primary source of information for the Green Courts. They trade favors with the dead in order to monitor *hengeyokai* activity in Korea, political developments in Shanghai and what is done with the jade they sell. The great storm that has ravaged the Yellow Springs, sending many ghosts toward the world of the living, has made these relations more strained of late. Although there are plentiful ghosts with which to trade information, many seem confused and enraged by the chaos in the Underworld.

THE STRANGERS

A year ago, vampires from India (creatures very like Kin-jin but subtly different) entered Korea, asking for protection from a degenerate Kin-jin family. They requested access to the Green Courts' collection of safe houses along the Parallel Path. In exchange, they offered their unsurpassed knowledge of necromancy and the techniques of channeling Yin. The Green Court ancestors hardly hesitated and granted the strangers asylum in Seoul itself. These Indian vampires have brought with them information that not even the most necromantically inclined ancestors knew.

Needless to say, these new arrivals have caused a commotion within the Dharma. Most Kuei-jin following other Dharmas have heard that they are scholars of vast learning and nothing more. Among Bone Flowers, however, the reaction is somewhat different. Representatives from other courts have been clamoring (in as much as a cold-minded follower of the Song of the Shadow can clamor) to visit Seoul to meet these scholars. The Green Courts, controlled by a cabinet of crafty elder Shadow Songs, are only too happy to host Bone Flower visitors, for a price. They are quite effectively turning their guests into a scholarly commodity and getting promises of favors from Bone Flowers from across the Middle Kingdom in exchange for the opportunity to study with these bizarre and old masters of death knowledge.

A rumor is currently flying that the Most Serene Black Pearl Mistress, Mother of Shadows, herself, is bringing the Most Exalted Shadow Blossom Family (her entourage) to Seoul. This has raised eyebrows among many Bone Flowers, who would welcome a chance to learn from the coldest-minded being in existence, the greatest arhat of the Dharma. To say that there is no trepidation regarding this rumor would be inaccurate, but no Bone Flower would ever admit to such a hot-minded thing.

DEATH-DEALERS OF JAPAN

In Japan, Bone Flowers are more like wise men or Shinto priests. They place the greatest emphasis on the second, third, fourth and eighth tenets. Until recently, the Shadow Songs acted as diplomats to the Yellow Springs, but a great storm has made relations with the Jade Empire difficult. Most notably, the storm has blown many ghosts into the lands of the living, bringing terrible *joss*. Bone Flowers do continue to act as intermediaries with

the dead, although the nature of those relations are now quite changed.

Many Bone Flower *gaki* have tried to help Japanese ghosts escape from the tyranny of the Chinese Yellow Springs. Indeed, the Japanese Yin World is effectively under foreign occupation — what the local *shen* call the *Senryo*. The recent upheavals in the Yin World seem to offer a chance to free the ancestors' ghosts from the Jade Emperor and many local Bone Flowers are busy gathering as much information as they can to help in this auspicious endeavor.

For more on the *Senryo*, see **World of Darkness: Tokyo** and **Dark Kingdom of Jade**. The recent storm and some of its aftereffects are revealed in the **Wraith: The Oblivion** supplement **Ends of Empire**.

HOUSE GENJI

The Bone Flowers of House Genji are subtle in their pursuits. Their Yin orientation mitigates the loud, aggressive disposition that seems to come over most in the house. These Bone Flowers are still Genji, however, and are enamored with the modern world. Information is almost as dear to them as Chi, and the clotted mass of data pulsing through the Web is their preferred way of obtaining it.

The more modern cities of Japan are strongholds for the Genji, and the Bone Flowers are adept at making the most of their locale; Kobe, Kyoto and Tokyo are their stomping grounds. The southern-most reaches of Japan, much less under Bishamon control than the rest of the country, are also home to many Genji Bone Flowers, despite the poisoned Chi.

Indeed, the Kuei-jin of House Genji have fewer problems, both philosophically and physically, with the corrupted Chi resulting from the Burnings. They consider whatever symptoms they develop from using corrupt Chi to be a fair trade-off for the inroads they have made into the West since 1945. They rushed back to Hiroshima and Nagasaki as soon as their mortal prey returned and began forging connections to the West, which they realized would soon have a powerful presence throughout Japan. The opportunities for powerful new contacts and alliances were not to be missed. The Bone Flowers took careful note of this auspicious fact and behaved accordingly.

Japan's expansionist phase gave Shadow Songs of House Genji a clean connection to the outside world. The Emperor's surrender hadn't yet finished echoing when Genji's adherents of the Black Metal Egg had to engage the incoming Occidentals. Their diplomatic skills forged alliances with various *gaijin*, both mortal and Kin-jin.

The most scandalous alliance was that made with the Giovanni family. The Kin-jin necromancers were early and enthusiastic visitors to Edo and, later, Tokyo. Their take on necromancy intrigued Genji Bone Flowers, who hoped to discover an advantage over the Bishamon that might shift the balance of power in Japan. Although Bone Flowers found they could adapt some of the Giovanni

rituals to their use, these techniques of bullying and intimidating the spirits of the dead were intolerably rude and disrespectful. Bone Flower Ancestors of both the Genji and Bishamon houses ruled Western necromancy to be an abomination, and those practicing it were to be subject to the Eye of Heaven.

The Genji tend to show Giovanni some leniency, since they, as foreigners, are expected to be unmannered, uncivil and boorish, but necromantic magic that browbeats the dead into compliance clearly violates the second tenet of the Song of the Shadow. A Bone Flower who practices one of the forbidden rituals is in for very harsh treatment and will have a hard time hiding his crimes. The spirits of the dead are used to being treated with respect in the Middle Kingdom and tend to report offenses to the appropriate ancestor. The current chaos in the Yellow Springs makes such reporting a little less likely but still a threat.

The Giovanni issue takes a back seat for most Genji Bone Flowers, however. The incoming Westerners brought with them enormous amounts of knowledge that needed to be explored and understood. They also brought with them foreign Zaibatsu agents called Technocrats. Both local and foreign Stone People now appear determined to minimize the power of the *shen* throughout the Middle Kingdom, and one of the Bone Flower's most significant callings right now is to infiltrate the Zaibatsu and mitigate its control over Japan's *shen* or — better yet — to use the Zaibatsu as a weapon against the Bishamon. Infiltrating and manipulating these Lightning People is proving extremely difficult; indeed, their version of scarlet screens are extremely effective.

The Genji have reacted by forging an uneasy alliance between the native *shen* against the Zaibatsu. On occasion, the Shadow Songs will even recruit foreign *shen* in their war against the Technocrats. Weakening the dragon lines in the major cities is likely to be only a minor step toward the subjugation of the *shen* of Japan.

HOUSE BISHAMON

A common joke within House Bishamon is that it has no followers of the Song of the Shadow. This, of course, is not the case, but so many of them are shadowy and subtle figures that there is no obvious population of Bone Flowers to be found outside of a few functionaries in the major cities. For a Bone Flower to give up her solitude and anonymity, however, the position must be worthy of such a sacrifice. The upshot of all of this is that Bone Flowers appear (to outsiders) to be very rare in House Bishamon, but those who are visible are very well placed within the house's feudal power structure.

Unlike the Chinese courts, House Bishamon is a stronghold for Bone Flowers who follow the paths of espionage and assassination. The vast portion of those who study at Daisetsuzan are from House Bishamon (see p. 37). This results in a reversal of the Bone Flowers' traditional role. Within the Bishamon *uji* they are not

BONE FLOWERS LEARNING NECROMANCY?

Although no Kuei-jin can learn the path-derived powers of the Discipline, Necromancy rituals can "cross over." The Kuei-jin must be a skilled ritualist (Occult ••• and Rituals •••••) and Yin-aspected to adapt and use these foreign death incantations (as well as somehow having access to a learned Giovanni). Any of the basic Necromancy rituals (see *Vampire: The Masquerade*, p. 165) can cross over and become Kuei-jin rites of one level higher than their ritual level. For example, Cadaver's Touch, a level four ritual, would be a level five rite.

Note that these adapted rituals may, in fact, accomplish the same goals as some traditional Kuei-jin rites. Nevertheless, the rituals are all banned by Genji and Bishamon Bone Flowers because of their origins. They also cause a mitigated version of a Kindred Discipline's ripple effect on local Chi (see *Kindred of the East Companion*, p. 122).

quiet scholars of the night, but the elite assassins of the house and deserving of great respect. They still attend to their stewardship of families and their studies, but scholarship consists primarily of mastering the arts of infiltration and war.

Bishamon Bone Flowers keep a deliberately low profile in the south of Japan, where almost all of the dragon lines are still poisoned from the Burnings. While the city of Kagoshima on the island of Kyushu has a token representation of Shadow Songs, for the most part they simply behave as if in August of 1945 Kyushu ceased to exist and the island of Honshu dropped into the ocean west of 134 degrees. Even Shikoku is suspect, and only three cities are "worthy" of a Bone Flower presence: Takamatsu, Tokushima and Kochi. *Gaki* scholars believe the island of Honshu north and east of Kyoto to be mostly untainted by the Burnings, although the dragon lines around Tokyo and other large cities are still weaker than they ought to be. Some suspect that the Zaibatsu has deliberately taken steps to weaken them, but it is by and large the Genji who live in the large cities and must deal with the problems this creates.

The true seat of power for the Bone Flowers of House Bishamon is farther north, on the island of Hokkaido. All the elements of the Black Metal Egg — water, darkness



and cold — are here in a concentrated form. The Yin dragon lines are strong and uncorrupted, and in the winter, the nights are very, very long, allowing those Bone Flowers residing there a great deal of freedom to travel, study or perform extended rituals.

Bishamon Bone Flowers, like many other members of their *uji*, have a preference for wilderness areas. They are masters of Beast Shintai, and in their black cycle, need feed only once every tenth night. Consequently they are able to exist in less populated areas without taking a noticeable toll on the local community. In conjunction with their alliances with the various other *shen*, particularly the hengeyokai, the Bone Flowers of House Bishamon have a degree of freedom to exist in these wild areas that other Kuei-jin simply do not. Alliances with the Beast Courts can be uncertain, however, so the wilderness is never entirely safe.

While the primary temples of the Bishamon Bone Flowers are found (or go unfound, as the case may be) in rural areas, there is a temple in Sapporo where Dharmic meditations are guided by a Bone Flower ancestor of House Bishamon. Bone Flowers of the *uji* also have a noticeable presence in Hakodate, Sendai, Niigata, Iwaki and Tokyo. These cities have the proper balance of Yin and other resources to make them worthy places of study.

LEAPING OUTWARD

The ancestors of the Song of the Shadow are not content to study the world they know. Being masters of subtle infiltration and assassination (and failing that, diplomacy), Bone Flowers are often the first Kuei-jin to enter regions marked for occupation. They soften up resistance by assassinating key figures in the local power structure and, on occasion, by taking the place of their targets. Once they have gained a foothold in the new territory, war *wu* of other Dharmas enter the picture to take care of the brute force tasks.

Song of the Shadow ancestors from various major courts, *uji* and cities communicate extensively to discuss finely tuned plans for new acquisitions. The highest priority goal is the infiltration of San Francisco. The secondary goal involves increasing the Bone Flower's presence in the Golden Lion Court of Singapore. With recent events in India, however, these plans are changing.

SAN FRANCISCO

Quietly and carefully, Bone Flowers pursue the conquest of the American city of San Francisco. There are more speakers of Chinese in San Francisco than in any city outside the Middle Kingdom. This makes it a cultural stronghold for the Quincunx, and, if they have it their way, for the Song of the Shadow in particular. True Kuei-jin have already taken the Second Breath in San Francisco. They are among the first to arise in the West and not become *kānbujiàn*. The Quincunx has taken this as an auspicious omen for the settlement of the west coast of

North America. The Flame Court of Hong Kong, in particular, has found the business connections between Hong Kong and San Francisco a useful tool for infiltrating this new land. The court expects to have substantial influence over the conquered city. The Bone Flowers have graciously accepted this mission of stealth and subterfuge.

For the rest of the Kuei-jin, Bone Flower activities in San Francisco are something of a sideshow to the more dedicated efforts at conquest in Los Angeles. That campaign went through highs and lows under the command of the aggressive Mandarin Hao but is now stabilizing under the watchful eye of Bone Flower ancestor Jiejie Li. Hao honorably acknowledged his defeat and met the Eye of Heaven.

Jiejie Li is, first and foremost, a diplomat, and she has both co-opted Kin-jin in Los Angeles and opened negotiations with the Western power structure in San Francisco. Some in the Quincunx call this folly, but the ancestor knows that while she negotiates, the Metal Dragon Talon *wu* and other Shadow Songs slowly erode the Kin-jin hold on the city. Whether the ancestor is using the negotiations to distract her enemies from an ongoing conquest or using the Bone Flower infiltrators to weaken the Kin-jin bargaining position remains unclear.

The Bone Flower ancestors of the Koga *uji* have been most gracious in accepting this subtle route, fully aware that it gives them the chance to secure the city for themselves and the Bone Flowers of the Flame Court. For the time being, their campaign goes well, and they are slowly whittling away Kin-jin areas of control. But the Western vampires are far from defeated.

For more information on goings on in California, see *Shadow War*.

SINGAPORE

Bone Flowers have a substantial presence in all the power-centers of the Middle Kingdom except the Golden Courts. While the Golden Courts proper, with their ruling *penangallan*, don't make a tempting target for the Bone Flowers, the Golden Lion Court of Singapore does. It has become a popular destination for Shadow Songs from the Bone Court and from the Green Courts. Those from Chongqing are trying to install a strong Bone Flower presence within the next decade, expanding the Dharma's influence and the Bone Court's. The Korean Bone Flowers in the city, however, are more interested in putting some distance between themselves and all the newcomers arriving to see the Indian necromancers currently staying in Seoul. Both factions tread carefully, insinuating themselves as useful aids and scholars, rather than attempting any overt takeover.

INDIA

The Indian subcontinent has recently opened up to Kuei-jin influence. Three bodhisattvas, a Thrashing Dragon, a Resplendent Crane and a Devil-Tiger, destroyed an immensely powerful Kin-jin and were sent to

Yomi in the process. In the carnage that followed that resoundingly inauspicious conflict, the Kin-jin fell upon each other like rabid beasts. But for a handful, the Kin-jin destroyed one another, leaving India open to Kuei-jin expansion (see the **Vampire: The Masquerade** supplement **Time of Thin Blood** for more details).

While those peculiar Kuei-jin following the heretical Path of the Rising Phoenix show little, if any, interest in claiming the portions of India that have opened up, the Devil-Tigers, Cranes and Dragons have launched a furious campaign to avenge their fallen bodhisattvas, and those few Kin-jin that remained in India have been sent on their way to Yomi. Meanwhile, the Bone Ancestor has sent several powerful *wu* of Bone Flowers from Chongqing into Ahmadabad, a city in the State of Gujarat on the

western coast of India. As *shen* of the west direction, it befits the followers of the Song of the Shadow to take up the westernmost frontier of the Middle Kingdom. Once the Bone Court has fortified its position in Ahmadabad, it has every intention of claiming the north and west of India for itself. This would put Meru in the very center of its territory, a move the Bone Court finds most auspicious indeed.

TEMPLES OF YIN

The Song of the Shadow has many places it considers holy. These temples are most often centers of learning sitting on powerful Yin-rich dragon nests. While this combination of Yin and study form the ideal Bone Flower holy site (just as it forms the ideal Bone Flower), there are areas of such powerful Yin that this alone makes them important to the Dharma. There are *wu* of Bone Flowers dedicated to guarding such sites, keeping them hidden from other Kuei-jin and *shen*.

Pilgrimage to these various temples is often part of a Bone Flower's Dharmic path. Shadow Songs are under no obligation to visit holy sites, however. They travel in order to learn from great teachers, consult valuable works or bathe in the Chi of the greatest Yin dragon nests. No law enforces pilgrimage, but enlightenment without visiting the major sites is nigh impossible.

DAISETSUZAN (HOKKAIDO, JAPAN)

Wall Rating: 5

The Daisetsu mountain range forms the "Roof of Hokkaido," a high plateau on Japan's cold northernmost island. In the side of Asahidake, the tallest mountain in the area, is a cave leading into a complex series of caverns. These caverns, and the mountain face outside, form the most secret of all Bone Flower temples, called Daisetsuzan for the region that houses it. Very few, if any, Kuei-jin of other Dharmas know of this place of Yin meditation and martial study. While not all Bone Flower spies and assassins study at Daisetsuzan, it is the school for the cream of the crop, and its graduates leave fear in their cold-minded wake.

The sensei of Daisetsuzan is the most honorable Kuro-sama. Kuro-sama's philosophy is brutally simple: By training in the harshest conditions possible, all other conditions will seem simple by comparison. In order to complete an apprenticeship with him without meeting Final Death, a student must grow very knowledgeable in the ways of infiltration and assassination. Those who do not never make it off Asahidake.

Kuro-sama will take three students at a time at the very most but prefers to train only two so he can pit them against one another. His tutelage lasts three years, and he divides his nightly lessons into three parts. In the early portion of each night students study the techniques of the great strategists of the Middle Kingdom. During the midnight hours, Kuro-sama leads them in exercises on the face of the mountain. The final portion of the night (and

TWO LARGE CATS

Lili Zhou stood on the corner of Washington and Grant in San Francisco looking at a sign in Chinese that advertised fried chicken feet and an excellent dim sum. It wasn't yet 11, and the streets were still teeming with Running Monkeys, and all around her, she heard voices speaking the language she grew up with.

She had consented to meet Dojima An here for a discussion of the war. The Bone Flowers of the Koga *uji* had wished to coordinate with the Bone Flowers of the Flame Court on the next move against the Kin-jin. Already the Kuei-jin controlled the city north of Mission and east of Van Ness. The next move was to be a push west, to incorporate the two blocks known as Japan Center into the Kuei-jin holdings. It would consolidate Kuei-jin influence and put the city that much closer to Kuei-jin control.

It was to be an odd meeting. She had never been fond of the Japanese, but they were at least civilized. As a Bone Flower, she was versed in etiquette and diplomacy, and she could rely on Dojima being so as well.

She did not hear Dojima sneak up behind her, nor did she look to see him now. He had been ordered to come in White Tiger Corpse, so as not to be seen. He was polite enough to address her in the Guangdong dialect. "What would a lonely magical bird do if his wings were clipped and two large cats were stalking?"

Lili Zhou smiled. "He would be eaten, of course."

"Quite so," whispered Dojima. Cold-mindedness frosted his words.

Two hours later, eyes wide as mah-jongg tiles, the Tremere Primogen of San Francisco burned to ash, and new borders were drawn.

past dawn for those who can manage it), consists of meditation on the Black Metal Egg in the central cavern near the heart of the mountain.

The academic portion of training takes place wherever Kuro-sama finds the student. He begins by teaching the great books of Asian military science: Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, Musashi's *The Book of Five Rings*, Zhuge Liang and Liu Ji's *Mastering the Art of War* and a handful of others. These he uses as the basis for everything else he teaches. Kuro-sama then instructs his students on the more exotic techniques of infiltration and assassination: those requiring the use of Disciplines or magic. He assumes that his students will be assassins of the highest order and, therefore, will infiltrate and assassinate only the most extraordinary opponents. Consequently he teaches the strategies of the *hengeyokai*, as well as those of the Wu Lung, the Wu-Keng, the Go Kamisori Gama clan and other groups of Lightning People. Kuro-sama's knowledge of these *shen* is most impressive, although not infallible.

The majority of the "applied" portion of the training takes place on the face of Asahidake. For those Kuei-jin used to the warmth of Southeast Asia, this can be the most difficult adjustment. Daisetsuzan is on the same latitude as Toronto, and the altitude of the mountains insures that there is ice and snow to train in throughout much of the year. Students who are still disciples or jina must also determine how to obtain Chi, since there are no mortals conveniently available for feeding (the nearest city is 50 kilometers to the west). Most students ride the dragon tracks to the city to feed, but Kuro-sama is said to reward more creative solutions.

The drills on the mountain-side are grueling. Kuro-sama sneaks up on his students repeatedly and stabs them through the stomach with his (much hated) short sword. Students eventually learn how not to be surprised (wearing body armor is considered cheating, as it circumvents the point of the exercise). Kuro-sama then challenges his students to sneak up on him. None ever has, although those who master the Harmony with Night rite (see p. 62)

PEARLS AND BLADES

Six hours on the side of a dark mountain in the same position. I am dead and, therefore, do not breathe or blink or tremble from the cold. In the quiet night, I hear everything. The falling snow makes a sound. It's saying *touch touch touch*. I ignore it. I listen for Kuro-sama's stealthy approach. I cannot simply listen with the ears. I must listen with the heart, with the Cold Mind. I must not think. I must be. Thinking will get me killed. Again.

The snow is noticeably deeper now than when I took my position. When the mind is fully engaged, time passes unnoticed. I have trained with Kuro-sama for one and one half years. I am quite skilled now. We are interacting on levels so subtle that the living would sense nothing. At these extremes, the victor is she who can keep her mind the most transparent. If it is me, I will hear him in time to avoid his attack; I will then have to beat him back to the cave. If it is he, then I will reap pain for my folly. I must not think. I must be transparent. I must attain the Cold Mind.

But my mind is unruly. I want to impress Kuro-sama. I want to show him that everything I am has become a weapon like him. I want him to recognize my skills. I should be beyond such simple attachments. *Gaijin* say not to throw pearls before swine, but it is infinitely worse to throw pearls before buddhas. They simply ignore them and continue serenely on their way, leaving you to wonder at the value of your pearls, the ones you thought were so beautiful....

Oh.

I hear the whispered rip of fabric and see the blade emerge from my stomach before I feel the flare of pain. I must not react. His blade passes through my left kidney. The pain fills the entire stage of my consciousness. I am cold-minded enough not to move. If I do, he will withdraw his sword and cut my head off with it, as is his right as sensei. To let him surprise me is a little failure. To respond to the pain of his punishment is a large failure. Kuro-sama does not tolerate large failure this late in the training. He twists the blade, ripping the wound open wider. I do not grit my teeth or make fists or close my eyes to block out the pain as I once did. I do not move in any way because he would sense it. I can but welcome the pain and let it teach me.

He withdraws the sword. Seconds and snowflakes blow by. I do not know if he remains behind me. I stop thinking.

Yes.

I sense him now, like a wall behind me. I suddenly understand how I failed. It will not happen again. And, perhaps sensing my realization, he is gone.

I channel Chi to close the wound. All the same, the echoes of that pain will continue until dawn.

I turn around.

He has left no footprints.

early on have been able to get within two meters of him before being subdued (and stabbed).

The final segment of each night takes place in the dark main cavern of the mountain. Kuro-sama instructs his pupils in meditation, esoteric matters and philosophy. Students learn to channel Yin, how to obtain information from denizens of the Yin World and the necessity for self-control and cold-mindedness in combat situations. The sensei also uses this time to build on the lessons of earlier that night, reminding his pupils of how to frame one enemy for the death of another, how to manipulate hengeyokai into killing enemies and other indirect solutions to problems.

Especially since a *wu* of his graduates helped plunge the Flesh Court into chaos in 1938, Kuro-sama has emphasized the importance of the second and seventh tenets when accepting assignments. Bone Flowers must not threaten the overall stability of *wu* and court through their actions or fail to see the dangerous implications of an assassination. As most of his students actions occur outside the formalized limits of twilight or midnight war, Kuro-sama strives to ensure that they do not unwittingly precipitate the Sixth Age. A superior assassin, he teaches, knows all the consequences of his actions and acts without ever being noticed.

MOUNT Tiantai (ZHEJIANG PROVINCE, CHINA)

Wall Rating: 3

The best known and most open of the Bone Flower temples is located on Mount Tiantai in Zhejiang province in China. It exists almost as a counterpoint to the majority of Shadow Song temples, which focus so intently on embodying the Yin principle that the second tenet, protecting the family, is incapable of playing any true part in the lives of the Kuei-jin who go there. Tiantai is quite different. Families that have been wronged in some way can come here at night to register their complaints. The complaints must be very serious, or the ancestor will be displeased. Complaints like "My son must marry this girl for her dowry, but he says he prefers men; you must punish him" or "My sister is a witch and has put a curse of impotence upon my husband so that we can have no more children" will result in loss of blood as a token of the ancestor's displeasure. Any family that knows about Tiantai will know to bring only serious complaints. Any given night may see a family or perhaps two approach the temple for an audience with the ancestor, Han Houshou. She will typically give advice recommending that the plaintiffs accept that death, even violent death, is a part of the cycle and that it is best to simply make peace with the dead and be respectful of the ghost. On occasion, a complaint will come in that is so offensive that the ancestor will assign a *wu* to investigate and redress, if possible, the wrong to the family. Twice since the founding of the Tiantai Temple 1,500 years ago, the insult to

the family has been so great that Han Houshou has attended to the issue personally.

Mortals throughout Zhejiang province and beyond have heard of Tiantai Temple, although most believe it to be inhabited by holy men and women who (at best) dispense enlightened advice. Stories of dark magic and the Hungry Dead still circulate among the rural population, but such superstition is less potent in urban centers. The "superstitious farmers" who continue to listen to the stories, however, find their belief reaffirmed upon meeting Han Houshou.

THE BONE LIBRARY (CHONGQING, CHINA)

Wall Rating: 3

With the exception of the Black Lotus Temple, the subterranean library of Chongqing is the holiest site of the Song of the Shadow Dharma. The Bone Flowers did not build it alone, however. A Wu Lung wizard assisted them in exchange for information on the demon masters of his enemies in the Wu-Keng. Hundreds of mortals also dug out the enormous main cavern in the days of legend, when memories of the Wan Xian still lingered in the minds of the living. Work on the library began the moment the sun had dropped below the horizon. The Kuei-jin explained the architectural techniques or physical principles to the unschooled workers. It took nearly 200 years to finish and claimed the lives of many workers and the unlives of several Kuei-jin.

Subterranean architecture did not come naturally to the mortals or the Kuei-jin, but the Bone Ancestor ruled that it was the wisest course of action. Should a small army of Kuei-jin ever need to mass, the library would protect them from the vengeance of the sun for as long as they needed it to. Great Bone Flower tacticians from across the Middle Kingdom (including the legendary Kuro-sama) advised the Bone Ancestor on proper defensive fortifications and strategic design to make the library defensible by as few as 10 Kuei-jin. The Bone Ancestor reasoned that unless the great Kuei-jin scholars felt thoroughly confident in the library and its ability to protect them and the books they labored over, none would choose to isolate themselves in the distant backwaters of Chongqing.

Once the library was complete, a slowly building trickle of scholars, both from the Shadow Song and other Dharmic paths, joined the initial handful of Bone Flower scholars already living in Chongqing. A century after its completion, the subterranean library was the primary research and cultural site for all Bone Flowers. It was only a brief time before it held that position among the other paths as well. When the Eight Sacred Steps *wu* returned from the region near Tibet with relics from Meru, they assured the fame of the library.

Other learned *shen* sometimes request access to the contents of the library, and the Bone Ancestor occasionally allows it, in exchange for promises of favors. Only Kuei-jin are ever allowed into the library itself, however.

It houses several hundred Kuei-jin scholars, and their security is the highest priority. The presence of so many Hungry Dead in a single place creates a great demand on the local mortal herd, although the vast majority of these scholars remain black cycled and need feed only once every 10 nights. When they do need to feed, the Bone Ancestor maintains a stable of those who are willing to donate their Chi to the cause of knowledge. She also allows careful feeding among the five million inhabitants of the city of Chongqing, but tasks the Black Screen *wu* (which includes both Bone Flower assassins and Devil-Tiger warriors) to make sure no incautious scholar attracts attention to the library by ill-advised feeding.

The only site that rivals the great subterranean library of Chongqing is the Shaolin Monastery of the Jade Court. The library of Chongqing has more books, more artifacts from Meru and more scholars to interpret them, reflecting its emphasis on research and scholastic learning. Those who have been the to the monastery, however, claim that asking one question of the bodhisattvas surpasses decades of study of tomes. The Bone Ancestor says nothing to these criticisms — jealousy is for the hot-minded.

THE BLACK LOTUS TEMPLE (LOCATION UNKNOWN)

Wall Rating: negligible

The Most Serene Black Pearl Mistress, Mother of Shadows, built the oldest Shadow Song temple herself. Called the Black Lotus Temple, it is the supreme shrine to Yin and nothingness. It is a vast place. The domed ceiling rises high overhead. The floor and walls are perfectly smooth. The one entrance is a long tunnel coming up through cold dark water. It is without light in all the ways a place can be without light.

The silence is painful to the ears, but breaking the silence is pointless. The temple is so rich in Yin that it swallows any sound above a whisper. The Wall here is thin and fragile, a mere step away from the Yin World. On occasion, sifus of the Bone Flower Dharma bring their better students here to begin sojourns into the Yellow Springs.

There have always been ghosts at the temple, but since the beginning of the new ghost world storm, hundreds of the dead have gathered there, lingering like a loss in the heart. The temple attendants welcome the respectful dead and remove the troublesome. In exchange for the right to stay at the temple, the former agree to guard it against any enemy if it is ever endangered. Young Bone Flowers wonder what would ever threaten a place that contains so many powerful ancestors, but the tradition was instituted by the Most Serene Black Pearl Mistress, Mother of Shadows, and none has bothered to find her to question her reasoning.

Bodhisattvas who have left the courts to pursue their own enlightenment perform their meditations here. They sit in contemplation, or they perform lengthy series of slow, agonizing postures that a living body cannot take. They bend and twist into unnatural and disturbing contortions

as a means of controlling the flow of Yin through their own bodies. The Yin Prana may well have its origins at the Black Lotus Temple.

The exact location of the Black Lotus Temple is known only to those Bone Flowers who have found it (although students can be brought to the temple blindfolded by their masters). Rumors swarm among the Running Monkeys of the Dharma. Some say it lies at the bottom of the Sea of Japan and benefits from a unique treaty with the deadly Same-Bito shark-men. Others claim it lies in North Korea on the site of Qin Shao's encounter with the fire and the foolish *wu* (see p. 16). Still others say it has no physical component at all and exists in a bubble of the Yin World. The mandarin and ancestors can but smile at these theories.

BONE FLOWERS IN OTHER REALMS

Followers of the Song of the Shadow hunger for knowledge, and to satisfy this hunger, they have traveled. Bone Flowers were among the first Kuei-jin to visit the lands of the Kin-jin. Even more notably, however, they are the ambassadors to the ghost and spirit worlds. Of all the Kuei-jin, Bone Flowers have the most dealings with the inhabitants of the worlds beyond the Wall.

THE YIN WORLD: AT HOME AMONG THE DEAD

"Dangling by a scarlet rope
in a vast and bottomless unlit pit,
I greet and converse with my associates, the dead.
But for the first tenet of the Dharma, I would be here now,
thinking in the cold."

Thus begins the *Black Winter Pearl*, the favored Bone Flower text on the Yin World and the etiquette of ghosts written by the scholar Han Dengbao.

Bone Flowers have a particular fondness for the Yin World. The dead are treasure troves of lost information, and while they can be difficult at times, the proper rites of appeasement can make them most forthcoming. Needless to say, Bone Flowers have established an entire scholarly dialogue concerning the rites of appeasement; the books are in the library at Chongqing.

Many Bone Flowers fancy themselves little more than ghosts with convenient vehicles in the material world. The number of Shadow Songs who enter the Yin World for extended "research" is quite high. The Yin Prana technique Semblance of the Ebon Dragon grants them freedom from the need to feed on a regular basis, allowing them to remain in the Yellow Springs for nearly indefinite periods. There are rumored techniques of obtaining Chi from ghosts, but they are highly dubious and a potential threat to the goodwill that exists between ghosts and those on the Shadow Path.

In recent times, an enormous storm in the Yin World has damaged many of the great cities of the Yellow Springs and sent the Jade Empire through monumental shifts and changes. Bone Flowers see this as a particularly ill omen, reflecting the imminence of the Sixth Age. Ghosts, who have always maintained a moderate presence in the Middle Kingdom, have now been blasted into the physical world, where they have begun to comport themselves in unbecoming and inappropriate ways. Bone Flowers have been instrumental in convincing some of these ghosts to behave in a more proper fashion, others they have had to send on to their next role. While some voices are counseling that the great storm in the Yin World is simply a part of the eternal ebb and flow of the worlds under Heaven, others claim that it is the worst possible joss and that this development may illicit a response from on high. Meanwhile, Bone Flower scholars whose duty it is under *tian* to study omens watch the storm rage. They note that a few ghosts have reported that this storm is worse in the European Underworld, another sign that the *gweilo* are harbingers of the Age of Sorrow.

THE YANG WORLD: THE UNPLEASANT HEAT

Bone Flowers do not like the Yang World. Only Cold Mind allows them to spend any time there at all. Their ambassadorial obligations to the Spirit Courts are the least favored of their duties under *tian*. The spiritual light and heat of the realms agitates them and makes them uncomfortable. Even Han Dengbao expresses his lack of appreciation. Early in *The Scarlet Sojourn*, his book on the Yang World and the etiquette of spirits, he writes, "Books should not be left in the teeming jungle. Steam warps paper, unwrites words. The insects bore."

A Bone Flower's cold-mindedness and etiquette face their greatest test when dealing with spirits. While ghosts commonly show a restraint that Bone Flowers find becoming, the spirits of the Yang World are more capricious, bellicose and unfocused. Some even note that the spirits of the Yang World are not unlike the Kin-jin in that regard. The Yang Realms' very nature makes them dangerous for Bone Flowers. Their frequent Yin imbalance highlights all the elements that make them seem cold in the Middle Kingdom. In the spirit world, the vast majority of Bone Flowers seem honorless, arrogant, sneaky and cruel. Unpleasantness can escalate much more quickly there than Bone Flowers are comfortable with. The Duke of Thunder may one moment promise to put his army at one's disposal and the next moment decide to put his sword to one's throat. The rules of the spirit world are much less clear to Bone Flowers, although a well-traveled ancestors once tried to explain it thus:

"Flames change direction.
They make no promises but
Fire always burns."

THE YOMI WORLD: SECRET EXCHANGES

There is a secret. Some Bone Flower ancestors, par-

ticularly bodhisattvas, speak with Yama Kings on a relatively frequent basis, possibly as often as once a century. It is not an alliance. They have not signed pacts with the Yama Kings, nor do they do their bidding, but there are times when each seeks the counsel of the other. While the Yama Kings are essentially omniscient in their respective hells, there are things they do not know and cannot readily find out without the knowledge of the exceedingly wise bodhisattvas. The Yama King Emma-o began this disturbing mutual imposition when he presented a question regarding his own origins to the Most Serene Black Pearl Mistress, Mother of Shadows. He offered her power in exchange for her ineffable wisdom, but nothing follows power so frequently as weakness, and the Mother of Shadows would have none of it. She did, however, make Emma-o sign a pact with her promising to answer, truthfully and completely, one question for her in reciprocation at whatsoever time she chose. He agreed. To this date, she has not asked the question. The scroll hangs from her neck in an ornately carved black obsidian tube. She is not averse to being owed a favor by a Yama King.


Other ancestors have not been sufficiently cold-minded to do likewise; they have asked their questions and answered still more in response. Knowledge can become an addiction for some Bone Flower elders. The number of ancestors who have dealt with the Yama Kings in such a capacity is very small, but there are questions that need answers. The ancestors are supremely discreet about this arrangement. They have no interest in being branded *akuma* for their "harmless" exchange of information.

The Yama Kings, on the other hand, are quite happy to dangle an ancestor's deeds in the face of younger Bone Flowers as temptation. Sadly, not all Bone Flowers are cold-minded enough to withstand the temptation of esoteric knowledge, and there are those who have become *akuma* in the name of learning.

Shadow Songs also sometimes travel into Yomi itself. Ancestors and bodhisattvas will occasionally do so to witness the infernal punishment of particularly deserving Kuei-jin criminals. They note, if possible, which hell the criminal goes to, by whom he is punished, who the Yama King of that hell is (if known) and the precise methods of torture. The ancestors then record these punishments in a work called *The Black Book of the Lash*. While not a particularly popular tome among the Bone Flowers (who find judgement and punishment to be at odds with the concept of Cold Mind), Resplendent Cranes frequently transcribe it as evidence of the August Personage's indirect justice and retribution.

NOTABLE WU

More than any other Dharma, Bone Flowers share a common body of knowledge. A vast wealth of history, legend, lore and Dharmic culture exists in the great underground library of Chongqing. This accumulated



wealth of history includes scroll after scroll of tales of three great *wu* composed solely of Bone Flowers who have left their unfading mark on Kuei-jin history. Each of these *wu* comprises some of the greatest cultural heroes known to Kuei-jin in general and followers of the Song of the Shadow in particular. There are also stories of *wu* with less glorious histories that serve as negative examples to running monkeys.

THE BLACK WAVE: SILENT, COLD AND DEADLY

The Black Wave *wu* is one of the most deadly *wu* in the Middle Kingdom. An early student of Kuro-sama named Yukio returned to Daisetsuzan to request of that great sensei the names of his four most accomplished students. Kuro-sama named off five, including Yukio herself. She left Daisetsuzan and sought out the other four he had named. It was four years later that Yukio found the last of them. Agreeing to cast their lot together, the five underwent *guanxi* and consecrated to themselves a powerful *nushi* spirit of darkness and night. The *wu* then began working as the primary assassins for the Koga *uji*. As Kuro-sama had instructed, the five were faceless and nameless. The assassinations they completed were invariably attributed to others. As Kuei-jin of considerable enlightenment (and incomparable training), they were the weapon of choice for the Koga when circumstances dictated that a powerful ancestor needed to be eliminated without the formality of shadow war.

That is what took the Black Wave to Shanghai in 1938. The Flesh Ancestor of the court had taken as prisoners several Kuei-jin of the Koga *uji*. When his thinly veiled threats and requests for Koga withdrawal from Shanghai were ignored, he personally killed the captives by burning them away piece by piece until their souls went screaming back to Yomi. He sent what little remained of them back to Japan in an ornately carved lacquer box. The *daimyo* of the Koga was furious, and he dispatched the Black Wave to avenge this insult. Within one week, the heavily guarded and most enlightened Flesh Ancestor had met Final Death, and the Flesh Court fell into a state of utter chaos. The assassination was not easy, however, and Yukio herself was grievously injured by one of the ancestor's guards. The *wu* was also unable to completely mask its participation, and many in the Flesh Court suspected their involvement. The Black Wave compounded these failures when it confirmed its responsibility to certain old Japanese Bone Flowers.

The death of the Flesh Ancestor plunged contested Shanghai into a cycle of chaos that has yet to end. This was a serious blow to the Black Wave *wu*, all of whose members faced an act of blindness when they realized that they had helped devastate the city. Several Bone Flower elders, including Kuro-sama and the Bone Ancestor herself, sought out the *wu* to reprimand them. The Black Wave had failed to respect the seventh tenet, they explained, when it had blindly accepted the Koga mission.

It had wrought further violence instead of a quick, cold death. Although the action was technically correct, as it came in the midst of the midnight war raging between the Flesh Court and the Koga, it had been inauspicious for the Black Wave to be but a tool. Its primary duty was to their Dharma, not the *uji*.

Since then, the Black Wave has held itself to a higher standard. It undertakes missions only if it can gain understanding from the mission and only if the results are firmly controlled. The first requirement can be met by payment in information or training or by missions that in and of themselves entail new learning (such as facing a new type of foe or one in a foreign land). The second requirement has been harder to meet in these inauspicious times. The Black Wind rejects many assignments because the risks of further chaos are too great — most notably, it recently refused to assassinate the Kin-jin leader Jeremy MacNeil in Los Angeles. Some have called this cowardice, but Yukio claims that eliminating the Kin-jin strongman now would just invite worse enemies into the battlefield of the Great Leap Outward. (For more on the conflict in Los Angeles, see *Shadow War*.)

Despite the *wu*'s stricter code and the events of 1938, the Black Wave still crashes down from time to time on the enemies of the Koga, and it continues to have close ties with the *uji*. Some say that the *daimyo* employs other, younger Bone Flower assassins when the Black Wave chooses not to accept a mission.

THE ETERNAL ICE: WORDS OVER WEAPONS

Less violent than either the Black Wave or the Metal Dragon Talon (see below), the Eternal Ice *wu* is primarily an emergency-response diplomatic corps. Its members have mastered the skills of intervention, de-escalation and negotiation and use them to prevent unnecessary friction between mortals and *shen* or between the various *shen* themselves. Armed with nothing but their knowledge of and experience with the denizens of the Middle Kingdom and their respective systems of etiquette, the Eternal Ice has a remarkable record of peaceful conflict resolution. Their reputation for unbiased judgement has also served to make them arbiters in various claims between the factions of the Middle Kingdom. In one of its most infamous cases, the Eternal Ice ruled against another *wu* and in favor of a village elder that accused them of overfeeding on the village's children. The ruling of the Eternal Ice was respected, and the other *wu* ceased preying on children, thereby avoiding having the Shih called in. In their distinguished career, the Eternal Ice has also ended hauntings by the ghosts of angry ancestors, defused hostilities between the Kuei-jin and hengeyokai of the Green Courts and smoothed over differences between courts heading toward midnight warfare.

While it is not particularly adept in the ways of combat, the Eternal Ice *wu* has many friends. Indeed, more ancestors, hengeyokai warriors and old ghosts owe the *wu* favors than can even be counted at this point.

Were it to ask, the Eternal Ice *wu* could have at its disposal a small army of protectors. Of course, not everyone can be satisfied with a negotiated settlement. The *wu* has several enemies among the *shen*, including the so-called Queen of Reeds, a powerful *penanggalan* whom they prevented from establishing a foothold among the Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong. Twice already, members of the Eternal Ice have faced angry Yang spirits sent from the Golden Courts.

THE METAL DRAGON TALON: INTO THE ENEMY'S LANDS

The youngest of the three famed Bone Flower *wu*, the Metal Dragon Talon came together 150 years ago in response to the Kin-jin incursion into China. By great perseverance, the Metal Dragon Talon learned the technique for utilizing Bone and Flesh Shintai together to mimic the appearance of others. Once their mastery of English was complete and without accent of any kind, the *wu*'s members began assassinating pivotal *gweilo* and learning everything they could from taking their place. It was an undertaking of extreme danger, but the Metal Dragon Talon was cold-minded enough to carry it out.

Once the *wu* had learned all it could of the Kin-jin incursion, it promptly returned the favor and began making incursions of its own into the West. The Talon's fact-finding missions has taken it to such diverse locales as Sydney, London, San Francisco, Vancouver, New York, Vienna, Venice and Johannesburg. Among Kuei-jin, the *wu*'s members are considered past masters of all things Occidental. The information they have gathered on Westerners (particularly Kin-jin) fills volumes in the great underground library of Chongqing.

In the last decade, the Metal Dragon Talon has discovered a new tool for gathering information on the West: the Internet. While China monitors and censors Internet feeds into the country, the *wu*'s members are nothing if not resourceful. Their uncensored Internet feeds bring them news, financial data and telltale hints of the movements and plans of the Kindred. The Metal Dragon Talon most commonly resides in Chongqing, but the Bone Ancestor deploys it to sites of possible Kin-jin/Kuei-jin conflict. The *wu* has recently been in San Francisco and Hong Kong but is now most active in Los Angeles.

The Talons' mimicry skills are reaching impressive heights. One member of the *wu* once successfully impersonated Robert Pedder during an encounter with the Kindred's own child. This came only after extensive study of the Kindred prince, however. Nevertheless, the *wu*'s members have used their disguise skills against the Westerners more times than any Kin-jin realizes.

THE EIGHT SACRED STEPS: THE QUESTIONABLE WU

Not all famous *wu* remain so. It happens that mystery or bad *joss* can darken a *wu*'s place in history. The standard example of this phenomenon is the Eight Sacred Steps

wu, responsible for the vast majority of artifacts recovered from the area near Meru that are now housed in the great library of Chongqing.

While not composed entirely of Bone Flowers, the Eight Sacred Steps *wu* only had one follower of another Dharma, the Devil-Tiger Chun Quan. The Sacred Steps took their Second Breaths in the city of Chongqing and were taught the values of the Bone Court. They learned that the return to the mythological city of Meru was the highest achievement the Kuei-jin could strive for. The four Bone Flowers were intent on discovering the truth behind the tales they had heard of those lands in Tibet where Meru once stood. Chun Quan was not particularly enthusiastic on the subject, but was not willful enough to defy the *guanxi* he shared with the other four members of his *wu*.

The five launched their expedition in the spring nearly 400 years ago. The Bone Ancestor waited a year before announcing that it was unlikely that they would be returning in any timely fashion. Three years later they returned, considerably more enlightened than when they left, bearing jade talismans, scrolls and other evidence of Meru. They were pronounced the high masters of the mountain.

Secretly, however, Chun Quan requested a meeting with the Bone Ancestor. He begged to be released from his *guanxi* with the four Bone Flowers. He could not be persuaded to explain why, although the Bone Ancestor was able to ascertain that neither he nor they had entered into any sort of pact with the Yama Kings. The Bone Ancestor wouldn't hear of it. She felt very strongly that the *wu* was the family of the Kuei-jin, and the second tenet of the Shadow Song Path demands that the family be preserved against those who would violate it. Chun Quan was told that he would have to work through whatever problem was affecting his relationship with the rest of his *wu*.

Nearly 40 years later, the Eight Sacred Steps made a second expedition into the regions of Tibet. Its members were again gone for over a year, though they returned much more quickly than on their previous journey. Again they brought back artifacts that painted a clear picture of Meru, the great city of the Wan Xian. The four Bone Flowers accepted the accolades of the court with the appropriate cold-mindedness. Chun Quan, however, seemed troubled. The Bone Ancestor requested a meeting with the Devil-Tiger and again he requested that she break his *guanxi* to the rest of his *wu*. Again she refused.

The Eight Sacred Steps did not make another journey for several hundred years because the Bone Flowers wanted to translate the *kaja* on the artifacts they had brought back. Chun Quan took this time to travel to the Blood Court and humbly request that the Blood Ancestor undo his *guanxi*. The Blood Ancestor was horrified and insulted. Only Chun Quan's status as cultural hero kept him from being branded *akuma* on the spot. Chun Quan traveled the Middle Kingdom alone for several genera-

tions, but just over 20 years ago he was called back to the Bone Court. Thinking that perhaps the Bone Ancestor was at last willing to nullify his *guanxi*, Chun Quan returned. He discovered that his *wu* had translated all of the *kaja* and wanted to go back for more artifacts in order to complete parts of the great mystery. Chun Quan trembled. His serene Bone Flower companions surrounded him, and the five of them returned to Tibet. They were gone six years, and only the Bone Flowers returned. They were heavily burdened with carefully packaged tablets and scrolls, jade artifacts and strange crystal bowls that sang when touched. When asked about the whereabouts of their companion, they explained with perfect cold-mindedness that things were not as they were when last they had gone into Tibet. The Chinese occupation had complicated things. This was all the answer they gave.

In the privacy of her meeting room, the Bone Ancestor asked the Bone Flowers again what had happened to Chun Quan. Again they obfuscated, but could not completely hide the truth from so skilled a riddle-master. By triangulating on their words through their lies, the Bone Ancestor was able to determine that the Devil-Tiger was dead, that he had died in some deeply painful or dishonorable way, that he was dead at his fellow's hands and that the culpability lay with them. She shared this information with them, and she serenely explained that if they were to persist in their obstinacy, they would be subjected to a more insistent interrogation. That morning at dawn, the four remaining members of the Eight Sacred Steps *wu* left the library where the Bone Ancestor's offices were and met the Eye of Heaven. The Bone Ancestor declared them *akuma* the next evening. Whether they had truly dealt with the Yama Kings or encountered some other dark fate in Tibet is unknown to all save the ancestor herself.

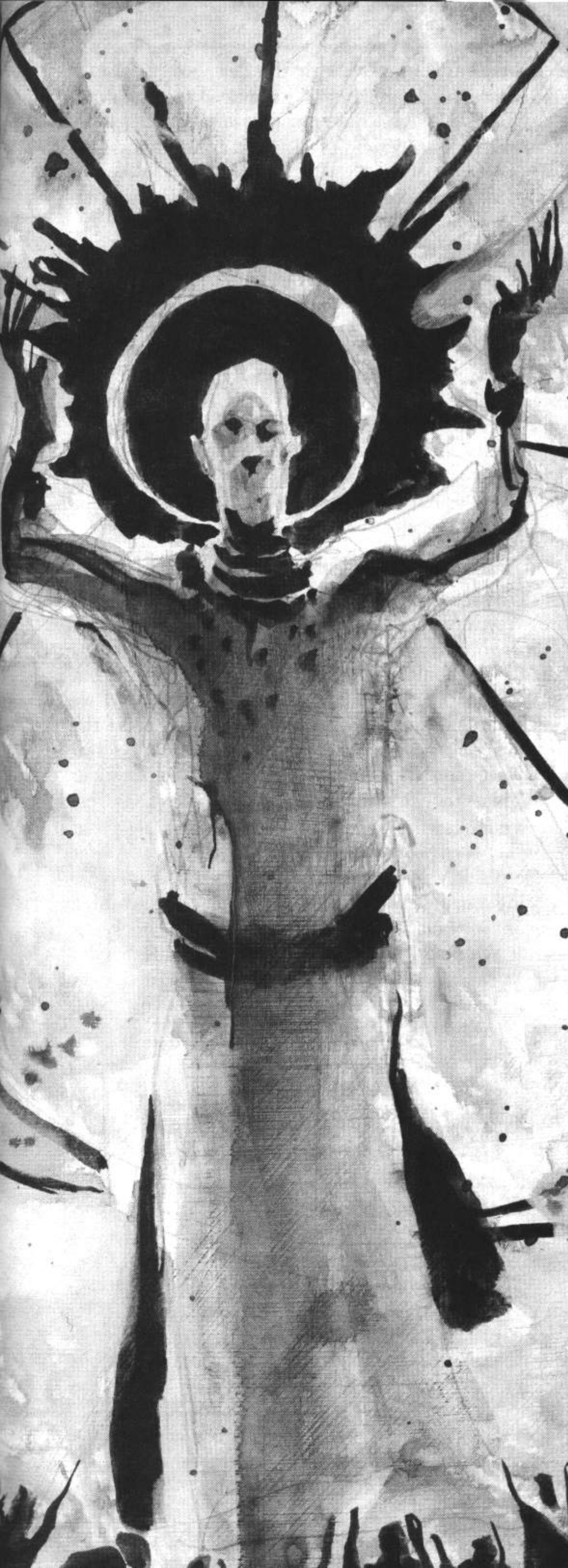
RELATIONS AND VIEWS

The scholars and diplomats of the Kuei-jin world, Bone Flowers know a great deal about the other inhabitants of the night. They study other Dharmas and other *shen* most avidly. Theoretically, they should learn and not judge, but relationships are never quite so free of prejudice and opinion. Bone Flowers know a great deal about others but presume to know still more.

The following notes are from Zhai Jingshan, a member of the Eternal Ice *wu* and a noted Bone Flower diplomat.

OTHER SONGS: THE DHARMAS

Were it not for the social expectations of Kuei-jin culture, we would be much more insular than we are. Our dedication to the Black Metal Egg grants us a distance and detachment that other Dharmas neither share nor appreciate, and left to our own devices, we Bone Flowers would almost all follow the solitary path of *da xue*. Ancestors take pains to make sure that we join *wu* to fight off these



isolationist tendencies. Ideally, our disciples enter *wu* that are imbalanced toward Yang to cool them down. We acknowledge our role in Kuei-jin culture and present a civil outward appearance as required of diplomats, but I admit that our private opinions of the other Dharmas remain somewhat critical.

THE HOWL OF THE DEVIL-TIGER

The Devil-Tigers are as dedicated to preventing Cold Mind as we are to achieving it. One would think that serenity was a great violation of their path, so energetically do they run from it. The pain that we overlook and ignore, they scrutinize, exacerbate and revere, not unlike a child with a fascination for picking at scabs. The satisfaction they achieve through the practice of their Dharma remains a mystery to us. We've been to Yomi and written whole books on the nature of the infernal; we know how devils live, and why any Kuei-jin would want to aspire to such unending annoyance remains a riddle even we cannot understand.

This does not prevent us from appreciating the Devil-Tigers, however. On the contrary, magicians frequently use one hand to distract the audience from what they are doing with the other. Devil-Tigers are precisely that, distractions to draw hostile eyes from us as we fulfill our obligations under *tian*. They make noise, frighten children, set fires, cause pain and make splendid targets of themselves. While they generate smoke and drama, we are free to analyze the situation and slip in unnoticed. The Devil-Tigers' high attrition rate is most regrettable but hardly unexpected; infantrymen have always died in greater numbers than more subtle operatives. While we do not follow their lead, we do appreciate their approach. It makes our work much easier.

THE WAY OF THE RESPLENDENT CRANE

We are diplomats. Ostensibly, we should be able to find common ground with any other Dharma. Of all the other paths, the Cranes make this the most difficult.

They want to save the world from itself; how noble, how grand. How arrogant. Individuals can save themselves by achieving The Hundred Clouds, but the fate of the individual is the individual's concern. Cranes need not feel obligated to shoulder the burden of the entire world's enlightenment. Attempting to do so makes them look like martyrs, and stupid, pushy martyrs at that. The wheel *cannot* be turned back, the Sixth Age *will* arrive, and none of their incessant crusades will delay the coming of the Demon Emperor by so much as an hour. By convincing Kuei-jin otherwise, the Cranes distract others from their Dharmic pursuits, the one thing that might actually free individuals from the coming storm. Perhaps what is most irritating about the Cranes' approach is that they couch everything in terms of obligations, as though they have the slightest comprehension of my obligations under Heaven. At the same time, I will concede that they are quite ingenious. By paying lip service to obligation

and nobility and saving the world, they take responsibility for situations and thereby pull others along after them. We appreciate that sort of motivating and bonding element, and we could almost like them, were they not so self-righteous. Unfortunately, it has happened more than once in the history of the Middle Kingdom that Cranes — full of idealism and obligations but completely lacking in strategy — have dragged Bone Flowers into their grand, world-saving notions and over cliffs to their Final Death. When these sorts of traumas occur, they only remind us of previous altercations.

One of the most infamous of such incidents occurred some centuries ago when a *wu* of Cranes arrived at the library of Chongqing and asked the Bone Ancestor if she would kindly destroy all known copies of certain “dangerous” manuscripts that were known to be kept there. When she politely declined, the *wu* attempted to storm the library and carry out its supposed obligations itself. Now in Yomi, its members are free of their obligations under Heaven and have an excellent vantage point from which to watch the crowning of the Demon Emperor.

The Cranes are overly fond of any sentence that begins, “You should not....” So full of judgment are they that they cannot see that all knowledge is valuable. They hear of the books that we keep in the library at Chongqing, and they scowl and tell us that these texts should be destroyed. Luckily, we know better. Heaven put scholars in charge of learning and moralists in charge of societal obligations for a reason.

THE PATH OF A THOUSAND WHISPERS

When a man’s finger is diseased, he knows it, and he can get assistance. When a man’s mind is diseased, he does not seek assistance. The Centipedes follow a path that we do not fathom, and if we were prone to judgement, it is likely that we would call it diseased. One night, the Centipede is your friend and ally, the next night, he tries to cut your head from your body, and on the third night, he forgets your name and does not understand why you bear him a grudge. It is not a sensible path to enlightenment, and its adherents cannot be relied upon as comrades, allies or even tools. They claim that they are gathering the wisdom of many lives, but if that were so, would it not be just as wise to gather allies and other resources from life to life as well? From our vantage point, it appears that they put on masks and take masks off again and claim that they have learned something by doing so. It is as though they wish they were Yulan-jin.

While we can understand their quest for balance (as most Bone Flowers prefer to keep their Hun and P’o in balance so as not to be distracted by them), the Thousand Whispers seem to mistake a constant swing from imbalance to imbalance for serenity. The sensation of a moderate temperature is not gained by alternately burning and freezing yourself. Likewise, the experience of balance is not gained by being imbalanced toward Yin one day and Yang the next. While we sit on the edge of the Yin World

and frequently interact with the dead as our way of understanding death, they feel the need to create new personae and let them die over and over again. It appears to us not unlike pounding one’s head against a rock as a way of comprehending the concept of solidity. It seems a great deal of unnecessary effort and suffering for an unimpressive amount of enlightenment.

The only thing we share in common with the Centipedes is our love of riddles. We are able to communicate with the Whispers in more depth than with any other Dharma, but they forget our words when they drop the mask they wore when we spoke them. We share insights with them, but we do not expect them to remember. Beyond that, we keep them at a distance. They are too unfocused and untrustworthy to claim as allies and too undependable to use as tools. Trusting them once is naive. Trusting them twice is foolish. Though we bear them no malice, we’d prefer to interact with them as infrequently as we can manage.

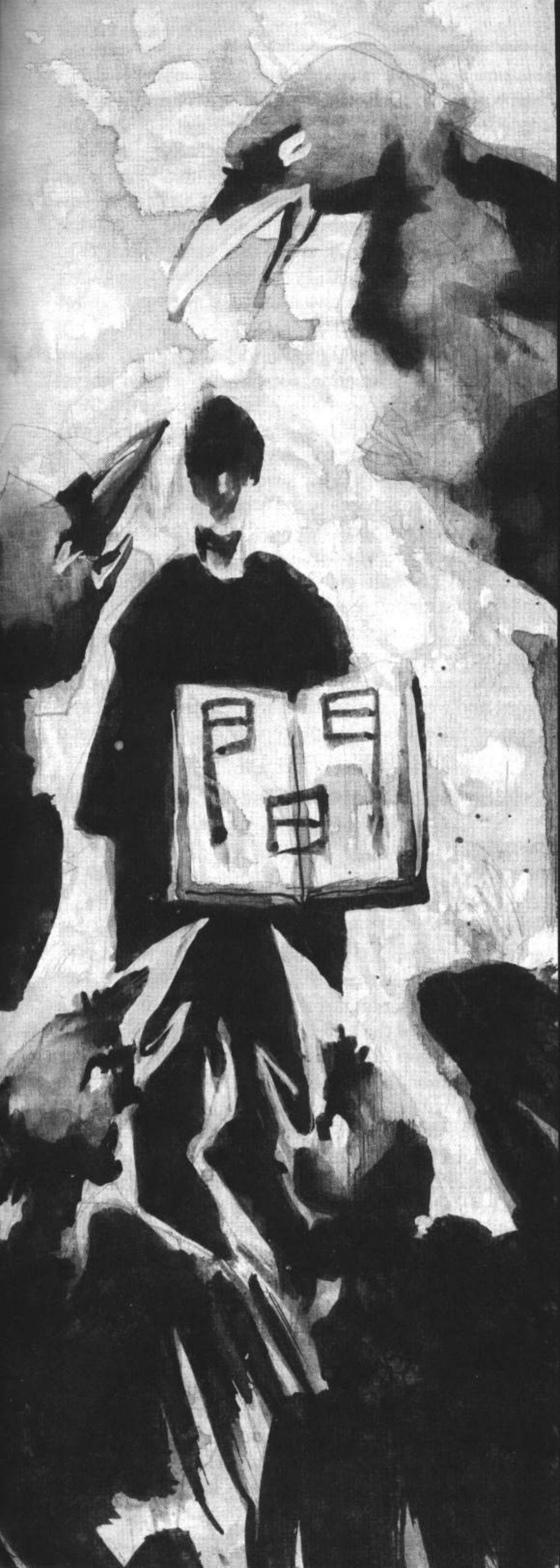
THE DANCE OF THE THRASHING DRAGON

They take everything that we do not want, and they are everything that we choose not to be; how can we not love them? There are nights when it seems that all of the Middle Kingdom was built on the dance between Dragon and Shadow. They pull us from our reverie, and we prevent them from dancing over the cliff. They are the fever we cool, the rage we soothe and the passion we draw out. We temper their folly, and they inspire us from our natural lassitude, invisibility and silence.

We are learned enough to see the mutual need that exists between our two Dharmas. Our intellectual pursuit of the Black Metal Egg can easily distract us from more pressing demands in the Middle Kingdom. The Thrashing Dragons were placed under Heaven to make us apply our learning in practical ways, just as we were placed under Heaven to guide and educate their unrestrained action. In accordance with the first tenet, they prevent our paralysis, and we prevent their folly.

I cannot dispute that someone needs to get things done, and the children of the Resplendent Phoenix Box are well suited to that. They are the executors, the tools, the body we shadow. They are reliable in their zeal, and we respect that. Of all the other Dharmas, we are most favorably disposed toward the Dragons. They are more trustworthy than Centipedes, less self-righteous than Cranes and less offensive than Devil-Tigers. Shadows and Dragons are the two faces of one coin.

That said, it would disconcert most of us not a whit were the arrogant *penanggallan* of the Golden Courts to vanish utterly. They do not acknowledge the value of our scholarship, nor do they recognize the reciprocal roles we play for one another. Their excess of Yang prevents their wisdom from ever exceeding that of a 16-year old, and they feel their passions so keenly that our wisdom cannot worm its way into their heads. Perhaps the greatest imbalance in the Middle Kingdom at this time is the lack of



Bone Flowers in the Golden Courts. It is a problem we are addressing even now.

THE FLAME OF THE RISING PHOENIX

It is hard to travel when you look only backward. These sad Kuei-jin are so burdened by their desire to live again that they are unable to use their status as agents of Heaven to any effect. Their Second Breath is wasted making amends to those they wronged, and once everyone they slighted is dead, they look around and wonder what the point of their existence is. They do not understand that they are not alive, they are not dead, and their role as Kuei-jin can be used for more than playing house and atoning for the deeds of one's past. There are few places as gratuitously morose as the Bijali Court. How can Kuei-jin be so misguided?

THE TEMPEST OF INWARD FOCUS

The dilettantes of the Middle Kingdom, they want to study everything, but just enough to distract themselves, never enough to actually gain any enlightenment from what they study. Taking two steps forward and two steps backward does not mean you have taken four steps. Any journey taken in such a manner is doomed to failure.

We respect restraint, but not to the exclusion of learning.

THE FACE OF THE GODS

Were it not for the sun, we should all fancy ourselves gods. If every one of these fools were shown the Eye of Heaven, their belief in their own divinity would cease to lead other Kuei-jin astray.

Some Bone Flower ancestors have suggested that the heresy of these pretenders is our responsibility. Their folly illustrates what may happen when *chih-mei* are not found and brought into the courts and instructed in proper Dharmic study. If this heresy is our responsibility, we will need to seek out the heretics and take whatever steps necessary to disabuse them of their erroneous beliefs in order to prevent the Wheel of Ages from spinning any more quickly than it already is.

THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING EARTH

Were they not so superstitious, they could be Bone Flowers. Taking orders from every last bamboo shoot and river stone is a tedious way to approach enlightenment. Yes, the spirits have wisdom; yes, there are times when they need to be thanked for their assistance, but that is only a single leaf on the tree. Do the Cerulean Veils not realize the grand joke the spirits are playing on them? Were I a spirit, I too would take advantage of the fool who thought that I spoke the will of Heaven. We should be the companions of the spirits, not their slaves. By focusing so narrowly on one aspect of our existence, they miss our larger role in the Middle Kingdom. A little education in the real ways of the spirits would help these fools a great deal.

OUTSIDERS: THE KIN-JIN

We are not so quick as other Kuei-jin to dismiss (or attack) the Kin-jin out of hand. While it is true that most of these *gweilo* are boorish, unmannered, childish and self-important, this is not the case with all of them. Some among the outlanders are both learned and subtle. The seventh tenet does not allow Bone Flowers the option of knee-jerk judgement, and our diplomatic and infiltration skills grant us greater access to the world of the Kin-jin than other Kuei-jin. While we are careful not to make ourselves targets of Kin-jin aggression, many of our envoys do have a few relatively civilized contacts in the West. These few make splendid tools, if not allies, provided one can tolerate their games and lack of focus.

Bone Flowers know enough about the Kin-jin to realize that all Westerners are not alike. Anyone reading so much as a single chapter of the books written by the Metal Dragon Talon *wu* will realize this much. Those who bother to read more comprehensively will learn a great deal about Kin-jin. Western vampires appear to have the equivalent of different Dharmas. For classification purposes, we have identified seven of the Western Dharmas and given to them irreverent names that nonetheless capture their essence. As they become more familiar with Kin-jin, the Bone Flowers analyze the Western vampires more closely according to their predilections and abilities. While it is clear that the Westerners have more "Dharmas" to identify, the majority of Bone Flowers are familiar with seven: The Way of the Insufferable Flesh Gardeners, The Hundred-Mask Clowns (recently purged from India), The Silent Tiger Brotherhood, The Rut of the Pretentious Geisha, The Shameful Path of the Ghost Bully, The Inauspicious Order of Blood Devils and The Thousand Charming Company Men. These are the seven groups the Bone Flowers have had the most experience with in the Middle Kingdom, and many of them can be identified by their habits or the crude magics they wield.

AMONG THE TEN THOUSAND THINGS: OTHER SHEN

It is the obligation of those following the Song of the Shadow Dharma to strengthen the ties between the various factions of the Middle Kingdom. While this is not always our most favored role, it is the one we take the most seriously. To that end, all Bone Flowers receive extensive training in etiquette. We learn the history of Kuei-jin interaction with the various *shen*, along with the proper forms of address for the many inhabitants of the shadows. For many of us, this knowledge is academic, however. While all Bone Flowers interact with ghosts, few are ever called on to mediate between the Kuei-jin and Kitsune or *hsien*.

RESTLESS BROTHERS: GHOSTS

What don't we know about ghosts? There are Bone Flowers who spend more time in the Yin World than in

this one and have more pleasant relations with ghosts than with other Kuei-jin. There are ways of thinking that are more natural to those of us who are steeped in Yin. Ghosts have been our allies, our benefactors, our spies and, on occasion, our enemies since the first Bone Flower began her progress on the Shadow Path. Our Dharma tells us to tend to the ghosts, and our natural inclination toward the Black Metal Egg makes it a simple matter to interact with the dead. And yet, although we thought we understood ghosts, the chaos in the ghost world shows that we have more to learn.

The storms in the Yin World have become much worse in the last year, and great gusts have blown ghosts through the Wall. We have been encountering more hostile ghosts than ever before as well, those spirits who want nothing more than to bring an end to everything. It is most disconcerting. What's worse, most of the ghosts aren't certain what happened. Perhaps as an indicator of the approach of the Sixth Age, explosions, storms and war have torn the underworld in the last year alone. The dead of the Golden, Bijali and Green Courts have joined the dead of Japan in their rebellion against the Yellow Springs. Bone Flowers know far more about this than we care to, since the ghosts are eternally asking us for favors to grant the advantage to one side or another. If we owe the dead favors, and we usually do, then we help them, otherwise it is most auspicious to simply tend to our own affairs and let the politics of the dead remain in the land of the dead.

SAVAGE BEAST COURTS: THE HENGEYOKAI

The beast folk are remarkable. They possess uncanny martial ability combined with a deep sense of honor, both of which they cloak in a myriad of forms. Kuei-jin have fought both beside and against them for centuries, and unfortunately, the Kuei-jin have comported themselves without honor about as frequently as they have comported themselves with it. If we Bone Flowers are successful in our ambassadorial role, there will be more of the former and less of the latter, but we are not all Kuei-jin. The Devil-Tigers in particular have undermined our reputation among the *hengeyokai*. It has happened time after time that the Bone Flowers extend a hand in peace only to have rabid Devil-Tigers fall prey to their P'o and make us look like the most reprehensible of all creatures. This is precisely the kind of damage we must prevent and repair before the Sixth Age arrives, otherwise we must hold the Middle Kingdom together by ourselves, and I do not believe we are that enlightened. Unfortunately, some of the beast folk continue to harbor grudges against the Wan Xian, for whose dishonorable behavior we can but apologize.

The Beast Courts comprise all manner of men who turn into beasts and vice versa. We can mention the ones we encounter most frequently or the ones we know from legend, but there are almost certainly more that we don't know about. Should you meet them, I give you this advice: Maintain Cold Mind in the face of all adversity, and

comport yourself with honor. Learn what you can, and take your knowledge to the library of Chongqing, where you can share what you have learned with others.

The Hakken wolf-changers are both dangerous enemies and noble allies. It is unlikely that they will deal with us at all, but if they do, be sure to treat them justly, and perhaps we can heal the wounds that exist between us.

The Kumo Goblin Spiders are, for the most part, pawns of the Yama Kings. Be wary of their lies, their venom and their extensive webs. Many serve Emma-o in Kakuri. Many more live in the Goblin Jungle along the Scarlet Path (a place no Bone Flower should ever find herself). Ignore them if you can, but if they appear hostile, kill them as quickly as possible.

The Tengu raven-folk are curious about what we do. If you have hesitations about talking with the raven people, do so anyway. They will tell you more about the Middle Kingdom and the events taking place therein than you can get from any other source. Do not tell them anything you would not want your worst enemy to know, however.

The Khan tiger-men are extremely fast and ferocious warriors, but also very playful creatures. Make sure you do not wind up as their plaything. That would cut short your progression to The Hundred Clouds quite effectively. If you meet one, remember that they can destroy you with little more than a few casual swipes of their enormous claws.

The Dragon Lords remind us of the necessity of Cold Mind because without it we would be terrified like children. Their grandeur is the stuff of legend. Do not deal with them unless you have to. When you do, remember even the finest points of your etiquette. They are wise enough that they do not jump to hasty judgments, but I suspect that the Kuei-jin and the Wan Xian before them both gave the Zhong Lung more than enough reasons to look askance at our kind. Giving them any more is ill advised.

The Nezumi rat-changers are the most disturbing among the hengeyokai, probably because they all seem a little mad. It has happened on occasion that our mortal families have been threatened by some of the rat-folk, and the conflicts that arise in those situation are most regrettable. We tend to have more to do with them than with the rest of the beast-men, if only because of their great numbers in the cities where we gather. It is not uncommon for us to encounter them in the shunned places: sewers, slums, cemeteries and the like. Unless you have good reason for doing otherwise, it is best to ignore them.

The shark-folk, called the Same-Bito, do not like us. It seems that the history of betrayal and malice between Kuei-jin and Same-Bito extends back for centuries. Now they will not listen to us. Even when we send in the best Bone Flower diplomats to speak with them, odds favor a violent outcome. If it proves necessary to travel over the ocean, I recommend flying. Ships carrying our kind are lost at sea with a disturbing regularity.



Certain scholars of House Bishamon have written treatises on the Kitsune nine-tails, but there's little I can say about them. They are arrogant, manipulative, clever and lucky. Fortunately, they seem to ignore our kind when they can. Unless you have a reason to insist on their acknowledgement, it's better to allow them to ignore us. On the other hand, certain among them are quite adept at traveling beyond the Wall, and it's entirely possible that an exchange of information could be most fortuitous.

STONE AND LIGHTNING: THE CHI'N TA

There are those Lightning People with whom we can interact civilly, and then, there are those Lightning People with whom we cannot. The Akashic Brotherhood, the Wu Lung dragon wizards and the Go Kamisori Gama assassins all possess enough wisdom and self-control to at least be reasoned with peacefully. Those Bone Flowers who have studied with Kuro-sama may even have some shared experience with the Go Kamisori Gama. Nevertheless, all chi'n ta are to be dealt with very carefully. They broke the Wan Xian at the end of the Fourth Age, and while they are no longer so powerful, they still possess enlightenment enough to send more than a few of us back to Yomi should they act in tandem. Avoid them when you can, and respect their power otherwise.

Other Lightning People are more difficult yet. The Wu-Keng are agents of the Yama Kings. They may appear to be helpless old women, but many (if not all) of them are simply bent on serving their demonic masters. Likewise, the Toc Faan, who devour their enemies, and the Tay Hoi Li, who pluck out their own eyes to gain wisdom, have proven to be somewhat more difficult to interact with diplomatically.

The most disturbing development with the chi'n ta in the last century is the rise of new groups of wizards who do not understand the old alliances or the proper role of *shen* in the Middle Kingdom. The Five Metal Dragons do not acknowledge that the Kuei-jin have a role to play in the drama of the Middle Kingdom and treat us as simple predators or parasites. They do not have the insight of the Shih. Instead, they rush to use their weapons and their magics on us at the slightest provocation. The best strategy around these Subtle Thunders is the practice of impeccable stealth. If one of these rude new wizards seems to be intent on making a kill, throw a Devil-Tiger at him; that's what they're there for.

HONORABLE ADVERSARIES: THE SHIH

One of our most important obligations under Heaven is performing ambassadorial duties toward the Shih demon hunters. There are no alliances between us, nor is there bitterness. The interactions are all rigorously civil and determined by centuries of tradition. The Shih wander the Middle Kingdom looking for *shen* who act outside their place under *tian*. Most of them, the older ones, anyway, know that, should they be so inclined, they can speak to Bone Flowers without fear of attack and address

their concerns that way. This is as it should be. Simple conversation has averted many a conflict between the Shih and Kuei-jin. The hunter finds a Bone Flower, informs her of the wrong he has been sent to rectify, and the Bone Flower informs her *wu* and ancestors. More often than not, the ancestors address the situation. Through this old custom of diplomacy, we have prevented the destruction of many of our fellow Kuei-jin at the hands of the demon hunters.

AVERTED EYES: THE HSJEN

The *hsien* fear our kind too much to interact with us. Kuei-jin have too long a history of preying on these tasty little elementals and people-beasts for them to trust even us. Though I have heard talk of Bone Flower *wu* who were sent out to make amends to the *hsien* and carry out our diplomatic mission, I do not remember hearing if any of these missions met with success. Any Bone Flower who encounters *hsien* in the course of her travels or studies should think first of establishing some form of diplomatic relations with them. Be wary, however. They're not powerless, and they may have agendas of their own.

OUR LESSERS

Not all the Hungry Dead are full members of Kuei-jin society. We all remember the savage moments after Yomi, when we were cannibalistic *chih-mei*, and we have heard of the half-damned dhampyrs Dragons sometimes sire. As defenders of the pillar of the family and as scholars, it is often our duty to tend to these lesser beings.

POLISHED ROCKS: CHIH-MEI

It is most gratifying to polish an ugly rock and find that jade rests serenely beneath the surface. *Chih-mei* are a savage, vile lot, but it happens on occasion that they become civil and surprisingly enlightened members of Kuei-jin society. One must behave toward them as parents toward fractious children, letting them learn their lessons at whatever pace they are able. Of all the Dharmic paths, it is we who most frequently tend to the training of the unenlightened. Perhaps it is the second tenet of the path, instructing us to safeguard the family, that instills in us the sense of obligation to do so, perhaps it is the sixth, which tells us to share our knowledge. Regardless, we are the gardeners of the young immortals. Should a *chih-mei* require destruction, that, too, appears to have become part of our role under *tian*; our cold-mindedness allows us to perform that function with neither malice nor attachment. And if a *chih-mei* is used improperly, say, chained up and made to guard a tomb instead of brought into the fold through the First of ten Dawns, then it is our mandate to free the wretch and punish those who would so endanger the future of the Kuei-jin.

ROOTLESS GHOSTS: YULAN-JIN

Many Bone Flowers come across references to the Yulan-jin early in their studies and find them intriguing,



for their exoticism if nothing else. On the surface, these body-hopping Kuei-jin seem to be in an enviable position. By their very nature, they cannot grow overly attached to one body, one way of perceiving things, and they tend to arrive at a knowledge of the Yomi Realms that is remarkable. Looking closer, however, it becomes clear that the uprooted ones are so obsessed with gaining some small measure of stability by remaining in their old bodies or adjusting to new ones that they are never able to achieve any semblance of the serenity of Cold Mind. They have no hope of achieving The Hundred Clouds, and their entire existence is one of merely delaying the inevitable final return to Yomi. If you encounter one, gift it with a koan and move on. Trying to render further help is pointless.

THE SWEATY MAN'S DAUGHTERS: DHAMPYRS

It is difficult to say which tendency is the stronger: the inclination to ignore these creatures as regrettable freaks of unwholesome origins or empathize with their role as

intermediaries between the worlds of day and night. The process that creates dhampyrs is utterly antithetical to Bone Flowers. We are neither prone to the passions that result in the birthing of these creatures, nor can we participate in their creation without first departing from our very natures and becoming imbalanced toward the Yang principle. While it might be possible for a male Bone Flower to become Yang imbalanced long enough to conceive a dhampir, no female Bone Flower could tolerate nine months of Yang imbalance.

They are creatures of little consequence, by and large. The one role they fulfill under Heaven is the one we must delegate to them: ambassadors between the sun family and the moon family. They are almost never gifted with strong connections to the Yin World. They have no Cold Mind to speak of, making them mediocre intermediaries at best, nor do they have any particular connection with ghosts. Neither helpful nor harmful, they are transparent to us. Our paths rarely cross, and that is as it should be.

— Zhai Jingshan, Northern Frost of the Eternal Ice



BONES AND SHADOWS

ROLEPLAYING A BONE FLOWER

Bone Flowers can be tricky to play. They are the very antithesis of the typical adventure hero. They do not go into a conflict with guns blazing, nor do they bluster or loudly intimidate their foes. The Song of the Shadow teaches and strives for levels of self-control that are orders of magnitude greater than anything most mortals are capable of.

The key is to keep in mind that Yin is the principle that binds these Kuei-jin together. Its psychological and behavioral corollary, cold-mindedness, is the driving force behind most Bone Flower actions. Cold Mind can be thought of as a combination of icy stoicism, perfect self-control and flawless logic. Unless very young, Bone Flowers will never be overtly agitated or emotional. They are thinkers and schemers of the first order, and they dislike taking any course of action that hasn't been carefully thought through.

When playing a Shadow Song, observation and study should be your primary tactics. Study your friends. Study your enemies. Try to step inside the heads of all those you meet. Ask yourself why people act the way they do, learn their motivations, and from there, predict their actions. Don't judge. Learn.

When it comes time to act, practice the arts of infiltration and stealth. Disciplines and Abilities can

certainly help a character move unseen, and these are important Bone Flower tools, but think also of social infiltration. Using etiquette, quiet behavior and an understanding of others' motivations, your character can get into places others will find impregnable, regardless of the number of dots of Bone Shintai they have.

Along the same lines, practice diplomacy instead of combat. Try to understand what an enemy wants, so as to negotiate a settlement instead of starting a war. "Win before fighting," as the ancestors say.

Seduction may not seem like an appropriate technique for the cold-minded Bone Flowers, but don't overlook it. Your character could have a frosty sexuality about him, but seduction and temptation need not be physical. Instead of forcing things *upon* opponents, coax things *from* them. Lure your prey; don't chase it.

SUGGESTED TRAITS

Bone Flowers can be (among other things) quiet scholars, fearful necromancers, dogged explorers, skillful diplomats or deadly assassins. At some point along their Dharmic path, most Shadow Songs will dabble with all of these roles. Because of this, there are few Attributes and Abilities that are *not* useful to members of the Dharma. There are, however, some that are especially appropriate.

Almost all Bone Flowers should have at least two dots in Dexterity in order to properly execute the Yin Prana so central to their outlook. If you want your

character to be an assassin or infiltrator, invest in even more Dexterity. The choice of other Attributes depends on your character concept. Diplomats should have high Charisma and Manipulation, while scholars will need Intelligence.

The single most central Ability is the Enigmas Knowledge. Koans and parables are the basic grammar of Bone Flower communication. Characters with less than 2 dots in that Knowledge will appear somewhat dim-witted in Dharmic circles. Etiquette is almost as important, especially among diplomats. Some Bone Flowers may have specialties in etiquette to help them deal with other *shen*. Assume that your character may specialize in the etiquette involved in dealing with ghosts, spirits (recommended when dealing with the volatile Spirit Courts) or *hengeyokai*. At the Storyteller's discretion, you may also take Expert Knowledges in these areas.

Other common Bone Flower Abilities include Alertness (one of the advantages of Cold Mind), Empathy

(born from observation rather than caring), Stealth, Linguistics (a corollary to their diplomatic role), Occult and Rituals (due to the heavy emphasis on scholarship). Your character need not start with these Abilities, but they will become increasingly necessary as her quest for enlightenment continues. Acquiring them should be part of your character's evolution and training. If you are using Secondary Abilities, then Instruction, Research and various Expert Knowledges would also be appropriate. For more on Secondary Abilities, see the **Vampire Storytellers Companion**.

When playing a Bone Flower character, it may also add to your game experience to keep a stockpile of unspent experience points. If your character is called upon to quickly research some exotic lore or learn a new skill for his next undercover assignment, he'll be able to pick it up with a swiftness appropriate to one of the great scholars of the Middle Kingdom.

Willpower is also very important to Bone Flowers, even more so than other Kuei-jin. Yin ultimately fuels the Cold Mind, but resisting pain and suppressing anger and desires will also require a strong mind.

SPEAKING THE TWO THINGS

Bone Flowers consider direct speech inelegant, rude and lacking in artistry. Direct statements are garish and insult the listener's intelligence. Worse, plain statements do not require thought from the listener, insuring that only the very surface of the words will be heard while the more profound meanings will be lost. Therefore, the more subtly a Bone Flower can say things, the better. Most wrap their statements in at least a patina of riddle. If others simply don't get it, that's their problem. Bone Flower bodhisattvas are masters of riddles and are known for saying the most shocking things phrased so carefully that the full brunt of their words doesn't hit until much later.

Storytellers should generally allow Bone Flower characters to speak in riddles without requiring a roll. The true meaning of the statement will dawn on the listener several minutes or scenes later. This delay is set by the player, up to (Wits + Etiquette) scenes later. Characters with a higher Bone Flower Dharma or Enigmas than the speaker's Dharma will see through the riddle immediately. When a roll becomes necessary, use a resisted Intelligence + Enigmas roll. A tie goes in favor of the speaker.

A Word of Caution: Speaking in riddles can be amusing, it can be enlightening, and it can be excruciatingly annoying. Use this ability sparingly and when it is dramatic, not to show that your character is somehow superior. Be especially careful when using riddles on other players' characters. Vanity goes against Cold Mind, and (*in extremis*) your Storyteller might just judge that your pride constitutes an act of blindness....

FAVORED DISCIPLINES

Yin Prana is by far the most popular Discipline available to the Shadow Songs. Its element of self-mastery, its use of Yin Chi and the sheer utility of its techniques appeal to almost every Kuei-jin on this Dharmic path.

Bone Shintai runs a distant second to Yin Prana. While it utilizes Yin, its effects are mostly martial and lack subtlety. Most Bone Flowers, with the exception of those training in the arts of espionage and assassination, receive instruction in the arts of Bone Shintai only in the interest of being "well rounded."

Certain other Disciplines that do not place such a heavy emphasis on the use of Yin Chi may also be studied, provided they assist a Bone Flower in her studies. For this reason, many Bone Flowers learn Beast Shintai; the ability to gather intelligence through animal eyes is worth learning for those Bone Flowers who trade in espionage.

The exotic Discipline of Mibasham is popular among the more scholarly Bone Flowers, particularly with the Kuei-jin of the Infinite Thunders and Bone Courts. Its emphasis on subtlety and riddles meshes flawlessly with their philosophies of gathering knowledge and mastering the self. It is also considered very valuable for the relatively easy access it grants to the worlds of spirits and ghosts.

Although Bone Flowers value all knowledge, there are certain Disciplines they find distasteful because of their complete lack of subtlety. Among all Disciplines, Kiai is the most antithetical to the quiet contemplation Bone Flowers strive for. It draws unnecessary attention, offends spirits and is utterly unsuitable for most roles a Bone Flower is likely to find herself in.

Likewise, most Shadow Songs consider Ghost-Flame Shintai little more than a flashy spectacle with convenient side-effects. Those truly devoted to the Black Metal Egg eschew its use.

See the *Kindred of the East Companion* for details on Beast Shintai, Kiai and Mibasham.

POSSIBLE CHARACTER CONCEPTS

Bone Flower characters are not loud, aggressive brawlers. They are thinkers. They are disturbingly patient. They are driven to fill the emptiness inside them with knowledge. These proclivities pull them toward certain activities for which the Dharma as a whole is known.

DETECTIVE

Bone Flower characters are quiet and contemplative. They think before they act and reason and synthesize better than they brawl or impress. This combination of talents makes them excellent detectives. With high levels of Mental Attributes, combined with Enigmas and Investigation, Bone Flower detectives can be the center of a chronicle.

ASSASSIN

The combination of Stealth and access to the deadly techniques of Bone Shintai makes Shadow Songs very effective killers. Many of the best known Bone Flowers have been the infiltrators and assassins trained by the ancestor Kuro-sama at Daisetsuzan on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. If you want to play a graduate of Daisetsuzan, prepare to invest all your freebie points into Dexterity, Stealth and Martial Arts.

SPY

It was not by accident that the Bone Flowers mastered the technique of meshing Bone and Flesh

Shintai abilities to allow for the impersonation of another. This coveted practice allows the Bone Flowers to infiltrate their enemies and consume them from the inside out. It has been particularly useful in dealing with the Kin-jin, who become too complacent in the belief that their Kuei-jin enemies always have Asian features. Bone Flowers who opt for this character concept will want to back it up with Linguistics (in order to speak the language of the infiltrated), Stealth (to avoid being caught while returning with information), Performance (to mimic the vocal patterns of enemies), Etiquette (for knowledge of the enemy's social mores) and Subterfuge (spies regularly need to be able to lie effectively and well).

AMBASSADOR

The patience granted them by their cold-mindedness, combined with their linguistic aptitude and their fondness for etiquette, make Bone Flowers the traditional ambassadors to other Dharmas and other *shen*. Again, Bone Flower ambassadors can be at the center of entire chronicles, especially if the characters are trying to preserve the peace, where others are pushing for war. Ambassadorial characters will need high levels of Social Attributes, as well as Empathy, Etiquette, Leadership, Linguistics and Performance (for putting others at ease, even when you want to kill them).

DEFENDER OF THE FAMILY

Bone Flowers are charged with protecting the pillar of the family from thieves and vandals. Some take this duty very seriously and choose to protect their mortal family (or sometimes other families that they "adopt"). As with all things, the Bone Flower approaches his obligation with subtlety and Cold Mind. He does not become a part of the family. He does not pretend that he is alive in the manner of a Thrashing Dragon or Rising Phoenix. More often than not, the family won't even know that it has a nightly protector.

PLAYING BONE FLOWERS IN WU

At first glance, Bone Flowers seem to make a poor fit for a *wu*. If you focus only on their cold inaction during play, you may well end up alienating other players and spoiling everyone's fun. Always remember that storytelling games are *cooperative*. A little social tension between the characters can be fun, but if your character only acts as if her *wu*-mates are unseemly fools and best ignored, you're missing the point. Bone Flowers, despite some reticence, value and respect the *wu*, especially one that includes Kuei-jin of differing Dharmas.

First and foremost, joining a *wu* is an obligation under the second tenet of the Song of the Shadow. Protecting the pillar of the family refers at least in part to the *wu*, directing young Bone Flowers not only to

WHAT IT TAKES

Following are the minimum Traits needed to graduate from (or survive) Kuro-sama's training at Daisetsuzan. The vampire will have undergone three years of training and, so, may be more mature than other characters. Nevertheless, she will have much to learn about the rest of the Middle Kingdom. These scores are *minimums*; many graduates (especially jina) emerge from Daisetsuzan with much higher ratings.

Attributes: Dexterity ••••, Stamina ••, Wits •••

Abilities: Alertness ••, Dodge ••, Enigmas ••, Etiquette ••, Martial Arts •••, Melee (or Firearms) •••, Rituals •, Stealth •••, Survival •

Disciplines: Bone Shintai •

Backgrounds: Rites •• (Harmony with Night, see p. 62)

respect that august institution, but to defend their own *wu* with their honor and existences. *Guanxi* and the association of a *nushi* spirit are not impositions on a Bone Flower, they are the very expressions of the second tenet.

The *wu* is not only a duty, however. It has many rewards. It provides a Bone Flower disciple with her first intimate contact with other outlooks and Dharmas. If she cannot even understand the ways of the Thrashing Dragon with which she shares *guanxi*, how can she ever hope to negotiate with powerful spirits of pure Yang? In the early years of her Second Breath, it is in the *wu* that the Bone Flower will gather "the falling leaves of knowledge."

The *wu* also provides motivation to act and explore. There's nothing quite like a Devil-Tiger *wu*-mate to drag a Bone Flower out of a dusty library and into the world at large. The fifth tenet tells Shadow Songs to ink the paper of knowledge with their own experience, and quite often, the *wu* is the inkpot of that experience.

Wu that include only Bone Flowers (and Bone Flower *heimin*) do exist, and several are even cultural heroes to the Dharma because of their near-perfect cold-mindedness. The notable *wu* in the previous chapter (p. 41-44) are good examples of this. But the ancestors see these paths as appropriate for Bone Flowers who have gained higher levels of enlightenment (*jina*, at least). Even then, the consequences of the Black Wave *wu*'s actions in the Flesh Court and the destruction of the Eight Sacred Steps *wu* caution against the dangers of single-mindedness. The latter also points to the value of a *wu*-mate from another Dharma and the danger of ignoring his opinions.

THE EFFECT OF DIRECTION

A Bone Flower's direction determines to a large extent how the vampire follows her Dharma. The Dharma itself is biased toward the west, hence the strength of the Shadow Songs in the Bone Court and the uncustomary enthusiasm they've shown in their westward expansions into India. But Yin always harbors a spark of Yang and vice versa.

The North: There is nothing so cold in all the Middle Kingdom as the Cold Mind of Bone Flowers of the north direction. Situated as they are at the confluence of a reserved Dharma and a cold direction, the north-oriented Bone Flower possess the personality equivalent of absolute zero. Their way has no place for emotion. Their penetrating scrutiny cannot be eluded, avoided or turned aside, and emotional pleas are to them nothing more than teardrops on a frozen lake. They know too well that the inelegant heat of emotion, even in the slightest degree, distorts judgment. While they tolerate emotions in those around them, they cannot abide emotion in themselves. Under no circumstances are their judgments subject to change

through bribes, threats, pleas or supplication. Once the facts become clear, their decision is immutable, one of the few constants in the Middle Kingdom.

The West: The west-oriented members of this west-most Dharma are the great sorcerers, necromancers and spirit-tenders of the Middle Kingdom. All Bone Flowers share a connection to the spirit worlds and a certain love of occult knowledge, but these Bone Flowers are extremists, dedicating their existence to the understanding of sorcery and the Yin and Yang Worlds. They master first those Disciplines that allow them to converse with or enter into the spirit worlds (Mibasham is perhaps the most favored of these, due to its sheer esotericism). Many of them may enter and remain in the spirit worlds for extended periods, learning the ways and the lore of ghosts and spirits. Almost all of those Kuei-jin who make exploratory journeys into Yomi are Bone Flowers of the west direction.

The Center: Of all the directions, the center is perhaps the most ostracized within Shadow Song culture. Their embrace of the center pressures them into maintaining a balance of Yin and Yang Chi. Their pursuit of Cold Mind is forever hampered by their inability to fall into the cold arms of Yin imbalance, and they remain somewhat suspect to their own kind. There are other interpretations of the center. Some Bone Flowers instructed to follow the center path willfully insist that their pursuit of balance will only be the balance between Hun and P'o (something most Bone Flowers do as a matter of course in their pursuit of Cold Mind). Regardless of their approach to balance, they are the caretakers of new Kuei-jin. Bone Flowers of the center are the most aggressive guardians of *chih-mei*, taking it as their sacred duty to protect and instruct the newly risen.

The East: Bone Flowers of the east direction have the good fortune to perform a task that is most in line with the tenets of their Dharma. The second tenet of the Song of the Shadow charges Bone Flowers with guarding the family, and the obligations of the east direction revolve around tending to the mortal herd. For the Kuei-jin aspected toward the east, the Second Breath can seem like an endless guardianship over descendants. Younger Kuei-jin occasionally refer to them as "babysitters." Regardless, Bone Flowers are less likely than most other Kuei-jin to want to return to their old lives, making them particularly well suited to their east-oriented obligations under Heaven. Tending the mortal herd, conveniently enough, can also be precisely the counterpoint needed to keep a Bone Flower balanced between the world of the living and the world of the dead, thereby helping her to follow the first tenet of her Dharma.

The South: It was a Bone Flower of the south direction who first realized that the tenets of her Dharma could be followed in the virtual realms as well as the physical, and she began accumulating knowl-

edge via the Internet. The elders of her court were shocked but not entirely displeased. The urge toward quest, change and rebellion mixes strangely with the Bone Flower tenets and values. Many southerly Shadow Songs rebel against the icily contemplative ways of their fellow Bone Flowers and become assassins and scholars of war. Others cast aside the knowledge offered them by the ancestors and seek their own ways of understanding Yin. After the great weakening of the Kin-jin in India, it was Bone Flowers of the south direction that joined the Devil-Tigers who poured into the country like a new Mongol hoard to wipe out any remaining Kin-jin and fortify Kuei-jin holdings.

PRELUDES: THE ROOTS OF THE FLOWER

Like all Kuei-jin, Bone Flowers take the Second Breath because they have a karmic debt. They have acted in a way that forces them to return from Hell to either complete what they have started or make good what they have done wrong. Spend some time thinking about just what this might be and how it brought your character to the Song of the Shadow. This will be the heart of your Prelude and should be the keystone of all future character development. Following are some especially appropriate karmic themes you can use.

- **Family Matters:** Bone Flowers who become guardians of their mortal family almost always have a karmic debt toward them. The extent of this debt can vary from the case of an abusive husband killed by his victim, to a greedy daughter who stole from the rest of his family, to a fully "modern" man who scoffed at respect for ancestors. Alternatively, your character may have already been a protector, but fallen against bandits or other predators. Now back from Yomi, she tries to make up for her failing.

- **Raging Anger Grown Cold:** Some Bone Flowers were raging pools of Yang in their breathing days. These sweaty mortals let their passions govern them and acted without thinking. It may well have gotten them killed. Now, returned from Yomi, they try to take the path of the Cold Mind to right their karmic balance. These can be very interesting characters because they *could* be on the wrong path; perhaps they should be Thrashing Dragons or even Devil-Tigers....

- **Thwarted Scholars:** The drive of a scholar rarely seems as hot as a lover's passion, but it can be. Those who have dedicated their entire lives to understanding one aspect of reality only to die before they have completed their study may well fight their way out of Yomi to complete their work. The Second Breath invariably opens up huge new possibilities, however. The study that once seemed only daunting is now endless.

- **Understanding at Any Price:** For those who wish to understand death, the Second Breath can seem a reward. Some Bone Flowers heard parts of the Quiet

Song even in life and have cast off their breathing lives in a quest to know the ways of Yin more completely. They are the obsessed necromancers and *ch'ing shih* of the Dharma. If you choose this path, your character will struggle with the temptation to break further barriers to obtain still more knowledge. He may well invite attention from the Yama Kings....

NEW TRAITS

The following new traits highlight the proclivities of Bone Flowers. Some are new powers and rites they have developed as part of their studies, others are less specific traits that are simply useful when portraying the Dharma. Storytellers should be careful when using these new traits, however. Make sure that they do not unbalance the *wu*'s abilities and that they make sense for the character.

MERITS AND FLAWS

ETERNAL CHERRY BLOSSOMS (4 PT. MERIT)

Perhaps you have reserves of Yang that you just don't know about; perhaps you have a stronger connection to the world of the living than others of your type. Whatever the reason, your body is capable of being Yin imbalanced for long periods of time and never developing the corpselike features of the *ch'ing shih*. Even exposure to the sun will not cause you to become twisted and corpselike; instead, you will suffer a type of dry rot, ultimately becoming flaky and brittle (although still beautiful). This does not change the game effects of sunlight except in regards to Appearance. The down side of this Merit is that the Yama King Emma-o targets beautiful female Kuei-jin with this Merit to become his *shikome* (see *The Thousand Hells* for more details).

CANNIBAL (1 OR 3 PT. FLAW)

Though it is only the common method of feeding among the *chih-mei*, you still find taking Chi from flesh preferable to taking it from blood or breath. In the one-point variant of this Flaw, you simply find flesh easier to "digest" and gain only half as much Chi from blood or breath as other Kuei-jin. In the three-point version, flesh is the only way for you to gain Chi. Except perhaps in the Green Courts, other Kuei-jin will likely frown upon this form of feeding and take it as a sign of lack of enlightenment. Those of Buddhist or Shinto backgrounds will be especially disturbed.

You will also find it very difficult to feed from a human without killing him, and disposing of a flesh-stripped body can be quite difficult indeed. The *Shih* and other demon hunters are likely to come after you sooner or later.

CH'ING SHIH (3 PT. FLAW)

Ch'ing shih are Kuei-jin who are strongly imbalanced toward Yin for long periods of time and, therefore,

begin to grow more corpse-like. Ultimately, this results in an Appearance of zero and all the difficulties associated with that state. Bone Flowers work with dark energies so often that it's especially easy to become imbalanced toward Yin. Being *ch'ing shih* can be a great disability in some courts, most notably the Golden and Bijali Courts, where the *ch'ing shih*'s corpse-like visage is a reminder to those who like to pretend they are alive that they are deceiving themselves.

Many older Shadow Songs eventually wind up as *ch'ing shih*. The mitigating factor, however, is that this state often indicates a Kuei-jin of great age or enlightenment, and while this doesn't make him any more popular, his words still have an impact (particularly in the Green and Bone Courts, where so many of the Kuei-jin are *ch'ing shih* that it's hardly an issue). The process of becoming *ch'ing shih* is neither fast nor irreversible. Once Appearance reaches zero, however, only bodhisattvas knowing the art of Equilibrium can repair the damage (see *Kindred of the East Companion*, p. 63). There is a ritual that grants a *ch'ing shih* an idealized semblance of her former self (see p. 62). For more details on the state of *ch'ing shih*, see *Kindred of the East*, p. 140.

LIMITED YANG (4 PT. FLAW)

Through disuse or inherent disability, you cannot store more than three points of Yang Chi. You may raise your permanent Yang trait, but the cost in experience points is current rating x 4 (instead of x 2 or 3 as normal). If you try to store more than three points of temporary Yang Chi, it simply bleeds off into the nearest dragon track. In all probability, this will eventually cause you to develop a permanent Yin imbalance.

LIFE-BLIND (5 PT. FLAW)

Through some unhealthy surplus of Yin, because of a curse or after an especially acute act of blindness, you do not have the Yang-based Lifesight ability common to all other Kuei-jin (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 89). You cannot see the auras and passions of others or the denizens of the Yang World. This limitation makes it impossible for you to progress beyond the first level of Yang Prana and may limit other Disciplines at the Storyteller's discretion. You may still heal wounds and resist wave nature with Yang, however. Note that a similar Ghost-Blind Flaw exists, but such blindness is virtually unknown among Bone Flowers.

NEW DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES

The temples, libraries and monasteries of the Song of the Shadow have been places of refuge and solitude



DISTURBED GRAVES

Bone Flowers pay a great deal of attention to the dead and their graves and take it very seriously if their own graves are disturbed or destroyed. The specific effects vary from case to case, but such a happening is decidedly inauspicious and very bad joss. The desecrated grave may attract the attention of unhappy familial ghosts or cause a sort of curse of the Kuei-jin, limiting her abilities until she can restore her resting place. For more ideas, see *Kindred of the East*, p. 25.

If you want your Bone Flower character to start play with a disturbed grave, one or more of the following Flaws are especially appropriate to represent the consequences: Cursed, Defiled, Different Body, Haunted, Hunted (by the desecrator), Life-Blind, Limited Yang, Nightmares, Smell of the Grave and Vengeful Ancestor.

for hundreds of Bone Flowers. These places have granted the Kuei-jin the time and resources to follow their philosophical calling. This has led to many Bone Flowers discovering new (or variant) techniques within the known Disciplines. While these particular practices are relatively rare, any Bone Flower may have learned them. It is unlikely that any other Kuei-jin have studied the principles and requisite Disciplines in enough depth to have learned these particular applications.

GENTLE YIELDING (FLESH SHINTAI LEVEL THREE)

Yielding is the essence of the Yin principle. True

LEARNING NEW TECHNIQUES

To learn these new techniques, a character must already have the appropriate Discipline or Disciplines at the necessary level. He then must study with a sifu who knows the desired technique. The period of study is at the Storyteller's discretion, but a number of hours of practice and study equal to five times the experience to be spent is a good rule of thumb. The player then spends experience as if the character was gaining the highest appropriate Discipline level for the first time. Characters cannot start play with variant techniques.

Example: Kazuo wishes to learn *Taking the Face* (see below) which requires Bone Shintai ••• and Flesh Shintai •. He already has those Disciplines at those levels, so he seeks out a sensei to teach him. His total experience cost will be 16 (the cost of learning Bone Shintai •••). He will have to study for around 80 hours, roughly four weeks.

followers of the Yin path prefer to win before (i.e. without) fighting, eschewing combat more often than not. However, a Bone Flower under attack can defend herself by completely yielding to the forces assailing her. Where she is struck, her flesh gives way without

being damaged. Weapons, punches, bullets and all other physical attacks make contact, but the body of the Kuei-jin using this Discipline simply gives way beneath the attack and takes no damage. Flesh parts to allow the attack to pass through without inflicting damage and, then, closes up instantly.

System: A Kuei-jin making use of Gentle Yielding may not Dodge. Instead, the player gains (Flesh Shintai) automatic successes when soaking bashing or lethal damage. Players may also roll (Flesh Shintai) dice to soak aggravated damage. Activating this power is a reflexive action and costs one Yin. Gentle Yielding will not mitigate the effects of explosions or non-impact (e.g. fire, lightning, acid) attacks.

TAKING WHAT IS GIVEN (FLESH SHINTAI LEVEL FOUR)

Bone Flowers who have achieved a true understanding of the yielding way realize that an opponent who has unbalanced himself to attack has left himself vulnerable to counterattack. The Bone Flower yields before the attack, but before her attacker can take back his foot, fist or weapon, the Bone Flower's flesh hardens and clamps down around the limb or weapon in question, trapping or severing it in the process.

System: The player spends two Yin Chi and gains all the benefits of Gentle Yielding (above). He then rolls Dexterity + Flesh Shintai (difficulty of the attacker's dice pool). Even one success traps the attacking limb or weapon. Every success beyond the second causes one level of aggravated damage as flesh constricts to sever the limb or shatter the blade. This disturbing counterattack counts as a defensive action. A trapped attacker has to achieve three successes with a Strength + Brawl roll to withdraw the limb (or weapon).

TAKING THE FACE (BONE SHINTAI LEVEL THREE, FLESH SHINTAI LEVEL ONE)

The level three Bone Shintai technique Bone Obedience does not by itself give the Shadow Song enough control over her visage to mimic others. Combining it with the skin shaping abilities of Flesh Shintai, however, allows the Bone Flower to alter her face and vocal chords with enough precision that she can fool even close friends and family members of the target.

System: The player spends two Yin and one Yang Chi and rolls Dexterity + Performance. Each success allows the Bone Flower to mimic the face and voice of an individual she has met recently for one scene. The basic difficulty is 6 and assumes the Kuei-jin has personally encountered the target and spent at least a half-hour observing him. Storytellers may adjust the difficulty to reflect minimal or extensive study of the subject. In addition to duration, the number of successes indicates the perfection of the mimicry. One success will fool casual acquaintances, while four suc-

cesses will fool a lover or child.

SPIDER'S BLESSING (YIN PRANA LEVEL TWO)

A variant of the Yin Mantle, Spider's Blessing allows the vampire to create thin black tethers of Yin that snake their way up to the ceiling of any room and anchor there, pulling the vampire up, where they secure him to the ceiling. Even without using Shrouded Moon to further enhance invisibility, the vampire is at +2 difficulty to be noticed. Provided no sunlight actually touches the vampire, she can even remain anchored to the ceiling while she sleeps, passing the day there.

System: The player spends one point of Yin to evoke the Yin Mantle and create the strands that anchor the character to the ceiling. If the vampire chooses to sleep there during the day, another point of Yin must be spent to maintain the threads. The strands resist any mundane efforts to sever them by simply flowing around the cutting implement and ignore concussive force altogether. Yang-powered weapons can cut the strands (including spirits' natural attacks, hengeyokai fetishes or claws and wooden objects charged using Yang Prana); the strands have a single

THE NEWCOMERS' PRANA

The Bone Flowers of the Green Courts have recently taken in some highly knowledgeable necromancers from the West. These refugee vampires are most bizarre, neither quite Kin-jin nor Kuei-jin. Although these creatures number fewer than 30, they are unquestionably knowledgeable in the lore of death and the Yin World. The Green Courts' powerful Bone Flower contingent was instrumental in engineering the acceptance of these odd vampires. In exchange, these scholars of death have been teaching a potent variant of Yin Prana to the Bone Flowers.

The Bitter Yin Caress, Bitter Yin Cloud and Dance of Shiva techniques derive from the teachings of these foreign death scholars. These variants are known *only* to Bone Flowers and predominantly only to the Bone Flowers of the Green Courts. While the Middle Kingdom boasts no such thing as a safe secret, the Shadow Songs are careful to share these new Yin Prana techniques only with a rare and enlightened few. Learning these techniques (or even learning of them) could make for an excellent long-term subplot for a Bone Flower character. Learning any of these techniques costs double normal experience, with a commensurate increase in study time.



health level and (Yin Prana) dice to soak. Direct sunlight automatically disperses the strands.

BITTER YIN CARESS (YIN PRANA LEVEL FOUR)

By channeling the most destructive forces of the Yin World, the Bone Flower causes substances to age and decay at a greatly accelerated rate. Metal rusts. Wood and other organic materials decay. Even glass will crumble after only a few turns. The Bone Flower must touch the object to be affected, and everyone in her vicinity will feel a notable chill rolling off of her.

System: The player spends one point of Yin Chi and rolls Intelligence + Occult against the difficulty of the local Wall to open a small connection to the Yin World. Objects subjected to the Bitter Yin Caress break down and become useless somewhere between one turn and one day after being touched, depending on the material, the type of object and its complexity. More complex objects break down more rapidly. A computer stops functioning after a single turn, but it takes several hours to completely corrode all the plastic, glass and metal that it's composed of. Living creatures touched by the Bitter Yin Caress feel an agonizing chill but take no damage.

BITTER YIN CLOUD (YIN PRANA LEVEL FIVE)

The Shadow Song makes a complex series of hand gestures and produces a cloud of destructive Yin energy capable of inflicting damage on living, unliving and ghostly opponents. The touch of the cloud inflicts terrible chilling pain and causes the victim to begin decomposing. The Bone Flower must be within 10 feet of her victim and must reach her hand out toward him.

System: The player spends three points of Yin Chi and rolls Dexterity + Occult versus the difficulty of the local Wall. The victim suffers one Health Level of aggravated damage per success. In all other respects, this power functions like Bitter Yin Caress.

DANCE OF SHIVA (YIN PRANA LEVEL EIGHT)

This dance is rumored to be based on the dance of Shiva the Destroyer. The Bone Flower goes through an intensely complicated series of mudras to bring the most destructive forces of the Yin World through the Wall. The black Yin of destruction pours from the Kuei-jin's fingertips, mouth, eyes, nose and ears. As the vampire continues her dance, black waves of icy Yin ripple outward from her to consume everything in her vicinity. It is one of the most destructive powers known to the Shadow Song Dharma.

System: At the beginning of the first turn, the vampire begins dancing and the player spends three points of Yin Chi. She rolls Dexterity + Performance against the difficulty of the local Wall. The effect lasts two turns for each success, and the player must spend an additional point of Yin Chi at the beginning of each

turn. The Dance of Shiva is very like Bitter Yin Caress and Bitter Yin Cloud except that it destroys everything within five feet of the vampire the turn after the vampire starts dancing, and the effects expands by another five feet every turn she continues to do so. Obviously, then, the Bone Flower must begin the dance one turn before she wants to start seeing the results. Any disruption of the dance spoils the effect, and the Yin Chi is wasted.

LI (NEW RITES)

Li is a word meaning simultaneously "ritual" and "universal principle." Ostensibly, the li below are teaching exercises (which illustrate the properties of Yin) rather than ends in themselves, but as teaching exercises go, they are most useful.

The Song of the Shadow Dharma comprises a wide range of scholars, philosophers, doctors and sages. No other Dharma places such emphasis on gathering — and truly understanding — knowledge of all sorts. Fully four of the eight tenets of the Dharma pertain to the accumulation of knowledge, truth and understanding. It is no surprise, then, that Bone Flowers use rites far more than other Dharmas.

While Bone Flowers will eagerly share the knowledge of these rites with those who follow other Dharmas, the likelihood of another Kuei-jin being able to successfully solve the complex riddles by which these rites are transmitted is exceedingly slim. Doing so requires an Intelligence + Enigmas roll against a difficulty of 7 or an Intelligence + Occult roll against a difficulty of 9, and this may be performed only after weeks of study. Even if the vampire solves the riddle and learns the li, he will not be able to transmit it to others. Trying to explain the techniques of the rite without the accompanying koans is like trying to teach someone marksmanship with a toy gun.

HARMONY WITH NIGHT (LEVEL TWO RITE)

One of the first things Kuro-sama teaches his students is how to so attune themselves to the

LEARNING RITES

The price of learning rites has always been problematic, as they provide serious in-game benefits for an unspecified price. Storytellers who wish to put an experience point cost on rites are within their rights to do so. One experience point for each level of the rite is a good rule of thumb, provided that the process of gaining access to the actual knowledge of the rite itself is reflected in-game. Storytellers who waive study times and the need to seek out texts and tutors may wish to increase the cost of rites to two or three times the level of the rite.

"unbeingness" of Yin that they cannot be heard, seen or sensed. This rite makes the Bone Flower the stealthiest of the stealthy, allowing her to walk through snow without leaving footprints or run through dead leaves without making a sound.

System: The Kuei-jin meditates for 20 minutes to bring her mind and body in line with the principle of Yin. The player then rolls her Yin rating. For the rest of the scene, she receives automatic successes on all Stealth rolls equal to the number of successes gained on the Yin roll. This commonly has the effect of making the vampire impossible to sense unless she does something extremely obvious, like kill in front of an audience or yell in someone's ear at the top of her lungs.

THE BLACK SILKEN POUCH (LEVEL THREE RITE)

Though regrettable, it is necessary on occasion to introduce an individual to the power of Yin in a most direct and literal fashion. When properly performed, this rite infuses the target's sensory organs with Yin, rendering him utterly senseless. He cannot see, hear, smell, taste or even feel. Gifts and Disciplines cannot be used to see beyond this negation. Some Bone Flowers have been known to use this rite on themselves to understand the nature of Yin more fully.

System: The Kuei-jin obtains a piece of black jade and carves the target's name on it. Triggering the effect requires the jade to be dropped into a pouch of thick black silk containing black volcanic sand and a dried cuttlefish (to symbolize the depths of the ocean). The player rolls Intelligence + Rituals. The effects of this rite last for one scene per success if done within line of sight of the target and one turn per success otherwise. Individuals whose Perception rating is two or more dots higher than the caster's Rituals rating are unaffected but sense the caster's intent.

DONNING THE FLAWLESS MASK (LEVEL THREE RITE)

This rite allows a *ch'ing shih* to put aside her Yin-induced hideousness for a while, wearing instead a serene and perfected version of her own face. When attending highly formal social events, all *ch'ing shih* who know this rite use it. Few things are so haunting as an assembly of Flawlessly Masked Kuei-jin. Some in the Quincunx hint that such aggregates are bad joss, but the *ch'ing shih* wield such power in the Quincunx (and decidedly more in the Green Courts), that allowing such rumors to reach their shrunken black ears would be exceedingly inauspicious.

System: First, the *ch'ing shih* feeds until she is full of Chi. She then locates a dragon line that is powerful with Yang Chi and infuses herself with enough of the Scarlet Queen's tears to counteract her corpse-like appearance. The player rolls Perception + Rituals. For each success, the *ch'ing shih* gains a night of the per-

fectured visage. The visage of the Kuei-jin becomes an idealized, though exceedingly pale, version of the face she wore when alive. No blemishes, flaws, asymmetry and wrinkles mar the Flawless Mask, and the *ch'ing shih* has, for the duration of the effect, a face that looks very much like white jade. Any Kuei-jin well-versed in the ways of Yin (with four or more dots of Yin Prana or Bone Shintai or knowing the *li*) recognizes the effects of the rite. Treat the *ch'ing shih* as though she had 4 Appearance for the duration of the effect. This rite may only be performed once per lunar cycle (essentially, once a month).

GRACIOUS ACCEPTANCE OF THE MOST REVERED LOTUS BLOSSOM GIFT (LEVEL FIVE RITE)

Bone Flowers are most gracious when given the knowledge they seek and coldly disappointed when they are not. Should a Bone Flower require the requested information badly enough, however, she may resort to forcibly plucking it from the mind of one who has that knowledge by performing this rite. At the end of the rite, the Bone Flower will "remember" the knowledge while it slips forever from the mind of the one who once knew it.

System: The Kuei-jin must be in the same room as her target, who must be conscious. If the target is wandering about and isn't specially prepared for the rite, the difficulty of the roll is 8. If the target is bound in a supine position with his head facing west, the difficulty is reduced to 6. The player rolls Perception + Occult, and each success makes the transfer of information more complete.

1 Success	A spotty awareness of the desired knowledge
2 Successes	An understanding that is mostly complete, although there may be details missing
3 Successes	The knowledge that was sought
4 Successes	The information plus some small amount of additional, vaguely related facts
5 Successes	The information and everything remotely associated with it

The ritualist may take a specific piece of information ("Where have you sent Li-Tsang, the Predator of Shanghai?") or an actual area of knowledge (Finance, Occult, Science). If the vampire steals a Knowledge, she gains a dot in that Trait for every two successes up to the upper limit of the victim's Knowledge. These dots will fade away at the rate of one dot per week, but the player may buy those dots within that week with experience points at half cost (i.e. 1 x current rating). This works only if the victim has more dots in the Knowledge than the ritualist. When the rite is over, the victim loses as many dots on the Knowledge as

were stolen, though the target may learn those things again at a later time. Neither Talents nor Skills may be acquired in this manner.

Bone Flowers who use this rite too often quickly gain a reputation for laziness among others following the Song of the Shadow. On the other hand, Bone Flowers have made themselves invaluable in the invasion of North America by performing this rite on captured Kin-jin.

THE INAUSPICIOUS GATE (LEVEL EIGHT RITE)

This rite not only allows the character to enter Yomi, it allows her to decide which hell she visits. It grants limited control over where in the hell the character appears, but that, for the most part, is determined by the Yama King. This rite is very secret, and those who practice

System: The vampire seeks the deepest location available (e.g. a sub-basement, pit or canyon), inscribes the entire rite on the walls, sacrifices three Kuei-jin victims and invokes the name of the Yama King whose hell she wishes to enter. The player spends one Yin and one Yang Chi and rolls Intelligence + Rituals against a difficulty of 9. Even one success indicates that the Yama King petitioned is granting access to her or his hell. For what purpose, however, is known only to that Yama King.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE ANCESTORS (IMPORTANT TEXTS)

The quest for knowledge, preferably of the rare and exotic variety, drives Bone Flowers. Knowledge is the core around which the other tenets of the Dharma revolve. Consequently, Bone Flowers have acquired a vast collection of knowledge in their assorted libraries. The rarest and most precious (or dangerous) texts are in the subterranean library of Chongqing, well warded and kept from those not yet enlightened enough use the information responsibly.

THE BOOKS OF GHOSTS

Any learned necromancer can prepare one of these unique texts, and they are so numerous in the library of Chongqing that the Bone Ancestor has had an enormous index of ghosts assembled to prevent confusion or undue burden on any particular wraith. The necromancer simply calls on a ghost with whom she has an amiable relationship, writes the history of the ghost on the left page — including ancestors, dates of birth and death, astrological significance of said dates, full name, accomplishments in life, descendants and a list of favored items from the ghost's life. If at all possible, a small sketch of the ghost done by the necromancer is a good addition as well. On the right page the necromancer prepares a highly legalistic agreement in which she and the ghost swear an oath of reciprocity. Both parties then sign the book at the bottom of the right page.

Thereafter, the book serves as a code of behavior between necromancer and ghost and a balance of accounts between them. The agreement does not create a magical bond or compulsion, it is, rather, an agreement of equals. If either party fails to honor it, the wounded party can call it to the attention of special ministers in the Bone Court. Some wise necromancers perform favors for the ghosts in their books in advance, in order to have an array of boons owed them that can be collected with no strings attached at a later date.

System: Creating a Ghost Book requires a Manipulation + Occult roll against a difficulty of 8. The number of successes has no direct game effect but reflects the quality of the tome. A botch will offend the ghost and create a debt of favors the necromancer must repay to make things right.

THE HEAVEN SCREAM BOOK

Perhaps the most disturbing of all of the eschatological texts kept in the forbidden section in the library of Chongqing, the *Heaven Scream Book* is nearly a millennium old. It is in two languages, an ancient dialect of Chinese and an utterly indecipherable (and quite ugly) scrawl. The words, including the calligraphy in which they are written, are frightening in themselves, but the disturbingly vivid illustrations are the essence of this terrible tome. When the text opposite one of the hideously well-detailed drawings is read in a loud voice, the illustration moves and shifts in an obscene drama of truly repulsive and disquieting imagery. Elder Bone Flowers claim that these inauspicious phantasmagoria, when properly understood, reveal the darkest elements of the history of the past Ages and show, as well, the events leading up to (and including) the crowning of the Demon Emperor in the Sixth Age. The effects of watching the vile pictures in this book are manifold, and few of them are good. The Bone Ancestor relegated this tome to the dangerous text vault after it reduced her Second Revered Minister of Knowledge to a slaving *chih-mei*. All the same, wise individuals of many Dharmas occasionally ask to see the *Heaven Scream Book*. Provided they have attained a certain age and enlightenment, the Bone Ancestor allows them to do so in hopes that they will be able to make clear the identity of the Demon Emperor.

Thankfully, there is only one known copy of the *Heaven Scream Book*, and it is under heavy guard in the library of Chongqing.

System: When a character reads the *Heaven Scream Book* and watches its accompanying repulsive drama, the player rolls her Dharma rating + Enigmas. Unlike normal rolls, 1s, 2s and 3s all count as 1s for the purpose of botching. On a botch, the Storyteller is free to assign any penalty she chooses, including, but not limited to: increasing the character's P'o, sending the character into fire soul, imposing an act of blindness or reducing the character's primary virtue by one. Five or more

successes on the roll indicate that the reader made her way through the book and knows a great deal more about the world than she knew before, and probably more than she cares to know (possibly including the identity of the Demon Emperor). The player may make a Dharma roll at this point. The knowledge of the Demon Emperor's identity, however, is more of a burden than a boon, because every Yama King in the running wants to know how that issue resolves, a point that could become the focal point for an entire chronicle.

OTHER TEXTS

While the library of Chongqing has a number of terrible books that must be kept from inappropriate eyes, including copies of *The Songs of Hell*, *The Red Book of the Iron Bridge* and *The Broken-Winged Crane*, not all of the books in the library are demonological texts. On the contrary, the library holds an extensive collection of nearly 400,000 books, scrolls and codices, of which perhaps one tenth of one percent have anything to do with Hell or the Yama Kings. The most complete and readable versions of all the major Kuei-jin texts, including *The Celestial Nail*, *The Empty Gate*, *The Ki Chuan*, *The Manual of Yi* and *The Midnight Jewel* are in the library at Chongqing, and any time the ancestor learns the whereabouts of another important book, she is not above dispatching a *wu* (or perhaps several) to obtain it. Most recently, she sent agents to recover a book long thought to be lost. Called *Phoenix*, *Monkey*, *Rat*, the tome is a philosophical treatise written, ostensibly, by Xue himself on the relations between the Dharmas. The book recently turned up in Hong Kong, where it made its way to a Kin-jin named Oliver Thrace, who somehow learned of its existence, studied it and then shipped it off to Vienna. This has further strained the situation in the troubled Flame Court.

TREASURES OF MERU AND YIN (NEW ARTIFACTS)

The Bone Flower fascination with the city of Meru appears never-ending. For those followers of the Song of the Shadow in the Bone Court of Chongqing, in particular, the lure of that legendary city can be nearly irresistible. Before its downfall, the notorious Eight Sacred Steps *wu* recovered several items that bear out the theory that the Wan Xian were brilliant craftsmen and sorcerers. Of these, two are of special interest to Bone Flowers, the Laughing Buddha Mask and Black Metal Egg. Bone Flowers also make use of other artifacts, which do not hail from Meru.

LAUGHING BUDDHA MASK

Level Two Artifact

Several of these odd treasures are known to be in circulation, predominantly in the Bone Court and Japan. Bone Flowers often need to show a certain degree of leadership and conviviality in their roles as

diplomats to other Dharmas or *shen*. This degree of extroversion does not come easily to them. Wearing the Laughing Buddha Mask grants the Bone Flower a remarkable degree of sociability that she may use in her interactions with others. When the Kuei-jin puts on the mask, it seems to disappear completely, becoming one with her face. While the mask is on, the Bone Flower becomes extraordinarily pleasant to be around, and her face takes on a white, smiling countenance that lasts for the scene.

The player spends one point of Yang Chi to activate the mask. For the rest of the scene, treat all Charisma rolls as if the vampire's Attribute were 5, except for those that involve using rites, Disciplines or other artifacts.

BLACK METAL EGG

Level Three Artifact

These small treasures confuse Kuei-jin who believe that "Black Metal Egg" is only a Bone Flower term for the Yin principle. Made of highly polished black metal (or, sometimes, obsidian or onyx), the eggs are the size of a large chicken egg, each one of which can hold up to 10 points of Yin Chi (rumor has it that some can hold even more). There are perhaps a dozen of these items in the world, most of which are in the possession of ancestors of remarkable power.

The Bone Flower channels her own Yin Chi into the egg, where it can be stored for future use. The Yin Chi remains inside the egg until such time that the Kuei-jin holds the artifact and channels the Yin Chi back into herself. If Yang Chi is placed into the egg, each point cancels out one point of Yin Chi. If more Yang Chi than Yin Chi enters the egg, it shatters. Such an act would undoubtedly have grave consequences for the individual so rash as to destroy an artifact of such value.

SOUL ASHES

Level Four Artifact

Soul Ashes are a very fine, almost silky, black or gray powder. The Bone Flower sprinkles a pinch of the ashes over an item carried by his enemy. Once the ashes are dropped on the item, they disappear. Thereafter, the possessor of the affected item will gradually grow morose and out of sorts. The victim loses the motivation to do anything and gains no satisfaction from any activities in which she engages. The victim loses one point of Willpower for each night she carries the cursed item on her person, and she is unable to regain Willpower during that time. Kuei-jin who are imbalanced toward Yang lose two points of Willpower a night. Victims who reach 0 Willpower fall into utter despair and may attempt to commit suicide. Mortals who succumb to this temptation can — and often do — take the Second Breath.

The player spends one point of Yin Chi to trigger the Soul Ashes before the vampire sprinkles them on



the item. These ashes come in small, highly ornate black lacquer boxes that hold enough to affect four victims. If the individual carrying the affected item places it in direct summer sunlight for one full day, the Soul Ashes burn off and the individual can regain Willpower as usual.

GHOST SHACKLES

Level Five Artifact

While Bone Flowers prefer to have the most respectful relations possible with the dead, the fact remains that there are certain ghosts whose wickedness is an affront to Heaven and the Middle Kingdom alike. The dead call these angry spirits Spectres, *kuei* and many other things. Ghost Shackles weaken and restrain fractious Spectres while providing Yin Chi to the Bone Flower who holds the "key." Most commonly found in elaborately embroidered black silk bags, ghost shackles resemble two unconnected, stout, white jade ankle cuffs with a heavily inscribed, small, black jade

peg "key," which is necessary to make any use of them. Among all artifacts available to Shadow Songs, these are the most coveted because of the constant flow of Yin Chi they provide the key holder.

The Bone Flower must first restrain or incapacitate the errant ghost and close the shackles around its ankles. Once the shackles are closed, they become the stuff of spirit. While the ghost is so bound, any Yin Chi (Pathos or Angst) that it would have gained shunts directly to the Bone Flower holding the black jade key. Most Kuei-jin find this quantity of Yin Chi overwhelming. Using this artifact — especially on a ghost who is not clearly a Spectre — usually results in word spreading through the ghost world and eventually reaching the ears of Bone Flower ancestors. Since most Bone Flower ancestors covet Ghost Shackles, they will almost certainly investigate and confiscate the key if there has been any misuse. They will then free the wronged ghost, who is unlikely to be kindly disposed toward the Kuei-jin who treated him so disrespectfully.

ADAPTIONS FOR MIND'S EYE THEATRE

What follow are adaptations for some of the Disciplines, rituals, artifacts and Merits and Flaws for Bone Flowers. The Storyteller has final say on what is permissible in game.

ETERNAL CHERRY BLOSSOMS (4 TRAIT MERIT)

For some reason, you are capable of being Yin imbalanced for long periods of time and never develop the corpselike features of the *ch'ing shih*. Even exposure to the sun will not cause you to become twisted and rotted; instead, you will suffer a type of dry rot, leaving you flaky and brittle but still beautiful. This does not change the game effects of sunlight except in regards to Appearance.

CANNIBAL (1 OR 3 TRAIT FLAW)

You prefer to take your Chi from flesh, rather than blood or breath. In the one-point variant of this Flaw, you simply find flesh easier to "digest" and gain only half as much Chi from blood or breath as other Kuei-jin. In the three-point version, flesh is the *only* way for you to gain Chi. Other Kuei-jin frown upon this form of feeding (it shows a distinct lack of enlightenment to feed like a *chih mei*), particularly Buddhist and Shinto vampires. Obviously, it becomes very difficult to feed from a human without killing him, and flesh-stripped corpses will trumpet your presence to Shih and other hunters.

CH'ING SHIH (3 TRAIT FLAW)

You have become too imbalanced toward Yin. You look like a monstrous walking corpse and can never be mistaken for human. *Ch'ing shih* may never purchase Traits or Merits relating to appearance (such as *Alluring* or *Eternal Cherry Blossoms*), they gain the Negative Traits: *Repugnant* x 2, and activities such as seduction become entirely impossible. In some courts, this can be a real handicap, while it may be more commonplace in others. While there are ways to circumvent the curse for a short time, only bodhisattvas skilled in *Equilibrium* can repair the damage.

LIFE-BLIND (5 TRAIT FLAW)

For some reason (perhaps a curse or a very inauspicious act of blindness), you do not have the Yang-based *Lifesight* ability common to all other Kuei-jin. You cannot see auras or passions of other Kuei-jin and mortals, nor can you see spirits of the Yang World. This makes it impossible for you to progress beyond the first level of *Yang Prana*, and the Storyteller may limit other Disciplines. This will not affect your ability to heal or test against wave soul.

NEW DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES

A character wishing to learn these new techniques must acquire the necessary level of Discipline (or Disciplines) indicated beside the technique. He must then seek out a teacher who knows the technique. The cost of these is based on the level of knowledge necessary to study the technique (so a technique that requires *Advanced Yin Prana* will cost nine experience points). Study times are at the discretion of the Storyteller, who may choose to increase or decrease learning time based on the character's diligence.

New characters may not enter play with these techniques.

GENTLE YIELDING

(FIRST INTERMEDIATE FLESH SHINTAI)

By following the principles of Yin, a Bone Flower being attacked can defend herself simply by yielding to the force of the blow. Physical attacks (weapons, bullets, fists and the like) make contact, but the body of a Kuei-jin using this Discipline simply gives way beneath the attack and suffers no damage.

System: A Kuei-jin using this power may not dodge. Bashing attacks cause no damage, while lethal damage is halved. The Kuei-jin may also perform a Static Physical Challenge and reduce one level of aggravated damage to lethal damage if she succeeds. Activating this power is considered

reflexive (and does not take an action to perform) and costs one Yin Chi. *Gentle Yielding* has no effect on damage caused by explosions or attacks such as fire, lightning or acid.

TAKING WHAT IS GIVEN (SECOND INTERMEDIATE FLESH SHINTAI)

This power takes *Gentle Yielding* one step further. The Bone Flower yields before the attack, but before her attacker can take back his fist or weapon, the Bone Flower's flesh hardens and clamps down around the limb or weapon in question, trapping or severing it in the process.

System: The Kuei-jin spends two Yin Chi and gains all the benefits of *Gentle Yielding* (above). He then makes a Physical Challenge against his attacker. If he succeeds, his flesh clamps down on the weapon or limb. By spending additional Traits, he may cause one level of aggravated damage to the trapped item (which may cause a trapped fist or foot to be severed, while a blade shatters). This is considered a defensive action.

TAKING THE FACE (FIRST INTERMEDIATE BONE SHINTAI, FIRST BASIC FLESH SHINTAI)

By combining *Bone Obedience* with the fleshcrafting abilities of *Flesh Shintai*, the vampire can alter her features and even voice (through manipulating the vocal cords). With enough precision, she can fool close friends and family of the target.

System: The Bone Flower spends two Yin and one Yang Chi and makes an Extended Physical Challenge. Each win allows her to mimic for one scene the face and voice of an individual she has met recently. Each win also indicates how foolproof the disguise is; one success will fool co-workers and acquaintances, while more can pass inspection from the target's lover or child. The vampire must have met the target personally and spent at least 30 minutes observing him.

SPIDER'S BLESSING (SECOND BASIC YIN PRANA)

This power allows the vampire to create thin black tethers of Yin that anchor to the ceiling of a room and can hold the vampire off the floor and close to ceiling. If no sunlight actually touches him, he may even pass the day in this fashion.

System: The vampire invokes *Yin Mantle* (player spends a point of Yin Chi) to create the strands that anchor her to the ceiling. If she chooses to sleep there during the day, another point of Yin Chi must be spent to maintain the threads.

BITTER YIN CARESS (SECOND INTERMEDIATE YIN PRANA)

The Bone Flower channels destructive Yin energies, causing substances to age and decay — metal rusts, while wood and other organic materials decay and even glass crumbles. Those in her vicinity feel a noticeable chill rolling off her.

System: The vampire touches her target. The vampire spend one point of Yin Chi and makes a Static Mental Challenge (difficulty of the local Wall) to open a connection to the Yin World. Objects affected break down and become useless between one turn and one day after being touched, depending on the material, the type of object and its complexity. More complex objects break down more rapidly. It takes only a single turn for a computer to stop functioning, but several more hours are needed to decompose the glass, chips and plastic. Living creatures touched by *Bitter Yin Caress* feel an agonizing chill but take no damage.

BITTER YIN CLOUD (ADVANCED YIN PRANA)

The Shadow Song makes a complex series of hand gestures, producing a cloud of destructive Yin energy that inflicts damage on any opponent (living, undead or ghostly). The cloud inflicts terrible

chilling pain and causes the victim to begin decomposing.

System: The Bone Flower must be within 10 feet of her victim and must reach her hands out toward him. The vampire spends three points of Yin Chi and makes a Physical Challenge. The victim suffers one level of aggravated damage. In all other respects, this power functions like *Bitter Yin Caress*.

Li (New Rites)

HARMONY WITH NIGHT (BASIC RITE)

This rite makes the Bone Flower the stealthiest of the stealthy, allowing her to walk through snow without leaving footprints or run through dead leaves without making a sound.

System: The Kuei-jin meditates for 20 minutes and spends a Yin Trait. For the rest of the scene, the vampire is for all intents and purposes invisible — she leaves no tracks, makes no noise in walking and otherwise leaves no physical evidence of her passing. To indicate that this rite is in place, the vampire should cross her arms over her chest, as per *Obfuscate*. This does not muffle her to otherworldly senses, however, and the effect ends should she do something obvious, such as scream or attack someone.

THE BLACK SILKEN POUCH (INTERMEDIATE RITE)

This rite infuses a target's sensory organs with Yin energy, leaving him unable to see, hear, taste, smell or, even, feel. This effect cannot be overcome by Gifts or Disciplines. Some Bone Flowers have been known to use this rite on themselves during their studies of Yin.

System: The Kuei-jin carves the target's name on a piece of black jade. To trigger the effect, she places the jade in a black silk pouch also containing black volcanic sand and a dried cuttlefish. The player makes a Mental Challenge. The effects last for one scene.

DONNING THE FLAWLESS MASK (INTERMEDIATE RITE)

This rite allows a *ch'ing shih* to wear a semblance of her mortal face for one night.

System: The vampire locates a dragon line that is powerful with Yang Chi and infuses herself with enough Yang to counteract the *ch'ing shih* effect (at least half her Yin pool). The result is an idealized, though exceedingly pale, version of the face she wore when alive. The effect lasts for one night. No blemishes or flaws mar the Flawless Mask, and the *ch'ing shih* will have, for the duration of the effect, a face that looks like white jade — quite beautiful but very unsettling. Any Kuei-jin well-versed in the ways of Yin (*Advanced Yin Prana* or *Bone Shintai* or knowing the *li*) may recognize the rite. This rite may only be performed once per lunar cycle (essentially, once a month).

GRACIOUS ACCEPTANCE OF THE MOST REVERED LOTUS BLOSSOM GIFT (ADVANCED RITE)

Bone Flowers use this rite to pluck desired information from minds unwilling to give it. At the end of the rite, the Bone Flower "remembers" the knowledge, while it disappears forever from the mind of the one who knew it.

System: The Kuei-jin must be in the same room as her target, who must be conscious. The target must be bound and lying down with his head facing west. The player then makes an Extended Mental Challenge, with each success offering more information. The ritualist may seek a specific piece of information ("Where did you place your copy of *The Broken-Winged Crane*?") or general knowledge regarding a particular topic. Abilities and Disciplines may not be acquired in this manner.

LAUGHING BUDDHA MASK

Level Two Artifact

Bone Flowers often need to show a certain degree of geniality in their roles as diplomats to other Dharmas or *shen*, something which does not come easily to them. The Laughing Buddha Mask allows the Bone Flower to gain sociability that she may use in interaction with others. When the Kuei-jin puts on the mask, it seems to become one with her face. While wearing the mask, the Bone Flower becomes extraordinarily pleasant to be around, and her face takes on a pale, smiling countenance that lasts for the scene.

The Kuei-jin spends one point of Yang Chi to activate the mask and gains the Social Traits *Charming*, *Friendly* and *Genial*, which she may use in Social Challenges (including overbids). Rituals or Disciplines that would affect her Social Traits affect only the normal Social Trait pool.

BLACK METAL EGG

Level Three Artifact

Made of highly polished black metal (sometimes obsidian or onyx), these treasures are the size of a chicken egg. Each one can hold up to 10 Traits of Yin Chi. There are perhaps a dozen of these items in the world, usually possessed by ancestors.

The Bone Flower channels her own Yin Chi into the egg, where it can be stored for future use. The Yin Chi remains inside the egg until the Kuei-jin holds the artifact and channels the Yin Chi back into herself. If Yang Chi is placed in the egg, each point cancels out one point of Yin Chi. If more Yang Chi than Yin Chi enters the egg, it shatters. Destroying such an artifact will certainly result in the *considerable* displeasure of the ancestors.

SOUL ASHES

Level Four Artifact

Soul Ashes appear as a very fine black or gray powder. The Bone Flower sprinkles a pinch of ash over an item carried by her enemy, where it disappears. Thereafter, the possessor of the affected item gradually sinks into depression, losing the motivation to do anything and gaining no satisfaction from the activities in which she does engage (the target should roleplay the effects). The victim loses one Willpower Trait per night while she carries the cursed item on her person, and she is unable to regain Willpower during that time. Kuei-jin who are imbalanced toward Yang lose two points of Willpower a night. Victims who reach zero Willpower fall into utter despair and may attempt suicide. Mortals who succumb to this temptation can — and often do — take the Second Breath.

The Bone Flower spends one point of Yin Chi to trigger the Soul Ashes before sprinkling them on the item. The ashes come in small, highly ornate black lacquer boxes that hold enough to affect four or five victims. If the individual carrying the affected item places it in direct sunlight for one full day, the Soul Ashes burn off, and the individual begins regaining Willpower as usual.

GHOST SHACKLES

Level Five Artifact

While Bone Flowers prefer to have the most respectful relations possible with the dead, the fact remains that there are ghosts whose wickedness is an affront to Heaven and the Middle Kingdom. Ghost Shackles weaken and restrain fractious Spectres while providing Yin Chi to the Bone Flower who holds the "key." Ghost Shackles resemble two unconnected, stout, white jade ankle-cuffs with a heavily inscribed, small, black jade peg "key," which is necessary to use them. Among all artifacts available to Shadow Songs, these are the most coveted because of the constant flow of Yin Chi they provide the key holder.

The Bone Flower must restrain or incapacitate the ghost and close the shackles around its ankles. Once the shackles are closed, they become the stuff of spirit. While the ghost is bound, any Yin Chi (Pathos or Angst) that it would have gained shunts directly to the Bone Flower holding the key. Using this artifact — especially on a ghost who is not clearly a Spectre — will gain the notice of the Bone Flower ancestors (usually through the complaints of angry wraiths). As Ghost Shackles are supposedly rare, ancestors investigate such claims without delay.



MASKS IN THE DARKENED THEATRE



Bone Flowers are not all reclusive, quiet scholars. Many, even most, of them spent a great deal of time out and about with their *wu* and getting to know the Middle Kingdom and the worlds beyond the Wall. Disciples diverge the most from Bone Flower stereotypes because they are still searching out a base of knowledge with which to fuel further study.

The following templates show much of the range of Bone Flower disciples. Some are dark scholars or ghosts, others are deadly killers. Use these as ready-made characters or as inspiration for your own characters. Storytellers may, of course, use these Shadow Songs as ready-made contacts, allies or enemies as well.

AMBASSADOR TO ANCESTORS

Quote: *Do not tell me how good you were to your father. His ghost stands behind you even now and weeps.*

Prelude: In your living days you could never fathom your role under Heaven. You tried to be a good daughter, but neither of your parents were happy with you. They both wanted a boy and never tired of telling you how disappointed they were to have had you. Only your grandmother cared for you, and she told you how your life would improve once you married and left your family. Your time with her was precious, but always too short.

Your father would drink to excess, come into your room at night and tell you lurid stories of parents leaving infant girls out in the forest to die of exposure or be consumed by wild beasts. He would chuckle softly and tell you how lucky you were.

You hated both your parents. You plotted their deaths many times, but you really only looked forward to the day when you married and finally escaped them. Unfortunately, your father drank away your dowry, and you weren't quite beautiful enough to marry off without it. You were terrified that you would be stuck at home for the rest of your life, a burden on the family, with only your sick grandmother to talk to. It didn't turn out that way.

The walls were thin, and when your father began making sexual advances toward you, your grandmother knew it. Rather than allow the family to become an insult to the ancestors, your grandmother poured lantern oil throughout the home and set it ablaze. Your parents, your grandmother and you all died in the blaze.

When you came back, you were amazed to note that you could see the spirits in their houses and the ghosts in their shrouds, including your grandmother, who still comforted you from the other side. Now you believe that relations between the two sides of the Wall need to be warmer. You hope to bring the comfort of the dead to all those who need it.

Concept: You are a peacemaker. You believe your ability to perceive the Yin World is a gift that you should use to bring harmony between ghosts and Kuei-jin. After all, you are both dead, and you both linger on to achieve some wisdom.

Roleplaying Hints: Your role as peacemaker shows up not just between those on different sides of the Wall, but between different Dharmas or different types of *shen* as well. Prevent conflict where you can. Your fascination with ghosts may occasionally make it hard for you to empathize with the living, but it's a price you're willing to pay.

Equipment: Demure clothes, family mementos, small collection of texts on the Yellow Springs





NAME: Ambassador

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Conformist

P'O NATURE: The Fool

DEMIANOR: Traditionalist

BALANCE: Yin

DIRECTION: West

WU:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Expression ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Streetwise ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Portents ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Martial Arts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Computer ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Enigmas ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rituals ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Bone Shintai ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Yin Prana ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

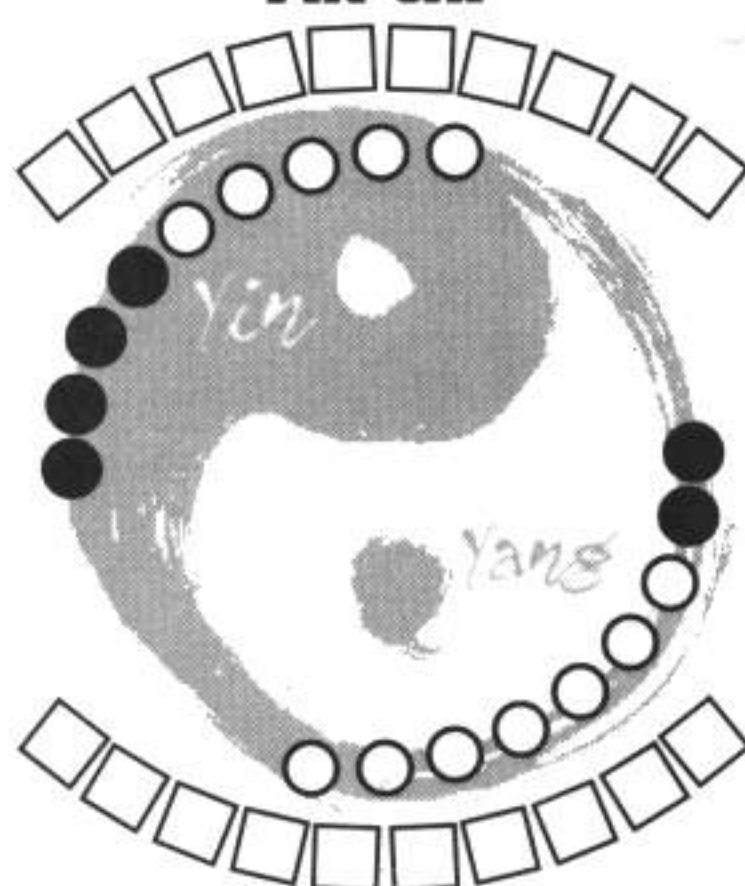
BACKGROUNDS

Horoscope ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Jade Talisman ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rites ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MITES

Behold the Spirits' Doorway
Construct the Dragon Bone
Prison

XIN CHI



YANG CHI

DHARMA Song of the Shadow / 1

HUN

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

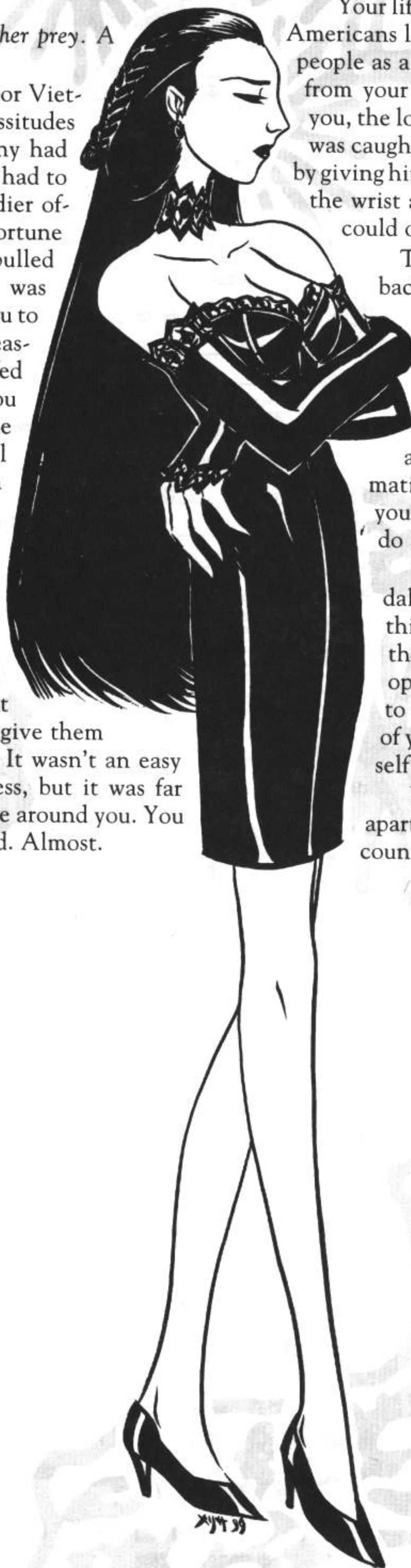
Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

IMBALANCE

EBON SEDUCTRESS

Quote: *A poor huntress chases her prey. A skilled huntress waits.*

Prelude: Your mother was a poor Vietnamese woman trapped by the vicissitudes of a war that was bloodier than any had predicted. She had to eat. And she had to feed you. When the American soldier offered her what seemed like a small fortune for a night with you, your mother pulled you aside, explained exactly what was going to happen to you and asked you to forgive her. The incident was not pleasant, but the evening's discomfort fed you and your mother for weeks. You soon found yourself repeating the events of that evening. Your physical skills grew, as did your reputation and your price. Of all the women doing what you did for money, you were the best at what you did, and there was power in that distinction. American men loved you. Their lust made them malleable. They paid you great sums of money, took you to fancy restaurants, bought you gifts, and in return, you would give them the hours of pleasure they wanted. It wasn't an easy life, there were moments of ugliness, but it was far better than the lives of most of those around you. You were almost sorry to see the war end. Almost.



Your life took a turn for the worse once the Americans left. You were scorned by your own people as a traitor and a whore. When a man from your own village raped and murdered you, the locals saw it as a small loss. When he was caught, the village shamed your memory by giving him nothing but a perfunctory slap on the wrist and setting him free. Your mother could only weep.

The insult was enough to tear you back from Yomi.

Concept: You are a dangerous beauty. With your looks and intelligence, it is easy for you to use guile, wits and sex to get what you want from men, and you use that advantage to its fullest. Gifts, information and Chi all make their way to you in this fashion, and all you have to do is smile.

Roleplaying Hints: Hint at scandalous things, then play coy. Make thinly veiled suggestive comments, then fall back and wait. Allow your opponent to pique his own curiosity, to convince himself of the necessity of your plan, and let him deliver himself into your hands.

Equipment: A well-appointed apartment, beautifully tailored clothes, countless gifts from suitors



NAME: Ebon Seductress

NATURE: Survivor

BALANCE: Yin

PLAYER:

P'O NATURE: The Legalist

DIRECTION: East

CHRONICLE:

DEMEANOR: Bon Vivant

WU:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Expression ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Streetwise ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Portents ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Martial Arts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Computer ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Enigmas ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rituals ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

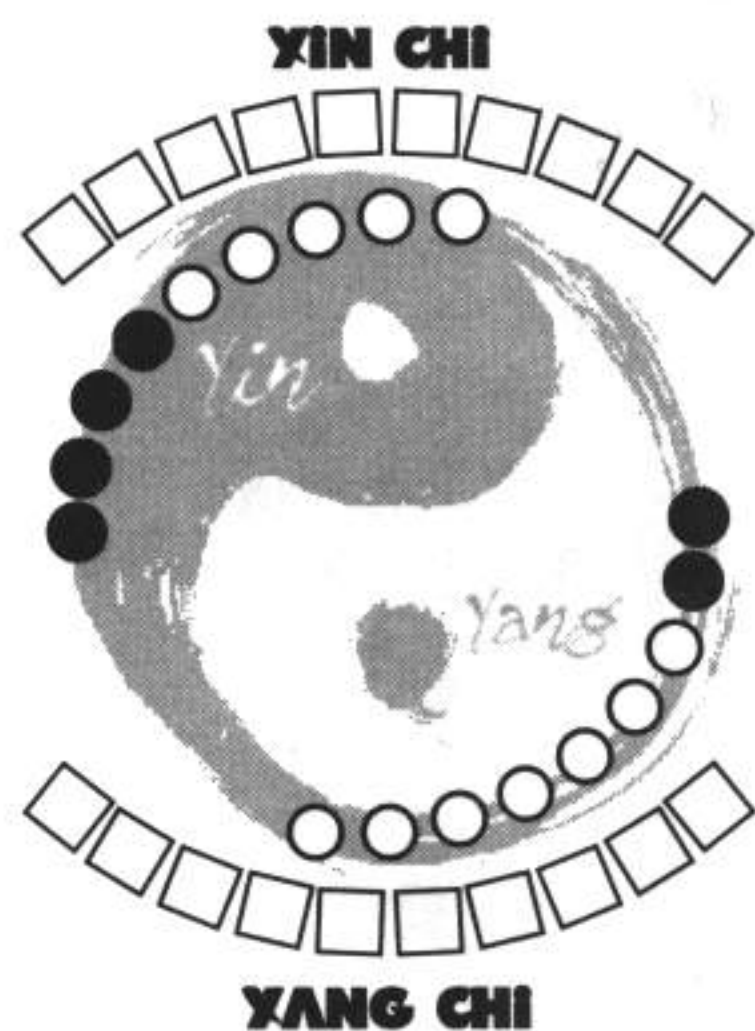
DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Yin Prana ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
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BACKGROUNDS

Contacts ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Horoscope ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Jade Talisman ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

rites



YIN CHI

YANG CHI

DHARMA Song of the Shadow / 1

HUN

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

IMBALANCE

GUARDIAN OF THE PILLAR

Quote: *I don't care what verdict you have rendered, Devil-Tiger, this family is under my protection. Further persistence on your part will merely expedite your return to Yomi.*

Prelude: You were a boorish, sake-swilling womanizer during your days among the living, and you treated your parents and your wife with thinly veiled contempt. Your job, your whoring-buddies and your opium addiction took obvious precedence over your home life. Your wife neither knew nor cared that the money she stole from you was to go to a loan shark, she simply wanted to get the abortion before you became a wretched father as well as a wretched husband. The Yakuza did not appreciate being toyed with in such a fashion, however, especially by a waste of skin like you. The thug smoothly lured you into the alley with promises of free opium and left you with three well-placed stab wounds. As you lay in the freezing alley in Sapporo, feeling your warm blood pouring from your wounds, it occurred to you that you wanted to be a better person in your next lifetime.

You only had to wait a week. Snow had covered your body in the alley, and you hadn't been found. The improper "burial" prevented you from resting, and so, you came back. You found the Yakuza thug who killed you and thanked him for the enlightenment he provided you. It was hard to hate the Yakuza, especially when these supposed gangsters saw to it that your wife was taken better care of in widowhood than in matrimony. Now, they look after her, and you look after them. It's an odd arrangement, but there have been stranger.

Concept: The second tenet of the Song of the Shadow charges you to protect the family as the central focus of life in the Middle Kingdom. That you do, with a conviction born of guilt for your dubious comportment in your living days and a relentless contempt for those who are like you once were. At your best, you are a noble champion of families; at your worst, you are a loose cannon and a vigilante, bringing painful deaths to those you judge unredeemable.

Roleplaying Hints: Watch the mortal world from a cool distance. Be polite to anyone worth a damn. Those who prove themselves destructive to respectable families or individuals deserve to be culled for the protection of families and civilization.

Equipment: Simple loft, Glock 17 9 mm pistol (smuggled from the United States by the Yakuza), photograph of your wife





NAME: Guardian

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Bravo

P'O NATURE: The Demon

DEMEANOR: Director

BALANCE: Yin

DIRECTION: East

WU:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●●●●○○
Dexterity ●●●○○○
Stamina ●●●○○○

SOCIAL

Charisma ●●○○○○○
Manipulation ●●○○○○○
Appearance ●●○○○○○

MENTAL

Perception ●●●○○○
Intelligence ●●○○○○○
Wits ●●●○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ●●○○○○○
Athletics ●○○○○○
Brawl ●●●○○○
Dodge ●●○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○○
Streetwise ●●●○○○
Subterfuge ●○○○○○

SKILLS

Animal Ken ○○○○○○
Portents ○○○○○○
Drive ●○○○○○
Etiquette ●●○○○○○
Firearms ●●○○○○○
Martial Arts ○○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○○
Performance ○○○○○○
Stealth ●●●○○○
Survival ●○○○○○

KNOWLEDGES

Enigmas ●●○○○○○
Finance ●○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○○
Law ●○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○○
Medicine ●○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○○
Rituals ○○○○○○
Science ○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Bone Shintai ●○○○○○
Cultivation ●○○○○○
Demon Shintai ●○○○○○
○○○○○○
○○○○○○

BACKGROUNDS

Allies ●○○○○○
Contacts ●●○○○○○
Horoscope ●●○○○○○
○○○○○○
○○○○○○

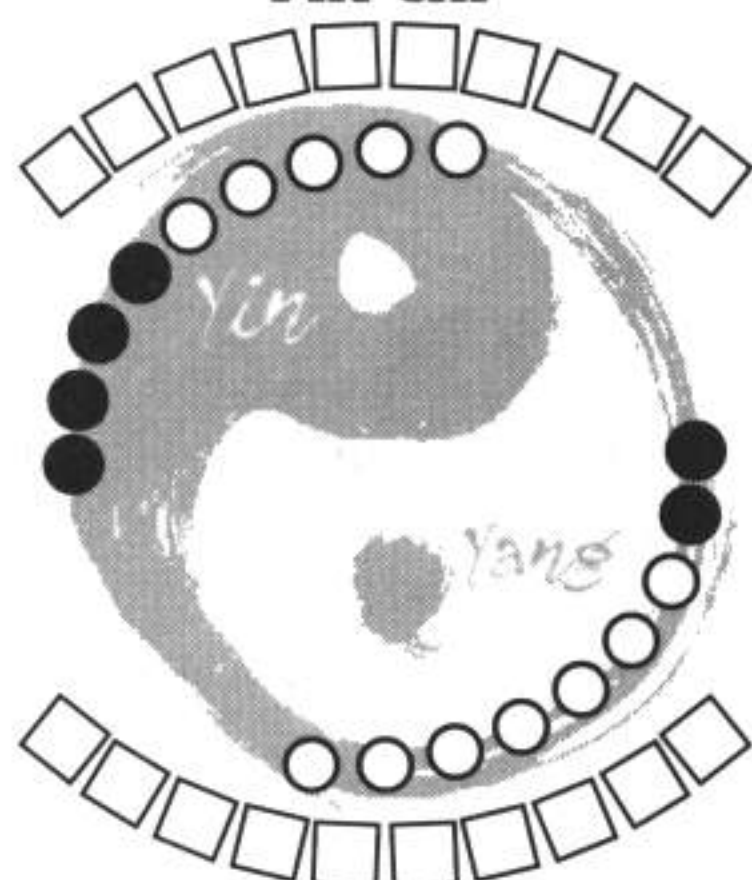
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HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

IMBALANCE

YIN CHI



YANG CHI

DHARMA Song of the Shadow / 1

HUN

●●●●●○○○○○

WILLPOWER

●●●●●○○○○○
□□□□□□□□

P'O

●●●●●○○○○○



□□□□□□□□

DEMON CHI

INVISIBLE WATCHER

Quote: *When you think you see me, you won't. I will already be gone.*

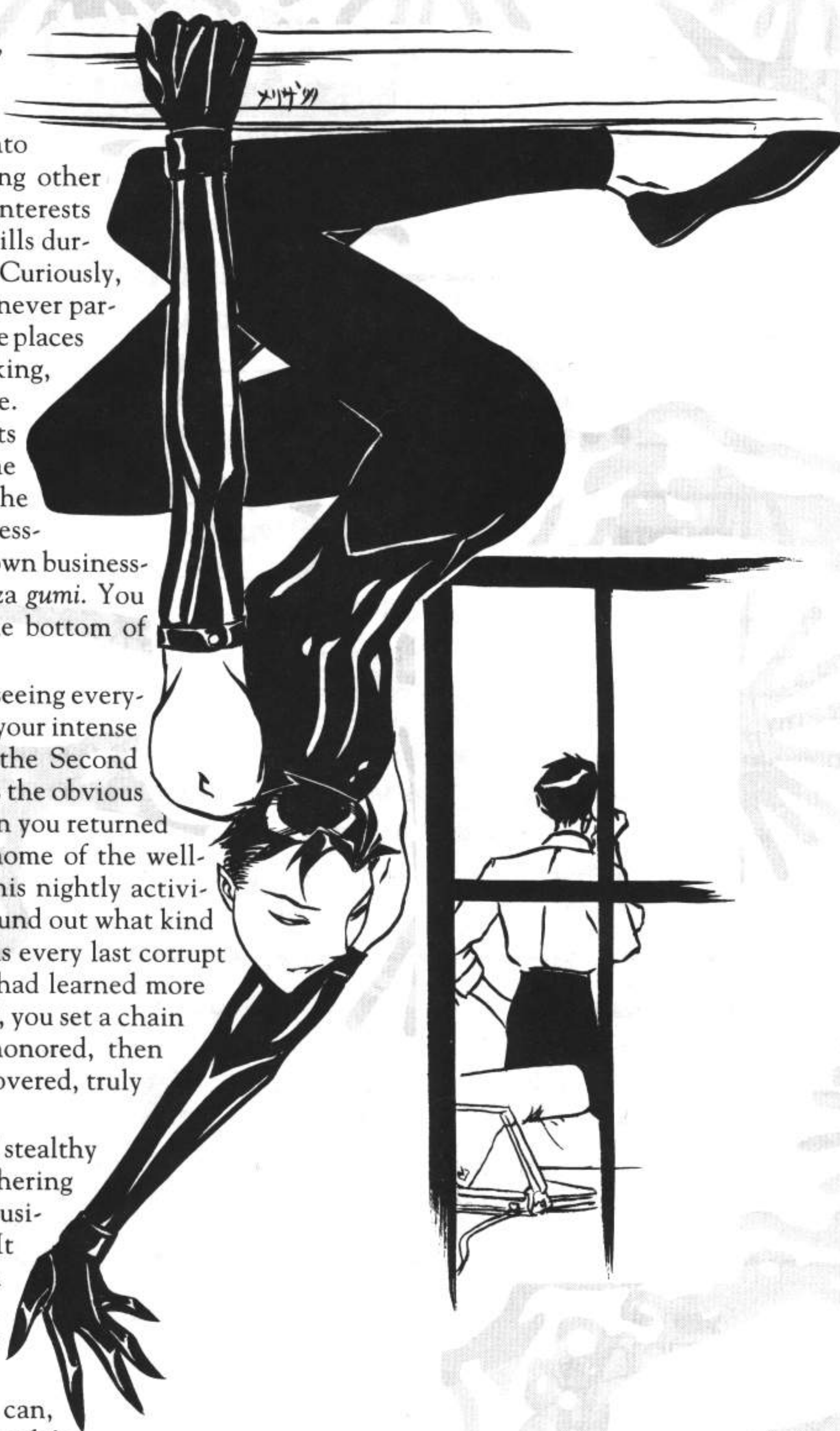
Prelude: Even as a child, you were peeking in windows, creeping into places you didn't belong and reading other people's journals. You honed those interests into actual breaking and entering skills during your turbulent adolescent years. Curiously, despite all the trespassing, you were never particularly interested in stealing from the places you sneaked into; to your way of thinking, that cheapened the whole experience. Unfortunately, word of your talents reached the ears of some small-time thugs who wanted you to break into the Tokyo house of a well-known businessman. It did not go well. The well-known businessman was the head of a major Yakuza gumi. You died and your body ended up at the bottom of Tokyo Bay.

But the feeling that you weren't seeing everything still haunted you in Yomi, and your intense curiosity was enough to grant you the Second Breath. Becoming a Bone Flower was the obvious thing to do, and you do it well. When you returned from Yomi, you went back to the home of the well-known businessman. You spied on his nightly activities, learned his children's names, found out what kind of prostitutes he liked, discovered his every last corrupt business transaction, and once you had learned more about the man than he knew himself, you set a chain of events in motion that first dishonored, then destroyed him. Knowledge, you discovered, truly is power.

Concept: Low-key in a crowd and stealthy when you're alone, you make the gathering of other people's information your business. It doesn't matter if you sell it. It doesn't matter if you can profit from it at all, just so long as you know it. That's the part that the others just don't understand.

Roleplaying Hints: When you can, you prefer to work alone. Other people's lives fascinate you. Watching them when they don't know they're being watched provides you with a deep satisfaction. When you're obligated to be around others, you love to hear them talk about themselves. You ask open ended questions and let people (especially Westerners) rattle on about their lives and businesses and little secrets. You smile and nod and take mental notes for later use. If you have to disguise yourself to gain access to this information, you happily do so. Ten thousand masks are available to you; why not use them?

Equipment: Lock picks, simple black clothing, covert video and audio surveillance equipment





NAME: Invisible Watcher

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Deviant

P/O NATURE: The Monkey

DEMEANOR: Loner

BALANCE: Yin

DIRECTION: Center

WU:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Dexterity _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Stamina _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●

SOCIAL

Charisma _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Manipulation _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Appearance _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●

MENTAL

Perception _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Intelligence _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Wits _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Athletics _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Brawl _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Dodge _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Empathy _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Expression _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Intimidation _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Leadership _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Streetwise _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Subterfuge _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●

SKILLS

Animal Ken _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Portents _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Drive _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Etiquette _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Firearms _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Martial Arts _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Melee _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Performance _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Stealth _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Survival _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●

KNOWLEDGES

Computer _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Enigmas _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Investigation _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Law _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Linguistics _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Medicine _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Occult _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Politics _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Rituals _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Science _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

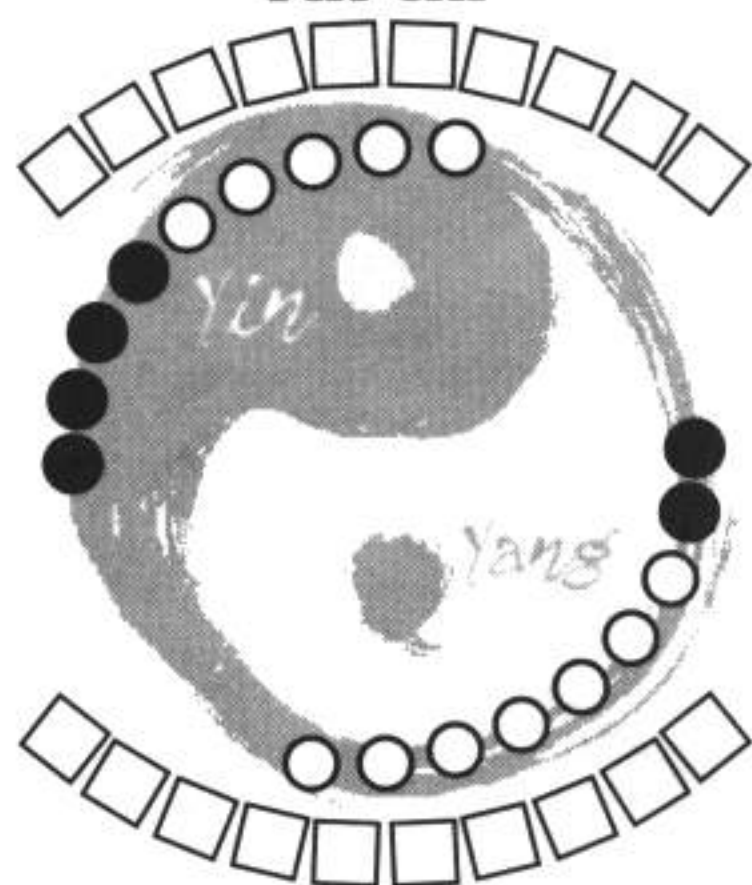
Black Wind _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Yin Prana _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
_____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
_____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
_____ ● ● ● ● ● ●

BACKGROUNDS

Contacts _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Horoscope _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
Jade Talisman _____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
_____ ● ● ● ● ● ●
_____ ● ● ● ● ● ●

MITES

YIN CHI



YANG CHI

DHARMA Song of the Shadow / 1

HUN

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

P/O

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

Bruised _____ □
Hurt -1 _____ □
Injured -1 _____ □
Wounded -2 _____ □
Mauled -2 _____ □
Crippled -5 _____ □
Incapacitated _____ □

IMBALANCE

OBSESSED NECROMANCER

Quote: *The secrets of the dead are not like our secrets, Mr. Kim, as I'm sure our strange visitors have explained to you by now.*

Prelude: You were always the quiet little girl poking around in things you shouldn't. One day you trapped a wasp and a fly in the same jar and watched with unrivaled fascination as the wasp mounted the fly in mid-air and began to eat it alive. When the process was done there was nothing left of the fly but a wing in the bottom of the jar. That was how you saw life after that: a thing that lands on our back and eats away at us until there's nothing left. You were only 20 when the gnawing of the wasp became too much, and you let it consume you entirely by cutting open your wrists in a bath of warm water.

Your time in the Hell of Being Eaten Alive showed you that the Yama Kings had something of a twisted sense of humor and that your understanding had been far from complete. Deep within you, the P'o demanded that you be able to deepen your understanding. The Second Breath came quickly after you devoured the wasp on your back.

Concept: The riddles of Yomi and death fascinate you beyond all reason. You are certain that your connection with the cold forces of Yin give you insights into death and dying that others cannot fathom,

and yet, you are weary of jumping to conclusions as you did in life. You must learn more about the exact process of death. You can hear the ghosts and see the ghosts, but you are still stuck on this side of the Wall, and it frustrates you endlessly.

You pursue the teachings of your Dharma with a zeal few others can match in your quest for the knowledge that will allow you to travel to the Yellow Springs and back. In the meantime, you're content to watch the light fade from the eyes of the living and see their ghosts slip from their bodies.

Roleplaying

Hints: Like most of your Dharma, you are quiet and distant most of the time, but when you have the chance to study a death, you are filled with an enthusiasm others find disconcerting. You are also capable of being quite socially engaging when a conversation turns to the macabre. Because of this, most of your social interactions are with ghosts.

Equipment: A crypt converted as your resting place, a small library on the subject of death and ghosts





NAME: Neckromancer

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Loner

P'O NATURE: The Deceiver

DEMEANOR: Deviant

BALANCE: Yin

DIRECTION: West

WU:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Expression ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Streetwise ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Portents ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Martial Arts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Computer ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Enigmas ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rituals ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

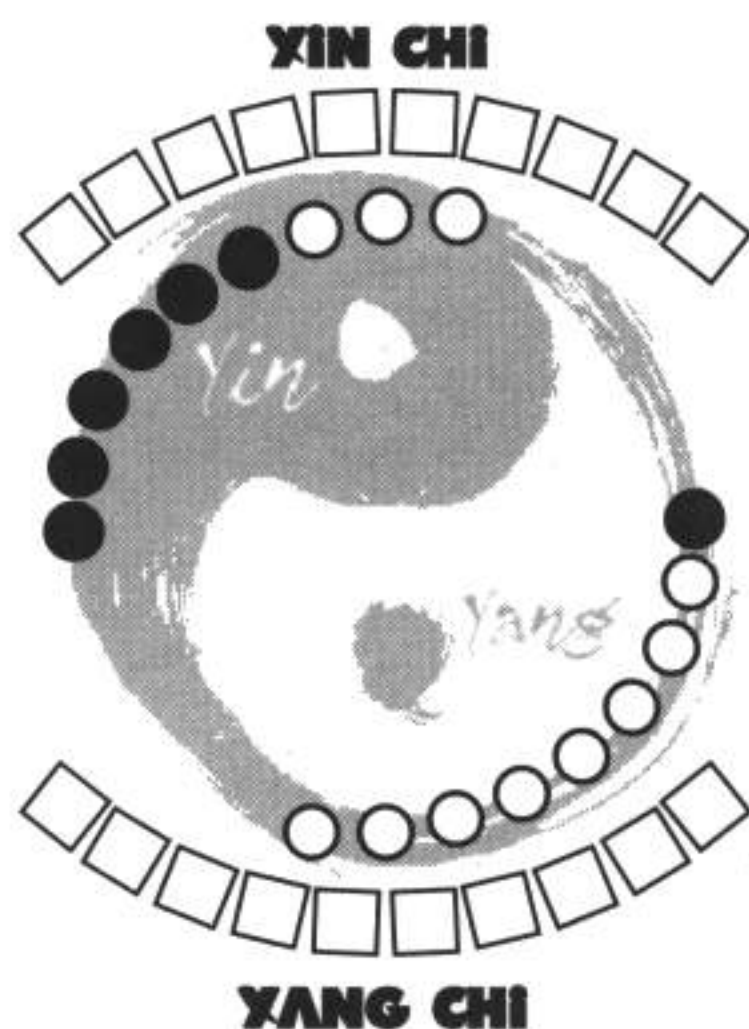
Black Wind ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Yin Prana ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

BACKGROUNDS

Jade Talisman ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rites ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

RITEs

Harmonius Shielding of the
Guarded Home
Trace the Dragon's Blood
Behold the Spirits' Doorway



DHARMA Song of the Shadow / 1

HUN

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

IMBALANCE

Permanent Yin

SCHOLAR OF WAR

Quote: *That a weapon does not belong to you does not mean you cannot destroy your opponents with it.*

Prelude: It secretly disappointed you that Japan never went to war during your lifetime. You had committed Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* and Miyamoto Musashi's *The Book of Five Rings* to memory by the time you entered university. You maintained excellent grades, despite playing go during most of your spare time and feeling your martial urges unfulfilled.

When your death came, it was by the hand of a simple street thug who just wanted your fat businessman's wallet. There was no honor in your end.

And so, you took the Second Breath to fix that oversight. You found yourself in a position where your knowledge could help you. During your *kôa* you tracked down your killer and used your knowledge of strategy to torment and terrify him for nights on end. Finally, you killed him in a drawn out ceremony.

When the Bone Flower ancestors realized your tactical skills, they spoke to Kuro-sama, and you were invited to study at Daisetsuzan, where your knowledge of tactics and techniques for infiltration and assassination were expanded by orders of magnitude.

Concept: You are a cold and calculating tactician. You know more ways to kill silently than most Kuei-jin know how to kill at all. You do not like to engage in combat, but your curiosity often gets the better of you, and you set up situations that allow you to test your strategies in the real world. The time you spent studying at Daisetsuzan was the most powerful time in your life or unlife. Unlike most Bone Flowers, when an urge to conflict hits you, you may not be able to master it.

Roleplaying Hints: Scrutinize those around you. Know their limitations, as well as your own. Do not rush stupidly into conflict, but if conflict is necessary, plan it out very care-

fully to maximize your chances of success. Once you've gathered intelligence about your opponent, take the necessary steps to see that you are utterly victorious.

Equipment: Various weapons, both modern and ancient, a treasured copy of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*





NAME: Scholar of War
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Visionary
P'O NATURE: The Slave
DEMEANOR: Gallant

BALANCE: Yin
DIRECTION: South
WU:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Expression ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Streetwise ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Portents ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Martial Arts ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐
Survival ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Enigmas ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Finance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rituals ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Bone Shintai ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

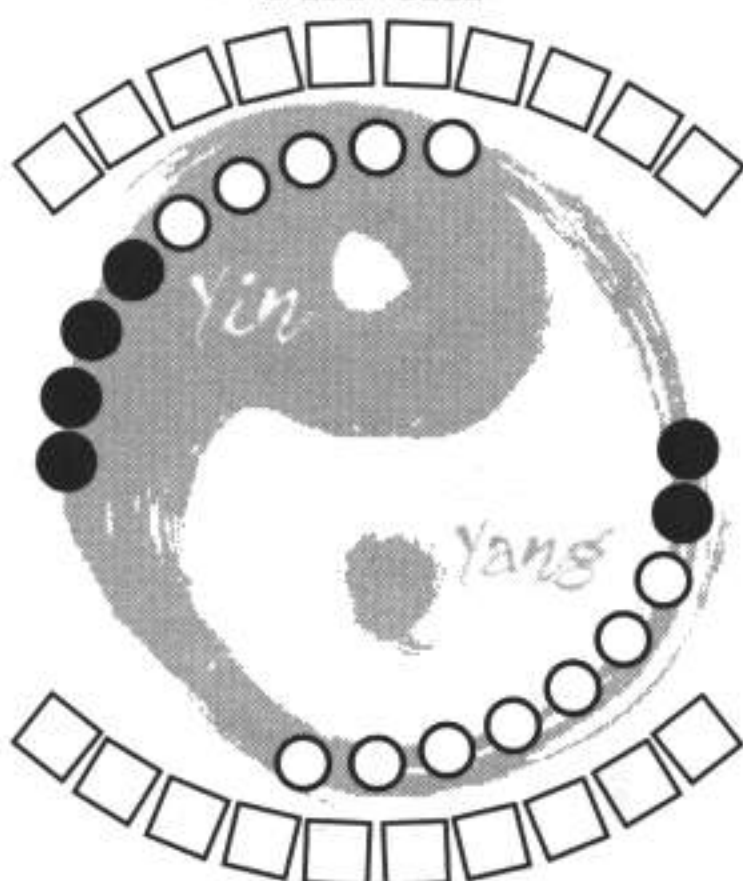
BACKGROUNDS

Horoscope ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rites ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

rites

Harmony with Night

XIN CHI



YANG CHI

DHARMA Song of the Shadow / 1

HUN

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

IMBALANCE



APPENDIX: PERFECT MASTERS

Bone Flowers spend much of their existences learning from a series of teachers. The quest for more knowledge, more wisdom and further enlightenment consumes them like no other Kuei-jin. The most august of these teachers gain a fame in the Dharma that flows across the Middle Kingdom, ignoring matters of court and rivalry. Younger Kuei-jin can also gain recognition in the Dharma, especially if they have accomplished much or come to the Dharma from another path.

The following “perfect masters” are some of the greatest minds in the Dharma and some of its rising stars. Of course, there are many others who play important roles in the Song of the Shadow. The fame of the young can be fleeting indeed, although the position of ancient masters is much more enduring.

Lili Zhou, Talon of the Metal Dragon

Lili Zhou was an interpreter in Hong Kong at the turn of the century. Her rape and murder by a British assistant

to the consul caused a brief stir and some friction between the native Chinese and the British, but it passed. It did not pass for Lili. Her P’o struggled for months before escaping Yomi, finally succeeding, and when she finally took the Second Breath, she was a raging thing. The few representatives of the Flame Court still in Hong Kong found her by following the trail of cannibalized British bodies. The local British press was attempting to pin the murders on a hypothetical “morally diseased Chinaman,” but thanks to Robert Pedder and his associates, the story never made its way into print. Pedder was afraid one of his own Kindred had committed the crimes in frenzy and aggressively clamped down on the press. He never did learn the true identity of the murderer or that he had covered up a crime committed by “the enemy.”

Lili initially entered Kuei-jin culture as a follower of the Howl of the Devil-Tiger, which seemed to suit her rage and her attunement to the southern direction. After achieving the Second of Ten Dawns and taking a notable toll on the British population of Hong Kong as part of the nascent Victorious Whirlwind *wu* (see *World of Darkness*:



Hong Kong), she was quite certain that her destiny did not include becoming a devil. At the moment of her questioning, she saw dead cherry blossoms being blown from a tree by a cold wind, and she realized where her destiny lay. Initially, she was not a favorite of the more enlightened Bone Flowers who wished to restore the Flame Court, and she was not assigned to a *wu*, but her diligence in her studies forced them to concede that she was quite cold-minded and deserving of favor. Furthermore, her proficiency with the English language granted her a standing that others lacked. When the Metal Dragon Talon *wu* lost one member to an especially perceptive — and dangerous — Kin-jin (Pedder himself, who had long been marked for assassination), Lili replaced her with the mandarin's blessing. The other four members of the *wu* were sparing in their praise of the notion. They asked the mandarin to reconsider. Lili was less advanced on her Dharmic path than the woman she was replacing, but the mandarin, who had full say over such things, could not be dissuaded.

It was a perfect fit. Lili's disdain for Occidentals, Kin-jin in particular, served her well, as did her brief time as a Devil-Tiger. She underwent training in the requisite techniques and even attained the rank of jina during her training. She rapidly earned the respect of her *wu*.

Most recently, the Metal Dragon Talon has traveled to San Francisco to hasten the ousting of the Kin-jin. Many among the Flame Court are eager to make San Francisco payback for the years of *gweilo* occupation of Hong Kong.

PROFILE

Nature: Fanatic

P'o Nature: The Slave

Demeanor: Judge

Balance: Yin

Direction: South

Dharma: The Song of the Shadow 4

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Dodge 4, Empathy 1, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 3, Expression 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics 4, Martial Arts 4, Melee 3, Occult 2, Rituals 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4, Survival 1,

Disciplines: Bone Shintai 4, Demon Shintai 3, Flesh Shintai 2, Yin Prana 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Horoscope 2

Yin: 6, **Yang:** 4, **Hun:** 4, **P'o:** 5, **Willpower:** 8

KU ZU, THE BONE ANCESTOR OF CHONGQING



Among the most celebrated of the Bone Flower ancestors remaining among Kuei-jin society, the Bone Ancestor is the august ruler of the Bone Court of Chongqing. Among the most learned of all extant Kuei-jin, Ku Zu has a mind that enables her to remember facts, data and conversations with perfect recall. Centuries after meeting a minor functionary from a distant court, she will remember his name and other details the moment he enters her presence again. Her mastery of even the most complex points of etiquette is legendary, especially when it comes to the ways of the Yellow Springs.

Ku Zu was a beggar woman in Kaifeng when she died. A haughty minister of Emperor Shen Zong ordered her

death because he deemed her too ugly to be on the streets, and his servants disposed of her body with a shameful lack of ceremony. Such a death did not sit well with Heaven.

Once Ku Zu took the Second Breath, she began haunting the minister's nights. She was hesitant to kill him because he had a great deal of power, and she did not wish to plunge the somewhat shaky dynasty into a tail-spin. Instead, she terrorized him and drained his Chi with a frequency that left him chronically bedridden. When others had risen to take his position, she granted the minister a quick death by draining his Chi entirely.

Ku Zu is among those Bone Flowers visibly marked by her time in the Black Metal Egg. She is a *ch'ing shih*, and her metallic black skin stretches tightly over her face. However ugly she was at the time of her death, she far exceeds that now. Nevertheless, both the Dharma and the Bone Court consider her appearance a sign of her station. Her position as Bone Ancestor, which she has held for the last 600 years, places her social standing beyond reproach.

Her interpretations of the tenets are very conservative. Once emotion has been excised from the interpretation process, she claims, clarity infuses the mind, and the way becomes obvious. Her preferred technique for arriving at that clarity of mind is pain. Those who come to learn the Dharma from her soon find that her methods of instruction are truly difficult to forget.

Ku Zu resides in the grand subterranean library of Chongqing. Her personal offices are well hidden and comprehensively warded against all manner of intrusion.

KURO-SAMA, EXALTED SENSEI OF DAISETSUZAN

During his life, Kuro-sama lived in the early Heian period of Japan's history, Kuro-sama was a *chi'n ta* of the Go Kamisori Gama clan of assassin magi. Although a skilled assassin and tactician, he never achieved the heights of power and status. He was too content to serve his betters to undertake the willful campaign for power and enlightenment necessary for true status among the Lightning People. He served as a teacher but never a leader. His humble service was not rewarded.

Three former students (including his own grandson) who had not been accepted into the clan (and, thus, felt his demanding teaching style was "unfair") betrayed him to a rival. Kuro-sama's death was extraordinarily painful, and all those who participated in his final moments were overcome by shame to see such a noble man die such a hideous death. They tossed his body into the ocean and thought about it as little as possible.

A scant few nights later, they were forced to think about it again. In the dark hell of Kakuri, Kuro-sama's P'o raged at his betrayal. His quiet manner, however, would have left him in Yomi had it not been for the intervention of the wizard Jizo the Wanderer. The only kindly soul in the entirety of the dark realm, Jizo told Kuro-sama quite



simply that he had made his own shackles. Enlightened, the assassin let his rage loose for the briefest of moments and took the Second Breath. (For more on Kakuri and Jizo the Wanderer, see *The Thousand Hells*.)

Kuro-sama meditated for the first evening of his return to grant himself the cold-mindedness it would require to avenge his death. He fed on the Chi of his perfidious grandson and the other two traitors. Then, with only the benefit of his vast knowledge of assassination and a few meager Disciplines, Kuro-sama infiltrated the camp of his murderer, a mage of vast repute. His enemy was dead and buried with the appropriate rites before it occurred to anyone that he was missing.

Kuro-sama, no longer capable of wielding the magics he had once known, returned to his clan only long enough to let them know what had befallen him. From there, he joined the newly returned Bishamon *uji* to learn the ways of the vampires. No longer willing to restrain himself but still happy to serve honorable ancestors, he rose in prestige among the vampires. His approach to the Second Breath was as considered and rational as his approach to assassination, and he progressed in his Dharma with a rapidity that others found excessive. Their envy made him uncomfortable, and he took two students and retreated to the desolation of Daisetsuzan on the northernmost Japanese island of Hokkaido. There he trained them

in the ways of assassination for three years. The length of the training period has not changed, and he will not vary it for any student. Students trying to slip away without finishing their training do not survive their escape. Kuro-sama has sworn that failed students would never return to betray him again, so those students who begin their training with him but cannot complete it meet Final Death as painlessly as possible.

Kuro-sama is nothing if not practical and cold-minded. Nothing matters to him but results. His students learn to use every method available to attain their goals. Ghostly informants, poisons, disguise, seduction, political intrigues, strategy and tactics all figure into Kuro-sama's training, and any student who leaves Daisetsuzan is well versed in all of these. They also learn the Song of the Shadow as well, because Kuro-sama will not teach followers of any other Dharma, whom he describes as "too hot."

He now follows each training cycle with four years of solitary meditation and Dharmic study. Kuro-sama's greatest hope at this time is to reach The Hundred Clouds before the commencement of the Sixth Age.

THE MOST SERENE BLACK PEARL MISTRESS, MOTHER OF SHADOWS



The arhat of the Song of the Shadow Dharma has denied the urge to leave the Middle Kingdom, and she remains humbly among the rabble of the world with a small retinue of those seeking to fine-tune their

understanding of the Dharma. It is her most exalted desire to prevent the loss of all knowledge and the destruction of the family during the Sixth Age. Once that dark time passes, many believe she will choose to rejoin the Great Cycle once more.

She rarely speaks and only makes herself accessible to the most worthy students of the Dharma. Even they must find where she and her nightmare entourage (the Most Exalted Shadow Blossom Family) have wandered. Her words are so cloaked in riddles as to sound like madness, though those few who understand her (or claim to) insist that she possesses uncanny insights into everything ranging from the Yama Kings to Kin-jin and the coming of the Sixth Age.

On occasion, the Most Serene Black Pearl Mistress, Mother of Shadows, will visit cities where the most enlightened Bone Flower bodhisattvas reside, and she will humbly request an audience with them. She has been to Chongqing three times in the last 500 years, the Shaolin Monastery twice and to Seoul once. In recent months, rumors have circulated that the Most Exalted Shadow Blossom Family is traveling to the Green Courts. Some say that she wants to learn the secrets of the strange visitors from the West herself, particularly after the recent destruction of three bodhisattvas by an ancient Kin-jin. The Most Serene Black Pearl Mistress, Mother of Shadows, understands the forces of Yin more completely than any other in existence, or so it is said, so why she might seek out these strange visitors is beyond speculation.

Folklore claims that she was the daughter of a scholar in the early Qin empire. Supposedly, she was so spoiled that she became an embarrassment to her father, who had her murdered, both as a means of saving face and as a ploy for sympathy. It is said that by studying with the philosopher Zhuangzi many years after her death, the Most Serene Black Pearl Mistress, Mother of Shadows, came to an understanding of *wuwei*, a philosophy of "action by inaction" or "effortlessness" which has guided her unerringly along the path of her Dharma.

Despite her vast age, the Most Serene Black Pearl Mistress, Mother of Shadows, resembles a beautiful girl of 16. When in the wilds, she wears little beyond clay and ashes. When she enters populated areas, however, she wears featureless black robes and a black broad-brimmed hat that keeps her face in constant shadow as an act of deference to those who have become *ch'ing shih* through their devotion to the Black Metal Egg.

The Most Exalted Shadow Blossom Family is very difficult to find. These renown Bone Flowers do not frequent cities and travel only on nights of the new moon. The entire entourage wears black silk robes and enormous broad-brimmed hats. They travel in complete silence. The company comprises between five and 10 Kuei-jin of formidable enlightenment and an enormous retinue of ghosts.



Feel the Cold of Yin

We hear the Quiet Song that whispers in the blackness of Yin. We are cold, yielding and unemotional. Our knowledge is supreme and our powers terrifying. We see the ancestors' ghosts and honor them. We are silent and deadly, scholar-assassins and mystics of the Yellow Springs. Do you understand our riddles? Do you fear our ways?

You will.

Hear the Shadow Song of the Hungry Dead

Dharma Book: Bone Flowers is the second in the Dharma Book series for Kindred of the East. It is a complete guide to playing the dark scholars of the Kuei-jin. New rites, Disciplines and artifacts, prominent teachers and their secrets, this book provides everything you need to sing the Song of the Shadow.

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- The secret methods and temples of the Dharma
 - The Bone Flowers' plans for the West
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ISBN 1-56504-240-9 WW2905
\$14.95 U.S.



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