

DHARMA BOOK

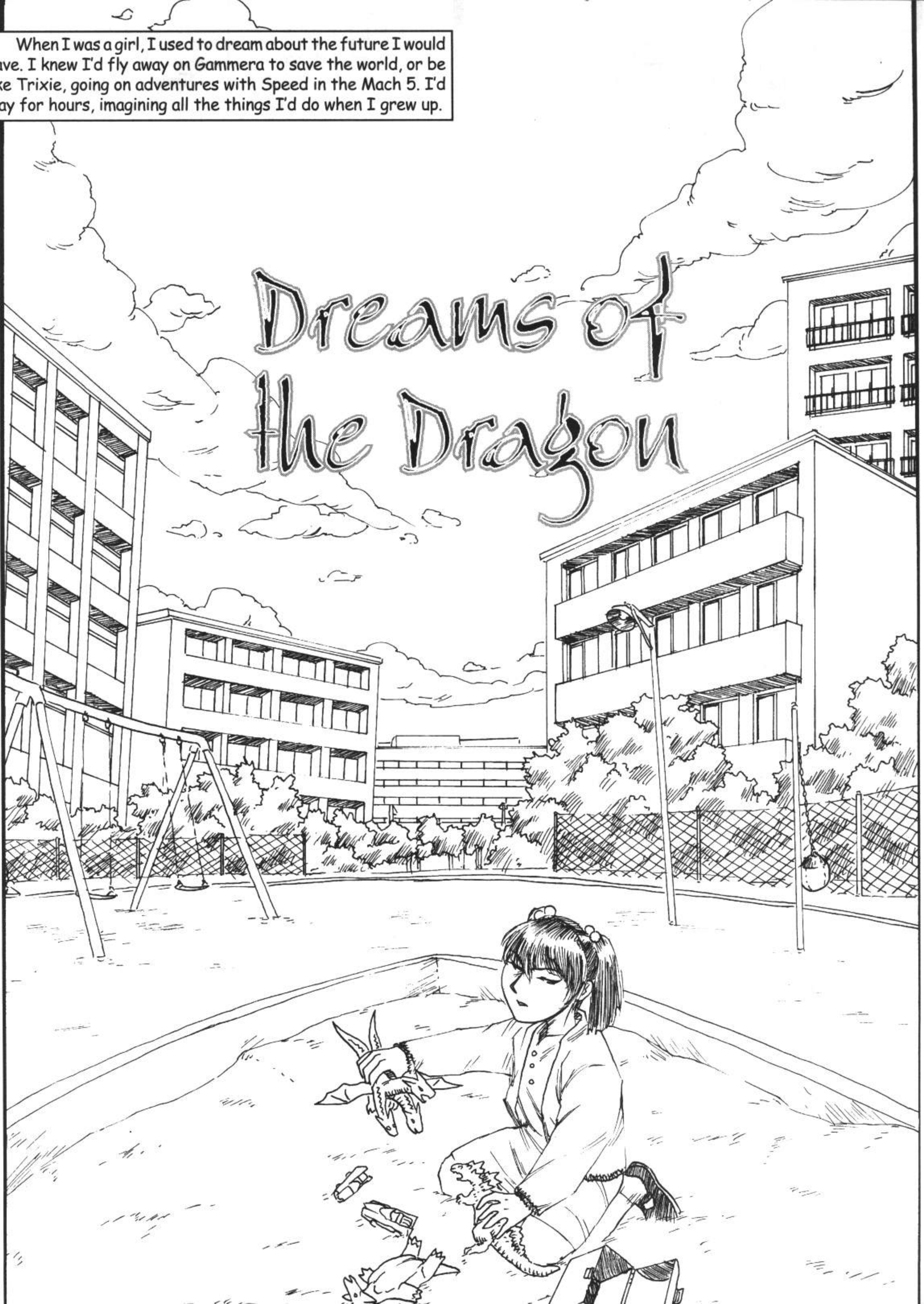
THRASHING DRAGONS™



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

When I was a girl, I used to dream about the future I would have. I knew I'd fly away on Gamera to save the world, or be like Trixie, going on adventures with Speed in the Mach 5. I'd play for hours, imagining all the things I'd do when I grew up.

Dreams of the Dragon



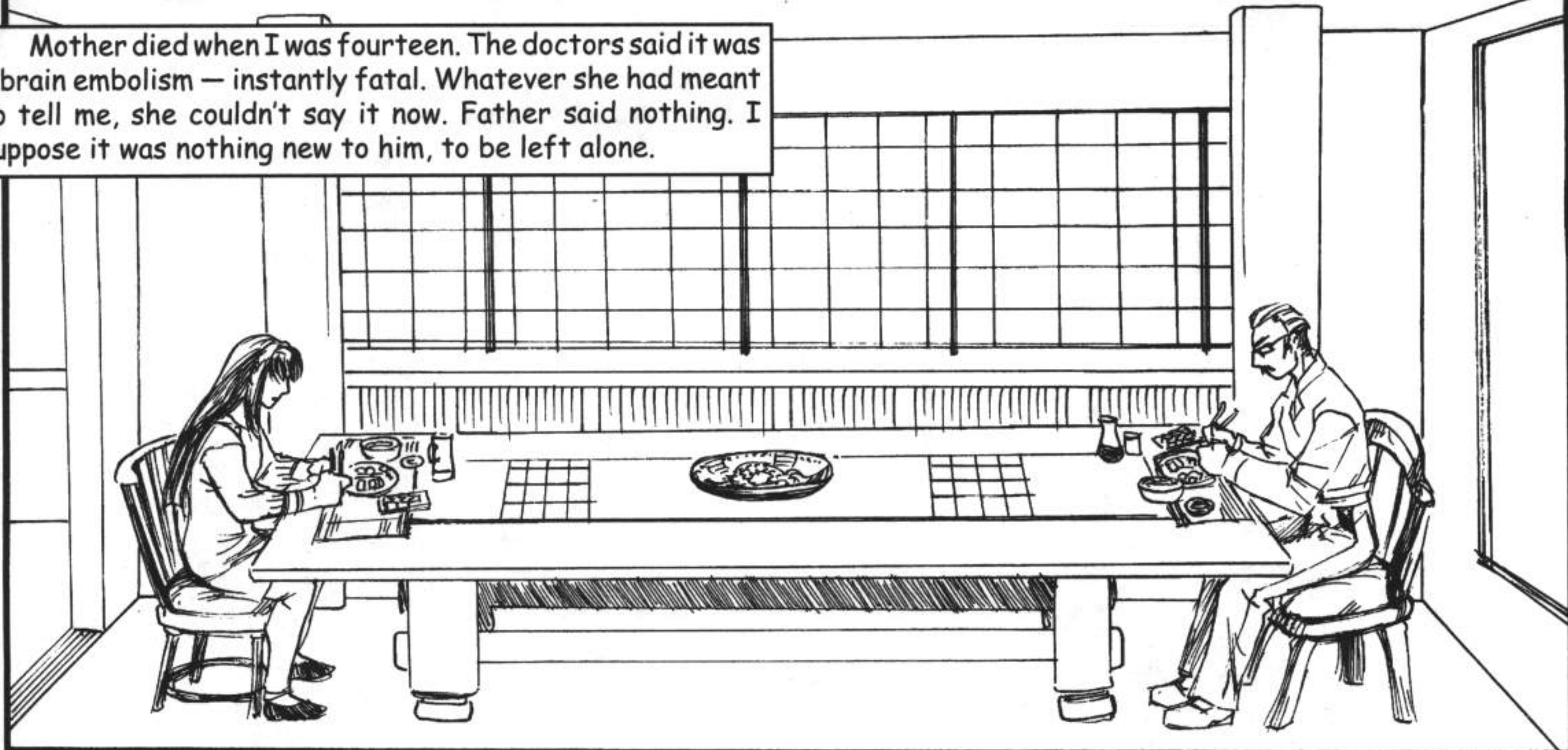
My grandfather had been an officer in Manchuria during the war, and died there. He had made friends in the service, though, and they looked after my father. Daddy was a lawyer, part of the government ministry that helped the keiretsu work together. He was stern, and he smoked, and I never saw him very much.

My mother was good-hearted but conservative, the daughter of one of grandfather's friends from the service. She always smiled, and it seemed like there were things she wanted to say to me, but never did.

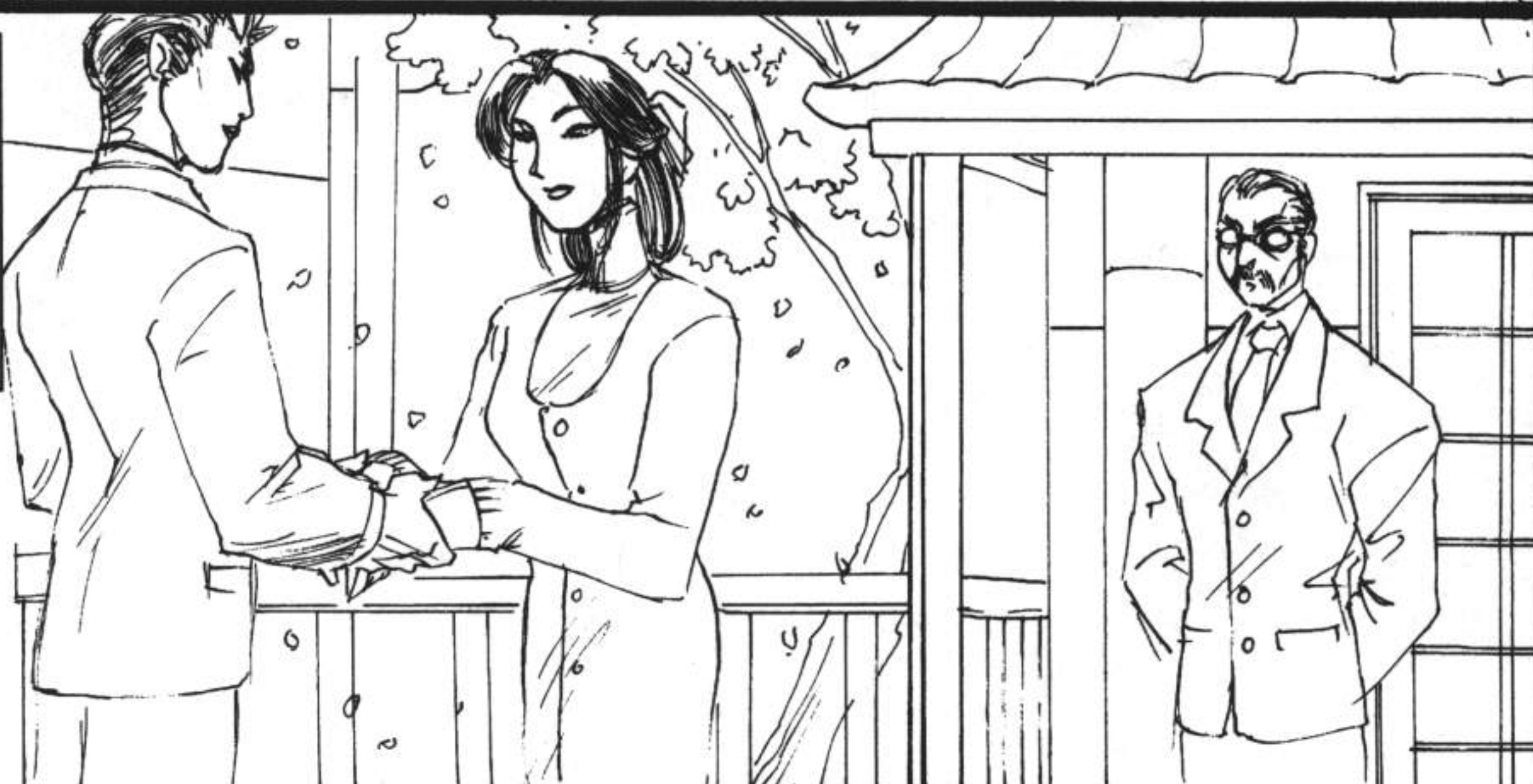


I didn't have many friends. I studied and read, and waited for the romance that would carry me away. I was young, then, and it seemed like some great adventure was right around the corner.

Mother died when I was fourteen. The doctors said it was a brain embolism — instantly fatal. Whatever she had meant to tell me, she couldn't say it now. Father said nothing. I suppose it was nothing new to him, to be left alone.



Father helped arrange my marriage, but he was very modern about it. He made sure I approved. Even made sure it was a love match. Maybe it was really love, or maybe I was just hoping for that adventure.



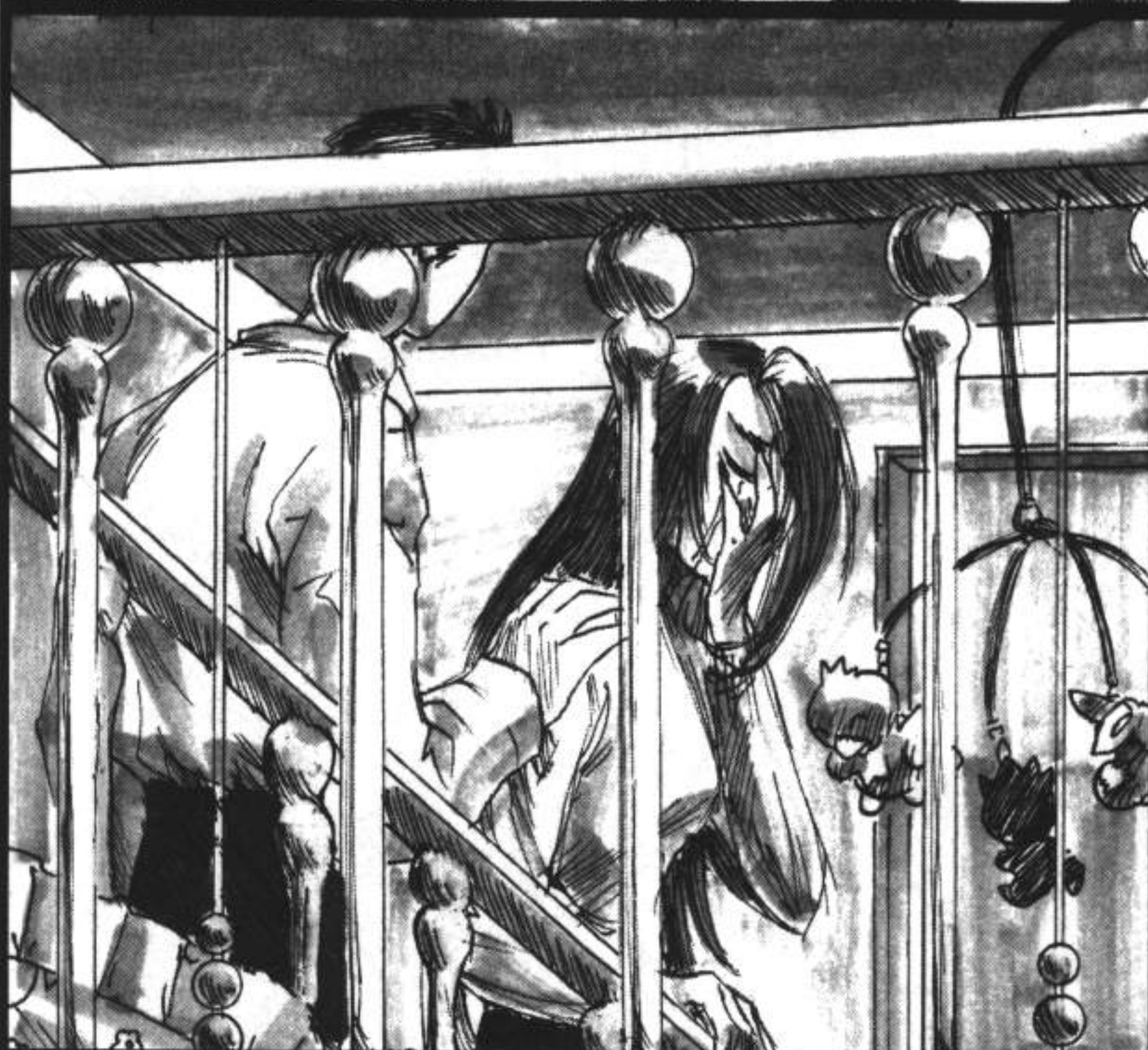
The ceremony was beautiful. I actually fainted, something I refuse to let embarrass me, even now. My dreams were finally taking flight, and even if I wouldn't be driving the Mach 5, I was now the wife of a promising young executive.



But promising young executives work long hours. When my husband wasn't working all night, he was drinking all night. Men who didn't party didn't make the right connections, and ended up in the back of the office tribe.



I used to watch the trains go by our house and dream that each one carried a bit of my life away with it. Commuter trains in the morning and the evening, freight trains in the afternoon and late at night. I felt as though I would live that way forever.



We had hoped for a child, but one never came. We went to doctors, and they called it "nonspecific ovarian failure," meaning they didn't have an answer. My husband didn't blame me, but I did.

My husband was a brilliant man, but not brilliant enough to serve his company. When the insurance firm he helped captain declared bankruptcy, he hanged himself. He did it at his office — to spare me, I think.



In the days before he died, I knew what he was going to do. I wanted to beg him not to die, but the life I had chosen never prepared me to say such words.

My guilt was without words or reason — I didn't even know why I wanted to die. I helped myself to a handful of sleeping pills and sealed a plastic bag around my neck, just as that American death doctor recommended.



But death wasn't the end. The train that took my soul away to Kakuri Yomi was full of broken souls, and the ticket-taker punched my hand to mark my fare. I hadn't known the world could hold enough wounded lives to fill that train.

Kakuri Yomi is a hell of snow and blackness. Of my time there, I remember only fragments. My ashes had been scattered by the time I returned, and I swirled together at a crossroads in the night. A snow-woman, I took the warmth of several before the Devil-Tigers caught me.

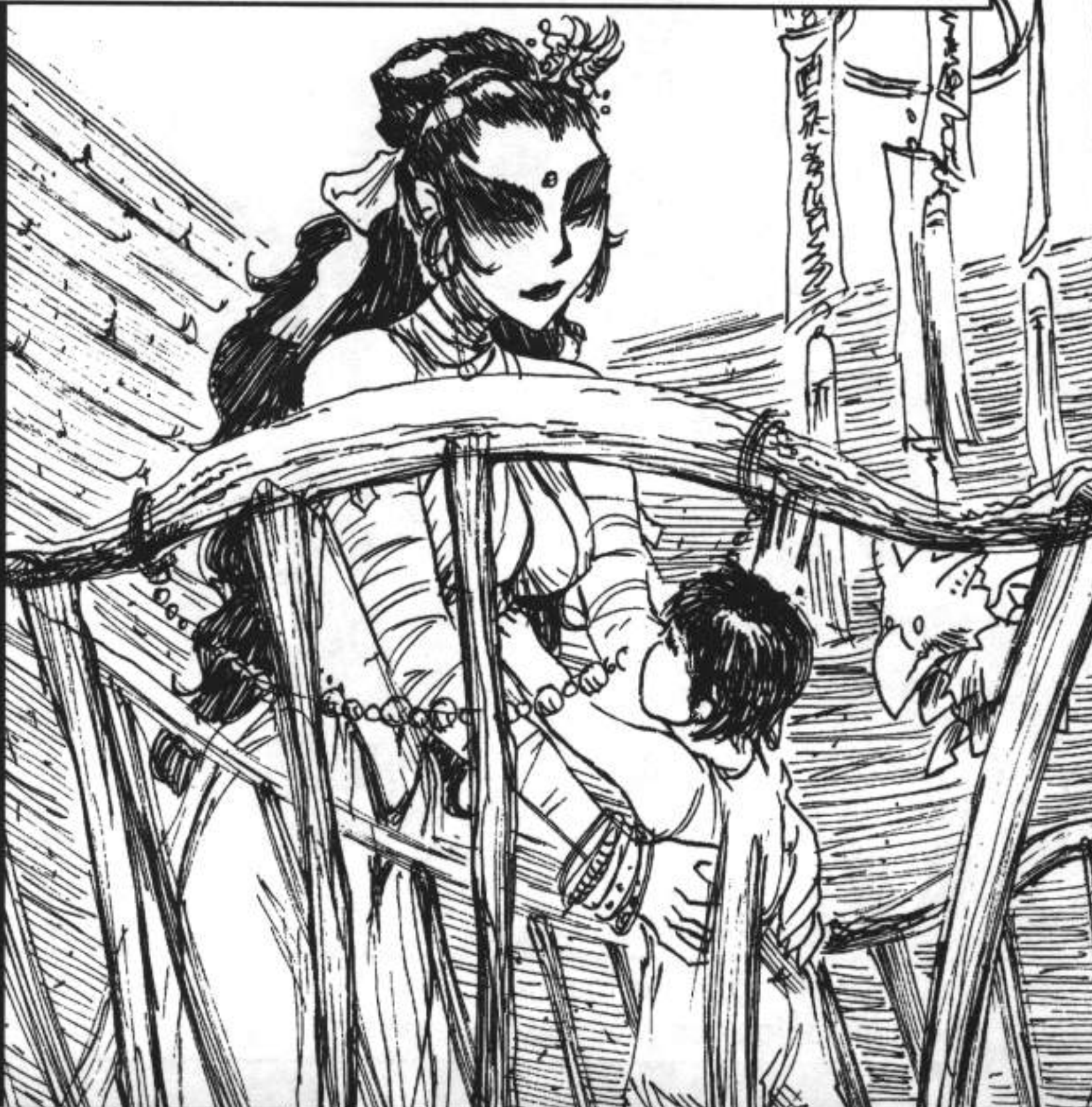


They taught me manners, and then gave me over to the mandarins for training.

Enlightenment is hard work, but I am rarely alone. The courts have given me a family, and I will gladly lay my toil aside to aid my brothers and sister.



What the doctors could not give me, my corpse-body provided gladly. I have a child now, and I will raise her and teach her as best I can in the ways of living.



The train will not take my life away from me again. I am a dragon, catching dreams within my coils. I am a tiger, shredding nightmares with my claws. This is my existence now, and I neither bless it nor curse it, but I thank Heaven for every sunrise the August Personage permits me to see.



Having been dead, one learns to appreciate the value of such things.

DHARMA BOOK

TATRASHING DRAGONS™

WE ARE THE HUNGRY GHOSTS

By GEOFFREY C. GRABOWSKI

VAMPIRE CREATED BY MARK REIN • HAGEN

CREDITS

Author: Geoffrey C. Grabowski. Vampire and the World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen
Storyteller game system created by Mark Rein•Hagen
Developer: Philippe R. Boulle
Mind's Eye Theatre Adaptations: Philippe R. Boulle
Mind's Eye Theatre Developer: Cynthia Summers
Editor: Jasmine D. Milberger
Art Direction, Layout & Typesetting: Brian Glass
Interior Art: Becky Cloonan, Steve Ellis, Michael Gaydos, Vince Locke, Jennifer Quick, Melissa Uran
Front Cover Art: Melissa Uran
Front & Back Cover Design: Brian Glass

AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my lover's cub. May he be as strong as the sun, as clever as the moon, and brave enough to laugh at thunder.

**LIVE-ACTION ADAPTATIONS
 FOR LAWS OF THE EAST**

Like previous Dharma Books, this book contains material to let you integrate the systems 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 Dance of the Thrashing Dragon in these pages.

Look for the live action sidebar at the end of the "Tiger's Claws, Dragon's Teeth" chapter. Remember that the Storyteller has the final say as to which systems are available in her game.



**735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
 SUITE 128
 CLARKSTON, GA 30021
 USA**

© 2001 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages, Hunter the Reckoning, Mage the Ascension, World of Darkness and Aberrant are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Werewolf the Wild West, Mage the Sorcerers Crusade, Wraith the Great War, Trinity, Dharma Book Thrashing Dragons, Dharma Book Thousand Whispers, Dharma Book Bone Flowers, Dharma Book Devil-Tigers, Kindred of the East, Kindred of the East Companion, Laws of the East, Nights of Prophecy, Shadow War and The Thousand Hells are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

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

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

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

Check out White Wolf online at

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

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES.

DHARMA BOOK

TATRASAJING DRAGONS™

CONTENTS

MANGA: DREAMS OF THE DRAGON	
PULLING OUT THE PIN (INTRODUCTION)	4
REFLECTIONS ON OUR STATE (PHILOSOPHY AND OUTLOOK)	8
THE HOLY RHYTHM (PRACTICES AND SECTS)	30
TIGER'S CLAWS, DRAGON'S TEETH (RULES & ADVICE)	46
YOUNG LIONS (TEMPLATES)	68
APPENDIX: FACES OF THE DANCE	80



PULLING OUT THE PIN

All we desire is to get as much happiness as a single existence can give, to extract from each year as it passes the utmost pleasure it can afford. Our only trouble is that the belly can hold no more while the mouth is still greedy, and the powers of the body give out while the lust is still strong.

—The Chuang Tzu, trans. Arthur Whaley

Most Kuei-jin go to any length to portray themselves as something other than blood-drinking undead monsters. They see themselves as Confucian scholars, as devils, as agents of the ancestors, as anything but what they truly are — monsters surviving from night to night on the life of others. But one Dharma embraces this alienation. One Dharma accepts the Cathayan's undead state, and holds it central to its beliefs.

This Dharma is the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon. Each vampire on this twisting path believes the natural way to enlightenment is observation of and union with nature. This is known as the maya, the illusion of creation, and each follower accepts wholeheartedly that their

unliving state makes it very difficult to truly understand this teaching tool.

And yet, Thrashing Dragons still strive to reach spiritual perfection through the study of life. They seek to penetrate its illusions, to understand its wisdom and to learn its lessons in the instinctive fashion of a beast. Their road is a hard one; their bodies are numb, their appetites unnatural and they lack the basic union with all things that breath imparts.

These Kuei-jin are dangerous creatures. Their attempts to reach the Hundred Clouds are as merciless as an enraged tiger or the winds of a typhoon. Many Chinese courts treat them badly, for the Quincunx's Confucian

underpinnings make Dragons seem repugnant and undisciplined. The Thrashing Dragons are hungry and passionate creatures, given to battle, scandal and bearing children. This approach to existence sits poorly with many Resplendent Cranes and Devil-Tigers. Though it is not a persecuted cult, the Dharma's members are often at a disadvantage in political matters and subject to the suspicion of the court.

Balance is the way of all this, however, and in the Golden Courts, the situation is reversed. There, the powerful *penangallan* of the Malay peninsula rule the South Asian night. All those who travel in that region must do honor to their bloody code of morality, and many traveling Chinese vampires have met their ends at the hands of a offended blood-queen or at those of one of her many lovers.

Regardless of their location, all Thrashing Dragons share a dynamic approach to enlightenment. As the Dharmic personifications of the Yang principle and the eastern way, they are like green growing vines, reaching for sustenance. Where they can find enlightenment, they take it, and they are forever trying to spread

in new directions and enter new spiritual environments. Be it a contemplative jina of the Ten Seasons

Sect or a savage *penangallan*, every Thrashing Dragon shares the same goal — to understand life's true and brutal lessons, and thus attain enlightenment.

How To Use This Book

The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon is a very easy Dharma to play as a caricature. But, like the other Kuei-jin faiths, it has a great deal of depth for serious players to explore. For all that it focuses on sex, drugs and violence, the Thrashing Dragon faith is a real religion that strives to better its members spiritually. The dance provides

those who follow it with access to true wisdom and a road back to the graces of Heaven. This book is your guide to this dangerous and exotic sect of killers.

Reflections on Our State discusses the Dharma through the narrative of an educated and moderate Quincunx mandarin. It portrays the Dharma and its relations with the outside world and itself, as the "average" Thrashing Dragon sees them.

The Holy Rhythm discusses the tenets and sects of the Dharma abstractly, as well as how the members of this Dharma view the P'o.

Tiger's Claws, Dragon's Teeth features the many specialized rituals, alternate Disciplines and artifacts that members of this Dharma have devised over the years to follow their dangerous and challenging faith. It also provides advice for playing Thrashing Dragon characters without indulging in gross caricature.

Young Lions showcases five starting-level characters for use as Storyteller or player characters.

Faces of the Dance profiles a number of influential or important Thrashing Dragons active in the Middle Kingdom today.

Lexicon

The Thrashing Dragons are a diverse faith, and have many specialized words to describe their various beliefs. Below is a glossary of the technical terms used in this book, with a brief definition following.

bajang: A disciple in the Golden Courts, who can be of either the Brilliant Coals Devil-Tiger sect or the Passion Bloodflower Thrashing Dragon sect. *Bajang* must assume male personas when interacting with their Dharmic betters.

Bone-Eating Dragon: A term for Thrashing Dragons of the western direction.

Black Earth Boy: A bodhisattva of the Laughing Rainbow sect. He died in the Infinite Thunders Courts in the summer of 1999, fighting the prince of the *rakshasa*.



J. Quick 5/01

corpse-kissing fever: Permanent Yin imbalance and the (to Thrashing Dragons) distasteful attraction to the dying it can engender.

gardens of the second sort: A term vampires of the Ten Seasons Sect use for the mortal groups and families they infiltrate and manipulate in search of wisdom.

Hungry Red Dragons: A term for Thrashing Dragons of the southern direction.

langsuir: A jina in the Passion Bloodflower sect. *Langsuir* have female identities, and support themselves by predatory marriage. These vampires marry a man, often an older, successful one, and work him to death. They greedily consume his wealth as well as his blood. Each *langsuir* serves a *penangallan*, whom she supports by gifting her a portion of her income. There are also *langsuir* of the Brilliant Coals Devil-Tiger sect, and it is not unknown for *langsuir* of one Dharma to serve *penangallan* of the other.

Laughing Rainbows: The Thrashing Dragon sect founded by Thousand Crane Mother after she entered the Hundred Clouds. This sect takes a moderate approach to the Dharma, preaching moderate action and contemplation of nature as well as sensation and bravado as legitimate avenues to Enlightenment.

Laughing Falcon: A bodhisattva of the Ten Seasons Sect. He still walks the Middle Kingdom, dwelling among the Uigur people of Mongolia.

Magistrate-Subverting Dragons: A term for a Thrashing Dragons of the eastern direction.

maya, the: The illusion of creation, made as a teaching tool by the August Personage of Jade. Kuei-jin have no natural connection to the maya, but Thrashing Dragons seek an intellectual and spiritual union with its wisdom. Roughly equivalent to what other Kuei-jin call the Tapestry, although it encompasses the Middle Kingdom and Mirror Lands as well.

Moon-Eyed Tiger: Founding bodhisattva of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect. Moon-Eyed Tiger left the Middle Kingdom at the end of the Fifth Age, and it is scandalously rumored among detractors of his sect that he left after his sect ceased to be viable.

Passion Bloodflowers: A Yang-oriented extremist sect of the Dharma most common in the Malay Peninsula. This sect was founded by the bodhisattva Piyau Payung, and operates very much in her somewhat eccentric image. Its members venerate the female sex and reproduction, and lead a predatory lifestyle that involves murdering husbands for their wealth. These vampires are greatly feared and are the prime cause of the Dharma's poor reputation.

penangallan: A mandarin or ancestor of the Passion Bloodflower sect. *Penangallan* are spiritually advanced creatures who have proven their valor, mastered the ability to detach their gut mass, and have passed a grueling test of their capabilities. There are also *penangallan* of the Brilliant Coals sect, and it is not unknown for a *penangallan* to have *langsuir* of both sects. *Penangallan* is also used as a generic term for any member of the Passion Bloodflower sect, or even for any vampire from the Golden Courts.

Peony-Blossom Princess: A bodhisattva of the Ten Seasons Sect. Like Moon-eyed Tiger, Peony-Blossom Princess left the Middle Kingdom shortly after the Turning of the Age.

Piyau Payung: A Malaysian Thrashing Dragon who achieved the Hundred Clouds after a distinguished career as a Devil-Tiger mandarin. She founded the Passion Bloodflower sect, and her thinking and way of life profoundly influenced the similar Brilliant Coals sect of the Devil-Tiger Dharma.

polong: A powerful form of pelesit often created by masters of the Flesh Shintai.

pontanac: A Malaysian term for a one of the half-damned, used in much the same fashion as dhampyr or Shade Walker.

Road Forward: Bestial existence, most specifically the *chih-mei* state. So-named because it implies an animal focus on the immediate future, without regards for enlightenment or consequences. Kuei-jin who deliberately or inadvertently revert to the *chih-mei* state are said to follow the Road Forward.

Scaled Magistrates: A term for Thrashing Dragons of the northern direction.

Scattering of the Seeds, The: A name for the ritual or recitation in which the Thousand Crane Mother distilled and revealed the true underpinnings of the Dharma, so that the Road Back of each vampire on the Dharma could be as broad as possible.

sect: Religious group within the Dharma based on the teachings of one of the various bodhisattvas who have reached the Hundred Clouds. Thrashing Dragons can normally only join a sect after they have achieved *ling*, and not all do. The Thrashing Dragon Dharma has four major sects: the Thousand-Faced Thunders, the Ten Season Sect, the Laughing Rainbows and the Passion Bloodflowers.

Teachers of Dancing: A term for Thrashing Dragons of the central direction.

Ten Seasons Sect: A Yin-touched sect founded by the bodhisattva Old Man Spider. Thrashing Dragons of this sect study what they call "gardens of the second sort," meaning families and communities of organisms. Members of this sect are very subtle, and pride themselves on their undetectable manipulations.

Thousand Crane Mother: The first Thrashing Dragon, and the first bodhisattva of the sect. She walks the Middle Kingdom even to this day. Thousand Crane Mother performed an act known as the Scattering of the Seeds early in the Dharma's history, and opened the Dharma to many competing schools of belief.

Thousand-Faced Thunder: A Thrashing Dragon sect based on the teachings of the bodhisattva Moon-Eyed Tiger. The Thousand-Faced Thunder sect studies the doings and habits of spirits, believing them to be the distilled essence of the maya, and thus a concentrated source of wisdom.



REFLECTIONS ON OUR STATE

The prince keeps [a] tortoise carefully enclosed in a chest in his ancestral temple. Now would this tortoise rather be dead and have its remains venerated, or would it rather be alive and wagging its tail in the mud?

—Zhuangzi, Autumn Floods

The teachings of the mandarin Hungry Badger, of the temple of the Golden Maple, to the disciple Xia Mao Li.

YOUR CONDITION

Welcome to your Second Breath. Make no mistake; you are quite dead. You had a life, but it is gone. You wasted it. Perhaps you indulged in wicked and unrighteous behavior, or perhaps you committed the most unforgivable sin of all — turning your back on the life you had. For these crimes, you were sentenced to an eternity of torment in the Yomi realms. Doubtless, even having suppressed most of these memories, you remember your stay all too well.

Yet, through determination, the good humor of your jailers or the benevolence of the August Personage, you have returned. You have escaped an eternity of broken glass and chains and come screaming back to the Floating World, the Middle Kingdom in which you dwelt during your breathing days.

You are now faced with two roads. You may continue to indulge yourself in ignorant and blind

behavior. In this case, Heaven will shortly frown upon you, and you will lose the tenuous grasp on enlightenment you currently possess. You will be reduced to your naturally savage state, and either be slain by righteous men or used as a hunting hound by your wicked brothers and sisters. Overall, I do not recommend this course of behavior, but it is not my place to make these choices for you.

Alternately, you may attempt to improve yourself, and pursue enlightenment. Even when you were alive, this was much more difficult than self-indulgence, as you well know. Now that you are no longer alive, the task is a hundred times more difficult. The world and the natural process of living are means provided by the August Personage for individuals to attain enlightenment. Every enlightened individual, from the Buddha to Chih the Brigand, has attained this state through observation of events and meditation on the natural order.

Alas, as a dead thing, you are now at a disadvantage. You lack the inherent connection of all living beings to the natural order. You no longer eat, shit or

breathe, and should your heart beat, it is nothing more than a useless spasm. You could cut it from your chest and continue on just as easily — in fact, I often recommend this experiment to younger Kuei-jin, to impress upon them just how distant they are from creatures which are truly alive. No, no, you need not look so concerned. I will not be performing it on you — that sort of exercise is for those who follow a path different than our own.

The effects of your condition are far more dramatic than a few unholy appetites. Lacking this connection to the celestial order, you are forever an outsider to the maya, the illusory tapestry of creation. You may watch the play, but you can never truly participate. You may go through the motions, but you may never truly perform the acts. You are truly a hungry ghost, forever ravenous for the taste of life, yet never able to sate that hunger. A moment of profound regret for your misdeeds and wasted life might be appropriate at this point.

Yet, your situation is not hopeless. Although you proved unable to achieve enlightenment during your mortal existences, and although it is a hundred times harder now, it is still possible to gain a true understanding of the nature of creation, and to transcend your damned state. Perhaps if the prospect of true wisdom and spiritual harmony is not itself sufficient to lure you, you might wish to reflect on the fact that if you fail, your soul will fall into the Mouth of Yomi, and there be consumed by the ultimate darkness. There, the agonies you would suffer are a thousand times greater than those of the Yama Hells.

Though you may not participate in life, you may still observe. Though you can no longer act in the play of creation, you may go through the motions and savor the faint memories of life's sensations. From these, you may learn lessons, and slowly gain insight into creation, even though you now exist outside of it. Your lessons must be learned from afar, for you are no longer sitting in the classroom. You have proven yourself unable to sit still at your desk and take lessons. Now, if you wish to learn, you must do it by peeping in on the other students through a crack in the wall. Luckily for you, you are not alone in this inability to heed life's most basic lessons. Your fellow Kuei-jin have proved themselves to be likewise thickheaded. Working together over the millennia, we have compiled some notes on what goes on in the classroom and which cracks are best to peer through for which lessons. They do not amount to much, but they are something.



So, your road is long, for you must first learn to put aside a vast block of mortal trappings: vanity, pride and fear, along with the ten thousand things mortals surround themselves with to ease those anxieties. After you have laid down several lifetimes of blindness and opened your eyes, perhaps then wisdom can find you. These are your choices — a brief and savage life of dissolution, or a thousand years of remedial studies.

I will teach you what I can while you are here, and then I will send you out into the world, as the tiger sends her cubs. Perhaps you will return in time to learn more, or perhaps not. The world is a hard place for young vampires, and you are not guaranteed a moment's life.

THE NATURE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

You are probably asking, "what is enlightenment like, and why must I have so much of it? A mortal may become a bodhisattva with but a fraction of the effort, and knowing far less of the true nature of creation."

To answer the first question is both difficult and easy. I cannot give you a complete explanation of enlightenment. If I could, I would. You would then be enlightened, and your Road Back would be complete. This tells you one important thing about enlightenment — it is not small. You may find a little enlightenment here, and a little bit there, but true wisdom is too big to swallow in one sitting. Even if someone was to show you true meaning all at once, you might only understand a little, or nothing at all. This tells you another important thing about enlightenment — it is in your heart and soul.

Enlightenment is not a secret you can write down on a scrap of paper and show to a friend. You will not stumble over it one night when you're walking around the house without any lights on. It is a state of the heart and the soul. The enlightenment which you can summarize and carry away is not true.

I can also tell you that enlightenment does not have a single shape or color. The Road Back that you are walking now is not the only such path. The Thousand Crane Mother, who founded our Dharma, still walks the Middle Kingdom. She is a bodhisattva of our faith, an unliving saint, who remains here in the mortal world to aid those who are less enlightened than she. Yet there abides in Canton another bodhisattva who disagrees with everything the Thousand Crane Mother believes. If you asked both for the time of day, one would tell you dawn while the other would answer dusk. But the other bodhisattva is also an unliving saint who abides in the Floating World only to aid others in their quest for enlightenment.

It is important for you to recognize that there are many roads to Heaven, for we Kuei-jin are all together in the same boat. The Arhat Xue said in the dawn of history that the Dharmas must never go to war amongst

themselves. Though individuals often put this tolerance aside, the Wan Kuei as a group are tolerant of all right-thinking faith.

Which brings me to another important trait of enlightenment — you cannot find it by looking just anywhere. Though the Dharmas are, to borrow a *gweilo* metaphor, all paths to the top of the same mountain, not every possible path leads to Heaven. Beliefs like the Face of the Gods heresy can sustain a Kuei-jin's soul for some time, and lend a certain degree of understanding, but their truth is not strong enough. Climbing that ladder of enlightenment, a Kuei-jin ascends as high as he can and finds the ladder is too short or the top rungs are broken.

In such matters, the proof is always provided by the presence of a bodhisattva in the faith. A faith which has never had a Kuei-jin reach true enlightenment is a faith without foundation. Kuei-jin who follow such paths can look forward, at best, to an eternity of unlife, as they are trapped on a path with no conclusion. For the less fortunate, there are the blandishments of the Yama Kings and the plunge to self-destruction or mindless rampage when they confront the inherent failure of their flawed Road Back. It is for this reason that the bodhisattvas of the Five Dharmas work together to suppress heretical faiths — a Kuei-jin who follows such a path has nothing to look forward to but stasis or destruction.

THE CONDEMNATIONS OF OUR BROTHERS

Though our faith is a valid one, that does not mean that we have not faced persecution. To explain why others often hate us, I must teach you a bit of history. Once, the Wan Kuei were the Wan Xian, divine protectors of the world against demons, black gods, wicked sorcerers and other such anathema. But the Wan Xian bargained with the Yama Kings. They learned how to draw out the breath of the living and gain might by consuming the life-essence of mortals. This gave them great power, but only at the cost of great excess.

In return for their gift, the Wan Xian agreed not to make war on the Yama Kings, and quickly turned to fighting one another instead. Year by year, their decadence and pointless bickering grew, and their depredations increased, as they drew more and more on the life essences of their mortal subjects. Finally, Heaven could stand no more and the age of the Wan Xian came to a close. The August Personage of Jade, terrible in his final displeasure, laid waste to their ancient capital of Meru and cast them forth into the world like chaff. Yet Diaspora was not the full extent of Heaven's anger. Because the Wan Xian had stolen life from the living, their own breath was stolen as well. Because they had come to be nothing more than

thieves and murderers, it was decreed that only the souls of the unrighteous would join their ranks. They would be known thenceforth as the Wan Kuei, the Ten Thousand Demons, and never again would they as a people know Heaven's favor. Stripped of their power and their lives, the fallen Wan Xian were at loose ends, and wandered the world like ghosts.

But Heaven's displeasure had not been total. Some among the Wan Xian — those who had been least corrupted — retained much of their former power. They protected the newborn Wan Kuei, and sheltered them against the dangers of their new existence. Behind the shield of their half-fallen brethren, the accursed creatures who came before us struggled to find the roads to Heaven, by which individual Wan Kuei could achieve enlightenment and escape their accursed state.

The first real philosophical reaction to this new state was acceptance. Many among the Wan Kuei joined the so-called Demon Warrior Empire, a secret society of former immortals who accepted their new, demonic state and sought to embrace it. Many of the Wan Xian in this movement were bullies and evil men, who reveled in corruption, while others accepted their condition as an unfortunate and unavoidable reality. Many within this Demon Warrior cult were ambitious. Some sought to spread their faith, while others simply sought to use it to dominate other Kuei-jin. The empire attempted to set itself up as the sole faith of the Wan Kuei.

Such temerity could not go unchecked, and the half-fallen Wan Xian persecuted the cult for its ambition. Their allies in this were Wan Kuei who believed that their condition did not change their mission in existence, merely made it more difficult — the same souls who would one day form the Way of the Resplendent Crane. The Demon Warrior Empire was suppressed, but the beliefs and feelings that had given rise to it were still a very real part of the opinion of these young Wan Kuei. To accommodate the many different views of enlightenment among their followers, the Yellow Emperor and his peers codified and promulgated the Great Principle. The Fivefold Way begins with the Way of Origin: that all Wan Kuei were brothers in their curse. It was taught that so long as an approach to enlightenment was valid, there was to be no persecution of its followers.

Xue was enlightened at that time, and began to teach the lessons and have the arguments of rhetoric that are collected in the *Ki Chuan*. He taught of the fivefold nature of enlightenment and of the connections between the elements and the directions. Many Wan Kuei applied themselves to his teachings, and the Dharmas as we know them were formed. Those former immortals who had once been a part of the Demon Warrior Empire were as touched by Xue's teachings as the rest of the Wan Xian.

Among these flesh-eating devils, a rift soon appeared. While all of them based their faith on acceptance, the question of what was acceptable became a pressing one. Many of these former immortals accepted their degradation as a mandate from Heaven. They were creatures of fire and conquest now — children of strife eager to give rein to the darkness in their hearts. Others viewed their condition as rooted in a different sort of metaphysical fall. Rather than heroes who had been made into bandits, they were living things that had been stripped of life. The favor that Heaven withheld was not heroic station, but connection to the tapestry of creation.

Fighting broke out within their ranks, and the faith soon split. The proponents of an ethical fall were associated with the southern direction, and the elements of fire and thunder. Those who maintained the fall was a spiritual one became associated with wood and the eastern direction, because of the life they venerated. Those of the south became the Devil-Tigers, and it is said that from their hands shall spring the fires of Heaven at the turning of the Age. Those of the east became known as the Thrashing Dragons, for we whirl to and fro through life like a tree pitching in an earthquake.

Thus did our faith gain two great rivals — those least like us, and those most like us. The Resplendent Cranes hate us, for they see our immersion in the world and mistake it for decadence. The Devil-Tigers hate us, for they see our love for the world, and they cannot reconcile it with their own hatred. Because we refuse to be alienated from the world in which we exist, two great rivals for the fate of history will pause to condemn us for our lack of rectitude.

Learn this lesson well — few individuals are comfortable with the idea of truly experiencing the world around them, and among the Gui Ren, those individuals are especially rare. As you make your way in the world, tread lightly, and be ready to fight or flee. There are many who will see you as a reminder of everything that they fear or can no longer have. The Fivefold Way will protect you from open persecution in some places, but you will face prejudice and discrimination everywhere except the strongholds of our faith.

ON THE TRUTH OF OUR FAITH

As a faith, we venerate life and the process of living. The natural cycle is our guide, and we participate in creation to the greatest degree that we are able. The push and the pull of existence, the riot of life; to truly understand these things, to take part in them and know your place in the thoughtless way that a beast knows its place in the world. To exist entirely in the now, and be a creature without memories or expectations of the future. This is the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon.

Many see our faith as brutal, aggressive and decadent — and in some senses it is. We admire and emulate the natural cycle as it is, not as we think it had ought to be. Life in the wild is brutal. There is no complacency in the jungle: tigers do not die of old age. Mate when you can; eat when you're able; fight when you must. This is the wisdom of the living world. But we are cut off from that world. We kill, and it is as if another man's hands strike clay. We mate, and it is a faint memory of rutting. To immerse ourselves in life to the degree that we can appreciate it and awaken our souls to the glory of life's bloody struggle — it is a great deal of living we must do to reach epiphany.

Hearing this, you may ask yourself what the purpose of our search for enlightenment is, if our goal is only mindless hunger and carnal satisfaction. Indeed, if those were our only goals, we would not reach enlightenment, but become flesh-eaters instead. Our indulgence in life sensation and experience is done not for its own sake, but for the insight it brings. There is a time, when thought fades to instinct, when the body is ruled by the forces of life, that we can glimpse the true significance and magnificence of the maya. From such glimpses do we assemble our enlightenment.

But such glimpses do not come only from the act of killing thirty-seven people bare-handedly or taking more drugs than any mortal could hope to survive. There is more to the pattern of life than fight-or-flight reactions and raw sensory overload. Life is also about raising the young and caring for the sick, about protecting one's mate and sighing with pleasure in a time of plenty. I know of one of our brothers who gained enlightenment when he knew he had been a good father to his child. I know of a mandarin who works as a janitor at a hospice for those dying of terrible illnesses — she seeks to experience life by spying on the last hours of the dying, and hopes one day it will contribute to her wisdom. Enlightenment is there for us whenever there is life without filters — the Thrashing Dragon seeks not just intensity, but also purity of experience.

OUR UNLIVING FORM

You must keep it foremost in your mind that this immersion in sensation is not simple physical indulgence. It is not done to experience the sensation, but to experience the dance. To take part in the dance of the world in a real and visceral way so intense that it confers an understanding of the divine meaning of creation. It is not a form of self-gratification, but a meditative state. While our unliving state is often a hindrance to our endeavors, it need not always be so. In many cases, it is a tool to be used to experience the impossible.

Death and serious illness are, of course, the most obvious examples. Without danger, we can survive

the ravages of a severe cancer and learn from the experiences. Indeed, not only can we survive such illnesses, *we can perish from them and learn from that as well*. Properly suffered, the Little Death can be the source, not just of insight, but of true enlightenment as well. It is a risky gambit, because last-minute hesitation or trepidation ruins the experience, but the act of dying can be profoundly educational.

Even in its lesser form, deliberately courting terrible illness, there is much living to be done. The physical symptoms of various diseases are themselves educational. Various jaundices, dysenteries, fevers and other sicknesses teach one a great deal about the process of living and dying. And if you become overbalanced with Yang, then know that Heaven will favor your search, for diseases will seek you out as unerringly as a cur finds a scrap of dropped bread.

If you choose this route, remember that your court will be watching your behavior, and may well be full of vampires who dislike you for your faith. Becoming a menace to the public health does not typically endear you to your fellow Wan Kuei. If you come to contemplate a career as a bearer of plagues, know that you are not the first, and that the ancestors will support your punishment.

I must also warn you of a danger of your form, which it is very difficult to clearly understand at the beginning of the Road Back, but which is of crucial importance to you. That danger is the immense span of your years. As a Wan Kuei, you run a very real risk of having quite literally done it all — having tasted all the tastes, danced all the dances and fought all the fights that will ever matter to you. Too much indulgence in physical pleasures early in your existence can leave you laboring for centuries later on the Road Back to achieve enlightenment of the most abstract sort.

As in the wild, exploration is the province of the young and daring. Do not walk the obvious path in your youth. When you are young and auspicious occasions are more frequent, try all sorts of audacious experiments. Even if you learn little, you may find a bit of enlightenment, while if you were to do the same later in your life, you would have to take away far more from it to progress. Certain events will always carry impact — your first ritual suicide, your first death from a terrible disease, your first child. Try to save them for your years as an elder, when auspicious occasions are the rarest of moments. I can tell you this now, and you will not understand, and when you are my age you will know how many events you have burnt up that you will never be able to have for the first time again. You have a very long life ahead of you. Don't live all of its significant moments in your youth, or you will be left with a long and meaningless twilight ahead of you as you for the completion of the Road Back.

This is what causes Wan Kuei to leave our Dharma as mandarins and accept disgrace and follow another path. Having done all the easy and important things in life, these unfortunates face centuries of searching for a meaningful lesson. Many such failures embrace the enigmas of the Song of Shadows, or the regimented existence of the Resplendent Cranes. The sad husks who survive often rise to become some of our fiercest persecutors. Because they could not walk the path, they have decided it must be flawed. There is no answer to these beings, save to discreetly point out their origins. Your fellow Wan Kuei are familiar with those who cannot bear their former faith, and give them less voice in religious matters.

THOUSAND CRANE MOTHER SPEAKS

All Kuei-jin know of the instructive value of taking. That life is a process by which the strong take from the weak is self-evident. The tiger takes life from the ox. The bird that cracks the seed for its meat steals the life of the tree that might have been. Though there is only a limited amount of food in any area, animals reproduce based on how much food they have eaten, and not on how much sustenance will be available for their children. Animals do not cease breeding when they have filled up a region — the starvation those who fail in their contention for fodder is assured by the natural order.

This is the most basic of wisdom, and no hungry ghost can be ignorant of such things. We tear our sustenance from the breath and blood and meat of the mortals who surround us. The joy and the wisdom and the naturally ordained character of taking what one needs or desires — be it sustenance, pleasure or some more abstract desire — hangs before us during every conscious moment of our existences.

What we must remember in our search for enlightenment is that there is wisdom also in being taken from. We are not seeking to become the ultimate predator, but to gain an ultimate understanding of the true character of the maya. Learning in this way is a difficult indeed. Most times something is taken from us, it is either so insignificant as to be amusing — what do we care if we are torn apart by tigers, or if some mortal thrusts himself on us? — or so threatening as to be blinding. Seeing past these distractions is the key to enlightenment.

There is much enlightenment in privation, failure and fear. Contrive manners in which you can truly learn these lessons and survive, and you will advance your understanding of the natural order.



OUR FELLOW EXILES

Members of our faith are not the only travelers on the Road Back. Indeed, at least here in China, we are in the minority compared to the Resplendent Cranes and Devil-Tigers. There may be only a few of us in a given court, and perhaps only a single mandarin. Learning the tempers and belief structures of our fellow Wan Kuei is not merely advisable, it is essential to our survival. They are as intensely committed to their own Roads Back as you are to yours, and all must work together to minimize friction. Because we are outnumbered and disliked, your share of working together will probably be considerably larger than the local Resplendent Crane magistrate's.

THE HOWL OF THE DEVIL-TIGER

The Devils of Heaven are our fellow-travelers on the path of acceptance, but the monstrous nature we accept is fundamentally different. We believe ourselves to be spiritual monsters, beings forever cut off from the central lesson of existence. The Devil-Tigers believe themselves to be ethical monsters, demonic creatures whose place in the universe is to punish wickedness and mete out justice to the unrighteous. They believe that the end of the world is near, and are by all accounts ready to challenge the Demon Emperor himself. There is some good to be said about them — they are fierce enemies of the princes of Yomi Wan, who they see themselves as supplanting. They are also forward-thinking beings who consider themselves masters of the garden of evil, and who carefully cultivate the wickedness around them. When you need to purchase favors from them, they will accomplish precisely the blackmail or murder you desire. Those are their good traits.

Their bad traits are that they are arrogant and single-minded creatures, forever scrabbling for scraps of dark power. They peer desperately into the future and maneuver in an attempt to line themselves up with the ultimate payoff, while trampling the world around them like a careless horseman. Having decided among themselves what is wrong through a calculus of evil that forms the center of their jurisprudence, they go out into the world with guns and hooks to enforce that rule. To appeal their judgements, one must argue with the devils in their own court — courts set up primarily to resolve disputes over which Devil-Tiger is entitled to torment a particular mortal.

Devil-Tigers will attempt to torment you, because they believe you to be self-indulgent and without ethical principles. If they can be educated, that is good — you may even be able to convert them. But there is no reasoning with many of them. In such cases, violence is the answer. Devil-Tigers respect strength, and inflicting the Little Death on a few of them will discourage further hooliganism.

THE WAY OF THE RESPLENDENT CRANE

Like the Devil-Tigers, the Resplendent Cranes have worked out an ethical system, and punish those who transgress against it. Though both pre-date Confucius, they are similar in their beliefs to that mortal's teachings. To someone who is not a member of the faiths, the difference between the Cranes and the Devil-Tigers is that the Devil-Tigers throw better parties, and the Resplendent Cranes make better bureaucrats. Cranes will also persecute you, and are harder to placate than the Devil-Tigers. The Devil-Tigers simply want you to be evil — the Resplendent Cranes want you to reform your morality and compel you to honor their Eight Lotus Path. Luckily, they want to reform everyone's morality, so their persecution of you is not likely to be too aggressive — such an action would be seen as the first stage of a general attack on all the other Dharmas.

Resplendent Cranes follow their bodhisattvas as we do, but in a much more regimented fashion. Resplendent Cranes rely for their strength on rural temples, each with a number of elder mandarins and occasionally a bodhisattva in residence. A Crane can grow in status either by working his way up through a temple hierarchy, or by founding his own temple and attracting followers. At any time, many young Cranes walk the earth having left their temple but not yet having the strength to build one of their own. These individuals are the pool from which the Resplendent Crane functionaries of the urban ancestors are drawn. Many never found a temple, or found a token temple, with human acolytes and no other Kuei-jin involved. A few return to their home temple and use their political skills to climb the temple ladder, or even found their own sect and attempt to take over a temple by force of righteous arms.

THE TEACHINGS OF MOON-EYED TIGER

When walking among Kuei-jin, do not forget to learn from them. Each is a beast with its leg in a trap. Each seeks escape in its own way.

While we attempt to tear the trap free and flee to freedom, our method is not the only one. A Devil-Tiger gnaws its leg and rejoices in the agony. A Resplendent Crane gnaws its leg and extols the merits of a three-legged existence. The Song of the Shadows stands patiently until the trap has withered to rust. The Thousand Whispers swim like the moon on a lake, seeking to find a shape the trap cannot hold.

Hold our own path to your heart, but learn from the example of your brother vampires. As there is no habitable place which does not contain life, so then there should be no form of wisdom which you do not accept.

These wandering Cranes are interesting people. You can learn much from watching them as they attempt to apply their textbook morality to the problems of the real world. Watching how they struggle, and why some fail while others succeed is quite educational. If you can convince them that your ethical system is worthy of respect, they even make good allies. Just remember that they are dangerous young idealists, and they may lash out at you if they lose face.

THE PATH OF A THOUSAND WHISPERS

Vampire of this Dharma follow a novel faith, and one not unlike our own. However, where we look at the world as events and patterns, they see the world as made up of lives and points of view. They undergo symbolic deaths and rebirths, putting on new identities and throwing away old ones. It is a great honor to guard the body of one of these vampires while they are "dead" and a terrible insult to refuse.

This way of these vampires is easier than ours in all ways, save that it is incredibly difficult. Heh — Zen master wisdom for you, yes? The Hollow Reeds meet every experience with a new face, and learn from every experience as if they were children. If only this trick of living with a new heart was not so difficult, this faith would hold great appeal. As it is, its practitioners bring to mind a goldbrick, who spends twice as much effort dodging work as he would if he did it. They practice for years to master a mind-trick that, when it occasionally works, grants them great insight. Better to face life head-on, I think; but then, that is the way of the Thrashing Dragon.

THE SONG OF THE SHADOW

The Song of the Shadow is our Dharmic antithesis — it is difficult for one such as I to speak adequately about these strange creatures. Guardians of the family and emissaries to the Yellow Springs, these Kuei-jin are a subtle and dangerous people. The Shadow Songs practice a discipline of cold detachment from existence called the Black Metal Egg. They often avoid our influence, because they see us as embodiments of the so-called Sweaty Excited Man, a principle antithetical to their Black Metal Egg. I can say nothing of this terminology, save that they take criticism of it very poorly. Because many of them are skilled killers attuned to the principles of Yin, bone and metal, it is best to avoid antagonizing them unduly. Simply smile and allow them to recoil from your presence. Content yourself with the thought that the reciprocal Yang spark within them burns so hot that the antithesis of their faith is not a cosmic principle, but the perspiration from a good bout of sex. Some of them are very nice creatures if you take into account the fact that their ethical system actively discourages them from liking anyone very much.

The Shadow Songs are incredibly delicate, in their own way. Your respect for the Way of Origin should restrain you in your dealings with them. Just as you are in possession of many secrets and revelations that could set the pillars of their faith rocking, they can also lash out at you with equal surety. Worse, as creatures of Yin, they are brooding, with long memories and hearts of ice and iron. Do not tempt their wrath, for they will not hesitate to even scores that you have long since forgotten. It is their way: offend them today and they smile, but 100 years later, when you cannot possibly defend yourself, they break you.

Learn from them, if you can, and allow them to learn from you if they are able. Like you, they are a minority among the Hungry Dead. Like you, they follow a narrow and often difficult road. Treat them with the respect they deserve, as masters of a discipline you cannot begin to understand, and perhaps one day, one will help you placate angry ancestors in return.

HERETICAL CULTS

Strange as it might seem to you, our faith is one of the most active in hunting out heretical faiths among the Kuei-jin. This is not out of a general dislike for heresy, but because so many heretical faiths directly oppose our own beliefs.

First among these is the Flame of the Rising Phoenix heresy. These beings practice what is in some ways a limited version of our own faith. Trying to live again, but "correctly," these beings focus with great intensity on "finishing" or "reliving" their mortal lives. This is a common belief among those who take the Second Breath but resist the call of the *chih-mei* state. Confused creatures, they struggle to make sense of their existence as best they are able. Others teach or follow the Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma in emulation of the ghosts of the Yellow Springs, seeking to find the same enlightenment as the restless ancestors. Both of these beliefs are founded on faulty thinking.

The first is simply incorrect. The enlightenment that can be gained from a mortal life is merely enough to make a Kuei-jin into a mandarin. Though it is important for many of us to settle unfinished worldly affairs, this alone will not open the gates of Heaven for one of the Ten Thousand Demons. However enjoyable it might be to wish it was not so, that is the truth and there is no escaping it.

Kuei-jin of this faith must be educated, not persecuted. You know the truth that they desperately do not want to hear — that this is not enough, that the Road Back is longer than simply bringing your mortal existence to a close. To do so is merely to become a jina, and that is not enlightenment. You must reach out to these unfortunates. If you do not, they shall surely succumb to the Yama Kings or the *chih-*

mei state. Do not mock them — rather, take them under your wing, and show them the true scope of nature's lesson.

The other heresy we often confront is the Face of the Gods. This heretical faith is mainly practiced in India. Its adherents believe that they are exalted to some sort of divinity by the Second Breath, and that they have become princes of creation. They demand the worship of mortals, and attempt to harness both their P'o and Hun souls together. These creatures are dangerous beings, for their teachings are pernicious — tempting to the goldbrick in every Kuei-jin's soul. They are also commonly in league with the Yama Kings in one way or another, for they believe themselves able to deal with these beings as one prince deals with another. In the Infinite Thunders Court at the edge of the Middle Kingdom, our members of our Dharma are constantly battling the Godlings and *rakhasa* of that area. Godlings are not tolerated in the more civilized courts. They are received with cold dignity in the Golden Courts, with stony silence in the Green Courts and with drawn blades and bared fang in the Five August Courts and the *uji* of Japan.

INTERNAL SCHISMS

Our faith is not founded on sects and temples like the Devil-Tigers or Resplendent Cranes, nor is it disorganized and chaotic like the Rootless Trees. Members of our Dharma do follow different sects, but these represent merely adherence to the teachings of a particular corpse-saint, who advocates a unique way of approaching the world. Each has found their own way to ultimate enlightenment, and many Kuei-jin seek enlightenment through emulation. There are also a number of Thrashing Dragons who choose to follow no single sect, but instead combine the teachings of all or several of them. This is a more uncertain existence, since the vampire has no idea if her personal Road Back will be a successful one, or if it will involve setbacks and long philosophical backtracking. Yet it is also a very noble effort, since each of the bodhisattvas was once just such a simple seeker after knowledge, finding her way in the dark.

There are proportionally fewer uncommitted Thrashing Dragons as one climbs the hierarchy. Many disciples start with the intention of finding a new path to Heaven on the road of the Dharma. As the years pass and the time between auspicious occasions grows, many of these young Kuei-jin falter, and are destroyed or leave the Dharma. Others, who are uncertain of their course, gravitate to the surety offered by the teachings of a bodhisattva. Only the truly determined press on to find an apotheosis of their own, and open a new gate into enlightenment for others to follow.

THE LAUGHING RAINBOWS

Our Dharma's first bodhisattva founded the Laughing Rainbow sect and it remains the most-practiced path of the faith, at least among civilized people. The founder, Thousand Crane Mother, still walks the Middle Kingdom this very night. The Rainbows take their name from one of her parables: She said that the properly behaved Wan Kuei is like the rainbow — it shows its face and all of nature laughs. Thousand Crane Mother's teaching emphasizes this exuberant quality, and Laughing Rainbows attempt to experience their existences to the fullest and without apology. It is a central tenet of their faith that one must learn to love what one truly is. Not to love yourself for your good points, or to love certain things about yourself, but to simply accept and take comfort from the fact that you exist at all.

Be like a dog, the Thousand Crane Mother teaches. Take a dog that has four legs, and maim it. Cut off one leg, and see how it adapts to its new life. It does not mourn the dog it could have been, nor does it pine for the days when it was more. Now, it is a three-legged dog, and it goes about its business as best it can. The goal of the Laughing Rainbow is to be like that dog — existing without justification or regrets. The rainbow is beauty without second thoughts, and nature laughs to see it. The Laughing Rainbow is likewise exuberant, and the world laughs with her as well. I am a student of this school, and I will make no pretense that I am unbiased in my portrayal.

The Laughing Rainbow faith is primarily practiced in the civilized lands of northern Asia — the Quincunx, the Japanese *uji* and in some parts of the Green Courts. There are individual Laughing Rainbows elsewhere, but those places are the strongholds of my path. I hope that after you finish your education here at the temple, you will choose to follow in the Thousand Crane Mother's footsteps as well, though I will not begrudge you your faith if you choose otherwise.

We Laughing Rainbows often indulge in sex, drugs and violence, but our path is not strictly one of physical sensation. It simply requires a very pure existence, free of guilt and inhibitions. For many, this does involve physical indulgence, but it is not a prerequisite to practice this faith. Laughing Rainbows combine pure living with reflection on the nature of existence. Holding the ice of death in one hand, the Rainbow reaches out and grasps the fire of life with the other. She learns not just from the sensation of fire and the sensation of ice, but from the differences between them, and the changes they cause within her.

The Laughing Rainbow sect is guided by Thousand Crane Mother herself, who has tutored and instructed members of the faith since the beginning of the sect. Until recently, there was another bodhisattva

in the Dharma. Black Earth Boy ascended to the Hundred Clouds at the turning of the Fourth Age, during the Mongol conquest of the Southern Sung dynasty. Tremendously powerful, and full of child-like joy, Black Earth Boy was a terrible foe of darkness. In the 1700s, he went to the Infinite Thunders Court to fight the *rakshasa* and Godlings of that district. Recently, when the prince of the *rakshasa* rose to walk the earth, Black Earth Boy and two other bodhisattvas traveled to fight him. All three bodhisattvas and the prince of the *rakshasa* were destroyed when the fires of Heaven were unleashed on the battlefield.

THE THOUSAND-FACED THUNDERS

The bodhisattva Moon-Eyed Tiger founded this sect early in the existence of the Dharma. It was not very long after Thousand Crane Mother gave the speech known as Scattering of the Seeds, and described the tenets of the Dharma in an abstract fashion that left more than one road open to apotheosis. Moon-Eyed Tiger taught that spirits were emblematic of creation, and that to exist near spirits was to exist in close proximity to the dance of life. The Thousand-Faced Thunders sect are thus sorcerers and spirit-walkers.

Originally, the Thousand-Faced Thunders roamed the natural world, but as the Xiong Ren beast-changers became increasingly intolerant, the Thunders were forced to retreat to urban areas. For the last 500 years or so, they have been largely city-dwelling and become closely allied with city spirits, particularly urban elementals. The modern age has been a great blessing

to the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect. They acted as the mentors and ambassadors to the young elementals of glass, silicon and information when those first came into existence. Now, these beings are powerful spirit lords, and the vampires of this sect are reaping the rewards of their early patronage.

The Thousand-Faced Thunder sect are sorcerers and practitioners of the Tapestry discipline. Just as they make pacts and alliances with greater spirits, they often bind lesser spirits to their service as well. In recent nights, Thousand-Faced Thunder sect members have even begun to bargain openly with urban elementals, taking them into service without the use of binding pacts.

The Thousand-Faced Thunders exploit their mastery over elementals of the modern world to work a magic of technology. They can subvert any security system, break into any computer, cause materials to function in impossible fashions and fail without reason or warning. They use their spirit servants to create scientific devices that have far more to do with magic than mortal physics and chemistry.

I feel that the Thousand-Faced Thunders are walking the fine edge of corruption. While their spirit commerce and binding are theoretically undertaken with a religious intent, the outcome rarely appears spiritual. This sect was once much more focused on observation of the spirits of the natural world, but now seems occupied solely with merchant relations in the Mirror Lands. Members of the sect once used their sorcery to binds spirits to act as servants, guards and



THOUSAND CRANE MOTHER SPEAKS

In finding ways to experience life, many disciples act with obvious desperation. They are like someone who has been commanded to quickly pull one hundred calligraphic characters from the air. Looking at the characters that resulted from such an attempt, you would see "man," "tall," "heaven" and so on. Quickly thinking, the writer's mind leaps from one character to another similar character.

It is the same with many young Thrashing Dragons. "I have learned something from crushing myself beneath a stone block," they think, "perhaps I will learn something from being torn apart and eaten by hungry dogs, or shall I now throw myself from a speeding airplane?"

In general, these disciples pursue one of two courses. They either strive to be shocking — first eating the organs of babies, then of the elderly, then of people who are born under certain astrological

signs — or else terribly mundane — I will be a school teacher, and then a traffic policeman, and then a trash collector.

The first sort of direction is very dangerous. It risks ennui, the attention of mortal demon hunters and the wrath of one's own court. The dangers of the latter are more subtle but no less real — it is a gateway to denial, and it attempts to emulate the Thousand Whispers Dharma without the specialized training of the Broken Mask technique.

Both are symptomatic of hurry. They are the product of an attempt to travel the Road Back as quickly as possible. Desperately, the disciple asks herself "Will this work? What about this?" Anything will work, if one has the proper attitude. Nothing will if you do not. The year does not hurry through its seasons, and the beasts do not hurry through their lives. Thus you must walk the Road Back with a relaxed attitude. Desperate circumstances only rarely lead to *dên*.

majordomos — not as tools to gain power in the world around them.

Moon-Eyed Tiger ascended into the Hundred Clouds just before the turning of the Fourth Age. Harsher critics than I have speculated privately that his ascent into the Hundred Clouds marked the end of his sect's viability. Although the Thousand-Faced Thunders remain officially respected by other Dragons, the sect has not had a bodhisattva since Moon-Eyed Tiger, and it is governed by a loosely allied group of mandarins.

THE PASSION BLOODFLOWERS

The warrior-saint Piyau Payung founded the Passion Bloodflower sect a little over 1,000 years ago. The Thrashing Dragons of the area had always tended toward excess and self-indulgence, and Piyau Payung came among them, a newly made bodhisattva, rooting out the *akuma* that plagued the southern courts and bringing their chaotic society together behind her charismatic rule. She was certainly enlightened, of that there is no doubt. But her enlightenment was eccentric, and it could be that not all of her ideas are necessary to achieve enlightenment as she did. Nevertheless, her followers pattern their existences after hers, and seek to emulate her in all ways.

First among her beliefs was that the female form is the repository of natural beauty and a mystical quality she called "Woman's Essence," which relates to reproduction. The superiority of the feminine form stemmed from its fertility. Likewise, Piyau Payung's followers share in her celebration of the feminine, and change their shapes to match their faith. Piyau Payung spent most of her existence pregnant with one form of offspring or another, and her followers

emulate her in this as well. Most wear exaggerated female forms, and have imbalanced themselves toward Yang so that they can reproduce.

Where the Laughing Rainbows take a measured approach to existence, the Passion Bloodflowers take a far more immediate one. Rather than carefully arranged brushes with enlightenment, their life is a helter-skelter of excess, sexuality and combat training. They are violent and combative enough that the very Yama Kings are said to fear them. In the model of the bodhisattva they venerate, they throw themselves into conflict and keep harems of younger Kuei-jin held in thrall to them through *guanxi* rites.

Passion Bloodflowers practice a form of frenzied ecstatic involvement, for which they ingest rare and maddening hallucinogens and work themselves up into a Yang-crazed frenzy. The *penangallan* enter this insane and bestial state to hurl themselves at their enemies, or to dance in mad packs over the grounds of their properties, tearing to rags of flesh all whom they come upon. Most terrifying of all, this ecstasy amplifies and enhances the effects of the Dragon Dance.

Predators among predators, these are dangerous beings. Their violence rivals that of their neighbors, the Brilliant Coals Devil-Tigers, whom some say also trace their faith to Piyau Payung. Passion Bloodflowers are religious fanatics whose fervent belief is not a menace to the world around them only because it professes the beauty of the jungles in which it thrives and from which it rarely expands. Walk among them with care, and do not subscribe to their crimson faith unless you truly understand what faith it is that you avow.

The Crimson Queens of the Golden Courts do not have a leader. Since the departure of Piyau Payung,

there have been no bodhisattvas among them. One of the *penangallan* is said to be on the verge of attaining that hallowed state, however, and acts as the de facto voice of the faith during times of crisis when the Golden Courts must make their opinion known. This vampire is called Shout of Anger and dwells in a temple in the Malay interior. She is served by her dhampyr acolytes, and also by her harem of lesser *penangallan*. Her followers train with her in combat, and she frequently entertains visitors from around the Golden Courts to debate theology or spar in ritual combat.

WHAT IS A PENANGALLAN?

The word *penangallan* means many things. Members of the Quincunx and we use it as a generic term for vampires from the Malay peninsula and Southeast Asia in general. But among these vampires, it is a title of respect and high station, similar to the title "mandarin" among more northern vampires. However, *penangallan* are not just Dharmically advanced; they have also gone through a ritual similar to the one used to create ancestors which kills some and gives others enhanced spiritual strength.

TEN SEASONS SECT

The Ten Seasons Sect is devoted to the veneration of nature's wonder as a complex fabric of relationships. The sect is so named because its founder, Old Man Spider, once said that a disciple who had his wits about him could become a corpse-saint after just ten seasons of observing a garden. So far, no one has come close, but many have tried.

That is not to say that the sect has not produced bodhisattvas. Peony-Blossom Princess took the Second Breath in the days of the Qin dynasty and ascended into the Hundred Clouds shortly after Moon-Eyed Tiger did so, not long before the discovery of the corruption of the Jade Ancestor of Changan. Laughing Falcon became a bodhisattva in the Three Kingdoms period and still remains in the Middle Kingdom. Neither reached sainthood in a mere ten seasons, but both confirm it to be possible. It is merely easier, they say, to see the road to enlightenment from the perspective of a bodhisattva than it is from that of a student. I think that this is a cheap trick to build confidence in the young, but I can admit it has value in reminding Kuei-jin that diligent study pays off.

These Dragons are famous for their collections of night-blooming orchids, but these are not the only thing they tend. The gardens they study may be any complex system of interacting organisms, including forests and ponds, or most notably, human cultures. These interlocking blankets of organisms are called gardens of the second sort, and vampires of the Ten

THE TEACHINGS OF PIYAU PAYUNG

This is the enlightened principle of existence —

When you are hungry, eat. If there is no food, seize food from one weaker than yourself, or steal it from the strong yet stupid. If you cannot eat, then starve.

Fuck when you are horny. If you cannot find a willing partner, take what you want or use taking's better-dressed sister, seduction. If you can do neither of those or if they would take too much time, then masturbate.

When in danger, run. When cornered, fight. Do not fight battles that will hurt you — the crippled tiger cannot hunt tomorrow. If you cannot run or win the fight, then die.

Breed, for children are the strength of their parent and will continue the parent's blood and mission in the world even when the parent exists no more. Children of your loins and of your philosophy are the only legacies that will not perish into dust. If you cannot breed successful offspring, then perish alone and unremembered.

Protect the Tapestry, because there are many who would tear and destroy it. Defend it even unto death, for you live inside the world, and if it perishes, you perish as well. Against these enemies, you are always cornered.

Glory in yourself and enjoy what you can, because misery, strife and trouble will be your constant companions in immortality. You will not find many opportunities to enjoy yourself, even in a long existence like our own.

This is the wisdom of life. If you use more words to describe it, you are walking down the wrong road. Sew your cunt shut and go become a Crane or Laughing Rainbow if you think that way. The thunder knows only one word, and that word shakes the entire world. When you have learned to live as thunder speaks, then you will know something.

Seasons Sect tend and study them as well. They shape the growth of individual components, but they also direct the effect and statement of the garden as a whole.

These Wan Kuei pride themselves on their awareness of the world and on the splendor of their gardens. Most seek to diligently advance the family, bureaucratic department or military unit they attach themselves to, tending and preening generations of successors and agents. They use their own power, spies and bound spirits in these tasks. Their awareness extends outward from the family, as well as inward. Using their spirit minions and the connections of their garden, Ten Season Dragons are spymasters. Through their

spirit spies, they are able to watch their enemies. Through their gardens, they are able to become privy to and influence decisions of the party, government agencies and important companies.

Ten Season members often spar in the corridors of power. They do not destroy the machinations of their enemies, but instead, simply inform the rival of what they have found. Ten Seasons sect members pride themselves on the subtlety of their manipulations. The goal of a gardener, they believe, is to achieve an effect indistinguishable from that of nature. A Ten Season vampire whose gardening is spotted by her peers must therefore become more subtle. To be attacked by the garden of a Thrashing Dragon of this Dharma is often indistinguishable from a run of terrible luck — small coincidences build upon one another, bringing the target to terrible misfortune.

Many vampires of this sect face east. They establish their gardens in mortal bureaucracies and governments, and use their influence to stifle demon-hunting efforts, minimize the exposure of the *shen* to mortal scrutiny and to play games with their fellow Kuei-jin. This sect is influential all across Asia, from Japan to China, Korea and the Infinite Thunders Court. Even in Southeast Asia, these Dragons build subtle gardens in the shadow of the *penangallan*, who tolerate them because of their ability to manipulate the mortal world.

THE DIRECTIONS

By taking the time of night when you took your Second Breath and analyzing the locations of various celestial bodies — some of which can be observed only through spiritual methods — with the orientation and geomantic properties of your grave, an astrologer can determine your direction. This is similar in some ways to your astrological house. It reveals certain things about what kind of person you are, and what sort of things you are best at. Don't worry about your direction and fulfilling your duty: it will come naturally to you. Astrology does not assign you a direction, it indicates the direction that was there all along. The Road Back is a different kind of journey depending on whichever direction it takes.

NORTH

Thrashing Dragons facing north are known as Scaled Magistrates. Though those outside our Dharma might not wish to believe it, we are well aware of the dangers of a life of sensation as a tool for enlightenment. North-directed Thrashing Dragons police the ranks of our Dharma. This is not so much a matter of enforcing rules as it is of watching for individuals whose behavior is growing erratic or risks drawing down the wrath of the mortals onto ourselves or Kuei-jin society as a whole.

OLD MAN SPIDER SPEAKS

In tending gardens of the second sort, it is important for the gardener to keep the overall effect in mind. The beauty of a garden does not lie in its size or in the height of the trees within it. The beauty of a garden lies in its composition and the overall effect of the plants within it. A fool can plant a garden the size of China full of every sort of exotic plant, and have only an ugly mess, while a skilled demon can make a garden of heart-wrenching beauty in the flower-box of a decrepit house. Think first of your goal, and then of the sort of garden that will accomplish it. Recognize the principle of economy — make your efforts no larger than they need to be.

Also, keep in mind that your gardening is done, not for the sake of gardening, but for the sake of learning and teaching. If you make a garden whose seasons unfold precisely as you have planned, how much have you learned? To experience success in the gardening of humans, you must carefully balance known factors with unknown. If you wish to watch the reaction to the murder of an eldest son, then repeat the murder three or four times with similar families and learn the overall pattern of the reaction, rather than planting your garden once and accepting the results without question. Maneuver the sons of similar families to deaths in a war, by disease or in an accident, and see how the reactions differ. Be thorough in your investigations — this is a matter of enlightenment, not of amusement.

Upon witnessing what he believes to be such a dangerous situation, a Scaled Magistrate does not himself act, unless the errant vampire is of his own sect and of lesser enlightenment. Instead, the magistrate reports what he has seen to an elder of the accused's sect or court who would be better-suited to assess whether it is legitimate behavior in the pursuit of enlightenment, or if the vampire is simply becoming degenerate. Wan Kuei who seem to be burning out are watched very closely, because the numb, black chasm of ennui can devour enlightenment in mere weeks or even days. A vampire who is a young mandarin might one day realize that he can no longer draw upon the sensual world for inspiration, and that he has become jaded. For such individuals, the *chih-mei* state can come very quickly. As they are mandarins in age if not station, it is important to apprehend them as quickly as possible. Their dark powers would make them a terrible menace if they were allowed to roam the countryside. Every effort is made to lift these vampires out of the bestial state to begin the process of recovery. North-facing Thrashing Dragons are responsible



for this as well, and learn many tricks for subduing powerful *chih-mei*.

You are of the northern direction, and while you may have scoffed at astrology when you were alive, let me assure you that the stargazing of your elders is of incredible accuracy. Even your defiant expression speaks of the north. You can run into the arms of your horoscope or you can run away from it, but you will eventually end up in its embrace.

SOUTH

Called Hungry Red Dragons, Thrashing Dragons of the southern direction are the warriors of our sect. Natural masters of the martial arts, these vampires are the foremost practitioners of the Dragon Dance, a Yang-laden battle trance that forms the heart of the Yang Prana. Its masters bend with the grace of bamboo and strike with the fury of fire. Many of the Thrashing Dragons of the Golden Courts are of the southern direction, and the Passion Bloodflower philosophy of emotion and combat skills certainly rewards them — no surprise, since Piyau Payung was the greatest Red Dragon the world has ever seen.

Southern Dragons venerate ferocious creatures like the shark, wolf or eagle. Some even model their behavior after the habits of these creatures, and these vampires are known for the deadly animal characteristics of their Dragon Dances. Others celebrate the raw ferocity of nature as embodied in natural forces. These vampires, sometimes called Thunder-Venerating Dragons, are often master practitioners of the Ghost-Flame and Storm Shintai.

South-directed Thrashing Dragons are the protectors of the Dharma against supernatural enemies, and are often involved in guarding their fellows against angry ghosts, spirits, beast-changers, *hsien*, and even other vampires. As well as being master warriors, Red Dragons have a reputation for being fast talkers. They have the animal charisma of all southern Kuei-jin and the predator's awareness that it is better to win a small victory without fighting than a great one at high cost. On-the-spot negotiators and rapid-fire teachers armed with the charisma of the Yang Prana, they talk when they are able and fight when they must.

EAST

Known as the Magistrate-Subverting Dragons, Thrashing Dragons of the east perform a role much

like that of their north-directed cousins, but aimed instead at the mortal world. The Magistrate-Subverting Dragons go among mortals to secure the services of important individuals through whatever means are necessary. Blackmail, bribery, murder — all are permissible. This influence is used to stymie mortal response to any Thrashing Dragon misdeeds, and to the misdeeds of the Kuei-jin in general. Its role in the latter — preventing outbreaks of hysteria which would bring demon hunters and the Shih down upon the Kuei-jin — is one of the Dharma's contributions to unliving society as a whole. Other Dharmas gain influence in mortal institutions to further their own agendas — Devil-Tigers often have control of the corrupt, Resplendent Cranes seek to manage government bureaucracies — but it is the Magistrate-Subverting Dragons who gain influence purely for the purpose of ensuring a protective silence over the doings of our kind. In the ancient days, Magistrate-Subverting Dragons were often quite open about their activities, strolling through the halls of power openly. The dangers of the Fifth Age and the lessons of the Ten Seasons sect, however, have taught them subtlety. Their influence is now hidden, and thus safer from attack.

Eastern-directed Thrashing Dragons are also those responsible for making certain that members of the Dharma have access to the sort of tools one needs for a life of enlightenment. For this reason, they are sometimes facetiously called Discreet Prostitute-Procuring Gentlemen. Most do not mind, for this does not really interfere with their business as monitors of the magistracy. Often, the procuring of drugs and prostitutes is nothing more than establishing friendly relations with the local Devil-Tigers, and if not, vice is a highly profitable trade, and brings one into contact with already-corrupted segments of the government.

WEST

Those Thrashing Dragons of the western direction are strange creatures, and called Bone-Eating Dragons. These vampires study the process of dying, and they are scholars of the heartbeat's ebb. The cold, Yin-addled ways of the Song of the Shadow are not theirs — Bone Flowers study the state of death, while Bone-Eating Dragons study the act of dying. They are great predators, for they love the feeling of life ending between their jaws. They are also natural scholars, and their homes are often tributes to their experimental nature. Every Bone-Eating Dragon goes after the process in a different way, of course; some lurk in morgues, while others dwell in slaughterhouses.

Bone-Eating Dragons also protect the Dharma by blocking the actions of the ghosts angry with their murder or the mistreatment of their descendents. Such ghosts can file for permission to intercede in the

Middle Kingdom, and create terrible problems for the Wan Kuei by legally haunting them. The Bone-Eating Dragons are responsible for preventing such problems. Sometimes, they argue the merits of a case, since death by Wan Kuei attack is recognized as a hazard of existence, and not a form of murder, and thus not easy to wrangle permission for a haunting over. In many other cases, however, the Bone-Eating Dragon simply uses their ability to carry jade into the Underworld to pay large bribes to magistrates, and ties the case up in endless hearings for months or years until the ghost loses heart and abandons the case. This may seem unjust to you, but it is the way of things. If they did not do what they do, angry ghosts would dog the steps of your eternity. Hunger, disease and luck — these are not forces which understand justice or injustice, but they are the forces which drive the natural world. Learn this lesson well.

Bone-Eating Dragons are known to fall to an imbalance of Yin, something we call corpse-kissing fever. This leads them to an undue fascination with death and to eschew the living. Some even take up residence in the Yellow Springs, feeding on ghosts and entering the breathing world only for matters of duty to their court. The Scaled Magistrates spend a great deal of time fighting the spread of the fever, for it can lead to a sudden detachment and collapse to the *chih-mei* state.

CENTER

The Thrashing Dragons of the center are called Teachers of Dancing. Students of life, they seek to ascertain what questions the world asks of its inhabitants, and how it rewards success and punishes failure. In doing this, they come to truly understand creation's goals and patterns. They seek to share this understanding with their fellows. Though many belong to one of the sects, they all attempt to keep an objective sense of their place in creation. Thrashing Dragons of other directions who are puzzled by the problems of existence often take council with one of these philosophers. Discretion is the specialty of the Teachers of Dancing, and it is considered quite disgraceful to take advantage of the confidence between a counselor and the Dragon who consults with him.

Teachers of Dancing also train young members of the Dharma in the ways of the faith. I face the center and have lived here at the temple one year out of three for the past 50. I have educated 17 young vampires like you, teaching them the ways of the faith and educating them in proper behavior. Centered vampires are very important to the Dharma, because we determine the knowledge and history that every Thrashing Dragon knows. We define the roots of the faith, while the paths of the bodhisattvas form its trunk and branches. If you wish for young Kuei-jin to become familiar with your teachings, it is good to

make friends with some of your centered fellows and convince them of your wisdom.

OTHER MATTERS

The Wan Kuei do not live alone in the Middle Kingdom. Beyond the mortal swarms, there are spirits, demons, skin-changers and magicians of every sort to contend with. The world has changed with the times, and sorcery and incantation now lurk behind crooked business and corrupt government, engaging in struggles over dragon nests and scraps of occult power. Politely, the mortal world overlooks it, pretending it does not exist. You must learn to navigate the maze of this magical world — there are many who would use you as a pawn or bound servant in their struggles. Stay among the Wan Kuei when you're able, and always come to their aid when there is trouble with outsiders. The Way of Origin demands loyalty to one's fellow escapees.

THE SPIRIT WORLD

The spirits are the manifest essence of the maya, and we owe them respect and reverence as the incarnations of the creation we seek to learn from. Spirits can teach much, and their rituals and games of dominance explicitly demonstrate the cycles and rhythms of the natural world. No surer guidepost is there to an object's purpose in creation than the actions of its spirit. The spirits of the seasons do not act out the cycle of the year — they personify it. They are the observable summaries of the thing they represent, and to study them closely is to have access to a fountain of knowledge about creation. Thus, becoming able to move among them and gain their favor is important to a Thrashing Dragon who wants to understand the pattern and purpose of the world. Members of the Thousand-Faced Thunders sect are the most avid in their dealings with the spirit world, though vampires of all the sects become involved with spirit world matters from time to time.

Generally, to earn the favor of the spirits and the spirit courts, you must do something that pleases them. Sometimes, this will involve an elaborate quest into the Yang world, to retrieve some object of symbolic or ceremonial significance. However, such quests are more typically given to beings with favorable ties to the spirit. As one of the Ten Thousand Demons, you are more likely to be asked to serve as a fixer of some sort. Most powerful spirits have mortal or magical concerns that need watching over and that demand more subtlety than a Zhong Lung lizard prince is likely to provide. At those times, you may parlay your services into obligation on the spirit's part.

Also, there is great political value to having spirit allies. A spirit court is full of valuable friends, especially when dealing with third parties who regard spirits with grave reverence. Hengeyokai,

particularly, are influenced by the intercession of spirits. Even outside of their influence on diplomatic negotiations, spirits have many useful talents and abilities that you as a Wan Xian lack, including the ability to safely influence the day-lit world.

In dealing with spirits, don't be too quick to bind them. Some spirits are without identity, and do not have names. They are simply the thing that they do. These spirits are safe to bind. They will not remember the binding after it has ended, and have no sense of self-identity to resent it. Other spirits do have identities, and memories — negotiate with them instead. There is a value among the exceedingly long-lived in being polite. With a life that lasts for century piled upon century, there is bound to be a moment of weakness when someone with a grudge can spell your doom. Spirits and wise Kuei-jin know this, and are careful not to give offense, or to take it too easily. See if you can make some sort of deal, rather than resorting to forcing them to do your bidding with your fangs against their neck.

HENGEYOKAI

The Xiong Ren, or Ferocious People, are powerful magicians and shape-shifters who protect what they see as the will of creation. They personify the world as a being they call the Green Mother, and guard her against what they see as the increasing influence of wicked spirits. Unfortunately, they see us as perfect examples of the sorts of wicked spirits that have come to infest creation. While wise elders and cool heads make open war between Xiong Ren and Kuei-jin rare, there is a constant undercurrent of tension. This shaky peace is marked by violent incidents between youths on both sides, and occasional raids over matters one or both sides consider important.

You probably cannot make friends among the hengeyokai. They do not want anything to do with blood-eating corpses, a sentiment you would likely share if you were not such a corpse yourself. At best, you may be able to convince them that you are a blood-eating corpse who shares some of their goals. Be honest. Look at yourself. You are a crass young vampire, and anyone standing around you for too long is likely to be eaten. Not even the elders of your court can be sure you're not a servant of Yomi. If you had an ounce of sense in your head, you would not trust yourself any further than you could throw yourself. No hengeyokai old enough to be making decisions is going to do otherwise.

In seeking out hengeyokai to speak with, be careful. Zhong Lung Dragon Princes are most likely to be polite to you, that is if they don't simply ignore you. Their noble station allows them to do that, and they have the thunder of heaven to smite those who fail to show them proper respect. The Nezumi ratmen make good allies, but they have a very narrow agenda and

are widely disliked. Having Nezumi as your allies is valuable but rarely translates into influence with other hengeyokai. Tengu raven men are the most likely to speak with you. They don't like the Wan Kuei very much, but they listen. If what you tell them is worth repeating, they'll spread the word.

You should know that Xiong Ren who deal with the Wan Kuei too frequently are known to die especially terrible deaths, deaths so horrible that the other hengeyokai go to any lengths to cover them up. I'm not sure of the nature of this — it may be some sort of divine curse. Whatever does cause it, it doesn't make them any more eager to deal with us.

CHI'N TA

The chi'n ta, the Lightning People, are miracle workers. They have unlocked secrets that have taken us a journey through Yomi to discover. They are mortals who hold the keys to Heaven, and their power is as frail and mighty as all other mortal power. They are magicians, not true *shen*. They have very poorly developed senses of obligation, and terrible manners. They're impetuous beings, and you can learn a great deal from the life and times of one. Unfortunately, their short life spans also mean they are not terribly adverse to abusing their might. Realistically or not, many expect to move from position of strength to position of strength until they die or reach apotheosis. Thus, some seek to bind you to their will. Some use spells that constrain you for a time, while others seek to enslave you forever. Regardless, this has terrible consequences to your Road Back. While you might learn a great deal as a slave, you will probably be set to dangerous or suicidal tasks. Be very careful how far you trust a magician, or you may regret it for a very long time.

The Lightning People come in two types. The first are those who practice ancient magical forms and traditions. They are masters of ceremonial Chi-channeling, alchemy, supernatural martial arts and prayer-slip creation. The foremost among these traditions are the Wu Lung dragon wizards, and dealings with them can be quite profitable if you are cautious. The other sort of Lightning People are more disturbing. They are called the Five Metal Dragons and they travel the Middle Kingdom using magic and science to suppress all sorts of *shen*. Their agents often look and act like government investigators, and many carry the identification of various government agencies. The Metal Dragons are very active in the electronic world, and so the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect often comes in contact with them. Try to avoid them.

HSIEN

In the time just around the fall of Meru, the *hsien* fought over whether they should become involved in the world following the Wan Xian's fall

from grace. The arguments led to fratricide, and the August Personage of Jade was offended. The Little Gods were cast out into the world and set to moving from body to body. As a society, they blame the Kuei-jin for their misfortune.

Today, the Little Gods are Heaven's last agents on earth. Some are animalistic shape-shifters and others are noble elementals. All are practitioners of elemental alchemy. If they would let you, you could learn vast amounts about the nature of life from them. Alas, they will not let you near. The Chi of the *hsien* is still divine in nature, the same golden elixir that the Wan Xian once respired and is thus extremely addictive to Kuei-jin who drink it. It is powerful, and creates in us the sensation of once again being alive. Kuei-jin have preyed on *hsien* since the time of the Yellow Emperor, and the Little Gods have little love for our kind. However, they are protective of nature and if you profess your Dharma, they may recognize you and treat you as something other than a deadly enemy. Even then, they will be distrustful. Devil-Tigers are not adverse to lying about their Dharma in order to gain a meal of golden Chi.

You may fight with the *hsien*, make alliances with them, or just live in uneasy peace — all are possible, depending on the local conditions and the personalities involved. Whatever you do, do not drink their Chi. Addiction to it is a terrible thing — almost certainly a death sentence — and to take a single drink is to be an addict. Your P'o will tell you their golden blood can make the world more alive for you, and it is correct. But to attempt enlightenment that way is a fool's game.

THE SHIH

However carefully you pass your existence, you eventually have to deal with demon hunters. Humans die and their families seek revenge; this is the way of things. Though you may be a prince of the earth, your flesh burns like flash paper and rots in the sun. Live carefully, and always have someone to guard your corpse in the daylight hours. Learn to follow in the crab's footsteps, and cross into the relative safety of the Yang World during the day if you are concerned about mortal attack. Do not play with mortals — they are weak, but the sting of the smallest wasp can humble a tiger.

Yet single, angry mortals are not our only problem. Throughout history, a gang of demon-hunters called the Shih have dogged our footsteps. In the time of the Qin dynasty, these warrior-monks led a campaign of annihilation against our kind. They failed, we survived and pulled their temples down. Now, they are drunkards and wandering vagrants, roaming the roads, robbing people to eat and hunting bakemono. If you draw their attention, they are likely to attack,

and their specialized forms of martial arts are quite capable of dealing you terrible blows.

When the Shih come for you, it is generally a sign that you have enemies among the *shen*. Typically, if you lose political face to the point where your rivals think they can survive the backlash of an assassination attempt, they'll feed information of your whereabouts and habits to a Shih. Then the demon hunters do the rest. The Shih are very dangerous people, and if you manage to survive one of their attempts on you, you are better off just counting yourself lucky rather than seeking revenge. This is especially true because your rivals are probably watching and ready to make an attempt on you themselves, and then lay it at the feet of the demon hunter.

THE YELLOW SPRINGS

Just as there is a spirit world, there is also a world of the dead. It is ruled by the First Sovereign Emperor and his army of terra cotta warriors. The land of the dead is a cold and terrible place, where wounded souls cling to existence through raw passion. The history of the underworld is a procession of storms, uprisings and scrabbling for jade and influence in the imperial bureaucracy. Avoid the Yellow Springs if you can — there are things that one can learn there, but they are unpleasant lessons. To meet a ghost is to meet a temptation to violence; to kill one would be to return energy to the Tapestry. To linger after death in the fashion of the ancestors is to be a miser, grasping tight the flame of life when the natural order has decreed your spark to be extinguished. For us, it is Heaven's punishment, but for the Restless Dead, it is a choice. They are most unwholesome.

In theory, there are treaties between our kind and the restless ancestors, that we will not feed on them, and in return, they will not haunt us for our killing. It could well be that this is truly the case. Certainly, well-connected ghosts can make trouble for you, and important Kuei-jin can have other ghosts take care of spectral problems for them. There may even be bureaucrats involved, and it is even possible they would be acting in their official capacity. The reality is as everywhere — those who have influence prosper, and those who have none are the victim of their betters. As you will often have little influence at court, it pays to walk carefully.

THE SUN

There is nothing so glorious as the sun. Golden orb, it rains down the rays of energy that the world needs to thrive and survive. Without the sun, the world would be a place of ice, starvation, and darkness. Life would perish, and even death would grow lonely and cold. So glorious is the sun that Heaven could not bear to cut your accursed forerunners off from it totally. Even when they conjured nine magical suns into the sky, and

baked the earth so that Yi the Excellent Archer had to shoot them all down; even then, when Heaven frowned on our hubris and made the light of the sun forever a bane to us, we were not cut off completely. Do not waste those moments that Heaven gives you.

Greet the sun, as it rises the morning. Kiss it, for it brings new energy into the world, and energizes the *maya* for its grand display of wisdom. Each night, bid it farewell as it flees over the horizon to take its light elsewhere. You are a creature of the night, but not a thing of darkness. Do not wrap yourself in a cloak of shadows, or shut away the sun from your existence. Do not think of it as hateful, or as your enemy. The sun is as the sun has always been — bright and hot and true. It is you who have changed. Celebrate the sun, for it is the heart of creation's grandeur. Give it honor for its importance to all things, rather than treating it as a stray dog because it is dangerous to you.

DHAMPYR

If a Kuei-jin is sufficiently imbalanced toward Yang energy, they can breed, producing half-living children. The Shade Walkers are strange creatures, and they are bound forever in a split existence — half given to life and half to death. Long-lived and possessed of some magical ability, the half-damned make excellent emissaries and daylight servants. Many are accorded *heimin* status by the courts, and act as go-betweens and fixers for prominent *wu*.

We Dragons are very likely to produce dhampyr during our existences. It is only natural — Kuei-jin must be strongly imbalanced toward Yang to reproduce, and such imbalances are something that many of us experience. In addition, the acts of giving birth and of caring for young are central to life. Thrashing Dragons have reason, and license, to explore these matters.

One of the important things to remember when you are bearing and raising a dhampyr is that, while you may see it as it will be in twenty years — your educated and responsible servant — it is in fact not a mere extension of you. It may serve you out of love, fear, or filial piety, but it is ever an independent being. If you do not allow your child to have a life of his or her own, it will have one anyway, and beyond your accounting. This would seem to be very elementary, but it can be very difficult to bring up a first dhampyr properly.

If you know the art of Obligation, then that can be very useful in managing your offspring. The soul bridge makes for an excellent understanding of the child. Be careful about using the soul shackle, however. Do so not because the shackled child may turn on you and become your nemesis, but precisely because they will not. You will not break the shackle by accident. There will be no surprises. By binding the soul of a dhampyr, you convert them forever into a diligent and faithful

servant. This is excellent if you are in need of a diligent and faithful servant, but so much of raising children is that they are not servants, but whole and independent beings in their own right. If you deprive them of their freedom, you deprive yourself of the Dharmic education of watching them explore that freedom — watching how they receive the lessons you teach and apply them to the real world, watching what they accept or reject, and why. That all vanishes in the moment when the dhampyr's soul is shackled to your will, and in return, you gain nothing but a reliable accountant. There are times you will want accountants, and there are times you will want an education. Be sure you know what you want before you irrevocably turn one into the other.

THE YAMA KINGS

There can be no mention of the Wan Kuei without mention of the Yama Kings. These beings were once the lords of the Underworld. They ruled the dead, tormenting mortals' souls in purgation of their sins, then passing them back into the Great Cycle to be reborn. But power and dark forces corrupted the Yama Kings. They fell from their station as Heaven's punishers and judges of the dead. They fed on tainted Chi and carved kingdoms out of the twisted fabric of the Yin and Yang worlds. They sealed their domain away from the rest of the Tapestry and called it Yomi Wan, and all the spirit-lands inside it are the Thousand Hells of Yomi.

The Yama Kings have openly declared their ambition on the Throne of Heaven. They trap and torture souls in the Yomi hells, collecting the energy of their suffering and using it to power machinations in the Middle Kingdom. Soon, the Yama Kings believe, the August Personage of Jade will abdicate. One of their number will seize the throne of Heaven, becoming the Demon Emperor, tearing the Wheel of Ages from its hub, and ushering in an age of eternal darkness. Each of the Yama Kings aspires to the crown of the Demon Emperor, and they vie daily for the position.

All Kuei-jin must bear arms against the Yama Kings. This is one of the primary purposes of the Way of Obligation — to prevent the sort of dark dealings with the Yama Kings that led to the downfall of the Wan Xian. To deal with the Yama Kings is a capital crime. Suspicion that you are in league with the Yama Kings tarnishes you and you can never escape its grimy clutches, even if the allegation is false.

We oppose the Yama Kings and the spirits of Yomi, but not because they are unpleasant or perform an objectionable task in the cosmic order. The necessity of demons is evident in the



fact that Heaven created Yomi and the Yama Kings in the first place, and that the Devil-Tiger faith produces bodhisattvas. Life and the world are often unpleasant places, but even the eaters of shit and carrion have their place in the natural process.

The Thrashing Dragons instead oppose the Yama Kings because their ambition is so beyond their legitimate goals in the celestial bureaucracy. From tormentors of the unrighteous dead, they have attempted to promote themselves to kings of creation. They are not just demons, they are mutineers against the celestial order. They pervert all they touch, twisting it with their dark power. Animals are diseased and made self-destructively ferocious, men are twisted into loathsome goblins, and even the very spirits are rendered cancerous and twisted by the blighted touch of Yomi. Those things which eat the dead have their place, and that place is not to make the rest of the world in their foul and diseased image. For this perverted need to twist all things, we Thrashing Dragons loathe the Yama Kings and their servants.

Most of our kind consider themselves the guardians of spirits and the spirit world against corruption and contamination by the influence of Yomi. We prowl the night of cities, seeking signs of infestation. Most frequently, we uncover bakemono and minor spirits of wickedness — creatures obvious enough that their evil is apparent to a vampire keeping one eye open for trouble. Members of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect are the most active in hunting the servants of Yomi, using their rituals or technological surveillance to detect problems, and their equally unnatural weapons to dispatch it.

Members of the Ten Seasons sect also frequently clash with the servants of the Yama Kings in growing their gardens. As they promote members of their chosen school, family or work unit, they often come upon signs of corruption by the forces of Yomi. The Ten Season Dragons are careful gardeners and remove the problem where it is small or easy to deal with. Yet they are subtle creatures, and to act boldly would endanger their gardening. More often than not, they carefully cover their sources and then let information slip to a Devil-Tiger or hengeyokai, and allow them to handle the situation.

Regardless of sect, we are all weary of the power of Yomi. The wise predator does not engage in fights where she may be injured. Victory in one battle is meaningless if it leads to defeat in the next. Unlike the warlike Resplendent Cranes and Devil-Tigers, our first question is not if we can achieve victory, but if we can escape the fray without serious harm. Nature rewards the cunning and the ruthless. It is also good to move slowly because of the Devil-Tigers. They also meddle in mortal institutions, and use demons and bakemono as their

minions. It is best to make sure that one is striking the first blow in an attack against Yomi, not in a careless shadow war.

THE WESTERN LANDS

It is always the fate of China to fall under invasion, and then to rise again to greater glory. For many years, these invaders were the steppe-dwelling horsemen of the Asian interior. But when the Manchu Dynasty became weak, the invaders who vanquished it were not the next nation of horsemen, but the imperial powers of the West. They divided up China like devils cutting up a baby, each taking a part of the country. They used opium to extract the country's wealth and ensnare its citizenry, and they suppressed any and all uprisings. The Manchu fell, but the West's choking grasp was only supplanted by the strangulation of Japanese occupation. The Japanese raped Manchuria for its resources and worked its inhabitants as slaves. They tested biological weapons on the inhabitants, and used the women of the region in comfort battalions for their soldiers' pleasures. Now China has some strength anew, but the Western powers still lurk at its periphery and make demands of it. The battles continue.

This conflict is the way of the world. Conquest is a brutal thing, and the world would be less without it. Yet many vampires do not feel this way. Members of the Devil-Tiger and Resplendent Cranes Dharmas often bear terrible grudges against the West. This is especially true of jina and older disciples, many of whom died in the brutal conditions around the fall of the Manchu dynasty, the civil war and the Japanese occupation. Rather than seeing the barbarians as a novelty to be learned from, they treat them as foes to be defeated. This is understandable, but it makes it difficult for us as a Dharma to study their existence.

The Westerners also brought the Kin-jin to our shores, and that is something that must be discussed on its own.

KIN-JIN

When the European pigs came to our doorstep, they brought the People of Cain — one of the terrible supernatural plagues of the west — with them. Many stories and movies are told of these creatures. One of their ancients, Zao-lat, studied with Xue for a time, but was not able to receive enlightenment. These creatures are superficially similar to *rakshasa* or Yin-aspected disciples. They are pale of skin, drink blood and fear the touch of fire and the sun. They are masters at subjugating the minds of men, and their blood is an addictive substance, and those who drink of it come to love them. However, they are not capable of enlightenment or

even true understanding. They are, however, capable of reproducing themselves by sucking out the blood of a mortal and then feeding the corpse some of their own blood. They infest many areas of the West, and have established warring conspiracies that fight for dominance.

The Kin-jin trace their lineage back through the fangs of their creator, and those who do not know their lineage are treated as heimin, accepted but without voice. Many among this foul brood believe that the end of the world is soon to come, as the hungry ancients of their breed rise from the grave in search of blood. This is probably inspired by some distortion of Xue's teachings about the Yama Kings.

The Kin-jin are forever seeking to enter and colonize new areas, establishing their twisted webs of conspiracy and influence. In the late 19th century, they became firmly established in the Portuguese Concession at later at Hong Kong and would often come to China in opium-smuggling boats, seeking to establish colonies on the mainland. Careful patrolling kept them out for a time, but the chaos that surrounded the fall of the Manchu Dynasty allowed some colonies to take root along the coast. We have never yet been able to eradicate these creatures, for they are like rats, skilled at stealth and hiding, and able to cover their tracks by making mortals forget or ignore evidence of their existence. They are forever smuggling in their fellows and attempting to establish fiefdoms on the soil of the Middle Kingdom. Like rats, they spread and infest all areas.

The Kin-jin are terrified of fire, and turn to ash in sunlight. It was recently suggested that silver bullets might be useful against them, but those who attempted to test it reported that silver had done them no good. Likewise, Kuei-jin who went to Los Angeles and who have lived near these creatures say

they have no particular fear of silver and often wear silver jewelry. Kin-jin are creatures of tremendous physical power, and are capable of overpowering even a mandarin. Feral creatures, they typically attack with claws and fangs, though some breeds also attack with their tongues. Do not meet their gaze, and do not drink their blood. The Quincunx, the Great Court of Ancestors, has ruled that the ancestor is the only proper conduit for negotiations with these creatures. If you come upon Kin-jin, you must report it immediately to the ancestor and the first oni or barbarian-suppressing general.

In modern times, we have been coming into closer and closer contact with the Kin-jin, and how we are to deal with them is an increasingly important question for us. Some elders favor striding boldly into the West and snuffing out the leaders of their blood-hives, and then hunting down their children in the ensuing chaos. It is said, after all, that this was done to a breed of savage steppe vampires at the dawn of the Fifth Age. Others are more moderate, and wish to secure the Middle Kingdom first, and then, having built up their strength, proceed in careful steps toward eradicating or controlling the Kin-jin threat.

I cannot say which philosophy I agree with, but they are very real and meaningful threats. For the last two years, disciples and jina have been going to war in Hong Kong and Singapore, attempting to eradicate entrenched nests of Kin-jin. Others went to the American city of Los Angeles and established a military government there which includes Kin-jin princes and nobles among its members. One of the Kin-jin empires has paid us a great tribute, and has promised not to send its children to our shores. The Western blood-eaters are a critical part of the future, and you should learn what you can of them. Though they are Dharmically uninteresting, they are also politically central to the coming days.



THE HOLY RHYTHM

*On action alone be thy interest,
Never on its fruits.
Let not the fruits of action be thy motive,
Nor be thy attachment to inaction.
—Bhagavad Gita, 2:47*

This chapter describes the inner workings of the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon, describing the Dharma's approach to its tenets, its philosophy regarding the Demon, and the beliefs of the four major sects.

CORE BELIEFS

Though there are many interpretations of the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon, there must by definition be some shared understanding between the members of the faith. That core group of beliefs gives the Road Back its redemptive character, and Kuei-jin who profess the Dharma all feel similarly (but not the same) about them. The different emphases they place on the varying tenets and how they implement them in the real world—those are matters of determined by the individual's personality and sect.

The following pages enumerate the eight tenets of the Dharma, as found in *Kindred of the East*, and describe them in greater detail. Each section includes a section called "The Truth," which discusses how the tenet is generally implemented by members of different

sects. Thousand Crane Mother first put the tenets forth, but phrased them abstractly, so that they could support interpretations other than her own. This act, called the Spreading of the Seeds, is one of the greatest moments of the Dharma, for it made the path to Heaven wider, and it is celebrated by all sects.

THE FIRST TENET: ATTUNEMENT TO LIFE

Attune Yourself to Life in All Its Forms

This tenet indicates that the maya itself is the subject of the Dharma's inquiry. The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon is an attempt to attain enlightenment by understanding the world and the place of its inhabitants in the natural cycle. Kuei-jin of this Dharma are seeking to comprehend the illusion of creation and learn the lessons illustrated by the grand phantasm of existence. Thousand Crane Mother was, and continues to be, adamant that vampires on the Dharma cannot lose themselves in bestial behavior and still attain this understanding.

"A wolf or tiger cannot become a bodhisattva," she teaches. "As *chih-mei*, we are as wolves and tigers. We live only in a world of instinct. From the outside, this is

terrible. But from the inside, the *chih-mei* sees nothing wrong. If it is hungry, it eats. It finds a safe place to sleep. If it is challenged, it attacks. That is its way, and that is the way of wolves and of tigers as well. This state is the key to much wisdom, but not all wisdom.

"It is a state without speech or need for speech. It is a place of action and reaction and momentary sensation. There is no Road Back from there — only the Road Forward, into the next thoughtless moment. This is fine for beasts, and one could even see it as something like enlightenment. If you feel that way, I can say nothing to you. Hear it this way, and if you are not persuaded, I will not stop you.

"Just as life is important to the world, the *maya* is important to creation. Yet life is not the only thing in the world. There are also natural forces and the bedrock of the world. So the *maya* is not the only thing in creation. There are other forces in creation as well. Those souls and spirits involved in the *maya* live without the burden of thought or anxiety, and they are not punished for this, for that is their place.

"But that is not the place of man. The place of man is his spiritual betterment. When we were in the *maya*, we did not tend to our whole selves. Now, we have been placed outside the *maya*, separated from life. Will we once again retreat into the illusion like cowardly dogs? You are a dead thing. Masquerading as an animal will do you no good when the judges of the dead render Heaven's verdict on you. You are one of the Wan Kuei. If you wish to become part of the universe as a whole, and not live as a fugitive from its schoolroom, you must become a student of the *maya* as a whole, rather than pretending to the limited existence of a single beast."

The Truth: Most Thrashing Dragons agree with this, because those who don't rapidly descend into the *chih-mei* state. This is a serious problem among younger members of the Dharma, and a fair number of them enter the *chih-mei* state and cannot be roused from it by ritual. These unfortunates are given over to the Devil-Tiger *chih-mei* handlers of the court, or put down if there is no need for them. Those who survive accept Thousand Crane Mother's pronouncement that the Dharma's enlightenment partakes of but is different than the beatific perfection of a thoughtless beast. While *jina* go without scrutiny, disciples are watched because they lack discipline. Mandarins are watched closely as well, because many victims of burnout rapidly fall into the bestial state as well.

THE SECOND TENET: INDULGENCE IN PASSION

Meditate Upon Passions; Do Not Shut Them Out, But Experience Them, Learn From Them and Encourage Them in Others.

This tenet justifies the two most well-known Thrashing Dragon traits: their tendency to indulge their corpses in physical sensation and their willingness to influence the lives of others. Though Thrashing

Dragons eschew losing themselves in physical sensation, they appreciate the need to occasionally immerse themselves. This is not a Dharma for shut-away scholars and bookworms. It is a faith of people who act and go and do and experience. Thrashing Dragons recognize this as a critical part of their faith, and Dragons who are seen as becoming too meditative and withdrawn are often caught up in elaborate ploys by their fellows. These ploys are intended to make their lives more interesting and shock them back into really experiencing their existence. These often involve little practical jokes and challenges, but the pranks of mandarins have brought nations to war in the past.

Thrashing Dragons are also known for their willingness to involve others in their lives. Life is not a solitary game — it requires lovers and rivals and romance and danger, if it is to keep the Thrashing Dragon on edge and awake. Such an exciting life requires a strong cast of supporting characters, and Thrashing Dragons as a group are perfectly willing to entangle others in their affairs. Among Kuei-jin and other *shen*, they typically observe decorum, since giving offense might lead to a duel or hard feelings. When dealing with those who are not *shen*, they need not be so polite. Heaven has assigned them the penance of walking the Road Back and achieving enlightenment. Their Dharma requires that they indulge themselves in every sort of sensation, and it is their right within the natural order to do so. As Wan Kuei they are beyond human morality, and must walk their path back as it is laid out before them. Thrashing Dragons are hungry beasts, and they hunger for enlightenment. If they must tear a mortal into rags to find the enlightenment within, then that is what they shall do. If Heaven disapproved, Dragons would never find enlightenment.

The Truth: Almost every Thrashing Dragon loves seducing, murdering and toying with humans. Mortals combine living bodies and self-aware spirits — the P'o and Hun — and are terribly fascinating and instructive to watch. It is terribly dangerous to be a mortal around any Thrashing Dragon — the monster may find some part of you so fascinating that it devours you for it. Treatment of *shen* depends largely on sect.

Dragons of the Laughing Rainbow and Ten Seasons sect are often deferential to other *shen*. Laughing Rainbows tend to keep other *shen* out of their search for enlightenment. Ten Season Dragons, however, see interactions with the *shen* as an enticing Dharmic challenge. What does the *shen* expect? A lover? A rival? A mentor or ally? Unless she has a preference or a pressing need to achieve some goal, the Dragon accepts the presuppositions of the thing she is interacting with, becoming what they most or least expect to see. Everyone knows how to be themselves well and easily. To the Ten Seasons, wisdom lies in learning how to be other things well and easily.

Members of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect are much more likely to involve other *shen* in their lives. As

walkers among the Yang courts, they lead spirit servants on red silk leashes and dine with the lesser princes of the Yang World. Such Kuei-jin are used to dealing with spirits (and some other *shen*) on a regular basis. While they are mannerly in their actions, they still use *shen* as props, foils and scenery in their quest for enlightenment.

Members of the Passion Bloodflower sect are totally without regard for manners in their involvement with *shen*. They are predator queens, and the world is theirs to explore. They are just as inclined to take ghosts for lovers as go to war with the *hengeyokai*. They are not climbing the path to enlightenment, they are hurling themselves at it. Any handhold is acceptable, so long as it leads one closer to Heaven.

THE THIRD TENET: STEWARDSHIP OF CREATION

Use Your Power As the Farmer Employs His Threshing Tools: Break the Stalks, Gather the Rice, Scatter the Seeds, Let Them Grow

This tenet is the mandate for Dragons to do what they must to find enlightenment. To manipulate mortals, to perform savage acts and then carefully examine the outcome, to immerse themselves in life in its true and vibrant state — without morals or restraint. This is their road to enlightenment, and they are doing Heaven's will to follow it. They no more regret their actions than a devout mortal would regret holy prayers.

Yet this tenet is not purely a license to rapine. It also specifies that the Dragon has a responsibility to return to the cycle. The farmer does not eat all the rice he reaps; he saves seed rice, and cultivates the fields before planting, and so there is rice the next year as well. A Thrashing Dragon is a terrible force, draining the life out of the world around it to fuel its attempts to achieve enlightenment. This can cause immense damage in terms of physical carnage. No other predator kills so much and eats so little as the Hungry Dead seeking a meal of enlightenment.

Because they consume and do not naturally return byproducts to the natural cycle, conscientious Thrashing Dragons make sure not to damage creation unduly, and to minimize what damage they cannot prevent. After all, the respectful student does not track mud into her teacher's classroom. The relationship is still one of man to object, but it is a respected and necessary object, not to be casually damaged.

The Truth: This tenet is honored in the grand scale, but of little comfort to mortals set upon by Thrashing Dragons. That is to say, the vampire is usually careful to make amends for any misdeeds, but those amends are made to creation, not to individual victims. They are not compensating the individual for his suffering; they are repaying creation for having taken without giving anything back to the world in return. To make amends for their misdeed, most Thrashing Dragons plant large, untidy gardens, or maintain large tracts of parkland.

Others consult with spirits to meet the needs of the *maya* directly, and this is most common among the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect. Ten Season Dragons are often also involved in this as ambassadors to the local spirit courts.



THE FOURTH TENET: SLAY THE DYING

Help all Living Things Thrive. When Something Appears to Be Dying, Consume It and Send It Back Into the Cycle

As the Thrashing Dragons protect and learn from the maya, they also tend it and see to its well-being. Dragons find weakness abominable. Infirmary in old age, decrepit buildings and moldy old social structures are all loathsome, for they trap energy out of creation, holding it in stasis. The cycle and process of death and rebirth are vital to creation, and to cling to longevity for too long is to disrupt the flow of history. To remove such obstructions is the duty of the right-thinking Thrashing Dragon. It is the way of things that new growth pushes aside old, dead wood. In forests where this is not the case, terrible conditions reign, and all the trees rot and decay. Every storm brings more sick giants crashing down, until at last the forest is nothing more than rotting wood and bushes. In a forest where there are young saplings ready to leap forward and seize every scrap of sunlight, the passing of the giants would kill trees, but not the forest.

No system should have indispensable components. The past should not haunt the present. Those whose time has elapsed should pass away swiftly and with grace. This keeps the world healthy and vigorous, much like pruning a fruit tree encourages the tree to produce more and better fruit. This way is true not only of plants, but also of organizations, religions and nations. Thrashing Dragons, particularly those of the eastern direction, often seek to destroy institutions they feel are burdens to society.

The Truth: This tenet is typically used to justify a Thrashing Dragon's tendency to kill and eat anyone or anything he pleases. However, it is also a statement of obligation. Again, the Thrashing Dragon is committed to the well-being of the maya, and not just his own betterment.

This tenet allows for destruction; however, it also restricts Dragons from causing the paralysis they loathe—they cannot be agents of stasis. They have historically shied away from the control of government or other parts of the dynastic cycle as a result. They may have influence in many organizations, but avoid outright domination. The temptation to enter into an ethical compromise in such a situation is too great.

The most passionate champions of this tenet in its physical incarnation are the *penangallan* of the Golden Courts. These vampires will not abide infirmity or old age in their households, and would rather appear as a man than with a wrinkled or liver-spotted form. When a *penangallan*'s mortal servants age beyond their usefulness, they can expect to be consumed by their mistress or one of her *langsuir* followers.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Ten Seasons sect has built much of its philosophy on tending and pruning institutions and social systems, those it calls

gardens of the second sort. Its members attempt to keep these organizations in good health, to make them better subjects of study. However, like good gardeners, they know that some plants cannot be pruned, but must be cut back or burned out. Ten Season Dragons do this as quickly and efficiently as possible. This often brings them into contact with Devil-Tiger gangs of similar intent. The two groups do not always share the same ideas of what is worthy of destruction, and there are often violent feuds over which will destroy some structure, and when.

THE FIFTH TENET: ESCHEW HALF-LIFE

Half-Life Is An Abominable State. Be As Alive As You Can.

The condition of the Thrashing Dragon is a punishment. It is Heaven's curse levied on errant underlings. It is not a thing to be compromised with, or grown used to, or utilized for its maximum benefit. Thrashing Dragons do not deny that they are hungry ghosts, but they do not make it into a badge of perverse honor by developing Disciplines that take advantage of their corpse-form. Thrashing Dragons typically find the Bone and Blood Shintai to be repulsive, as those take specific advantage of the Kuei-jin's undead form. Many instead practice the Chi and Soul Disciplines, or carefully learn the other shintai.

This tenet is a philosophical reminder to Thrashing Dragons regardless of sect. This is not their goal. The half-existence of the Wan Kuei is a waiting place on the lip of the Mouth of Yomi, and the last carriage-house on the road to oblivion. There is nothing to be learned from it, other than how to leave it more quickly. Right-thinking Dragons become students of their inner nature and nature as a whole, not students of their own physical remains. To venerate the corpse-flesh is to pay homage to crimes that incurred the August Personage's curse, using cleverness to make Heaven's displeasure into a blessing.

The tenet is not an injunction to Yang Imbalance, though some interpret it as such. Most Thrashing Dragons differentiate between life and Yang suffusion. To many members of the Dharma, particularly the *penangallan*, permanent Yang imbalance is a way of life. Its hunger and ferocity brings about a way of seeing the world that they find conducive to Dharmic advancement. Other vampires find reproduction a necessity on their Dharmic quest, and are forced into permanent Yang imbalance as a result. Yet it is the outlook or fecundity of that state that members of the Dharma seek, not the state itself. They are lively corpses, but corpses nevertheless.

The Truth: This tenet is followed by almost all Thrashing Dragons, regardless of sect. Just as the Road Forward, the mindless existence of the *chih-mei*, is a Dharmic dead end, so also is the inward-turning path of the dedicated immortal vampire. To a Thrashing Dragon,

members of the other Dharmas are often far too concerned with making their current existence a pleasant one. From the Dragon point of view, they are like bureaucrats in exile. First they think of finding their morning meal, then they check to see what the messengers have brought, and then if there is time left before lunch, they work on accomplishing their duty. In comparison, Thrashing Dragons are like soldiers. They wake in their clothes, leap into the saddle, and eat breakfast on the march. It is very easy to come to creeping compromise with the corpse, to become at home in the world of the dead. Why hurry enlightenment when one is a prince of the nighted Earth? This sort of thinking is baggage that weighs down a Kuei-jin on the Road Back. Rather than a swift messenger on foot, he is soon a laden ox, plodding forward under his burden.

This tenet is also one that young Thrashing Dragons have a conflict with. It is very easy to confuse the actions of life with living. Young Thrashing Dragons often become caught up in trying to be "alive again." Many of them become permanently Yang imbalanced, and even those who do not still involve themselves in some sort of project (establishing a family, caring for a mother or lover) that involves imitating life in some fashion, be it a manufactured life or the life the vampire "should have" lived. This is to be expected — it takes some time for the inhuman perspective of the Wan Kuei to sharpen in a young vampire. However, elders are careful to surreptitiously watch young disciples, both for signs that they are slipping into denial of their damned state and for signs that they are about to crack and lose their Dharmic path. Both extremes of reaction are possible during such experiments. Alas, it is almost impossible to persuade young vampires which parts of such an experiment are dangerous until they have undertaken it for themselves. If this worked, the Flame of the Rising Phoenix heresy would be orthodoxy.

THE SIXTH TENET: SUN VENERATION

Guide the Sun Up Each Morning. Sleep When It Is Risen.

Thrashing Dragons have a undying respect and admiration for the sun and the sunlit world, and they cultivate this feeling within themselves. This tenet reinforces the Dharma's concept of the corpse-flesh, and of the Gui Ren state as a punishment from heaven. The Thrashing Dragons ask, if a man is upside down, how long until he begins to believe that it is the world that is wrongly-oriented? The Wan Kuei are creatures of the night — with the coming of the day, they must sleep in dark places or retreat across the Wall to lurk powerlessly on the borders of the spirit world. Their ancient hubris in summoning the Nine Suns trapped them away from the day-lit world.

As an exile from the realm of the living, the Thrashing Dragons maintain, it is too easy to hate the living. It is too easy to seize the night and call it home, to seize

wickedness and pull it close, too easy by far to turn one's face away from the sun and become a Devil-Tiger, Bone Flower or worse. The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon is the dance of the living world, not of the dead one. The diligent dancer always keeps that in mind.

The Truth: It is almost impossible for a vampire not to come to an acceptance with her state. It is the nature of life to come to such accommodations, and the Dharma allows for them. It is only required that the Dragon do what she can to remind herself that her state is not natural, but is a profound disorder. She must remember that the sunlit world is a place of beauty and life, and that she is not its adversary but its student and an exile from it.

All Thrashing Dragons, regardless of sect, honor this tenet in a similar fashion. Every morning, as the sun begins to color the sky, they go to a high place and watch the its golden face rise above the rim of the world. Every morning, just before they sleep, they lay their eyes upon the furnace at the heart of creation. Every Thrashing Dragon goes to sleep knowing that there is divine mercy. Even in its wrath, Heaven could not bear to cut them off wholly from the face of life. The inability to follow this tenet is one of the most serious problems for Yin-imbalanced Thrashing Dragons.

THE SEVENTH TENET: LAUGH OFTEN

Laugh Often and Help Others See the Humorous Shadows

This tenet is not an injunction to be a humorous trickster, though many Thrashing Dragons are. It is instead an admonition from the Thousand Crane Mother to avoid becoming humorless scholars. Thrashing Dragons are students of life and Yang. Yet scholarship — watching and learning and studying and writing commentaries — is a profoundly Yin act and scholars tend to be bookish, retiring and unfamiliar with the world outside their studies. Such a life is antithetical to a right-thinking Thrashing Dragon. In order to dance this Dharmic dance, a vampire must become a natural scholar. Like a Taoist priest, she must be at home in the world she studies. This is not a matter of taste — Yin energies color and transform the experience. While some cooling and tempering of experience is necessary, excessive Yin influences on a vampire's Dharmic thinking can decrease the impact of her studies, depriving her of the *dên* she seeks.

A Thrashing Dragon is cut off from the maya, but she need not be distant from it. Her studies should be active, immersing her directly in the life she studies. She must learn to be a part of things while still absorbing something from the experience. The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon is like all dances: meaningless to those without rhythm.

The Truth: Most Thrashing Dragons attempt to take the philosophic implications of this tenet into account as they lead their lives. Their faith is a very

immediate and hands-on one, and by and large they do the best they can to stay involved in the world around them. Not all succeed, but all attempt it.

The difference between sects is in how literally they take the tenet's injunction. Thousand-Faced Thunder Dragons are not at all prone to humor — they are humble ambassadors to the spirits. Laughing Rainbows, partaking of life as they do, bring a certain thing that they call "laughter" to the world — bafflement and amazement at their animal grace, and their own predatory joy at a chase well-run and a kill in their jaws.

Passion Bloodflowers delight in tricks and novelties — clockwork animals, mechanical puzzle boxes — anything to bring curiosity and amazement into the heart. They delight in giving each other these elaborate gifts, and in challenging one another's intellect. How does such a wonder function? What makes it possible? This is the laughter of the Passion Bloodflower — a quest for knowledge of the physical world, intimately connected with their existence. Understanding such wonders is an act of meditation for them, and the modern age has brought their creativity to a peak. Prodigies of science and amazing objects abound in their collections, and the rich among them pay great sums to their toy makers. Such toy makers are never killed during warfare between the *penangallan*. Instead, they are ransomed or made to work for their new master.

Members of the Ten Seasons sect are the most prone to bringing actual joy to the world around them. Gardeners of social structures that they are, Ten Season Dragons see that joy and humor serve a special role in gardens of the second sort. A happy and harmonious body politic makes for a healthy structure. Ten Season Dragons often spread good luck, arrange successful marriages and encourage the harmonious coexistence of the parts of the garden. Though the joy they distribute is always intended to somehow shape the social garden, it is a sort of joy that mortals can comprehend and share.

THE EIGHTH TENET: PROTECT SPIRITS

Protect the Spirits. Without Them, the Life-Dance Stops

The Thrashing Dragons are the students, guardians and gardeners of the maya. And it cannot really be disputed that spirits in some way personify different parts of the Tapestry. Sicken the place, sicken the spirit. Sicken the spirit, sicken the place. Thus, spirits are in one of creation's most fragile links, for they are susceptible to direct corruption and assault.

Originally, this tenet was felt to mean that the Thrashing Dragons should tend to and cultivate the spirit world, as they tended to and cultivated the Middle Kingdom. Later, as the menace of the Yama Kings grew, it became apparent that the Thrashing Dragons would need to become the watchdogs at the gates of the Yang World. The spirits did not need cultivation, they needed vigilant guardianship. They were not the only protectors

of the spirit world — there were also the hengeyokai beast-folk. Yet there were areas these shape-changing mystics would not explore — urban regions that their attunement to the force of the natural world made dead to them. Here, the Thrashing Dragons patrolled the night, hunting black spirits of corruption and unnatural disease. Thanks to this dutiful service, Thrashing Dragons have enjoyed an easy relationship with city spirits.

Thrashing Dragons are respectful of spirits, but not unduly deferential. Spirits are beings of supernatural power, like themselves, and not deities worthy of worship. A Thrashing Dragon never hesitates to guard the Yang World against a threat from Yomi. It is important to remember, however, that they venerate only spirits of the Yang World. They find ghosts distasteful, Yin spirits disturbing and demons worthy of combat without honor. Most Thrashing Dragons enter the Yellow Springs only in the direst of circumstances.

The Truth: Each sect relates to spirits differently. Thousand-Faced Thunder Dragons walk among the city spirits as peers and courtiers. These sorcerer-diplomats can influence the mortal world in ways that spirits cannot, and they barter this ability for influence. The Thousand-Faced Thunders are masters of the modern elementals of electricity, glass and data. The explosive growth of the semiconductor design and fabrication industry in Asia greatly expanded their influence, and their technological sorcery has opened many doors for them in the modern era. In some places, they even serve as scourges, hunting renegade spirits with the permission of the spirit court.

The Passion Bloodflowers walk the spirit world as dignitaries. Their formidable battle skills demand respect, and individual *penangallan* throw in with various spirits if the cause is good. The Passion Bloodflowers make rowdy forays into Yomi-tainted parts of the Yang World, delighting in attacking the strength of their enemy. Yet these bloody forays are typically executed as a sport or a form of meditation. They are social pageants and times to display combat ability and the loyalty of one's circle of consorts. The targets of these attacks are chosen for their ability to provide an entertaining fight, not their degree of menace to the world. The Passion Bloodflowers are great enemies of the Mukade devil-centipedes, but rarely chase after clever tempters or slow corrupters.

The Ten Seasons sect deals with very small spirits constantly. Its members use them, along with surveillance devices and human agents, to set up their espionage networks. But they bind only the littlest of spirits — bird, monkey and rat spirits, which they use as spies and messengers, and the plant-spirits of their beautiful gardens. Ten Season Dragons rarely become involved with the doings of the spirit courts.

The Laughing Rainbows protect the spirits and the spirit world, but do not engage in direct commerce with them. Many Rainbows stalk the Middle Kingdom and

the Mirror Lands, preying on forces of corruption, but they have little direct contact with the spirit courts. They see the spirit world on the whole as something deserving of protection, but think little of the individual spirits. Some may be worthy of respect like an ancestor or bodhisattva, but most are just creatures, like any others in the maya. Being spirits, they are inherently holy, but they are neither perfect nor inviolate. The Laughing Rainbows guard the spirit world, and have congress with spirits when they must; yet most seek enlightenment through their studies of the natural world, and not spirit ecologies. In some places, this protection has an a bullying character to it, as the Dragons cow and threaten the spirits they watch over, punishing and pruning any unusual behavior as a possible threat to the overall spiritual landscape.

DANCING DEMONS: THE P'Ō

The P'Ō is the bane of every Thrashing Dragon's existence, yet it is an ineradicable part of existence as one of the Gui Ren. Vampires of different Dharmas often have radically different Demons, and approach their dark side in very different ways. This is caused not by the Demon shifting to match the vampire's faith, but by the fact that the P'Ō is an intrinsic part of the Kuei-jin's personality (although amplified and given voice). The various Dharmas each appeal to different sorts of vampires, and so certain Demons appear more commonly than others.

Thrashing Dragons treat their P'Ō as their animal half. They do not seek to crush it, but instead learn from, study and ultimately control it. To obey the P'Ō is to walk the Road Forward, to pursue the oblivion of instinct rather than the nirvana of true enlightenment. Those Thrashing Dragons who obey the P'Ō rather than studying it soon fall into the *chih-mei* state. Among the Thrashing Dragons, three P'Ō archetypes are most common.

THE DEMON

The most common P'Ō archetype among Thrashing Dragons is the Demon. This P'Ō resembles the vampire before it escaped the prison of the *k'naa* state of pure hunger and began to walk the Road Back in earnest. This P'Ō constantly urges the vampire away from the difficulties of enlightenment and toward the simplicity, the blissful ignorance and the guiltless self-indulgence of the Road Forward.

This demon is most dangerous to very young and very old Kuei-jin. Young Kuei-jin simply haven't developed the mechanisms to deal with the endless urgings toward animalistic behavior. Older Gui Ren fall to its blandishments for the same reason they often become *akuma* — after centuries on the Road Back, when the time between auspicious occasions is measured in decades and the vampire is wise enough to realize the true

difficulty of his Dharmic journey and the genuinely bleak future that awaits the world, the lure of an insensate animal existence grows strong. When it seems as if there are no new sensations, as if there is no novelty, no thrill left in physical or mental stimulus, then the siren song of an animal life without past or future becomes strong.

THE BANDIT

Common among Thrashing Dragons, and indeed among all Kuei-jin, the Bandit is full of wrath. It hates the creation that gave it a life so terrible it fell into Yomi, and it hates the Heaven that saw full fit to pull it forth and curse it to an eternity of struggling for enlightenment. A creature of endless hate, the Bandit seeks to tear down creation and throw all into the fires of a universal destruction. Though the Bandit might serve the Yama Kings, it hates them as much as it hates all other things, and would destroy them if it could.

This P'Ō is disruptive over the Kuei-jin's whole existence. When it can, it lashes out at the world, without even the Demon's sly concern for its own safety. Luckily, the Bandit hates itself as much as it hates the rest of the world, and rarely develops complex plans or long-term schemes. Instead, it lashes out when it can at the most obvious target, and then lapses back into a hateful slumber.

THE MONKEY

Similar to the Demon in its intent, but without that P'Ō archetype's predatory bent, the Monkey is a creature of the moment. It indulges in sensation for the sheer joy of sensation, without worry or remorse. Worse, Kuei-jin who have such a P'Ō are typically those who are most susceptible to its blandishments. These vampires are always being tempted to put enlightenment and worries aside, and engage in what is little more than an elaborate Road Forward, albeit one stocked with more amusements than the Demon's.

The Monkey can be a playful trickster, as its name implies, or it can be much worse. Indulging in sensation and gambits for immediate gratification, the Monkey can be a rapist or thief as easily as a prankster. This P'Ō is often very dangerous for the Thrashing Dragon who possesses it, because it can seem quite normal or even sociable. This can cause a great deal of trouble, because the difference in behavior between Hun and P'Ō is not stark. Others are often distrustful and suspicious of these vampires — it is too easy to be tricked by the Monkey, and many such vampires use their P'Ō as an excuse for their Hun's misbehaviors.

The Monkey P'Ō is most dangerous to young Kuei-jin. Older and more jaded Thrashing Dragons have typically had enough irresponsibility and childish behavior in their existences that the Monkey's blandishments have little meaning.

THE SECTS

The Thrashing Dragon Dharma does only a minimal amount of capturing and training of *chih-mei*. They mainly rely on Devil-Tigers and Thousand Whispers to train larval vampires for them in the basic arts of survival. Dragons then take them and train them for the rest of their *ré*, teaching them the Dharma and preparing them for their Fire and Stone test.

After the Fire and Stone test, the Kuei-jin does not immediately join a sect. Instead, young Thrashing Dragons must explore the world on their own for a time. This allows the vampire to experience existence without the preconceived notions of the sects. The ancestors of the faith believe that young vampires should accept a sect, rather than be pushed into one. Many young Thrashing Dragons explore several sects at once, only settling into a single denomination when they become jina or even mandarins. From the ranks of the Kuei-jin who never find a sect to their liking come the new sects, as individual Kuei-jin find their own paths to heaven on the road of the Dharma. Every one of the sects was founded by a vampire who felt compelled to find her own way to Heaven.

However, most Thrashing Dragons do become members of one of the sects over time. This is rarely a matter of official note, even among the Passion Bloodflowers. Though the Bloodflowers throw great revels when another vampire becomes a *penangallan*, the act of actually claiming adherence to the sect is something the vampire simply does. As a vampire gravitates more toward a sect, she begins to make herself a part of it. Contacting elders, she professes interest and obtains the sect's important theological tracts. She attempts to practice the sect's version of the faith as well as she is able, consulting with her mentors and tutors when she encounters difficulties. If she persists and shows aptitude for the sect's brand of understanding, she will progress.

LAUGHING RAINBOW SECT

The Laughing Rainbow sect was the first, and for some time the only Thrashing Dragon sect. After the Demon Warrior Empire fell and before the teachings of Xue became known, many Kuei-jin walked the night looking for solace or enlightenment. One of them, whose name has been forgotten, heard of Xue's Fivefold Way and teachings from one of her fellow Gui Ren. She listened to the reports of Xue's message for three nights, and then wandered under the moon and through the night thinking about the matter for a lunar month. She was already close to *dâh*, and hearing Xue's message sent her deep into meditation.

One morning, this Kuei-jin stood in a plum grove in the South China mountains, and looked out across a mist-filled valley. She stooped down to pick up a fallen plum. She bit into it, and its sweet and dew-covered taste

surprised her. Overcome, she laughed at the taste. In the mist below her, a thousand startled cranes took wing. Seeing this, the Kuei-jin was enlightened, and entered the Hundred Clouds. Choosing to call herself after the event that caused her to complete the Road Back, she became Thousand Crane Mother. The bodhisattva began to travel the world, taking disciples who wished to hear her teachings.

She taught for a time, and in her wisdom learned a lesson. The road of Dharma, she came to understand, was one up which a Kuei-jin traveled to the Hundred Clouds. Though it was narrow and difficult in places, it was still a pathway wider than her own footsteps. By teaching her own path and not the course of the road as a whole, she made the travails of those who followed her unnecessarily harsh, and their road needlessly narrow. Yet life was successful not because it tried the wise path, but because it tried every path.

Seeing her error, Thousand Crane Mother called her most advanced disciples together and taught a lesson now known as the Scattering of the Seeds. In it, she explained the true tenets of the Dharma, not of her own belief and practices. In doing this, she laid out the markers of the road of the faith, but allowed those who followed after her to find their own path along it.

Yet not every disciple sought his or her own road. Even with the road of the Dharma opened, many chose not to follow their own paths, but to stay close to the footsteps of the Thousand Crane Mother. Terrible, graceful and fierce, she taught a faith of action, experience and reflection. Those who wished to emulate her, she said, must be terrible, like an enraged shark. They must experience the world with the eyes of a beast, and take in each moment and sensation as if it were new and unexpected. Finally, these Laughing Rainbows must be reflective, for they were holy creatures, and not beasts. Their road to salvation lay not in animal behavior, but in enlightenment. Learning the lessons of the tiger and the wild beast, the Laughing Rainbow must apply those lessons to a greater matter than survival into the next moment.

And so it remains at the end of the Fifth Age: The Laughing Rainbow attempts to be lively, for life is a lively place, and those without high Yang spirits do not easily understand it. She attempts to dance the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon and laugh the laugh that sets a thousand cranes to flight. It is not a state of life, but a state in emulation of living, seeking to learn by natural study and meditation.

Laughing Rainbows can often be found experimenting with new ways of living, sometimes pretending to be different kinds of people, at other times, indulging in new sensations and meditating upon them. They often stalk wild and lonely places, looking for mortals to prey on and bakemono to chastise. Others walk the edge of the Yang World, seeking to guard the spiritual supports of the maya from corruption by the forces of Yomi. Often

active but little-seen, these vampires fight a slow rear guard action, preying upon wickedness wherever they find it, nipping at its heels like a hungry yellow dog.

These creatures are the most moderate of the Thrashing Dragon sects. They seek to emulate nature in serenity as well as in fury. However, theirs is the moderation and serenity of the Wan Kuei, and not of mortals. A hungry ghost is moderate not by walking the middle road, but by never staying for too long at either extreme. A Thrashing Dragon is serene as a tiger playing in the surf is serene—it leaps and splashes, forgetting the length of its claws, yet its claws do not leave it. The Laughing Rainbows are most common in the Quincunx and the *uji* of Japan, though a fair number dwell in the other courts as well.

STRUCTURE

The Laughing Rainbow sect does not have much organization. Obviously its head is Thousand Crane Mother, the first bodhisattva of the faith. Even today, she dwells in the world. She does not live in one place for long, changing lairs every three or four years. A number of jina typically stay near the bodhisattva in case she is endangered, but she does not tolerate them too close. Instead, they live near her and follow her discreetly. This

is a difficult and seemingly unrewarding job, but those who perform it have a chance to observe the Thousand Crane Mother as she goes about her existence. Almost all those jina who devote several years to looking after her become mandarins shortly thereafter.

These jina, each of whom is sent and sponsored by an elder mandarin of the Dharma, observe the bodhisattva, and summarize her doings for the elders of who sent them. Mandarins do not generally directly approach the bodhisattva—jina she will let near her because they are frail in comparison. Mandarins are more her equals, and she will not tolerate them in her territory.

Beyond this loose alliance of elder mandarins to look after and record the sayings of the Thousand Crane Mother, the sect has no real structure, other than the inherently hieratic shape of Kuei-jin society. A jina or well-established disciple who wishes to take up this sect contacts a mandarin of the sect. If the mandarin is willing, he provides her with learning materials and Dharmic teaching. A Thrashing Dragon can recommend other teachers to the aspirant, but is morally obligated to provide tutoring if the aspirant or acolyte has no other choice. The mandarin acts as the acolyte's mentor and tutor, though the relationship is frequently

quick 5/01



a distant one. Mandarins who become very wise often tutor less enlightened mandarins, and so there is a rough hierarchy. However, acolytes can switch mentors freely, and so follow whichever master's teachings seem best to them, in accord with the principle that the road of Dharma is wider than any one set of footsteps.

HOLY PLACES

The sect has a number of modest temples in rural areas of China. Set on land bargained from the Xiong Ren, these refuges are small places, and have no permanent staff. Of durable construction, they are inhabited sometimes by several mandarins and acolytes, sometimes by a jina who clears the leaves from the gutters and acts as priest, or just enjoys the beautiful solitude until someone else comes along who has a use for the place. Sometimes, they are inhabited only by the badgers and foxes and tigers that are drawn to these places of powerful Yang energy. The most famous of these places is the Thousand Crane Monastery in the mountains of South China. There still stands the plum grove where the Thousand Crane Mother bent to pick up a plum. Below it still lies the lake where a thousand cranes rose to the dawn in response to her laughter. The cranes do not go there any more, for the world is no longer so full of auspicious things as it once was. Yet one can easily picture them, rising through the mist and crossing the glowing orange disc of the rising sun.

LEADERS

The sect is "led" by the Thousand Crane Mother — she is the final arbiter of her teachings. While her commentary is at this point rather exhaustive, at least once or twice a year the mandarins must pose to her a question regarding matters of enlightenment. These elder Laughing Rainbow mandarins are several dozen in number, and most have several younger mandarins who occasionally consult them. This group of elders exerts influence on the behalf of the sect and Dharma, protecting members from persecution and working as a group to steer the sect. Most Thrashing Dragons are rather friendly to these efforts, and advice or instructions from the elders of the sect is generally heeded.

PASSION BLOODFLOWER SECT

The reality is that the so-called Golden Courts are an umbrella cast over a disparate number of cultures and religions. The region as a whole does not have a dominant sect, but some regions do. The Malay Peninsula is the home of a sect of vampires so fearsome they color the reputation of all of Southeast Asia as a whole.

Before the late Fourth Age, it was the custom of the many Thrashing Dragon Gui Ren in Malaysia to survive as the wives of men. Those who were female or could become female lived as women, and those who were male in gender became transvestites and lived as the mistresses of men who preferred women of that sort.

They would use their husband or lover as a source of resources, and typically controlled them through the art of Obligation, love potions or some other occult influence. When the husband died (often prematurely), the *penangallan* would mournfully take her leave to return to "her family in another district" and move along, finding a new husband in a different area. Such vampires did not bear dhampyrs because of the difficulty such offspring would have given them in changing husbands. This was often a hard life, and many of these vampires were killed by Xiong Ren or demon hunters. Many others fell into the clutches of the Yama Kings, as they made dark bargains to find rich spouses and guarantee the health of their husbands. By the time of the Southern Sung dynasty, it was clear the region was largely under the control of *akuma*.

One Thrashing Dragon, Piyau Payung, was sitting on her doorstep one night, watching a mantis in the garden. As it finished devouring its mate, the vampire was enlightened. The savage nature of the genitive force was shown to her, and she entered the Hundred Clouds. She soon took students, first from the Devil-Tigers of the region, and then from the Thrashing Dragons. She taught the primacy of the female form, the sacred nature of the reproductive act and the importance of aggression and dominance in success. She and her students descended on the *akuma* of the regions like mad animals, for in her newfound wisdom the bodhisattva had devised new fighting rituals of terrible power that enhanced her followers' own Dragon Dance.

Piyau Payung liberated the Golden Courts and founded the Passion Bloodflower sect among the many frightened and disillusioned vampires of the court. She did not seek to change their way of living, but instead sought to demonstrate the importance of sisterhood and power in the face of the perilous world. The Wan Kuei must be like the mantis, she taught: dangerous, capable of bearing many dangerous young, and willing to eat their mate when then were of no use. This was not the Way Forward, the descent into the *chih-mei* flesh-eater state, but a true embracing of the principles of the Thrashing Dragon. Laugh often. Break the stems and scatter the seeds. Eat what you like of that which you tend. These are the tenets of the Dharma — if the Passion Bloodflowers follow them more openly and immediately than the rest of the Dharma, then perhaps that is because their insight is keener.

The mandarins of this sect are called *penangallan*, and all have mastered the art they call "dancing without one's skin." These vampires use Flesh Shintai to allow their head, bowels and reproductive organs to pull away from their body, and they travel through the air like this by means of Jade Shintai. They disport in this disembodied form at certain rituals, for they say it embodies the basic truths of life: consumption, digestion and reproduction. These *penangallan* are destructive creatures who walk near the borders of the Devil-Tiger faith. They

disport themselves lewdly, covered in feathers and gems and showing feminine characteristics outrageously enhanced by their shape-shifting skills. They and their circles of *guanxi*-bound lovers practice Dionysiac rituals, both for orgiastic purposes and to prepare themselves for combat. Masters of many deadly Disciplines, these creatures defend their queenly status and place in the natural order with a fierceness that makes them unpalatable to the sexist and conceited courts of northern Asia.

STRUCTURE

Young Thrashing Dragons in the Golden Courts are treated much like young Thrashing Dragons anywhere — they are sent out into the world to find a place for themselves. Those who are inadequate die. During this period of their existences, these young Thrashing Dragons are known as *bajang*. Some may choose other sects, but vampires of the Passion Bloodflower sect never recognize a Thrashing Dragon of another sect as higher than *bajang* status. *Bajang* of this sect can and frequently do become *bajang* of the Brilliant Coals Devil-Tiger sect without much difficulty and vice-versa — the faiths are very similar.

Those *bajang* who survive until they experience *ling* and become *jina* are known as *langsuir*. *Langsuir* are either female, shape-shifters or skilled transvestites. They marry rich mortal men and take them for everything they have. Using guilt, sex, threats and Disciplines, these vampires work their mortal spouse to death, fattening themselves on his wealth as well as his blood, hiding his fortune away. They typically become pregnant by these spouses, and give birth to dhampyr offspring, which they call *pontanac*. These offspring they use as their agents, lovers and daytime caretakers, and they are often just as dangerous as their immortal mothers.

All *bajang* spend years learning to live the life of a *langsuir*, and so the act is not as difficult as one might believe. Indeed, some may have been living in all ways like *langsuir* since immediately after their *kôa*, but only recently experienced *ling* and been recognized. Each *langsuir* is part of a blood-family, similar to a *wu*, led by a *penangallan* and including other *langsuir*, usually four to six of them. They serve as servants, bodyguards, sex partners and confidants to the *penangallan*. These *langsuir* all feel normal *guanxi* for one-another, and strong *guanxi* for the *penangallan* they serve. In turn, the *penangallan* feels weak *guanxi* for all of them. Since *penangallan* were once *langsuir* clients of other *penangallan*, they also feel *guanxi* for some of their fellow queens. The Kuei-jin of the Malay peninsula are thus tightly bound together by bonds of kinship, yet frequently torn by jealousy and interfamilial disputes.

To become a *penangallan*, the vampire must demonstrate her absolute valor, her reproductive ability, her wisdom, her ability to Dance Without Her Skin and her financial independence. Thus, to ascend the rank a *langsuir* must be a mandarin (Dharma 6 or higher) and

must have Flesh Shintai •• and Jade Shintai ••••. She must have borne a dhampyr child, must have accomplished a battle feat noted by the other *penangallan*, and must have enough money that she need never marry again. She then goes through a traumatic rite called Welcoming the *Penangallan* (see p. 59).

Penangallan are not totally bereft of income. They can become investors, partners in business, or have any other form of income — they can simply no longer marry for it. Also, each *langsuir* pays her *penangallan* a tribute, which the *langsuir* presumably extracts from her own spouse. This tribute is set by the *penangallan* each year, and is the same for every *langsuir* — it is set so that a *penangallan* with five *langsuir* around her can live in luxury without expending her own wealth, and it is often a hefty sum.

Sex and gender are important to the Bloodflowers, who venerate the reproductive urge. In the eyes of the sect, *bajang* are universally male. They are referred to with the male pronoun and prohibited from female dress at any official functions. *Langsuir* are all female, and even if male must live as females and appear as women in court. For *penangallan*, the appearance of femininity is not enough. These vampires must be capable of bearing *pontanac* offspring and must have done so at least once. Kuei-jin who do not bow to the ironclad gender laws of courts under the Bloodflower sect's control are severely punished. This is a capital offense for natives, and foreigners are typically given the Little Death, and sent home before their Corpse reanimates.

HOLY PLACES

Penangallan set up temples to themselves, placing them on dragon nests whenever possible. Though they are nominally shrines to the reproductive and predatory principles in the abstract, the reality is that the *penangallan* who lives within them enshrines herself as the embodiment of those virtues. This treads near hubris, but the way of the *penangallan* is a prideful one.

LEADERS

Langsuir follow their *penangallan*, and the *penangallan* follow no one. Though many work together from time to time and some work together frequently, each *penangallan* is answerable only to herself. Until her departure into the Hundred Clouds in 1700, Piyau Payung spoke for the sect. Since she left the Middle Kingdom, there have been no new Bloodflower bodhisattvas to lead their sisters. The result is a colorful chaos of clashing interests and unregulated family quarrels, and produces some of the most singularly dangerous Gui Ren in existence.

THOUSAND-FACED THUNDER SECT

Not long after the Scattering of the Seeds, the Thrashing Dragon Moon-Eyed Tiger was hurrying through the night, seeking shelter against a terrible storm. All through the night, the storm had raged, and

all the streams were flowing in bright white torrents, and all the bridges were washed out. Wandering through the blackness of the storm, he could tell from his drowsiness that morning had come, but that the clouds were so dark that the sun was completely hidden. He greeted the sun. Still wrapped in rain and with lighting all around him, Moon-Eyed Tiger used jade to enter the spirit world. There he witnessed the storm unfold. Lighting struck, and the thousand thunders bloomed from the bolt, racing through the world and trailing the sound of the thunderclap behind them. Moon-eyed Tiger saw the nature of the world with unrelenting clarity, and entered the Hundred Clouds. He then taught that the Yang Mirror Lands are an epitome and summary of the living world. By studying their inhabitants and observing their actions, the Gui Ren can gain enlightenment, for to observe the spirits is to observe the living world, but without any of the clutter or smoke of reality.

Moon-Eyed Tiger departed the world shortly before the beginning of the Fifth Age, and the Thousand-Faced Thunders do not currently have a bodhisattva. Even at the end of the Fourth Age, the Xiong Ren's reaction to the increasingly unpleasant nature of the Second Breath was forcing these vampires out of wild areas and into cultivated regions and cities. Today, almost all dwell in urban areas, studying urban spirit courts and politics, as well as dabbling in urban ecology and the nature of life in cities.

Today, most Thousand-Faced Thunders live closely with the urban spirit courts where they dwell. Over the centuries, they have found their place in the courts, and act as scourges of corrupt and errant city spirits. Always natural sorcerers, these Kuei-jin have become friendly enough with urban spirits that some bargain to be bound into talismans, and the spirit courts as a whole tolerate the vampires binding weak Yang spirits. In the latter half the twentieth century, a number of the sect's jina and mandarins were closely involved with the growth of the spirits of data, atomic power and finance. Patrons of these up-and-coming spirits, they gave them advice on the nature of the urban courts and saw that their ambassadors and representatives were made welcome there. Today, these spirits reciprocate, and send lesser spirits to be bound by their former mentors.

Many vampires of this inner circle are also active in simulating life, and pursue projects of virtual existence closely. Self-replicating code, chaos models of natural patterns, modern evolutionary and mimetic theory — Thousand-Faced Thunders study all these, seeking to gain an even more compressed and abbreviated form of enlightenment, a bare-bones divinity which quickly elevates the Kuei-jin to the Hundred Clouds. Enlightenment is a bootstrap process, they argue. There is no good in taking longer than necessary.

STRUCTURE

This Dharma was once loosely led by Moon-Eyed Tiger, but after his departure and the turning of the Age, these vampires were quickly driven from their wilderness stronghold and into the cities of men. There, in hidden temples, the faith adapted. In structure, it is similar to that of the Laughing Rainbow, but more organized and accountable.

Most Thousand-Faced Thunders are members of a temple, which is led by a mandarin and staffed by jina and younger mandarins. Often of only loose spiritual value, these temples are arrangements for the trading of knowledge and favors, and act as an old boy's network for these scourges and diplomats. Temples operate independently, but often have official and unofficial congress, with members exchanging favors between temples as well as within them. Also, the leaders of the temples often work together on important matters — allegations of impropriety or congress with the Yama Kings within a temple, for example.

Recently, the Thousand-Faced Thunders sect has begun a practice of "headhunting" — seeking out young disciples and preparing them to enter the sect when they become jina. The mandarins point out that there is no obligation imposed on this assistance. The sect needs many talented young recruits to mind its operations. What harm is there in making sure they know what they're getting into before they start?

HOLY PLACES

Each temple keeps a place for meeting and worship, ideally on a dragon nest. This is more than a simple church. Originally, these temples were places where the vampires gathered to hear their mandarin speak, or to discuss and meditate on the wisdom of the spirit world. Today, they are the retreats and gathering-places of courtiers and gossips, where they can trade the favors of the spirit world and speak freely among themselves about the state of matters. In the modern day, they bristle with spirit wards and pseudo-technological talismans for defeating mortal eavesdropping.

To modern practitioners of the Dharma, this is not so different from ancient practice. In any gathering of Kuei-jin, there have always been precautions taken to keep out the uninvited and prevent eavesdropping. That these precautions have been modernized and strengthened is perfectly understandable. The spirits who are the subjects of the sect's study are intelligent and capable of magic. No one objects that Kuei-jin take precautions so that mortals do not discover their identity — why should their desire to remain secure from spiritual surveillance be seen differently?

It should be noted that this protective attitude includes those Thousand-Faced Thunder Dragons who have not ridden the wave of the modern world, but deal instead with more traditional urban spirits. These

vampires might not have data spirits in their bug detection devices, but the roads and streets of a city simply do not lead to their temples, unless the searching party is a member of the sect or travelling with one. Likewise, many such places are protected by agreements with spirits of the city government, and those who pry too closely soon find themselves mired in bureaucratic investigations and tie-ups. Though the methods differ, the result is the same bubble of peace and protective quiet. Many temples have a jina whose sole job is seeing to the place's magical and physical security.

LEADERS

The Kuei-jin mandarin who first became involved with the spirits of modern technology was Asako Kiko of the *uji* Genji. The ambitious head of a temple, Kiko quickly involved the rest of the temples in Japan and made advances to her fellow mandarins all across Asia. Today, "Auntie Kiko" is one of the most influential Thrashing Dragons. Her temple outside of Yokohama is an ornate tribute to the spirits whose rise has brought her success. It is a halogen-lit warehouse, full of robot manufacturing equipment and data screens where her ongoing modeling of jellyfish and sponge colonies is displayed. Many Kuei-jin go there to meet with her and do business, as do many spirit world factors. Asako Kiko is one of the Middle Kingdom's most significant supernatural fixers, and the sect as a whole has shared in her success.

Many outside the sect question the Thousand-Faced Thunders' reductionist approach to enlightenment. Even some inside the sect argue that the success of Auntie Kiko's business dealings with the spirits of technology has given her eccentric approach to enlightenment an undue following rooted in a desire to gain her favor. But Asako is not the only voice in the sect. Many of those mandarins who follow her are also influential, and have great say in their own spheres of influence. They have side deals with many spirits that owe Auntie Kiko nothing.

Nevertheless, there are a number of vampires in the sect who are unhappy with the faith's new direction. Many of them have left their old temples, and either roam the world as heimin or gather together in new temples. These Kuei-jin feel that the sect's new reliance on its partnership with technology spirits is foolishly mistaking personal gain for enlightenment. Members of these more traditional temples still keep their relationships with the districts and rivers of their cities alive, mediating disputes and studying the adaptations of life to the urban infrastructure, and vice versa. The main voices of these dissidents are the mandarin Xi Chao (of Shanghai's Telegraph Road Temple of the Neon Rainbow) and Toyotomi Iro (of Kobe's Chokecherry Temple).

Relations between the factions within the sect are tense but not yet violent. While there are many individuals who might be willing to make an attempt on Asako Kiko, Auntie Kiko is hardly without defenses. She has many powerful contacts among the spirits courts and among the mandarins of the *uji* and the Quincunx. Her person and face are protected by young Kuei-jin ambitious and naive enough to defend her in hopes of bettering their social station. The elders who oppose her will have to move very carefully if they wish to take an active hand in her downfall. Asako owes some of her political survival to the fact that many mandarins expect her to self-destruct soon anyway.

TEN SEASONS SECT

Old Man Spider was out walking in the world in the time before the Warring States. Those were the times when kings rode to battle in great chariots and presided over the crops of their people in religious ceremonies. Though Old Man Spider was a vampire who studied gardens and forests and other places full of growing things, he did not always walk in those places.

One night, he was walking in the house of a king, and he came upon a scene. Looking into the garden, he saw the aging but still beautiful lover of a young king strangling her own daughter. Looking within the concubine, he saw that she did her deed so that the girl's budding beauty would not grow to rival her own. Seeing this, Old Man Spider saw also the way that trees in a forest let their leaves blanket the soil around them, choking out young growth and small things. He saw the need for cleansing fire as well, so that old growth would not persist longer than it should, and choke out the forest with sick and ailing trees. Stepping forward, he struck the concubine a terrible blow and broke her neck, killing her instantly. Old Man Spider was enlightened, and entered the Hundred Clouds.

Old Man Spider came to understand that just as people were made up of organs, so there were greater things, organisms of which people were the organs. These he came to call gardens of a second sort, and set himself to studying and tending them. There were many such interesting gardens in the world in that time, but Old Man spider knew every garden is interesting to the right eye. Straightaway, he used the Soul Shackle to enslave the concubine's husband, the king, and directed his attentions away from his young daughter. He watched the court for a time, and then one by one he weeded out the pests — wastrels and fools who would bring the house to ruin, and also amateur witch-hunters who would make trouble for him. He helped raise this girl, and made her a knowing accomplice. The father died tragically and without an heir, and when they married her away, it seemed as if they married the family with her.



Yet within a few decades, the concubine's daughter had control of the family, and through her so did Old Man Spider. He rendered her husband sterile with alchemy, and impregnated her with his own seed instead, so that she would bear a dhampyr and cement his control. Then, he grew the family this way and that. Carefully, he arranged marriages, cut short some branches and encouraged others. And within his broad gardener's strokes, he watched how the family grew, how the members interacted. He made two branches similar, and killed the heir of one. How were the reactions of the branches different? How did the second family grow then, with only today to live for?

Old Man Spider soon had students, and he taught them of his wisdom, through both gardens of the first and second sort. They took control of their own gardens, and soon they were also learning from the lives of humans. The gardeners often worked apart, and often worked together. Within a century, Old Man Spider had taught them an ethic of subtlety, minimalism and careful observation and planning based on a through understanding of the garden's

nature. Yet gardeners must not be creatures of stasis. He urged them to make clever little changes in the gardens of others, and to let the edges of their gardens mix. Thus did the efforts of one gardener color the results of the others, and make the whole more palatable the way two flavors on the tongue can taste better together than they do alone.

Shortly before the rise of the Qin, the Dharma produced another bodhisattva, Peony Blossom Princess, and during the Three Kingdoms period, Laughing Falcon entered the Hundred Clouds as well. But Peony Blossom Princess left the Middle Kingdom at the turning of the Age. It is said that she heard of the discovery of a terrible book of black prayers whose very existence would be impossible until the coming of the Fifth Age. This book, *The Broken-Winged Crane*, was found among the belongings of the Jade Ancestor of Changan when he was discovered to be an *akuma*. Hearing this, the bodhisattva shook her head and departed into the Hundred Clouds forthwith. Old Man Spider and Laughing Falcon remain in the Middle Kingdom still.

STRUCTURE

Old Man Spider's faith is not a structured one. Thrashing Dragons learn of it during their *kôa* and *ré*, and those jina who feel attracted to it must find a mandarin to tutor them in the practice of the faith. Finding such a mandarin is the first test of the aspirant, but is not always difficult since many such mandarins are politically active. What is more challenging is that the jina must present the mandarin with some knowledge of their personal garden of the second sort. This is a further spur to subtle gardening on the part of the mandarins, and a proof of the student's good eye. A mandarin who has been so caught is obligated to teach his new student to the best of his ability. As with all things in life, this is more complex than it appears. A student, even one as sophisticated as a jina, is a burden on the subtlety of the mandarin and a drain on their time. Though it is not legitimate to directly inform an aspirant of the activities of a fellow gardener, words or advice can be slipped to certain heimin or Shade Walkers known to associate with such an aspirant.

Each gardener grows her garden in her own way, and has little Dharmic contact with her fellows. Their practice is a careful one, built on contemplation and small actions of great consequences. It is a lonely path, but those who follow it rarely mind. Like spiders, they live their lives in happy isolation from their fellows, though they may have contact with other Thrashing Dragons (of this and other sects) in other contexts. It is considered natural to consult with elders over some philosophical or technical question, but they are expected to reveal the answer as a parable or riddle.

The Ten Seasons Sect has an unfortunate reputation as a breeding ground for *akuma*. Abstract, solitary, given to sorcery and study and often presented with nearly insuperable logistical challenges, these vampires are seen as naturally gravitating to the sorts of practice that breed congress with the Yama Kings. Quite a few have been caught in the practice of devilish congress, and so the sect is seen as especially at risk. This may be so, but Ten Season Dragons maintain that the garden of the second sort that can be scrutinized with such ease is by definition corrupt. Regardless, members of this sect

can expect to become thoroughly acquainted with the court security officials, and may have to secretly register their garden with the court.

HOLY PLACES

Members of the Ten Season Sect do not keep temples for gathering together as groups. Individual typically dwell in or near a garden of the first sort — that is, one made up of mundane flora and fauna. Old Man Spider taught the importance of patience in gardening of the second sort, and his lectures urge that the Thrashing Dragon have a more mundane garden to keep him busy and prevent restlessness from ruining his efforts. Every Ten Season Dragon has such a garden, even if it is nothing more than a few potted plants in a cramped apartment. The actual type of garden varies from vampire to vampire — some cultivate flowering gardens, others fruit orchards and make the finest wine in the Middle Kingdom. Some even cultivate vegetables. Those who are able to do so put their gardens on dragon nests, so they can perform their rites in the secluded peace of their own sanctuaries. A Ten Season Dragon's mundane garden is his private place. To trespass in it is a grave insult, and to be invited into it is a great honor.

LEADERS

Old Man Spider still walks the Middle Kingdom, but he has not shown himself for centuries. Subtle as the plague, he tends his garden still, and through his many agents watches over his philosophic offspring, introducing this change or that in their plans, pruning and growing them into a greater thing. When members of the Ten Seasons Sect come across some moment in everyday existence that later leads to enlightenment, they say that Old Man Spider has sent them a message. They pride themselves on spotting such moments, for Old Man Spider has a ghost-light touch, and to sense his actions is to know the thoughts of a saint.

Laughing Falcon is not so subtle. These nights, he lives in Mongolia, tending to and observing the Uighur people. He dispenses advice and is not too difficult to find, but he gives his opinion only to those who visit him in person. Even in the modern era of planes and other forms of fast transit, Mongolia still provides him with an agreeable level of privacy.



TIGER'S CLAWS, DRAGON'S TEETH

*The Perfect Gun exists in the savage state.
The Perfect Gun confers omnipotence.
The Perfect Gun will follow the free tendencies of Desire.
—MC 900 Ft. Jesus, "Dali's Handgun"*

PLAYING THE DRAGON

Roleplaying a Thrashing Dragon can be very difficult. They must be spiritually enlightened while still immersing themselves up to their elbows in the bloody wrack of life. Indeed, that immersion is the gateway to their enlightenment, and those who do not so indulge themselves are either in Dharmic stasis or about to lose their footing on the Road Back and fall into the *chih-mei* state.

An authentic portrayal of this is difficult for people who are constrained to a mortal perspective. As human beings, we have a strong desire to avoid pain, violence, infection and death. Our society and our better judgment both discourage us from aggression and self-destructive acts. A Thrashing Dragon must leave all of that behind. The corpse is a vehicle for enlightenment, and the world is a garden of sensation and a constant and ongoing lesson in natural wisdom. If the Thrashing Dragon is true to her philosophy, she is living her existence in as pure a fashion as possible, trying to

expose herself to life and understand the nature of creation as a whole. To die, to sicken and suffer, to know the guilt of having hungrily devoured what one most loves — these are not things to be avoided, but opportunities for growth and enlightenment. A Thrashing Dragon must not flee from them, but must delve into these experiences, savoring them and seeking to find the wisdom of a world in which such things are the natural order.

As a person playing a Thrashing Dragon, you're likely to find all this to be uncomfortable. Your instincts are telling you the character's actions are ethically and morally wrong. To a certain extent, that's the nature of the beast. Much of *Kindred of the East's* appeal is the vicarious thrill of acting on the Kuei-jin's rigorous but monstrous ethics, and knowing the character is unquestionably right in doing something the player knows is absolutely wrong. If it didn't make you at least a little uncomfortable, it wouldn't be as much fun to play. What follows are some suggestions to make portraying a Thrashing Dragon easier.

REMEMBER, YOU AREN'T THERE YET

A large part of this book describes what a Thrashing Dragon does and does not do, how she perceives the world and interacts with it. Keep in mind that this is how an ideal member of the Dharma (or specific sect) sees the world. Not every member of a sect is going to agree with the catechism. Not every disciple is going to understand and accept all the tenets of the Dharma. If your character really understood, agreed with and had absorbed all the tenets of the Dharma, you wouldn't need to play her, because she'd be a bodhisattva.

Don't look at the list of Dharmic tenets to see what your character believes. Instead, make up your character as a person, wicked enough to take the Second Breath. Then, after you know her as an individual, consider how she sees each of the Dharma's tenets. Practicing a Dharma isn't just a matter of learning the Six Harmonious Prayers and always brushing your teeth. It is the difficult task of accepting at a fundamental level a system of totally inhuman morality and religious thought. It isn't easy, and *all* Thrashing Dragons are wracked by doubts and questions about their practice. Even today, the Thousand Crane Mother must occasionally clarify points of the faith. Consider that when a Thrashing Dragon reaches Dharma 4 and becomes a jina, she has just at that point abandoned its human illusions and biases — which can take decades. A mandarin must achieve more enlightenment than a human could in a mortal lifetime to become one of the governors of Kuei-jin society. Learning to be good at their Dharma is something that every Kuei-jin must learn, but for Thrashing Dragons, this is often a very emotional and challenging time. Most Dharmas tutor young Kuei-jin extensively, even after the Fire and Water Test. This is often not the case for Thrashing Dragons, especially Passion Bloodflowers and Laughing Rainbows. These vampires usually cast young Dragons into the world for a number of years to find themselves before instructing them any further. This allows the weeding effects of nature to take place, culling the weak disciples. Most Thrashing Dragon characters are just entering or in the midst of this period of acclimation to the vampiric state. Don't just ignore this; to be a Thrashing Dragon, especially a young Thrashing Dragon, is to be forever at odds with the undead state.

REMEMBER, THIS IS ENLIGHTENMENT

Your character is striving for something more, not something less, than what she is. Thrashing Dragons are not turning into terrible monsters — that's the Howl of the Devil-Tiger. Instead, they are becoming incarnate storms, fearsome and hungry tempests of natural wisdom. They do not simply indulge in animal instincts, but rather they study and practice the benefits and wisdom those instincts bring. As a mandarin, a Thrashing Dragon knows more of the universe and her place in it than any mortal saint. Her fearsome

demeanor follows naturally from this understanding, and not the other way around. Don't portray your character being bestial; portray her instead as someone who wears a beast's mask in an attempt to learn a very true and important lesson.

IT'S JUST YOUR BODY

On their quest for enlightenment, Thrashing Dragons have the deck loaded against them in many ways. They're cut off from the natural world, from even the most basic breathing functions, and all their sensations are dimmed by the grave. Yet for all that this is a burden, the corpse does give the vampire a very important advantage over mortals. The corpse cannot be slain by poison or drug overdose. The Kuei-jin need not fear maiming or death by illness. Even a Kuei-jin whose body has been horribly deformed by arthritis or elephantiasis need only give their corpse the Little Death and have her *wu*-mates burn the body to ashes. She springs from the ashes as if fresh from the grave, and can thus tolerate the most serious and protracted of malformations, the most terrible illnesses and the most virulent cancers. She can appreciate the pain and suffering of the terminally ill, and then put those aside and seek other wisdom.

Mortals do not have the choice of undertaking such actions, and it greatly expands the Thrashing Dragon's choices of behavior. Thrashing Dragons, more keenly than any other Kuei-jin, feel that their physical body is nothing but a ceremonial vessel through which their soul travels toward *dah*. At the same time, however, the Thrashing Dragons emphasize that the corpse must be seen as a curse, and not a blessing. It can be utilized, but the Thrashing Dragon should not become indolent and fixated on the corpse's few good points, and thus attach herself to her undead existence.

The ability and need to utilize the Kuei-jin's undead state provides Dharmic conflict with the need to avoid fixating on the virtues of the corpse. This is a particularly important struggle, because undue reliance upon the corpse to provide extreme sensation is a sure ticket to numbness. It is easy to become jaded by even the most powerful sensations and situations when one experiences them frequently. The Thrashing Dragons are the Cathayans most aware of their undead state. They use it and loathe it, but never for a moment do they forget it.

THERE'S MORE TO LIFE THAN DRUGS AND SEX

An intense existence does not necessarily mean a chemically enhanced one marked by frequent bouts of gunplay and sexual intercourse. That is certainly one sort of intense life, but there are many ways to experience the world, even from a purely human frame of reference. The life of a wastrel or prostitute may be an interesting and educational one, but what about the path of an ascetic monk? Of a father trying to raise a family on limited means? What of the existence of a

soldier or a vagabond or a performer? All of them are intense and challenging existences, and a Thrashing Dragon who experiences life only through excess will soon run out of experiences.

Keep in mind that the character's teachers have doubtless made this point repeatedly. One of the major problems that confronts a Thrashing Dragon is exhausting the world's sensual prospects early in her existence, leaving her without visceral involvement in creation for the latter parts of the Road Back. Elders in the Dharma are often quite anxious to remind young Kuei-jin to avoid doing too much too soon, and even though these warnings rarely have the intended effect, they do at least make Dragons aware of the need for more complex sorts of study.

BE CAREFUL

Your character is keenly aware, perhaps more than a member of any other Dharma, that he is an unnatural predator. Thrashing Dragons, and indeed all Kuei-jin, are hungry ghosts. Punished for evil deeds, they prey on the blood of the world and derive an alien enlightenment from nature's struggles. It is perfectly understandable for the inhabitants of sunlit existence to attempt to hunt and destroy them. Thrashing Dragons must therefore be cunning predators. A Thrashing Dragon must always be meticulous when choosing victims. Choose those who will find it romantic or even sexually stimulating for your victims. Alternately, choose those who will not be missed, and consume them totally. As a Thrashing Dragon, you are much less reluctant to consume your prey than a vampire of another Dharma — do it. Nature does not give creatures abilities which it does not desire them to exercise. For particularly messy experiments, always make sure you have another trustworthy Kuei-jin there to act as security should anything go wrong. In addition, make sure to conduct them in places that cannot be traced back to you — use construction sites, abandoned buildings, flats whose inhabitants are on vacation. If the situation is particularly unpleasant, burn the area to make investigation more difficult, and be sure to inform your court, so they can stifle the authorities' response to the situation.

TRICKS OF THE HUNGRY DEAD

The power of the Kuei-jin flows from their spiritual abilities, but not every vampire follows the same path. Like the followers of all the Dharmas, those who pursue the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon have their own preferences.

CHI DISCIPLINES

Chi Disciplines are those most commonly practiced by members of the Thrashing Dragon Dharma. By manipulating the very energies of reality, the Dragons can act as its gardeners in a way no mortal ever could attempt.

LEARNING ALTERNATE TECHNIQUES

To learn an alternate technique for a Discipline, the Kuei-jin must already have the appropriate Discipline level and find a tutor who knows the technique. The player must pay the experience cost as if they were learning the Discipline at that level again. Characters cannot start play with alternate techniques, but can gain them from learning the Discipline in-game if their instructor teaches them.

Example: Suro has mastered the Yang Prana. He wishes to learn the Eightfold Yang Barrier to supplement the Eightfold Yang Mantle. If he can find a tutor, he will have to spend 24 experience points to learn it, just as if he was learning the fourth level of Yang Prana again.

TAPESTRY

Tapestry is a fairly common art among Thrashing Dragons. Members of the Thousand-Faced Thunder and Ten Seasons sects use it in their spirit bindings, while many other Dragons appreciate its ability to give good joss, manipulate the Wall, and allow the Kuei-jin to Ride the Dragon. In addition, the skill of Chi-shaping is also useful for the practice of the Dragon Tear, and so Thrashing Dragons who learn one Discipline have an incentive to learn both.

EQUILIBRIUM

Many Dragons at least study the basics of Equilibrium because it enables the vampire to manipulate Chi, the very essence of life itself. Learning this — the nature of the breath and the ebb and flow of Yang and Yin — is a potent boost to a Thrashing Dragon's understanding of her Dharma. In addition, a vampire who has mastered this ability is able to inflict health or harm upon their targets.

YANG PRANA

This Discipline, more than any other, is the province of Thrashing Dragons. With it, a Kuei-jin can attune her body to the sway of Yang energy. Lesser mastery allows the vampire to exploit Yang's energetic state, move quickly and charge weapons — and herself — with Yang auras. With greater mastery comes the ability to perform the so-called Dragon Dance, a powerful martial arts form that allows the vampire to whirl through impossibly fluid acrobatics and strike fatal blows with her bare hands. Further mastery allows the Kuei-jin to concentrate her aura and cloak herself in illusion, or even to become partially spiritualized, suspending herself halfway between the world of the living and the world of flesh, thus allowing her to walk the day-lit world with impunity and even become visible to mortals in the daytime. Although the vampire is atomized — a phantom unable to interact



physically with the world around him — he can still make brief appearances or ghostly visitations. Spiritual disciplines like Obligation and Cultivation work quite well under these circumstances, and Thrashing Dragons often exploit this.

ANIMAL FORM DRAGON DANCE (YANG PRANA ••••)

By observing wild animals, some Thrashing Dragons learn to incorporate their natural combat techniques into the Dragon Dance. Most Thrashing Dragons simply fight in stance, but some actually use Flesh Shintai to actually mimic the physical form of the chosen animal. This is particularly grotesque for Thrashing Dragons whose martial forms combine the habits of several animals.

System: The power has the effects of the normal Dragon Dance, plus several additional benefits. As in the normal Dragon Dance, the character strikes for lethal damage, subtracts one from the difficulty of attack and damage rolls, is not subject to wound penalties and may burn Yang Chi for extra actions or an initiative bonus in the next turn as if through use of the Principle of Motion.

However, the character's animal stance gives his attacks a bestial ferocity — the damage of the Kuei-jin's Brawl, Martial Arts and Melee attacks increases by 2. In

addition, the vampire's animal reflexes and natural grace imbue him with swiftness to react quickly to threats; the player adds the character's permanent Yang rating to initiative each turn the Animal Form Dragon Dance is active after the first. This bonus is in addition to any bonuses the vampire gains from burning Yang Chi for the Dragon Dance's Principle of Motion-like effect. Kuei-jin who use a Shintai of some sort to enhance their physical form with animal characteristics should apply the bonuses from those Disciplines as normal.

Like the Dragon Dance, it costs one point of Yang Chi per turn to activate the Animal Form Dragon Dance.

EIGHTFOLD YANG BARRIER (YANG PRANA ••••)

The Eightfold Yang Mantle allows the vampire to change her shape into something totally alien. Through their mastery of Flesh Shintai, however, many Thrashing Dragons learn better ways to change shape, and have no use of illusions. Others appreciate the value of power in a confrontation more than illusion, and develop their abilities likewise. Others simply learn every possible branch of the Yang Prana in search of greater Dharmic understanding. Regardless, some Thrashing Dragons learn the Eightfold Yang Barrier in place of the Mantle.

Through the use of this power, the vampire concentrates her Yang-charged aura into a crackling energy field around herself. Blows struck against her are softened or even blocked by her aura.

System: The vampire must spend a turn in concentration while gathering her aura. At the end of the turn, the aura surrounds her as a glittering scarlet cloak, protecting her from harm. Whenever the vampire is struck by an attack, she rolls her permanent Yang rating. If the weapon or attack is metal, the difficulty is 4. If the attack is made by a nonmetallic item, the difficulty is 6. If the attack was made by a source of aggravated damage, the difficulty is 8. If this roll is successful, the vampire adds her dots of Yang Prana to her soak total against that attack. It costs three points of Yang Chi and one point of Willpower to activate this power for a scene.

YIN PRANA

The Yin Prana is studied occasionally by Thrashing Dragons. Many who learn it do so as a way to learn more about the Chi energy that opposes their own drives. Others use the Shrouded Moon to facilitate stealth, or to harmlessly dissipate excess Yin Chi that builds up in their bodies. Few Thrashing Dragons learn this Discipline above its first rank, however.

SHINTAI

Thrashing Dragons overwhelmingly congregate in just two of the Shintai — Jade and Flesh. While the other Shintai are not actually banned from Dharmic study, they are seen as generally inferior — distractions from the path.

BLOOD SHINTAI

Very few Thrashing Dragons learn the Blood Shintai. Blood is an inherently unclean substance, and tainted with death. Very few Thrashing Dragons are willing to venerate the corpse by exploiting its most essential element for the purposes of the power.

BONE SHINTAI

Like Blood Shintai, Bone Shintai is generally avoided by Thrashing Dragons. Though not so unclean as blood, the corpse-shape is still quite distasteful. There are two groups of Thrashing Dragons who commonly use this shintai. The first group are Fire-Dancing Princes, including many *penangallan*, who commonly master the first level of this discipline. Members of this group scoff at their fellows, who look unfavorably upon the Corpse Skin for moral reasons. What thing in nature eschews a virtue, they ask? Does the wolf refuse to bite because the taste of blood offends it? Does the tiger refuse to claw? This serves well enough to justify the study to their warrior hearts, but carries little weight with the Dharma as a whole.

The other type of Thrashing Dragons who pursue this shintai are the Bone-Eating Dragons of the western direction. These vampires learn the full course of the Discipline, even mastering the *ch'ing shih* form. Typically victims of corpse-kissing fever, most of these Kuei-jin have enough Yin from feeding on the dead and dying to easily afford the high cost of negative energy required to utilize this powerful combat style.

FLESH SHINTAI

Thrashing Dragons originally pursued paths of the Wood Shintai that allowed them to create life to study, or slowly “grow” themselves into new shapes. As the Wood Shintai became dark and more concerned with the vampire's own body at the end of the Fourth Age, many members of the Dharma delayed the use of the spiritually impure Flesh Shintai for as long as possible. Finally, in 1500, Thousand Crane Mother spoke to the Dharma, specifically permitting the use of corpse-related shintai. It was the spirit of the use which mattered, she asserted. So long as they were used for the purpose of spiritual research, and the vampire took no undue pleasure in its undead state, then employing such shintai was permissible. Black Earth Boy and Old Man Spider both acknowledged this as truth.

GENDER CHANGE (FLESH SHINTAI •••)

Particularly in the Golden Courts, it is important for vampires who want to become *langsuir* to be able to assume the female gender quickly. While a *langsuir* can survive as a transvestite, such vampires are often seen as second-class members of the Passion Bloodflower sect. In addition, such transvestites cannot reproduce.

Using this power, a vampire can change its gender with minimal alteration and remain recognizable to acquaintances. Male vampires grow breasts and lose any facial hair, while female vampires lose their breasts. The vampire's frame also changes slightly, and vampires who shift to a female form gain wider hips and narrowed shoulders (and vice versa). The vampire now has a functional set of the appropriate sort of genitalia, and can engage in all the appropriate sex acts. If the vampire is permanently Yang imbalanced and male, he is able to impregnate females; if female, she is able to become pregnant.

System: The player spends 3 points of Yang Chi and 1 point of Willpower, and the vampire must concentrate for three turns while the changes take place. Disrupting the vampire's concentration can leave it a bloody and terrifying mess, a grotesque monster trapped between sexes, until it has a chance to use the power again. This power governs only the ability to change between the two regular genders. Vampires who wish to experiment with alternate “equipment” or with combining genders will have to master the Ten Thousand Forms technique.

FLESH SHINTAI AND REPRODUCTION

Since Flesh Shintai tends to “make do” with the flesh the Dragon already possesses, twisting it into a new shape rather than creating new flesh, it is natural to wonder if Kuei-jin who use it to become female (and are permanently Yang imbalanced) can actually reproduce successfully. After all, their internal organs and flesh have only deformed into an approximation of a reproductive tract. The answer is yes. Such vampires can reproduce. The mechanical aspects of such a pregnancy would give a normal gynecologist nightmares — the reproductive tract is typically made out of borrowed large intestine and reconfigured muscles — but it can carry a baby comfortably to term just as easily as a normal mortal woman can.

It should be noted that alleging that a *penanggalan* is a male masquerading as a female is an unpardonable offense in the Golden Courts. Visitors would be wise to assume that everyone and everything they meet is indeed the gender he or she appears to be in public, regardless of what the “truth” may be. The public image and the attitude are far more important than the truth — important enough to kill or die for.

FUR AND FANGS (FLESH SHINTAI •••••)

Some Thrashing Dragons develop animal-inspired combat styles. Some of these vampires simply emulate an animal's patterns of movement and responses to attack, but some vampires actually go so far as to develop the ability to emulate some of the animal's physical characteristics. Thrashing Dragons who practice the Tiger Style martial arts often grow terrible claws, while those who practice Monkey Style are known for their amazing flexibility.

System: The character concentrates for two turns and the player spends two points of Yang Chi. She then rolls her Perception + Athletics, with a difficulty of 6. If the roll succeeds, she adds the character's permanent Yang to the number of successes she achieved in the roll. She may spend one of these points to add 1 to the character's initiative, Dodge Ability or to the damage of her unarmed attacks. She may spend two of these points to increase the character's soak by 1. If they were not so previously, all the character's unarmed attacks are now lethal.

This transformation lasts until the end of the scene. Keep in mind that Flesh Shintai is not an attractive art. Vampires who have used this ability on themselves are not silky and attractive hybrids of man and animal. Their bodies are twisted and rudely reshaped; red, torn flesh marks where the new-grown animal features tear through the vampire's flesh. Most Thrashing Dragons use this ability in conjunction with the Yang Prana power Animal Form Dragon Dance.

THOUSAND LICE SPIES (FLESH SHINTAI •••••)

Mastered by the Ten Seasons sect, this power is not unlike the ability Pelesit, but in a much more advanced and subtle form. The Kuei-jin sheds tens of thousands of tiny mites, each far smaller than a pinhead, and uses them to explore the area where they were dispersed. Kuei-jin can see through the eyes of these mites at any range, and often use them to “see with ten eyes” — a Ten Seasons term for maintaining awareness of many locations and events at once.

System: The player spends a point of Yang Chi and the vampire shakes vigorously, loosing a cloud of dust from her person. In reality, these are tiny creatures, small as grains of dust and able to float on the wind. It takes a few minutes for the mites to settle and orient themselves. The vampire can see through the eyes of all these mites simultaneously, and nothing in a room that she has dusted is hidden from her; it is as if she herself could perceive it. The mites themselves do not have perception powers, but the vampire can exert her full range of perceptions — even magically enhanced ones — through the dust. Anyone hiding in the room is discovered. Any hidden objects are found unless sealed away tightly enough that a mite can't discover them. The mites persist for about 48 hours, and then rot — they cannot be fed more Chi to preserve their existence. Bug detectors and other means of detecting electronic surveillance will not detect the mites, but a vampire using Sharpened Senses or Chi Sight will detect them with a successful Perception + Awareness roll. In an open space, the mites cover an area with a radius of 20 feet from the vampire.

Ritual fumigation destroys the mites, as does the Harmonious Shielding of the Guarded Home. For the vampire to see through the eyes of the mites, she must be able to concentrate and there must be a large number of mites together in the area — a single mite is not enough to allow remote sensing. Direct sunlight destroys the Thousand Lice Spies, but they attempt to scuttle out of the light. Those who are being used to watch indoor areas can sense dimly during the day, should the vampire somehow be awake to receive the information.

POLONG (FLESH SHINTAI •••••)

This is a more advanced form of pelesit. Like the pelesit, the polong is a creature created from the vampire's own flesh. Though it can have any overall form the vampire desires, it is always a creature of gristle and raw flesh, and whatever its shape, it cannot pass for natural under even the most cursory glance. Compared to the pelesit, the polong is a more powerful creature. While the creature can act on its own, the vampire can sense through the its eyes and exert Disciplines through the effigy as well. Some Flesh Shintai masters exploit this and use polongs to share both sides of an experience, so that they can study the yin and yang passions of predator



and prey, attacker and victim, ravisher and ravished. This discipline is also favored by the *penanggalan*, who use the polong as a weapon of assassination.

System: A polong is created in fashion similar to a pelesit. The player spends three points of Yang Chi and a point of Willpower, and one or more health levels. The polong detaches itself from the character's body, and has two health levels for every health level the player spent to create it. Also, each health level gives the polong one point each of Strength and Stamina. Polongs have a Dexterity of 3, Mental Attributes of 2, Social Attributes of 1, and a Brawl, Dodge and Athletics of 3. The player can also chose to give the polong points of Yin and Yang Chi, and can transfer as many points of a given type of Chi from the vampire to the creature as the vampire's permanent rating in that Chi Virtue. The vampire can also see through the polong's eyes and otherwise share its senses whenever he desires, and can control it as if it were an extension of his body.

When the vampire is controlling the polong, the player uses the vampire's Abilities and Mental Attributes and the polong's Physical and Social Attributes. The vampire can use his full range of sensory abilities and all his Disciplines through the polong, although he can't make the creature create yet more polongs from itself. It can create pelesits, but the vampire cannot control these directly. Controlling the polong requires concentration—if the character is performing actions with both bodies simultaneously, the player must split his dice pool, and all actions in both bodies suffer a +1 difficulty penalty. Normally, the vampire assumes a stable posture so that he does not injure himself—typically, this means sitting in the lotus position or on a throne, or reclining on cushions. This latter is favored by masters of the Jade Shintai, who go one step further and levitate their bodies when controlling the polong, so that they are without sensational distractions from their central flesh.

If the vampire uses Disciplines through the polong, it is the Chi invested in the creature that powers the ability. Once the creature exhausts this Chi, it must return to the vampire and consume more Chi. Polongs can also use Chi to heal themselves as if they were normal vampires. A player cannot use Willpower to supplement the polong's actions, and a vampire cannot use powers through the polong that require the expenditure of Willpower. Polongs can soak lethal damage with their Stamina, and these creatures can attack for a base of their Strength in lethal damage if they are given some means to do so—fanged mouths, claws or so forth. Like pelesits, polongs can speak in a shrill voice and the vampire may speak through it as well. Creatures given wings are able to fly, but giving them this endowment costs an additional health level that provides no other benefit. If the polong is destroyed, the vampire must make a wave soul check for one round from the shock.

A vampire who also knows Cleave the Demon (Cultivation ••••) can force her P'o into a polong,

allowing the vampire to use the spirit to motivate the creature. Treat this the same as forcing the vampire's P'o into its body after the gut-mass has separated.

GHOST-FLAME SHINTAI

Like most Kuei-jin other than Devil-Tigers and some *gaki*, the average Thrashing Dragon finds Ghost-Flame Shintai to be dangerous and costly in terms of the Chi expended. The Ghost-Flame Shintai has its aficionados among the Fire Dancing Princes, but most Thrashing Dragons eschew this Discipline. It is fine for war and art but not terribly useful for survival, making it Dharmically unappealing.

JADE SHINTAI

Many Thrashing Dragons practice Jade Shintai for the same reason many of them learn Equilibrium — because the Shintai increases the character's awareness of the natural Chi flows around her. This grants the Thrashing Dragon great insight into life and its rhythms. Indeed, the members of the Passion Bloodflower sect cannot advance to the rank of *penangallan* until they can "dance without their skin." To perform this act, the vampire removes her head, gut mass and genitals through the use of Flesh Shintai and uses Jade Shintai to twirl through the air in intricate ceremonial dances. Most *penangallan* prefer to feed in this form as well, feeling that the purity of feeding as nothing but a mouth and gut brings them close to the true nature of existence in the natural world. Beyond the shintai's use for *penangallan*, the ability to hide within the Earth is an excellent survival tool, and survival is something that Thrashing Dragons understand very well. Finally, the Jade Servant of the August Personage technique is extremely effective when used in conjunction with the Dragon Dance.

DEMON ARTS

The Demon Arts are practiced by all Kuei-jin — the P'o will not allow otherwise. However, some Kuei-jin study these dark arts more extensively. Thrashing Dragons typically eschew these Disciplines, because they are rooted in the corpse and the hungry ghost state.

DEMON SHINTAI

Many Thrashing Dragons know this Discipline because it suited their bestial nature in their *chih-mei* state. Few pursue it very far — while powerful, it lacks flexibility. Thrashing Dragons who wish to change their shape into something more combat-worthy probably already know Flesh Shintai. Those who do not are more likely to pursue esoteric arts like Beast Shintai than give power to the Demon in such a fashion.

BLACK WIND

Few Thrashing Dragons practice Black Wind, primarily because so many study Yang Prana. While the Principle of Motion is considerably less efficient than Black Wind, it isn't nearly as dangerous for the vampire.

Also, mastery of Black Wind requires constant practice and effort, while most Thrashing Dragons naturally master Principle of Motion as they increase their skill in Yang Prana. Those few Dragons who do master this Discipline are typically from the northern court. In the south, there is a stigma attached to the practice of this Discipline, to learn it is to forswear the Yang Prana.

IRON MOUNTAIN

The reluctance of the Thrashing Dragons to learn the primary Kuei-jin defensive techniques of Corpse Skin and Flow Like Blood attracts many to the Iron Mountain Discipline. Fire-Dancing Princes who have learned the Iron Mountain in addition to the Eightfold Yang Barrier are capable of withstanding tremendously damaging attacks without harm.

SOUL ARTS

Like most Kuei-jin, Thrashing Dragons are eager to learn the Soul Arts. These Disciplines grant the vampire control over herself, over other Kuei-jin and over other *shen*.

CULTIVATION

Mostly practiced by Thrashing Dragons of the Golden Courts, this discipline is valuable for the ability it gives practitioners to control their P'o. The *penangallan* and *langsuir* of the south have no time for the antics of the Demon, and keep it tightly chained. Other than these Passion Bloodflowers, however, most Thrashing Dragons avoid Cultivation.

CHI'JU MUH

Like the Devil-Tigers, the Thrashing Dragons frequently learn the art of the Dragon Tear. Yet they learn it for different reasons. While the Devil-Tiger treasure the art's P'o characteristics — insight into the future, ease of spotting enemies, the enslaving bite — Thrashing Dragons learn the Dragon Tear for its Hun principles. Through the use of the Rasa, they gain insight into the patterns of fate and destiny. Through Chi Sight, they can gain an insight into the nature of the entire Tapestry at once. Purification allows them to heal rents in the Tapestry, and those few who learn Spirit-Eating use it to heal those who have been spiritually injured, or else deploy it like the Soul Shackle, to ensure the loyalty of important underlings. To the Thrashing Dragons, Chi'iu Muh is a source of tremendous supernatural insight.

OBLIGATION

Obligation is a powerful Discipline, worthy of respect. Traditionally, only mandarins and jina learned its secrets, but over the last few centuries, it has become commonplace for younger Dragons to learn it as well. Those who deal extensively with the mortal world find it especially useful, and it is most widespread in the Ten Seasons sect. That faith's followers use it extensively while tending their gardens of the second sort.

INTERNALIZE

The focus on the inner world that Internalize espouses is rather antithetical to the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon, and has a reputation for being a crutch for repressed Bone Flowers and Resplendent Cranes. Thrashing Dragons gain focus by following their nature, not by practicing meditation tricks. Most of those in the Dharma who do practice Internalize are courtiers who learn it exclusively for the No Mind ability. A few other Thrashing Dragons learn it to gain insight into the animal condition without risking the Way Forward and descent into the *chih-mei* state.

NEW RITUALS

Kuei-jin use ritual magic, not just for sorcery, but to strengthen their own directions and decisions. What follow are rituals particular to the Thrashing Dragon faith. Some are known to Kuei-jin outside the Dharma, but most are of little interest to those who are not on its path. Others are the jealously guarded secrets of particular sects and cults. Any outsiders known to possess such knowledge live in fear for their continued existence, and even members of the Dharma's other sects can be suspect.

Those Kuei-jin who know these rituals derive great power from them, and teaching them would dilute that power. Even those Wan Kuei who are not self-interested still protect the important secrets of their faith. Why should they teach one of the great inner mysteries of their religion to a youngster, who will only spread it to a hundred ears or use it to become an *akuma*? Kuei-jin who wish to become ritualists must show dedication to the field and trustworthy character if they wish to learn much magic.

RITES OF DAILY EXISTENCE

More than any other Kuei-jin, Thrashing Dragons use rituals to commemorate everyday events. If they cannot return energy to creation directly through the natural process, then they can attempt to do so through prayers and offerings. In so doing, they give thanks for the process by which they sustain themselves and grow in enlightenment while clinging like ticks to the underside of life. Indeed, the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon is itself a ritual, the great shaking saraband of existence joining one instant to the next, and drawing the world through its countless motions. A Thrashing Dragon must strive to make each of the rituals she performs just a smaller part of the world's own great ritual. When this is so, and the Thrashing Dragon's spirit sways flawlessly to the ferocious harmony of nature, she achieves the bodhisattva state and reaches the end of her road back. The following three rites are ritual acknowledgements of important happenings, rather than magical entreaties.

THE GREATEST OF RITUALS

The greatest Thrashing Dragon ritual was Thousand Crane Mother's recitation of the sutra known as the Scattering of the Seeds. When she sat down with her disciples and revealed the tenets of the Dharma in an abstract fashion, she gave of herself to every Thrashing Dragon who followed. To them, she gave not just the path to enlightenment, but the freedom to find their own path while still treading the road of Dharma. As the mother tiger gives milk to her cubs, so the Thousand Crane Mother shared her enlightenment. This is the greatest magical act that any member of the Dharma has yet performed.

GREETING THE SUN (LEVEL 1 RITE)

To the Thrashing Dragons, there is no sight more holy than the face of the sun. The eternal symbol of the August Personage of Jade's infinite benevolence, the sun brings life and light to the world. Without its radiance, the Tapestry would weaken and die. Before retiring for the day, every faithful Thrashing Dragon performs a simple ritual to welcome the sun back to the world. Of course, this "simple" ritual involves exposing oneself to the sun's destructive power, which goes a long way toward proving the dedication of a true Thrashing Dragon.

System: To Greet the Sun, the Thrashing Dragon assumes a meditative posture, facing east, and begins to center himself as the sky lightens. The goal is to reach a state of inner harmony and empty mind as the sun breaks the horizon, so that the glory of the Eye of Heaven can be appreciated by a consciousness uncluttered by worldly concerns and worries. Many Thrashing Dragons attempt to remain in this posture until the sun has risen fully above the horizon, but it is permitted for the vampire to adjourn to its lair after three mortal heartbeats. Bone-Eating Dragons who are permanently Yin-imbalanced often suffer spiritual difficulties because of their inability to perform this important ritual. This ritual has no direct effects, but Thrashing Dragons often experience *dên* while reflecting on recent experiences as a prelude to their meditation.

PRAYER FOR TAKING LIFE (LEVEL 1 RITE)

To be a hungry ghost is to be abhorrent. The Kuei-jin drink life and give nothing back to the Great Cycle. This state is tolerable only because it has been decreed by Heaven as punishment. When a Thrashing Dragon consumes a creature to sustain itself, it has incurred a debt to the world as a whole that it can never repay. In acknowledgement of this debt, the vampire offers prayers to the spirit of the fallen creature and to Heaven, which has allowed the vampire to continue its existence, even at such a great price to creation.

System: The rite must be performed within three days of the vampire killing a mortal. If the Thrashing Dragon cannot perform the ritual herself, she must have another vampire who is able to do so perform it in her place. The ritual itself is a simple one, consisting of an hour-long prayer followed by an offering of food, wine and paper goods to the spirit of the deceased, and by burning bundles of prayer strips entreating Heaven to grant special dispensation to the victim.

There are no direct mechanical benefits to performing this ritual. However, vampires who are lax in their duty towards their victims may incur a moment of blindness due to their lack of respect. It bears noting again that though they offer prayers to the spirits of their victims, Thrashing Dragons show little compunction for feeding. Indeed, they are more prone to kill their prey than any other sort of Kuei-jin, because they see it as their place in the cycle to do so.

RITUAL FOR GIVING BIRTH (LEVEL 1 RITE)

Thrashing Dragons, particularly those of the Passion Bloodflower sect, agree that it is a great gift from Heaven that they can bring new life into the world. Though they do not respire or give back to the world in any normal way, the Thrashing Dragons can at least reproduce. Though their offspring are still half-dead creatures, they are also half-living, more than the Kuei-jin herself. So highly do the *penangallan* value this experience that none may enter their ranks until she has given birth.

System: This ritual is practiced as the Kuei-jin gives birth to a dhampyr, and is a celebration of the event. The vampire meditates on the birthing pains, using them as a reminder of the pain of Yomi. She reflects also on the world's harsh beauty; at the heart of this most wondrous event there is agony, and the young enter the world screaming and covered in blood. Thus is the nature of life illustrated. This ritual has no direct mechanical effect, but many Thrashing Dragons experience *dên* during the process of giving birth — an event made more likely by the use of this ritual.

RISES OF SORCEROUS INTENT

Though the Thrashing Dragons are creatures of ritual action, they do not limit themselves exclusively to ritualizing daily behavior — many of their rites have great occult power. The following rites are unique to the Dharma, and most are protected as secrets of the faith. They are taught only to trusted members of the sect.

THE SCARLET SILK LEASH OF YANG SPIRIT BINDING (LEVEL 3 RITE)

The Thrashing Dragons of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect often have congress with spirits and elementals. These vampires live in close contact with the urban spirit courts, and act as scourges of these places, consuming corrupted or negligent spirits. These Kuei-jin often exert their mastery over lesser spirits of

the technological domain — little elementals of data, atomic power and honeycomb composites. They sometimes bind these creatures for use in talismans, which requires this ritual and the ritual Fabrication of the Elemental Instrument as well. Other times, they use them as valets, servants and guards, and such servitude requires only this rite.

A sorcerer who uses this ritual can be sure of her servants' loyalty. Spirits who are held by it are rendered tame and faithful, executing the sorcerer's orders to the best of their ability. They may fail or make mistakes, but they will not intentionally disobey the magician's commands. The ritualist's command is a very real thing. It cannot simply be brushed aside, even by the spirit's superiors, for its power is rooted in the same source as the power of those superiors. A spirit of less than 90 power is unlikely to be able to free the bound spirit from the ritualist's control or bind the fettered spirit to itself.

System: Placing the leash upon a spirit is a fairly complex ritual, and cannot be carried out without some preparation. This includes a lit brazier and a number of ceremonial objects (bells, censers, etc.), so using the ritual as a defense against hostile spirits is impossible — the Kuei-jin is unlikely to be able to tap his spirit-subjugating gong at the proper tempo when under attack by the spirit's charms. Likewise, unless the Kuei-jin has some means of forcing the spirit to hold still (typically the Tapestry power Chi-shaping), it can be problematic to leash a spirit that is intelligent enough to recognize what is happening and leave the area. This is, in any case, an act of questionable wisdom, since spirits intelligent enough to recognize the ritual are also intelligent enough to harbor hard feelings over their bindings.

Kuei-jin must be able to sense the spirit as well as immobilize it. This is done usually through the vampire's Lifesight or the Chi'iu Muh power Chi Sight, but any other means of sensing the Yang Mirror Lands works, so long as they are at least as precise as vision.

Typically, the Kuei-jin enters an area of the Middle Kingdom opposite the area of Yang Mirror Lands where the spirit to be bound is located. After immobilizing the spirit, she begins placing the leash, which takes about thirty minutes. While the rite can be performed in the outdoors, it is obviously occult in nature, involving burning incense, jade chimes, complex prayers and intricate magical diagrams. For this reason, it is generally done in private.

Once the rite is complete, the player makes a Manipulation + Rituals roll (difficulty equal to the local Wall rating, or 4 if actually in the Yang World). If this is successful, the player spends a point of Yang Chi and rolls the character's Manipulation + Occult roll with a difficulty of the spirit's Willpower. Lower the difficulty of this roll by 2 if the spirit has been previously trapped via Chi-shaping. The player can make as many rolls as she scored successes on the initial Manipulation + Rituals roll, at a rate of one per turn, but must spend a point of

Yang Chi for each roll. During the period when the player is making Yang + Occult rolls, the spirit is aware of the ritual's effect and may resist by lashing out at the Kuei-jin. While unintelligent spirits may become agitated by this ritual and attempt to flee, they are not likely to connect the magic with the vampire. Spirits immobilized by Chi-shaping or without combat-oriented charms are essentially helpless. When the player chooses to make no additional Yang + Occult rolls (or runs out of them), the spirit becomes bound to the Kuei-jin's service for a number of lunar months equal to the total successes accumulated on the vampire's Yang + Occult rolls. The Kuei-jin can renew the effects of the leash on a spirit, but must free it for at least the duration of the rite (when the player is making Yang + Occult rolls). During this time, the spirit is likely to attempt to flee or destroy the Kuei-jin — even the stupidest spirits will realize the nature of their master after several months of slavery.

A Kuei-jin can safely control spirits whose total power is equal to or less than her (Yang + Occult) x 20. To control more spirits lessens the vampire's control over the stable as a whole, and the Storyteller should emphasize the increasingly weak control after the sorcerer surpasses the safe limit. When the vampire passes the limit of safe control, compare the Rage of the bound spirits to the Willpower of the sorcerer. For every full 10 points of cumulative power the sorcerer controls beyond her safe limit, subtract 1 from her Willpower for the purposes of the comparison. Any spirits whose Rage is greater than the sorcerer's adjusted Willpower are increasingly free of the magician's control. A spirit whose Rage is only 1 point higher than the sorcerer's adjusted Willpower is occasionally disobedient, one with a 3 point advantage is openly willful, and one with a 5 point lead slips the scarlet silk leash completely. A spirit, particularly one with high Rage, is likely to be poorly disposed to the vampire who enslaved it when its period of slavery lapses.

This ritual cannot be used to bind spirits with a power greater than 40, though there are more powerful versions available to mandarins and bodhisattvas. A botch during the casting of this ritual often has negative consequences, which are left up to the Storyteller to determine.

DONNING THE NECKLACE OF SKULLS (LEVEL 3 RITE)

This dangerous rite is used by the *penangallan* of the Golden Courts before battles and as part of their religious celebrations. One or more vampires can take part — all participants imbibe a powerful hallucinogenic poison and begin dancing. When it is over, the vampires either enter a battle-trance or an orgiastic state, depending on the circumstances — outsiders may find the two states difficult to distinguish. *Penangallan* frequently use this ability to increase their combat power when fighting especially powerful foes, when preparing for duels with other jungle queens, or as part of the bonding orgies they use to reinforce *guanxi* bonds.

System: The dance lasts about an hour, and spreads the poison into every atom of the vampire's being. At the end of the dance, the hallucinogenic effects take hold and the participants' players make Willpower rolls (difficulty 8) to control the hallucinations. It is easier to master the hallucinations caused by the poisons if the vampire is part of a group. Lower the difficulty of the Willpower roll by one, to a minimum of 4, for every other Kuei-jin who takes part. Each vampire in the group must know the ritual.

If the player fails the Willpower roll, the vampire is left paralyzed and helpless in a hallucinatory state. Those whose players succeed enter an ecstatic trance, becoming sharply aware of sensual input. The resulting state is often described as a combination of orgasm and the joy of killing — many *penangallan* have experienced *dên* during their first exposure.

The mechanical effect of this is to grant the vampire a number of combat advantages. The player adds 3 to the vampire's base initiative on all combat rolls, suffers no wound penalties, and gains a number of special Yang points equal to her permanent Yang score plus the number of successes she achieved on her Willpower roll to master the hallucinogen. These "phantom" points of Yang can be used *only* to fuel the Yang Prana arts Principle of Motion or Dragon Dance, and fade when the hallucinogenic poison wears off. A vampire under the effects of this ritual never retreats from combat, cannot use Demon Chi or enter any soul state, and reacts directly and aggressively to anything she perceives as hostile. Vampires affected by the ritual do not attack one another or their allies, and have a preternatural sense for all other *penangallan* involved in the dance — knowing their location and whether they are in danger.

This dangerous ritual can only be safely performed by someone who knows the Dragon Dance (Yang Prana •••) and has survived a rite such as Welcoming the *Penangallan* or Naming the Ancestor. Mortals who ingest the poisons used in this ritual die after hours of terrifying hallucinations. Supernatural beings who ingest the hallucinogens without appropriate psychic reinforcement go into a killing frenzy for the duration, and emerge with a number of derangements equal to (10 - their Willpower). This madness can only be cured through the use of Purification (Chi'iu Muh ••••) or some similarly potent magical curative.

This ritual is also used by Kuei-jin of the Brilliant Embers Devil-Tiger sect.

THE THOUSAND-EYED SORCERER (LEVEL 4 RITE)

Through the use of this rite, the sorcerer binds a multiplicity of tiny Yang spirits to him. The exact number of spirits is irrelevant, for all are so small as to be individually insignificant. Kuei-jin use these spirits to keep an eye on a person or place, and can see through their eyes with concentration.



System: This ritual takes about six hours, and the results last until the next full moon. A Kuei-jin who already has his Thousand Eyes deployed can perform this ritual on the full moon to renew his control over his servants and continue his surveillance without interruption.

For every point of Occult the Kuei-jin possesses, he may control enough spirits to watch one target. The target can be a person, place or object, but the sorcerer must carry the spirits with him until he “attaches” them, and they are clearly visible as a horde of tiny spirit-creatures swarming around him. To attach the spirits to a target, the sorcerer must touch it, and make a ritual gesture with the other hand. This is subtle enough that Shrouded Moon (Yin Prana •) conceals it, but any informed person who sees the Kuei-jin knows he has done *something* magical.

Once they have been attached, the spirits bound by the Thousand-Eyed Sorcerer rite are very subtle — they can only be seen with spirit sight or from the Yang World, and even then the player must make a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 7) for the character to spot the spirits. Observers muse score at least 3 successes on the Occult roll to realize that the spirits are part of some sort of deliberate surveillance, if they’re not familiar with or expecting this ritual. The spirits have a Power, P’o, Hun and Willpower of 1, and are stopped by any wards. Spirits

bound with this ritual do not count against the maximum Power the magician can control using the Scarlet Silk Leash.

FABRICATION OF THE ELEMENTAL INSTRUMENT (LEVEL 4 RITE)

Thrashing Dragons, particularly those of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect, frequently bind spirits into objects, creating powerful artifacts. This ritual works on all spirits of the Yang world, but it is especially effective if the spirit is the willing servant of the vampire.

Objects to be enchanted must be of fine materials — spirits do not dwell in inferior residences, even if bound into servitude. Items made of poor materials either shatter or result in an enchantment that attacks the wielder. The intelligent sorcerer determines the spirit’s preference before obtaining the receptacle. The most important thing is that the shape of the housing corresponds with the purpose of the spirit — a spirit of erotic love will have little interest in an automatic pistol as a home.

System: The sorcerer must first obtain and prepare the object to be enchanted. The vampire need not prepare it himself, but the being who crafts it must be a master (Crafts 4+). If the item is of technological nature, it must be a one-off or prototype — mass production is

antithetical to talismans. Next, the sorcerer must convince the spirit to enter the object; the process for doing so varies depending on whether the enchanter intends to create a temporary or permanent artifact.

Temporary artifacts — also called lesser elemental instruments — are relatively easy to create. A spirit bound via the Scarlet Silk Leash can be placed into such an object during a four-hour version of this rite. This ritual must be conducted in a dragon nest, and requires the sacrifice of at least one pound of incense and one pound of jade. The player rolls Charisma + Occult (difficulty 6) when the rite is complete. For each success, the artifact may be used once. For lesser elemental instruments which are expended during use (such as ritual powders or strips), each success creates enough for one use. While the items are good until used, in no case can the number of instruments created via the rite exceed the number of lunar months left in the spirit's service.

Spirits do not usually partake in the creation of a permanent magical item, called a greater elemental instrument, even if bound. In order to be forced into such an item, the spirit must either be beaten to 0 Power in spirit combat, or restrained via Chi-shaping. The major exceptions to this are the spirit allies of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect. Kuei-jin with such personal relationships can often bargain with their spirit allies to obtain one of the ally's less powerful servitors to create a permanent item — normally with the provision that the item be destroyed (and the spirit released) after a few years. In either case, the sorcerer must sacrifice some of her own life force to bind the spirit to the item. To create a greater elemental instrument, the Kuei-jin takes part in a nightlong ritual at a dragon nest and the player makes a Charisma + Rituals roll (difficulty 9). If the roll is successful, a greater elemental instrument is the result. If it fails, the vessel shatters, along with any magical constraints holding the spirit. Regardless of the success or failure of the rite, the vampire loses a point of permanent Yang.

The Storyteller and the player should work together to determine the powers of any items created via the use of the Fabrication of the Elemental Instrument. Examples of both lesser and greater elemental instruments are provided later in this chapter. As a general rule, the maximum level of the artifact that a vampire can create from a given spirit is equal to the Power of the spirit divided by 10 and rounded down. A ritualist cannot create an artifact whose level is greater than her Yang score at the beginning of the rite.

WELCOMING THE PENANGALLAN (LEVEL 7 RITE)

Among the vampires of the Golden Courts, the term *penangallan* describes a Kuei-jin who has fulfilled certain prerequisites. These include reaching an advanced state of the enlightenment (Dharma 6),

possessing female sexual characteristics, having borne a child after taking the Second Breath and accumulating enough resources that she need never take another husband to increase her wealth.

But this position is not simply a matter of fulfilling a few preconditions. To become a true *penangallan*, a vampire must survive a grueling initiation similar to the rite used by the mandarins of the Quincunx to crown ancestors. It comprises a series of tests where the prospective *penangallan* demonstrates her Dharmic knowledge, combat skills and ability to endure and overcome pain. If the participant survives, the *penangallan* who tested her celebrate by forcing the hallucinogenic poison used in Donning the Necklace of Skulls between her lips and dragging her through the ritual dance and the subsequent orgy. If she fails, her corpse is left for the Eye of Heaven, and the dust of her remains that are left when night falls are used in the garden of the *penangallan* who sponsored her when she was a *langsuir*.

System: The rite involves three parts: a test of Dharmic knowledge, a test of combat ability and a test of endurance. Each test requires the player to make an extended roll at difficulty 7. In the first, the player rolls Yang three times, in the second, she rolls her Martial Arts, Melee and Firearms once each, and in the third, she rolls her Stamina three times. In each case, she must accumulate five successes in those three rolls for her character to pass the test.

If the vampire fails the first test, she loses face and cannot take the test for five years. If she fails the second test, she suffers the Little Death (including a roll for a possible act of blindness) and cannot take the test for another year. If she fails the third test, she dies the Final Death, and her soul falls into Yomi. If she passes the initiation, the *penangallan* gains several benefits:

- Her maximum Yang Chi is increased by 5.
- The player may spend one more point of Chi per turn than the vampire's Dharma level would normally allow.
- Her attempts to resist wave soul are decreased in difficulty by 2.
- She no longer suffers the increased likelihood of fire soul associated with permanent Yang imbalance.

These abilities last so long as the vampire continues to exist. Like Donning the Necklace of Skulls, this rite is shared with the Brilliant Embers sect of the Devil-Tiger Dharma.

ELEMENTAL INSTRUMENTS

These magical devices produced by the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect have a technological appearance, and typically also feature technological mannerisms and interfaces. In the modern era these are electronic, but transistorized, mechanical and even clockwork versions of some of these items exist. However, beyond the requirements of similarity for sympathetic magic, these objects are not actually functional technology. Their power and effects come purely from the spirits bound within them.

PROSTITUTE-CLEANING OINTMENT

Level One Artifact

The terrible susceptibility to disease of Yang-addled vampires combines poorly with the Thrashing Dragon propensity for physical indulgence. As with the Wine Bottle of Plenty (see below), some Thrashing Dragons have turned to elemental instruments for the answer. This artifact is a scentless, clear and somewhat thick cream made by binding spirits of health into a mundane ointment of some sort. Applied to an individual, it prevents any diseases he has from spreading until the next sunrise, no matter how virulent the disease or how intimate the contact — including drinking the target's blood. This is often useful in circumstances other than sex, such as when a Thrashing Dragon must go out in public while she is herself infected with some disease.

Each dot of the Artifact Background that a player takes provides her with four uses of the ointment, which is often disguised as a sex lubricant of some sort. Note that this ointment provides only one-way protection; the subject can still contract diseases, she simply cannot spread them.

SERVICE INTERCHANGE TALISMAN

Level One Artifact

Made with the assistance of a spirit of roads and highways, these items are stiff red plastic prayer strips that include one-way pull-through connectors. Once a Service Interchange Talisman is attached to a telephone, cable, gas, water, electricity or other utility connection, the meter will never be shut off. Mortals fail to take note of the undue usage, and meter inspectors simply ignore them. It cannot reconnect a disconnected utility, however. If the Service Interchange Talisman is tampered with or removed, the protection is voided, and the character may be billed or their service terminated. However, this only removes the protection, it does not call specific attention to the situation. It will not be spotted until the next audit or billing cycle. Characters can change or replace the tags if they are careful about their timing.

Service Interchange Talismans are single-use artifacts — they cannot be moved from utility to utility. Taking Service Interchange Talismans as an artifact provides the character with a dozen of them, which is enough to provide full connections to two houses or survival services to a half-dozen.

WINE BOTTLE OF PLENTY

Level One Artifact

It takes a great quantity of intoxicants for a Kuei-jin's corpse-body to feel the effects of a drug. The Wine Bottles of Plenty are the ritualist's answer to this problem: lesser elemental instruments created by binding a spirit of vice into a bottle of wine. From the time the bottle is opened until the next sunrise, the wine inside will not run out unless the bottle is broken or deliberately emptied out. The wine reaches the halfway mark, and then never noticeably descends, no matter how much is consumed or how many people share it.

Originally, this ritual was used primarily with skins or pots of wine, but today it is typically used on bottled wine of the cheapest sort. Versions also exist that provide beer, whiskey, crack cocaine, marijuana, opium, morphine and practically any other drug imaginable. Each dot of this artifact the character takes provides him with five such items, which need not all contain the same drug.

DATA TAP

Level Two Artifact

Data taps are made by binding a spider-spirits into an electronic device of occult design. This device is a rugged black plastic box with a high-resolution monochrome screen, a number of buttons and several I/O ports. The box is plugged into the computer by running a cable from one of the data tap's I/O ports to the computer's keyboard or TTY port, and then plugging a normal computer keyboard into the data tap. The spider spirit in the tap rewrites the machine's interface to accept commands from the character's keyboard. This takes a few seconds for an office worker's computer, minutes or even hours for high-security systems.

Data taps are designed to steal data, and have vast storage capacities. The tap can display most file types via an onboard browser, and has a sophisticated array of code-cracking tools built in. Commercial codes can be cracked in a few hours, while military or high-security coding schemes may take days. The tap has sophisticated status displays for all stages of the operation, and characters with computer skills may enhance the data tap's performance — the player rolls Intelligence + Computer to modify the tap's operating parameters.

SHADY ELECTRIC BANKNOTES

Level Two Artifact

Made by binding spirits of finance and investment into magnetic-stripped plastic cards, these artifacts are typically elaborately decorated, with logos similar to those of real banks. If they are placed into an ATM or run through a debit or credit card reader, they register as providing sufficient funds for the Kuei-jin's withdrawal or purchase. The purchasing store receives payment for the transaction, but no records of the purchase remain. Verification attempts always show the card as valid and identified with whatever address the user provides.

Vampires use these cards to pay for expenses anonymously, and as emergency sources of funds. The power of these finance spirits in the card is not great enough to allow single purchases over the equivalent of \$1,000, or expenses of more than \$5,000 a day. Use of these devices is spiritually obtrusive, and often attracts the attention of the Five Metal Dragons. Characters who use these devices too much may find they no longer work, or that they've become a target for Metal Dragon demon-hunters. Wise Thousand-Faced Thunders use them to pay for moderate, regular expenses, such as rent, or to fund efforts to flee attack or survive the loss of their lair.

CAMOUFLAGE SUIT

Level Three Artifact

These suits are created by trapping a spirit of night and darkness, and are normally patterned after the battle dress of various elite forces, with cargo pockets, rip-resistant fabric, a back brace and armored knee and elbow pads. Most have integral type I or IIb body armor, and all include hoods and CBR facemasks. When the suit is worn, the character can invoke the Yang spirit within it to muffle her scent and her infrared and radar signatures. The suit also blends in with the vampire's surroundings, softening the edges of her outline and making her more difficult to spot. The result is a +2 increase in the difficulty of Alertness or Stealth tests to find the character. The suit does not amplify or enhance more powerful magical stealth effects like Shrouded Moon (Yin Prana •) and White Tiger Corpse (Bone Shintai ••). Camouflage suits are powered by the spirit's energy, which is limited, and which recovers slowly. It costs one Chi per scene to power the suit's effects, and the spirits bound into these suits normally have 10 Chi available for such effects. This Chi returns at the rate of one point per day, but this recovery time is halved at a dragon nest or in the Yang World.

BATON OF MASTERY

Level Four Artifact

These weapons are made by binding a tiger-spirit into a baton. In ancient days, these were made with the spirits of fierce tiger-generals, and the Cathayans of the Thousand-Face Thunder used them to pursue unrighteous spirits through the jungle night. In the modern nights, the tiger-spirits used are typically those who have been pressed into urban duties of some sort — serving as the mascots of some army force or overseeing the depredations of the secret police. Their separation from the wild and their dark duties have changed these beasts. Once, these weapons were made in the shape of ornate sistrums, and struck musical blows at the enemies of righteousness. Now, they are made in the form of slick, black plastic riot batons with steel cores, to provide more fitting homes for their inhabitants.

The artifact drives those that it strikes to panic and submission, in addition to causing the regular damage of a riot baton. The victim's player must make a reflexive P'o roll (difficulty 6) every time the character is struck. Failure sends the vampire into wave soul and causes her to flee. If the target is a mortal, Cainite or other being, the player rolls Courage. The victim enters Röttschreck or simple panic if the roll fails.



ADAPTIONS FOR MIND'S EYE THEATRE

The following are adaptations for some of the Disciplines, rites and artifacts for Thrashing Dragons. The Storyteller has final say on what is permissible in game. Refer to the main text for more complete in-setting descriptions of these abilities.

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 Yang 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.

ANIMAL FORM DRAGON DANCE (SECOND INTERMEDIATE YANG PRANA)

This is an advanced version of the *Dragon Dance* (see *Laws of the East*, page 138) that incorporates techniques observed from the animal world to make the Kuei-jin's battle style even deadlier.

System: The power costs one Yang Trait just like the normal *Dragon Dance* and grants all the same benefits as it (not suffering wound penalties, a free retest on attempts to resist mental domination, etc.). The character's animal stance also gives his attacks a bestial ferocity — the Kuei-jin's brawling, martial arts or melee combat attacks inflict an extra level of damage. In addition, the vampire's animal reflexes and natural grace make him react quickly to threats; his brawl and melee attacks are considered to have the *Speed* special ability (like a knife or nunchaku). This special ability does not work if the character is using a melee weapon but does not have the *Melee Ability* or is using a weapon with a speed-related Negative Trait (such as *Slow*).

EIGHTFOLD YANG BARRIER (SECOND INTERMEDIATE YANG PRANA)

Some Thrashing Dragons learn the *Eightfold Yang Barrier* in place of the illusion-based *Eightfold Yang Mantle*. Through the use of this power, the vampire concentrates her Yang-charged aura into a crackling energy field around her. Blows struck against her are softened or even blocked by her aura.

System: This technique costs two Yang Traits to activate for a scene and grants the vampire extra health levels like armor. The number of health levels of protection the barrier grants depends on the type of attack. The barrier grants three levels against attacks from metallic weapons, two levels against attacks made with non-metallic items, and a single level against sources of aggravated damage. These health levels are the first to absorb any damage, and disappear at the end of the scene if they have not been used.

GENDER CHANGE (FIRST INTERMEDIATE FLESH SHINTAI)

Using this power, a vampire can change his or her gender with minimal alteration and remain recognizable to acquaintances. This is important in the Golden Courts, where being female and able to bear children is an important part of status as a *penangallan*.

System: This power costs three Yang Traits and one Willpower Trait and requires about 15 minutes of concentration. This power governs only the ability to change between the two regular genders. Vampires who wish to experiment with alternate equipment or with combining genders will have to master the *Ten Thousand Forms* technique.

Since such a change is physically impossible (without considerable time and expense), the Gender Changed player is advised to wear clothing that is either nondescript or appropriate to his new gender, as well as a tag that identifies him as looking like the opposite sex. This takes considerable maturity to roleplay in live-action, and should not be used as an opportunity to make other players uncomfortable or to act silly.

FUR AND FANGS (SECOND INTERMEDIATE FLESH SHINTAI)

Some Thrashing Dragons develop animal-inspired combat styles and go so far as to develop the ability to emulate some of the animal's physical characteristics. Thrashing Dragons who practice the Tiger Style martial arts often grow terrible claws, while those who practice Monkey Style are known for their amazing flexibility. Vampires who use this ability, however, are not silky, attractive hybrids of man and animal. Their bodies are twisted and rudely reshaped, and red, torn flesh marks where the new-grown animal features tear through the vampire's flesh.

System: This power costs at least two Yang Traits to activate and lasts for one scene. It makes all the character's hand-to-hand attacks cause lethal dam-

age. In addition, the player can purchase other benefits with the Yang Traits spent to activate *Fur and Fangs*. Benefits must be cleared with a Storyteller and can include:

- Gaining the *Speed* special ability for unarmed attacks (one Yang Trait).
- Gaining extra levels in the *Dodge* Ability (one Yang Trait per level).
- Gain extra *Bruised* health levels (two Yang Traits per health level).

Most Thrashing Dragons use this ability in conjunction with the Yang Prana technique *Animal Form Dragon Dance*.

THOUSAND LICE SPIES (ADVANCED FLESH SHINTAI)

Mastered by the Ten Seasons sect, this power is not unlike the ability *Pelesit*, but in a much advanced and subtle form. The Kuei-jin sheds tens of thousands of tiny mites, each far smaller than a pinhead, and uses them to spy into the area where they were dispersed.

System: This power costs one Yang Trait to activate and requires the vampire to shake off a cloud of mites. The player should inform a Narrator that her vampire has done so and where. The vampire can then leave the area and, simply by concentrating, perceive what transpires in the location where the mites are. She can also use the mites to search the area thoroughly, uncovering anything she can see through normal perception, no matter how well hidden. The mites vanish with the next sunrise. They are not visible to normal means of electronic surveillance, but a vampire with *Chi Sight* or *Sharpened Senses* may spot them with a successful Mental Challenge. Ritual fumigation or the ritual *Harmonious Shielding of the Guarded Home* will destroy them, as will sunlight.

POLONG (ADVANCED FLESH SHINTAI)

This is a more advanced form of a *pelesit*. Like a *pelesit*, the *polong* is a creature created from the vampire's own flesh. While it can act on its own, the vampire can sense through the its eyes and exert Disciplines through the effigy as well.

System: A *polong* is created in fashion similar to a *pelesit*. The player spends three Yang Traits, one Willpower Trait and one or more health levels. For each health level spent, the *polong* has two health levels, three Physical Traits, two Mental Traits and two levels of *Brawl*. *Polongs* can also bite for a level of lethal damage. The vampire can transfer Chi Traits to the *polong* (as many as he has to give if he wishes). He shares his senses with *polong* as if it were an extension of his body, and the creature shares the vampire's Abilities and Mental

Attributes. The vampire can use his full range of sensory abilities and all his Disciplines through the *polong*, although he can't make the creature create yet more *polongs* from itself. It can create *pelesits*, but the vampire cannot control these directly. Controlling the *polong* requires concentration. If the vampire uses Disciplines through the *polong*, it is the Chi Traits invested in the creature that power the ability. Once the creature exhausts this Chi, it must return to the vampire and consume more Chi. *Polongs* can also use Chi to heal themselves as if they were normal vampires. Powers that require the expenditure of Willpower Traits cannot be channeled through the *polong*. Like *pelesits*, *polongs* can speak in a shrill voice and the vampire may speak through it as well. Creatures given wings are able to fly, but giving them this endowment costs an additional health level which provides no other benefit. If the *polong* is destroyed, the vampire must make a wave soul check from the shock.

A *polong* should be represented with a prop card and given to a Narrator if it is sent away from the vampire.

RISES OF DAILY EXISTENCE

More than any other Kuei-jin, Thrashing Dragons use rituals to commemorate everyday events. The following rites have no direct benefits in terms of game rules and do not require the expenditure of Traits. They are, however, part of leading unlife as a Thrashing Dragon and can lead to auspicious occasions.

GREETING THE SUN (BASIC RITE)

To the Thrashing Dragons, there is no sight more holy than the face of the sun. The eternal symbol of the August Personage of Jade's infinite benevolence, the sun brings life and light to the world. Without its radiance, the Tapestry would weaken and die. Before retiring for the day, every faithful Thrashing Dragon performs a simple ritual to welcome the sun back to the world. The vampire assumes a meditative posture, facing east, and begins to center himself as the sky lightens. Many attempt to remain in this posture until the sun has risen fully above the horizon, but it is permitted for the vampire to adjourn to his lair after three mortal heartbeats. Dragons who are permanently Yin-imbalanced are said to suffer from being unable to perform this rite.

PRAYER FOR TAKING LIFE (BASIC RITE)

When a Thrashing Dragon consumes a creature to sustain itself, he has incurred a debt to the world as a whole that he can never repay. In acknowledgement

of this debt, the vampire offers prayers to the spirit of the fallen creature and to Heaven, which has allowed the vampire to continue his existence, even at such a great price to creation. The ritual itself is a simple one, consisting of an hour-long prayer followed by an offering of food, wine and paper goods to the spirit of the deceased, and by burning bundles of prayer strips entreating Heaven to grant special dispensation to the victim. It must be performed within three days of the victim's death. While there is no direct mechanical benefit to performing the ritual, failure to acknowledge a victim's death with this rite may find the vampire suffering moments of blindness at inopportune times due to her lack of respect for creation.

RITE FOR GIVING BIRTH (BASIC RITE)

This ritual is practiced as the Kuei-jin gives birth to a dhampyr, and is a celebration of the event. The vampire meditates on the birthing pains, using them as a reminder of the pain of Yomi. She reflects also on the world's harsh beauty; at the heart of this most wondrous event there is agony, and the young enter the world screaming and covered in blood. Thus is the nature of life illustrated. There is no direct mechanical effect, but a Thrashing Dragon is more likely to experience *dên* during birth if she performs this ritual.

RISES OF SORCEROUS INTENT

The following powerful rites are unique to the Dharma, and most are protected as secrets of the faith. They are taught only to trusted members of the sect.

DONNING THE NECKLACE OF SKULLS (INTERMEDIATE RITE)

This dangerous rite is used by the *penangallan* of the Golden Courts before battles and as part of their religious celebrations. One or more vampires can take part — all participants imbibe a powerful hallucinogenic poison and begin to dance. When it is over, the vampires either enter a battle-trance or an orgiastic state, depending on the circumstances.

System: The dance lasts for about an hour, and every atom of the vampire's being becomes saturated with the poison. At the end of the dance, the hallucinogenic effects take hold and the participants must make Static Willpower Challenges to control the hallucinations. It is easier for a group of vampires to master the hallucinations caused by the poison; each participant gains a free retest for every other participant. Each vampire in the group must know the ritual.

If the player fails the challenge, the vampire is left paralyzed and helpless in a hallucinatory state. Those whose players succeed enter an ecstatic trance, becoming sharply aware of sensual input for the remain-

der of the scene. This grants the vampire a number of combat advantages: The vampire gains an extra action for all hand-to-hand attacks, suffers no wound penalties, and gains a number of special Yang Traits equal to her starting pool of Yang Traits. These "phantom" Yang Traits can be used *only* to fuel the Yang Prana arts *Principle of Motion* or *Dragon Dance*, and fade when the hallucinogenic poison wears off. A vampire under the effects of this ritual never retreats from combat, cannot use Demon Chi or enter any soul state, and reacts directly and aggressively to anything she perceives as hostile. Vampires affected by the ritual do not attack one another or their allies.

This dangerous ritual can only be safely performed by someone who knows the *Dragon Dance* (Intermediate Yang Prana) and has survived a rite such as *Welcoming the Penangallan* or *Naming the Ancestor*. Mortals who ingest the poisons used in this ritual die after hours of terrifying hallucinations. Supernatural beings who ingest the hallucinogens without appropriate psychic reinforcement go into a killing frenzy for the duration, and emerge with a number of derangements equal to (10 - their *Willpower Pool*). This madness can only be cured through the use of *Purification* (Intermediate *Chi'iu Muh*) or some similarly potent magical curative.

This ritual is also used by Kuei-jin of the Brilliant Embers Devil-Tiger sect.

THE SCARLET SILK LEASH OF YANG SPIRIT BINDING (INTERMEDIATE RITE)

The Thrashing Dragons of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect exert their mastery over lesser spirits of the technological domain — little elementals of data, atomic power and honeycomb composites. They sometimes bind these creatures for use in talismans, which requires this ritual and the ritual *Fabrication of the Elemental Instrument* as well. Other times, they use them as valets, servants and guards, and such servitude requires only this rite.

System: Placing the leash upon a spirit is a fairly complex ritual, and cannot be carried out without some preparation. This includes a having lit brazier and a number of ceremonial objects (bells, censers, etc.). Therefore, using the ritual as a defense against hostile spirits is impossible; unless the Kuei-jin has some means of forcing it to hold still (typically the *Tapestry* power *Chi-shaping*), an intelligent spirit may realize what is happening and leave the area.

Kuei-jin must be able to sense the spirit to trap it. Typically, the Kuei-jin enters an area of the Middle Kingdom opposite the area of Yang Mirror Lands where the spirit to be bound is located. After immobilizing the spirit, she begins placing the leash.

This takes 30 minutes of out-of-game time, and is generally done in private. The rite involves many ritual acts such as burning incense and inscribing diagrams, and spending Yang Traits. The player then faces a Mental Challenge against the spirit's Willpower (retest with Occult). If successful, the spirit is bound for a number of lunar months equal to Yang Traits spent during the rite. The Kuei-jin can renew the effects of the leash on a spirit, but must free it for at least the duration of the rite. During this time, the spirit is likely to attempt to flee or destroy the Kuei-jin. This ritual cannot be used to bind individual spirits with a *Power Pool* greater than 40, though there are more powerful versions available to mandarins and bodhisattvas.

A Kuei-jin can safely control spirits whose total *Power Pool* is equal to or less than $20 \times (\text{Yang Traits} + \text{Occult Ability Levels})$. When the vampire passes the limit of safe control, compare the bound spirit's Rage Traits to the sorcerer's Willpower Traits. For every 10 points of cumulative Power the sorcerer controls beyond her safe limit, subtract one Willpower Trait. Any spirits who have more Rage Traits than the sorcerer's adjusted number of Willpower Traits are increasingly free of the magician's control. A spirit who has only one extra Rage Trait is occasionally disobedient, one with three extra Traits is openly willful, and one with five extra traits slips the Scarlet Silk Leash completely.

THE THOUSAND-EYED SORCERER (INTERMEDIATE RITE)

Through the use of this rite, the sorcerer binds a number of tiny Yang spirits to him. The exact number of spirits is irrelevant, for all are so small as to be individually insignificant. Kuei-jin use these spirits to keep tabs on a person or place, and can see through the eyes of these minute spirits with concentration.

System: This ritual takes six hours, and the results last until the next full moon. A Kuei-jin who already has his *Thousand Eyes* deployed can perform this ritual on the full moon to renew his control over his servants and continue his surveillance without interruption.

For every level of Occult the Kuei-jin possesses, he may control enough spirits to watch one target. The target can be a person, place or object, but the sorcerer must carry the spirits with him until he "attaches" them, and they are clearly visible as a horde of tiny spirit-creatures swarming around him. To attach the spirits to a target, the sorcerer must touch the target and make a ritual gesture with the other hand. This is subtle enough that *Shrouded Moon* (Basic Yin Prana) conceals it, but any informed person who witnesses this knows the Kuei-jin has done *something* magical. After they have been attached, the spirits bound by the



Thousand-Eyed Sorcerer rite are very subtle — they can only be detected with spirit sight or seen from the Yang World, and even then the player must make a Static Mental Challenge to spot the spirits.

The spirits have a Power, Rage, Chi and Willpower Pool of 1, and are stopped by any wards. Spirits bound with this ritual do not count against the maximum power the magician can control using the *Scarlet Silk Leash*.

FABRICATION OF THE ELEMENTAL INSTRUMENT (ADVANCED RITE)

Thrashing Dragons, particularly those of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect, frequently bind spirits into objects, creating powerful artifacts. Objects to be enchanted must be constructed of fine materials — spirits will not dwell in inferior residences, even if bound into servitude. The most important thing is that the shape of the housing matches the purpose of the spirit — a spirit of erotic love will have little interest in an automatic pistol as a home.

System: The sorcerer must first obtain and prepare the object to be enchanted. The vampire need not prepare it himself, but whoever who crafts it must be a master (three levels of *Crafts*). Next, the sorcerer must convince the spirit to enter the object, and the process he uses to achieve this depends on whether he intends to create a temporary or permanent artifact. Social Challenges may be necessary for reluctant or recalcitrant spirits.

Temporary artifacts — also called lesser elemental instruments — are relatively easy to create. A spirit bound by the *Scarlet Silk Leash* can be placed into such an object during a version of this rite four hours in length. This ritual must be conducted in a dragon nest, and requires the sacrifice of at least one pound of incense and one pound of jade. After the sacrifices, the player makes a Static Social Challenge (difficulty of eight Traits). The artifact can be used once for a successful challenge and one extra time for each Chi Trait the player spends (he need not spend any to create a single-use item).

Spirits do not usually partake in the creation of a permanent magical item, called a greater elemental instrument, even if bound. In order to be forced into such an item, the spirit must either be beaten to 0 Power in spirit combat or restrained via *Chi-shaping*. Spirit allies of the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect are the exception. In either case, the sorcerer must sacrifice some of her own life-force to bind the spirit to the item. To create a greater elemental instrument, the Kuei-jin takes part in a nightlong ritual at a dragon nest and the player must win two Static Social Challenges (difficulty of nine Traits). If they are both successful, a greater elemental instrument is the result. If it fails, the vessel shatters, as do any magical constraints holding

the spirit. Regardless of the success or failure of the rite, the vampire permanently loses a Yang Trait.

The Storyteller and the player should work together to determine the powers of any items created via the use of the *Fabrication of the Elemental Instrument*. As a general rule, the maximum level of the artifact that a vampire can create from a given spirit is equal to the *Power* of the spirit divided by 10 and rounded down. A ritualist cannot create an artifact with a level greater than her number of Yang Traits at the beginning of the rite.

WELCOMING THE PENANGALLAN (ADVANCED RITE)

To become a true *penangallan*, a vampire must survive a grueling initiation similar to the rite used by the mandarins of the Quincunx to crown ancestors. It comprises a series of tests where the prospective *penangallan* demonstrates her Dharmic knowledge, combat skills and ability to endure and overcome pain. If the participant survives, the *penangallan* who tested her celebrate by forcing the hallucinogenic poison used in *Donning the Necklace of Skulls* between her lips and dragging her through the ritual dance and the subsequent orgy. If she fails, her corpse is left for the Eye of Heaven.

System: The rite involves three parts: a test of Dharmic knowledge, a test of combat ability and a test of endurance. Each test requires the player to pass three Static Challenges. In the first, these are three Yang Challenges; in the second they are Physical Challenges (related to combat — Brawl, Firearms, Martial Arts and Melee are all acceptable grounds for testing); in the third, they are Physical Challenges (these tests are related to Stamina). She must pass all challenges (after appropriate retests, if necessary) to pass the tests.

If the vampire fails the first test, she loses face and cannot take the test for five years. If she fails the second test, she suffers the Little Death (including a test for a possible act of blindness) and cannot take the test for another year. If she fails the third test, she dies the Final Death, and her soul falls into Yomi. If she passes the initiation, the *penangallan* gains several benefits:

- Her maximum number of Yang Traits is increased by 5.
- The player may spend one more Chi Trait per turn than the vampire's Dharma level would normally allow.
- She is one Trait up to resist wave soul.
- She no longer suffers the increased likelihood of fire soul associated with permanent Yang imbalance.

These abilities last so long as the vampire continues to exist. Like *Donning the Necklace of Skulls*, this rite is shared with the Brilliant Embers sect of the Devil-Tiger Dharma.

ELEMENTAL INSTRUMENTS

These magical devices produced by the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect have a technological appearance, and typically also feature technological mannerisms and interfaces. In the modern era these items are electronic, but can also be transistorized, mechanical and even clockwork versions. However, beyond the requirements of similarity for sympathetic magic, these objects are not actually functional technology. Their power and effects come purely from the spirits bound within them.

SERVICE INTERCHANGE TALISMAN

Level One Artifact

Made with the assistance of a spirit of roads and highways, these items are stiff red plastic prayer strips that include one-way pull-through connectors. Once a Service Interchange Talisman is attached to a telephone, cable, gas, water, electricity or other utility connection, the meter will never be shut off. Service Interchange Talismans are single-use artifacts — they cannot be moved from utility to utility. Taking Service Interchange Talisman as a *Magic Artifact* provides the character with a dozen of them, which is enough to provide full connections to two houses or survival services to a half-dozen.

WINE BOTTLE OF PLENTY

Level One Artifact

It takes a great quantity of intoxicants for a Kuei-jin's corpse-body to feel the effects of a drug. The Wine Bottles of Plenty are the ritualist's answer to this problem: lesser elemental instruments created by binding a spirit of vice into a bottle of wine. From the time the bottle is opened until the next sunrise, the wine inside will not run out unless the bottle is broken or deliberately emptied out. Versions that provide beer, whiskey, crack cocaine, marijuana, opium, morphine and practically any other drug imaginable are also available. Each level of *Magic Artifact* taken for this grants the character two bottles, which need not contain the same drug.

DATA TAP

Level Two Artifact

Data taps are made by binding a spider-spirits into an electronic device of occult design. This device is a rugged black plastic box with a high-resolution monochrome screen, a number of buttons and several I/O ports. The box is plugged into the computer by running a cable from one of the data tap's I/O ports to the computer's keyboard or TTY port, and then plugging a normal computer keyboard into the data tap. The spider spirit in the tap rewrites the machine's interface to accept commands from the character's keyboard. This takes a few seconds for an office worker's computer, minutes or even hours for high-security systems.

Data taps are designed to steal data, and have vast storage capacities. The tap can display most file types via an onboard browser, and has a sophisticated array of code-cracking tools built in. Commercial codes can be cracked in a few hours, while military or high-security coding schemes may take days. The tap has sophisticated status displays for all stages of the operation, and characters with computer skills may enhance the data tap's performance by making a Static Mental Challenge to modify the tap's operating parameters.

SHADY ELECTRIC BANKNOTES

Level Two Artifact

Made by binding spirits of finance and investment into magnetic-striped plastic cards, these artifacts are typically elaborately decorated, with logos similar to those of real banks. If they are used in an ATM or run through a debit or credit card reader, they register as providing sufficient funds for the Kuei-jin's withdrawal or purchase. The merchant receives payment for the transaction, but no records of the purchase remain. Verification attempts always show the card as valid and identified with whatever address the user provides. The power of these finance spirits in the card is not great enough to allow single purchases over the equivalent of \$1,000, or expenses of more than \$5,000 a day. Frequent use of these devices is spiritually obtrusive, and often attracts the unwelcome attention of the Five Metal Dragons. Wise Thousand-Faced Thunders use them to pay for regular living expenses like rent, or for emergencies.

CAMOUFLAGE SUIT

Level Three Artifact

These suits are created by trapping a spirit of night and darkness, and are normally fashioned after the battle dress of various elite forces, with cargo pockets, tough, rip-resistant fabric, a back brace and armored knee and elbow pads. Most have integral type I or IIb body armor, and all include hoods and CBR facemasks. When the suit is worn, the character can invoke the Yang spirit within it to gain two extra levels of *Stealth*. These extra levels cannot be used in conjunction with more powerful magical stealth effects like *Shrouded Moon* or *White Tiger Corpse*. Camouflage suits can be used five times a night, each time lasting a full scene.

BATON OF MASTERY

Level Four Artifact

These weapons are made by binding a tiger-spirit into a baton. The artifact drives those that it strikes to panic and submission, in addition to causing the regular damage of a riot baton. The victim must test against wave soul every time she is struck. Cainites test against Röttschreck, and mortals and other beings simply make a Willpower Challenge or flee.





YOUNG LIONS

Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive one; it is man and not materials that counts.

—Mao Zedong, Lecture (1938).

The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon, thanks to the Sowing of the Seeds, can be followed in many different ways. Each Dragon is an individual, seeking her own understanding of nature and the maya. The templates in this section are only a sample of the possibilities available for Dragon characters. Some

are savage seductresses, while others are careful manipulators. All are Green Devils.

Each template is a balanced starting character for **Kindred of the East**. You can use them as inspiration for your own characters, while Storytellers can use them as ready-made contacts, allies or antagonists in their stories.

BLACK WIDOW

Quote: *You seem very... virile. What do you do for a living?*

Prelude: You were just another put-upon woman. You grew up in a culture that expected you to be a sex-object and baby-making machine, preferably with a child-like intellect to educate as a hobby. You were never viewed as a full-fledged person. You wanted more than that, but the truth was, you didn't really know how to get it.

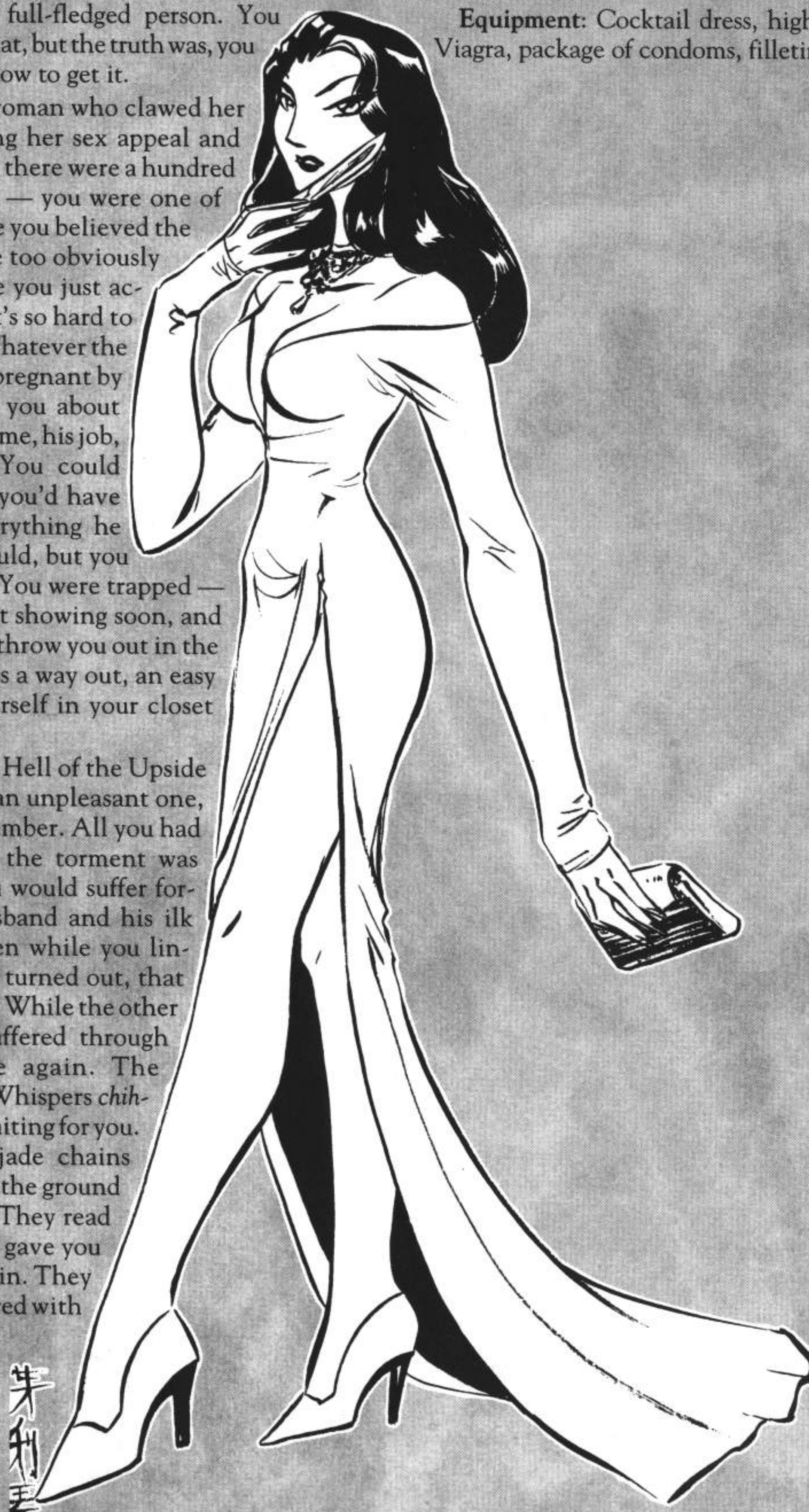
For every one woman who clawed her way to the top using her sex appeal and manipulative skills, there were a hundred that didn't make it — you were one of the hundred. Maybe you believed the wrong boys, or were too obviously desperate, or maybe you just actually fell in love. It's so hard to tell after the fact. Whatever the case, you ended up pregnant by a man who lied to you about everything — his name, his job, his love for you. You could hardly blame him, you'd have wrung him for everything he was worth if you could, but you hated him anyway. You were trapped — the baby would start showing soon, and your parents would throw you out in the street. But there was a way out, an easy way. You hung yourself in your closet one morning.

Your trip to the Hell of the Upside Down Sinners was an unpleasant one, from what you remember. All you had to cling to amidst the torment was outrage — that you would suffer forever, that your husband and his ilk might get to Heaven while you lingered in Hell. As it turned out, that outrage was enough. While the other hundred sinners suffered through eternity, you rose again. The masked Thousand Whispers *chih-mei* catchers were waiting for you. They had you in jade chains before you even left the ground — thwarted again. They read your horoscope and gave you to the *langsuir* to train. They needn't have bothered with reading the stars. This was where you belonged. When you become a jina, it will be nothing

more than a formality, because you were a *langsuir* from the moment you left the grave.

Roleplaying Hints: You desperately want to be a femme fatale. During life, you had neither the proper training to achieve this nor luck to rely on until you learned. Now, in death, you have excellent teachers leading you along your chosen path, and you will fulfill your dream.

Equipment: Cocktail dress, high heels, bottle of Viagra, package of condoms, filleting knife



朱利安



NAME: Black Widow
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Curmudgeon
P'O NATURE: The Demon
DEMEANOR: Architect

BALANCE: Yang
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 ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Martial Arts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Melee ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Performance ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Survival ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Rituals ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Science ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Demon Shintai ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Flesh Shintai ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Obligation ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

BACKGROUNDS

Mentor ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Resources ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Rites ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

RITES

Greeting the Sun
Ritual for Taking Life

YIN CHI



YANG CHI

DHARMA Dance of the Thrashing Dragon

HUN

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

P'O

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

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

IMBALANCE

KUNG FU RAPPER

Quote: (spoken in English with an atrocious Japanese accent) *Fuck you, beotch! I'll put my Shaolin Fist right in your grill, motherfucker! If you got beef with me, bring it on!*

Prelude: Some archetypes just don't fit in certain cultures. Witness, for example, hip-hop gangsters in Japanese culture. But when you were alive, you were proof that no matter how strange the scene, someone would get into it. You grew up the child of a perfectly respectable family — your father was a businessman and your mother stayed at home. But in your heart, you always knew you would be a hard-core gangster, ghetto or no ghetto.

Much to your family's horror, you became a member of a *boso-zoku* biker gang as soon as you were old enough to drive, and being an *oyabun* in the Yakuza was clearly just a few years away. Or at least, that was the theory. The Yakuza were probably a little too stodgy to accept a true playa like yourself into their midst, and you'd have had to shoot your way to the top like Pacino in *Scarface*. Luckily, a tragic motorcycle accident saved you from crushing disillusionment.

And that's what got you out of the mess you woke up in. Be one of 7,000 drones typing away in a cubicle farm in the Wicked City? No way, G! You weren't self-aware enough to know how hopeless it all was and the next thing you knew, you were clawing your way out of the expensive funeral plot your parents had buried you in. It only took a few days for the Thrashing Dragons to grab you and take you back for education. You took well to their training — you'd always done well in school — and after you passed the Fire and Water test, you set out bravely into the unlife. This is, after all, your chance to be a real gangster, and this time, no motorcycle accident is going to stop you.

Roleplaying Hints: As your P'o reminds you, some people think you're a joke. But you're also a supernatural monster with magic powers who kicked his way out of Hell, so

fuck 'em all. If you survive the years to come, maybe you'll grow out of your fixation with American hip-hop culture, but for now, you are talking the talk, walking the walk and God help anyone stupid enough to mock you for it.

Equipment: Gat, nunchucks, Timberlands, the latest urban fashion from America





NAME: Kung Fu Rapper
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Bravo
P'O NATURE: The Demon
DEMEANOR: Bravo

BALANCE: Yang
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 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive ● ● ● ○ ○ ○
Etiquette ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms ● ● ● ○ ○ ○
Martial Arts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Melee ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Performance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Survival ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Rituals ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Science ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

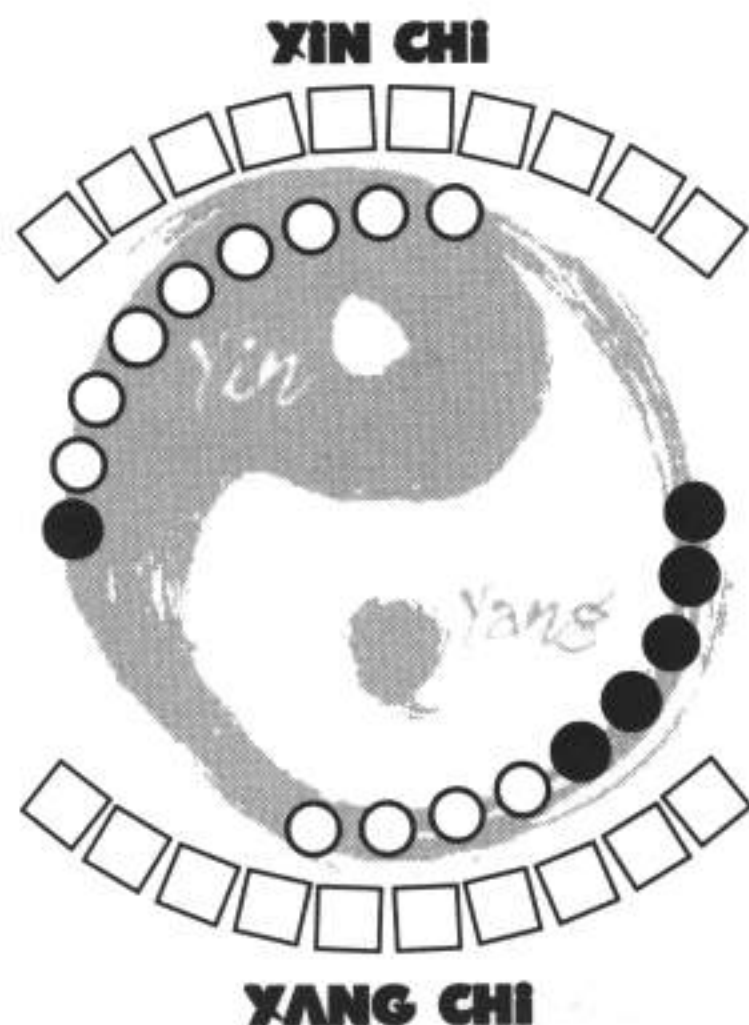
Demon Shintai ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Yang Prana ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

BACKGROUNDS

Allies ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Influence (Underworld) ● ● ● ○ ○ ○
Mentor ● ● ● ○ ○ ○
Resources ● ● ● ● ○ ○
Rites ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

RITES

Greeting the Sun



DHARMA Dance of the Thrashing Dragon!

HUN

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

P'O

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

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

IMBALANCE

MARTIAL ARTIST

Quote: *You want to try my technique? Very well, but it proves nothing.*

Prelude: You were just a kid from a tough neighborhood — nothing special. The product of a broken home, you would have ended up in a gang, or working some dead-end job, or just bumming around drunk and shiftless like your old man. You got into martial arts through one of those in-school demonstrations. You'd been having some... problems, and the teachers suggested it to your mom as a good way to instill discipline in you.

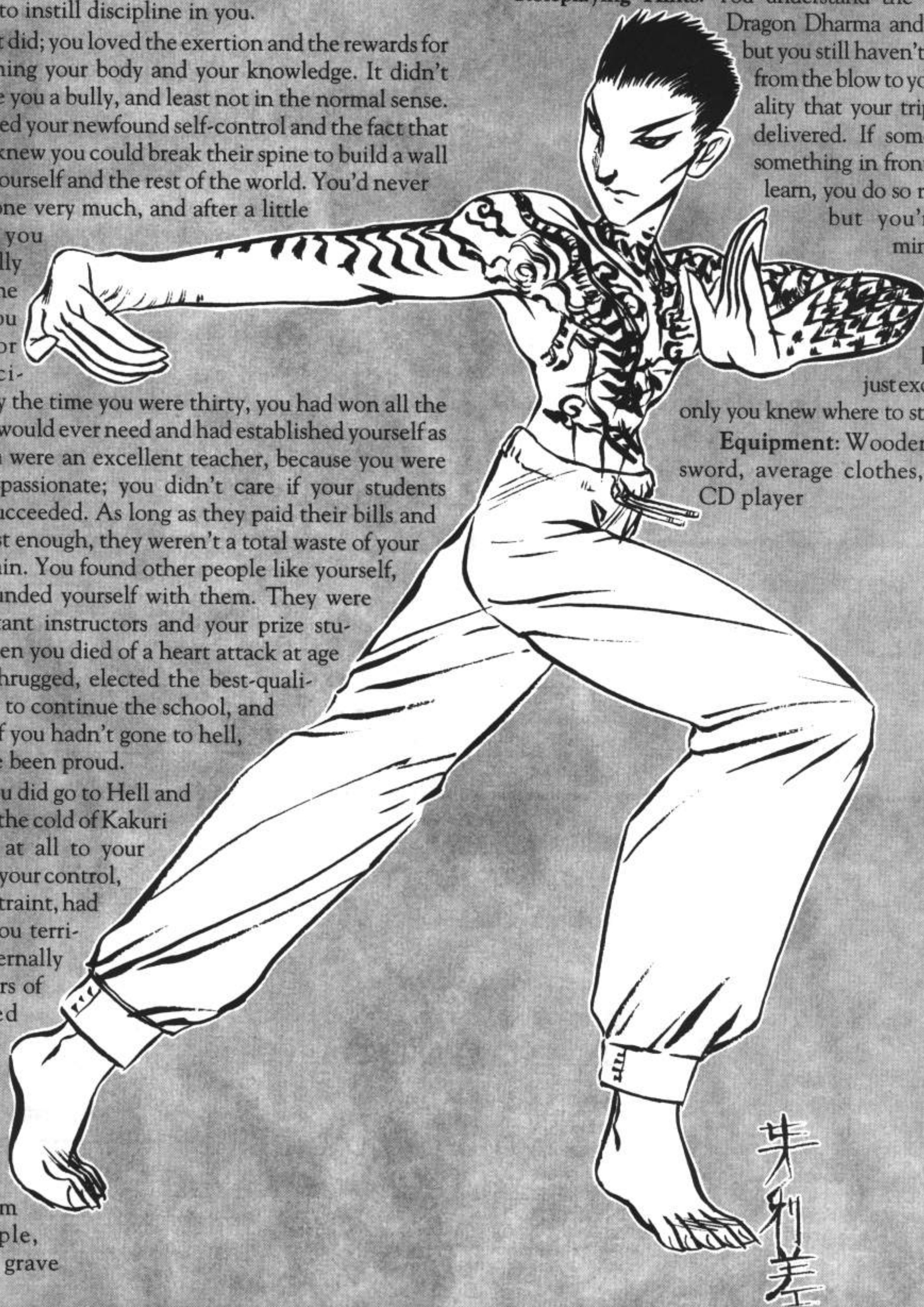
And it did; you loved the exertion and the rewards for strengthening your body and your knowledge. It didn't even make you a bully, and least not in the normal sense. But you used your newfound self-control and the fact that everyone knew you could break their spine to build a wall between yourself and the rest of the world. You'd never liked anyone very much, and after a little while, you didn't really like anyone at all. You lived for your discipline — by the time you were thirty, you had won all the prizes you would ever need and had established yourself as a sifu. You were an excellent teacher, because you were totally dispassionate; you didn't care if your students failed or succeeded. As long as they paid their bills and learned fast enough, they weren't a total waste of your time to train. You found other people like yourself, and surrounded yourself with them. They were your assistant instructors and your prize students. When you died of a heart attack at age 39, they shrugged, elected the best-qualified leader to continue the school, and went on. If you hadn't gone to hell, you'd have been proud.

But you did go to Hell and you found the cold of Kakuri Yomi not at all to your liking. All your control, all your restraint, had only left you terribly and eternally alone. Years of suppressed rage and buried anger exploded, and 49 days later, you rose from your simple, untended grave

with a hunger for flesh, and full of fury towards the people who had helped you insulate yourself from the realities of the world. Your former students were good, but not good enough to resist your fangs and jaws. The martial artist who bested you was a Thrashing Dragon, and he broke your bones with effortless grace. Disciplined even after death, you took to the rigorous training for the Fire and Water Test like a fish takes to water. Now you walk the land, determined to find life, enlightenment and the meaning of existence.

Roleplaying Hints: You understand the Thrashing Dragon Dharma and accept it, but you still haven't recovered from the blow to your personality that your trip to Yomi delivered. If someone puts something in front of you to learn, you do so reflexively, but you're determined to find something more to life than just excellence. If only you knew where to start.

Equipment: Wooden sparring sword, average clothes, portable CD player





NAME: Martial Artist

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Survivor

P'O NATURE: The Bandit

DEMEANOR: Bravo

BALANCE: Balanced

DIRECTION: North

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 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Martial Arts ● ● ● ● ○ ○
Melee ● ● ● ● ○ ○
Performance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Survival ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Rituals ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Science ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Demon Shintai ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Yang Prana ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

BACKGROUNDS

Horoscope ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mentor ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Resources ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Rites ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

RITEs

Greeting the Sun

XIN CHI



YANG CHI

DHARMA Dance of the Thrashing Dragon

HUN

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

P'O

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

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

IMBALANCE

SECOND SORT GARDENER

Quote: *Is he the child of a single parent? You see this sort of behavior a lot in children of single parents.*

Prelude: You were always the silent kid in the back of the room. You watched the other kids, the other teachers, the neighbor when she undressed. It was all fascinating to see from the outside — how people reacted and acted when they thought they were alone, and how that differed from how they behaved when they knew they were being observed.

You were just a harmless voyeur until you found a way to see into the basement of the whorehouse where the Party officials had a good time. Even then, you would have been fine, except you got a little greedy. You really had no idea how to set up a blackmail plot so that you could get the payoff without being caught, but you sure thought you did. The security forces taught you otherwise, though, and a wetwork specialist shot you twice in the head with a silenced pistol as you lay in the bushes waiting for the payoff to be delivered.

You rose from the quarry lake seven weeks later, after careful observation showed you a way out of Tou Mu's Hell of Being Skinned Alive. Your skills as a voyeur were useful even as a *chih-mei*, and you led the Devil-Tigers on quite a chase until they finally tracked you down. You evaded them for months, and they didn't catch you until they called in their experts, a feral old man and woman who caught you in a few days and beat some common sense into you, then gave you to the Thrashing Dragons for your real training.

Roleplaying Hints: For now, you're just another Thrashing Dragon finding her place in the world from the outside looking in. The Ten Seasons sect is already looking in on you, though, and you have a number of jina and mandarin contacts who are showing you the ropes and teaching you how to do things the right way. If you can actually get enlightenment and not just thrills out of your spectator's approach to life, you'll soon be joining their ranks.

Equipment: An ounce of hashish, Chinese knockoff of a Colt 1911, fairly modern computer, an apartment with a view of many other apartments



朱利美



NAME: Second Sort Gardener
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Architect
P'O NATURE: The Slave
DEMEANOR: Loner

BALANCE: Balanced
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 ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Martial Arts ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Melee ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Performance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Survival ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Law ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Rituals ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Science ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Demon Shintai ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Obligation ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Yang Prana ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

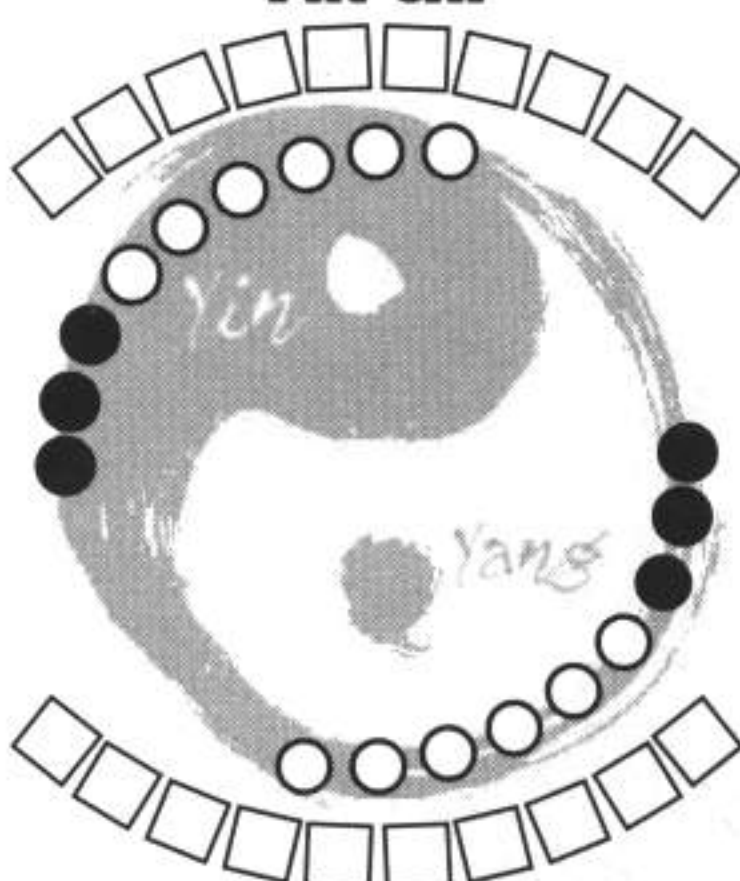
BACKGROUNDS

Allies ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Contacts ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Mentor ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Resources ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Rites ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

RITEs

Greeting the Sun

YIN CHI



YANG CHI

DHARMA

Dance of the Thrashing Dragon!

HUN

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

P'O

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

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

IMBALANCE

THOUSAND-FACED THUNDER PUPPET

Quote: *Say what you want — it's just jealousy. We're part of the future, you're part of the past.*

Prelude: You were a hipster and a geek; it's common enough. When you're making a fortune as a database administrator, it's easy to go clubbing and indulge in drugs and women whenever you want, and flexible hours make it easy to get through those long mornings after. How the fuck were you supposed to know you were going to get kidney cancer? What a way to die! Then again, at least you got something out of life.

And you got a trip to Hell. So maybe you hadn't been the best person ever, and maybe you'd blackmailed your boss and taken advantage of the people around you. It's just that kind of world, right? They agreed with you down in the Wicked City all right, and you knew how to play their games too. Sure, there was a lot of pain and lot of fellow travelers had to be sold into the pits for you to find a way out, but them's the breaks. So here you are again. The Devil-Tigers beat you and the Thrashing Dragons taught you halfway and kicked you out into the world to fend for yourself — thanks.

Luckily, you found some people who share your interests, and understand that enlightenment isn't incompatible with getting ahead. They know what they're doing, and they have some powerful friends. Fuck the way it should be done. They used to pull carts with horses, too. You're not going to wait for 50 years to find friends.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a total dupe of the jina and mandarins who manipulate you. They've got you running errands and worse, and your Dharmic studies are in near-total neglect, because you don't realize that you have to make time for them

and the people you're working for haven't suggested that you do so. So far, everything is going well because you're too busy to commit outright acts of blindness, but you're not going anywhere. It hasn't sunken in yet that you'll never equal the people you take orders from until you gain more enlightenment, and when it does — if you live that long — it's unlikely you'll react well.

Equipment: Condo you can't afford, bleeding edge computer, Data Tap, FN-FAL, .38 Special





NAME: Thousand-Faced Thunder Puppet

NATURE: Autocrat

BALANCE: Balanced

PLAYER:

P'O NATURE: The Monkey

DIRECTION: East

CHRONICLE:

DEMEANOR: Architect

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 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Crafts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Martial Arts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Computer ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Finance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rituals ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

Demon Shintai ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Obligation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

BACKGROUNDS

Mentor ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Resources ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Rites ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MITES

Greeting the Sun ☐
☐
☐
☐
☐



DHARMA Dance of the Thrashing Dragon!

HUN

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

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

P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DEMON CHI

HEALTH

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

IMBALANCE

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐



APPENDIX: FACES OF THE DANCE

*Cats will be cats, remember these words.
Cats will be cats, and cats eat birds.
—Timbuk 3, "Facts About Cats"*

THOUSAND CRANE MOTHER, LAUGHING RAINBOW ARHAT

Thousand Crane Mother is the founder of the Thrashing Dragon Dharma. It was only a few decades after Xue began teaching that the Mother found *dâh* and entered the Hundred Clouds. For several centuries, she taught her own path derived from Xue's observations of nature — what is today known as the Laughing Rainbow sect. However, near the end of the reign of the Yellow Emperor, the Thousand Crane Mother performed an act known as the Scattering of the Seeds, wherein she revealed the tenets of the Dharma in a general fashion, rather than a specific one. In doing so, she made the Road Back much wider for her followers, sacrificing her ego as a mother sacrifices food to feed her young.

Thousand Crane Mother has never ascended into Heaven or vanished from sight. Throughout the history of the world, she has lived among mankind and

Kuei-jin. A mighty being, she fears little. She lives a life of natural harmony, surrounded by a hush of peace, for what ambitious *shen* or servant of the Yama Kings would be foolish enough to attract her awesome wrath by acting in her vicinity?

Thousand Crane Mother's existence consists primarily of eating, sleeping, exploring the area around her current lair and meeting the local inhabitants. However, she does listen to reports of important controversies, and occasionally gives her opinions on important Dharmic matters. She does not become directly involved in matters of the world under normal circumstances, but she does clarify points of her beliefs. Thousand Crane Mother will not permit mandarins to enter her presence, but there are a number of *jina* who look after her and record her sayings at the behest of their mandarin mentors.

When the prince of the *rakshasa* was manifest in the Infinite Thunders Court during the summer of 1999, she voiced her approval of the actions of her



fellow bodhisattvas in fighting him. "The duty of the beast," she said, "is to live as a beast, protecting only its territory, and caring about only that which takes food from its own mouth. The duty of the Wan Kuei is not to live as a beast — though hungry ghosts, we are *shen*, and it is our responsibility to involve ourselves in such celestial matters."

Among those who traveled to Infinite Thunders Court to battle the devil-prince was Black Earth Boy, Thousand Crane Mother's favorite student. He and his fellows were victorious but were destroyed in the process. In the years since, rumors have circulated among the Laughing Rainbows that Thousand Crane Mother has suffered profound melancholy at the death of her favorite. In some circles, with would seem normal, but among the Dragons it is a true scandal: sadness at death is not the way of nature and for the arhat of the faith to feel this way would be truly scandalous — and surely mean profound *diao* on her part. The ancestors of the sect deny all such rumors. Some say that Thousand Crane Mother has simply been meditating on the Dharmic lesson of her student's death, while others claim she walks among the disciples and jina unseen, studying the effects of the Eye of the Demon Emperor upon the newly dead.

BLACK EARTH BOY, LAUGHING RAINBOW BODHISATTVA

Little is known of the Black Earth Boy, other than that he was a student of the Thousand Crane Mother during the period immediately after the Burning of the Books. Many believe that he was once a farmer, but that is speculation based on his name, which is taken from — or perhaps is the origin of — a peasant folktale.

Regardless of his origins, Black Earth Boy was an extremely formidable being. Though he spent much of his time in repose in the mountains of South China, he was still active in the affairs of the Dharma and of the Kuei-jin as a whole. While he was not a political animal like the Devil-Tiger bodhisattva No-Shadow Raven, he was far from retired, and often spent time consulting with the other bodhisattvas at New Forest monastery. Black Earth Boy was the undisputed master of Jade Shintai and Yang Prana, and used a great two-handed jade club in battle.

During the Time of Nightmares, after the opening of the Eye of the Demon Emperor, Black Earth Boy traveled to the Infinite Thunder Courts with two other bodhisattvas. There, they did battle with the prince of the *rakshasa*, who rose from his tomb to consume the world. The three bodhisattvas battled the devil-prince until the fires of heaven were unleashed upon the battlefield. The prince of the *rakshasa* was slain, as were all three bodhisattvas.

Black Earth Boy's ultimate fate remains a point of contention among the Laughing Rainbows. Beyond the scandalous rumors of Thousand Crane Mother's melancholy (see above), there is the question of whether her student and fellow saint has returned to the Hundred Clouds or fallen into the Mouth of Yomi. Several *wu* have taken it upon themselves to search for evidence of Black Earth Boy's fate, traveling to the Infinite Thunders Court and deep into the spirit worlds. None have been successful as of yet.

MAHSURI AZMI, JUNGLE QUEEN

One of the most prominent *penanggalan* in the Golden Courts, Mahsuri Azmi took the Second Breath during the Muslim conquest of the region in the 14th



century. At one point in the late 19th century, she stood on the brink of the Hundred Clouds, but lost her way on the Road Back and is now nothing more than an enlightened mandarin.

Mahsuri's setbacks on her road to enlightenment have done nothing to cool her anti-Chinese sentiments, however. She loathes the mortal Chinese communities that have established themselves in Indonesia, and blames them for her nation's many woes. She hates the Quincunx and the Laughing Rainbow sect with equal vigor, blaming them for the condition of the world and the onrushing tumult of the Sixth Age. She and her *langsuir* took advantage of Indonesia's recent anti-Chinese riots to force out the Quincunx delegations in Jakarta. Several of these Kuei-jin were sent into the Mouth of Yomi, and the rest were forced to flee into exile. Since then, there has been no official Quincunx delegation to Indonesia, and many of the more moderate *penangallan* worry that the Five August Courts may dispatch assassins to extract vengeance.

Despite her intolerance for Chinese culture, Mahsuri Azmi is quite tolerant of certain other matters. She is known to favor the Brilliant Coals sect of the Devil-Tiger faith as being Dharmically compatible with her own Passion Bloodflower faith, and actually has *langsuir* of that sect, whom she treats as equal to her other *langsuir* — something that has caused her trouble in the past. Mahsuri Azmi is also a master of the Blood Shintai, an art she learned from a classically-trained Devil-Tiger *langsuir* who had found refuge in Indonesia when she fled from the Quincunx and converted to the Brilliant Embers sect.

FUN TOY, LAUGHING RAINBOW MANDARIN

In life, Fun Toy was a cold and brutal gangster, infamous for his ruthlessness and cruelty, even to his own men. Shot to death in 1889 in the first gangland hit in Shanghai to involve western firearms, Fun Toy rose from the grave profoundly changed by his time in Yomi. Though he was still a gangster, he was a gangster with a mission — to make the world smile. He cast himself into the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon without hesitation, and soon made a name for himself by successfully standing up to the *penangallan* of the Malay Peninsula.

His heroic reputation grew during the Second World War, when he was active in the resistance against the occupation of the city by Japanese *uji*, and their attempted extermination of native Chinese *shen*. During this period, he forged close ties with the Silent Mandarins, the distant and mysterious rulers of Shanghai's supernatural underworld. Of his *wu*, only he survived. In the post-War era, he joined together in a new *wu*, the Black Pearl Pirates, who had interests up and down the Pearl River delta, from Canton to Hong Kong. Establishing themselves in the Cantonese rice business and Hong Kong's thriving textiles industry, the Black Pearl Pirates soon gained reputations for scandal and success.

In the early 1990s, the Pirates entered into a political alliance with the prominent Blood Court elder mandarin Jiejie Li, the titular leader of the Harmonious Menders of Fences faction. This political party advocates the eradication of Kin-jin infestations from the shores of China before any sort of punitive measures are taken against these creatures abroad. Fun Toy and his fellows soon became one of the party's most effective chambers militant. They fought a number of shadow wars against the Righteous Foreigner-Vanquishing Crusaders, a political party within the Five August



Courts that advocated an all-out war of destruction on the Kin-jin, wherever they might lurk.

After the beginning of the Great Leap Outward, Fun Toy was sent to Los Angeles, though it is said his contacts among the Silent Mandarins were a key cause of the Fence Mender success in cleansing the city of Kin-jin and Japanese *gaki*.

In Los Angeles, Fun Toy and his fellows quickly established themselves in mortal commerce, building large holdings in light industry and small business. In honor of his work in the Great Leap, he renamed the *wu* the Flatbush and Stockton Posse. While more militant Kuei-jin exhausted themselves in strife against the city's Kin-jin packs, the Flatbush and Stockton Posse built a formidable commercial empire with eyes towards body disposal and money laundering. His *wu* has consistently patronized circles of progressive young vampires, and he is personally responsible for bringing quite a few disciples and jina to America to help manage his growing concerns.

Fun Toy survived the tumultuous aftermath of the attempted coup in San Francisco, and continues to sit on the council of mandarins of the coalition New Promise Mandarinate in Los Angeles. For more information on the coup attempt, the Mandarinate and the Great Leap Outward, see the supplement *Nights of Prophecy*.

XIAO "MOLLY" MAO LI, THOUSAND-FACED THUNDER JINA

Xao Mao Li was a disco diva, famous in the Hong King club scene. She died in 1978 in a spectacular club accident, when a discotheque caught fire and her personal load of pharmaceuticals prevented her from escaping the blaze. While her entrance into the Thrashing



Dragon Dharma wasn't a shock, her later engagement with the Thousand-Faced Thunder sect was. Xiao has pursued a rigorously traditional course, studying the spirits of roads and buildings, parkland, markets and urban waterways.

Mao Li is a disciple of Xi Chao, the superintendent of the Telegraph Road Temple of the Neon Rainbow and himself a conservative member of his sect. She virulently opposes Auntie Kiko's policies of engagement with the rising tide of ultramodern spirit beings. Her opposition can be quite deadly when combined with her noted martial arts ability. Recently, she resigned her place in her *wu*, and as a heimin, filed notice of personal disagreement with two young mandarins of her sect. She pressed for a midnight war with a former *wu*-mate as her advocate to the court and killed both in quick succession—one with a Barrett's sniper rifle, one in single combat with wooden swords. After that, she disappeared, and some say she is in hiding under the protection of an elder of her Dharma. There are persistent rumors she has slipped away to the New Promise Mandarinate to work as a strong arm for the notorious mandarin Fun Toy, but this may be nothing more than scandalous talk.

PROFILE

Nature: Competitor

P'o Nature: The Demon

Demeanor: Traditionalist

Balance: Balanced

Direction: North

Dharma: Dance of the Thrashing Dragon 4

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Animal Ken 1, Athletics 2, Dodge 2, Etiquette 3, Firearms 3, Linguistics 2, Martial Arts 3, Melee 4, Occult (city spirits) 4, Rituals 3, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2

Disciplines: Black Wind 2, Yang Prana 3

Backgrounds: Mentor 3, Resources 2

Yin 3, Yang 4, Hun 3, P'o 3, Willpower 6

ODO ITO, TEN SEASON DRAGON

Odo Ito is one of the most influential young jina in the Ten Seasons sect. A virologist, he died of lung cancer in 1961 and took the Second Breath for reasons unknown. After his *kôa*, he applied himself to the emergent field of computers, seeking to model the interactions of humans the same way that wind tunnels and chemical interactions were modeled. With the resources of a number of amused mandarins at his disposal, he was soon at the leading edge of research into predictive human psychology and the modeling of chaotic systems.



Yet although his experiments yield fascinating results, he cannot predict the future. Models that attempt to depict the flow of political power, economic strength or mimetic structures through the Pacific Rim fail catastrophically when extrapolated beyond 2010. The processors burn out or break down, and media used to hold the results is invariably corrupted. There even appears to be a creeping sort of reverse corruption — in many cases, copies of the predictive models or notes for the predictive algorithms used in them become corrupted at the moment of failure.

The nature of the spiritual force that derails these models is unknown, but it must be of immense might — perhaps some sort of universal principle or decree of the August Personage of Jade... or of the Demon Emperor. Ito's models are new, and the terminator

line seems blurry and indefinite — some misty predictions foresee up to 2015, while others end at 2009. Ito and his patrons wait anxiously to see if time rolls back the blockage, or if the terminator is some sort of fixed and immovable point that draws closer and closer as time passes.

Odo Ito was never a large man, and his cancer emaciated him considerably before his death. He has spent little of his time since taking the Second Breath pursuing enlightenment outside of the laboratory, and as a consequence knows few Disciplines. He is hardly defenseless, however, as he is watched closely by a number of jina of his sect. These handlers cooperate to offer him physical protection while ensconcing him protectively in the social nets of their gardens.

PROFILE

Nature: Architect

P'o Nature: The Monkey

Demeanor: Judge

Balance: Balanced

Direction: Center

Dharma: Dance of the Thrashing Dragon 5

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Computer (modeling) 5, Empathy 1, Etiquette 3, Expression 2, Firearms 1, Investigation 3, Leadership 3, Occult 2, Politics 3, Rituals 2, Science 3, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 2

Disciplines: Demon Shintai 2, Obligation 3, Yang Prana 2

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Resources 4

Yin 6, Yang 4, Hun 5, P'o 4, Willpower 7



Dance the Dance of Life

They call us the Green Devils, unliving monsters who drink deeply of life in all its twisted ways. We dance like the raging dragon and flow like the teeming river. We never stop, for to stop is to die. All this we do to tear down the walls between us and the Mandates of Heaven and Hell. Only the brave can join us. Are you worthy?

Tear Away the Illusion of Death

Dharma Book: Thrashing Dragons is the fourth Dharma Book for **Kindred of the East**™. It is a complete guide to playing the lush and sensual Cathayans who follow the dance of Yang. The secrets of predatory enlightenment await within, along with many new rites and powers, prominent characters and new facts about the Asian World of Darkness.

Dharma Book: Thousand Whispers Includes:

- New powers and rites for vampires of this Dharma
- The secrets of the terrible *penangallan* jungle queens
- Conversion rules for Mind's Eye Theatre live-action play



ISBN 1-58846-211-0 WW2907
\$14.95 U.S.



9 781588 462114

5 1495

