



# Wherestres Of The Way™



A Character Sourcebook for  
Kindred of the East™

# Interests of the Vampires™

By MICHAEL BUTLER, GEOFFREY C. GRABOWSKI, ELLEN KILEY,  
JAMES KILEY, STEVE KENSON & GUY-FRANCIS VELLA

VAMPIRE CREATED BY MARK REIN • HAGEN

## CREDITS

**Authors:** Michael Butler (The Scorpion Eaters), Geoffrey C. Grabowski (The Face of the Gods), Ellen Kiley (The Spirit of the Living Earth), James Kiley (The Spirit of the Living Earth), Steve Kenson (The Flame of the Rising Phoenix) and Guy-Francis Vella (The Tempest of the Inward Focus). Vampire and the World of Darkness created by Mark Rein•Hagen.

**Additional Material:** Lucien Soulban

**Storyteller Game System Design:** Mark Rein•Hagen

**Developer:** Lucien Soulban

**Editor:** Michelle Lyons

**Art Director:** Brian Glass

**Layout and Typesetting:** Biff!

**Interior Art:** Andy "Fine Andy, I'll Give You Another Week's Extension" Brase, Becky "Oi! Congrats on the Engagement!" Cloonan, Chynna Clugston-Major, Mike Danza, Steve "Chunder" Prescott and Melissa Uran

**Front Cover Art:** Dave Leri

**Front and Back Cover Design:** Brian Glass and Biff!

## "MY ATLANTA FIELD TRIP" SPECIAL THANKS

**Philippe "Twisted Metal" Boule**, for applying Quebec road rules on Atlanta's streets and taking me to the best restaurants.

**Bill "Thespian" Bridges**, for those great pictures of him in tights... Wait, maybe I should be thanking Phil instead.

**Carl "Jedi Mind Tricks" Bowen**, for sitting back, contemplating the universe and looking like the tallest Yoda I've ever seen.

**John "Bugman" Chambers**, for being the only one to laugh (okay... groan) at my "werewolves are Klingon cool," joke. Sorry we crushed your bugs.

**Ken "Health Nut" Cliffe**, for skipping dinners to go work out, then blowing it all on... biscuits and gravy. Thanks for picking me up and dropping me off at the airport.

**Matt "WASP" McFarland**, for teaching me how to order German food and joining us for some messy rib-eatin'.

**Cynthia "Eep" Summers**, for not bashing me over the head when she walked into her office.

**Mike "Godlike" Tinney**, for providing the voice of reason while still allowing people to express their ideas.

**Fred "Bones" Yelk**, for his hospitality and movie suggestions. Bones really sucked, by the way.



1554 LITTON DR  
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA  
30083  
USA

© 2002 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire the Masquerade and World of Darkness are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Kindred of the East, Demon the Fallen, Year of the Damned, Kindred of the East Companion, Killing Streets, The Thousand Hells, Dharma Book Bone Flowers, Dharma Book Devil Tigers, Dharma Book Thousand Whispers, Dharma Book Thrashing Dragons and Heresies of the Way 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.

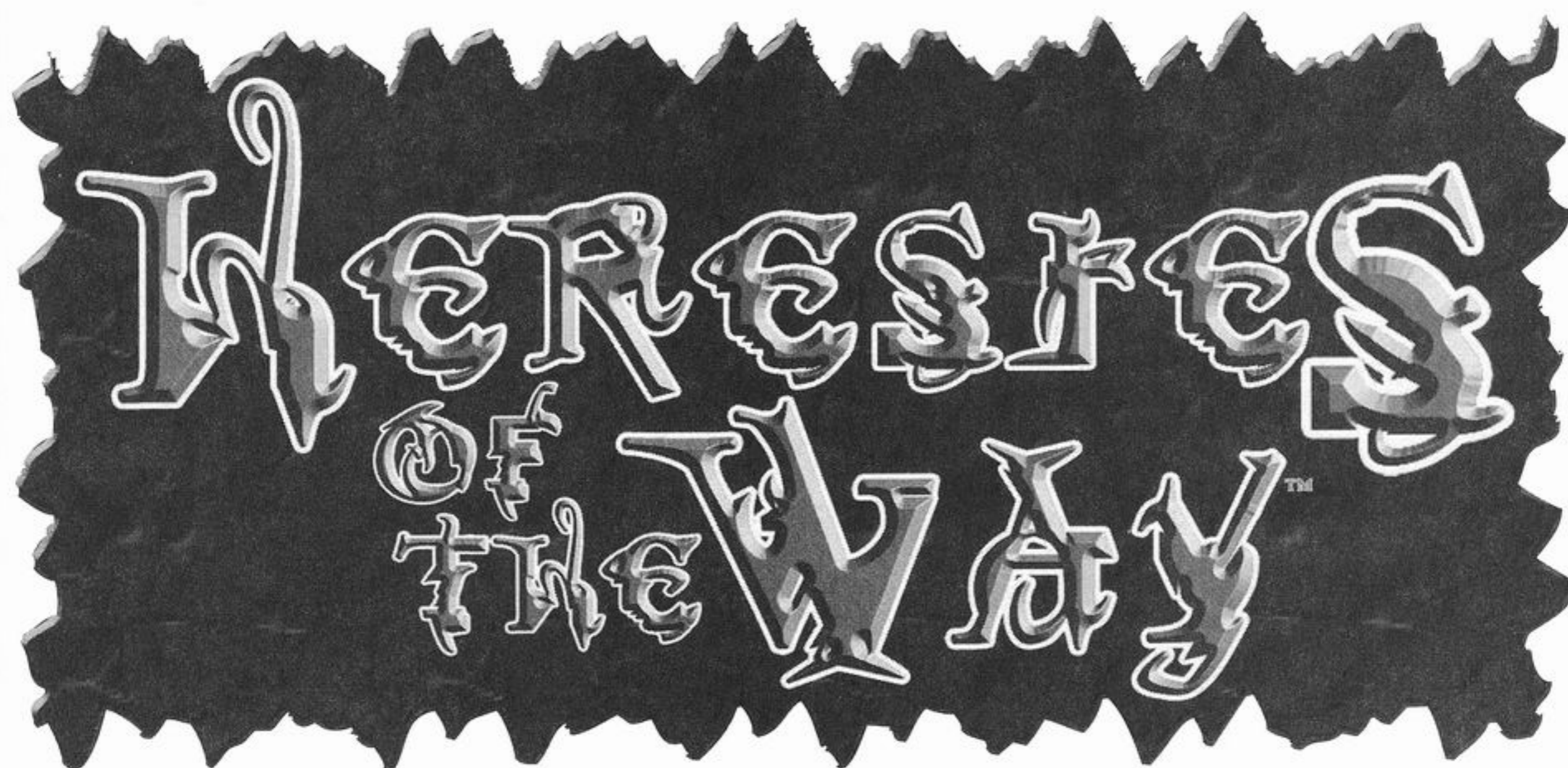
This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

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](http://alt.games.whitewolf) and [rec.games.frp.storyteller](http://rec.games.frp.storyteller)

PRINTED IN THE USA.



---

## CONTENTS

---

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: THE FLAME OF THE RISING PHOENIX</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO: THE TEMPEST OF THE INWARD FOCUS</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE FACE OF THE GODS</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING EARTH</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: THE SCORPION EATERS</b>	<b>112</b>



# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the bare seconds defining the span between Ages, the mere inch where this epoch teeters dangerously close to the precipice of the Sixth Age. Some Wan Kuei push against the Great Cycle, hoping to forestall that inevitable last click, but how does one stop a great wheel, already five ages in motion, when it's been barreling down time's steep slope? You can't, argue most Kuei-jin, but that doesn't stop them from railing out against the symptoms of the impending Sixth Age.

What are these symptoms? Well, according to the Quincunx, the most obvious are called the heresies, a collection of beliefs that fell far from the cherry blossom tree of Xue's vaunted Fivefold Way. Are these heresies actually evil, responsible for the world's calamities? No, but they make for fine scapegoats, nonetheless.

**Heresies of the Way** delves into the history and structure of four Dharmas already offered some coverage in the **Kindred of the East Companion**, as well as one Dharma new to the Middle Kingdom. The first four are probably as old as, if not older than, the Quincunx. They are: The Flame of the Rising Phoenix, The Tempest of the Inward Focus, The Face of the Gods and The Spirit of the Living Earth. Their "misfortune," as it were, stems from the crime of not being Chinese and, therefore, inferior to cultured thought. The fifth Dharma, however, is unapologetic in its quest for survival at any cost. Known as the Scorpion Eaters, this lot thrives on the projected misery of the Sixth Age. They can even consume corrupted Chi. Of the five heresies covered in this book, they are perhaps closest to the accusation of "*akuma*".

Still, this is the World of Darkness. Even Heaven and Hell possess shades of gray, as evidenced by **Demon: The Fallen**. Are these Dharmas actually evil, or simply consumed by agendas outside the Quincunx's mandates? Perhaps neither or, more likely, a touch of both. You decide.

## NAME YOUR PRICE

Although this book deals with heresies against the five established Dharmas and the Quincunx, these chapters make no attempt to validate or refute the beliefs of these heretical paths. The truth is, the road to Hell is paved with good intentions. The five groups herein operate on the assumption that their philosophy is the one true road to happiness... or at least survival. In light of the Year of the Damned — what cost is too high a price for one's soul?

The first four sections are written largely from an in-character perspective, by which the reader can understand the Dharma from the point of view of one of its members. While this undoubtedly presents a bias in favor of the Dharma, it is important to realize that each Dharma is dangerous not because of its philosophy, but its desires. All Dharmas are victims and targets by virtue of their needs and aspirations.

Fortunately for the five established Ways, Xue and the Quincunx provided them with a framework in which to practice their Dharmas. These codes of conduct provide a safety net beyond the Dharma itself, protecting the vampires from dangerous choices. Tack on the Black Iron Talons sect of the Devil-Tigers in addition to other policing forces watching for signs of apostasy, and you have a society with better protection than most — even if that protection does act as something of a bureaucratic nightmare.

The heresies, however, have no "friendly" policing force outside of themselves. Even then, most members are so scattered and isolated that they can only rely on the help of one or two other Kuei-jin. While they may be targets of the Quincunx because of philosophical shortcomings, they are made greater targets by the Yama Kings' minions — who have less fear of getting caught or attacked when approaching

these stragglers. It's the lone sheep syndrome, where the wolf attacks the lamb grazing outside the herd, a victim by virtue of its isolation.

The final Dharma, the Scorpion Eaters, is presented in a more neutral fashion. Due to its relative youth, the Dharma still lacks sufficient cohesion for a common voice to emerge with any authority.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### THE FLAME OF THE RISING PHOENIX

What would you sacrifice for the chance to return home, to a normal life? The Five August Courts and Xue were perhaps wise in encouraging vampires to forget their mortal families and friends. Regardless a Kuei-jin's intentions, he is invariably a "thing," a product of his hunger for Chi. When he slips into fire, wave or shadow soul — and he will slip — then Heaven help anyone around him.

The Flame of the Rising Phoenix, however, believes differently. They contend that they can stay ahead of the hunger and keep their appetites isolated from their mortal loves. Unfortunately, the proclamation is far easier than the application. When a Rising Phoenix slips, he falls far.

This Dharma's weakness, and perhaps greatest folly, is their unwillingness to surrender their old lives and begin a new existence. In doing so, they jeopardize the very people they claim to love. This then begs the question: are they pursuing this course of action to right their wrongs, or is it for more selfish reasons — an unwillingness to surrender the familiar, regardless its eventual cost?

While Kuei-jin argue semantics, the fact remains that the Yama Kings know how to prey upon these Phoenixes all too easily. Phoenix aims may be altruistic, but the ends are all too fragile and thus exploitable. What happens when the Phoenix is bereft of family, or loses a loved one in a moment of fire soul? What happens when the Phoenix outlives everyone who once anchored him to this existence? What will he do, willingly, to protect his beloved from harm, age or even himself? These are the questions demons whisper in a Phoenix's ears, using the Kuei-jin's fears and concerns for family as a lever against him. What is your soul worth against the safety and longevity of those you care for? Terrible questions for anyone to face in the dark, especially when it's the dark asking them in the first place.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### THE TEMPEST OF THE INWARD FOCUS

Life is an illusion; the only constants are the universal polar forces working against each other like dark and light, north and south, Yin and Yang. These opposing dynamics collide with one another, driving all things to action, but somewhere in the perfect center between the two lies a point of absolute serenity where everything is still again... and whole. It is a perfect balance; a singular existence; a homogenous mix of its contributing elements... that state of one, framing the perfection of the First and Twelfth Age.

The Tempests believe that to uncover this pure state, one must explore the polarities of life, the extremes of all pursuits. To find the balance and center within, one must first understand discord. In essence, they encompass everything, thereby incorporating the dynamic flows within themselves and becoming the absolute axis where the

extremes intersect and, hopefully, steady one another. The Tempests believe strongly in their ultimate goal, and are thus blind to the more immediate perils born from the pursuit of their current "experience."

What proves dangerous for this Dharma stems from a simple form of baiting. Young Tempests tend to underestimate Yomi's minions because they believe them illusions given form by the delusions of another. Older Tempests recognize demons as mirages, though dangerous mirages nonetheless.

Regardless, demons are often far more ingenious when it comes to exploring heinous vices, malignant appetites and vile proclivities. It proves relatively simple for a demon to create some new sensation or experience with which to lure the Tempest into experimenting beyond the fringes of caution. "Why do you fear this pleasure?" the demon might goad. "Without willingness to explore this extreme, how can you claim yourself complete? How can you ever achieve balance knowing you could not venture beyond your own confines?"

The aim of such lures is not to ensnare the Kuei-jin immediately, but to slowly inure him to his own morals through increasingly extreme experiments. Eventually the vampire will hit the point of no return, when the P'o is stronger than the Hun because the Tempest strayed too far from his center. Therein lies the danger of being Tempest... the risk that sometimes, things on the edge of dynamic momentum can spin out of control forever.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### THE FACE OF THE GODS

The Face of the Gods, deities in exile according to their faith, pursue the adoration of a new pantheon of gods — themselves. The Quincunx fears these vampires, if only because they perpetuate the foolishness of the Wan Xian, the folly of hubris. The Kuei-jin pride themselves on having learnt from their mistakes, but what of the imprudent vampire who refutes conventional wisdom and tries scaling Heaven's mountain after the August Personage of Jade pushed him off once already? The Quincunx calls it heresy, but the Gods believe it perseverance.

The Gods have one goal in mind... to reclaim their place in Heaven as equals to all the spirits around them. The folly of this Dharma, however, is that they believe themselves free of danger because they adhere to a different cosmology; one born of the Indian subcontinent where the gods exhibit both divine and unholy facades. Certainly, the Yama Kings exist, but the Gods believe them peers to their own unclaimed thrones. It's a belief the Yama Kings are only too happy to foster.

Unfortunately, the Dharma's plans to retake their place in Heaven lack a specific itinerary. With no bodhisattvas in sight and no idea on how to wage such a celestial war, the Gods are ultimately lost as they look for the answers to their dilemmas. Naturally where there's a want, there are the Yama Kings, offering solutions seemingly tailor-made for the Gods.

While this Dharma's wants are great, however, they possess both the community framework to protect another and the arrogance not to share their divinity with other beings. Still, the Yama Kings are patient. The Gods do not believe in the impending arrival of Hell as professed by the

Courts and are thus off guard. Already several ancestors stand on the cusp of bodhisattva, but none can make that final step across. With time, their impatience will grow in proportion to their desire and desperation, eventually leading them to the Yama Kings for help. When that time comes, the true *akuma* can sweep through this Dharma from the top down.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING EARTH

There is a spirit in everything, from the doorway in your room to the sentence you just read. The Spirit of the Living Earth understands these *kami* better than most. Their array of rituals and rites force the spirits to respond and act on their behalf, though the Dharma also honors these beings for their services.

This path shares similarities with the Shinto faith, a parallel that earns them no end of grief with the Quincunx. They are a heresy, the Five August Courts claim, because they follow a mortal religion (which, in fact, they do not) and because they consort with a variety of spirits, including demonic ones. The last part is partially correct, but only because the Spirits consider it their duty to serve all the various *shen* of the ephemera, both good and evil. If this practice of serving the evil spirits is becoming increasingly more frequent, it's because the Dharma is becoming more vulnerable to the changing world. More so than any other Dharma, they are closely tied to the natural world around them. They must change alongside it if they are to survive.

Pollution, radiation and a growing gap between today's Asia and yesterday's traditions leave Dragon Nests ravaged by toxins and many nature spirits and ghosts poisoned or ignored. The Spirit of the Living Earth, unfortunately, has long relied on these resources to survive and provide it with strength. Indeed, those within the Dharma aspire to become *kami* one day, releasing themselves from this noxious flesh and entering the Spirit Worlds with their P'o and Hun whole. Unfortunately, that dream grows more distant with each passing night.

The Dharma itself is fractured and split, either by terrain or by rivalries, and thus unable to consolidate their powers or knowledge. Secondly, the Dharma is losing sources of pure Chi to the Sixth Age and other *shen* fighting for these dwindling natural resources. With each corrupted Dragon Nest, the *kami* likewise become more strange and unpredictable.

The Dharma has a tradition of appeasing both good *kami* and evil spirits, so concourse with demons is not entirely unknown or repugnant to them. Unfortunately, as more *kami* grow evil or uncaring, the Spirits remain steadfast in their willingness to serve them. The Dharma isn't growing evil, one might say, though those they serve and petition are. This presents the Yama Kings with potentially unwitting allies, ones who may eventually serve them by default.

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE SCORPION EATERS

The Scorpion Eaters: avatars of Triad-movie chic and everything violent and shiny in Asia, they could almost be a pop Dharma... if one was stupid enough to underestimate them. The Scorpion Eaters are the new face of urban vampires, the ones willing to do whatever it takes to survive...

and they like their corn flakes irradiated. The Eaters have the singular distinction of being able to ingest toxic Chi, whether from the tainted Dragon Nests of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the polluted filth of the Ganges. Perhaps more fearful, however, is their ability to poison Dragon Nests and turn them virulent to other Kuei-jin. The Quincunx calls their heinous powers the work of the Yama Kings, but the Scorpion Eaters call it territorial acquisition and securing the supply lines. It's all about survival.

The amusing thing is that while the Quincunx labels these Scorpion Eaters *akuma* (and rightfully so, the Eaters claim), they are also the safest from the Yama Kings' depredations. This Dharma has no intention of allowing demons to rule them, but they also recognize that Yomi will control the next several Ages, once the Demon Emperor rises to assume the August Personage's throne. Instead of fighting what they believe an eventuality, the Scorpion Eaters have entered a non-aggression pact with the Yama Kings. They have promised not to intervene in the Yama Kings' rise to power or to help the Quincunx. In exchange, the Scorpion Eaters earn the power to consume tainted Chi.

The Scorpion Eaters are arrogant, cocky, and terribly shortsighted. By virtue of their neutrality, they already benefit the Yama Kings by distracting the Quincunx and by poisoning the remaining Dragon Nests. In turn, the Scorpion Eaters are growing overconfident and brazen in their attitudes under the belief they possess the blessing of "the new regime." Oh, they still hide from the Quincunx and its agents, but they don't believe the Five August Courts will be around long enough to cause them any great worries. And who knows, they may be right, as the Yama Kings don't intend to hinder or bother the Scorpion Eaters.

## THEME

The Dharmas are a result of nurture over nature. The Quincunx has long sown an ill crop across Asia, forcing its views and beliefs upon Kuei-jin of different cultural experiences. In ostracizing these groups, the Quincunx did a great deal to drive them into the hands of the *akuma*. In other words, the hastening of the Sixth Age is partially the result of the Five August Courts' attempts to slow the Wheel of Ages down. Call it a self-fulfilling prophecy or simply divine justice. Either one bears ugly fruit.

Are the Dharmas innocent, though? No, not entirely. It's hard to back out of a corner when the Quincunx keeps shoving you there, admittedly. This is part of the fight or flee instinct in us all. Unfortunately, when crying "persecution" leads to its own atrocities in the name of freedom, there's too much blood in the mix for anyone to come out clean. That's the wonderful truth behind the World of Darkness. Nobody is made of Teflon; everyone gets dirty.

This book covers the repercussions and backlash of those follies. The heretical Dharmas are well aware that change is in the wind, and they will capitalize on that as much as they can. What convictions might emerge from this awareness: Revenge? Recognition? Rebellion? Regardless, the theme invariably ties back into the lust for power, whether over self, over destiny, over others or over creation. Just how far, though, are these Dharmas willing to go for their slice of Heaven? That's for each Storyteller to determine for his game.



# CHAPTER ONE: THE FLAME OF THE RISING PHOENIX

## PRELUDE: GREETINGS, HONORED READER,

I do not know if I commit my words here to history or to the flames, although it is my greatest wish to reveal the truth of the coming Age so that blind eyes may open to it. I know it is likelier that readers will turn away from my words, crying "heresy, heresy," but I ask, how can words trouble you? What do you fear from the truth? If you are strong and resolute in your Way, then read on and see for a time through other eyes. If you doubt and question, then may the knowledge here guide you toward the path for which you were destined.

I am Jiwan Shan, and for four years, I heard the Song of the Shadow. I whispered in the dark with ghosts and did their bidding in the Middle Kingdom to give them rest, without seeking any for myself. I embraced the Cold Mind of Yin to soothe the fires burning in my soul and chain the demon that howled there. I devoted myself to knowledge and understanding of the Demon People's place within the Great Cycle. That understanding shattered all that I thought I knew and believed. In the eyes of the Honored Courts' ancestors, that makes me a heretic, an outcast, and *akuma*. So be it. The truth always exacts its most terrible price.

But whatever I may be, I am no fool. Although I am still young in the ways and wisdom of our people, I understand the quest for enlightenment. It is one the Wan Kuei have followed since the Ten Thousand Immortals fell

and the August Personage in Jade laid his punishment upon them. My Dharma taught me to learn my lessons dispassionately, to dissect the truth and study it from all sides. That showed me there is more than just the Fivefold Way of Xue and the August Courts. The fire reborn within my heart tells me there is more in the designs of Heaven than we may ever know.

I came seeking to understand the Flame of the Rising Phoenix, and succeeded beyond all imagining. The August Courts considered the very subject of my search heresy. What wisdom, the mandarins still argue, is found in a heretical path? All we need know is in the sacred texts of the Divine Xue and his disciples, in the Great Principle. If so, I ask in return, then why are the August Courts so imperfect? Why does corruption riddle the Middle Kingdom, rotting it from within? Why does the Eye of the Demon Emperor hang in the Heavens even now, mocking the very mandate the ancestors claim as their own?

I set out to explore what others refused to see, but the Flame of the Rising Phoenix does not shine brightly. Its followers must conceal its light from ignorant eyes, and finding them is often a matter of them finding you first. Speaking with them, learning about their ways is even harder.

I began my travels on the island of Sri Lanka in the heart of the Infinite Thunders Court, long believed a stronghold of the Rising Phoenix Dharma. I never had previous cause to visit the Infinite Thunders Court, so I had no idea what to expect. My elders taught me that this Court is depraved,

where *akuma* prey upon all visitors. I was prepared for anything... except, of course, for what actually lay in wait.

On the surface the Infinite Thunders Court is a troubled place, like so much of the Middle Kingdom. Struggles between ethnic and religious groups tear the land apart, with the terrorist Tamil Tigers (and other factions) striking in cities like Colombo and claiming northern parts of Sri Lanka for themselves. Still, the political unrest does not prevent thousands of mortals from visiting Sri Lanka each year. They come to experience the wonders that drew travelers to this island for centuries, earning it a reputation as a place of legends and giving it many names like Resplendent Isle, Pearl of the East, and Island of Dharma. From the moment I set foot on its soil, I felt a sensation unknown to me since the Second Breath. It was the brief serenity following my escape from hell... it was returning to a familiar place.

I arranged for lodgings in Colombo and prepared to present myself to the Infinite Thunders Court. Walking through the dim and dusty streets of the city, I felt the flow of humanity surge around me, like the petulant push of the wind. I stood apart from it all, cold and distant, secure in my spiritual armor, strong in my self-assurance. How superior I felt to those poor wretches who I passed on the streets... how certain was I of my place in Heaven's design.

That was when Prachak crossed my path. I mistook him for a mere beggar at first, one of many looking for a few coins, jabbering away in a constant stream of noise that you learned to ignore. I almost tripped over him, literally, when he stepped in my way. When I turned my cold glare at him, he simply smiled and held out a hand. I began to turn away, but he spoke with a voice that cut through my armor like a warm breeze.

"You're wasting your time," he said, with a soft, almost fatherly edge to his voice, "expecting to find the Flame in sutras and ancient texts."

I turned slowly back to face the grinning beggar.

"How do you know what I seek?" I asked cautiously.

He shrugged. "Many seek the Flame," he replied, "and most look in the wrong place. You have that look, so serious and studious, but... perhaps I was mistaken."

The beggar turned away from me. Part of me said to let him go; he spoke foolishness, but another part...

"Wait," I said, stepping toward him; he paused. "I do seek the Flame. Can you tell me about it?"

He smiled again and shook his head. "No, but I can show you, if you wish." He held out his hand expectantly.

I reached into a pocket and pressed some money into his hand. It was warm and dry and he pressed his other hand firmly on top of mine. How cold my flesh must seem to him. If it bothered him, he showed no sign of it.

"My name is Prachak," he said. "Come with me. We will meet my family."

I expected, perhaps, to meet Prachak's *wu*. Little did I know that he was referring to his real, living, family... his blood relations. My new guide took me into a crowded Colombo district, where he shed some of his beggar guise, standing straighter and walking with more certainty.

His home was humble and betrayed its years of wear. As we approached, a small form bolted from the door and slammed into Prachak's legs.

"Papa! Papa!" she said. Prachak lifted the exuberant little girl from the ground and held her in his arms. She wasn't more than four or five years old. I must have stared in

bewilderment at this tender, almost mortal scene because Prachak looked at me and laughed.

"Come in," he said. I entered the house and met Prachak's wife, Sepna, and their four children. Sina, the little girl who greeted us, was the youngest. If Sepna thought it odd that Prachak brought home a well-dressed foreigner, she didn't show it. She offered me all the hospitality of family. After I assured her for the third time that I didn't need any further refreshment, she excused herself and put the children to bed, leaving Prachak and I alone.

Prachak offered me some tobacco. When I refused, he lit his pipe and sat back for a moment, savoring the smoke and letting it billow around him. It filled the air with its sweet, pungent aroma.

"I took the Second Breath three years ago," Prachak began. It was the first time he confirmed he was indeed Wan Kuei. Everything before this moment made him seem nothing more than a well-informed mortal, though I sensed otherwise.

"I was starving and ill," Prachak continued. "We did not have the money for a doctor, and what food we had went to the children. Sepna cared for me tenderly, but my fever grew worse and I couldn't breathe properly." He took a deep puff from his pipe, clearly enraptured by this simplest of sensations, before exhaling slowly.

"I feared for myself, but most of all... I feared for my family. How would they survive? My last dying thought was that I'd failed them. I drank too much... I was too lazy... If I had been a better husband and father..." He waved off the thought, churning swirls in the smoke.

"My sins dragged me to Hell, as you well know."

I showed no outward sign of acknowledgment, but inwardly I cringed at the recollection of Yomi's touch.

"There maggots ate my flesh and devils seared my skin," Prachak said, forcing me to recall my own torments. "They punished me for failing my family, but they unwittingly reminded me of who I struggled for and loved. It gave me the strength to escape and to return here." He touched his chest, showing that "here" meant not only the Middle Kingdom, but also the flesh he now inhabited.

"Sepna had called for a doctor when I died; he pronounced me dead. I could hear her weeping when I took the Second Breath and... awoke. I felt the desire of the demon within me, like some black sea screaming for her, but I managed to quell it, subdue its waves. I would not fail her again.

"Sepna was overjoyed at my return... she believed it a miracle, and it was. That night, while she slept, I slipped out to satisfy my hunger. It was the demon's price for ensuring her safety. I gladly paid it over and over again in the following evenings, if for her and our children alone. And on each excursion, I... gained enough money to buy food and medicine for a short while." Prachak paused a moment, puffing on his pipe as though recalling those first nights, the first kills. I scarcely remembered my own, ridden by the demon in a frenzy of hunger.

"It wasn't long before others found me and taught me," Prachak said. "I learned more about the miracle that brought me back from Hell to amend my sins and care for my family. We've been given a great gift," he said to me, "a gift most squander in petty games, pursuing dreams of grandeur they don't deserve."

I considered that for a moment. "So, since your Second Breath, you've been...."

"Right here," Prachak said, "where I belong."

"Why trust me with this? I asked."

"The Flame is a beacon for Wan Kuei. They recognize it as a light to guide their path just as it recognizes them as followers... whether they know it or not."

"Are you certain?" I said. "Am I supposed to be here?"

"If not, then where do you belong, my friend?"

When he asked, I realized I hadn't known the answer to that question for a long time.

## LAMENT

The loss of one of my most promising students is felt even in the Bone Court of Chongqing. So let his last work enter our archives to show we do not fear heresy, for none will shake our determination in finding the path to the Hundred Clouds opened to us by the Grand Arhat Xue. Let this also serve as a warning to other students who stray too far from the path in search of knowledge. Do not stumble blindly into the dark. Carry your Dharma as the lamp to guide your steps and you will not falter.

—Kun Yuwei, archivist and scholar of the Bone Court

## HISTORY

The Dharma known as the Flame of the Rising Phoenix extends back to the Fourth Age and the creation of the Scarlet Phoenix Court in the south of the Middle Kingdom. In that time, Wan Kuei of the Scarlet Phoenix came to Lanka, which was inhabited by fierce *yaksas*, spirits and shapechangers. The Wan Kuei drove these *shen* back into the wild places, making room for mortals to settle the land and support the Court's Demon People.

Like most of the Scarlet Phoenix Court, Lanka's Kuei-jin fell victim to the temptations of the Yama Kings. Ravana, Rajah of Demons, took particular delight in corrupting Wan Kuei and hengeyokai and bringing them into his service as his *rakshas*. It wasn't long before Lanka became Ravana's stronghold in the Middle Kingdom, a place of wickedness and evil amidst the corruption of the Scarlet Phoenix Court.

Those spirits who fought their way free of Yomi and returned to Lanka found themselves trapped in an extension of Ravana's Hell. They had only two choices: yield to the demon within them and join the ranks of Ravana's *akuma*, or strengthen their Hun and hold to their moral principles. This brought some to the Way of the Resplendent Crane, but the *rakshas* delighted in hunting this Dharma's followers. The Shining Ice Guardians concerned themselves only with overcoming Ravana and his demon servants, not with the future fate of the isle of Lanka itself.

So it was that a man named Kataragama took the Second Breath in Lanka, rising from the tortures of Yomi and wrestling with his own demon nature. He was a humble man in life and more so after Heaven had levied its judgment upon him. He rejected the temptations of the Rajah of Demons. He looked upon the Shining Ice Guardians and saw how they lorded their power over others and rejected them as well. Instead, Kataragama returned to his mortal life and family, and did his best to protect them from harm.

His deeds drew the attention of other mortals, who rallied around him and considered him a hero. He also

gained the respect of the Emerald Mother's Beast Courts, and Kataragama aided the clever hengeyokai Hanuman in overcoming Ravana. Together Kataragama and the Monkey Hero harried Ravana's followers. They purged the Yama King's Lanka in flames and consigned it back into the Yomi World, restoring the island to the paradise it had once been. It was now called Ceylon, or Serendib.

After Ravana's defeat, Kataragama retired to the small village that now bears his name. There he laid out the tenets for the Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma and gathered his first students around him. Prachak told me how Kataragama achieved enlightenment long ago, leaving behind only his teachings and his wisdom. Ever since then, Sri Lanka has been the center of the Rising Phoenix, where the bodhisattva's teachings are preserved.

After the Yama King had fled, Kuei-jin and mortals from India settled in Ceylon where a number of Sinhalese kingdoms took root. The wisdom of the Buddha flourished and co-existed with local Hinduism. Petty kingdoms struggled over the island for centuries while the Infinite Thunders Court established itself, extending its influence over the mainland even as Indian princes and rajahs reached out to Ceylon. The Court lay far enough beyond the reach of the Quincunx that there was little conflict with them, though the Flesh Court sometimes sought to extend its influence toward Bangladesh and India.

Any conflict between the Infinite Thunders Court and the Flesh Court became secondary when *gweilo* first arrived. The Portuguese established a colony at Colombo in the 16th century and soon took control of the island. Some fifty years later, the Sinhalese kingdom of Kandy enlisted the aid of the Dutch in pushing out the Portuguese. The Dutch held Ceylon but ignored it for decades, until the English took from them in 1796 with little effort. The British Empire ruled the island and imported Tamil laborers from India to work the coffee, tea, cinnamon, and coconut plantations.

With the Europeans came the first Kin-jin to the Middle Kingdom. The Kin-jin were always few in Sri Lanka's nights, and the Infinite Thunders Court remained well-hidden thanks to the Rising Phoenixes. Their mortal existence and families concealed them as well, if not better, than the Westerners' Masquerade. The invaders were not interested in the spiritual mysteries of the island or its people, so they were scarcely even aware the Court existed.

The same could be said of the Quincunx, which focused on other matters for centuries, paying little heed to the Infinite Thunders Court. It was not until the Eye of the Demon Emperor appeared that the August Courts cries against the *akuma* became so strident, or that the ancestors saw servants of the Yama Kings everywhere. The rise of a powerful Kin-jin demon and the destruction of three bodhisattvas in the Infinite Thunders' domain turned the Middle Kingdom's attentions here.

Now the Quincunx says it will stamp out the Yama Kings' forces and restore righteousness to the Middle Kingdom. It says that it will no longer tolerate heresies of Dharmas like the Rising Phoenix. The Rising Phoenixes are not overly concerned. They hid their light for many centuries now, and will continue to do so even into the dawning of the Sixth Age. I came here to understand what the Quincunx considers such a threat, and I have learned. The Rising Phoenix Dharma is a danger to the August Courts, but not in the way they believe.

## SOCIETY

The society of this Dharma is deceptively simple, often obscured by stereotypes and misunderstandings. Phoenixes follow the teachings of Kataragama (though they don't always agree on the exact interpretations of his words). They seek their own humanity and do not exalt themselves as so many other Kuei-jin. They simply exist and look to correct the mistakes of their past... to free themselves from the Great Cycle as illustrated by their bodhisattva.

### TENETS OF THE RISING PHOENIX

The wisdom of Kataragama is evident in the Rising Phoenix's eight tenets. They describe the path in its entirety, and all that the followers need to achieve understanding. It often takes as long as a mortal lifetime to truly understand their wisdom, though. According to Prachak, some grasp the fundamentals of the tenets right away, while others struggle.

#### TENETS OF THE RISING PHOENIX

1. Return to the world from which you came.
2. Repay the debts of your human life.
3. Help others find the unique value of humanity.
4. Fight the Demon and deny monstrosity.
5. Live not with extremes or balance, but simply well.
6. Wake the sleeper who shuns experience. Life is the arising of experience.
7. Never deny the joys and sorrows of living.
8. Return to your mortal ways; seek your human state.

#### THE FIRST TENET: THE RETURN

"Return to the world from which you came," says the Phoenix's premier tenet. Followers of the Fivefold Way of Xue see the Second Breath as the start of a new existence, a break from their previous mortal lives. We died and escaped from Hell to rise again, with a new mandate from Heaven.

The Rising Phoenixes do not share this view. They see the Second Breath as a continuation of their previous existence, no more new than the passage from childhood to adulthood or adulthood to old age. Although they see and experience things most people will never understand, like the great change in body and spirit, they essentially remain the same individual.

Like Kataragama, Rising Phoenixes do not leave their old lives behind to enter the night-world of the Wan Kuei. Instead, they return to their homes, their families and their old lives with the knowledge that they possess a rare gift, the opportunity to set unbalanced and inauspicious events right. They can make amends for past failures, and they see this as their only righteous pursuit.

"Others talk much about righteousness," Prachak told me, "but they often begin their new existence by ignoring the injustices they created in their own lives. It's easy to lay claim to purity and honor when you have a clean slate. It's

harder to confront the problems that may have led to your mortal death and set them right."

More than simply confronting the burden of their karma, the Phoenixes embrace their humanity. We call ourselves the Demon People... inheritors of the fallen Ten Thousand Immortals and their sins. The Phoenixes do not lay claim to that legacy or to the Mandate of Heaven.

"We are no longer mortal," Prachak says, "because we have passed from life, bearing a heavy burden from our time in Hell. But — we are still human. We still feel, still care, and still bear a duty to our families... to our original purpose in this world. It is that same purpose that forced the rebirth upon us once more. It is so strong that not even death keeps us from fulfilling it. When we turn away from our humanity, we shun our purpose and defile the gift of the Second Breath."

#### THE SECOND TENET: THE BURDEN OF KARMA

The Dharma's second tenet is "repay the debts of your mortal life." The Phoenixes believe in the principle of karma even more strongly than other Dharmas. To them, it is Heaven's judgment that Kuei-jin return from Yomi to correct the misdeeds of their lives and exalt righteousness. Many of my teachers spoke against such attachments, saying we must sever all anchors binding us to our old mortal lives. We must assume the new mandate placed upon us. The Rising Phoenixes, however, believe just the opposite.

"It is our karma's weight that drags us down to Hell," Prachak said. "Our willingness to correct our misdeeds is what allows us to return. We cannot forsake that. The Heavens gave us the opportunity to balance the scales and do that which we failed to accomplish in life. For some, it is caring for family. For others it is undoing the harm they committed... or repaying harm against others and seeing justice done. The debts of karma are many, and resolving to pay them is the first step of our way."

Recalling my own Second Breath and the Kuei-jin who fall victim to their Demon, I asked Prachak... "What of vengeance? Are there Phoenixes who rise from the grave and seek out those who have done *them* wrong? Does this balance the scales of karma?"

He shook his head sadly. "While we are often instruments of justice, we should not be instruments of vengeance. Often, the desire for revenge and a need to satisfy the Demon's hunger drive the *chih-mei*. This further burdens their karma, which must be balanced by righteous action once they have conquered the Demon and learned the way. Some followers of the way seek revenge for injuries done to them. It becomes difficult for them to find true peace and understanding."

This was something of an understatement, as I later discovered. Running Monkeys among the Rising Phoenix are often entangled by the need for revenge... or what they see as "justice." At the Court I heard about a young man who died in a Tamil Tiger bombing in Colombo. He took the Second Breath and immediately believed his karma entailed the destruction of the terrorists responsible for his death. When his activities threatened the stability of the Court, a Resplendent Crane elder was forced to give him the Final Death. Obsession leads Phoenixes to burn brightly... and briefly.

## THE THIRD TENET: HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

"We must never forget from whence we came," Prachak told me. "The third tenet tells us to 'help others understand the unique value of humanity.' So it is our duty to teach as well as learn." I understood Prachak's willingness to speak of his Dharma while he explained this tenet.

The Flame of the Rising Phoenix believes humanity is the source of all wisdom and Heaven's crowning achievement. Kuei-jin should welcome human virtues and qualities, which is why Phoenixes return to their mortal lives. Their friends and families help them maintain a connection with their own humanity. Other Dharmas shun the principles of their mortal lives, seeking perfection by exalting wickedness, virtue, thought, passion, change, or balance.

Phoenixes also believe in showing mortals and Kuei-jin the human potential dwelling within them all. "Our Second Breath proves a spark of righteousness and goodness exists within us all. It is simply a matter of fanning that spark into a flame," Prachak said. How much better is it that sinners be shown the error of their ways so they can repent before Yomi comes for them? Where the Devil-Tigers send sinners screaming into Hell and the Resplendent Cranes castigate them, the Rising Phoenixes hold up a mirror, a light to show them the correct path through the darkness. They hope to spare others from their own fate. It is not always successful. Some refuse to listen, but others recognize their mistakes and seek to rectify them.

"Mistakes are meant to be corrected and not used as weapons to punish us," says the Phoenix guru Hawan Ali. "Heaven is all-merciful in this opportunity to repent." The Phoenixes champion righteousness through example and gentle guidance.

Their belief in the power of humanity also makes the Rising Phoenix Dharma humble. The followers of Xue learn that the Wan Kuei inherited an ancient and great power. Even in their humbled state, they are still greater than the common masses. Not so for the Phoenixes. They seek to remain within humanity's family.

## THE FOURTH TENET: STRUGGLE AGAINST THE DEMON

A vital component in the Rising Phoenix's quest for humanity is their struggle against the P'o. "Fight the Demon and deny monstrosity," says Kataragama. To the Phoenix, the Demon represents all his sins come home to roost... all that is corrupt and evil within the soul. It is a burden each Kuei-jin must bear and eventually overcome to reclaim his humanity. Those who succumb to the Demon may suffer Final Death and pass on through another cycle of the Wheel. Those who truly fail and fall to the Yama Kings must be destroyed. Their souls must pass on, and hopefully, learn their karmic lessons in the next life.

"We are not *akuma*," Prachak said firmly. "We are not demons. The Devil-Tigers who lash sinners with barbed whips and roast them over flames are more demons than we can ever be, and yet they dare brand us as outcasts, because we do not support the Heavenly Mandate of the Fivefold Way."

"We each struggle against the Demon every night, seeking to cage it while we starve it with righteousness and weaken it with the honest flame of humanity. It is a difficult



task." Indeed, the Rising Phoenixes face their greatest threat from within. There is always the chance that their shadow soul will overwhelm their human nature, giving the Demon free rein to satisfy its never-ending hungers. Phoenixes also have the most to lose, since they gather their friends and families close at hand.

"Many would call them our greatest vulnerability," Prachak said, watching his youngest daughter sleep; so peaceful... so helpless and innocent. He reached out, gently stroking her hair with a tenderness I had never known, before or after the Second Breath. "In truth, they are our greatest strength. It was my love for my family that leashed the Demon after it helped me return to the world. It is their love, and my duty to them, that allows me to leash it still. I would permit nothing to bring them harm."

Their struggle against the P'o is not without its price. In addition to the risks they take, Rising Phoenixes disdain the Demon Arts so widespread among the Kuei-jin and the use of Demon Chi that accompanies them. "You should accept the Demon's gifts only with great care, and use it only in times of greatest need. Anything else gives it too much strength."

## THE FIFTH TENET: LIVING WELL

"Live not with extremes or balance, but simply well," says the fifth tenet of the Rising Phoenix. It reveals a core belief of the path's ethos. The Phoenixes *live*, they do not merely exist. Although they have died and returned changed, they do not see themselves as dead things, only as different from how they were before. They have returned to life and embrace it wholeheartedly.

"Part of our duty is to live life as never before," said Prachak. "I know Thrashing Dragons who think living means hurling themselves into orgies of sex, food, and other pleasures. They make the same mistakes as mortals who use those things to feel more alive. They only become empty inside when the party ends and there's nothing left to eat or screw. Kataragama encourages us to take pleasure in the simplest things. We don't have to look for them... they've always been here, waiting for us to notice them: a child's laugh, the touch of a loved one's hand, honest work well done, the gathering of family in celebration. These are all a part of our lives."

I thought the fifth tenet weak compared to the ways of Xue, and said as much. It dedicated one virtue above all others. Prachak shook his head. "It's just the opposite. Placing all emphasis on a single extreme, even one of balance above all else, is unnatural. Consider... even the great Xue pursued all Dharmas that he laid out for those who followed him. It was only after experiencing all their virtues that he achieved enlightenment. Kataragama achieved enlightenment just by the simple act of living. That's why I said you wouldn't find the secrets of the Flame in sutras and scrolls. It isn't something easily transcribed or related. It is something you must experience for yourself."

It was then I felt the stirring of an unfamiliar warmth inside me. "How can I experience this?" I asked.

## THE SIXTH TENET: WAKING THE SLEEPER

"You must awaken," Prachak told me. "That is the lesson of the sixth tenet: 'Wake the sleeper who shuns

experience. Life is the arising of experience.' All that we are, we fashion from our experiences in life. It is when we cut ourselves off from life that we are truly dead."

Once, the Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma tried following this tenet to its fullest, bringing their understanding to all Wan Kuei. Since the August Courts' orthodoxy declared them outcasts and *akuma*, they now focus their attention on mortals and those new to the Second Breath, or those occasional seekers looking to understand their ways, like myself.

"There are many mortals who walk through life with their eyes closed," Prachak told me. "Some may become as we are after death. Or, they simply move on to the next life in the Great Cycle, repeating hardships over again until they learn to wake up and see the world around them. The same is true of those who have taken the Second Breath, but rejected their second chance by making a new set of mistakes."

Rising Phoenixes believe they have a particular duty to *chih-mei*, those whose souls lie in the grips of their Demons. They seek them out whenever possible, so they can help them conquer their Demons and educate them in the Dharma's ways. The August Courts call this a grave threat, saying the Rising Phoenixes are "stealing" potential *hin* and indoctrinating them into a heretical path solely as a means of perpetuating their false beliefs. Prachak laughed when I told him that.

"Of course that's what they think," he said. "That's what *we* think of *them*. The difference is we don't label people *akuma* for choosing another way. We may disagree with their choices, even pity them, but we don't declare them outcasts. We think it's important to give those newly returned to this world a chance at the truth we understand, before the Quincunx snatches them up like jealous hawks."

"The Devil-Tigers teach *hin* with lashes and hot irons. The Rootless Trees and your own Bone Flowers teach with meditation and endless riddles and puzzles. We teach our neophytes by showing them how to embrace their humanity... how to be whole, sometimes for the first time in their lives... not de... r spirits. That's the duty demanded of us by the sixth tenet. That's what the August Courts fear."

## THE SEVENTH TENET: OPENING THE HEART

"Afraid?" I thought, "How could the revered ancestors fear such a thing?" When I asked that of Prachak, he said it illustrates the seventh tenet of his Dharma.

"Life can be frightening," he said. "We all know that. After all, didn't our lives seemingly end badly before the Second Breath?" I thought back to the razor slicing through the skin of my wrist and the warmth of the water as my blood turned it crimson. How I longed for the peace of death. Yes... things often ended badly indeed.

"All of us who have seen Hell know just how frightening life, and death, are. There are two ways of dealing with this fear once we return and know we must face it again. The simplest way is to flee from the fear, wall yourself up behind beliefs that claim you don't have to live any longer. You can abandon the old life that gave so much pain, so much hardship. That's what the Quincunx encourages. Their Dharmas hide from life in one way or another, through excess or strict devotion to balance. They claim they're *different* than before, not tied to their frightening, terrible life."

"The other way, our way, is understanding you *cannot* escape. Even death does not liberate us, or anyone else. We return from Hell so we can live again. How can we now turn our backs on what we fought to regain? We must face our mistakes and miseries and deal with them. In doing so, we discover rewards unknown to those who shut themselves away from life. The seventh tenet tells us, 'Never deny the joys or sorrows of mortal life,' sorrows *and* joys! They are both a part of life."

Prachak shared his own struggles, before and after taking the Second Breath. Interspersed with these tales were stories about the things he cherished and appreciated since escaping Yomi—from the birth of his youngest child to his deepening love for his wife, to the friendships he forged in the community and the Infinite Thunders Court. I found myself thinking about those I left behind... how much of their brief lives had I missed? And what had become of them since my passing into Hell?

## THE EIGHTH TENET: MORTAL WAYS

"Return to your mortal ways; seek your mortal state," was Kataragama's final tenet," Prachak said. "It is the culmination of all our way's other creeds. Rather than believing ourselves fallen and seeking another path, we see ourselves as human and seek to return to that state with all the lessons that death and rebirth taught us."

Prachak asked me to consider the qualities of a true Kuei-jin bodhisattva... what would they be? Wisdom, I supposed, understanding, transcendence and purity.

"A true bodhisattva," my host said, "is in harmony with all things... is *natural* above all else, not unnatural." He maintained that the Dharma's various bodhisattvas learned the lesson the Phoenixes taught. In achieving the Hundred Clouds, they came full circle back to their human nature. They became perfected humans rather than gods or the hungry dead. They learn the same lessons we do, though they arrive by a longer road.

"To follow the Flame of the Rising Phoenix is to become as a child once more," Prachak said. "In childhood we are most at harmony with what is natural in the world. We know in our hearts what feels right and what doesn't. The Second Breath can be a true rebirth, if we allow it to be, and our new existence an opportunity to experience childhood again. We are no longer innocents, but we are open to new experiences and new needs, with a greater awareness of what is natural in the world. If we follow our highest instincts and deny the power of the demon, they can lead us to understanding."

## THE INFINITE THUNDERS COURT

After our talk, Prachak insisted I spend the day at his family's home. The next night, he would introduce me to the elders of the Court. I accepted his gracious offer and we retired just before sunrise. Although the room where I rested was simple and humble, I felt comfortable and secure.

I rose after sunset, feeling refreshed. Prachak's wife greeted us with some simple fare, which she once again pressed upon us. I hadn't eaten so much in months, but I did not wish to appear rude. As we ate, I asked Prachak what I could expect of the Infinite Thunders Court. What I had already seen certainly did not meet my expectations.

My host's features darkened. "The Bijali Court is not what it was a few years ago," he said. "Dark times are upon us, Jiwan. The cycle turns and terrible omens are everywhere." He went on to tell me about the deaths of several ancient bodhisattvas within the domain of the Infinite Thunders Court. It led even more ancestors of the August Courts to claim that *akuma* riddled the Infinite Thunders and that it was all but in the hands of the Yama Kings.

"That is not so... yet. The Yama Kings, though, do turn their greedy eyes to the Isle of Dharma and the Infinite Thunders Court. There are those who would dearly love to return to the days when they and their kind ruled this land... the dread lord of the *raksha* most of all." He did not mention the name of Ravana, but what properly educated Kuei-jin did not know of one of Yomi's most infamous lords?

"There are *akuma* here, make no mistake. The Yama Kings have many ways to tempt and lure us into their service, but there are not as many as the Quincunx has you believe. We are not all demon-ridden... no more, and perhaps less even, than the August Courts."

I asked about the Bijali Court and Prachak told me more as we made our way from his home into the streets of Colombo.

"Order is an important quality to us," he said. "You may see what appears to be disorder and chaos all around you, but there is structure underlying it all... sometimes beyond what we can easily see. Understanding that divine order is part of our goal in following the way."

"That is certainly a goal I understand," I said. "My Dharma seeks the same understanding."

"No," Prachak replied gently. "Our comprehension of the order of things comes from our understanding of ourselves and our own humanity. It comes from our empathy and compassion for all living things. Your Dharma's understanding comes from silence, darkness and speaking with dead things. While I think you gain invaluable knowledge for the order of death and what lies beyond, I think you lack an understanding and appreciation for life."

I did not wish to insult my host, so I held my reply and asked instead about how the Infinite Thunders Court educates its *hin*, if not by the Fivefold Way.

## THE FOUR STEPS

"The Bijali Court follows Four Steps rather than five great principles. They are also known as the Four Gateways along our path."

"When a *chih-mei* first wrests control from the shadow soul, the Court's teachers begin the process of instruction. The first task is to master social graces, much like the *hin* under the August Courts. Supplicants learn to understand the diverse ways of our people, the names of the various Courts, proper etiquette and behavior. We expect them to set aside their conflicts and live harmoniously. Unfortunately, not everyone can do so." I thought back to Prachak's tale about the Running Monkey who sought only vengeance and his ultimate end.

"It is also in this time that a supplicant chooses a Dharma to follow. Students learn about the various Dharmas so they can choose wisely and follow the path meant for them."

"Do you teach all of the Dharmas here?" I asked. Prachak chuckled.



"Do you know all of what exists when it comes to the Dharmas?" he said in reply. "Do I? Does anyone, save the bodhisattvas? We teach what we can from what we know. Most of our elders follow the Path of the Resplendent Crane, so it is the most widely taught Dharma, along with the Flame of the Rising Phoenix. Some Dharmas have few, if any, elders here, so they find few adherents. You won't find many Devil-Tigers among us — or Bone Flowers, for that matter," he said, glancing back at me. "Thrashing Dragons are known, but are more common in the Golden Courts; many leave here for Indonesia and its neighbors."

"Once a student chooses a Dharma, the education continues. Some spend a mortal lifetime or more in study and go no further than the first gate, the Gate of Clay. A student who masters manners and proper behavior passes through the gate to become a Child of Clay, recognizing the humble material we mold into things of purpose and beauty.

We came to a simple whitewashed building with thick pillars supporting its open, arched entrance. The man standing watch inside recognized Prachak. With a nod, Prachak led me through, into an antechamber. We shed our shoes and he gestured that I should sit with him on the cushions placed for guests; he continued my lessons.

"Next comes the study of rituals and lore, along with meditation to strengthen and nourish the mind and spirit. Many of us neglected those things before the Second Breath, so we promote them here. A student must have an understanding of the nature of prana, the flow of life force, and the lore gathered by scholars over the centuries. They study sutras and practice. Most importantly, they practice the ways of their Dharma, which for us means returning to their human lives and amending the wrongs they find there.

"A student who successfully masters these disciplines passes through the second gate, the Gate of Stone. He is known as a Scholar of Stone... strong, able to support his own weight and carry on as long as needed."

A woman emerged from one of the shadowed halls. Veils covered her entirely save for her slender hands and her dark eyes, which glanced over me before turning to Prachak.

"The brahmins are ready to receive you," she said softly, withdrawing to lead the way.

## THE BRAHMINS

The jina and mandarins of the Infinite Thunders Court are the *brahmins*, warrior-priests respected for their skill and enlightenment. Most follow the Path of the Resplendent Crane or the Flame of the Rising Phoenix, exemplifying the qualities of excellence and righteousness. Their backgrounds are often diverse, but they are united in their dedication to the path and the challenges they must overcome to achieve their status.

I explained to the brahmins my reasons for coming to Sri Lanka. Thankfully, they found my petition worthy; particularly after Prachak spoke in my favor and humbly asked I be given whatever assistance I needed in my task. The brahmins exchanged looks and spoke quietly for a few moments. Then Hawan Ali, a dark man with a full beard and a turban set with a blood-red stone, turned to me.

"Do you understand?" he asked.

"Forgive me, noble brahmin, but I do not understand."

Ali nodded. "Good. Let us hope that you do... in time." Our audience was at an end.

Prachak said he would show me the sutras of Kataragama, and he continued explaining about the remaining gates.

"The third gate is the Gate of Jade, a sign of perfection. It is the warrior's gate. Many students do not reach it, preferring the scholar's life, which is no poor choice. To pass through the warrior's gate, a disciple must study the martial disciplines and learn how to fight and, more importantly, how to win.

"The techniques of the Jade Warrior teach us to appreciate and accept the inevitability of death as part of life. It gives us strength and the ability to protect what we value."

I said I had seen the martial virtues exalted in other Dharmas as well, and Prachak agreed.

"But do not forget that a Warrior of Jade does not fight or kill without reason. Our way teaches that fighting is sometimes necessary, but a warrior's true goal is to avoid conflict. By learning and mastering the ways of war, they understand how to bring peace."

The collection of scrolls and books Prachak showed me was small compared to the Bone Court's library, but it was impressive nonetheless. Many works were ancient, painted on silk and lovingly preserved. Others were more recent, though no less artful or carefully penned. Most were written in Sanskrit, so I prevailed on some help in translating them since my skills in that language were sorely limited.

"What of the final gate?" I asked while looking through a scroll laid out on the table before us.

"The final gate is the Gate of Perfection," Prachak said. "It is the Gate of Diamond, the true entrance to the path of enlightenment."

"How does a disciple achieve that gate?"

"By opening the heart and cultivating compassion for all things," he replied. "Only by learning love and compassion can one become a Priest of Diamond, a true brahmin. Compassion is our ultimate goal." He smiled, his teeth white against his brown face. "Do you understand?" he said, echoing Hawan Ali's words to me.

"No," I repeated, "but I think I'm beginning to."

## WALKING AMONG THE LIVING

My studies at the Bijali Court were not limited to books and scrolls. Prachak and the Court's other Kuei-jin ensured that I spent some of nights among the people of Colombo. They also took me to visit various places in Sri Lanka, from the village bearing Kataragama's name to the mountains where the Muslims believe Adam stood after his exile from Eden. Some Phoenixes believe it was a parable for the fall of the Wan Xian.

Having spent so much time after my Second Breath alone or in the company of the Bone Court's scholars, I found being surrounded by life and activity again uncomfortable at first. Still, I saw the Phoenixes walk among the mortals, living their mortal lives. That showed me more about their Dharma than any written work could, just as Prachak promised.

"Isn't it difficult?" I asked Prachak one night while we sat, sipping strong coffee and watching the marketplace close its tents and doors. "I mean, being so close to life, but apart from it?"

"Important things are always difficult," he answered, "but they are still worth the struggle. We have limits imposed



upon us, but most of us find ways around them or we learn to deal with them in time. We appreciate what we have all the more by what we don't have, after all."

"But surely, your Dharma's demands carry great risks," I said.

"Yes, but life is risk. You cannot have one without the other. We choose life, so we choose risk as well." Then, Prachak told me of some of the risks the Phoenixes take, so that I could better understand.

## THE RISKS OF LIVING

In addition to risking being branded *akuma* simply for following their way, Rising Phoenixes assume many jeopardies in the name of the Dharma, which demands they live their mortal lives and right the wrongs.

The first and perhaps most substantial risk is that of discovery. "We learn much about trust," Prachak said. A Phoenix must know whom to trust and exactly how far to extend that trust, because his existence often lies in the hands of friends and family. He must conceal the true nature of his existence for a time, but not forever (particularly from those closest to him, who see him every night and must watch over him every day). Each Phoenix decides who to trust with the truth, and how much to tell them. It is inevitable, since Phoenixes cannot follow the way in isolation. Their light must shine and touch the lives of those closest to them.

Some of the living are horrified or revolted, or course, and turn away. There are Phoenixes who kill to protect their true nature, an additional burden of karma to bear. Fortunately, there are other means of dealing with mortals who stumble upon a Phoenix's true nature... rituals to confuse the memory and blur any such dangerous knowledge in the living. There are also rites the Brahmin and scholars of the Infinite Thunders Court use to help Phoenixes return to their mortal lives without the awkward questions they would face if others knew they had somehow returned from death. These rites fog the mind, forcing the living into believing the Phoenix was in fact away on a trip or hospitalized rather than killed.

While Phoenixes surround themselves with trustworthy friends and family when possible, they must still face the mortal masses that know nothing of their true nature and keep it secret from them. There is the danger of exposure as well as a temptation in drawing living Chi (or Prana, as those of the Bijali Court call it). Fire soul can overwhelm a Phoenix, bringing on a frenzy that results in violence or murder. This is particularly true for Phoenixes strongest in Yang and closest to life. Worse still, one may succumb to shadow soul, giving the P'o free rein to satisfy its dark needs. Phoenixes can only hope to resist these states and cover up the results of their deeds when they fail.

Even the most successful Rising Phoenix faces danger among the living; even if they are not detected, even if they master their P'o and not fall victim to fire or shadow soul. The reward of a successful Rising Phoenix entails watching family and loved ones grow old while they remain the same. Mortals may age, grow sick and die while we are eternal. Even Prachak is wistful when faced with the possibility of watching his wife and children age, perhaps even one day seeing his grandchildren fade to dust. But it didn't seem to worry him much. "Hopefully, I will have left the Cycle by then," he said.

Of course, not all of a Rising Phoenix's progeny will age so quickly. Another consequence of remaining so close to mortals, particularly wives, husbands and lovers, is the possibility of dhampyr children born from the union of Phoenix and mortal. This is one reason, I'm sure, for the number of dhampyrs scattered throughout the Infinite Thunders Court and in the nearby Golden Courts. Dhampyrs born to Rising Phoenix parents are among the most fortunate of their kind, since the Phoenixes regard family ties quite seriously. They are unlikely to abandon a dhampyr child and are more willing to raise it as their own. Nearly all dhampyrs raised within the Infinite Thunders Court support their parents' Dharma.

## VISIONS OF LIFE: PHOENIX SECTS

After listening solely to Prachak's interpretation of the Rising Phoenix's tenets, one might believe the Dharma's followers are in accordance about their nature and mandate in the Middle Kingdom. This is not entirely so. There are divisions within the Dharma, just as there are with any other. The Flame of the Rising Phoenix's sects generally fall along religious lines. Their view of Heaven and why they were chosen to correct their mistakes colors their interpretations of the Dharma's tenets and ways.

The three major sects within the Flame of the Rising Phoenix adhere to the three most influential religions in the Bijali Court: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

### BUDDHIST PHOENIXES

Buddhism is the most influential religion in the Rising Phoenix Dharma and Infinite Thunders Court. The followers of the Buddha believe in the Four Holy Truths and relate them to Kataragama's revelations on the nature of the Second Breath. The Four Holy Truths show that existence is suffering caused by desire, and that freeing oneself from suffering is the cessation of desire through the Holy Eightfold Path.

These Phoenixes link desire to the suffering of their mortal lives and the terrible torture that followed in Yomi. This suffering is their due for wrong actions, which usually involves entanglement in material desires and pursuit of material goals. To them, death and torture in Hell is meant to open their eyes to the Four Holy Truths, more strongly than any experience in mortal life possibly could. While some understand the Holy Truths in life, others can only grasp them with demons as their instructors.

The Second Breath comes with this understanding, a return to the Great Cycle without passing on to another incarnation. Instead, the spirit returns to the corpse with the opportunity to follow the Holy Eightfold Path toward enlightenment. If they succeed, the Great Cycle will free them into Nirvana's arms. If they fail, they must continue in the Great Cycle. Most Buddhist Phoenixes believe that Final Death is not final at all. This leads a small number of suicide cultists to seek it out, considering it preferable to their undead state.

These suicide Phoenixes, nearly always Buddhists in life, end their suffering and involvement in the Great Cycle by embracing Final Death, usually after preparing and purifying themselves as much as possible. They pray and meditate on enlightenment and the wisdom of the Buddha before deliberately facing the Eye of Heaven and rotting away into dust. A few immolate themselves instead, becoming

true "phoenixes" in their personal funeral pyres. Fortunately, such extremists are rare.

Most Buddhist Phoenixes consider the Second Breath a blessing, albeit a stern one. After a life of immoderate behavior, they receive the opportunity to correct their mistakes and follow the Eightfold Path toward righteousness and enlightenment. They "possess" full awareness of their experiences and the lessons they must teach and learn. The way is hard, but all the more important that they succeed.

Following the Eightfold Way is difficult for any Kueijin, and Buddhist Phoenixes do their best within the limits of their nature. They avoid killing any creature, including other *shen* but not the demons of Yomi or other servants of the Yama Kings. This means they take only small amounts of Chi from others, just enough to sustain themselves, and they struggle against fire soul and the P'o's demands to glut themselves on Chi. In fact, the ideal is to feed only upon freely offered Chi, but few Phoenixes achieve such trust even with members of their families. Still, one reason they continue their human relationships is to seek their kin's aid in following the Way.

Buddhist Phoenixes practice moderation in all things, following the Eightfold Way and the tenets of their Dharma. They avoid excess, both indulgence and asceticism, in favor of a simple existence sufficient for their needs. They practice the virtues of right thought and action in all things, from their meditation to their work and their relationships with others, both mortal and *shen*.

### HINDU PHOENIXES

Hinduism is common in Sri Lanka, particularly in India's Infinite Thunders Court. Phoenixes who follow the Hindu path seek enlightenment much as do their Buddhist peers, but with a different understanding of their existence and the tenets of their path.

The Hindu belief in karma is pivotal to the Rising Phoenix. Hindus believe that one's deeds in life dictate one's future. A person who is good and moral reincarnates into better circumstances, allowing for continued spiritual advancement. A person living a wicked and sinful life returns in a degraded or lesser form as a spiritual lesson. Once they master the necessary knowledge, they move on to a better life in their next incarnation. Eventually, they achieve a deep understanding of the universe's Truth and become one with it, leaving the Great Cycle altogether.

Within the Dharma, there are several interpretations of the Hindu doctrine of karma. Prachak related to me how some Hindu Phoenixes believe that the Second Breath is much like a rebirth, with souls consigned to unlife as a result of their karma so they can learn the necessary lessons. Other Hindus believe that the Second Breath removes them from the Great Cycle entirely, suspending their progress. Since they're no longer alive, they do not incarnate. They must learn that which an existence as Demon People offers, and seek to balance the karmic scales of their lives so as to reenter the Great Cycle and continue toward enlightenment.

With that in mind, the duty of a Hindu Phoenix is twofold: to balance out their karmic debt and to learn. They follow Hindu disciplines of yoga and meditation, thus becoming more spiritual, and they often adhere to codes of proper behavior similar to those espoused by the Resplendent Cranes (cultivating the Hun and elevating it above the P'o while keeping the Demon bound within). They seek the

state of *samadhi*, in which they can apprehend the Truth of God, though some Phoenixes believe that such an enlightened state is denied them. All they can hope for is to return to the Great Wheel of Reincarnation and continue their mortal journey.

Hindu Phoenixes balance their karma in two ways. First, they try to correct mistakes their life's mistakes. This may range from righting small wrongs to atoning for a lifetime of shameful behavior. Since Rising Phoenixes maintain contact with mortals from their living years, this work usually begins at home, with family and friends they mistreated. Apologies for their past behavior are common, along with attempts to win back the trust and respect of people they offended.

The other way Hindu Phoenixes balance out their karmic debt is by cultivating proper actions and performing good deeds following the Second Breath. Here they find allies among the Resplendent Cranes, who encourage their virtue, though the Phoenixes prize humility through righteous deeds instead of pointing out someone else's faults or leading by example. Prachak told me that the guidance he freely offers me is a part of his own redemption.

## MUSLIM PHOENIXES

Muslims from the mainland as well as Sri Lanka constitute the smallest of the Rising Phoenix's three sects. Nearly all of these Kuei-jin followed Islam in life and found their descent into Yomi a just punishment for a sinful and wicked existence. Those who don't simply don't follow the Rising Phoenix Dharma.

"But Allah is all-compassionate and all-merciful," said Hawan Ali. After a taste of Hell, these souls return to their mortal flesh and the world of the living, to amend the wrongs they committed and earn a place in Paradise.

Muslim Phoenixes emphasize their unliving state more than others of their Dharma. Having died and been to Hell, they understand that their old life is over. Why go back to a state of being that condemned you in the first place? Their return to mortal existence extends only insofar as atoning for their sins and living according to Allah's will and Islam's doctrines. It is certainly not a simple task, given their nature as Kuei-jin, but they are grateful for any opportunity at all. A disciple who complains about the challenge of following Allah's Will as undead is simply asked, "would you prefer the tortures of Yomi for all time, then?"

Buddhist and Hindu Phoenixes both seek escape from incarnation's Great Cycle, bringing them to oneness with the universe. For Muslim Phoenixes, the goal is eternal Paradise where they will dwell with Allah in Heaven. While the other sects adhere to the progression of the Great Cycle, believing they will return to life, Muslims believe each soul incarnates only once, so the second chance Allah granted them is the only chance they have.

Muslims of the Flame of the Rising Phoenix seek Paradise in one of two ways. Many try to right the wrongs of their mortal life and live in accordance with Islam to the best of their ability. They seek Allah's infinite compassion and mercy. Some believe that only martyrs are guaranteed entry into Paradise. These hopefuls become *akuma*-hunters, using the "gifts" Allah gave them against the minions of Hell in hopes of a glorious Final Death, taking as many servants of Shaitan with them as possible. They believe this will grant them entrance into Paradise. According to

Hawan Ali, it is not unknown for some Muslim Phoenixes to turn against all Kuei-jin, though they usually find their martyrdom quickly, indeed.

## THE SOCIETY OF THE SUNSET PEOPLE

The Flame of the Rising Phoenix has little to do with Kuei-jin society. The Infinite Thunders Court sits in grand isolation from the adjoining Quincunx and the Golden Courts, and would gladly remain so if its neighbors allowed. Phoenixes do not follow many of the other Kuei-jin ways with regards to traditions like direction, arrangement of *wu*, or other matters the August Courts consider sacrosanct.

## THE DIRECTIONS OF THE STARS

My teachers and fellow scholars at the Bone Court consider all Rising Phoenixes oriented in the Eastern direction, an imbalanced arrangement to be sure. Not so for the Phoenixes, however, who do not follow the August Courts' system of directions. The Quincunx claims these bearings guide a Kuei-jin towards his or her duties under Heaven, whereas the Phoenixes take their duties from the tenets of their Dharma and the needs of their mortal life (something the August Courts instruct Kuei-jin to "look beyond").

Instead of directions, the Rising Phoenix Dharma and much of the Infinite Thunders Court uses Vedic astrology to study the exact place and time where disciples take the Second Breath. Treating it as a true rebirth of sorts, they cast an astrological chart for the disciple's new existence, often comparing it to one created for their mortal birth. In this way, they understand the sign under which the newly created Kuei-jin will labor, and what universal forces are at work in their existence. The position of the different planets in the chart's twelve houses shows a person's strengths, weaknesses, and the challenges to their quest for understanding.

The subject fills volumes in the Infinite Thunders Court's library. Many spend mortal lifetimes studying and mastering the art of casting and interpreting charts, and the local Kuei-jin prize their skills greatly. At my request, a Jade Scholar prepared charts for my First and Second Breaths and interpreted them for me. I found them incredibly accurate. They mirrored the challenges I faced in life both before and after my mortal death, such as overcoming emotional blocks, balancing my intellectual and physical needs, and finding satisfaction within. This art guides the Phoenixes and other Kuei-jin of the Bijali Court.

## DHARMIC VIEWS

It's too simplistic to say that Rising Phoenixes view other Dharmas with the same scorn the Quincunx heaps upon them. In fact, Phoenixes often find things to admire and respect in other Dharmas and acknowledge them as valid, if flawed, paths toward enlightenment. As Prachak pointed out, many see the Fivefold Way's Dharmas as incomplete, parts of a greater whole that Grand Arhat Xue understood but that his students misinterpreted. In this respect, they consider the other heretical Dharmas even more misguided.

### Way of the Resplendent Crane

The Dharma closest to the Rising Phoenix's tenets is the Way of the Resplendent Crane, which allows the two

Dharmas to co-exist peacefully in the Bijali Court. The Shining Ice Guardians respect and uphold the same high standards as the Phoenixes, and both Dharmas believe in the importance of honor and supporting one's family.

The difference between them stems from their views on the Second Breath and its meaning. The Resplendent Cranes see their undead state as shameful... a punishment for their sins in life. It is their duty to atone for this shame with right action and virtuous behavior. The Phoenixes do not see the Second Breath as punishment, but as a gift, an opportunity. Resplendent Cranes consider their past actions shameful, but they hide their disgrace and cover it with good deeds and righteous speech. They aid their relations, living and dead, but never communicate or interact with them. They put all concerns of living aside to assume the burden of their newfound duty.

Although the Resplendent Cranes are closest to understanding their way, the Rising Phoenixes believe them too bound up in their own shame and pride. If they would only set those things aside and *live*, keeping to the virtues they uphold, then they would truly understand.

### Dance of the Thrashing Dragon

On the surface, the Thrashing Dragons seem to share much in common with the Rising Phoenixes. Both Dharmas embrace mortal life and the essence of Yang as virtues. The similarities end there, however. For the Phoenixes, the Laughing Rainbows are closer in nature to the Face of the Gods' would-be godlings. "They seek an ideal, fantastic sort of life," Prachak said about the Thrashing Dragons. "Theirs is an existence filled with pleasures, beauty, dancing, drinking, eating and fucking. It is no more real than a movie."

The Phoenixes believe the Laughing Rainbows overlook two important ideals. The first is the tenet "live not with extremes or balance, but simply well." The life of a Thrashing Dragon is rarely simple. They seek the polarities in pleasure and sensation that the Phoenixes disdain. They reach beyond the experiences they were born with, into existence as the opposite sex, beasts, or things born solely from their fevered imaginations. They also ignore the principle of "never deny the joys and sorrows of life," by trying to drown sorrow in a torrent of ordeals and laughter. Their celebration and joy turn pale and hollow without the grounding of true human experience and sorrow.

### Path of a Thousand Whispers

Returning to mortal existence is part of the Thousand Whispers as well, but again, the Rootless Trees miss the point. "Life is not a shadow-play," Prachak said. The Rootless Trees wear masks that are just that, masks. They play at being mortal without exploring the most important mortal role of all — their own.

Phoenixes find the Wise Centipede practice of repeatedly cutting their ties with the mortal world abhorrent, and attribute their strange behavior to it. They deliberately torture themselves by creating shadows of the life they could have, building up trust and understanding with others, then tearing it all down so they can start over again. Are they afraid of true closeness and trust? Some Phoenixes would say so.

### Song of the Shadow

It was Prachak's description of my own Dharma that truly opened my eyes to what I had long felt. "Embracing death should only strengthen our appreciation for life," he said. The example used by the Rising Phoenixes is the way

of the warrior. When a warrior learns to accept death, he becomes fearless and is free to act. "But accepting death is not the same as accepting *being* dead," my guide said.

"To dwell in death is to deny life, and that is a great offense to karma and to our purpose in the Great Cycle. We are here to live. We returned from Hell so that we could know life again. Why hide in the cold and dark unless you fear life? There are those who need time to heal from the wounds they suffered, but wasting a life among the dead? One may as well intern himself in a tomb."

### Howl of the Devil-Tiger

Although Rising Phoenixes pity those of us existing so close to the Yin World, they reserve their true disdain for the Heavenly Devils and their ways. "Ah, yes," Prachak said with a bitter note in this voice. "The self-appointed Avengers of Heaven, who take it upon themselves to punish sinners and excuse any evil in the name of their Mandate. They hunt us and call us *akuma*, but they are more demons than we have ever been."

"What is better: to slowly strip off a sinner's skin, sending another soul screaming into Yomi, or to show the sinner compassion and help him understand the error of his ways? Were we given a second chance merely to become instruments of torture and evil? I don't think Heaven is so cruel. When I think of the Devil-Tigers, I pray they do not truly hold the Mandate of Heaven. If they do... then we're all lost."

## OTHER HERESIES

The followers of the Rising Phoenix view the other Dharmas deemed heretical by the Quincunx as they do the Fivefold Way. Each has something to offer, but at best, all are misguided in their beliefs. Phoenixes typically have little to do with any of them.

The Tempest of the Inward Focus is too rigid, denying both the joys and sorrows of life to seek perfect balance and control. The Spirit of the Living Earth has some understanding of the truths espoused by the Phoenixes, but they remain too focused on their worship of spirits to enjoy their mortal existence. "They would prefer walking with spirits than spending a day of honest work or honest enjoyment," Prachak said.

The Face of the Gods Dharma is sorely deluded, according to Rising Phoenix wisdom. "They are close to becoming *akuma*," said Hawan Ali. "Proclaiming themselves gods is the height of arrogance, certain to bring about their fall. They follow the insights of a madman, which can only lead them into madness."

Finally, the Scorpion Eaters are among the most reviled. "They are what the Godlings, the Devil-Tigers and others may become," Prachak said. "They bathe in corruption and poison, eating their own humanity to become something pleasing to the Lords of the Yomi World." *Akuma* like the Scorpion Eaters are threats against which the Rising Phoenixes protect their families.

## THE YAMA KINGS

The Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma understands the grave threat posed by the Yama Kings to the Middle Kingdom and the world. As Prachak explained it, they also believe that in the end, the August Courts actions benefit only the Yama Kings.

"The ways of the Courts, their politics, their instructions, their 'Great Leap Outward'... all of this serves the Yama

Kings. How do the August Courts fight the Yomi Wan's forces? By recreating Hell on Earth through war, by declaring us outcasts and *akuma*. If the August Courts are so concerned about righteousness, they should look within themselves and see what they find."

It is sad that the Infinite Thunders Court, reviled as a place of heretics, is freer of *akuma* than perhaps any other Court in the Middle Kingdom. The members of the Bijali Court know the signs of the demon-ridden when they see them, and they spare no expense protecting their homes and families. I saw a hunt against a true *akuma* in Sri Lanka, and the Brahmins' justice was swift and sure. If the Yama Kings ever claim this land, it will be over the corpses of its protectors, only after a fair share of devils are first sent screaming back into Yomi.

## THE PHOENIX BURNS BRIGHT

"Our way is not easy," Hawan Ali told me when I stood before the council of the Bijali Court. "Indeed, it may be the hardest road to walk. It requires facing fears and pain and responsibility... it requires tearing away illusions and it requires the courage to live, and live well, above all else. It is not a choice undertaken lightly. Do you understand?"

I nodded slightly, feeling the flush of my face, the heat on my skin. "I'm beginning to, sir."

The Rising Phoenix guru nodded gravely. "Then what is your choice?" he asked.

"I choose to live," I said.

"So be it. Understand, disciple, that because the Phoenix burns brightly, you can never wholly conceal its light. It consumes all, but the Phoenix is reborn in that all-consuming flame. So will it be with you. May the fire of your devotion grow to consume you, so that you may be reborn and leave the Great Cycle behind."

I stepped onto the path without looking back, thinking of the family I hadn't seen in so very long. "Mother, Father," I thought, "I am coming home."

## SYSTEMS

This section examines the challenges and opportunities offered by Rising Phoenix characters, as well as how they can affect chronicles. It also provides information on the Dharma's use of disciplines, specific rituals, and other game mechanics.

## THE SHADOW OF LIFE

As part of their Dharma, Phoenixes do their best to resume their mortal lives from before they took the Second Breath while correcting their past failures. This is often difficult, given their restrictions as Demon People. Phoenixes must always make some concessions for their new existence, particularly their need to operate at night and hide from the Eye of Heaven during the day.

## FLAMING INTO NOTHINGNESS

The problem with bright candles in the dark is that they become beacons to everything in the shadows, be they predator or prey. A Phoenix's desire to exist in mortal surroundings again may force him to stand vigilant against the approach of *akuma*, but the Phoenix rarely understands that he's the target of the Yama Kings, not his mortal relations. The Phoenix's friends and family are merely levers and strings to pull and manipulate.

The Yama Kings take extra delight in corrupting a Phoenix, if only because they stand out by trying to encourage their flame to burn. The path of the Eightfold Way is frustrating, especially when mortal life makes no allowances for your return or you live long enough to watch your loved ones collapse into dust. It is in these moments of anguish or loss that the Yama Kings intrude.

Unlike the other Dharmas, Phoenixes pride themselves on being the most "mortal." This gives *akuma* plenty of hooks into a Kuei-jin's psyche, the most dangerous of which is a Phoenix's often-woefully shortsighted nature. By living in mortal standards, a Phoenix mistakenly measures his life in the mortal quantities of his loved ones — in the restricted finite of decades instead of the open expanse of centuries. His perceptions are likewise inhibited, glimpsing a world whose borders rest squarely within his life's experiences.

What happens, then, when a Phoenix's reasons for atoning suddenly evaporate? What if the abused wife whose forgiveness he sought dies before he can rectify that mistake? Or the children she abandoned perish before she saves them from the street? Suddenly, his mortal anchors are gone, and the Phoenix's avenues of salvation gone with them... and he still has the centuries stretching out before him. What then?

It is in these times of indecision and uncertainty when *akuma* arise to corrupt the Phoenix. They offer what appears to be salvation... perhaps a way to make your loved one's forever dependent on you, or giving you easier goals to pursue (ones not so filled with tragedy). The *akuma* appear when your shadow soul snaps a loved one's neck. He's there to justify your moment of weakness and encourage such actions as natural. He's your friend in a time of need when it appears you can't sink lower. He'll help you bury the corpse and deal with the witnesses.

When a Phoenix fails, mortals are the first to suffer for it. The *akuma* know that. In fact, when a Phoenix fails, he becomes that which he struggles against; a demon. Everything he strove for up to that point was seemingly all for naught. The *akuma* rely on that despair to bring the Phoenix to their side. The Phoenix's self-loathing is often strong enough that he believes he is a demon for his actions and thoughts. It's a perception that the Yama Kings try very hard to foster and maintain.

Another weakness of returning back to one's mortal life is that the people and circumstances that led the Kuei-jin into Yomi in the first place still exist. Phoenixes try and rise above their failings, with memories of Hell provide incentives to avoid them. Mortals, however, are surprisingly blind and fatalistic even when they know the consequences of their actions. By returning to the place of their spiritual failings, the Phoenixes now must fight the Demon with decades of mortal conditioning acting as a stumbling block. In fact, they can even excuse their trips and stumbles along the way as being "only human." The *akuma* are more than willing to encourage these lapses, if only because the Phoenix will believe she still has time to turn back and save herself. Unfortunately, that's what dragged her into Yomi in the first place.

Often, a Rising Phoenix's first concern is concealing the circumstances of her mortal death. It is difficult to return to life as usual when family members saw you mowed down by gunfire or, worse yet, attended your funeral. Most Kuei-jin who follow the Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma died alone or in circumstances where they can cover their death as a mere absence. A kidnapped and murdered woman, for example, might take the Second Breath and kill her murderer. After a Phoenix finds and teaches her, she can claim to have escaped from her kidnapper, whom the police never find.

Players and the Storyteller can work out how Rising Phoenix characters conceal their deaths as part of the character's Prelude. In extreme cases, the ritual Shroud Over Death may be used (p. 24). A Rising Phoenix mentor or guide can always cast it, even if the character isn't capable of doing so.

Phoenixes quickly find evening jobs, either the kind of drudgery that most avoid or work that takes place at all hours, be it the graveyard shift at stores, security work, or becoming a bouncer at a nightclub. Since night-work is not as common in the Middle Kingdom as it is in North America, Phoenixes often rely on menial jobs or crime to support themselves and their families.

### SCARLET CHI

Phoenixes prefer animating their corpses using Yang Chi when possible, since it brings them closer to a semblance of life. That means Rising Phoenixes are often Yang cycled, making them warm and apparently "alive" to casual inspection. Of course, Yang Chi burns quickly through the body, and Kuei-jin require much of it to maintain themselves as compared to Yin Chi. That means Phoenixes hunt often

for fresh Chi. The irony of feeding more often to be more human is not lost on them.

Their need to focus on the consumption of Yang Chi often leads Phoenixes towards Yang imbalance. In fact, some Phoenixes favor this condition deliberately, because they believe it brings them even closer to being alive. Yang imbalanced Kuei-jin are very human-looking. They are warm to the touch and they appear to breathe. They can even withstand sunlight for brief periods of time.

Yang imbalance would be an ideal state for the Phoenixes, except for its side effects. The excess of Yang inflames the passions; Yang imbalanced Kuei-jin fall victim to fire soul more easily, and are more hot-tempered and lustful. They become carriers for disease and mortal ailments. They also fall prey to their hunger for more Chi with greater frequency. This makes a Yang imbalanced Phoenix dangerous not just to himself, but to his mortal family as well. More than one Yang-imbalanced Phoenix slaughtered loved ones or family members in a fit of fire soul or uncontrolled hunger.

### DHARMA AND DIRECTION

Rising Phoenixes don't follow the August Courts' accepted system of directions. Instead, they apply Vedic astrology to understand their strengths, weaknesses, and the tasks awaiting them following their Second Breath. The Horoscope background (*Kindred of the East*, p. 86) is fairly common among Phoenixes, and its information gives Phoenixes a stronger grasp of their capabilities.

In game terms, Storytellers may allow Phoenixes with the Horoscope background to choose two "lucky numbers" from 1 to 10 instead of the normal lucky numbers associated with a Kuei-jin's Dharma and direction. A common number for Phoenixes is 8, associated with the East direction in



Quincunx numerology. These lucky numbers work normally; for every result on a Horoscope roll corresponding to a lucky number, the character receives an automatic success on an action attempt the next turn.

Storytellers can also use horoscopes as story-hooks to nudge characters toward particular goals, to point out roleplaying challenges, or to drop hints about upcoming events and obstacles within the chronicle.

## DISCIPLINES

Rising Phoenixes see their Disciplines as *siddhis*, spiritual “tricks” that, while useful, can distract a Kuei-jin from enlightenment if she relies on them too heavily. They also remind some Phoenixes of their inhuman status; they use their Disciplines sparingly. Phoenixes prefer focusing on and mastering a select few Disciplines rather than learning a little from each Art. In studying Disciplines, their goal is to make them more effective in rectifying their past mistakes and not power for its own sake. Of course, some Phoenixes justify gaining power as a means to an end, even when it becomes the end in and of itself.

Phoenixes most often focus on Disciplines associated with their virtues: Hun and Yang. They disdain those Arts dealing with Yin (like Yin Prana and Bone Shintai), as well as the Demon Arts associated with the P’o (beyond the small measure of ability in the Demon Arts found in all Kuei-jin). Black Wind is far more common among the Phoenixes than Demon Shintai, since the latter is too great a reminder of their Hell-born nature (though some Rising Phoenixes possess it for that very reason; the P’o wants them to remember what they truly are). Phoenixes study Cultivation because it promises control over the P’o, though Internalize and the other Soul Disciplines are more common.

## YANG PRANA

One of the Rising Phoenix’s key Disciplines, Yang Prana, teaches control over the potent energies of life. Not coincidentally, training in Yang Prana demands the great stamina and flexibility required of Brahmins when they become Warriors of Jade. The Discipline’s postures and katas are often part of a warrior’s training regimen.

## CULTIVATION

The Rising Phoenix’s exploration of this Discipline frightens the Quincunx into labeling the Dharma as *akuma*, but the Phoenixes study their P’o nature to better understand and control it. They can also combine Cultivation with Yang Prana to restore them to a semblance of life.

At the Storyteller’s discretion, Rising Phoenixes may decrease the difficulty of their Cultivation rolls (or their normal fire or shadow soul rolls) when a member of their family is at risk. Many Phoenixes first come out of shadow soul when confronted with a family member or loved one. Of course, this places the loved one at risk should the roll fail and the Kuei-jin succumb to his baser urges.

### Blush of Life Restored

(Yang Prana ••, Cultivation ••)

When reality fails, illusion provides. This technique allows a Phoenix to regain some semblance of life. Like a forgotten machine, the body’s autonomic functions flare up; the brain signals the lungs to draw breath again, and the heart flushes blood through the veins and arteries, bringing

color back into the skin. Not everything works, but enough to support the illusion.

**System:** By spending a point of Yang Chi to animate her corpse, the Kuei-jin enters a state similar to permanent Yang Imbalance (*Kindred of the East*, p. 140), but without some of its more severe drawbacks. The vampire’s flesh is warm and of normal hue, and she breathes (without actually needing to) for the duration of a scene. Sunlight also has less effect; the Phoenix can endure indirect sunlight for up to an hour with no ill effects, and direct sunlight for (Stamina x 5) minutes with no adverse reaction.

The vampire suffers an extra die of damage from fire attacks due to excess Yang energy in her body. Kuei-jin using this Discipline can catch and vector communicable diseases as per permanent Yang Imbalance; the disease survives until the Kuei-jin drops into permanent Yin Imbalance, at which point, it dies. Kuei-jin can also impregnate or become pregnant, but must spend an additional Yang point every night to carry the baby to term. One missed “feeding” and the baby miscarries. The character does not suffer a Derangement as the Yang-imbalanced do, nor does she enter fire soul more easily than other Kuei-jin.

This technique costs 8 experience to learn.

### Clothed in Life

(Yang Prana ••••, Cultivation ••••)

The Quincunx claims *akuma* taught the Phoenixes this technique because it offers them fleeting hope that fades in quick moments. Using this technique, a Rising Phoenix can actually recover many living qualities for a time at the cost of regaining his mortal vulnerabilities as well. This technique is like Blush of Life Restored, but it goes further. The body not only functions normally in every capacity, but the Chi alters the Kuei-jin’s internal alchemy enough to negate its supernatural and accursed state. The P’o becomes muted, and sunlight only warms the skin as it should in any mortal. This is a precarious state, however, and any attempt to draw upon the Kuei-jin’s true nature collapses the effect like a house of cards.

**System:** The vampire spends a point of Yang Chi and a point of Willpower to activate this technique, then rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 8). If successful, the Kuei-jin assumes the qualities of a mortal for a single scene: immunities to sunlight and to fire, wave, and shadow soul. The Kuei-jin’s flesh is warm and alive and the vampire can enjoy all of life’s pleasures.

For the scene, however, the Kuei-jin cannot spend Chi or use disciplines. To use any such powers ends the effects of Clothed in Life immediately. Yin-aspected vampires cannot use this technique; the Yang must be dominant, or at least balanced, for the Kuei-jin to properly channel the necessary Yang energies. A botch on the roll to activate this technique means the Kuei-jin must immediately check for shadow soul. The Demon is incensed by such efforts to cage it.

This technique costs 24 experience to learn.

## MIBASHAM

Many Kuei-jin throughout the Infinite Thunders Court, where Phoenixes claim it originated, study this Discipline for greater insight into reality’s nature (*Kindred of the East Companion*, pgs. 188-190). The Dharma’s few elder vampires often master it, and use the art’s beguiling and confusion techniques to educate students as well as question other Kuei-jin — planting the seeds of doubt regarding their

Dharmas and their path. Ancestors of the August Courts are certain that such tricks account for many (if not all) of the Running Monkeys lured into the Flame of the Rising Phoenix's clutches. It's doubtful, however, that enough Mibasham masters exist to account for the actual number.

## RITUALS

Rising Phoenixes study and practice several rituals that enable them to follow the tenets of their Dharma and overcome the hurdles of constantly dealing with the mortal world.

### TITHING TO THE ANCESTOR (LEVEL TWO RITE)

Rising Phoenixes prefer harvesting Chi that is freely offered them, inflicting as little harm as possible in taking it. This ritual links members of a Kuei-jin's family (by blood or choice), allowing the vampire to draw Chi from them more easily and without taking flesh or blood along with it.

Kuei-jin outside the Rising Phoenix Dharma know of this ritual, though the Phoenixes use it most often; other Kuei-jin generally have little contact with or compassion for their mortal families (or both, in many cases).

**System:** All potential donors must be present when the Kuei-jin performs the ritual, and they must swear an oath to help the vampire (though they don't have to know the exact consequences of their oath). The Kuei-jin then spends one point each of Yin and Yang Chi and rolls Manipulation + Rituals (difficulty 6). Each success establishes a link to one person of the ritualist's choice in the oath-circle. These connections are visible through rituals like Trace the Dragon's Scales (*Kindred of the East*, p. 127).

Thereafter, the Kuei-jin can draw Chi from anyone in the oath-circle directly from their breath (*Kindred of the East*, p. 137), regardless of the vampire's Dharma rating. The donor does not have a resistance roll against this; the Kuei-jin may take as much Chi as desired, up to the amount on the Chi roll. This serves as the maximum, cumulative limit before the link to that one person is severed. The effects of this are the same as normally taking Chi by breath. A botch on the Chi roll to feed breaks the connection between the Kuei-jin and the donor (though it can be re-established after another ritual).

This rite does not protect a Kuei-jin against the dangers of fire soul while ravenous or from overfeeding.

### MISTS OF THE LOTUS (LEVEL THREE RITE)

More than most Kuei-jin, Phoenixes must conceal their true nature from many mortals. Rather than destroying anyone who happens upon their secret, some use this ritual, which eliminates knowledge of the Kuei-jin's true nature from mortal minds.

The ritual requires the brewing of lotus flowers, which creates a potion with a heady perfume. When the intended target inhales these vapors, the ritual takes effect.

**System:** The ritualist must prepare the mists for a particular person (or persons) by name and they must inhale the potion's aroma. The ritualist then rolls Manipulation + Rituals with a difficulty equal to the subject's Willpower. One success means the subject forgets anything he or she knows about the Kuei-jin in general and about one Kuei-jin

in particular. This may leave some gaps in the subject's memory, such as remembering conversations but not recalling what was said. Two or more successes blur the subject's memories to where there are no significant gaps. The target rationalizes or ignores inconvenient memories.

A failure on the roll means the ritual does not affect the subject, though the caster can attempt it again only after a full night passes. A botch means that the ritual will *never* affect the subject, forcing the Kuei-jin to take other measures to silence them.

Note that this ritual does not prevent the subject from later learning the truth again. Repeated uses of Mists of the Lotus on the same subject also become less effective (add one to difficulty for every two times the caster successfully targets the same subject). *Shen*, including Kin-jin and other Kuei-jin, are completely unaffected by the potion.

### SHROUD OVER DEATH (LEVEL FOUR RITE)

The Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma requires followers to return to their mortal lives. This can prove difficult if there was incontrovertible evidence of their death; at best, sudden resurrections can be tricky to explain away. This ritual clouds the minds of mortals associated with a particular Kuei-jin, and prevents them from recalling that their friend or loved one died. In this way, Phoenixes may slip back into their old lives with few suspicions.

**System:** The Kuei-jin must procure a significant item connected with his death to act as the ritual's focus. It might be a murder weapon, a part of a totaled car, the corpse of a killer (or someone who drove the vampire to suicide), someone who handled the body (such as a paramedic), or something similar. The Storyteller and player should collaborate to determine the appropriate focus, perhaps as part of the character's Prelude.

The ritualist must then roll Manipulation + Rituals (difficulty 8). A single success means most memories of the Kuei-jin's mortal death are eliminated and most people will not question his return (except to ask where he's been all this time). Particularly strong-willed (Willpower 6+) people or truly loved-ones might have lingering doubts or dreams about the vampire's death. Two or more successes completely eliminates all memories of the subject's mortal death from everyone mortal... only the Kuei-jin and other *shen* recall it ever happening.

Unfortunately, the physical evidence for the death remains, be it obituary records, police reports, or gravestones. Anyone affected by the ritual that sees this evidence will not remember the Kuei-jin's death, but it will fill their heads with echoes of memories and fleeting images. The Phoenixes tell of one murderer who sits in a jail cell in Cinnamon Gardens Police Station in Colombo, uncertain of why he's there. In fact, everybody's forgotten why he's there, so the police keep him in custody... just in case.

## PHOENIXES IN PLAY

Rising Phoenix characters present some unique challenges that players and Storytellers should keep in mind for ongoing chronicles. The major issues likely to crop up with Phoenix characters, and some ways of handling them, include the following:

- **Heresy:** First and foremost, the August Courts of the Quincunx consider the Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma

heretical. A Rising Phoenix who ventures into the more conservative or reactionary areas of the Middle Kingdom could easily be branded *akuma* and destroyed on the spot. Unless all the chronicle's characters are outcasts, a Phoenix may have some problems.

One way of handling this is setting the chronicle outside the Middle Kingdom's more conservative Courts. The Infinite Thunders Court where Phoenixes are prevalent is a good example. They're not likely to raise too many concerns in the Golden or Green Courts either, and a discrete Phoenix can even survive in Nippon or in Hong Kong's Flame Court.

Another option is granting the character a degree of immunity. It is not unknown for ancestors to assemble a *wu* from unusual components because it creates an auspicious assemblage of directions, elements and numbers. A Rising Phoenix could be assigned to this Corpse Family, either to balance it or upset its existing harmony. The ancestor may consider this as an opportunity to save a "lost" soul by demonstrating the rightness of the Fivefold Way. The Phoenix, meanwhile, may believe he can share his Dharma's wisdom with other Kuei-jin, which can make for interesting roleplaying possibilities.

- **Family Ties:** Rising Phoenix characters must maintain their mortal lives, and families, as part of their Dharma. This is actually not that different from other Dharma's various requirements, some of which involve familial obligations. So long as the Phoenix's family-life does not overshadow the chronicle's other plots and activities, there shouldn't be a problem.

A Phoenix's family can actually offer some unique roleplaying opportunities. The player and Storyteller should take the time to detail the Kuei-jin's family and members. They can serve as regular supporting characters and provide the chronicle with a human point of view, allowing the players to glimpse matters through their eyes from time to time. There's also the dramatic tension borne from Kuei-jin and mortals interacting on a regular basis. How does a Phoenix safeguard her family against a *wu*-mate Devil-Tiger, for example?

- **Mortal Life:** Rising Phoenixes are far more concerned with living their mortal lives than with the politics and plots of Kuei-jin society. This can create a gulf between Phoenixes and Kuei-jin from other Dharmas. One solution is giving the Phoenix's mortal life enough drama that it can serve as a source for stories involving

the entire *wu*. The Phoenix may run afoul of a local ganglord or become embroiled in a local political issue. Likewise, Storytellers may want to handle a Phoenix's mortal life "off-stage," in a solo game or with correspondences through e-mails. This gives the character a rich mortal existence without monopolizing too much game-time dealing with issues outside the concerns of the other characters.

## THE RISING PHOENIX CHRONICLE

Storytellers looking to add that "human touch" in a *Kindred of the East* chronicle may consider a game where some or all of the player characters belong to the Rising Phoenix Dharma (perhaps set somewhere in the Infinite Thunders Court). Other characters may belong to the Way of the Resplendent Crane, or could even be Kin-jin sympathetic to the Dharma's tenets. Such a chronicle would focus far more on the human drama of the characters, dealing with maintaining their humanity in the face of their undead state, than with the Middle Kingdom's various political machinations (though they can also come into play).

### MASTERS OF THE WAY

There is considerable speculation as to what becomes of Kuei-jin who advance far enough along the Flame of the Rising Phoenix. As seen in previous accounts, different Kuei-jin have different theories. Quincunx scholars and ancestors believe the heretics fall victim to the Yama Kings and become *akuma*. Some Phoenixes believe their bodhisattvas free themselves from the Great Cycle and ascend to Heaven (or merge with the cosmos), while others think they become mortals once more, returning to their proper place in the Cycle. A few maintain there are Rising Phoenix bodhisattvas hiding in the Middle Kingdom, guiding others toward the enlightenment they attained.

Ultimately, it's a question left to the Storyteller to decide. Some, all, or none of the various views on Rising Phoenix elders may be true. Certainly, some Phoenixes fall prey to the Yama Kings (like all Kuei-jin), but others may reach a pinnacle of achievement before vanishing from this world. What becomes of them remains a mystery.

## BRAHMIN DISCIPLE

**Quote:** *The path that karma laid out for me is not an easy one, nor is the way I walk it. The tortures of Hell ripped away my illusions, but, now I see more clearly than ever. I aspire toward perfection of body, mind, and soul... for that day I am ready to leave the Great Cycle behind. Until then, I am at the service of the Court and my brothers and sisters of the Way.*

**Prelude:** You lived a poor life, and not just in material things. Your life was destitute where it mattered most — in spirit. You did not honor your family. You did not acknowledge the joy and sadness of your life. Most of all, you did not honor yourself and your place in this world. All these things accumulated into a heavy debt of karma. When your mortal life was cut short, that debt came due.

The weight of your failures dragged your soul down into the depths of Yomi, where you learned your mistakes at the hands of devils. As you suffered, you cried out for a second chance... a way to make things right and correct your mistakes. Heaven was merciful and your newfound conviction was enough to pull you back from Hell and into your mortal body. You still bear the marks of your suffering on your soul, and you are different, in body and spirit, from who you once were. The greatest change, however, is in your understanding of your purpose and place in this world.

Others like you took you in. They helped you leash the Demon within and taught you to keep your thoughts on your duties. You returned to your mortal life with their lessons in mind, along with those you learned in Yomi. Now you can fulfill the promise you made when you begged for a second chance. You are correcting your misdeeds and making your life a rich one. You hold each moment as though it were your last, and you value the human qualities you have re-discovered in yourself.

**Concept:** You are dedicated to your studies. Once you have mastered existing in the world and the intricate ways of the Court, you'll be ready to pass through the first gate, the first in the long journey toward becoming a true Brahmin. Although it may require more than a mortal lifetime, you will not falter. You do this for your own salvation, and to save the world. All around you are the signs of the Yama Kings and their growing power, but you stand between them and your mortal family, as a true warrior should.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Once you were lost, but now you have found your way. Death opened your eyes to everything you once took for granted and you cherish life as only one who has lost it can.

You pity and revile other Kuei-jin who have turned their new existence into an excuse for indulgence or, worse yet, for wicked and terrible acts. You wear your humanity like a badge of honor, but you don't feel truly worthy of it yet.

Everyone who knew you before the Second Breath is amazed and impressed at your transformation. You have truly learned from your past life and done what you can to set things right. You realize you have far to go before you can claim true righteousness, but at least you have begun.

**Equipment:** Simple clothing, mortal identification and papers, journal or book of sutras, walking stick or staff (used for training, exercise, and defense when needed).





NAME: Brahmin Disciple

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Penitent

P'O NATURE: The Deceiver

DEMEANOR: Conformist

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 ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Meditation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Melee ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### KNOWLEDGES

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

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Iron Mountain ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Yang Prana ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### BACKGROUNDS

Allies (Family) ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Horoscope ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Rites ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### MITES

Harmonious Shielding of the  
Guarded Home  
Trace the Dragon's Blood



YANG CHI

DHARMA Flame of the Rising Phoenix

### HUN

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### WILLPOWER

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

### P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

## FAMILY GUARDIAN

**Quote:** *My family survived more hardship than you'll know, and are far from helpless so long as I'm watching over them.*

**Prelude:** For as long as you can remember, your family depended on you. Even as a child, you helped your parents and cared for your younger siblings. It was good to feel needed, but sometimes you wished you had more time to have fun instead of doing chores and helping everyone else. It was that selfishness that earned you a place in Hell.

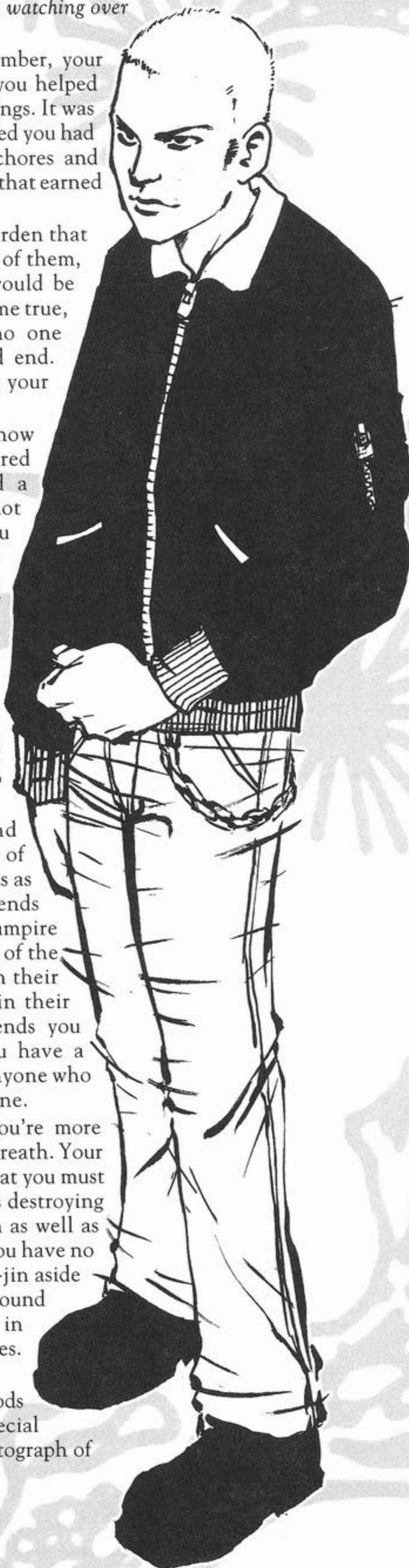
You found your family an increasing burden that was difficult to bear. You wanted to be free of them, to do as you wished, knowing your life would be different without them. When your wish came true, you indulged in carefree excess. With no one watching out for you, you came to a bad end. There was no one else to blame... it was your choice, just like you wanted.

The demons of Yomi reminded you how you had failed your family. For all they suffered because of your absence, you agonized a thousand times more, yet still it would not absolve you from what you had done. You repented your mistakes and wanted more than anything to rectify matters. You fought your way free of Hell thinking nothing of yourself, only of your duty to your family. It was that devotion that allowed you to subdue the Demon in your soul when you returned home, changed. They comment on how your experiences alone improved you, made you more responsible and mature; they're glad to have you back, and deep down, it's good to be needed again.

**Concept:** Since taking the Second Breath, you continually encounter others of your kind, mostly predators stalking mortals as their prey. You made it clear that your friends and family are off-limits by sending one vampire screaming back into Hell. You also learned of the Kuei-jin who feel as you do. Now you learn their ways. The majority of vampires conspire in their secret Courts, toward what mysterious ends you don't know. All that matters is that you have a second chance. As long as you're around, anyone who threatens your family will regret it... anyone.

**Roleplaying Hints:** In many ways, you're more human now than before taking the Second Breath. Your dedication to your family is total; you do what you must to protect and nurture them. That includes destroying the odd Kuei-jin or mortal bothering them as well as using your gifts to ensure their prosperity. You have no interest in the so-called society of the Kuei-jin aside from your own Dharma. The other Courts sound like nothing more than monsters plotting in the night and fighting amongst themselves. Why would you want to partake in that?

**Equipment:** Some stolen money and goods stashed away in case you need them, a .38 special revolver (for self defense), a dog-eared photograph of your family, and an empty locket.





**NAME:** Family Guardian  
**PLAYER:**  
**CHRONICLE:**

**NATURE:** Martyr  
**P/O NATURE:** The Demon  
**DEMEANOR:** Caregiver

**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 ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Equilibrium ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### BACKGROUNDS

Allies (Family) ● ● ● ○ ○ ○  
Resources ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### RITEs

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### YIN CHI



### YANG CHI

**DHARMA** Flame of the Rising Phoenix

### HUN

● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### WILLPOWER

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

### P/O

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## QUINCUNX APOSTATE

**Quote:** You call me *akuma*, but you don't know what that means any more! I rediscovered the compassion I lost... I returned to the life I left behind. I'm not a saint or a devil, and I protect and provide for my family as best I can. So which of us is truly the demon here?

**Prelude:** Your mortal life was a wretched and pointless one, so filled with misery that you embraced the Second Breath with all your heart. You took to your teachers' lessons and excelled, earning their quiet praise and a place in Kuei-jin society. You chose your Dharma from the Fivefold Way and pursued it with unending diligence. Many in the August Courts believed a worthy future in you... you would go far in service to the Revered Ancestors.

After settling into your newfound existence, however, you realized your achievements brought you little joy. The praise of your teachers and elders seemed hollow while the Court's political games became meaningless. Everything you accomplished turned to ash that a cold wind blew far from your hands. You pondered an eternity existing like this and the thought became unbearable. Your Second Breath was nothing but a hollow mockery of life, a sham. You studied the other Dharmas, hoping to fill the void, but you found only meaningless philosophy and useless guides to a pointless existence.

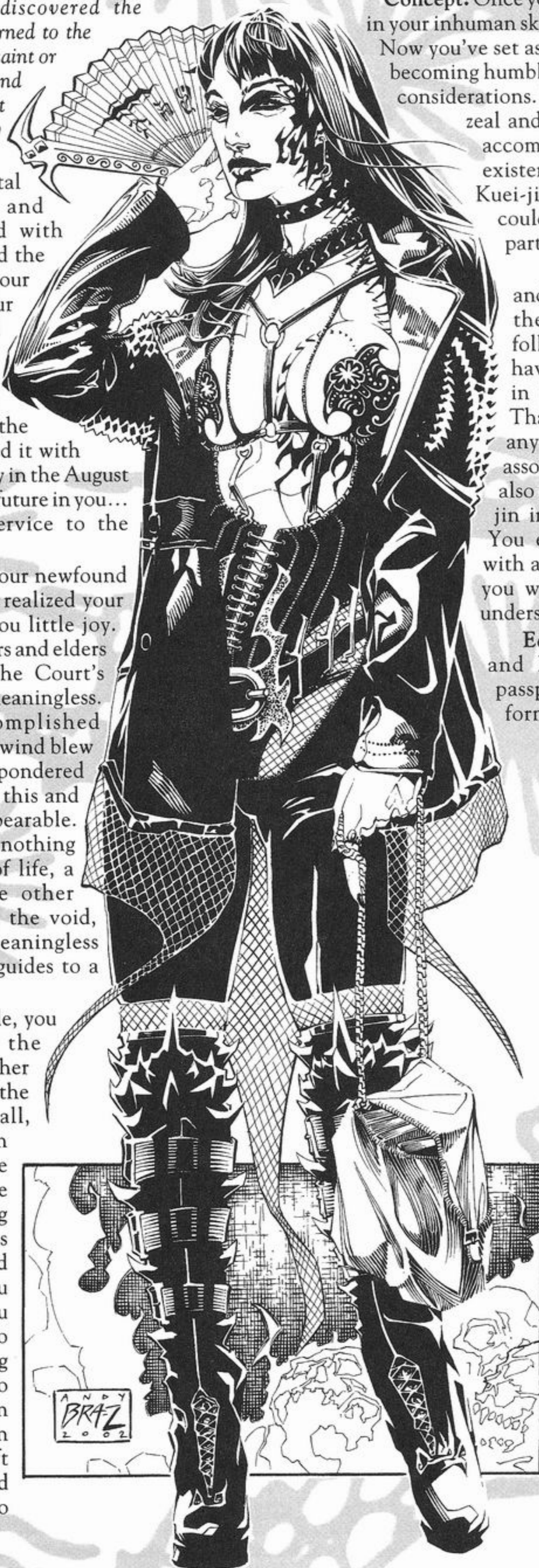
In a desperate gamble, you secretly sought out the heretical Dharmas and other knowledge forbidden in the August Courts. After all, what was left to lose? In time, your search bore fruit. You discovered the Flame of the Rising Phoenix, and it was as though your path had come full circle. You realized the mortal life you left behind was the key to a contented and enriching existence. You needed to heal the wounds left in your spirit and truly learn to live again. You left behind all you achieved in the August Courts to

seek out a Rising Phoenix guru and become a student all over again.

**Concept:** Once you were arrogant, supremely confident in your inhuman skills and assured of Heaven's Mandate. Now you've set aside vampiric pretense and posturing, becoming humble and grateful for the simpler, human considerations. You pursue your path with a renewed zeal and dedication, filled with purpose and accomplishment. Your Dharma gives your existence meaning and vitality. If only more Kuei-jin, once they understood as you do, could put aside their immortal games and partake in life once again.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are humble and sincere, dedicated with the faith of the newly converted. Although you follow the Rising Phoenix Dharma, you haven't forgotten all that you've learned in your time with the August Courts. That knowledge has helped you avoid any would-be *akuma* hunters or former associates who might cause you trouble. It also proves useful for finding other Kuei-jin interested in discovering a new way. You eagerly discuss your recent insights with any of your kind willing to listen, and you wish more Kuei-jin would reach the understanding you have.

**Equipment:** Journal of experiences and Dharmic research, fake IDs and passports, jade talisman (a gift from a former teacher).





**NAME:** Quincunx Apostate  
**PLAYER:**  
**CHRONICLE:**

**NATURE:** Visionary  
**P'O NATURE:** The Fool  
**DEMEANOR:** Rebel

**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 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Meditation ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Melee ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Stealth ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Survival ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### KNOWLEDGES

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

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Cultivation ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Yang Prana ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### BACKGROUNDS

Contacts ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Jade Talisman ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Rites ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### RITEs

Way of the Lone Walker  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### XIN CHI



### YANG CHI

**DHARMA** Flame of the Rising Phoenix/1

### HUN

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### WILLPOWER

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

### P'O

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## GREAT LIVES OF THE RISING PHOENIX

Unlike many Dharmas, the Flame of the Rising Phoenix has few great bodhisattvas still walking the Earth. At least, if any exist, they remain hidden from everyone. Most of this Dharma's followers believe their masters have ascended from the Great Cycle, leaving the world behind, though there are stories about enlightened ones who travel in disguise, teaching here and there to guide other Kuei-jin towards their state of grace.

### KATARAGAMA

The legendary bodhisattva of the Rising Phoenix, Kataragama is associated with Buddha and the Hindu god Vishnu. He reputedly took the Second Breath when the Yama King Ravana controlled the island of Sri Lanka and was spreading his influence throughout what would become the Infinite Thunders Court. Kataragama was one of the many mortal victims of Ravana's and his *raksha*'s cruelty.

After emerging from Yomi as Wan Kuei, Kataragama chose not to follow the Dharmas espoused by followers of Xue. Instead, he returned to his mortal life to protect and care for his family. In his writings, he likened his return from Hell to a Phoenix rising from the ashes, and his example inspired other newly returned Kuei-jin to follow him. Kataragama helped the Beast Courts and allied *shen* to overthrow Ravana's rule of Sri Lanka, putting an end to the Yama King's domain on Earth. Afterwards, he taught many students, who wrote down his teachings. These became the core tenets of the Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma.



It is said that Kataragama achieved transcendence through his simple observance of life and ascended to Heaven in a blinding light, no longer trapped in the Great Cycle of incarnation. Phoenixes, particularly those in the heart of the Infinite Thunders Court, study his existence to emulate him through his teachings and actions.

### PRACHAK

The Rising Phoenix Prachak is far more than he first appears; he is one of the Dharma's stronger teachers and guides in the Infinite Thunders Court. This is despite the fact that he is barely a Running Monkey by the August Courts' standards, having only taken the Second Breath less than a decade ago.



A poor man in Sri Lanka, Prachak fell ill from malnutrition and died knowing he had failed his family as a provider. Heavy with guilt, his soul sank into Yomi and suffered terribly until his devotion allowed him to overcome his fear and pain, and fight back. He fought his way free of Hell and returned to his mortal flesh, convincing his family that a miracle had brought him back to them. He had not been dead, merely in a deep coma. His deep love for his wife and children allowed him to hold his Demon nature at bay for a time.

Since his Second Breath, Prachak has become a dedicated student of the Brahmin of the Bijali Court. Although he is not a true Brahmin himself yet, only a Scholar of Stone, Prachak has advanced far in such a short time and shows considerable promise. His particular aptitude is teaching, and he takes newly risen Kuei-jin under his wing to show them the Rising Phoenix's ways. He is also an able provider for his family, using his connections and influence in the Court. He sometimes

pretends to be a beggar in the streets of Colombo to observe, knowing first hand that few people pay the poor any regard.

### HAWAN ALI

Rising Phoenix guru Hawan Ali originally hails from Bangladesh. He still visits his homeland, though affairs within the Infinite Thunders Court distract him more often. While few Kuei-jin question Ali's dedication to his Dharma or duty, some Brahmin are concerned that his devotion to duty holds him back from fully exploring his path.

Ali took the Second Breath in 1981, during one of several military coups that overthrew the government of Bangladesh. His "recovery" from his fatal wound was lost in the confusion of other events, and Ali, a devout Muslim, believed it was Allah's will and mercy that granted him a second opportunity at a righteous life. At first he believed it meant continued involvement in efforts to oust the ruling military dictatorship. He rejected blasphemous Dharmas like the Face of the Gods and the Howl of the Devil-Tiger in favor of the Flame of the Rising Phoenix.

In 1988, terrible floods devastated Bangladesh, killing Ali's wife and one of his children. Their deaths proved to be a moment of Dharmic insight for Ali, and he redoubled his devotion to his path, becoming more involved in the Infinite Thunders Court. He even took new Wan Kuei who arose from the disaster as students. It was that which brought him to the attention of the Brahmins of the Bijali Court; they offered Ali the opportunity to relocate his surviving family and study with them. He accepted, leaving Bangladesh in 1990.

Since then, Ali has risen quickly through the Dharma's ranks, becoming a Brahmin himself shortly before the appearance of the Eye of the Demon Emperor and the events that followed. The impending Sixth Age has convinced Hawan Ali that the teachings of the Rising Phoenix are needed now more than ever. He encourages the Court to recruit new Kuei-jin before they fall into the hands of Dharmas like the Face of the Gods or the Yama Kings' clutches.





# CHAPTER TWO: THE TEMPEST OF THE INWARD FOCUS

## PRELUDE

### SINGAPORE

Chong jogged along the beach, the lights and noise of the East Coast Parkway Hawker stands receding slowly behind him. The waterfront park was empty and the moored ships in the bay, lit like Christmas decorations, gave the humid evening a pensive, introspective consideration it didn't deserve. Nervously Chong stopped for the fourth or fifth time since hitting the beach and peered intently into the darkness to see if any of Mistress of Ulu Tiram's killers had followed him.

Moving again towards the distant roar of Changi Airport, Chong cursed the *penangallan* bitch for setting her dogs on him... he cursed himself even more for not listening to Dewatacengkar. Chong had been so smart, so clever, in keeping his interest in the Inward Way secret from the ancestors; they never realized he'd finally seen through their thick web of lies and illusions. That a member of his own *wu* would betray him had never occurred to Chong....

Oh... he'd been so clever.

Cursing himself for a fool again, Chong picked up his pace. The Ancestor of the Ulu Tiram Court hadn't wasted time when Deddy told her that the Lion Court's favorite jina was dabbling in the forbidden. Grudgingly, Chong admitted he didn't really blame Deddy. Dewatacengkar had warned him that most Kuei-jin were so lost in their world of illusions and fear that the truth would only drive them to violence or

treachery. He'd tried reasoning with Deddy, but to no avail... he had to kill him. At least Dewatacengkar would be proud of him for trying.

Chong, realizing his mind was wandering, leapt into the calming succor of a meditative chant that Dewatacengkar taught him and tried centering his mind and body on the Tau. The Ulu Tiram Court killers wouldn't expect him to jog to the airport. Sure they'd watch it, but they'd spend more time tearing up Holland Village, believing he hid in one of the boltholes he kept there. Once Chong climbed over the wire and clambered up the undercarriage of a Garuda jet, he'd be in Indonesia in no time. No passports, no police, no chance for the Courts' assassins to find him.

Changi Airport painted the night sky a demonic orange, rudely reminding Chong of his time in Yomi. Portents weren't his strong suit, but this wasn't a particularly good comparison to be making right now.

Jets roared in and out in measured cadence, more than enough distraction to cover Chong knocking out a perimeter searchlight and leaping the twelve-foot fence. He grinned to nobody in particular while moving across the maze of runways, home free.

Suddenly, a 747 briefly dominated an adjacent runway like a silver ghost before it rocketed skyward. It sent wildly distorted shadows and a shrill roaring wind racing past Chong, who had just enough time to note the figures behind him....

Something with the force of a sledgehammer hit Chong in the back of the head.



Chong rolled with the blow and came up in a Preying Mantis stance. He didn't recognize his assailants, but they could have been Ulu Tiram soldiers... they weren't carrying guns or swords, though. Instead the half dozen attackers shifted into Sweeping Swallow stance. Looking into their hard eyes, Chong prepared to take the fight to his opponents (the Tempest of the Inward Focus taught that attack was the best defense). Chong hesitated, however. Sweeping Swallow was the classical Tempest riposte to Preying Mantis.

"Hey... are you..." Chong tried asking. His momentary hesitation spurred his attackers into action; the six launched a coordinated flurry of kicks and punches. They worked in tandem beautifully, timing their attacks and pressing him on three sides simultaneously. Such coordination required hours of work in a martial studio, for the Tempest of the Inward Focus was not an easy form to master. Fortunately, Chong's mind worked faster than his hands and feet... he was trying to intuit what was happening here before these clowns sent him howling back to Yomi. They were Seekers... they had to be. They knew the Tempest too well, but, they had to know he did too.

Calling on the Black Wind of his inner storm, Chong moved faster than the eye could see. A plane lumbered towards them, but Chong wasn't sure if the roar he heard came from the plane, or from him. His solitary punches and kicks gave way to the fluid movement roles of the Tempest's form. Chong slipped past two attackers in a low sweeping spin, and sent them flying from the fray with snapping blows. The plane, a 787, was upon them, just inches from the ground. One assailant landed unconscious outside the tarmac, while the other was sucked screaming into the turbine of the 787 thundering past.

The pilots were probably howling over their radios by now. The plane plunged back to the ground, turbine flaming and one wing dropping heavy towards the tarmac. The front wheel bracket snapped from the heavy landing... the plane was turning into a flaming snowball of wreckage.

Chong used the momentary lull in his attack to look around and grin. He adopted the Strutting Bull Stance. "Well don't be shy," he yelled over the screech of the crashing plane, "let's get it on."

An explosion broke the spine of the plane further down the runway, nearly rocking everyone off their feet. Chong pressed the attack with a series of swirling foot combinations; the air around them billowed from another explosion. One attacker fled, alight from a spray of burning avgas that lit her up like a torch. Puddles of burning fuel and a hail of debris littered the runway, turning the fight into an obstacle course, but the battle continued.

Chong could sense the rising fear in his attackers, another of whom fled, but Chong grew calmer. The Tempest of the Inward Focus centered him on the Tau. The burning wreck of the 787 lit the night like Hell's dawn and Chong realized his attackers were a fairly motley bunch... Malays and Bangladeshis dressed like street trash. They weren't assassins....

This was all piss-poor luck on everyone's part.

Sirens howled in the distance and the area would soon swarm with mortals... so much for a quiet trip to Indonesia. It was unlikely any more flights were leaving tonight. It was time to go.

In a controlled burst of lethality, Chong lashed out with double knife-hands, his fingers biting deep into one attacker's

chest. The last assailant bolted before the unlife even fled his friend's eyes. Chong grunted, and with the last vestiges of Black Wind, leaped over the perimeter fence before heading for the bay. A ship wasn't as fast as a plane, but it was better than trying to hide in the city.

## JOGJAKARTA; A MONTH LATER

The distant melodies of wind chimes atop the Wat's pagoda mingled with the greeting cries of jungle birds. Chong slipped deeper into his dawn trance, the Inward Way carrying him towards the Tau. Around him a dozen other Seekers awaited the coming day, testing their endurance and inner calm against the purity of the Sun's rays. The last months had passed almost without notice, as though the Wat stood outside of time. This didn't surprise Chong; he now understood that time was an illusion like so much else he had taken for granted. Still, he had learnt much here. In the peaceful center of his personal storm of unbalance, Chong recalled the most recent experiences in his search for the Tau....

Music throbbed in Chong's temples, the deep bass thrumming through the club floor where hundreds of mortals crammed together in the sweaty darkness. Chong could feel Yin bubbling in his blood, like his skin was pulled tight and he was about to explode. Diva turned to him, grinning and sticking her tongue out lewdly; she swore she could taste the mortal blood in the air. Her white skin and blonde hair marked Diva as the center of attention for every man who saw her, as well as a few women. As immune to mortal temptations as he was, Chong could still feel the Kin-jin's seductive pull, a forbidden sensuality that spoke of pleasures beyond mortal ken. No matter what nonsense the Courts spouted about the Kin-jin, one thing was certain. They knew more about having a good time than anyone else Chong had ever met.

The toilet cubicle was filthy with piss and more intimate fluids, and Chong gasped at the pleasure the girls gave him. Below him, Chong could see Diva drinking deeply from one girl, her ecstatic look telling him that being drained dry by a Kin-jin was certainly... pleasant. Chong and Diva had been at it for hours and neither could remember how many mortals they'd been through this evening; the drugs and alcohol he'd consumed along with all the blood left his mind in a spin. However many it was, they already had to change clubs twice.

"Damn inconvenient trying to hide bodies in a nightclub," he giggled to himself.

As Diva dropped the drained girl to the floor, Chong felt himself rise beyond death, taking the last girl with him and sowing her with the fruit of his night's debauched labors.

The darkness and panting of the stall gave way to a bitter smell of old, rotted flesh and the singsong call of the muezzin. Chong was elsewhere in his meditations, though he could feel his flesh putrefy beneath the rising sun's caress. He redoubled his efforts to return to his meditation, but instead found himself crouching in the semi-darkness of a hovel built of corrugated iron and packing crates....

Chong ran his fingers over a child's corpse, looking for evidence of the creature he hunted. The first whispers of this beast had emerged from the squatter camps on Surabaya's outskirts weeks before; something was preying on young boys. Chong had done nothing, sure that the Illuminated Thoughts of the Monkey *wu* would deal with the problem.

## INTRODUCTION INTO THE DHARMA

The heretical Dharma called the Tempest of the Inward Focus stands far outside the accepted laws and rites defining most Kuei-jin boundaries. Rather than being *akuma* in the normal sense of the word, the Tempests (or Seekers of the Inward Way, as they call themselves), deny the validity of the spiritual beliefs endemic to the various courts. In many ways, this sect lives in a different world, dismissing the Wheel and the Yama Kings as mere illusions and having little patience for the concept of karmic debt. Seekers instead see the world as a puzzle, a fusion of reality and illusion cloaking the nature of the all-encompassing Tau. Their nights revolve around exploring the hidden truths of the Tau so they can leave the world behind and become one with the universe.

Kuei-jin of the August Courts find the Seekers endlessly frustrating. The Seekers do not believe East Asian cultures and beliefs are superior in understanding the Tau, which creates a cultural gap with many elder Kuei-jin. Because they believe the world around them is an illusion, Seekers generally deny the existence of the "truths" the Courts believe are self-evident, such as the Fivefold Way. Finally, the Seekers speak in riddles and esoteric metaphors, their inscrutable behavior arousing both paranoia and anger amongst the Courts.

Ultimately, the Seekers exist in a different world from the August Courts and seek a different salvation. Of course, neither side accepts the other's viewpoint, because doing so would undermine the validity of their own beliefs. This sets the stage for ongoing conflicts, all because the Seekers often unwittingly pursue actions supporting the Yama Kings... sometimes even deliberately, to shock the Courts into "piercing" the illusions of the Yomi and Spirit Worlds.

The Seekers of the Inward Way are also an anomaly in the East because many are seemingly optimistic. The Inward Way has none of the apocalyptic elements of Court beliefs. The Seekers recognize the negative elements of the Wheel, but claim the world's slow, downward spiral is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Court Kuei-jin believe in the inevitability of the Sixth Age; therefore their descent into the horrors of the Sixth Age is inevitable, for they create their own illusion. Seekers move through the world in a state of almost bemused conceit, though some are bitterly angry about their persecution at the hands of the Courts.

This division violently splits the Seekers. Some are quite otherworldly, not particularly interested in the Courts or their beliefs. Others are religious fanatics whose pursuits are an excuse to wreak havoc and chaos in the Courts. In all instances, however, there is an obvious disdain for the concept of the Sixth Age; the Seekers lay the blame for the region's problems directly on the Kuei-jin of the Courts.

Conversely, the Seekers are seen as alien intruders in the Courts. They are either violent or curious, thinking and rationalizing matters in ways that seem foolish to the Courts. As a result, the Courts see them as either naive and out of touch with reality or completely insane.

To many Kuei-jin of a non-east Asian background, the Inward Way also represents a serious challenge to the Courts' Chinese-dominated beliefs and society. What if the Seekers are right? By being more closely tied with local cultures and actively adopting the beliefs of those cultures into their philosophy and opinions, the Seekers often strike deep chords within non-east Asian Kuei-jin. This seductive element frightens the Courts the most, especially since the Seekers' dismissal of the Yama Kings and the limits of the Great Principle often makes them unwitting harbingers of the Sixth Age.

After all, these locals were their possessions and responsibility. Weeks passed and nothing happened... the whispers grew more frightened.

Now here Chong was, brimming with Yang and searching through a truly foul place for something that consumed blood and souls. He'd caught a local *wu* vampire, and after some inventive torture, got the little shit to admit that the Wicked City had laid claim to this slum; the *wu* had arranged a deal with the demon running the portal. In return for its help in a midnight war, they gave it unopposed reign in the area.

Demons?

The Wicked City?

Slum?

Chong emerged from the hovel, cursing to himself. When would these fools open their minds? These were nothing but illusions. Regardless, Chong planted a large number of incendiary devices around the area where the illusions had taken root in reality. A good fire and some urban renewal would cut at the root of the problem.

The recollections of smoke from the inferno and the screams of the dying gave way to Chong's self-preservation. He was among the last to scamper through a trapdoor into

the Wat's protected basement. Chong looked around the cellar, grimacing at his decaying, graying flesh. He collapsed, exhausted, and decided to sleep until night came. Then....

Then it would time to travel again, time to leave Java behind. Chong felt the need to return to Singapore. The rest of his old *wu* were still there, lost in illusions. Perhaps it was arrogance; perhaps it was guilt that he was saved while they were still lost, but he needed to try and rescue them. He wanted to deliver them from the darkness that blinded them, or give them surcease for their endless subservience to the Courts. Better death than to be forever lost.

At least he owed his old friends that much.

## HISTORY

### CHUANG TZU

At the feet of Lao-Tzu I learnt the truth of the formless and eternal Tau, but I denied myself pleasure. I over-indulged in abstinence and asceticism in the mistaken belief such sacrifice would lead me to become one with the Tau. When I went out into the world, I was unprepared for its multitude of tastes and pleasures; they seduced me and I...

I abandoned my search for the Tau. I ate spicy food, drank fine wine and indulged in the pleasures of the bedchamber. I was just another corrupt mandarin in the Court of a depraved and decadent emperor. When death took me, I was far from the Tau. I became one with Yang and suffered endlessly through the imbalance of my nature. Yet my wisdom returned, and in the midst of suffering I sought the Tau again through pure strength of will. From an unbalanced death, the Tau is forever elusive, but I found something else... the knife-edge upon which balance the Yin and the Yang. I existed here, but did not breathe. No longer did I seek the Way outside myself; now the path could only be within, in the tempest of my own conflicting being.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

\* \* \*

"You seriously expect me to believe that those howling maniacs in the mountains are Taoists? No way, man, no way! They hate us Chinese more than the breathing *abangan* do! No way they're Taoists."

"I don't require you to believe me, Wengho Chong. Indeed, I am completely indifferent to how you regard the followers of the Inward Way. Do you truly believe, however, that these barbarians have ever thought for themselves? Even their heresies are Chinese. The irony that these rebels against the Quincunx follow the path of one of our own is sweet... all the more so for their inability to comprehend that the joke is, how you Running Monkeys say, on them?"

"So this Chuang-Tzu was one of your lot then? Why didn't you mandarins take care of him before his ideas became such a problem."

"Watch your tongue, Chong... I don't need you enough to tolerate impudence."

"My humble pardon, Minister of First Principles and Enlightened Words."

"Better. For that I'll ignore your earlier insolent banter and answer your question. Yes, Chuang-Tzu was one of ours, as you so crudely stated, back at the time of Spring and Autumn after the fall of Luoyang and the Zhou. He was a jina in the Yellow Emperor's Court, a prodigy already past the *chih-mei* when they found him. He was destined for great things, had he not welcomed unacceptable thoughts. He refused to accept the Great Principle and called for a foolish denial of Di'hana. When Chuang-Tzu would not correct his... impertinence, we declared him *akuma*. But he escaped to the tottering Scarlet Phoenix Court before we could expunge his heresy by the light of heavenly truth."

"So... he thought the Dharmas were a total load of crap, and that he didn't need to kowtow to get ahead. Then, when you went to snuff him, he skipped south."

"Foolish *kôa*, his heresy was more serious than that. Chuang-Tzu did not resent the Ancestors' temporal authority... he denied their spiritual superiority. Burying himself in mortal foolishness, Chuang denied Heaven and the Fivefold Way. He refuted everything so that he could be one with the universe. That his search should lead him into every excess the Great Principle disapproved of was no small factor in motivating his heresy, I assure you.

"Chuang-Tzu was not content keeping his spiritual pollution to himself... his words were like fire amongst the barbarians. He shared responsibility for the Scarlet Phoenix Court's collapse into the den of half-cultured peasants and *akuma* that the Golden Courts are today. Eventually, even the petty mandarins of the Golden Courts believed him

dangerous and destroyed the vast majority of his followers. Unfortunately, as the Wheel turned further, more Kuei-jin willingly turned to any heresy that excused their denial of the Mandate of Hell."

"So this Chuang guy taught all those southern pig-eaters that the Courts were all wrong and he had it right?"

"Must I explain everything in words only the uncultured would grasp? The barbarian Kuei-jin always hate us, yet our Di'hanic superiority is so evident that they have no choice but to follow our dictates and admit our rightful place of leadership. Chuang tried changing that... he gave the barbarians a path without rules, without limitations, where they could wallow in the filth of their ignorance and poor habits and call themselves blessed."

"Okay, right... I get it. But I still don't understand why you call these guys Taoists. They don't actually follow all that stuff the mortals do, like that Tai Chi shit my grandparents did? Actually, you know, now that I think about it... some of their moves did look familiar."

"In his debauchery, Chuang-Tzu and his acolytes adopted many mortal beliefs. At least those of Lao-Tzu were Chinese... others were drawn from whatever disgusting rites justified their debauchery and rebellion. In Chuang's eyes, why bother building something more complex, especially when barbarian Kuei-jin knew no better and cared even less. As you noted, even their martial art, the Tempest of the Inward Focus, is based on the mortal Tai Chi. Of course, being called a Taoist infuriates them. It's a reminder of exactly how meaningless all their babble actually is. Now let us proceed with our task. The sooner we can return to Rangoon and Chung Kuo the better.

*The Mandarin of Jade of Blood Court, recorded by agents of Ne Win, Bamboo Prince of Rangoon*

\* \* \*

In my new state I was not alone, but those around me were still lost in the ignorant beliefs that accompanied them over death. Illusions of demons, spirits and a foolish notion of subservience they called the Mandate of Hell consumed their attentions. They were ignorant... all such concepts were merely stories to guide the unenlightened towards comprehending the eternal immensity of the Tau. These other seekers, calling themselves the Demon People, hid from the Tau and denied the eternal balancing of their nature. I shouted out, my lessons borne on my words, my cries shattering their beliefs for the insubstantial shadows of a lantern that they were.

Yet the Tau frightens, and many could not pull their mouths from the teats of ignorance and superstition upon which they nursed. Only a few had the courage to seek out, though all who escaped the imbalance of unenlightened death surely possess the will. As the honest mandarin can find no peace under a corrupt dynasty, I found no rest amongst the Great Courts. I took my few disciples, and left the lands of the Zhou to spread the truth to all those who might treasure the peace of the Inward Way.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

\* \* \*

Hey Deddy!

How's the gang down at Causeway Bay? I know I'm supposed to be dead, but man, I'm not... and I'm really not sure why. I followed that out-of-date pompous ass up in the Shan Hills and it all went seriously bad. These Tempest *akuma* dudes have this massive old temple up there Deddy,

and I mean like ancient. It was so packed with Chi, I felt I was doing ice just being near it. Anyway, the First Minister of Stupidity misjudged these guys. They handed him his head when we tried to go in. I thought I was a goner too, but instead I got a lecture and they let me go.

*Email from Wengho Chong to Deddy Hermanus*

\* \* \*

You would do well to listen, young seeker, for much of what you know flounders in ignorance. The Sage, he who is Chuang-Tzu, first came to us on the slopes of Penanggungan, at the Gates of Jedong near the seat of the Scarlet Phoenix Court. He brought us a truth as sweet-scented as cloves, and broke the chains of illusion used by the Ancestors of the Great Courts to bind us. He demanded no tribute, accepted no gifts, refused any thought of rulership and gave meaning to the nights we spent in slavery and servility. We became *Danh Tú*, seekers of the way, and sought to extricate ourselves from the meaningless Great Cycle... the path of never-ending imbalance as dictated by the ancestors.

The lackeys of the Scarlet Phoenix attacked us, for we denied them their mistresses' false glory and foolish honor. Yet we had no thought of fighting. We only wished to lift the veil of illusion from their souls... fighting is a distraction from the great task revealed to us by the Sage. When persuasion failed, we left the Courts to their baubles and turned to our search for the Tau, ignoring them as best we could. The Sage knew our enemies would beset us and prepared us well, teaching us the Tempest of the Inward Focus so that we might defend ourselves in the streets and jungles.

The Inward Way is not easy, however, for to find the Tau one must know the path intimately. You must know the pleasure of the whore and the purity of the monk. All experiences are valid, for the Tau is everything and everywhere. It is the universe of experiences.

Inevitably some fell from the way, losing themselves to debauchery or abstinence, treating those who persecuted them with hatred and enmity. These we called Aks. They professed the Sage's words, but perverted them to justify their weakness and strife.

With their mastery in the Tempest of the Inward Focus, the Aks caused much destruction. By the time the Ancestor of the Scarlet Phoenix Court fell to her mandarins' treachery, the others only knew the Inward Way for the fighting skills it taught. Naturally the little Courts that grew from the manure of the Great Courts used the Aks to persecute us all. Their thoughts were safely ensconced in the banality of their own cultural arrogance, pathetic superstition, and spiritual desolation.

*Lesson from Dewatacengkar, Prophet of the First Jewel*

\* \* \*

Most Illustrious and Honored Ancestor,

I have followed your instructions closely and examined all our records regarding those *akuma*, the Tempest of the Inward Focus. What the jina Wengho Chong learned matches our knowledge of the Fall of Great Courts — with savage hordes of *akuma* sweeping down from the mountains to fall on those loyal to the Scarlet Phoenix Court. Yet, according to our records, the Tempest devils did not only strike to the south.

The *akuma* also struck the Yellow Emperor and White Tiger Courts. Indeed, some annotations in the records indicate that the attempt by the White Tiger Ancestor to enter forbidden Tibet was based on her misguided belief that it sheltered powerful Tempest Wats. Perhaps the most dangerous secret I uncovered, however, one made all the more pertinent by the *akuma* Dewatacengkar attempts to seduce young Wengho, was that the fall of the Black Tortoise Court to the Yama



Kings' minions was due directly to the influence of Chuang-Tzu's infamous blindness.

That these *akuma* seek converts once again is a disturbing sign of things to come.

As for the supposed Sage of the Inward Way, we have heard nothing of him since the destruction of the last Black Tortoise during the time of the Shi Huangdi. Tales from tortured Tempest *akuma* since reveal no clues as to his whereabouts, except for the idiotic notion he meditates in a secret Wat in Tibet. What is more certain is that from the time the Scarlet Phoenix Court fell, a internal schism has divided these *akuma* into two main camps... the Aks and the Danh Tú. This had led to significant fighting for control of the powerful Tempest Wats constructed on hidden Dragon Nests. It appears this division continues, though active fighting between the two factions stopped during the Wang Mang interregnum.

The records also state that the secretive Danh Tú retained control of most Wats, as the ill-timed destruction of the Mandarin of Jade made sadly clear. The records of the Most Revered Ancestor do not say why these *akuma* develop these places of power, but they are always situated on Dragon Nests, often in conjunction with mortal temples, and often in accordance with local *shen*. It appears that cooperation between the Danh Tú and various *shen* developed during their war with the Aks, but again, the records do not elaborate why.

The records are clear that through guile, right thinking and purity of action, the Quincunx prevented the Tempest *akuma* from gaining any influence in Chung Kuo, though they prospered like corpse maggots everywhere except the Azure Court's ancient domains. Whatever their faults, at least the Japanese and Koreans kept this scourge from their door, no more willing to tolerate the southern barbarians than we were. Such remained the case, Most Honored Ancestor, until the coming of the Foreign Devils. From that time on, the records are silent with many scribes and scholars diverting their attentions to the threat of the Kin-jin. It is a most unfortunate oversight, for which I am shamed.

*Letter from Mandarin Zhang Yang, Lady of Delicate Nuances and Hidden Meanings to the Ancestor of the Blood Court*

## KIN-JIN BETRAYAL

I don't know if I should be sending you this, Chong. The old ones are apparently all paranoid about the Tempests right now. I'm not sure why, but everything's just going from bad to worse. These *akuma* are obviously screwing with the ancestor's peace of mind. Still, I've dug up a reasonable amount of info for you, though I'm not sure why you want all this ancient history. If the mandarins catch you poking around in this shit, they'll hang you out to cook. The stuff I found comes from several places, but together, they explain why the Quincunx has such a major problem with these guys. I think I got the information clean, but you can never be too sure. You owe me big for this Chong... and I mean really big!

*Email from Deddy Hermanus to Wengho Chong*

\* \* \*

Matters here are rather strained, though the Cathayans are making no further attempts to drive us from Hong Kong. Pedder is doing his best to keep matters under control. More importantly, my research into the possible abilities of the

Taoist Magicians we've heard so much about has uncovered a potential gold mine. While working my way through the layers of charlatans expected in such endeavors, a Cathayan calling himself Feng Kaiying approached me. While I remain suspicious of any friendly Cathayan, he managed to offer several Kindred in Shanghai, Singapore, Rangoon, Calcutta and Batavia as references. He apparently represents a faction of Cathayans we've never dealt with before, and he doesn't seem to bear us the same animosity that the others do. He claims to have the location of a potent Cathayan Temple near the headwaters of the Red River in Yunan. I haven't accepted his proposal for a joint expedition yet, but some friendly Cathayans could very much add to our power here.

*Intercepted letter from Oliver Thrace, Hong Kong, to unknown recipient, Vienna, 1885*

\* \* \*

Of course, the Aks sided with the *gweilo*, for they offered new perversions to practice and a chance to strike at the Quincunx. In the south, amongst the more tolerant Golden Courts, there was less cooperation between the Western dogs and Aks. It seems the Aks did not care to drag themselves from their orgies and Yomi worship. These Tempest dancers were little more than bandits, emerging from their holes when the Five Courts were weak and bathing themselves with disgrace and depravity through their alliance with the Kin-jin. As for the scuttling cockroaches who call themselves Danh Tú, we've heard little of them for centuries... though the Aks and Kin-Jin Tremere inflicted much damage to their vaunted Wats.

Still, while we drove the Kin-jin from Chung Kua, the Danh Tú were spared our direct wrath because of their neutrality. They remained hidden in their corrupt jungle and mountain nests. With the Aks, however, we almost exterminated them to the Kuei-jin for their treachery, black even by the demonic standards of *akuma*. Still, like the insects they are, some scuttled into deep, dark holes from which they could not be dug out, with many thanks, of course, to the Golden Courts whose affiliations with the Kin-jin was always widespread. With so many of their own *akuma* to deal with, it's no surprise that the crawling dung heaps of the south fester with all manner of heretical maggots and worms.

*Lecture from the Bodhisattva Lai Zhang of the Illuminating Darkness, recorded 1967.*

\* \* \*

Of course we... cooperated with the Kin-jin. They offered us another experience by which we could understand the Tau. One must speak... to understand, and one has to understand to help... and the Kin-jin are almost as spiritually barren as you are.

Stop cutting me! I'm telling you everything....

You talk about your "plans," but you're blind. You're all blind. We have no plans. We just want to be... to find the immortal balance... become one with the Tau. Why won't you let us do that? We're not like the Aks... we're different. They seek experience without... without understanding. They've been the constant thorn in your sides... and ours... trying to get our Wats, but they're like yapping dogs. Never been of real consequence... except in their own minds.

We Danh Tú worked... through the centuries, not to overthrow your precious Courts. We could have, but we didn't. We wanted to show you the folly of your ways. You move... in a world of illusions created by your own fears. We've been among you the entire time... You were satisfied

driving off the Aks bandits and proclaiming yourself safe. We never threatened you... We whispered words here, give you an object lesson there... tried turning you from your self-fulfilling prophecies of doom.

You call it corruption... I call it learning. We're nobody's servants... not even the Aks are stupid enough to believe in your Hells. We never did anything except... show you the Way. It's not so charitable as you think... for the Sage said, "One can search and see but a single path, but many can search and discover many paths." Some think that until all Seekers are on the path, none will find the Tau. I don't know, but enough of us think it's worth the risk that some face oblivion trying.

*Transcript of the interrogation of the akuma Dùo Súi, 1976, Saigon*

## RECENT EVENTS

There's no doubt that there's been a dramatic increase in the activity of all *akuma*, though the most disturbing information at present is the growing movement of the Danh Tú. While the Aks have been more active, this is hardly surprising given the present disquiet and the fact that these vultures have always flocked to trouble. Additionally, the Aks haven't been actively hunted since the Second World War, when the Gaki did at least one thing right by killing as many of these corrupt traitors as they could find. And what most Gaki didn't get, the locals caught in revenge.

For the first time in centuries, though, if we can believe the reports, the Danh Tú are involving themselves in matters outside their mountains. Aks we've interrogated know little of what motivated these secretive *akuma* to break their millennial old traditions. I would caution you though, Comrades, that all of them are almost certainly moving at the behest of their Yama King masters, and this can mean nothing but trouble for the Courts. The following intercepted communiqué from a high-ranking Aks to his agents indicates the worst.

*Report from Ly Khac-Kham First Deputy Secretary of the Bureau of Court Security, the Hóng Quân Court of Hanoi, 1995*

\* \* \*

Greetings Fellow Followers of the Way,

The time is upon us to bring the last of the corrupt Courts to their knees... we have hidden and skulked enough since our defeat at the hands of the Gaki. But now, as the storm breaks, we shall take our revenge and make our way beyond this mortal realm to be one with the Tau. Now is not the time for the subtlety and refrain we exhibited in the past... now is not the time for prisoners... and now is not the time to fight amongst ourselves.

The Courts have persecuted us for three thousand years; we have been chaff before the wind of their power. The past is history and the future shall be ours!

*Open letter from Feng Kaiying, Aks Bupati*

## SOCIETY

That we pursue knowledge inevitably means we pursue ignorance as well, for the Tau is all things. Learn from these words, for bitter, sweet, distasteful or pleasing, they are the range of your pallet. After all, if we were not meant to sample that which displeases us, why would we then be able to taste

## LEXICON

**Aks:** Hatred and enmity (Urdu); the militant sect of the Inward Way.

**Bupati:** Chief (Javanese); an Aks who, through personal prowess or charismatic appeal, leads a band of Aks Kabalyeru.

**Chuang-Tzu:** A disciple of Lao-Tzu who fell from grace and became Kuei-jin. He developed the teaching of Lao into the Inward Way to meet the needs of the Demon People.

**Danh Tú:** Seekers of the Way (Vietnamese); the intellectual sect of the Inward Way.

**Inward Way:** Also called the Way of the Inward Focus and the Inward Path, this is the name the Tempest *akuma* reserve for themselves.

**Kabalyeru:** Knight (Kapampangan); an Aks proven worthy of treatment as a full member of the sect through prowess in battle.

**Nais Khu:** Teacher (Hmong); a Danh Tú who takes time from his own search for the Tau to teach others.

**Seeker:** The name for Kuei-jin used among followers of the Inward Way. Kuei-jin who do not follow the Inward Way are called blind or lost Seekers.

**Tau:** Path/the Way (Chinese); refers to a power that envelops, surrounds and flows through all things, living and non-living. The Tau regulates natural processes and nourishes balance in the Universe. It embodies the harmony of opposites (i.e. there would be no love without hate, no light without dark, no male without female). Based on the mortal beliefs promulgated by Lao-Tzu, his student, Chuang-Tzu, introduced the concept of the Tau to Kuei-jin society.

**Tempest of the Inward Focus:** The Chi-based martial art practiced by Seekers of the Inward Way. Externally it appears to be combat Tai Chi, but is powered by a discipline of the same name into something far more dangerous. The Courts applied the martial art's name to the entire Dharma after Aks bands continually used it against them.

**The Sage:** see Chuang-Tzu

**Wali:** Saint (Javanese); a Danh Tú of great inner peace and learning.

**Wat:** Temple (Cambodian); a Danh Tú stronghold, usually in isolated mountainous places; a combination monastery and library.

it at all? Take each lesson, and learn the arguments for and against each one. That is the Inward Path.

*Lesson from Dewataengkar, Prophet of the First Jewel*

That the followers of the Inward Way disbelieve in the Yama Kings as greatly as they dismiss the truth of the Great Wheel and Mandate of Hell damns them in equal measure as *akuma*. Yomi seeps into the world like rot overtaking the aged melon, and anyone who is not against the minions of the Yama Kings is with them, even if only through ignorance.

*Lecture from the Bodhisattva Lai Zhang of the Illuminating Darkness, recorded 1967.*

## BELIEFS

The ability to deceive oneself, even when the very nature of existence is awash with Yin and Yang and cries out for balance, does not come without labor or purpose. The Great Principle and other rules espoused by the Mistresses of the Great Courts are silken ropes of deceit perfumed by the lotus of avidity. They serve no purpose but to reinforce the superstitions of our mortal lives and to give credence to the baseless superiority of those who founded the Courts (and those who would benefit from it). Each fold of The Great Principle offers illusions to the ignorant and makes fools feel important.

**The Way of Origin:** We are now seekers, torn by Yin and Yang in an ever-conflicting tempest. Who we *were* is unimportant, whether we played the scholar or the cobbler. What we were, whether Malay, Qin, Hakka, Tamil, or other is also of no importance. The mortal world and its ties are a distraction from the search for the Tau. Ignore your past assumptions; concentrate on the here and now, for this is how you will find balance and become one with the Tau.

**The Way of Lineage:** That age brings death is the only certainty of our mortal lives; now that we are immortal, what matters lineage? Listen to others, for they may show you a path yet explored, but you will find the Tau on your own. Obey none, listen to all and seek alone. Nor do the words of the sons and daughters of Han and Tang hold any special wisdom; be wary of them, for they seek to enslave you for their own ends.

**The Way of Integrity:** In a world of illusion where one seeks true experience, it pays to never trust anyone save other Seekers. Only we can discern truth from lies, and can be trusted to speak of the reality of a matter. For those not seeking any advice that would allow them to proceed with their search, they have woven their existence out of deceit and childish dreams.

**The Way of Obligation:** There is no duty but the search. This world is nothing but a great shadow show of illusions and lies; to claim obligation to it is to enslave yourself to whoever deceives you first. Nor can we claim obligation to the Tau, for one cannot serve what one doesn't understand. It will always remain beyond comprehension until we can at last find enlightenment.

**The Way of Propriety:** Why bind oneself with rituals and ceremonies? These are blinds that trap the mind within the Quincunx's illusions. The Tau requires understanding, not worship. It cares not for bowing and trite words. Seekers only desire truth, a rough and bold way beyond the pretty draperies and silks of deception clothing the Courts' slaves and emperors alike. Speak your mind to other Seekers without reservation and they will treat you likewise.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

Lies are a complicated matter, for every word is an excuse justifying intent. The greater the lie, the longer the explanation. Hence the Fivefold Way, a knot of fables and untruths. The Tau needs no such duplicity, for it simply is. It needs no justification.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

In denying the teachings of the Grand Arhat, the *akuma* of the Inward Way leave themselves exposed to the minions

of the Yama Kings and disturb the tranquil pursuit of karmic purpose. Rude, disrespectful, believing in none of their experiences... how easy it must be for the Yama Kings to steal their souls. They do not even sense the loss, going about their way and believing the chaos and loss they sow around them is mere illusion.

*Lecture from the Bodhisattva Lai Zhang of the Illuminating Darkness, recorded 1967.*

### TENETS OF THE TEMPEST OF THE INWARD FOCUS

1. Pull all things near and make them part of yourself.
2. Balance the needs and desires on all poles, that they may strive against each other.
3. Never stray from the core of your nature.
4. Realize the potential to learn from all people.
5. Remember the lessons of the past; apply them to the future.
6. Be consistent in your rewards and punishments.
7. Teach others the virtues of peace and moderation.
8. Bring harmony to the spirit worlds through balancing the living realms.

### TENETS

Pull all things near and make them part of yourself.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

No belief, no thought, and no experience is without meaning. Like children — for all are children when contemplating the Tau — we learn through both our experiences and lessons. Even when you realize a belief is false, you still learn. Even when an action becomes painful and destructive, you learn. Take everything you can hold and let it become part of you, for eventually you will find understanding... and encompass it all.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

The Tempest *akuma* have no restrictions. They feed on tainted Chi and abide the presence of those soiled by concourse with the Yomi world. Nothing is forbidden to them, even if they admit they do not understand their own actions and its consequences, or cannot give any reason for said actions. Like undisciplined children, they run amuck, without a care for the future. They feast from so many sugared sweets that they are liable to make themselves sick. Be careful that their spiritual disgorge does not pollute you.

*Excerpt from "Lies and Heresies" by Ning Jing, Hidden Scholar of the Bone Court*

\* \* \*

Balance your needs and desires on all poles, so that they strive against each other.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

Our imbalanced natures... Yin and Yang, P'o and Hun... pull us in all directions like the Monsoon's gales. To avoid endless fighting, we must find the storm's calm center. Calm is not only hidden in chastity and meditation, it is also found

through lust and celebration, peace and violence, the animal and the rational. Give the body pain; give the body pleasure. Give the mind peace; give the mind impossible conundrums. The secret is allowing no specific aspect of oneself to possess more importance, for once you unbalance the scales of desire, need ensures you seek tranquility in the raging river from the first stone once again.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

In following one's Dharma, to ensure the completion of Karmic purpose you must, by necessity, starve the hungers leading into Yomi or avoid whatever places your soul under the dominion of the P'o. Such control over one's appetites, however, is unknown to the Tempest *akuma*. They exist in a constant and chaotic cycle of over-indulgence that sends them careening from one extreme to another. It inflames their hungers, feeds their desires and sends them stumbling from their path with the speed and fury of hail. And like hail, they shatter and melt away, for the very substance of their being cannot withstand the heat of their uncontrolled vices.

*Excerpt from "Lies and Heresies" by Ning Jing, Hidden Scholar of the Bone Court*

\* \* \*

Never stray from the core of your nature.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

In every Seeker, even those who have not found the Inward Way, there is a truth allowing us to reach our state of eternal balancing. To be untrue to yourself is to bury your mind in falsehoods. Internalizing reality's lies and illusions is the ultimate deception, and will forever deny you enlightenment.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

Revealing the essence of yourself is foolish in the extreme. As the polite courtier allows no one to know his intentions, the cultured Kuei-jin allows no one, even his own *wu*, to know his inner nature. The Tempest *akuma* are anything but cultured, and in their loutish, barbaric manner reveal their innermost soul. While our hands more easily deceive them, it also makes them easier to ensnare by the Yama Kings. For this reason, never seek to manipulate a Tempest *akuma*, for they are like excrement in the street: you never know to whom they might belong.

*Excerpt from "Lies and Heresies" by Ning Jing, Hidden Scholar of the Bone Court*

\* \* \*

Realize the potential to learn from all people... and things.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

The tiger is the best of hunters... the dolphin, the best of swimmers. Why then not observe them? If a mortal woman knows the Sufi ways, will you not sit at her feet to learn from her? If a *shen* can teach of the secret paths of the Kush, will you not follow? The Courts would have you believe all knowledge comes from the Han and the Tang. The greatest fools are those who deny the knowledge of their own people to enslave themselves to the Quincunx's arrogant bigotry.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

Willfully illiterate and ignorant, the Tempest *akuma* collect the lies and atavistic beliefs of barbarians like they were pearls from Heaven. They deny the Great Arhat and spiritual superiority of the Bodhisattvas and Ancestors of the Great Courts of China who revealed the very meaning of existence to the barbarians around Chung Kuo. Their stupidity would be amusing, were it not so tempting to the barbarian Kuei-jin of the south who ignore our strict teachings and forget to pay us proper respect.

*Excerpt from "Lies and Heresies" by Ning Jing, Hidden Scholar of the Bone Court*

\* \* \*

Remember the lessons of the past; apply them to the future.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

Once a path is trodden, venturing there again achieves nothing. Learn all you can and move on. That learning will help light the way. You can gain nothing from revisiting matters endlessly; such is the path of self-delusion. Understanding is less important than remembering. That which you do not understand will reveal itself when you eventually achieve enlightenment. In the meantime, the nature of the lesson can be as important as its meaning.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

These *akuma* are wanderers, vagabonds, dilettantes and scholars of little virtue. They flutter about endlessly, like leaves on the autumn wind that will rot with the coming winter of the Sixth Age. They apply themselves to learning nothing but easy lessons, and ignore meaning that would require deep thought.

*Excerpt from "Lies and Heresies" by Ning Jing, Hidden Scholar of the Bone Court*

\* \* \*

Be consistent in your rewards and punishments.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

At the heart of balance is the ability to treat every event as it relates to every other event. All is relative, and understanding that there are no absolutes is central to following the Inward Way. Murder or mercy, sustenance or gluttony, you must judge without prejudice and decide on facts alone without reference to so-called established concepts. Good or evil, moral or immoral, they will deceive you from the reality of the matter in hand.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

When one deals with these *akuma*, it becomes obvious that they hold to nothing and cannot be trusted, save to do what is most convenient at the time. Their laziness and amoral behavior is such that they will not even expend the effort to pursue the dictates of the Yama Kings. They show expediency without purpose and pursue goals without meaning... they respond more like animals than men.

*Excerpt from "Lies and Heresies" by Ning Jing, Hidden Scholar of the Bone Court*

\* \* \*



Teach others the virtues of peace and moderation.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

The easy path is not the way to the Tau. So it is that we must work tirelessly to bring all Seekers to the Inward Way. In their ignorance, every Seeker who does not search for the Tau denies us a light that may yet illuminate the way.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

More than any other *akuma*, except those working openly for the Yama Kings, the Tempest seek to spread their tendrils into the bosom of the Courts. Be wary, be vigilant, heed not their honeyed words and peaceful miens. They intend nothing but negation of the Great Cycle and your Karmic purpose.

*Excerpt from "Lies and Heresies" by Ning Jing, Hidden Scholar of the Bone Court*

\* \* \*

Bring harmony to the spirit worlds through balancing the living realms.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

Reality consists of all that which is perceived by man, beast and *shen* alike. Truly, if you believe yourself a chicken then only your poor will prevents you from becoming one. The spirit worlds are illusions brought into existence by the dreams, nightmares and desires of those lost from their Inward Way. Such illusions are not without their dangers. They assume malevolent forms and work to protect themselves from the revelation of their insubstantial nature. Never cease to work towards illuminating the minds of the ignorant, for as they learn, their fears diminish; in turn, the malice of the spirit worlds diminishes too, in proportion to its reduced substance.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

"Deny the Mandate of Heaven" these *akuma* teach mortals. "Deny the Mandate of Hell" they teach Kuei-jin. Ignore proper services to the spirits of dead and nature. These fools stir the hornet nest in their ignorance, creating angry storms of spurned spirits or leaving entire regions empty of Heavenly guardians, messengers, and scholars.

*Excerpt from "Lies and Heresies" by Ning Jing, Hidden Scholar of the Bone Court*

## A DHARMA DIVIDED

The Tau cannot be found while cowering in hills and skulking about like thieves in the night. We must follow the path, drink in every experience and indulge in every opportunity to correct the misguided who do not seek the Inward Way. If this means fighting, so be it! The Sage did not teach us the martial forms and mantras of the Tempest without reason. He knew we would have to fight. In violent struggle, we find the most enlightening experiences and free ourselves from restrictions. The Courts are our enemies for they seek to hinder our search for new experiences; never stop fighting their ignorance and enmity.

*Initiates' exhortation from Feng Kaiying, Aks Bupati*

Experience must be treated like water from a well. If one falls into the well, he will likely drown. Conversely, taking water from the bucket gives life without risking it. So, we use the power of the Wats, the strength of the Tempest of the Inward Focus and our hidden rites of guile and deception to pursue our search without risking destruction or the distraction of bloodshed. Of course, we hazard such fates to teach and spread the word, but that is a careful venture, not a wild gambit. We gather our secretly collected experiences, building the Wats' libraries into citadels against ignorance and preserving the knowledge of those who undertook the experiences.

*Lesson from Dewatacengkar, Prophet of the First Jewel, Danh Tú Wali*

When dealing with Tempest of the Inward Focus *akuma*, it is important one realizes that these rebels stand divided. Those we know as the Aks are a potent and dangerous foe, emerging from the night and the jungle-clad hills to fight fist and heel against the Court's valiant champions. They are violent, predatory, and unmoved by mercy... you must be wary of them, for they believe it their holy duty to slay any Kuei-jin who follows the Great Principle.

Just as deadly, or perhaps more so, are the Danh Tú who sneak into the Courts. Seemingly gentle and non-violent, they are revolutionaries of the most insidious kind. Their words seduce even the most loyal comrade, and their scurrilous and Yomi-inspired texts can deceive the most vigilant mandarin into wrongful action.

*Briefing by Ly Khac-Kham First Secretary of the Bureau of Court Security, the Hóng Quân Court of Hanoi*

## INDOCTRINATING RECRUITS

When we emerge from unbalanced death, the shock of our return reduces us to a bestial state where we exist like animals. The Quincunx's lackeys call this phase *chih-mei*. We can rescue some of these creatures from their savagery through martial training and stern discipline. Those who you cannot help still make fine hunting dogs, though you must always treat them carefully... they'll happily bite the hand that feeds them.

Since recruiting *chih-mei* is such a haphazard task, the best option is to kidnap *hin* or *jina* from the Courts and break them from their conditioning. This process is uncertain, and many recruits die before we can unshackle them from the Quincunx's collars. Often the best option is to watch for those Kuei-jin already disgraced by the Courts or disillusioned with them. Those the Courts label *akuma* are especially good finds, since they're desperate for any help and their exile often opens their eyes to the Quincunx's fallacies.

*Excerpt from "Manual for Resistance" by Wilhelm Tjilatjap, Aks Kabalyeru*

While we strive to help all Seekers, we do not actively seek recruits. The decision to follow the Inward Way must be voluntary or it is of little consequence. Freedom from illusion comes from within, and while our words and teachings might help initiate the search for truth, only the individual can finish it. Thus, we do not help those who have not yet recovered from their animal state. They must advance of their own will before the Way is open to them. Finally you must be careful, for some who come to us claiming to have become true Seekers are charlatans lost to the illusions of the Spirit Worlds.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

## THE LESSONS LEARNED

You have but started on the long path of the Inward Way. Your knowledge of the Tempest is a bud that will grow into a lotus of strength. Like the lotus, growth must come from within. We will not coddle you. We will not fill your heads with empty rhetoric and foolish rituals. Advancement can only come through experiencing the world, watching those more exalted along the path in combat and emulating their techniques. Only then will you grow in your understanding and place amongst us.

With every passing hour, you should also seek new experiences. Try fruits you have never eaten, test your courage against new terrors and feel pain and pleasure in ways you never imagined. Nor should you neglect your mind, for the Tau is not just about what we feel, but what we think. Study any text you find, be it a children's fable or manual for a rocket launcher. Torture your prisoners carefully and absorb every word they say, for in their screams may lie the clue to bring you to the next step of awareness... and bring true pain to our enemies.

*Initiates' exhortation from Feng Kaiying, Aks Bupati*

As a chick must learn to fly before leaving the nest, so must you bide your time in the Wat until you have mastered the Tempest's basic martial forms and mantras. Without this learning, your path along the Inward Way will be a deadly one. There is nothing to learn from a quick trip to oblivion. You'll know when you are ready to leave the Wat, and you'll be free to go. Yet you must return, if not here, then to another Wat to ponder what you've learned and record it for others to experience. Also, you may find yourself teaching others just as I guide you now. Perhaps you will become *Nais Khu* or *Wali*, teaching even me, for we have no rank among us.

We are all Seekers. If I knew more than you, I would be enlightened and not sitting here in the Living World still searching for the formless and eternal truths. It is our nature to offer titles to indicate those better balanced than others, but that is a sign of stagnation rather than progress, for who says the Tau grows upward as the tree branches? Does the tree not have roots as well? Sometimes, we also name teachers for their particular gifts. Never believe such titles are any more than hollow words used solely to drape illusion with substance.

*Lesson from Dewatacengkar, Prophet of the First Jewel, Danh Tú Wali*

\* \* \*

The Quincunx's ignorant and fascist minions beset us on all sides. The mandarins and ancestors do not want us becoming one with the Tau, for in doing so, we reveal their lies to all and show them for the racist imperialists that they are. Our heroic resistance against the Courts, therefore, is a fight that can have no limitations. We must allow nothing and no one to stand in the way of our enlightenment. Any tool that helps in the struggle is acceptable; the better if the Courts either fear those tools or will not use them.

Among our prime targets for exploitation is the foolish mysticism perpetuated by the Courts as their main ideological weapon. By using the Spirit World's worst illusions, you can strike terror into the hearts of the most powerful mandarin, and deny them use of so-called tainted Chi nests.

Independent Seekers outside the Courts and not following the Inward Way make useful cannon fodder. Especially amusing are those who have completely surrendered their minds to the illusions of the Spirit Worlds and so-called Yama Kings. Use their madness, their belief in this Yomi, for any tool that brings us closer to final victory over the Courts must be exploited.

*Excerpt from "Manual for Resistance" by Wilhelm Tjilatjap, Aks Kabalyeru*

Think one thought that would have shocked you most as a mortal. Then multiply it a thousand fold. This is an experience worth having, for the more startling and confounding the endeavor, the more there is to learn something of the Tau that you had not previously known.

In our state of eternal balancing, we know there is no evil and no good. Yin and Yang, P'o and Hun are beyond such absolutes. I have seen Kin-jin and Gaki fight by moonlight on Singapore's docks. I've seen lunatics, haunted by the demonic illusions they wove about themselves, eat babies from the mother's exposed womb. Once I watched a single larvae grow into a caterpillar, then a butterfly. I threw myself into the headwaters of the Ganges and floated on night currents to the refuse laden wharves of Kolkatta. Every experience has its value... and we have the time to experience them all.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

## TO KNOW YOUR ENEMIES

When dealing with the cowardly fools called the Danh Tú, there are several strategies that will reap you their destruction. They are hard to uproot in general, but you can always count on them to defend their Wats. While these are places of power, they are also anchors, which is why we do not bother with such foolishness. You can also rely on a Danh Tú to talk to you before fighting. If you deceive them correctly, you should be able to approach close enough to land the killing blow before they can defend themselves.

The Danh Tú always travel alone. If you pierce their cunning disguises or follow their shadowed footsteps, you can always overwhelm them with numbers. Be warned: they are rarely so distracted that they lose track of their surroundings. You can, however, lure them into an ambush or flush them out from hiding if you can create something beyond their own frame of experience. I have often found that foreign men and women (especially Americans and Europeans) appeal to the Danh Tú's curiosities for the exotic. If you can guide a group of such mortals into an area, the Danh Tú will eventually find them and follow their actions. Still, this isn't easy, especially since these cowards work diligently to avoid the Quincunx's lackeys. Indeed, they hide themselves so deep underground that they often miss the most obvious treats.

*Excerpt from "Manual for Resistance" by Wilhelm Tjilatjap, Aks Kabalyeru*

The Aks are a constant threat; they desire our wisdom and envy our mastery over the Tempest. Yet, like the dogs they are, once outside their packs, you can easily cajole and fool them. They lack courage when alone, and even as a team, they do not possess the will to fight together. Each

Aks tries to be the one who brought you down, thus gaining the illusory regard of his peers. Challenging them to single duels can be successful if you have a moment to speak before their onslaught.

They also seek experience without knowledge, so distracting them with some baseless fact often works. Throw them a bone, even the paltriest snippet of information will do. Best to keep it simple and preferably violent, though, for they have limited attention. That also makes it hard for them to track a victim they lost. Once an endeavor becomes too hard, they will sulk off in search of easier victims, or fall into a berserk, impetuous state of frenetic violence at having lost. They also bear the Courts a huge enmity and will, by preference, attack their minions over us.

*Lesson from Dewatacengkar, Prophet of the First Jewel, Danh Tú Wali*

\* \* \*

Shadows hide the truth, and hiding in it prevent us from following the path. That said, being torn limb from limb by the Quincunx's dogs doesn't help you follow the path, either. Until we can relegate the Courts to oblivion, it is of the utmost importance you do not reveal yourselves unless victory is certain. Sometimes hiding in plain sight is enough, though trying to act like a cowardly heimen can make self-control difficult since you must kowtow to every Court lackey.

Most of the time, you must stay completely out of sight. Move in on a nice family with a good home, use them, dispose of them and move on. Never stay a week in one place. When collecting experiences, be careful not to alert the Courts' minions, for they are many. Keep your revelries hidden by using the mortal red-light districts where there is so much lust and misery already, a little more will unlikely show. Best to stay in the countryside if possible, since modern travel is quick. Best to utilize it and make use of our superior knowledge of the jungle and hills to hide from the Courts.

*Initiates exhortation from Feng Kaiying, Aks Bupati*

When one is obsessed by illusions, it becomes hard to tell one thing from the other. Never try to hide from the Courts, for they are experts at searching the shadows they have built around themselves. Learn their ways, speak with their foolish tongue and pretend to be as blind as they. If you mouth the right words, you can wander through their territories as safely as if you were in a Wat. It also affords you an excellent opportunity to help enlighten these lost Seekers of the Way, but remember, we are at our most vulnerable when seeking new experiences. Lost in the wonders of the Tau's new vistas, it becomes easier for our opponents to surprise us and reveal our true nature. Make use of mortals to protect you; manipulating their feeble desires is easy, and while they possess few great capabilities, they are an endless resource.

Only in the Wats can we relax, for our Harmonious Shielding of the Guarded Home protects us from hostile intent. While entering and leaving the Wats, however, we must exercise caution, for the Courts, *shen* and Aks all desire our power. To us, it is merely useful in providing a source of Chi while we study and learn; more valuable are the collected records in the libraries of our sanctuaries. Their loss to the

ignorant and unappreciative would be disastrous; we must undertake every subterfuge to protect them.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

## COURTING YOMI

The Seekers that the Courts have deceived into worshiping their own shadows and worldly illusions quake at the children's tales they use to populate the nights. Whatever Spirit World beast they claim stalks them is their own creation. Nothing but their acceptance of the Inward Way and realization of the Tau can save them from these fabricated demons, for these demons are inside their own minds.

*Excerpt from "Way of the Inward Focus" by Chuang-Tzu*

The Tempest *akuma* must truly amuse the Yama Kings. The Aks clamor like wild dogs gathered round a dying calf, screaming into the night, spilling blood and spreading terror for no reason other than their own unthinking desires. The *Danh Tú* are perhaps worse, for in their self-righteous arrogance, they not only deny the Great Principle, but also argue against the entire structure of Heaven. They spread heresies of the most malignant sort, indulging their P'os with excesses beyond imagining, all the while pouring scorn on the very concept of the Yama Kings.

The Wheel is turning and soon the Sixth Age will be upon us. The icy wind of its approach already rattles the shutters of the Courts. When it arrives, the Aks will be its cruel harbingers while the Demon Emperor stokes their desire for blood. They will rise up in new fury and fall upon the unwary. The *Danh Tú* will play a subtler role, for in denying the Demon Emperor, all their acumen and persuasion will delay many from reacting before it is too late.

*Lecture from the Bodhisattva Lai Zhang of the Illuminating Darkness, recorded 1967*

It is an unfortunate necessity of our search that we actually help bind our fellow Seekers who we have not yet freed from their illusions. As a moral boundary, the Courts have created the Illusion of Yomi, which we know is naught but the state of imbalanced death facing all those who do not find the Tau. The Mistresses of the Courts, however, have populated their illusions with demons spun out of nightmares, creating a source for the imbalanced suffering terrorizing their subjects. This fear and certainty is so real that some of these creatures can even take physical form. More often, however, the imbalance drives these Seekers mad, and they come to believe they are the servants of their own delusions.

By pushing the boundaries of reality, we cause ripples in the illusions of the Living World and the Spirit Realms. The Quincunx condemns these ripples as immoral, and decries them for serving the lordly illusions governing Yomi, the so-called Yama Kings. These mighty illusions have actually taken form, but in the minds of the lost and deluded, our actions supposedly lend power to these fabrications. While we cannot turn from the Way to save these poor fools from themselves, it does pay to kill any illusions that have taken root in reality... if it doesn't disturb your tranquility of purpose. We cannot solve the problem, but at least, we can stem its effects.

*Lesson from Dewatacengkar, Prophet of the First Jewel, *Danh Tú* Wali*

## BROACHING THE WORLD

As rich in mortals as China and even more dynamic, the lands of the Indian Subcontinent hold an untold wealth of experiences for followers of the Inward Way. Not only do the tumultuous and energetic mortals of this land of mountains, jungles and gleaming deserts serve up delectable insights and harsh flagellations, but the mysticism of their varied faiths also offers a multitude of potential paths. The many Hindu Gods, with their eclectic mix of asceticism and opulence, are matched by the hidden mysteries and iron beliefs of the Muslims. Then there are the dozens of small sects, each exploring, in its narrow mortal way, one aspect of the Tau. The Jains, Sikhs, exiled Tibetan Buddhists and many hidden cults proliferating the subcontinent like lice on a beggar are all available to the discerning Seeker.

They are open, for here, we are safest from the Quincunx's machinations. Tibet's forbidden borders prevent direct access by the Han and Tang, while these mortals' rich heritage has given more to China than it has taken. This makes the local Kuei-jin far less enslaved to narrow cultural elitism, and subsequently, far less interested in troubling us in our pursuit of the Tau.

*Excerpt from "Vichara Sambandhi" by Ghumava Garaja, Nais Khu of Still Waters Wat*

Many of my companions chafe under the official interpretations of the Great Principle. They feel the Fivefold Way is too deliberately slanted in favor of the Five August Courts. That the Great Arhat traveled to China from India, as did many great thinkers and holy men, is well known, but certain arrogant and narrow-minded Kuei-jin deny this fact. As a result, we have many problems with the Tempest of the Inward Focus who pay homage to the great spiritual legacy of India. They don't stand aloof or disdain the culture or its faiths. In fact, they're so intricately involved with all its different cults, it's hard to believe that individual *akuma* share any common ground at all.

Admittedly, we teach the Great Principle to *hin* in a method foreign to them and their mortal beliefs. Our way is not for the weak. The Tempest offers a seductive alternative, however; the *hin* don't have to respect the "arrogant, petty lords of the Quincunx." Unfortunately, hunting these local *akuma* is more difficult than in China. India lacks the mortal institutions to oppress and monitor people, and the Indian people are not given to mindless obedience to authority.

*Conversation with Nirudhapasubandha, Kshatriya of the Sphatika Padma Court of Jabalpur*

\* \* \*

Here more than anywhere else, we have suffered persecution by the men of Han and Tang. Perhaps they were more successful in China, but here, the lands of the South are our oldest homes. It was here the Sage came to escape persecution in China; here, that the first of the Great Courts fell; here, that the Way of the Inward Focus established deep roots in the syncretic beliefs of the fierce hill and island people. Our oldest Wats and most determined *Walis* and *Nais Khu* can be found in the terraced hills and jungle-filled valleys.

It is not so much from the Golden Courts where our dangers have come, but rather, from Quincunx assassins, Gaki hunting parties and Aks war bands. The latter

proliferate in the slums and rebellion-ridden hills. Our most exposed Wats have long fallen to them and been left in ruins. Thankfully, as the illusions of doom grow stronger and more deluded souls join the Aks, they also become a greater danger to the Courts. Indeed the Aks have become so grave a threat, spreading violence and terror as a farmer spreads seed, even the Golden Courts have noticed and now act against them.

*Lesson from Dewatacengkar, Prophet of the First Jewell, Danh Tú Wali*

The most unfortunate collapse of the Scarlet Phoenix Court into rebellion and negligence allowed the Tempest *akuma* to secure a stronghold in the remote and inaccessible portions of South East Asia. Social disruption, weak morality, poor planning and the arrival of Kin-jin and the Gaki allowed them not only to survive, but to also multiply. While the Gaki thinned out the Aks, the chaos they and their mortal Japanese allies left behind allowed these counter-revolutionary bastards to regain their strength before the Courts could suppress them.

The Danh Tú are not missing either. They maintain ancient and powerful Wats in many places, though we have managed to expel them from Cambodia and Vietnam. Unfortunately, they remain numerous in the back hills of Thailand and Burma and are pushing hard to return to their former strongholds in Cambodia. They are equally strong in the islands, especially in the primitive areas of Mindanao, Borneo and Sumatra. Also, with so many small and near unexplored islands, they could be hiding anything out there, beyond the knowledge of the Golden Courts or our ability to do anything about it, even if we knew where to look.

*Briefing by Ly Khac-Kham First Secretary of the Bureau of Court Security, the Hóng Quân Court of Hanoi*

## WHERE THE MIDDLE KINGDOM LAYS

Home to the Sage himself (and how many other uncounted Seekers), eastern China is denied us except in stealth and hiding. Even the cowardly Danh Tú find few places to slither and, unless they hid their Wats in the plateaus of Tibet, we can find none of their temples north of the Red River or east of the Koko Nor. Why then, do we risk oblivion to return here time and time again? Because only in the teaming cities of the East can we find the most sublime pleasures and foulest torments. There is nowhere else that can offer a Seeker such bounty. Even India lacks the depth and history of experience that enthralls us to China.

You can always expect a good fight as well, and anyone surviving a raid into China, let alone Nippon or Korea, is an Aks worthy of emulation. They proved they will risk everything to pursue the Path. Even the Danh Tú feel the immensity of the Chi energy and history in the so-called Middle Kingdom. It attracts them like flies, despite the Courts' adept swatting. We rarely hunt these cowards here; it's too dangerous and achieves little but the destruction of the hunting party.

*Initiates' exhortation from Feng Kaiying, Aks Bupati*

Most Honored,

I apologize for this overly brief and direct message, but I fear someone has discovered my role in providing our beloved ancestor with the knowledge she requires. As you suspected, Tempest *akuma* are flooding through Hong

Kong and Shanghai like garbage through a sewer in the Monsoon. It's apparent they have a powerful Wat in Taiwan and possibly another on Okinawa. The arrogant Gaki do not even suspect that Tempest *akuma* walk their lands... the more fool they. Here, in Chung Kuo, these vultures are following the growing turmoil of this Western economic invasion, using the opening markets to hide from our watchful gaze.

The violence perpetuated by the Aks is not as worrisome as the secretive and watchful Danh Tú. Wherever these snakes tread, outbreaks of Yomi-inspired lunacy and craven displays of moral and physical cowardice abound. Even while rifling the shrines and temples of China and Japan, these leeches also steal the hope and determination of the Kuei-jin. I'm uncertain what they hope to gain, but then, I never understood the twisted schemes of the Yama Kings.

*Report from Liu Konghui, Dhampyr Heimin Messenger, to Blood Court Mandarin Zhang Yang, Lady of Delicate Nuances and Hidden Meanings*

## OTHER HERESIES

No, no, bro. The other heresies got it wrong too. They all wrapped up in the great illusions, falling to one of its tricks or another. Now you take the Rising Phoenixes, right bro? They looking to reunite with their loved ones and everything be happy like some Taiwan soap opera, but the storm already raging inside them. They stick around to one place, one mind-set too long, letting the illusion drown them, and that storm gonna break out, bro. It gonna break out and scatter their illusion like rice in storm winds. They at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Scorpion Eaters who got it no better, bro. They letting themselves get shackled in the illusion too, with their toys and games. Just watch, when we break their illusions, they ain't gonna have nothing left to play with. That when they really become dangerous, bro.

Nah, the Face of the Gods too busy chasing a lie to ever find the truth. This is how it is, they say. They searching for Heaven up there instead of looking for Heaven... and Hell in here. That's all you need, bro. You find everything in here once you stop looking... everything in here. Now, the Spirit of the Living Earth ain't too bad, if you teach them how to cut loose. They too wrapped up in ritual... in "appeasing" the spirits. Too bad... they might have a chance if they didn't focus on one spot too much. But they do, bro, they do. That mean for now, we alone here. Just rocks in a sea of make-believe, bro. Believe that.

*Recorded excerpt from conversation with Big Daddy Wa*

## SYSTEMS

The Seekers of the Inward Way may play several roles in a **Kindred of the East** story. They can be the wandering teachers leading Kuei-jin to question the society in which they exist, or barbarian-like Aks seeking to tear down civilization out of a strong conviction in their own actions. With the growing darkness gripping the world, Tempests are very useful in demonstrating how easily good can become evil. Although players may dismiss most *akuma* as baby-eating monsters, the Seekers are not so easily categorized. They follow a strict code that, while alien to the Courts, is not inherently evil or without merit. Yet as a result of denying the Courts' cosmology, they often act as unknowing

agents of the Yama Kings. The Seekers perhaps represent one of the worst facets of what will come with the Sixth Age... evil perpetuated by those who are well intentioned.

## DISCIPLINES

Seekers of the Inward Way can practice any Discipline available to Kuei-jin, though few Danh Tú are interested in much other than those pivotal to the Inward Way itself. Aks tend to concentrate on the Tempest of the Inward Focus martial form than the more philosophical Inward Way. They also spend a concerted effort on other combat-oriented Disciplines like Blood Shintai and the Demon Arts. Generally, however, a Storyteller should feel no qualms about giving Seekers whatever Disciplines suit the story's needs or character concept.

One important point concerning Disciplines associated with the Inward Way is the importance of Dharma levels. The character's Dharma level limits the Tempest of Inward Focus' and Inward Way's potential, which is a significant restriction on their effectiveness. Dots in either Discipline may not exceed the character's Dharma level. This is deliberate, even though it is prohibitive. The Inward Way is highly internalized, with Seekers actively disbelieving in the spiritual structure most Kuei-jin rely on to mold their world-view. Thus, Seekers draw their power from within themselves, and their Disciplines reflect this. Only as they become more centered on the Tau does their ability to manipulate their internal Chi resources rise. While a Storyteller can change the Dharma level restrictions if they wish, the Disciplines below are powerful and, if not limited by Dharma levels, can quickly unbalance a game.

## INWARD WAY

To become one with the Tau, the Seekers believe you must become completely at one with yourself. In line with this belief, the Discipline of the Inward Way is all about controlling the four imbalanced Virtues at the heart of the constantly whirling tempest within. A true master of the Inward Way manipulates her Yin and Yang Chi as well as her Hun and P'o with equal facility, and is always in complete control of her internal balance. Because it is so introspective, the Inward Way does not enjoy widespread popularity with the Aks, but those who realize its potential outside the rarefied and intellectual pursuits of the Wats can be a terrifying opponent.

### • INNER BALANCE

This power is exactly the same as the Master Flow power of the Equilibrium Discipline (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 102).

### • • REST UPON THE BLADE

Upon achieving some modicum of inner balance and calm, Seekers of the Inward Way can rest their spirits from the struggle. They suppress their need for Chi for a number of days equal to their Willpower by placing themselves in a deeply meditative state. This power can also be used for increasing their Willpower for resisting mental control, terror, or the lure of imbalance. Many Wali, for example, use this power to meditate for an extended period over several days and nights, while some Kabalyeru find it useful to suppress their natural fear of fire to wield such weapons as a flame thrower.

**System:** The character can initiate this power by spending a minimum of ten minutes in a preparatory trance. They may then enter a meditative state, not having to spend any Chi but unable to do anything requiring physical activity, even if it is only lifting a finger. They may remain in this state for a full 24 hours for each of their Dharma's levels. If they do so in open places, where the sun can reach them, however, they will have to break the meditation to escape destruction.

If using this power to increase Willpower, the Kuei-jin must spend Yang Chi at a rate of one point per ten minutes if there is no active mental coercion or terror against the character, or one Yang Chi point per turn when actively resisting such effects. Players add their Dharma level to their Willpower for the period during which they continue spending Chi. Because Tempest Seekers are usually at the second level of their Dharma's path, that means adding a minimum of two dice to Willpower rolls.

### • • • SCALES OF NEED

This skill is exactly the same as the Shift the Balance power of the Equilibrium Discipline (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 102).

### • • • • FEED THE SOUL

Through either careful meditation and stringent physical pranas or wild debauchery and bloody violence, a Kuei-jin can attempt to rebalance her Hun and P'o. The reasons for doing so are many. Some Seekers of the Inward Way wish to spend time as animals, emulating the words of the Sage when he urged them to learn from every creature, rational or not. Others want to raise the Hun, devoting their minds to pure thought in the hopes of eking out more secrets on the Tau's nature from their cognitive senses. Some Aks who reach this level of understanding in the Inward Way also use this power to turn themselves into killing machines of terrifying ferocity, though such usage is why few Danh Tú teach this skill outside their own sect.

**System:** These pranas take several hours to complete (equal to the number of Virtue points being converted) and must be done in isolation, free of interruption. The player dictates how many Hun or P'o points she wishes to convert to its opposite number, then makes a Willpower roll (the difficulty is her present score in the Virtue receiving the points). Thus, if converting P'o to Hun, the difficulty is the Hun score before this power's use. For every success, the player transfers one Virtue point while spending one Chi point of any type. The one caveat here is that once influenced by her P'o, a Seeker is just as likely as other Kuei-jin to remain under its malevolent sway permanently, and be unwilling to change back. It is for this reason that many Danh Tú only use this skill when aided and assisted by fellow Seekers.

### • • • • • FLOWING WITH THE TAU

By this level, the Seeker's control over her Chi is so complete that she can dispense with her mortal form and exist purely as a force of Chi for a number of days equal to her Dharma rating. In this state, she can travel the Dragon Lines with ease or pass through physical barriers. She is, however, without her mortal senses and can see the world around her only in terms of its Chi energy. It is therefore very hard to navigate outside of strong Chi highways like the Dragon Lines or areas with which the Kuei-jin is intimately familiar.



Many Kuei-jin use it as the ultimate wandering state, however, drifting wherever fate takes them and drinking in the Tau's wonders in its purest form.

**System:** The character must spend three turns concentrating on the change, then spend two Yin Chi and two Yang Chi to reflect balance. Once done, the character's material form dissolves and she becomes disembodied Chi energy for the duration of a scene. The character now perceives the world in Chi patterns and waves of flow and flux. Everything manifests as part of the Tau, a rhythmic movement of breath made manifest. The effect is similar to the Chi Sight power of the Chi'iu Muh Discipline (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 122), only without the mortal sight playing a factor. That means the character cannot distinguish colors, or even the specific shapes of objects... only the way they interact with the Tau. As a sort of Chi-consciousness, the character may also travel along Dragon Lines the same as the Ride the Dragon power of the Tapestry Discipline (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 104).

It is important to note that the character is not a spirit in this form, and thus, cannot be affected by powers like Spirit Call (see *Kindred of the East*, pp. 103-104). They cannot harm or be harmed by anyone who cannot discern the natural movements of Chi energy, though once that occurs, the character becomes vulnerable to Chi-manipulation powers that would normally affect opponents, such as Chi Interrupt and Chi Mastery in the Equilibrium Discipline (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 102). Disciplines simply exploiting ambient Chi or Dragon Lines will not affect the directed consciousness of the character.

The character cannot venture to the Spirit Worlds, and any action that would lead her through the Wall causes her to rematerialize abruptly. Any area of tainted Chi also requires a shadow soul roll, since the character's balanced state reacts to the area's toxic and corruptive energies.

## TEMPEST OF THE INWARD FOCUS

Designed by the Sage as a movement-based meditation, the Tempest is more than a Kuei-jin martial art. It was meant to serve as an external component to the internal Inward Way, and the Danh Tú believe that to be truly proficient in either, you must master both. The Tempest is also limited in that its powers can only be applied to Martial Arts maneuvers; it is, after all, a meditative-combat discipline.

### • SWIRLING WINDS STYLE

This power is exactly the same as the Principle of Motion, Yang Prana (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 105), but can only be used in conjunction with Martial Arts maneuvers.

### • • MEDITATION OF METAL

By contemplating the metallic cool of Yin, the Kuei-jin imbues her skin with many of metal's qualities. Unfortunately, metal lacks flexibility and suppleness, and use of this power leaves the Kuei-jin a veritable statue. A few of the Inward Way's followers, however, believe this power's use somewhat cowardly and too inhibiting for such a freeform Dharma. They only use it in battle against those wielding weapons or firearms.

**System:** For every three points of Yin Chi the character spends, she gains one point of armor for the rest of the scene. For every point of armor after the first, the character

also loses one die from any Dexterity related Dice Pools. While this armor's effect is cumulative with more mundane protection, no true Tempest would dishonor themselves in this manner.

### • • • KATA OF MOUNTING FURY

This skill is exactly the same as the Dragon Dance, Yang Prana (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 105), but can only be used in conjunction with Martial Arts maneuvers.

### • • • • FIGHTING CLOUD STYLE

The Kuei-jin finds that still point in the tempest of her soul, where Yin and Yang cease to be in opposition and form a mote of harmony. By concentrating on that point, the Kuei-jin may remove the physical impediment of the Living Realms. Opponents facing masters of this style find themselves under attack from seemingly lightning strikes, and when they attack, they discover their opponents drifting away from their blows. This is purely a combat power, however, and cannot be utilized except for combat maneuvers (since it is learned through martial meditation).

**System:** By spending two points of Yin Chi and two points of Yang Chi when entering combat, the character can run up walls and leap triple her normal allowance as though floating through the air for the rest of the scene. By using her new buoyancy, the character can make multiple kicking attacks, up to half her Dexterity at no reduction to her Dice Pool. Kicks and strikes aimed at the character, however, only inflict a third of their potential damage dice.

### • • • • • ILLUSION SHATTERING STRIKE

Just as the Dharma denies the illusions of the Spirit Worlds, so too have the Tempest's masters developed a technique for destroying the physical form of their illusory opposition. By focusing the power of the Tau, the character's every hit against the demon, spirit or wraith "breaks off"

part of their illusory form, driving them back into nothingness. Unfortunately, the strike only shatters instead of destroying the chimera, allowing the creature to reform in the Spirit World and return to the Living World if they are capable of doing so.

**System:** The player announces her character's desire to use this strike before resolving her attack, and spends up to the character's Dharma level in Chi points to prepare the strike. The target must be a creature of the Spirit World, one of the Ten Thousand Spirits, and not tied to the Living Realm. This includes ghosts, demons and spirit entities but not those powerful enough to be classified as gods.

If the strike is successful, the character does not roll normal damage. Instead, for every Chi point spent, the target loses one Willpower point. When a spirit's Willpower reaches zero, its form in the Living Realms is shattered and it must return to the Spirit Worlds, even if it doesn't possess the Re-form Charm. Spirits dispensed in this manner will remember the character, for this power is extremely painful to them. They will become the responsible Kuei-jin's implacable enemy.

## RISES

Seekers of the Inward Way are not particularly interested in rites, their goal being internal control rather than external manipulation of a world they believe riddled with illusions. That said, the Danh Tú's intellectual curiosity justifies their passing interest in a wide range of Kuei-jin rites. They are unlikely to ever know those rituals dealing with Kuei-jin social matters, however, like Way of the Lonewalker, or those touching upon the Spirit World, like the Rite of Supplication. Considering Seekers believe Kuei-jin society adrift and bereft of merit, they have no interest or need to learn its rites or those dealing with the "illusory" Spirit World.



## Aks Kablyeru

**Quote:** *I bowed to your sort for too long. Now, you're going to pay.*

**Prelude:** You had much in life. High marks at school, straight through university, a good job with a multinational corporation, and a happy family in a new middle-class suburb far from the squalor of the masses. You were successful but a non-entity, and nothing ever stirred your passions. You were just another faceless cog in an inhuman corporate machine. Stress, a poor diet, and little exercise led to a massive stroke before you hit fifty. One hell was merely replaced by another and the screaming in your soul, unheard for decades, rang free. In your narrow beliefs, you could not understand or comprehend where you were or what happening. All you remembered was the pain... the searing, twisting, bestial pain. Mindless and screaming, you clawed your way out from Yomi, never appreciating exactly where you'd been or why you were there. All you knew was that you'd never be someone's "yes man" again. You wanted purpose... and an explanation.

The Courts were a rude awakening; you never liked the primitive nonsense your uneducated countrymen practiced. Worse still was finding that even in immortality, people expected you to bow and scrape to arrogant foreigners... foreigners who made no attempt to hide their contempt for your culture. Instead, they blathered endlessly about the Great Principle, which you quickly recognized was a cunning control mechanism. There had to be an explanation for what you were and the pain you'd suffered, a sensible one not rooted in Chinese children's stories. Eventually, your distaste for the foreigners overwhelmed your sensibilities and you told a mandarin what you really thought. Such impertinence was compounded by your open contempt of the Great Principle, which was enough to send the Court's enforcers after your head. Running into the night, your desperate pleas were answered when an Aks war band ambushed the assassins and led you into the hills.

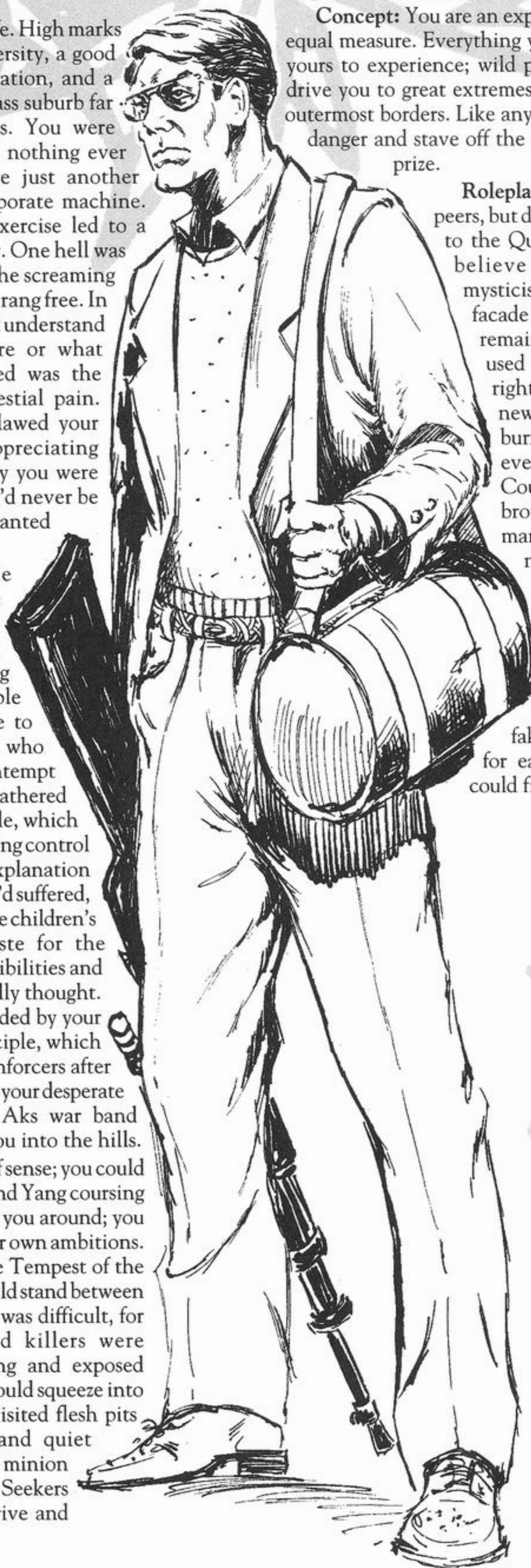
The Inward Way made a lot of sense; you could feel the conflicting power of Yin and Yang coursing through you. No one would order you around; you finally possessed a goal born of your own ambitions. The fierce martial violence of the Tempest of the Inward Focus ensured nothing would stand between you and the Tau. Still, initiation was difficult, for the Court's secret police and killers were everywhere, but you were strong and exposed yourself to every experience you could squeeze into the nights. Every evening, you visited flesh pits and monasteries, orphanages and quiet gardens. You even fought a Court minion who stood in your way. Your fellow Seekers took note of your passion and drive and

welcomed you into the Aks as a Kablyeru. Now you have the freedom you always secretly craved, and the path to enlightenment is your own to follow.

**Concept:** You are an explorer, seeking truth and thrills in equal measure. Everything you denied yourself in life is now yours to experience; wild passions fill your dead heart and drive you to great extremes in search of the Living Realm's outermost borders. Like any good pioneer, you willingly face danger and stave off the beasts that would deny you your prize.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Be friendly to your peers, but dismissive of those either too blind to the Quincunx's illusions or those who believe in "primitive and ancient mysticism." Behind the positive, driven facade you show to the world, doubts remain from that grey little man you used to be. What if the Courts are right? Rather than compromise your new passion, these doubts arouse your burning anger and you respond with ever mounting violence against the Court's minions. The sense of power brought on by your confrontational manner is reinforcing your spirit, but negatively. The other paths to the Tau are slowly falling to a haze of ego-driven machismo; soon fighting won't be something... it'll be everything.

**Equipment:** Casual suit, canvas sports bag, a number of fake credit cards (and appropriate ID for each) and the biggest pistol you could find.





NAME: Aki Kabayeri

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Fanatic

P/O NATURE: The Slave

DEMEANOR: Fanatic

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 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Drive ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Etiquette ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Firearms ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Martial Arts ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Melee ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Security ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Stealth ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Survival ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Torture ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○

### KNOWLEDGES

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

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Blood Shintai ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Demon Shintai ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Tempest of the Inward Focus ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Inward Focus ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### BACKGROUNDS

Allies ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Horoscope ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Resources ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Status ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### rites

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### YIN CHI



### YANG CHI

DHARMA Tempest of the Inward Focus/1

### HUN

● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### WILLPOWER

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

### P/O

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## DANH TŨ SCHOLAR OF THE WAY

**Quote:** *If you understood but a tenth of what I have discovered about the universe, I wouldn't be hurting you like this.*

**Prelude:** Hardship and poverty were so prevalent in your mortal life that you almost mistook them for members of your family. You even had to wrest life's simplest indulgences from an unforgiving environment, thanks to natural disasters that seemingly swept through your region with monotonous frequency. Yet, you never complained, never wavered in your faith or commitment to your family. Then the war came. Even today you don't understand what started it. All you know is that one day, bandits calling themselves revolutionaries demanded food and shelter. After they left, the army arrived and did the same. Soon there was no food left in the village and famine claimed many. To worsen matters, the secret police came looking for the bandits. When your village didn't know anything, murdered and raped their way through the local populace.

Soon you were in the hills with the revolutionaries. Memories of your dead family demanded retribution, but your newfound brutality could not save them or bring them back. Anger and revenge eventually gave way to bleak, unfeeling sadism. The years in the jungle were hard and, eventually, the government's assassin pierced your mountain bunker. Hell reawakened your soul... pain and suffering could not mask the fact that this was not the afterlife promised by your holy men. Anguish and howling rage drove you to attack the devils guarding you, setting you free from Yomi's bonds.

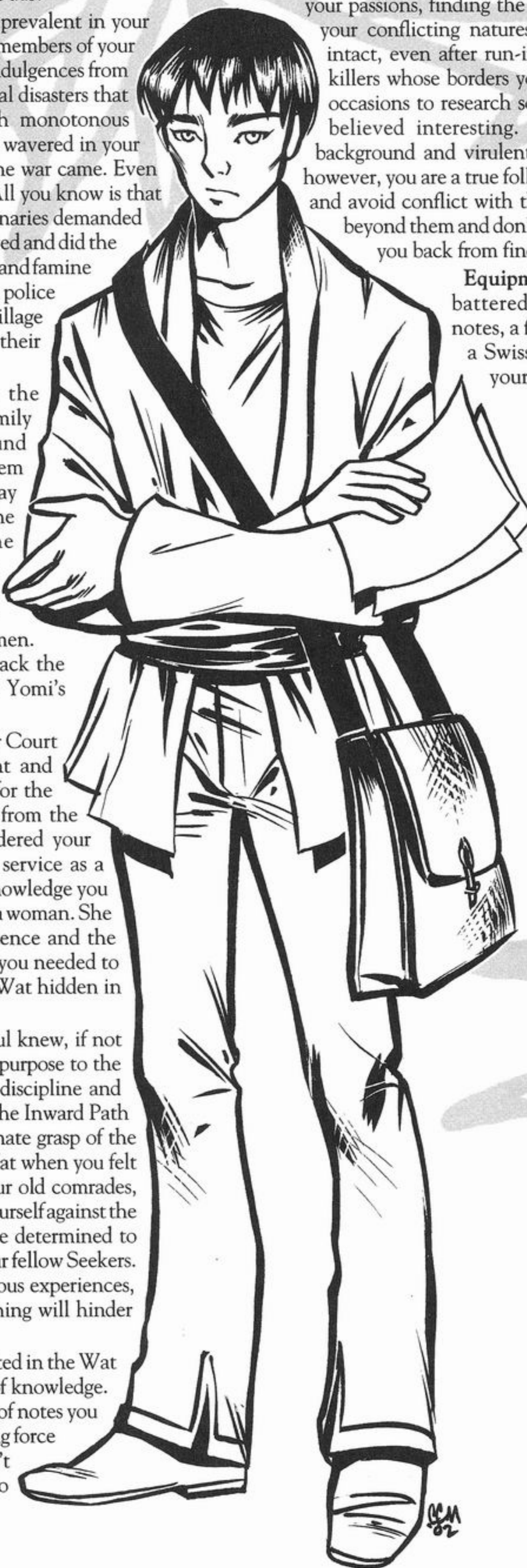
Caught as a *chih-mei*, you slaved for your Court for years while they treated as an ignorant and backward yokel. The Courts appalled you, for the ancestors and mandarins were no different from the landowners and military officers who murdered your mortal family. The Court pressed you into service as a soldier, but you struggled daily against the knowledge you were being used. Finally, they sent you to kill a woman. She spoke of the Tau, of the wholeness of existence and the Inward Way. The truth of her words was all you needed to abandon the Quincunx and follow her to a Wat hidden in the hills.

In the Wat, you healed. At last your soul knew, if not peace, at least contentment that there was a purpose to the universe other than wanton cruelty. Study, discipline and natural temperance made you well suited to the Inward Path and your military experience gave you an innate grasp of the Tempest of the Inward Focus. You left the Wat when you felt ready and traveled. You fought alongside your old comrades, slept with beggars in the slums and defended yourself against the depredations of the Court's assassins. You are determined to thwart the tyrants; nobody will stop you or your fellow Seekers. You have taken to pursuing the most dangerous experiences, those with orbits closest to the Courts. Nothing will hinder your quest to become one with the Tau.

**Concept:** You are a scholar, newly educated in the Wat and full of righteous passion in your pursuit of knowledge. Your curiosity, displayed by the massive wads of notes you clutch and sort through endlessly, is the driving force of your existence. If there is something you don't know or haven't experienced, you just have to give it a try and annotate the experience.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You are the epitome of a Seeker. Every hour of every night you spend searching for new experiences that could give you insight into the Tau. Yet you are also in control of your passions, finding the middle ground between your conflicting natures. This control remains intact, even after run-ins with the Quincunx's killers whose borders you've pierced on several occasions to research some esoteric matter you believed interesting. Despite your militant background and virulent dislike for the Courts, however, you are a true follower of the Inward Way and avoid conflict with the lost Seekers. You are beyond them and don't intend to let them hold you back from finding the Tau.

**Equipment:** Simple clothes, a battered briefcase filled with notes, a few smoke grenades and a Swiss army knife hidden on your person.





NAME: Danh Tú Scholar of the Way

PLAYER:

CHRONICLE:

NATURE: Director

P'O NATURE: The Demon

DEMEANOR: Judge

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 ●●●○○○○  
Meditation ○○○○○○○  
Portents ●●○○○○○  
Stealth ●●●○○○○  
Survival ●●●○○○○

### KNOWLEDGES

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

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ●○○○○○○○  
Inward Way ●○○○○○○○  
Tempest of the ○○○○○○○  
Inward Focus ●○○○○○○○  
                     ○○○○○○○

### BACKGROUNDS

Influence ●○○○○○○○  
Rites ●●●○○○○  
Status ●●○○○○○  
                     ○○○○○○○  
                     ○○○○○○○

### RITES

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### XIN CHI



### YANG CHI

DHARMA Tempest of the Inward Focus/1

### HUN

●○○○○○○○○○○○○○○

### WILLPOWER

●●●●●○○○○○○○  
□□□□□□□□□□

### P'O

●●●○○○○○○○○○



□□□□□□□□□□

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## WANDERING SENSE

**Quote:** *I am the wind and the storm given form... nothing can protect you from my perfection.*

**Prelude:** Young, rich and well connected, nothing was too good for you and nothing was forbidden. You had a sinecure at a foreign company that needed your father's goodwill, trained regularly at a Hung Gar Kung Fu school to keep in shape, and were given all the money and time to do whatever you wanted. That included several unwilling bed partners and more drugs than was really good for you. You kept pushing the envelope, however, always wanting a new thrill, a new buzz to jolt your jaded senses. One night you went too far —too many drugs and a fast car—and a fiery, high-speed collision ended your life.

For someone who never knew pain or denial, Yomi was a torment beyond your imagination. Steel whips and unbearable heat stripped away your skin and demons teased you with cool shadows that might have soothed your burning flesh. You'd never been religious or considered anything beyond the next hit, the next fuck, but the demons tormented you with your own shallowness, always surprising you with a new torment to beggar the last in humiliation and pain. Eventually, you couldn't stand their ministrations any longer and escaped, speeding away from the tempting shadows, towards the burning sky.

You awoke in a new body, not the beautiful lithe one you'd destroyed, but the broken, worn frame of a peasant.

You had just escaped *chih-mei* when the Courts found you wandering the slums and eking out an existence feeding off the squalid misery. You were nothing to the Courts, and for the first time in your life you knew what it was like to be the social inferior... to have the wrong ethnicity and none of the proper connections. The Courts would have worked you to destruction as their servant if your new form hadn't ensured your survival for another night of humiliation and slavery.

You couldn't accept what had happened to you or the stories the Courts told you to justify your lot. It wasn't that you didn't believe them; you just couldn't accept being someone's slave.

Eventually you left the Court, escaping the city and hiding in the deep jungle. It was here you found the Wat and the inner peace eluding you. The Inward Way was important, but the Tempest of the Inward Focus touched your soul. The martial forms and mantras flowed through you as if customized to bring your soul peace and strength. You mastered the first techniques the Wat taught and headed out in search of more Wats and more skilled teachers.

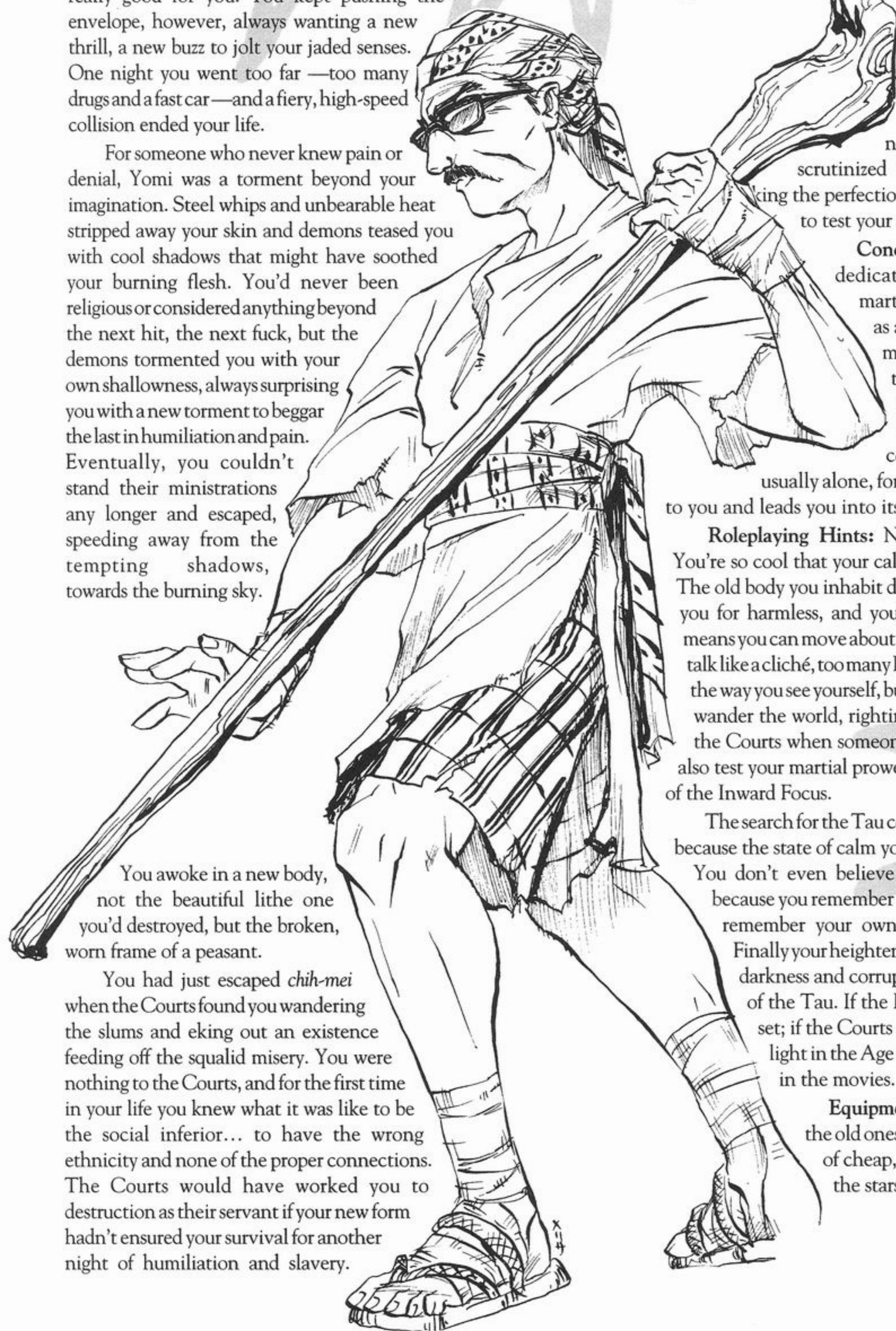
You now pursue the Tau purely to master the classical forms of the Tempest of the Inward Focus and discover new mantras. You've even scrutinized various mortal martial arts, seeking the perfection of your craft and opponents to test your courage and will.

**Concept:** You are an artist, totally dedicated to the essence of your martial art. Some Seekers see you as a potential guru, a wandering master at peace with your inner tempest (as expressed through your art). While you sometimes wander in the company of students, you're usually alone, for in the silence the Tau speaks to you and leads you into its deep mysteries.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Nothing ruffles your feathers. You're so cool that your calm mien unnerves opponents. The old body you inhabit deceives people into mistaking you for harmless, and you're fine with that because it means you can move about beneath everyone's radar. You talk like a cliché, too many Hong Kong movies influencing the way you see yourself, but you really believe them. You wander the world, righting the wrongs perpetuated by the Courts when someone worthy beseeches you. You also test your martial prowess by only using the Tempest of the Inward Focus.

The search for the Tau concerns you only peripherally, because the state of calm you achieved is enough for you. You don't even believe that the Courts are wrong, because you remember Yomi all too well, but you also remember your own pointless mortal existence. Finally your heightened senses feel the encroaching darkness and corruption eating away at the heart of the Tau. If the Inward Way is right, you'll be set; if the Courts are right you'll be a beacon of light in the Age of the Demon King... just like in the movies.

**Equipment:** A new set of rags when the old ones wear out, a walking staff, a set of cheap, black sunglasses you imagine the stars wearing.





**NAME:** Wandering Sensei  
**PLAYER:**  
**CHRONICLE:**

**NATURE:** Visionary  
**P'O NATURE:** The Fool  
**DEMEANOR:** Penitent

**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 ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Meditation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Performance ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### KNOWLEDGES

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

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Inward Way ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Tempest of the Inward Focus ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Inward Focus ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### BACKGROUNDS

Contacts ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Resources ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Status ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### RITES

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### YIN CHI



### YANG CHI

**DHARMA** Tempest of the Inward Focus/1

### HUN

☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### WILLPOWER

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

### P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## LEAVES ON THE TEMPEST

### FENG KAIYING, AKS BUPATI

Perhaps the best known Aks chief, Kaiying is far older than his numerous enemies realize. Born into the feudal nobility of the early Han Dynasty, Kaiying was a dilettante and would likely have died peacefully in bed had a peasant revolt not sent him howling into Yomi. In death Kaiying found a strength he had never realized he possessed, and emerged from Yomi into the Black Tortoise Court. Initiated into the Way of the Resplendent Cranes, Kaiying found that the Court's exaggerated courtesy and subtle politics reflected the society of his mortal days, something he found disturbing for reasons he couldn't define.

Kaiying's life changed forever when Chuang-Tzu came to the Black Tortoise Court. Finally, Kaiying had found a goal worth attaining, and he played a significant role in spreading the Inward Way's word through the Court. He was, however, caught completely off-guard when the other Great Courts struck and all but annihilated the Black Tortoise. Kaiying seethed with anger and realized that only through acting upon this anger and seeking vengeance would he ever achieve the balance he needed to find enlightenment and become one with the Tau. So, Kaiying founded the Aks sect of the Inward Way.

Since that day, Kaiying has fought those he perceives to be the Inward Way's enemies. He even led the attacks against the Danh Tú when he felt they were becoming too pacifistic and not putting enough emphasis on the Tempest of the Inward Focus. He sees violence as necessary for sect members to achieve balance, but in reality, violence itself has become his true desire. Kaiying senses the Courts are vulnerable and beset on all sides. He is determined to use their growing weakness to send them all into oblivion. As a result, his followers are actively working against the Courts everywhere. Where an opportunity to truly harm a Court arises, Kaiying will likely appear.



### DEWATACENGKAR, DANH TÚ PROPHET OF THE FIRST JEWEL

Born in the turmoil of WWII as Benni Murdani, Dewatacengkar grew into a dedicated anarchist-for-hire: bombing, assassinating, running protection rackets, and fighting whichever corrupt politician paid him most. His life of easy violence ended in the massacres of 1969, when the Suharto junta came to power and purged anyone who proved a threat. Injured but still breathing when dumped into a mass grave, Dewatacengkar spiraled into Yomi choking on the dirt suffocating him. He spent very little time in Yomi, however; his anger and terror quickly drove his soul back to the Living Realms, where he dug his way from the grave and survived his *chih-mei* by feasting on the remains of his comrades.

Accepted into a small Javanese Golden Court, Dewatacengkar declared himself heimin as soon as he could; he was eager to do what he enjoyed best, hurting people and having fun. He was especially keen on



remaining outside Chinese influences, his mortal racist prejudices still crisp. Back on the prowl and looking for trouble, Dewatacengkar found it with increasing frequency until he finally pushed the *penangallan* too far. Badly wounded, he escaped the *penangallan*'s killers through sheer luck by stumbling onto a Wat.

After the Tempest Kuei-jin took him in and healed him, Dewatacengkar listened politely to the moral tales they offered. As time passed, he found himself drawn into arguments and debates with his hosts. Soon a few months became a decade, and Dewatacengkar was an initiate of the Inward Way. Although not entirely convinced of his new path, Dewatacengkar adopted his new name and journeyed back to his old stomping grounds. There he discovered his new balance had muted his old desires, while the discipline of the Tempest of the Inward Focus moderated his violent inclinations. His experiences and insights quickly made him a respected scholar. Soon, his peers were calling

him Wali, one of the few young Seekers to be so honored for his spiritual acumen. To this night, Dewatacengkar wanders Asia, learning, teaching and tasting the Tau's delights in the hope that enlightenment rests around the next corner.

### **GHUMAVA GARAJA, NAIS KHU OF STILL WATERS WAT**

Perhaps the most influential scholar of the Inward Way, Ghumava has advised and taught most of the Danh Tú as well as a few Aks. Born before the fall of the Great Courts, Ghumava was an official of the Scarlet Phoenix Court when Chuang-Tzu's philosophy of balance and harmony entranced him. Ghumava talks little of his early years or of his role before he left the Courts. Until recently, he preferred digging through the Sage's teachings or the recorded experiences and insights offered by the hundreds of Seekers; he'd long retired to his Wat from seeking new experiences. His knowledge and oratory skills are legendary amongst the sub-continent's Kuei-jin, and many seek his advice whether they follow the Inward Way or not.

Recently, Ghumava has been leaving his Wat, a fact unknown to all but his closest disciples. The Still Waters Wat sits upon a dragon nest where, Ghumava recently discovered, there's a well-hidden spirit road leading into the Tempest (where the Yin and Yomi meet and the mouth of Hell sits). While he dismisses the Spirit Worlds as immaterial and illusory, Ghumava believes they "exist" because of the faith of millions of mortals. Therefore, he reasons, it's possible that the Tempest is a metaphor given form for imbalance by the irrational reactions of the Living Realms' state of disparity. If this is true, the Inward Path's greatest secrets may likely lie within the Tempest.

In his explorations of the Tempest, Ghumava has encountered an increasing number of demons; a disturbing number, in fact. While he understands that humanity's growing disenchantment will affect this — given the pollution and spiraling violence associated with modernization — he wonders if these demons have actually become self-sustaining. If so, Ghumava fears



this indicates that imbalance is overwhelming the forces of balance, leaving the entire Tau at risk. He has only mentioned this to some of his most trusted students, hoping they perceive something he missed.

Increasingly desperate, Ghumava is asking young Seekers to investigate the activities of the Courts and *shen* in great detail. At the same time, he delves more deeply into the Tempest, always at great risk to himself. Worried that fear itself of the Sixth Age might actually bring about this very event, Ghumava works on a plan to shock the Courts and mortals alike from their deluded apathy. Through manipulating the Tempest's immense power, Ghumava thinks he can obliterate the Wall between the Living Realms and Spirit Worlds. By doing so, he believes it will expose the illusions contained therein and finally free mortals and Kuei-jin from the chains binding them. Finally, all will join the Seekers in their search for the Tau.



# CHAPTER THREE: THE FACE OF THE GODS

## PRELUDE

At first, the prayers are muted, distorted as if heard through thick water. Although the supplicants chant the words of the sutra I myself penned, I have trouble understanding them, even up to the moment of my emergence. Once, the sound of prayers would have rung like a clarion across the Wall, and gods great and small would have hastened to catch the invocations, like honey-dust upon their lips. Now, only the words of holy men can penetrate the barriers, and even they are hushed and difficult to hear.

My worshipers are not, by and large, holy men. They are people from every walk of life, every caste. They gather here because they are *not* ascetics. They cannot meditate upon the celestial mandala and bring Lord Indra or Lord Naryana to their presence. They are frail mortals, and they cluster about the small god who walks among them in hopes that I can provide a petty miracle or two and perhaps instruct them in some trivial fashion. They know that having the ear of any god is better than having the ear of no god at all. My miracles are small, but they are real and you can touch them. Thus, the veneration my followers offer to a tiny god such as myself is quite fervent and heartfelt.

They beat their drums and shake their *sistrums*; over and over again they wail the prayer of invocation, "*oh prince, oh most exalted one, oh you who have walked among the gods, come to us and hear our entreaties.*" They chant it repeatedly, their voices unwearying, and slowly but surely I fade into sight before my altar, crossing from the true world into the illusion

mortals call Earth. As my godly spirit steps across the final threshold of the *maya*, I feel a sharp crack within my soul. The manikin of jade that held my place in the illusory world of men has shattered.

The worshipers gasp. Several faint and the rest grovel before me. I wave sticky fingers through the air and catch their prayers. I bring fingers dripping devotion to my mouth and kiss away the wishes. Their mood is mixed, as always; some prayers for the god and some for the devil. My spirit flutters between its faces, and the devil prevails. That is good. Tonight is a good night for the devil-nature to triumph, for I have devil's work to do.

I raise my four hands above my head, and the prayers cease. My two lower arms are skinless, meat and bone wet with lymph, while my upper arms rise soft and unblemished, like a dove's wings. All eyes are upon my invincible divinity. I walk among my followers, touching their heads, meeting their eyes, knowing their secret wants, hates and passions. Oh, they love me so, and I love them, for their prayers are nectar far sweeter than the blood I would drink in their place. Bow down before me, my children, for I am your god.

Looking into their hearts, I see passion fills some of them. I tap two of the most fervent on their shoulders. Later, they will share their passion with me. Touching them as I have is a sign of this, and they prostrate themselves, moaning and grinding their faces into the dusty cement floor of my warehouse-temple.

I walk among my frail mortal worshipers, touching their heads, trailing my hands across their shoulders. Those whose

clothes are stained by the wet, bloody touch of my lower arms often keep these garments as sacred relics, a practice I do not discourage. This is the time of the new moon, when their god provides them with miracles.

The giving of miracles is the most challenging of my tasks. I am a finite god, a limited deity chained by the sick perversity of the Heaven that forsook it; I cannot grant my worshipers' every desire. Not that I would grant all their wishes even were I able; miracles are only meaningful when they are unexpected. A god who grants all wishes is not a god, but a vending machine. It is not the mechanical act of praying that makes meals of honey-like devotion for my hungry soul, but the fervency, the *wanting*. That is what I consume.

As I said, the granting of miracles is a most challenging task. Some miracles are easy to select. I will reward those who make great offerings; a god cannot exist on prayer alone, after all. Likewise, those who doubt I will also reward. Not for their doubt, but to convince them irrefutably of my own divinity. When I have power remaining, I give to those who are fervent and deserving, but unable to make an offering. It is, after all, the duty of a god to answer the prayers of those devoted and in great need.

Tonight, there shall be three miracles. My priests and I discussed matters of concern to my congregation, talking over the state of my worshipers and their particular needs, and the state of my divine power as well. I supplement this with my own knowledge of my flock and priests. I listen to their prayers. I look into their eyes and know the state of their devotion, so some miracles I devise alone.

To a wealthy old man, I give potions of my own blood. There are three bottles, and each will help his infirm wife recover from the pneumonia afflicting her every winter. A year, two, perhaps even three years of life for his beloved are surely worth the donation he gave my priests.

To a woman, devout but suffering a crisis of faith not just in my divinity but in all things, I whisper words I received from her dead husband. This is no easy miracle, for I had to travel to Swar to hear them. I tell her three things only her husband knew, and that he does not blame her for failing to follow him to the pyre. He sends her his love and his good wishes, and that he will wait for her in the afterlife.

Her face lights from within and tears roll down her cheeks, bleeding decades of guilt from her frame. I have given her new life. I do not tell her that the city of the dead is alive and often devours those dwelling within it. This is not a matter that should concern her, and she will most likely die long before the city consumes her husband.

All eyes are upon me. My worshipers await my next act. My priests, who believe that these are all the miracles I will offer tonight, wait for the sign to begin the recessional while I adjourn to my temple's inner precincts. But I have lied to my priests. My whispers to the old woman are not my final miracle.

I walk toward my high priest, as if to kiss him. This is unrehearsed, but they are used to spontaneity on my part. There is no fear in the Brahmin's eyes. He believes there is no way I could have learnt of his misdeeds, as if I, his living god, did not know his mind and haunt the precincts of my temple even when not visible.

I am a devil, and I grow a devil's vast teeth. It is not hard — the prayers offered me by my congregation are often for woeful deeds, and their dark desires feed the devil just as their hopes and aspirations feed my god-aspect.

21

He blinks in surprise, seeing my long, yellow canines; I lean toward him, my mouth opening far wider than any mortal's. He struggles, attempts to flee, but my four arms wrap him in an iron embrace, and my jaws close around his visage. I feel a momentary resistance as his skull slows my fangs, and I pause for a moment... to let him understand and struggle, my serrated teeth in his flesh, blood flowing freely, the tooth-tips parked in the divots that the gentlest of pressure has cut in his skull. I lick his face with my tongue, and then bite down, removing his lower jaw, his face back to his temple and, of course, the forepart of his brain.

His wretched and disloyal body spasms; mad impulses race forth from his damaged brain, and I ratchet my face forward. My rear teeth grind my former high priest's skull and face and my tongue mechanically propels the pulpy mass down my throat even as my forefangs shear the remains of the priest's head from the top of his neck. I pause for a second to crush his skull between my molars and drink the blood gushing from the stump of his neck. I then devour his body in a rapid series of bites. Consuming him takes less than a minute, during which the audience stares raptly at my miraculous appetite. The demon-me leaps and revels. These are the wages of impiety and sin.

I wipe my mouth against the back of my upper right hand when I am done while my lower arms fold in prayer. "Know this... I am your god, and you my worshipers. None among you can steal from me or betray me without my knowing. High Priest Mathub thought he could deceive me and rob the temple's coffers. Now, he is no more. Amul Kumar, you are my new high priest. Carry out your office well, and the full favor of divinity shall shine upon you. Betray your god and his wrath shall consume you with iron jaws, for he is a small god, but still far greater than any man."

The worshipers prostrate themselves again, moaning in ecstasy at the power of their deity, and High Priest Kumar kneels at my feet in the blood and bits of fatty tissue remaining from High Priest Mathub's untimely demise. Kumar's head is bent, and even though I cannot see it, my god-senses tell me he mouths the prayers of my faith.

"Now," I say, smiling benevolently, my skinless lower hands still clasped in prayer while my upper arms spread in benediction, "My service has ended. Those of you who have been selected to join me in my inner sanctum, come with me and join in the holiest of my rites. The rest of you, I release you from attendance upon me. Go forth and know that in a world of idolaters and fools, you alone are fortunate enough to worship a true god, in whose eyes you are all favored." They rise and depart, and my two chosen lovers follow me into my chambers to join in the mysteries of divinity. In the darkness, I shall show them the light of my love.

## HISTORY

### BEFORE ALL

*The Celestial Nail, sutra 1*

Dream came to me on burning crimson feet  
A cat, put rusty hooks into my eyes  
Anointing dragon's tears with milk and blood  
A Heaven riddled with fire and poverty  
Ten thousand workless gods  
Riots, demons, iron rods  
Golden gates flung wide, an exile  
And a thousand celestial books unpenned  
What emperor ordains this?

## THE HERESY AS DESCRIBED BY O

*From the proscribed circular "Rising Inner God"*

Read close and learn, for the world is full of untruthful speakers, but I am honest. I tell you hard and ugly truths where others would feed you soft lies. The stories your elders and "betters" have told you are lies.

You may not be familiar with the short poetic book known as *The Celestial Nail*, and perhaps you have not heard of the controversy surrounding it. This is because it contradicts the lies with which the elders of Kuei-jin society want to fill your head. Fearful that anyone will question the religions they themselves spent centuries mastering the trivialities and minutia of, they ban it rather than allowing you to exercise your own judgment. This proscribed collection is the final work of O, the poet whose earlier book, the *Red Book of the Iron Bridge*, provided seminal insight into the workings of the Thousand Hells for all Kuei-jin philosophers (which you may well have read).

After penning the *Red Book*, O dwelt in Changan as the Court poet, just before the discovery of the Changan's Ancestor's corruption by Yomi's forces. Many orthodox scholars say that the Yama Kings maneuvered O into becoming the Court poet of Changan after he wrote the *Red Book*. These scholars maintain the Lords of the Underworld did this because they wanted the brilliant scholar in a position where their servant, the Changan Ancestor, last of the half-fallen Wan Xian, could destroy O and avenge the compromise of so many secrets.

Other equally orthodox scholars, say the Yama Kings had already ensnared O, and that the *Red Book of the Iron Bridge* was a plea for help by a Wan Kuei whose mind was no longer entirely his own. Unable to speak of or relate directly the mind-twisting influences already subverting his psyche, the poet used his insight to pen a treatise, either to draw attention to his plight or for all Kuei-jin to extract some benefit from his own terrible destruction. These scholars, who are often the poet's most sympathetic defenders, frequently claim O became aware of the Changan Ancestor's true nature somehow. They typically assert that the poet placed himself in a position where his inevitable demise would cause the discovery of the Ancestor's copy of *The Broken-Winged Crane*, and result in the subsequent downfall of the Yama Kings' mighty slave.

In both cases, the historians agree that *The Celestial Nail* is the last, incoherent ramblings of a mad being succumbing to infernal influence. Regardless of when the alleged madness started, O finished his insane jottings and committed suicide by greeting the Eye of Heaven willingly.

\* \* \*

*The orthodox scholars are deluded fools. O was not mad, and he did not commit suicide of anything but the most transitory sort.*

O did have some profound insight into the Yama Kings, that's true, but that insight deepened until he not only saw the secrets of Yomi-Wan's lords, but the secrets of the August Personage of Jade as well. *The Celestial Nail* is not the ranting of a mad thing, but an exposition of the dirty facts that Heaven had sought so diligently to conceal for thousands of years. Although the Changan Ancestor had fallen to the Yama Kings' power, that was not his most important secret. He was, in fact, an agent of Heaven, the last secret servant planted by the August Personage of Jade among the Wan Kuei to conceal Kuei-jin history's most terrible secret:

*Kuei-jin are not mortals. They are imprisoned gods.*

*The mandarins and bodhisattvas of orthodox Kuei-jin society are dupes.*

## A COMMENTARY ON *THE CELESTIAL NAIL*

*Admitted as evidence in the trial of Chiu Guan-yu, charged with treason.*

*The Celestial Nail* is a short text with only 40 sutras, typically presented one to a page. Written in *kaja* of the most obscure sort, each sura of *The Celestial Nail* is more difficult to understand than the last. Each is increasingly couched in ever-greater, indecipherable allusions and metaphors, so that only the most clever and (presumably) spiritually advanced Kuei-jin can understand its occulted message.

Those with the education to decipher the text's many obscure references and the spiritual insight to understand the book's hidden missives will find the contents subversive in the extreme. Rather than resurrected mortal heroes, it seems to imply that Kuei-jin are former godlings, cast out of Heaven during some sort of civil unrest or celestial downsizing. The August Personage of Jade, the book claims, realized that such immortal creatures would doubtlessly wreak havoc on the world if left to their own devices in the Middle Kingdom. To prevent such chaos, the Heavens chose a path of deception. They muddled the memories of the fallen godlings through divine magic and trapped them in an illusory life cycle designed in imitation of the prison of karma.

Each godling would be born as a mortal human, pass through life, die, fall into the torment of the Thousand Hells, then rise again as undead beings. When this undead form was destroyed, the godling would then fall into an oblivion-like state between reincarnations, only to be born again in a false mortal guise. Thus, their irrepressible power would be allowed expression, but in a context making widespread destruction or a vengeful return to Heaven unlikely.

To prevent these exiled divinities from discovering the power and understanding to break this spiritual imprisonment, the August Personage of Jade planted spies and minions among the freshly exiled godlings. These agents of Heaven's throne were to lead the newly reborn into faiths and philosophies that would always focus on acceptance of their undead state and spread a false history of service as semi-immortal heroes of men. These beings, obviously meant to be the half-fallen Kuei-jin who stood as superintendents and protectors of the humanity in its earliest days, reinforced the Heavenly deception, saw to the foundation of the conventional Dharmas and the suppression of movements like the Demon Warrior Empire that might have caused havoc on Earth. As time went by and the deception became impenetrable, Heaven withdrew its agents one by one until only the Changan Ancestor remained.

One can only speculate on O's motives in approaching the Changan Ancestor's Court to pen this text. He could have sought a confrontation, or perhaps it was an attempt by the Changan Ancestor to do his Heavenly assigned job. It may have had something to do with the obvious influence the Yama Kings had over O's behavior. It's all quite possible, as O was either growing extremely enlightened or extremely mad. Also, if he is somehow correct, the situation is also confused by the clear, repeated implication that the Yama Kings and the August Personage of Jade are colluding to maintain and further the Kuei-jin's ignorance as a race.

## THE FACE OF THE GODS ABROAD

*From a confidential report to the Bodhisattva No-Shadow Raven.*

I make this report as requested after seven years of study and travel in what the Quincunx's Kuei-jin call the Scarlet Courts and the Infinite Thunders Court. This humble devil

thanks his mistress for the funds and letters of introduction she so generously provided. This is only my initial assessment, and I hope to have a fuller version compiled by this time next year. With the urgency of the current world situation, however, I feel it appropriate to make a concise preliminary filing.

I interviewed the three heretics you sent me to meet. They clearly thought I was some sort of Quincunx legate and naively imagined that these interviews might lend legitimacy to their creed. Clearly, they know nothing of the Quincunx. Had I been a genuine Quincunx legate, I would have returned from the whole affair with a feeling of great horror and a renewed determination to stamp out their beliefs. As it is, I came away with a sense of worry. There is something behind this Dharma, either some shard of truth or a plot by the Yama Kings.

O is not this Dharma's progenitor. One of the elder heretics I spoke with was practicing his faith long before O ever took the Second Breath, and he had both a master and a grandmaster, both of whom were quite old. There has been indigenous practice of this faith in India for a very long time.

You may ask how this relates to O's work? He was a traveler who vanished from sight over several periods during his career. It is possible he went to India or made contact with members of this heresy elsewhere before adopting their teachings. That would still leave the heresy's ultimate origin in question, but at least it reduces the number of intellectual wellsprings to a single source.

I don't think O was the kind of vampire to study under foreign swamis. He was resolutely Chinese in his culture, and he doubtless regarded Indians as quaint and unusual; his scholarship is entirely metaphysical, not oriented around the Indian region at all. The idea that he studied from the Infinite Thunders practice isn't very likely. You knew him, where I can only know what others said of him. I'll leave it up to you to decide if there's a chance he took spiritual tutelage from a foreign Kuei.

If the two practices arose separately, then there is, I think, probably some common thread. Obviously, the most likely source is the machinations of some Yama King. Possibly whoever drove O mad was well versed in the theological or metaphysical practice of the Dharma, and wanted to extend it eastward into the Middle Kingdom.

Presumably O was to start a cult, but either deliberately committed suicide in shame or went completely mad from Hell's influence. I suppose the immediate counter-assertion is that someone intended O to draw attention to some infernal rival's plans and act as a decoy, but I don't think so.

First of all, driving O insane was a major ploy. I don't think they'd have done it with a petty goal like undermining someone else's machinations. Secondly, if it was to instigate a pogrom against the Face of the Gods, it seems very half-hearted. With as many cat's paws as the Yama Kings have in politics, I think we'd have seen a more aggressive pursuit. The movement was outlawed, of course, but there have been no real calls for action.

If O's subversion was intended to instigate an attack against an opponent, I can only imagine that the Yama King who went through all this trouble would try to draw attention to the cause and build it up. Yet to my knowledge, that didn't happen. So we have to assume that whoever set O off his rails did so with the genuine hope of creating the faith, if indeed it was founded as a tool of the Yama Kings.

The alternative is that O and the heretics of the Infinite Thunders Court both stumbled upon some deeper truth that they misunderstood and misinterpreted into their Dharma. Maybe they learned something about the final fate of Kuei-jin

souls not understood in civilized lands. Because they took it superficially, they ended up interpreting it to be some sort of exiled divinity.

I think this is probably what happened. Yomi drove O mad for writing *The Red Book of the Iron Bridge*, and his madness was contributive to his heretical theology. The other possibility is that the Yama Kings had him under surveillance and realized his direction of thought would lead him to conclusions that would put them at a disadvantage. Afraid that with his intellectual weight behind it, this theological revelation would become a powerful weapon against them or their agenda, they destroyed him to limit the damage he incurred.

I want to go back and look into this more. If the latter is the case, we need to find out what O had discovered. What does a sect with delusions of persecution and divinity think or know that a mad poet also discovered in the 16th century that puts the Yama Kings in jeopardy? I want to conduct more interviews and work at reading some of the seminal theology. If there's a clue here, I think I can find it within a year or two. I'm pretty confident we'll have that long before the end, and I think it's a worthwhile gamble. As always, however, your humble servant will await your instructions.

## ORAL HISTORY

### Collected Text

This all happened in the days of legend, before history as we know it. We believe this period ends some time before the emergence of Harappan culture, but can't date it more tightly than that. I'll assume you've read the Mahabharata, so I won't burden you with a description of the narrative. At the end, the solar prince Rama exiles his faithful wife, Sita. Even though she's been devoted to him while in the captivity of rakshasas, there was talk of her unfaithfulness. As king, Rama needed to set the rumors to rest, even though she was innocent.

The story says Sita lived as a hermit afterwards, but that's not the tradition of my faith. It is my faith's belief that after Rama exiled Sita from Ayodhya, she was forced to flee into the forest, a sort of primeval wilderness echoed in Chinese and Russian mythic perceptions (I'm sure you're familiar with it). There, the tradition says, this beauteous maiden, exiled by her husband, survived by lying down with wolves and brutish bandit-farmers. For thirty-three years, she prayed when she rose in the morning, and prayed before she slept at night. In every prayer, she reminded the gods of how she'd been caught up in their doings, and ground under the Wheel of Fate as finely as flour crushed for the king's table.

Finally, burning from her prayers as he sat upon his throne, Lord Narayan came down to Earth and looked upon her with pity. He asked her what he could do to stop her prayers, and she asked, selfless as always, that her children be beloved by the gods. She asked that each be as fierce as an *indrajit*, a wind spirit servant of the storm lord, or a dutiful queen with the dancing skills of a *ghandarva*, a type of celestial dancing girl accomplished at music. Lord Krishna agreed, for her prayers burned him severely and he felt guilty for his part in Rama's affair with the rakshasas.

In time, Sita had a mighty brood of children, all heroes under the eye of Heaven. The women were beautiful and talented, the boys brave and furious in battle. There were many children, and all were fair though their fathers were the wild wolves and bandit-farmers. Indeed, their virtue was so great that they were not men, but like the gods.

In time, their numbers came to be so great that their mother no longer prostituted herself to the lords of the forest.

Her own offspring came to rule instead, and made the men who forced themselves on her to work themselves to death, building Sita a palace where she could reign. The gods, however, caught sight of these many children, and saw in them another menace equal to the rakshasa.

The gods sent Lord Yama down to solve this problem. Lord Yama, in turn, sent out Death, who killed all of Sita's offspring, but could not find her. She had grown so clever by then that she even evaded Death. Yet, the Wheel of Dharma had not yet finished turning for Sita's offspring, and they existed on. So powerful was their virtue that their dead flesh walked still. Even if destroyed, they immediately reincarnated into new bodies that sprang whole from their ashes. The gods had made a woeful error slaying Sita's children. She was now angry and perhaps more powerful than before. So they contrived that Lord Yama would hold the children's souls after death, before they were reborn from their ashes, and torture them, wiping away all memories of their lives as heroes. When they were reborn, they'd think they were just men.

The ploy was largely successful; the gods, after many bitter battles, put down Sita's children and forced them into the shackles of reincarnation, from which they emerged ignorant, weak and unable to realize they were greater than men. Thereafter, they lived a mortal life, died, were reborn, and were eventually taken again into Yama's realm, where the gods stripped them of their memories before their next incarnation. It was a cruel twist of fate.

## THE PRACTICE OF DIVINITY

*Told to an initiate*

Shiva-Ohm was a dead hero. Reborn, he lived as a mortal prince and died, rising again as a flesh-eating beast. Yet, the strength of his heart mastered this terrible state, and he fell to contemplation of his essence. By deep meditation, he gained insight and visions into his nature as a child of Sita, using the spiritual discipline of the third eye to discern the truth. Compiling what he knew, he wrote *The Practice of Divinity*, which is a book on how an ignorant, young, dead thing might remember his holy state and become a god.

This is the heart of our faith, a confirmation of our power. To study this art is to learn to be a god—what more proof do you need of your innate divinity than to exercise the powers of your station? When you have read the supplicant's devotion through his eyes and known their deepest heart's desires, when you have tasted the honey of worship upon your tongue, then you will know how this is the undeniable truth. Anyone who tells you otherwise, then, does not know what it is to be a god, or they know and deny it. Soon, you'll learn the forms of *The Practice of Divinity*, and your eyes shall see the glory of prayer as beheld by an exiled god.

## THE FATE OF DIVINITY

*From a confidential report to the Bodhisattva No-Shadow Raven.*

The second holy book of the Celestial Tribe faith is the *Sevenfold Gathering*, which seems to have impelled the Dharma on their messianic course. The militant attitude toward regaining Heaven, and the idea they would reclaim their destiny as the Children of Sita, is not present in *The Practice of Divinity*. The *Practice* is a very pragmatic book, one about developing the spiritual powers necessary to becoming a god. The *Sevenfold Gathering* is a narrative concerning seven brothers uniting to avenge their mother's disgrace and their disinheritance. It is a blatant allegory of the Celestial Tribe's predicament. Several



notable and early members of the Dharma may have been the authors, but we can't attribute it to any of them with certainty.

The book has a very millenarian character — the Celestial Tribe will secure a place in Heaven and force the gods to acknowledge their mother's suffering and the wrong committed when Lord Yama sent Death to claim them. Then the world will presumably be set aright, as least as far as the Children of Sita are concerned. It had an immediate effect, and while the Dharma's members didn't instantly build a tower with which to scale Heaven, they still approached their faith in a new light.

I think it's possible this faith might have been a valid or potentially valid Dharma once, one focusing on reforming and purifying the spirit of the exiled immortal. Then, this was added, and the purification became a quest for spiritual power to reclaim a rightful place in Heaven. It's not imminent or something that will happen this generation, but they believe they will receive their rightful place among the gods. This is only my opinion, of course. You are far more eminently qualified to know if such a belief might hold any validity.

I should note that, while I'm certain the Dharma is the product of the Yama Kings' meddling, I don't think we should immediately identify this as some kind of infernal text. It could be that the Yama Kings propagated it, or it could be a line of thinking we can no longer attribute to an author. The book is a product of the Dharma's later prehistoric period, spurring a heroic age probably contemporaneous with the reign of the Yellow Emperor in China. It could be the Yama Kings only inspired the book, or they seized upon it as a tool for their own ends. I don't think we should conclude they actually *wrote* it.

There were certainly enough spiritual heresies professed in the Middle Kingdom as well, but luckily the Yellow Emperor and Xue enforced and inspired proper spiritual thinking. How terrible it must have been, after Meru's fall, to be trapped out across the mountains here, unable to profit from the wisdom of those Wan Xian still retaining a shadow of Heaven's grace. Without a force for intellectual orthodoxy, every type of mistaken thinking could and did take root.

## THE COMING OF THE CHINESE THINKERS

*Told to an initiate*

Eventually Buddhist missionaries reached China, and the introduction of Buddhism also introduced an awareness of India in Chinese culture. In time, Kuei-jin followed the path of the scripture-pilgrims. They sought flesh-eaters to educate and convert for their faith.

They were intolerant and believed the lies a jealous Heaven told them. They saw themselves as Heaven's disgraced champions, and forever schemed to ingratiate themselves with the celestial powers. They were of the same race as us but they were forever unlike us, for they abandoned Heaven and sought enlightenment as monsters.

When they first arrived, the Thrashing Dragons were simply pushy. They brought with them knowledge of the Chi Pranas, but they also brought their Chinese pride. They demanded space to build their temples and we gave it to them. Then they demanded the right to train flesh-eaters, first some and then all, for they sought to convert our land to their own faith. When it became clear the Thrashing Dragons hoped to spread their alien philosophy among our people, there was tension. The Thrashing Dragons were sincere, but still slaves of a Heaven deluding them of their essential birthright.

Unfortunately, we cannot *make* them believe, and if they attempt to force their beliefs on us, we can send them into their next incarnation, hoping they'll find the truth in their next passage through Dharma. We wish there was some other way, but that is not the case. Sometimes, it is possible to coexist with them, but more often, it is not.

## THE CONFLICT AFTERWARDS

*Read on a computer screen in a dark room.*

From: as3ds90f@hotmail.com

To: fg2319@yazoomail.com

Subject: Let's Go Out For Coffee.

—  
#found RSA code block

#looking for keypad dongle — OK

#dongle auth — OK dongle key check — OK

#begin RSA data

Continues Last Report

I believe these beings... these sects, have been in competition for probably 800 years. Both need to capture immature vampires and train them, because whoever reaches them first can probably make a lifetime convert. They've both desperately struggled for a critical edge in strength for centuries, attempting to proselytize their opponents out of existence. Actual violence seems common, but there aren't many organized campaigns. They're mainly spur-of-the-moment pogroms followed by a spate of revenge killings.

While the goals are wildly different, the two groups are superficially similar in their practice. The Chinese-import Thrashing Dragons traditionally held an upper hand in the struggle, because they found it easy to influence the Muslim rulers and because they recruited well from the Buddhist population. In the modern nights, this has changed.

Buddhism's demise in the Indian subcontinent and the rise of Hindu nationalism have given the "Celestial Tribe" faction a distinct edge. Many of the Thrashing Dragons' institutional strengths have withered. In addition, the Celestial Tribe can found cults essentially preaching their own Dharma, which gives them a tremendous edge. They can actually practice their faith more-or-less openly before their own worshipers, which apparently spurs them to develop greater power.

These elements added up to a conflict a long time in the making, and whatever happened in Bangladesh set it off. Apparently, someone destroyed an important Thrashing Dragon, and that sent the local Dharma members on the rampage. The resulting violence destroyed several infection-class vampires and some Thrashing Dragons; the Celestial Tribe has gone on the warpath as a result. Relations were never cordial, but now they're downright hostile — under the cover of regional military operations, the Celestial Tribe has been doing a lot more rub-outs.

I imagine they'll be at one another's throats within a few months. If we push here and there, we can probably help one faction terminate the other, then eliminate the winners with a few selective strikes. We need to do something about these guys, though. They control the local security forces, and they're pretty much running the show.

Sir, every place like this is another Bangladesh waiting to happen; are we just going to sit around until the planet's next threat pops up somewhere?

#end RSA block

## THE MODERN NIGHTS

*From ECHELON surveillance recordings, suppressed by the FISA. Material deemed of no investigative value, but of a confidential nature relating to personal business, and thus not subject to release.*

Caller: There's one of them here... they're here!

Sound of gunshots

Receiver: One what, what are you talking about?

Caller: A Chinese man. There's a Chinese man here.

Receiver: A Thrashing Dragon?

Caller: I don't know.

Receiver: What's happening?

Caller: He hurt my son and he's killed Ahmdi and the other guards. More gods must come and help me right away... I think he may try to destroy me.

Receiver: Is he Indian?

Caller: No, a Chinese man. He's got chalk-white skin and two guns. He's definitely a Chinese god, I can hear him changing clips.

Roaring Voice: Come out, woman. I can smell you.

Caller: Please, other gods must come now, please.

### "THRASHING DRAGONS"

Contact between India's vampires and more orthodox Cathayan culture has been almost solely through the Laughing Rainbow sect of the Thrashing Dragon Dharma. Thus, the Celestial Tribe tends to call all Chinese or Sinicized Kuei-jin "Thrashing Dragons," regardless if appropriate or not. They do understand Dharmas and sects, at least in concept, they just aren't very careful with their terminology. This often causes offense among prickly Cathayans, easily angered at being misidentified as part of the wrong sect.

## THE MODERN NIGHTS

*From the proceedings of the Bone Court of Chunking*

The subject of this proclamation is the heresy known as the Face of the Gods. This blasphemous faith, in an affront to Heaven, claims the Wan Xian are not the disgraced servants of Heaven, but gods cast down improperly. This faith is abominable. It causes their very soul to rot, all full of hubris and pride against Heaven —the very same hubris and pride that led to the downfall of the Wan Xian. For the third time in twenty years, we have found a Kuei-jin guilty of practicing this Dharma.

How can such ill-founded teachings persist among the disciples of Xue? What errors do we commit that our students falter to such lies. It is a sign of the world's decline that often comes to pass, and comes to pass so often.

The Court consigns the three disciples in question to the Eye of Heaven. They shall fall into the Mouth of Yomi, and into oblivion, never to reach the Hundred Clouds. The execution shall be open to the spectators; it shall take place in eleven days, on the night of the new moon so that the moon need not witness the dishonor of those executed. Let all who can, come watch the final moments of these unrepentant dissidents. Those of you who are training young Wan Kuei for the Fire and Water Test should certainly bring them. In addition, the Court urges every mandarin, every jina — regardless if they have disciples under their wing or not —to redouble their efforts to

encourage orthodoxy among those who recently took the Second Breath. If we don't teach them how important proper thinking is, how will they ever learn?

## SOCIETY

The Face of the Gods heresy exists in two distinct forms. The first is a perverse rebellion against the celestial order by Kuei-jin of the Five August Courts. In this form, it is a small, persecuted cult, mainly composed of individual practitioners. The second is an indigenous religion of Asian vampires in the Indian subcontinent, who have practiced it from prehistory.

The two versions do not really mix. The Indian version is much more practical and concerned with day-to-day existence, while the "heretics" vary from Luciferian rebels to occult plotters with schemes for the throne of Heaven itself. Their existences and theologies are separate; only in the eyes of Quincunx scholars who make it their business to categorize such things are they one and the same.

Of course, this means that Chinese-variant practitioners of this Dharma see themselves as part of the religious disciplines on the Indian Subcontinent, because they are Quincunx scholars and thus see the religions as identical. Still, there's no shared discourse, and the ritual formalities of the religion's Indian aspect are only somewhat similar to the practices O suggests in *The Celestial Nail*.

### CATHAYANS, THE FACE OF THE GODS AND THE CELESTIAL TRIBE

This chapter uses some specific terminology when discussing the Face of the Gods heresy. Generally, what is being discussed will be clear from context, but to be explicit, there are two major veins of the Face of the Gods heresy, which apparently arose independently, and have little relation. One, in India, survives from prehistoric times, while the other unfolds in the west as a product of the Changing of the Ages in the 15th century. Kuei-jin heretics derived the latter vein from a forbidden work of theology penned by the mad poet O before his death.

When the text mentions the Face of the Gods, it is talking about the heresy in general. The chapter uses the indigenous Indian term "Celestial Tribe" when referring directly to the heresy as practiced in the Indian subcontinent. Also, throughout this chapter, the term Kuei-jin is used to indicate vampires both within and outside this sect. Those following the Face of the Gods, however, believe themselves to be something more than the predators the Quincunx claims of all Wan Kuei. Some of the Dharma's venerated members dispense with Kuei-jin entirely, and simply refer to themselves as Gods (in China's case) or the Celestial Tribe (in India's case).

## SITUATION

No one stays a practitioner of the Gods for long in the Quincunx. Those who are young and discover the religion typically make their way west to India, to join with the resistance forces of their godly brotherhood. Only there is no resistance and no armies gathering to storm the gates of Heaven.

The slow, continual influx of Chinese godlings determined to reclaim their birthright does nothing to allay China's reputation as a land of dogmatic fanatics in the eyes of Indian vampirism. Some expatriates from orthodox Kuei-jin culture reside in India and attempt to establish Face of the Gods communities. Needless to say, the Dharma's local practitioners want nothing to do with these outsiders, and often cooperate with local Thrashing Dragons in controlling them. Sometimes, young heretics traverse the gauntlet to India or Bangladesh, contacting their co-religionists in the hopes of sanctuary only to be handed over to Quincunx enforcers at their first meeting. Circumstances force others under official pressure to flee into south Asia, where they build training camps in the jungles and compete for space with the *penanggalan* vampire-queens.

Old orthodox vampires who discover the heresy typically find their way west, into the hazy maze of expatriate Asian *shen*. There, they seek out fellow practitioners, build their cults and plan their campaigns against the celestial conspiracy that created them. The dangers of being supernatural and existing abroad are nothing like the dangers of following a religious heresy under the scrutiny of the ancestor's spies, the Devil-Tiger Black Iron Talons and the security apparatus of their own Dharmas. As long as a heretic exists quietly and doesn't oppose Quincunx (or *uji*) interests abroad, they can probably survive. Those who look dangerous or try inserting agents back into Asia are dealt with as security threats by whichever interests they crossed.

This situation is not echoed in the Infinite Thunders Court—there, the so-called “Celestial Tribe” exists despite the efforts of local Thrashing Dragons. It prospers under the resurgence of Hindu culture, which allows it to exist in a very pure form, to the benefit of its practice. There are many older and powerful sect members, but nobody has reached bodhisattva status recently. Currently, approximately 60% of Kuei-jin in the Indian subcontinent are members of the Celestial Tribe. Bear in mind that this is a significant number. The Celestial Tribe outnumbers the smaller Kuei-jin Dharmas, but its practitioners cluster around southern India.

## ARE THEY AKUMA?

Does the Celestial Tribe serve the Yama Kings, sell their souls and betray their fellow Wan Xian to Yomi in exchange for power? This is central when discussing the Face of the Gods. Chinese and Sinicized Kuei-jin traditionally level charges of being *akuma* at this sect, saying its members feel they can make treaties with the Yama Kings on equal footing, as though they were fellow princes.

In Quincunx domains, this is largely true. After all, where do heretics learn to behave except in the works of heretical chroniclers? Members with the Face of the Gods heresy are very often lesser *akuma*, who engage in Iris Bulb Commerce (See *The Thousand Hells* for detail of this). Most do it because they're supposed to, because that's what they've always heard or read. Others engage in such activities because a heretic in Cathayan culture is adrift in a leaking boat without a paddle. The sort of vampires who succumb to a heresy like the Face of the Gods are usually librarians, spiritualists or other educated individuals with access to libraries and thus, infernal texts meant to serve as a warning, not a guide. Some heretics delve into them because they're locked into a suicidal lifestyle, indulging in every horror that springs to mind. Others do it because they realize they're going to need every trick to survive in exile, and selling half their soul is a potential necessity.

Dharma practitioners in India believe they are no more prone than other Kuei-jin to become *akuma*. In fact, they believe themselves in less jeopardy, since they don't have the legalistic cosmological outlook of mainstream Kuei-jin culture. They are educated to beware Heaven's dishonesty from their first conscious, undead thought as a member of this Dharma. Making business deals with the princes of Lord Yama's realm isn't a very attractive proposition if you don't believe the fundamental order of the universe enforces those contracts.

## TENETS OF THE FACE OF THE GODS

1. Develop your divine nature.
2. Expand both godly and demonic consciousness.
3. Accept the veneration of mortals, but answer their prayers in return.
4. Harness Chi to bring divinity back to your dead form.
5. Act according to the tenets of your Godly Voice, and your Godly Desires shall be fulfilled.
6. Visit the Heavens to remember what you have lost.
7. Practice ritual and tradition to empower your own essence.
8. Commune with the spirits; learn of their messages from Heaven.

## TENETS

### DEVELOP YOUR DIVINE NATURE

*I saw a mote of light within myself,  
A needle; a celestial nail.  
Cherishing it, I held it to my heart,  
and it became a sword, cutting away ignorance.*  
— O, The Celestial Nail

\* \* \*

The disciple should never neglect the development of the spiritual self. From Heaven's blessing does your soul extend... you should seek to make it worthy of that exalted state. For all your duties as shepherd to the flock's needs, or as warrior or prince, you must also acknowledge that which allows you to perform these deeds. You are a god, a divine being trapped in a prison of flesh. If you do not nurture and strengthen that spirit, it will continue suffering beneath the imposed twin yokes of ignorance and mediocrity.

— Shiva-Ohm, *The Practice of Divinity*

This tenet commands the Kuei-jin to pursue their Dharmic advancement. Almost all Dharmas take time to emphasize, through their fundamental philosophy, the importance for Kuei-jin to advance spiritually; the Face of the Gods is no different.

### EXPAND BOTH GODLY AND DEMONIC CONSCIOUSNESS

*I heard the words of the darkness within me,  
and I knew those words.  
It was the voice of my true heart.  
And I was enlightened.*  
— O, The Celestial Nail

\* \* \*

Within your heart lies a darkness. Do not deny its presence, for you are not the only one who hears its voice. Know that this voice belongs to your coarse nature, your animal heart. It urges you to self-indulgence, vengeance and wickedness. This is a woeful thing, for the words of this demonic impulse are always with you, hidden in your own thoughts. Once, it was but the voice of temptation. Yet now, unburdened by the conscience of the soul, this animal force seeks only self-gratification and wickedness, destruction and war.

Your heart will demand you suppress this voice and turn your back to it — that the intensity of your base desires is unnatural and horrifying. It will say, do not let this voice control you, for it covets your ruin and has no comprehension of tomorrow. Yet, it is also the voice of your own divine heart, and it is wrong that gods should be meek and shrink unnaturally from their own wrath. When your howling spirit rises in righteous anger, let it have its run for it shall come regardless. By moderating its passion, you can perhaps come to terms with it.

— Shiva-Ohm, *The Practice of Divinity*

In Indian practice, expanding your godly and demonic aspects means the development of the P'o, which Indians feel to be equally valid in the manifested divine; the blood of the Celestial Tribe's evil fathers has demonized the children somewhat, and they have no choice but to accept that, for it's an inescapable part of their nature. It doesn't lessen their divinity, it just means that they are punishers, warriors and even ravagers to their people, as well as protectors, defenders and guides. Each is both angel of mercy and blood-soaked fiend, warrior and spiritualist, and they all accept this and incorporate it into their religion.

In the case of those Middle Kingdom Kuei-jin following *The Celestial Nail*, this is a very immediate matter. Most of them brim with the convert's fervor but haven't progressed far in their Dharma; they are almost certainly without tutors or supervision. This lot has very direct and simple outlooks on their faith (sticking to the letter of the tenets in *The Celestial Nail*), but often fall into trouble during their struggle to fulfill the P'o without becoming its slaves.

India's heretical Kuei-jin, however, have a more complex and well-rounded outlook. Local Kuei-jin expect their Dharma peers to hold themselves to certain standards of behavior, ones that don't bring about the wrath of mortals or *shen*, ones that help protect each other from adversaries, and ones that demand they manage their power responsibly.

The Dharma's Kuei-jin generally issue warnings to the vampire who can't adhere to the community's standards. Those who don't mend their ways after repeated admonitions are then punished in a variety of ways; their mortal flocks are killed or claimed by other "gods," their temples are destroyed or they are exiled from a region. The really troublesome Kuei-jin earn an instant trip to their next incarnation. Hopefully, on their next junket across the karmic wheel, they'll learn more wisdom and handle their power with more responsibility. The end result is that some vampires with civil P'os remain under the control of their Demon almost constantly, while their higher soul watches and learns from its Demon-self.

## ACCEPT THE VENERATION OF MORTALS

*I heard the bells of the temple and hurried away.*

*I heard the chanting of the monks and hearkened close.*

*I read the prayer slips, and read my name.*

*And I was enlightened.*

— O, *The Celestial Nail*

\* \* \*

You are a god, and it is your purpose to act as such. Although other gods control Heaven and deny you passage, do not be disturbed. You are a god, nonetheless. Fulfill that role, and exist within that divinity. If it seems absurd to you, then observe yourself through the perspective of your worshipers, who now possess a god of greater power and substance than whatever carved idol you displaced. Your deeds do not seem so foolish to them. Comfort yourself, if you must, with the conviction that you train for your duties on the day you return to your true Heavenly home. With the full blessing of divinity at your disposal, what an effective god you shall be, having learned the trade with only the most meager of tools.

This is not, however, a license for excess. You are a god, not a despot or prince. You are not a robber, but the protector and defender of those sheltered beneath your wing. As they levy to you the blood and tribute that is your right, you must give them the fortune, wisdom and protection they expect. Do not ever forget your bond with your followers, for it is the heart of your power.

— Shiva-Ohm, *The Practice of Divinity*

Accept the veneration of mortals, but answer their prayers in return. Both factions of the Dharma practice this religious tenet roughly the same way. Both gather groups of worshipers who venerate them as divinities. Both *The Celestial Nail* and *The Practice of Divinity* advocate that Kuei-jin gather groups of believers, and both teach the powerful Discipline of Prayer-Eating that the Dharmas use to manage their followers.

Ideally, these underlings see the Kuei-jin as an exiled god. To have followers practice some sort of cover faith to generate belief, but conceal the vampire's nature is Dharmically unsound for several reasons. First, it means the vampire cannot use his cult to the fullest on theological matters, like proving his obvious divinity when bringing mortals to his worship. To the Dharma's members, the belief in their own godly status is real, which means others must believe in them too. Secondly, it detracts from the strength of veneration that the sects feel is essential to the Kuei-jin's Dharmic progression. A member of this sect cannot increase in Dharma unless they are leading a sect.

Following this tenet also means providing service to worshipers. A member of the Face of the Gods is not just a vampire. They attempt to better and strengthen the members of their cult, giving them a supernatural "ace-in-the-hole" that can help them overcome life's hurdles. After all, that's the point of worship, at least to the Dharma's perspective.

For Indian Kuei-jin, a period of conservatism and hiding is ending. Whereas the Face of the Gods once kept small sects, the Dharma has gained considerable ground over the imported Quincunx faiths, allowing cults to flourish with dozens, or even hundreds, of worshipers. It could be, members of this Dharma believe, that no vampire of this sect has reached divinity in recent memory because none of them had a strong enough public following. That worship, the veneration of multitudes, is really necessary for ascension. And to become truly divine, the followers must enshrine their gods in temples as the ancient sages once did. Understandably, there is significant competition between cults for important recruits.

Heretics who stay in Asia long enough to establish cults must maintain small ones to remain below the Quincunx's radar. Those fleeing to India or Bangladesh may keep whatever size cult they can manage. The cult's size and the Kuei-jin's ability to act openly as a god outside the Middle Kingdom may be why so many Celestial Tribe members seem so advanced compared to their Chinese Dharma "brethren."

Excerpt from a confidential report to the Bodhisattva No-Shadow Raven from heimlich observer Twice-Seeded Blossom.

Discipline within the individual cults is very strict — the religions are not at all “spiritual,” and by this I mean mysterious or shrouded in ritual. The worshipers enter a deal with their “god,” offering worship and service in return for protection and having their prayers fulfilled. The faith is very concrete. The worshipers gain actual benefits from their god — who healed their illnesses or found them government postings — and so, are generally quite fervent. The cult severely punishes any transgression, often killing one member to teach dozens if the situation warrants it. The one cult whose procedures I observed used intrusive monitoring practices; they deployed surveillance devices in members’ homes both with and without their consent, and administered regular polygraphs to the cult’s inner circle. This was, I was given to understand, not an atypical practice.

The Dharma’s Kuei-jin seemingly develop the ability to read worshipers’ minds, adding their own scrutiny to their security practices — it’s a formidable testament to just how hard Indian Kuei-jin play the game and for how long. I’m sure local agents of the Courts do try infiltrating these cults, and one of my Face of the Gods’ hosts all but admitted he’d arranged for the destruction of a Laughing Rainbow in an arson blaze started by someone in his personal entourage.

The cults sometimes start as neighborhood affairs, or as part of a professional circle, but they invariably develop political ambitions. Local vampires try cementing their positions by gaining a foothold in the local power structure. Generally, they don’t have too much trouble. Partisanship and corruption are widespread, almost as bad as in China, and the dead have a significant advantage over humans when working their way into corrupt systems. Once they take hold of the local political machine, they generally reinforce the cult’s position with pork barrel contracts. You see this at home all the time. It’s no different in India.

## **HARNESS CHI TO BRING DIVINITY BACK TO YOUR DEAD FORM**

*And I saw icy fire spring from my hands.  
All the cranes on the lake fell silent,  
and the fire burned bright against the night.  
And I was enlightened.  
— O, The Celestial Nail*

\* \* \*

Your body is deformed. As a result of the curse the gods levied against you, denying you your heritage, you are like a dead thing. You must bring divinity to this corpse. You must convince those around you, the gods above you and, most importantly, you must convince yourself that you’re a god, a sacredness worthy of worship, love, adoration and fear.

Your tools in escaping this wretched state are the powers your body commands. Fueled by blood sacrifice and prayers, you are a being of great spiritual power. You can warp your body to express magical effects, influence the spirits and attitudes of those who come before you and even change the very fabric of the world with your abilities. Do not hesitate to use this gift and do not stop practicing it, for your divinity shall be your salvation. You must master the power within yourself, so that it serves as your spear and shield. When you use it, it shall always remind you of your godliness.

— Shiva-Ohm, *The Practice of Divinity*



Members of both sects likewise agree that the display of power is one way to redeem the half-living corpses Heaven forced them to wear during their existence. While most Kuei-jin wish to simulate life as a way of teaching themselves life-lessons, the Dharma actually seeks to experience divinity. They believe that expending Chi is working miracles, which is an assertion difficult to argue with, if one defines miracle broadly enough. From this Dharma's perspective, the Kuei-jin are deluding themselves, claiming the powers they exercise are natural phenomenon when, in fact, they are clearly the powers of divinity, properly harnessed.

Members of this Dharma are generally excellent practitioners of the Chi Pranas, which were brought to India well after the Soul Arts and shintais arrived. Members of this Dharma use the Pranas to foster their divine mantle and to improve a set of Disciplines they consider miraculous.

### ACT ACCORDING TO YOUR GODLY VOICE

*My heart spoke to me,  
Telling me of unknown secrets.  
It showed me the righteous truth behind a screen of lies.  
And I was enlightened.  
— O, The Celestial Nail*

\* \* \*

*You are a god, but do not believe that renders you immune to guilt. The voices within you are powerful urges; one draws you toward righteousness, the other toward self-indulgence. Just as you should not deny your desire for self-indulgence, it should not overshadow your push toward godly behavior.*

*To do otherwise is to be a demon, and not a god. You do not exist in this world only to feel good and indulge your proclivities... you exist to serve as a deity. It is your heritage and duty as provided to you by Sita, your first mother and wife of Rama. Even when your duty grows burdensome and leaves you in despair, remember this. Even in the utmost extremities, do not forsake your divinity, for you will spring forth again from your own ashes to live a mortal life anew and rise once more as a Prince of the Earth. What then do you fear? Surely you knew pain enough in the tortures of Lord Yama's Realm when they attempted to wash away memory of your divinity. What Earthly injury can this world inflict that compares? And without fear of death or pain, what is left to trouble you?*

— Shiva-Ohm, *The Practice of Divinity*

The Dharma's members widely accept this tenet to mean the Kuei-jin must act according to the precepts of their Godly Voice, meaning their Divine Consciousness or Hun. It's an injunction not to become a demon instead of a god, and it's one every Dharma vampire seeks to follow. Obviously, not everyone succeeds. Many fall to their P'o and are destroyed, or simply become creatures and servants to the Yama Kings.

Shiva-Ohm, however, received his vision of the past through meditation and transcendental dreaming, while O meditated avidly. The Red Book of the Iron Bridge was reputedly inspired by visions experienced during his meditations, as was (at least according to the manuscript) his writing of *The Celestial Nail*. Thus, vampires of both sects are prone to learning the Dragon Tear, Chi'uh Muh, to its first level. The gem-like forehead growth is seen as a sign of divinity, and the vampires who possess it treasure and heed its subsequent prophetic dreams as a form of divine insight.

### VISIT THE HEAVENS

*I saw Ten Thousand Divinities,  
the spirits of the realms beyond our own,  
and I saw in them a kinship.  
And I was enlightened.  
— O, The Celestial Nail*

\* \* \*

*I urge you to venture across the barrier between our world and the spirit lands. You must study and learn from this place, for this is your natural domain. Like an exiled prince sneaking back into his kingdom to plot with loyal troops, so you must likewise learn the contours of Heaven and the laws of the spirit world. Learn which spirits you can deal with, and which will have no truck with you. Find allies and sniff out enemies, and you will multiply your chances for success. There will be a day when you find this lore useful.*

— Shiva-Ohm, *The Practice of Divinity*

Visit the Heavens to remember what you've lost. This Dharma's members are drawn to the spirit world for the same reason Thrashing Dragons immerse themselves in life and the Song of the Shadows submerge themselves in death. It is the element of their faith... of divinity; throughout the Tapestry of the Yin and Yang worlds, it is all-encompassing, all-empowering, and the heart of the Dharma's might. Being near it, interacting with it, taking part in spiritual congress; these are all religious experiences for a creature believing itself to be an exiled divinity. Members of this congress visit Heaven to increase their spiritual understanding as well as profit from their dealings with spirits.

### PRACTICE RITUAL AND TRADITION TO EMPOWER YOUR OWN ESSENCE

*The men abased themselves at my feet,  
Chanting again and again, "thou art our god and our protector,"  
until blood dripped from their foreheads from the fervor of their prostrations.*

*And I was enlightened.  
— O, The Celestial Nail*

\* \* \*

*There is no god without a religion. There is no god without a temple and the idolizing masses. I'm sure that in a year or two, someone will venture by and tell me they follow my faith, and that they are the greatest baker in such-and-such a village, and widely worshiped thereabouts.*

*This is false. A baker is not worshiped. The women of the village do not come to his bakery, asking if he would endow their child with a pie. Yet, women commonly bring their children to temple for their god's blessing, offering their god their children, but trusting in their hearts that he will not take them. They also know that sometimes the god may indeed desire their child, and this is part of the price they pay for his blessings.*

*This is not a matter concerning bakers, or war heroes or even princes. If you are a god, than act as befits one. Do not exist in mortal squalor and lesser titles. I enjoin you, do not be the god who claims divinity, but keeps a bakery as his temple. Your worship is like paper... do you scribble upon it or pen a note of such eloquence that even jade weeps for you? Remember, there are no prayers more potent than ones given by the faithful pressing themselves into the floor in adoration, burning offerings and desperate for your approval and aid. They will not offer such worship to one who only knows how to scribble, who plays at being a god but has none of the trappings to foster such faith.*

*This is the lot of a god. Those who willingly accept meager surroundings and lack an appreciation for the gravity of their own ceremony insult both godhead as a practice and those who genuinely engender proper worship as befits their station. Spare these rogues no mercy, for they are liars, calling themselves by a faith, but unwilling to truly pay the price of practice.*

— Shiva-Ohm, *The Practice of Divinity*

As divinity requires service to the worshipers, it also demands that the ceremony be a formal one. The relationship between the supplicant and god can never be one of someone simply exchanging words for a good or service. There must be love born from respect, and the Kuei-jin must receive the reverent worship befitting a creature of his celestial stature. To create this veneration, the pomp and stance of adoration must take place in a formal context. If the Kuei-jin simply rents himself for service, then he is not a god, but a prostitute. A member of the Face of the Gods cannot just make do with being a popular fixer or adored hero. He must elicit respect and fear. After all, who will admire the image of godhood when god himself has little care for his own demeanor? Ritual and tradition protects the appearance of godhead by forcing the worshiper into an unspoken agreement, one that establishes the rules of conduct and exchange of services.

## COMMUNE WITH THE SPIRITS

*I sat with the spirits of the region,  
and we spoke as equals.*

*Disposing matter like wasted flesh... acting together in kinship.  
And I was enlightened.*

— O, The Celestial Nail

\* \* \*

*Never forget, you are not simply studying Heaven. This is not knowledge for its own sake. You are learning to become a god. You meet with spirits to understand their ways and to establish relationships for the day you soar to your proper station. You must know the inhabitants of these domains as well as the world's nature itself.*

*Learn the habits, personalities and demands of the spirits, for they are the same as any other important person or city official—they control access to what matters to you, those things for which you must negotiate or beg. For now, do not instruct or judge how this is done, or that is wrong. You are a young and small god. Do not anger the older gods around you by judging their actions. I admit some spirits are thoroughly corrupt.*

*Certainly, when you are a great god, you can exert your influence, but, you are still an infant, and you should dream only of protecting your village and ensuring its inhabitants come to no harm. Later, you may rise to a position where you sit as judge on these spirit beings, but doing so now is simply foolish. You will only emphasize your weakness and inability to enforce your demands as well as informing them of your bad intentions in advance.*

— Shiva-Ohm, *The Practice of Divinity*

Learning lessons isn't the only reason members of this Dharma visit the Heavens. Vampires of this sect see themselves as exiled divinities. They interact with spirits and the spirit world for two reasons. One is as a deity talking to fellow gods. In the Indian subcontinent or in exile abroad, these vampires frequently intervene in local spiritual affairs in the name of the general good or for the benefit of their cult. This isn't possible in China and other mainstream Kuei-jin cultural bastions, however, because the local spirits can report the matter (or gossip about it) to Quincunx observers. In India, this is hardly the case since the Quincunx's regional agents are too outmatched to capitalize on such information.

As for the Dharma's claims they have grievances with Heaven, many spirits make similar statements (and even more outrageous declarations). Thus, spirit world entities are generally willing to deal reasonably with the strangest of beings, provided they have something the spirits want and are strong enough to stop the spirits from taking it.

To the Dharma, however, such alliances are to build up an army of celestial warriors in their campaign to reclaim their place in Heaven... even if the spirits don't realize they're being conscripted.

## EXISTENCE

In India, the night-to-night existence of Dharma members is much the same as those for Cainites and Cathayans anywhere else. There are three primary concerns — securing food, developing personal assets and developing their contacts — and they pursue these goals in the same fashion as vampires in any other region.

The primary difference is that rather than following their personal goals as individuals, Face of the Gods Kuei-jin do so as the leaders of small, tight-knit political organizations... namely, their cults. This facilitates development of certain financial and political interests, but makes it more difficult to pursue personal or spiritual development. In this capacity, they are more like Western vampires, who are far less mobile than their Cathayan cousins (by choice), and prone to using their addictive blood to form cults similar to those of the Celestial Tribe.

*Excerpt from a confidential report to the Bodhisattva No-Shadow Raven from heimin observer Twice-Seeded Blossom.*

The Dharma's actual practice is somewhat prosaic. They form cooperative societies for self-protection, but the individual pursuit of their Dharma is very central to their faith. There are personal associations, but they aren't for the purpose of spiritual advancement. They are more an attempt to manipulate local institutions that might persecute these Kuei-jin, a process seemingly involving loyal members of the cult infiltrating the group. The methods may range from bribing local goondas or thugs to provide an introduction into these organizations, or bringing someone important into the cult's fold. The Face of the Gods are savvy enough to use everything at their disposal, from bribes, to coercion, to divine manifestation. They also negotiate collectively with other supernatural forces. They nominally enforce justice, which is as perfunctory as any other Kuei-jin justice — strictly concerned with dangers to the community (and thus, feeding stock), with no worries at all about mortal law.

## TEACHING

The Indian members of this Dharma learn much like Kuei-jin elsewhere. Groups of experienced vampires search out and catch newly risen *chih-mei*. This is a very important act for members of the Dharma, because of their conflict with the Thrashing Dragons. The Celestial Tribe not only loses the *chih-mei* they overlooked, but strengthens the Quincunx with the new recruit who will undoubtedly fight the Celestial Tribe; they're also almost impossible to covert. They must be destroyed and sent back across the Wheel of Reincarnation.

Once broken and restored to sentience, the young Kuei-jin learns from one master acting alone. The Celestial Tribe feels that teaching is only proper if conducted by a solitary voice; so, for the next five years, the initiate remains under one Kuei-jin who serves as the source of all the student's wisdom. In

general, the Face of the Gods disburses responsibility of raising young vampires to individuals of appropriate age. Some Kuei-jin, however, are “natural gurus,” and see more than their fair share of disciples, while other community members with no interest in educating new gods may pass the right of education off to a willing party.

For the first five years of their existence, initiates are almost completely sheltered from the outside world. Their teachers educate them in basic matters, and feed them from the master’s inner circle of worshipers. It’s only after two years that a student gains his first worshiper (usually as a gift from the master’s flock), and during the next three years that he learns, step by step, how to run a cult, recruit new followers, avoid police scrutiny and help worshipers rise in the world.

Only after five or more years, when a young Kuei-jin has a strong-enough cult to support himself, does he leave his guru’s tutelage and set out on his own. Older vampires often help subsidize the younger vampire’s new cult, to help strengthen the community of gods and their followers. Some Dharma members, however, foreswear any help and take their own time establishing their cult. Either is considered acceptable, as long as the student is well prepared.

The gurus don’t encourage young Kuei-jin to rush off. While the community discourages the forcible detainment of students, they allow masters to sweeten the pot for initiates to keep them longer. Such bribes might include extra worshipers from the master’s cult, access to organizational ties or even financial recompense. The reason the Dharma’s Indian-sect offers such enticements is because they need members at their strongest before dealing with the world alone. Strong, self-sufficient members make for a stronger Dharma.

Additionally, older masters prize their younger apprentices because there are some things worshipers cannot do. Most members of the Celestial Tribe try keeping their mortal followers relatively ignorant of the supernatural world. Having a young vampire around proves quite useful when the master needs an ally or dupe in dealing with the unseen. New Kuei-jin also help by providing security, a field where mortals, regardless how skilled or devoted, are at a significant disadvantage. One-on-one, mortals can rarely contend against a demon or shape-shifter, even if their fanaticism wills them into action.

Even after the Kuei-jin leaves her guru, the community expects both to maintain a close relationship. The guru is the student’s primary contact in a society of his peers and elders. Young Face of the Gods followers can always turn to their guru for help, whether in fights, financial troubles or to extricate themselves from legal and political jams.

In exchange, the Dharma expects the Kuei-jin to look after her guru’s interests, show her guru’s teachings respect — even if she surpasses him — and defend the guru in battle if necessary. In general, the relationship is one of a doting parent for a beloved child. The guru might be smothering or spoiling, kind or harsh, but she must never be superficially neglectful. It doesn’t mean it doesn’t happen; only that the Dharma supervises the student-master relationship with random checks and interrogations.

There is no “final test” akin to the Fire and Water test, and no period of group education. If the Kuei-jin cannot liberate himself from the *chih-mei* state, then after three or four relapses, his guru destroys him. Likewise, if the Kuei-jin is antisocial or dangerous, then the community simply isolates the vampire in his time of need, and the problem solves itself. It isn’t as efficient as the regulated world of Quincunx politics, but then

again, the Face of the Gods believes it doesn’t breed the same vast and ruthless political games either.

*Excerpt from a confidential report to the Bodhisattva No-Shadow Raven from heimmin observer Twice-Seeded Blossom.*

Of course, they collect *chih-mei* for training. This is a major part of their faith, and one of the most dangerous acts they undertake. While the Celestial Tribe (as they’re known in India) and the Laughing Rainbows of the Infinite Thunders Court do occasionally collide over other matters, gathering *chih-mei* is often the catalyst for the majority of their conflicts. *Chih-mei* are a resource shared by both undead cultures, but once indoctrinated in one faith, they remain entrenched in that world-view and rarely switch to rival Dharma. Because both sides are in a state of war, they often develop strong and embittered outlooks on one another. This means early recruitment is crucial in both Dharmas’ ongoing attempts to obliterate the other out of existence.

There are regular skirmishes over control of flesh-eaters. I witnessed one battle, and it was surprisingly fierce. Naturally, everyone was heavily armed for securing the *chih-mei*, and almost everyone had an automatic weapon of some sort. There are few battles fought using supernatural attacks because firefights are quicker and more mobile, but it happens, and the Little Death is to be expected. Machine gun fire raked our car while we idled on the roadside, discussing the next move in the hunt. The heretics with me returned fire, and there was a short skirmish while we escaped on foot. Everyone suffered a gunshot injury of some sort, and one of the Thrashing Dragons had definitely taken the Little Death.

I believe both sects cover up this and other conflicts by using loyal elements of the local security forces to clean the scene. These mortals normally secure and collect evidence at the sites of terror attacks, but during Kuei-jin skirmishes, they subsequently deny the incident’s existence. Everyone assumes they’re covering up death squads and antiterrorist actions. All pretty standard stuff — the *penangallans* do the same thing with Indonesia’s army.

## DHARMIC ADVANCEMENT

As the heretic grows in experience and wisdom, their guru’s lessons and practical experiences become less effective in helping the Kuei-jin grow spiritually. By the time they become jina, it’s unlikely a vampire’s guru will have any advice that’s immediately informative or insightful to the young vampire. Everything else is either a lesson the vampire must survive to learn, or else, the master is simply not high enough in Dharma to teach the Discipline.

Additionally, for whatever reason, the Dharma’s members seem to have problems with spiritual advancement. Many members reach rank 6, and some even 7, but none have progressed higher than that spiritually since Shiva-Ohm went into occultation. That was before the Christian era, leaving members of the faith to seek many novel means to increase their Dharma. There is currently an intellectual movement towards large cults, and towards the refinement of Prayer-Eating. Previous fads for increasing one’s understanding of Dharma existed in extreme secrecy, at the center of mystery cults and enigma societies (seeking to emulate Shiva-Ohm’s presumably exemplary occultation). Others have spent significant time studying the spirit world, or developing elaborate ritual ceremonies, or meditating for months on the nature of their state. None have yet brought anyone close to the state of bodhisattva.

The sect seems in many ways to lack focus. Individuals band together locally to meet threats and group needs, and the fellowship from the student-guru relationship gives the practitioners a sense they are part of a shared practice and faith, a "tribe" as it were. Unfortunately, the tribe has no chief, and no concrete goal. At least, no concrete goal in the short term.

## TRUE ENLIGHTENMENT

In the long term, there is one goal sought after by most of the Dharma's members... true enlightenment. Yet, this concept of enlightenment is one seemingly foreign to the Dharma prior to the arrival of the Thrashing Dragons. It was only then, after contact with its venerable mandarins, that the degree to which Kuei-jin gained power from spiritual advancement became clear to the Face of the Gods. Indeed, even this Dharma's term for this spiritual pinnacle, *jen*, is a Chinese borrowed-word denoting "excellence" or "culture."

Prior to the arrival of the Chinese, the sect's goals were more political than spiritual, in that they sought power to mount a campaign against Heaven. No commanding leaders or particularly good plans emerged prior to the arrival of the Chinese; with the appearance of the Thrashing Dragons, however, the Dharma realized its first goal — they must develop a bodhisattva.

This realization was in part a reaction to the rejection they received from the Thrashing Dragons. Centuries before O had written any heretical texts and almost as long before the rise of the Quincunx, the Chinese sect had firmly told the Celestial Tribe: No bodhisattva, no validity. Without adherence to Xue's teachings or knowledge of the *Ki Chuan*, the Thrashing Dragons would not accept the legitimacy of this faith until they saw a bodhisattva (occulted holy men weren't going to convince them of anything). Thus, not only was there a political payout if the Face of the Gods produced a bodhisattva (a concept unknown to them previously), but a military one as well.

There weren't many elder Thrashing Dragons, but they were powerful and they did deliberately exaggerate their true strength. While the Celestial Tribe didn't need more spiritually advanced vampires to fight the Thrashing Dragons, it became something of an obsession that spiritually advanced vampires would help in the battle to reclaim Heaven. In many ways, this philosophy is not unlike that espoused by the Searing Wind sect of the Devil-Tigers, and it is possible that "Grand Arhat" Hon Li, had some contact with the Face of the Gods when it was in its military phase (see *Dharma Book Devil-Tigers*).

During this period, members of the Celestial Tribe locked themselves into rigorous spiritual training, and created a martial atmosphere within the cults. They honed their worshipers for war, only to discover their newfound practices were either prohibitive of spiritual development, or, unrelated to it. No bodhisattvas emerged, but the practices drew the blades of Persian, Hindu and, eventually, Muslim vampire hunters; finally, the war-cult leaders drifted out of existence. A few still remain around the periphery of the subcontinent, living as warlords in the mountainous regions and generally marginalizing themselves from their own society. Many of these disaffected vampires are the ones attracting Middle Kingdom *akuma* and teaching them the Dharma's limited scope of enlightenment.

The remaining culture focuses on the belief that increasing spiritual power is esoterically and somehow necessary to reclaiming the Dharma's place in Heaven.

When a bodhisattva comes to the faith, he'll possess the secret knowledge required to confront those who expelled the Celestial Tribe, or else redeem a place long vacant. Until that time, everyone must stand in readiness and pursue spiritual development as rapidly as possible.

It seems this may be working... somewhat. The Dharma has only pursued this spiritual push (*sans* the military angle) for less than 500 years, and there are already several elders at ancestor status (Dharma 7), waiting to accumulate enough spiritual power to advance to the next rank of their faith.

It should be noted that the Celestial Tribe has no real sense of an imminent eschatological event awaiting it. There is no real feeling the world will end soon, or that a great battle is coming. Obviously, *shen* politics in the subcontinent are especially tense currently, given the Eye of the Demon Emperor Incident, but members of this Dharma don't believe that the universe is about to collapse.

*Excerpt from a confidential report to the Bodhisattva No-Shadow Raven from heimin observer Twice-Seeded Blossom.*

...something already being practiced, and of course, nobody knows where Shiva-Ohm is. He's been in occultation from the time Greeks were in the Five Rivers. I think he probably got his ticket punched or flamed out somewhere private.

Nobody but Shiva-Ohm is said to have made it to true enlightenment on the path, but there are several Kuei-jin who are quite spiritually advanced. Some of them are still around, but I couldn't arrange an interview.

As an aside, I'm told Indra-gha, God of Rain and Tears would like to speak personally with my superiors. I think she's hoping to speak with the Quincunx's Ancestor, but I'm sure she'd see you as well. I have her secretary's telephone number. I don't know if she's a god, but she has some formidable people showing her deep respect. I'm sure you've already thought of it, but she's spent some time thinking about killing gods. Maybe she's learned something useful to us? Maybe she, or someone like her, is the instrument the Yama Kings will use to assassinate the August Personage? Either way, I'd like to reiterate that I think this merits attention.

## ATTITUDES

In many things, the members of the Face of the Gods heresy are similar to their more orthodox cousins. Regardless of location, vampires generally have strained relationships with the other *shen* sharing their habitat. Yet there are some matters where the Celestial Tribe makes a concerted effort to foster treaties or alliances with regional spirits and shapeshifters, if only because it advances "the big picture" of recapturing their place in Heaven. To do that, however, they need allies, especially ones well versed with the spirit domains. So they forge and respect territorial treaties and non-aggression pacts in the hopes of turning a cease-fire into a genuine alliance of mutual interest.

This exceptional attitude, however, doesn't really apply to those heretics hiding in the folds of the Quincunx's robes. Members who practice their Dharma directly from the pages of *The Celestial Nail* likely have relatively mainstream views for whatever their Dharma used to be, before they fell to the lure of finding a bodhisattva. It is unlikely that converted Quincunx Kuei-jin will see themselves in the role of bodhisattvas, or accept the unique outlook of their Indian brethren as regards other *shen*.

## QUINCUNX CATHAYANS

The attitude of Chinese *akuma* towards their Quincunx peers is a combination of contempt, hatred, and terror. The contempt is for those vampires, and their elders, who labor intensively under the tyranny of their beliefs, without ever wondering if they're correct. To the heretics, these beliefs are obviously wrong and enslaving. Of course, some of that contempt is doubtless directed back at the heretic for the Cathayan he once was, making that anger all the sharper. The hatred and terror is derived from the fact that the regime they once advocated is a terrifying juggernaut of orthodoxy. It is a society where every theological argument is scrutinized for signs of incorrect thinking, a society designed entirely to crush heretical faiths like the Face of the Gods.

As a dissenting voice in a society that barely tolerates dissension of any type or discussion of their culture's underpinning theological assertions, heretics almost invariably become embittered. Even those fleeing this environment know their ancient culture is so inflexible, there's no way they can disseminate their true and urgent message of Heaven's betrayal.

Members of the Celestial Tribe, however, have a different outlook concerning their Cathayan neighbors. For hundreds of years, the Thrashing Dragon barraged them with propaganda: their faith isn't complete without a bodhisattva, they're unrighteous, they're puppets of the Demon Emperor and should renounce their faith before the Quincunx. The Middle Kingdom's Cathayans are clearly more spiritually sophisticated, more individually powerful and more organized than the Celestial Tribe.

Yet at the same time, the Cathayans are clearly wrong. They throw their might and spiritual authority around carelessly, earning few friends in the process, and they act like dupes of a jealous or fearful Heaven. They will not even consider the possibility their own faith is flawed while, at the same time, insisting that members of the Celestial Tribe indulge in deep introspection before converting *en masse*. Finally, they murder and disgrace one another over convoluted and incomprehensible internal religious conflicts, but deny suffering from internecine friction before casually mentioning a long string of religious policing forces who examine each vampire's nightly existence for signs of heresy.

This places the average members of the Celestial Tribe in a slight conundrum. They desperately want to understand what secrets the Thrashing Dragons (among others) possess, yet want nothing to do with the Quincunx's faiths or practices, where so many of those secrets are inextricably bound. Still, the Celestial Tribe and Gods eagerly seek out Cathayan books and texts, and happily pay exorbitantly for them... *kaja* texts especially.

*Kaja* has proven a stumbling block for the Celestial Tribe in learning from their more spiritually sophisticated neighbors. Although there have been a few defectors or agents learned in its secrets, the Indian Kuei-jin never had a good guide to *kaja* made available to them. This elegant Court language, with its complex syntax and elaborate calligraphic system, hides many secrets. Vampires of the Indian subcontinent have purchased or stolen these texts, but unfortunately, only a half-dozen of them read *kaja*. Even then, none of them possess the combination of skills, time and knowledge to write a calligraphic guidebook, an ideogrammatic phrase book, a dictionary and a grammar book, all of which are necessary to read *kaja*. In essence, they are made mules by their own knowledge, unable to teach others and propagate their acumen.

The fact that local Quincunx vampires encourage this and go out of their way to kill any heretic they know to read or speak *kaja* only adds to the frustration. Anyone daring and lucky enough to bring knowledge of the Kuei-jin Court language to the Celestial Tribe will definitely receive high regard. The existing *akuma* who already read *kaja*, however, might protect their monopoly with murderous intent.

## DHAMPYRS

The Face of the Gods has few real objections to creating dhampyrs. This Dharma's members are gods, so of course, they may choose to have heroic offspring. What is rare, however, is permanent Yang imbalance. Most members of the Celestial Tribe try to moderate their internal alchemy, keeping their Chi virtues evenly balanced. This means without the fertility treatments and rituals that are unknown in their culture, they cannot generally produce half-damned offspring.

Those who can breed, usually derive the most mileage possible out of their offspring. Many raise their own child in a religious environment, weaning the dhampyr on stories concerning its role as the mouth of a deity and chosen avatar of a god, blessed with supernatural powers and destined to be their parent's champion and representative. This is all true, at least from the Dharma's perspective, and the children typically have little chance to disagree. Their parents educate them from the cradle to fill whatever role they envisioned for their offspring, be it high priest, enforcer or bookkeeper. Those whose parents are old (and most Chi-imbalanced members of the Celestial Tribe are often quite old) are typically raised to be soul-bonded into service. These beings can do little save what their radiant godlike masters permit. They are, in many ways, truly their parents' avatars. The Quincunx even believes these *akuma* possess rituals or Disciplines that allow the Celestial Tribe's ancestors to directly control their shade-walker children as puppets and extensions of themselves.

## CAINITES

Cainites have always been a problem in the Indian subcontinent. Since prehistory, the Ravnos Clan proved a vexing menace for the Face of the Gods. Until recently, Dharma saw them as distinctly separate beings from the Gangrel, who accompanied successive waves of barbarian raiders, and the Western Cainites (like the Toreador and Lasombra), who came with the Arabs and developed their own hives in the continent's great metropolises.

In all cases, however, Cainites are most unwelcome. Their propensity to reproduce in comparatively large numbers makes them very dangerous, as does their extreme physical prowess and ability to completely bend the minds of those around them. The average member of this Dharma has a very large herd, and so does not compete with the Western vampire in the same way as local Thrashing Dragons (who are, in most places, constantly at war for hunting grounds).

Where the competition between East and West lies is in the infiltration and subversion of the state and various non-state actors. Western vampires are always trying to invade the heretics' cults, and there are only so many officials capable of being subverted. The shoving territorial matches between members of this heresy and Western Cainites are often quite violent—as violent as the battles between members of the Celestial Tribe and the Thrashing Dragons over the possession of promising flesh-eaters.



Generally, the Dharma views Cainites as savage, bestial monsters, prone to explosive infestation where left unchecked, and always waiting to profit from a moment's carelessness. Individuals may escape this stereotype, but the context of interaction—lethal fights between supernatural beings—rarely allows for the development of friendships.

## SPIRITS

Spirits are an important part of existence for members of the Celestial Tribe. After all, two of their eight tenets specifically involve spirits and the celestial realm. In most cases, members of this Dharma negotiate with the spirits as honored equals, an approach with varying degrees of success. In India, where this has been the case since before recorded history, the spirits assent to it. Indeed, most spirits created since the dawn of annotated time do not exist in a world where the Celestial Tribe is anything but an eccentric society of blood-drinking exiles seeking entrance into a Heaven most spirits neither heard of nor wish to visit. Those older than recorded history are either no longer willing to discuss the matter or too powerful to pay the slightest heed.

## OTHER HERESIES

Of all the heretical Dharmas, the Face of the Gods shares the most in common with the Spirit of the Living Earth. While both believe the other has fallen just short of their true potential, they admire one another's skill when dealing with spirits. In fact, the Celestial Tribe often seek out the Cerulean Veils as intermediaries when dealing with particularly stubborn spirits, or teachers when trying to learn more about the Heavens. This has forged an unspoken alliance of mutual respect between the two heresies, which could grow troublesome for the Quincunx (who prefers its heresies scattered and divided).

Unfortunately, the Dharma shares little with the Flame of the Rising Phoenix. The Phoenixes only deserve pity, for the lie of Heaven is so complete upon them that they aspire to be mere mortals. How sad, for even the other Dharmas recognize some greatness within themselves. The Tempests, however, are too enraptured with physical sensations and experiences to ever scale upward. They seem content to simply spin around and around, like ignorant mutts chasing their own tails. Masters of none, indeed.

The Scorpion Eaters are currently an issue for the Middle Kingdom's Kuei-jin, and not a matter to concern the Celestial Tribe. Certainly, when the time comes to vanquish their Earth-bound foes (after entering Heaven), the Scorpion Eaters shall be the first to fall. They are too enamored with their undead state to be saved in this incarnation. Until destroyed, however, they are like children with AK47s... dangerous and the Quincunx's problem.

## SYSTEMS

## DISCIPLINES

Members of the Face of the Gods heresy have one signature Discipline, which almost every one of them practices... Prayer-eating. This strange and powerful Discipline is at the center of both *The Practice of Divinity* and *The Celestial Nail*.

In India, these are not the only Disciplines that sect vampires master. These *akuma* practice all the primary Disciplines of the Middle Kingdom, though the shintais are relatively recent imports. Introduced by Chinese scripture-

pilgrims, the shintais are nominally practiced, so it's rare to find members of the Face of the Gods who master them to elder levels. These Kuei-jin eschew the shintais — they learn the basics of the “god body” techniques, but few progress to advanced mastery, because they believe the shintais to be disfiguring and exploitive of their bodies' undead nature.

Soul Disciplines are an overwhelming favorite among vampires belonging to this Dharma. Face of the Gods members must manage a cult, meaning a sophisticated and devout political structure. Powers allowing them control over their inner turmoil and that of others are extremely useful. Obviously, Obligation is the most popular of these Disciplines, though Chi'uh Muh and Internalize are equally well regarded—the Dragon-Tear especially, since the ram-like Rasa eye is a mark of insight. Cultivation has a certain popularity among sect vampires, some of whom are rumored to have mastered the power to send their P'o into a living worshiper, turning them into an engine of destruction under the control of the vampire's lower soul. No proof of this claim, however, has yet surfaced.

Following closely behind are the Chi Disciplines, especially the relatively new Chi Pranas. The Dharma's members practice the latter Disciplines to lend “divinity” to the vampire's form, since the sect's *akuma* believe the postures and mudras lend supernatural grace.

In China, beyond knowledge of the Dharma's signature Discipline, there is no single unifying thread linking the vampires of this Dharma in terms of practices. Many learn Cultivation because they have nothing else to learn or are immensely self-destructive, so it seems useful. Others focus on shintais (thus further alienating them from India's Celestial Tribe), which are generally more useful for personal survival.

## PRAYER-EATING

The Face of the Gods are the primary practitioners of this heretical Discipline, which survives despite proscription in civilized regions of Kuei-jin society — thanks to the Dharma's widespread pursuit in the frontiers of the Infinite Thunders Court. While Prayer-Eating remains mostly the purview of this Dharma, its practice is not exclusive to them. *Penangallans* of the Passion Bloodflower Thrashing Dragon sect and the Brilliant Coals Devil-Tiger sect often develop this Discipline as well. While cults for these powerful Wan Kuei do not typically involve many mortal worshipers, *penangallans* with mortal cults often cultivate this Discipline to better profit from and manage their followers.

Admittedly, this knowledge is theoretically banned in the Scarlet Courts, but the relative autonomy of the *penangallans* and their willingness to transact foreign policy on an individual basis means there is no real mechanism outside of social pressure to stop the spread of Prayer-Eating. Of course, *penangallans* are Dharmically advanced Kuei-jin with a genuine sense of spiritual responsibility, so social pressure in the Scarlet Courts can often involve ambushes and blood feuds. Because of this, this Discipline's knowledge is not so widespread as the panic-stricken mandarins of the Quincunx (eager to write the *penangallans* off as sluts and straw dogs) pretend.

In the formal categories developed by conventional Kuei-jin to quantify their spiritual powers, Prayer-Eating lies somewhere between Chi Disciplines and Soul Disciplines. Unlike most Soul Disciplines, however, both Kuei-jin in shadow soul or those using Demon Shintai form may use Prayer-Eating. This makes it very powerful... and very dangerous for vampires whose P'os will exploit or destroy their cults if they slip into shadow soul.

Prayer-Eating operates on the principle that a god is connected to her worshipers. Through the development of this Discipline, the Kuei-jin learns to extend her spiritual influence into those who pay her homage. Among those Quincunx Cathayans permitted to review such blasphemous teachings, largely bodhisattvas and elder mandarin-magicians, there is a long-running debate on the source of the Discipline's power.

Some scholars maintain this hubris-born art harnesses power that is mostly divine prerogative. They argue that *akuma* derived this Discipline from the study and spiritual vivisection of the *hsien*, and the ability to derive golden Chi from Prayer-Eating seems to support this. Others say the Discipline is in no way divine or special, and instead, simply manifests a soul-touching effect like Obligation, only it's centered on beings willingly making a connection with the vampire through the channel of “worship.” The fact that the study of this proscribed art is entirely academic makes discussion ponderous, and more rooted in the ideologies of the Wan Kuei discussing it than the actual spiritual realities of the art. These origins remain largely unexplored by the Discipline's traditional practitioners, who learn it as an established craft, not an academic pursuit.

### • HEAR PRAYERS

This power allows the Kuei-jin to relax and listen to the sounds of prayers as they leave the lips of their worshipers. This enables the vampire to monitor its followers, of course, hearing their supplications and desires no matter how faintly whispered. Face of the Gods members can also use it to hear messages from imprisoned followers, so long as the supplicant's message is part of a sincere prayer.

**System:** The vampire must relax, making a Stamina + Meditation roll (difficulty 6) to reach the appropriate state for reception. He may then hear prayers over a number of miles equal to the appropriate Soul Virtue. The Hun receives those prayers for positive or constructive results, while the P'o detects negative or destructive wishes.

This power only allows the vampire to listen to prayers, and only prayers specifically intended for them.

### • • PRAYER APPRAISAL

The Kuei-jin meets the target's gaze, and within her eyes sees her prayers and desires. This power forms the foundation of many Face of the Gods cults. Similar to Cultivation's Scrutinize and Obligation's Soul Bridge, this more limited art has no effect on anybody except those willingly offering prayers to the Kuei-jin. These prayers must be offered voluntarily, regularly and sincerely. This last part is very important. If the worshiper does not genuinely acknowledge the Kuei-jin as a supernatural being capable of exercising miraculous guidance over his life and worthy of deep respect, this power will not work. This limitation can be quite useful, allowing the Kuei-jin to monitor their inner congregations and weed out those not truly faithful.

This power works across the Wall, and many followers of the Face of the Gods traverse the Yin and Yang, staring into the eyes of their followers and reading their inner thoughts and prayers.

**System:** The character makes a Perception + Empathy roll, with a difficulty equal to the target's Willpower if they are not actively involved in devotions when read. If they are actively praying to the Kuei-jin when appraised, the spiritual vulnerability of prayer makes the target very easy

to read. In this case, the difficulty is the lower of two values; either 4 or the target's Willpower. Note that the prayers revealed are only those directed at the god himself, and may not reveal those wishes the supplicant hides because they seem trivial or he knows are immoral by the deity's standards. Sometimes, however, even those darkest secrets stand naked before the god.

**One Success** - The vampire knows if the target is sincerely praying and what general result they hope for, like "I want my grandmother to live."

**Two Successes** - As per One Success, but the Wan Kuei also knows why the target is praying, as in "I want my grandmother to live so I can get into her will."

**Three Successes** - As per the first two, but the vampire learns of the target's prayers over the last month, complete with the reasons for those prayers. The Kuei-jin also gains an understanding of the target equal to that of a Two-Successes Evaluate roll, learning the supplicant's true name, her Demeanor and some general personal history.

**Four Successes** - In addition to the catalog of recent prayers, the vampire determines the target's Willpower score, Nature, any Blood or Spirit Bonds, most of their personal history, their current thoughts and feelings, and any long-term plans. The Kuei-jin can tell if the target has ever lied to him, and what generally those lies entail.

**Five+ Successes** - The target's soul is an open book to the vampire. All his hopes, dreams, thoughts and memories are at the Wan Kuei's command, even those that have been edited or suppressed. The vampire learns the identity of anyone who has a Blood or Spirit Bond to the target, even if the target doesn't know they are bonded.

### • • • FULFILL PRAYER

Among Indian followers of the Dharma, there is a saying claiming there are two arts to becoming a god. One is making your worshipers truly believe and pray to you. The other is making those prayers as similar to your own goals as possible, so that when you grant your supplicant's entreaties, your own wishes are fulfilled.

Through this power, the vampire manipulates fortune so a prayer will likely come true. This is a minor miracle, and cannot raise the dead or manufacture fictional things. It is not so grand. It is simply a significant chance that, in matters relating to the prayer, the target will experience good fortune. This simple power will not cure a potent wasting disease like cancer or AIDS, but a worshiper might, for example, find his cancer or syndrome in remission for years, or perhaps, just until after his son's birthday, if his prayer was small. Obviously, the smaller the prayer, the likelier the tiny miracle can make it happen. Of course, many small miracles can add up to a great effect.

That said, the *akuma* using this power to help further his own agendas (like fulfilling a supplicant's desire for promotion, knowing he, in turn, can bring more cult members into the supplicant's organization), also benefits from good fortune. Pursuing a mutual goal concurrently helps both the god and mortal in this case.

While this power may seem miraculous, some skeptical mandarins have observed it is no more than a particularly intricate and powerful form of *joss*-manipulation, not some wholesale reshaping of reality. Prayers cannot be fulfilled by something appearing from nothing or through gross violation of reality's laws.

**System:** The vampire must spend a point of Chi and make a Perception + Crafts (Chi-shaping) roll with a difficulty equal to the local Wall rating. If the roll is successful, the target experiences extreme good fortune when pursuing the prayer's goals. The more successes, the closer this power fulfills the prayer to the letter. A prayer for more money, for example, might net the supplicant some finances with one or two successes, or the entire amount at three or four successes (obviously depending on the amount desired).

The effect lasts a number of days equal to the vampire's Dharma rating. If there's no way the god can concurrently pursue any relevant goals actively, then there's still a very good chance the worshiper will experience good fortune relating to the question. If the character goes into harm's way while trying to fulfill the prayer (or his own actions relating to the prayer), then both god and supplicant enjoy the benefits of good *joss*, as extended by the Tapestry power, Chi-Shaping. At the very least, the god becomes beneficiary of outlandish fortune, which treats all botches as simple failures and allows for rerolls of all 10s, as if an applicable specialty was involved. Obviously, this only applies so long as the worshiper is trying to fulfill the prayer as well (in other words, the worshiper can't sit around, waiting for the prayer to come true; he must seek answers/solutions for the good fortune to find him).

The prayer must be one issued to the vampire made within the past week. The Kuei-jin cannot grant prayers in a monkey's paw sort of way. Generally speaking, if your god gives you good fortune, then you genuinely receive good fortune. Of course, it could be good fortune at a misdeed, like murdering the target's wife, if the P'o grants it. Vampires cannot use this power on themselves or each other; it only works on individuals who sincerely believe in the vampire as a god and accept her as protector and spiritual lord.

### • • • • PRAYER-EATING

This is the power that so often makes the Face of the Gods seem twisted and vile in the eyes of outside Kuei-jin. When appearing before a congregation of worshipers who believe in and worship the vampire, the Kuei-jin can literally catch their prayers on its hands and eat them, refining them into Chi-like sustenance. The entreaties collect on the vampire's hands as a thick, honey-like substance, which it then consumes before the worshipers. Generally, Celestial Tribe members find the drinking of blood offered in sacrifice to be distasteful and the mark of low station. Most try mastering Prayer-Eating to this level as quickly as possible.

**System:** The vampire must officiate or otherwise take a central part in the ceremony dedicated in its own honor and attended solely by loyal worshipers. The presence of a single doubting heart will ruin the prayers and render the service useless for sustenance.

At the height of the liturgy, the player spends a point of the character's temporary Willpower and rolls Charisma + Performance (difficulty 7) to stage-manage the climax. Every success milks a point of honey-like Chi from the crowd, which the god must eat quickly before it evaporates (approximately ten minutes). In theory, the vampire could feed the Chi to someone else, but it is very clear what is happening when a vampire practices Prayer-Eating. If the congregation sees the Kuei-jin giving their Chi to another vampire, it would probably have a negative effect on their faith — their god is feeding their prayers to someone else!

Yang Chi comes from energetic or aggressive congregations, while negative or passive congregations weave Yin Chi. The average gathering provides roughly half of each type of Chi. By raising the difficulty of the Charisma roll when gathering Chi by one, however, the vampire may try gathering only one type. Under other circumstances, the cult may offer all Yin or all Yang Chi on their own; funerals, for example, generally give all Yin Chi, while weddings typically give all Yang. If the vampire's cult were to make an obscene display of self-mutilation and degradation, the vampire might gain Demon Chi. In this example's case, the Quincunx claims that powerful *akuma* master this Discipline and use it to regain their unholy power faster with the aid of demonic cults.

A vampire cannot gather more points of Chi than (worshippers present /10), and supplicants cannot be made to give thanks more than once a day. If it becomes relevant, assume a worship service of any sincerity lasts a minimum of an hour—it takes at least this long to draw the congregation into a suitable pitch for worship, and get them going.

### • • • • • UNBREAKABLE SOUL-BONDS

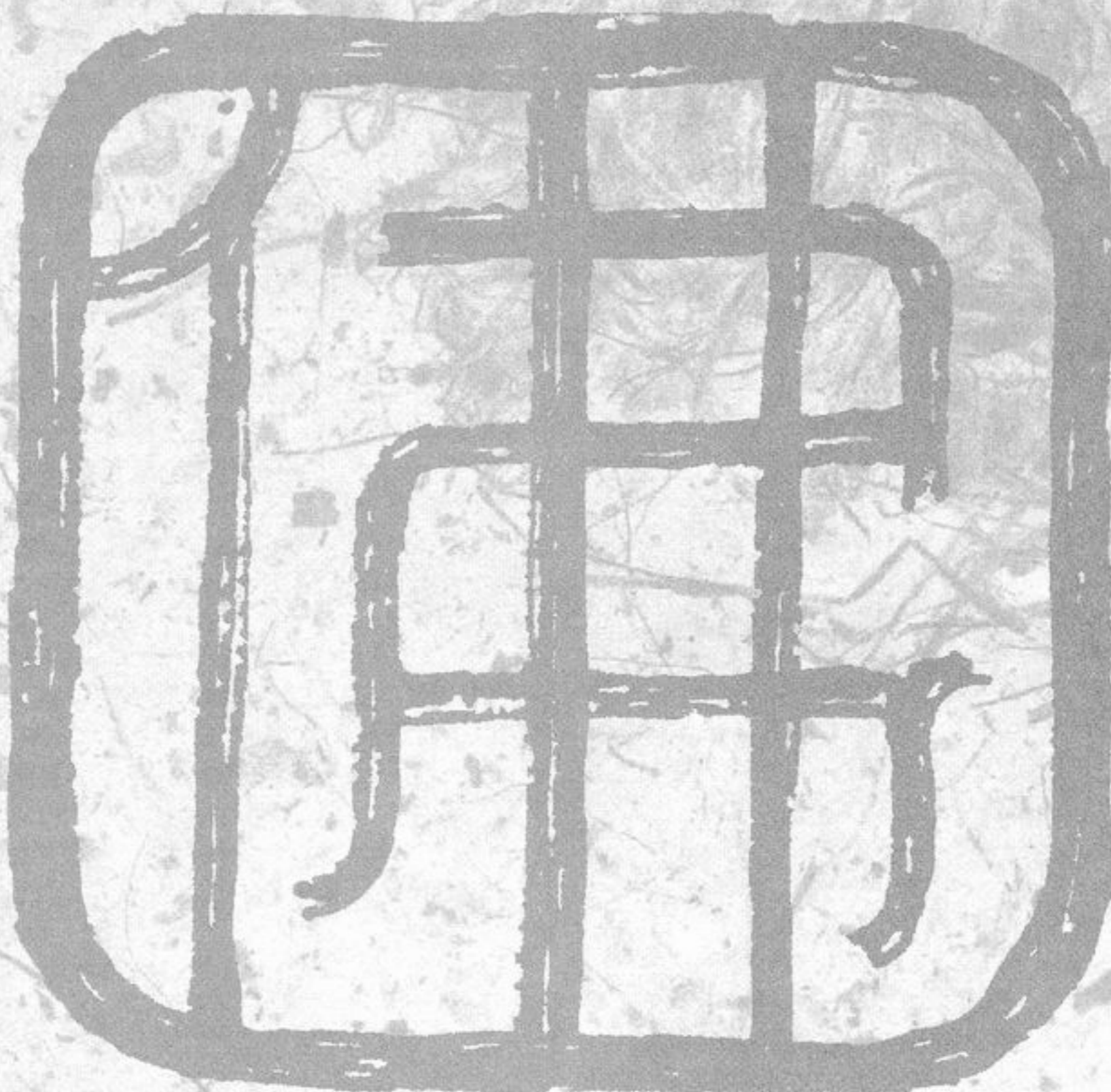
Through this, the vampire can forge a bond between a true worshiper and herself, allowing her to forever command that being's unflagging loyalty. No torture or drug can force the target to divulge the vampire's secrets; if necessary, she will bite off or swallow her own tongue to protect the Kuei-jin's secrets.

Likewise, she will never dim in the ardor of her worship, nor will she ever cease loving the Kuei-jin as her leader, protector and incarnate god.

**System:** The godling must use this power on someone who is a true, willing and indeed fanatical worshiper of the vampire, someone from whom the Kuei-jin fed at least 10 times through Prayer-Eating — blood and even breath will not do.

This is almost identical to the Soul Shackles power of the Obligation Discipline, save that it is easier and that the target must truly worship the vampire for the soul-bonds to take root. The vampire spends a Willpower point and rolls its Hun + P'o (difficulty 4). If the vampire rolls three or more successes, the target is bound permanently and completely to the vampire. The soul-bond is equivalent to the Spirit Bonds of Soul Shackles, including its ability to shatter existing blood bonds. The Spirit Bonds of Soul Shackle, however, cannot undo the unbreakable soul-bonds of the Prayer-Eating Discipline because the bond is enacted out of an already existing and pure devotion to the god.

There is no "partial" or "temporary" result to this power; it is an all or nothing effect. Successes do "accumulate" between attempts, however, so if the vampire does not immediately succeed, he may still roll again later, adding the prior successes to the new roll as additional dice. There is no limit on how long the vampire's mark remains on the victim's soul if the bond is not completed, but the target must willingly participate during each application of this power, not just the first.



## AVATAR OF THE STREETS

**Quote:** *I understand the poverty crushing your heart. Look at my feet... are they not as bare and black as yours? I alone understand your suffering... Am I not your God? Do I not share your pain?*

**Prelude:** Deep within the filthy and disease-riddled warrens of Calcutta and Bombay hide millions of the poor and destitute. This is your home, from the time you were born in a derelict and squatter-filled missionary, to your death at the hands of a local *goonda* who murdered you because it pleased him. You never asked for this bleak life, squatting next to exposed sewer lines, begging for enough change to eat something... anything. You avoided the youth gangs and eventually earned money stitching soccer balls. Certainly, you barely earned a few coins a day for such demeaning work, but it was an honest job.

Honesty didn't save your 12-year old neck from being snapped like a chicken bone, however. You plummeted to Yomi, angry... intensely furious, even. Life was nothing but a tragic lesson in bitter betrayal. It never afforded you a chance, a hope to change your lot and become something greater than street trash. Your body now lay in a dark alley, feeding a swarm of rats. You were *chih-mei* before even escaping Yomi, a diminutive beast who slaughtered the rats looting his body's meager flesh before killing the tenants of the alley's adjoining buildings for ignoring your death cries.

A Celestial Tribe guru found you and rescued you from *chih-mei*. He gave your anger a target, Heaven, and taught you how to best strike back at them. You learned from the guru, then left under cordial circumstances. Since then, you've become a saint of the streets, manifesting in back alley temples and squatter tenements. Your guru chastises you for not creating more austere surroundings where your worshipers may gather to properly administer to you, but you've done well as an urban messiah, appearing to the destitute as "one of them." They truly believe that within you is a god who understands their plight, a humble divinity who willingly exposes himself to their hardships. Little do they realize that you can't be anything but a product of your surroundings... a lost boy who knows no other world than this one.

**Concept:** Few gods or mortals understand the streets as you, but your comprehension comes after years of brutal hardship. These city's warrens are a home unlike any other, and you cannot envision dwelling anywhere else, regardless the comforts offered. This has given you a unique insight into the minds of the local poor and a place in their hearts for decades to come. Unfortunately, you fear

existing elsewhere, for elsewhere is unknown; you have no real desire to invade Heaven. This is your kingdom now.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You exist among the poor, a deity of the streets. You will protect the weak from the youth gangs and *goondas* who terrorized you for your 12 meager years on this Earth. You claim to safeguard the frail and honest when brutalizing various mortal predators, but the truth is, you're unleashing your pent-up rage and frustration at your own demise. Each person you kill always wears the face of the man who strangled you or the children who kicked and robbed you. They're all paying for slights they did not commit against you.

**Equipment:** Rags, a survival knife stolen off a *goonda's* corpse, a pouch with coins that you give to the truly needy.





**NAME:** Avatar of the Streets  
**PLAYER:**  
**CHRONICLE:**

**NATURE:** Survivor  
**P'O NATURE:** The Demon  
**DEMEANOR:** Judge

**BALANCE:** Yin  
**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 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Enigmas ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Investigation ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Linguistics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Medicine ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Occult ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Politics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Rituals ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
Science ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

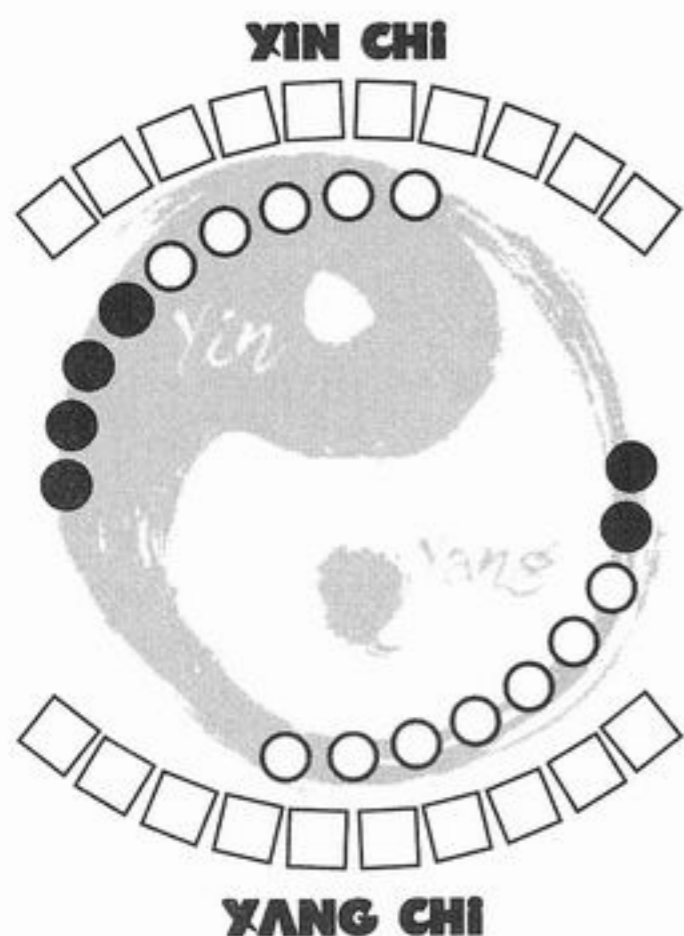
Chi'iu Muh ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Demon Shintai ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Prayer-Eating ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### BACKGROUNDS

Followers ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○  
Rites ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### rites

Behold the Spirit's Dookway  
Harmonious Shielding of the  
Guarded Home  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**DHARMA** The Face of the Gods/1

### HUN

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### WILLPOWER

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

### P'O

● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## GODDESS OF THE SERVER ROOM

**Quote:** *As one rises through network layers, the same process is being performed, but at increasingly high levels of sophistication. This is similar to spiritual development—you will rise through the hierarchy of being, but that will not render you immune to natural functions.*

**Prelude:** You were a bright, young girl, the promising child of the local village sent to the regional school with everyone's best wishes. By the time you finished with regional secondary school and American baccalaureate and masters' programs, you were completely alienated from your home. You were a bisexual, Americanized information technology professional, and you were going to teach your country to eat E, rave on and make custom scripts for purchase traffic analysis.

You lived a fancy American lifestyle in New Delhi. Your girlfriend skated to work on roller blades, and you both listened to the latest Pakistani dance music and American pop. You had DSL and a laptop while beggars starved on the sidewalk. The people of your village were so desperate they turned their cows loose to fend for themselves in the drought. You walked past the newsstand at the airport and pretended like you didn't see the disturbing headlines. That's where you came from, but not what you were. Nobody had to know you were born from that.

You were visiting the Kashmiri Parliament when you died in a terrorist suicide attack. You fell into a lonely, empty Hell, there to reflect on the errors of your lonely, empty life. When you finally escaped and returned as a hungry ghost, it was a relief from the silence that made your ears bleed and smothered your eyes.

The Celestial Tribe teacher who grabbed you did it during a running gun battle with several Thrashing Dragons — lucky you'd scuttled after a different victim, or you'd have been a slave of Heaven. After the poignant reminder from Hell about the importance of family and culture, you're willing to explore the Hindi side of your life more. You're slowly gathering your own cult now, recruiting mostly from your old IT contacts (many of whom are currently underemployed and prime recruiting material). When the next economic upswing comes, you'll have your people in position.

**Concept:** You exist on the cusp of trendy, and dream of things your peers probably couldn't even fathom. Fear Factory, Ibiza Raves, Crystal Meth, the White Party... all trappings of a society you're desperate to enjoy. Unfortunately, that's what sent you to Hell in the first place, so, you're trying to connect with your heritage... give your existence some purpose. Of course, it's still hard to escape the neon and latex lure of the West when you're building a temple using techno-savvy phreaks like yourself.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Your loving parents brought you up well, but you lost that somewhere along the way... probably after deciding you wanted to be Westerner in a way most Westerners would frown upon. You're improving, but you're still a fallen god, and your negative voice is very strong now. It tells you this all sucks compared to smoking a bong while listening to Juno Reactor. Unfortunately, your religion says you must heed this voice, but the stings of Hell are still too fresh. You're at a turning point.

**Equipment:** Work clothes (girl-suits) and play clothes (raver gear), Mitsubishi sedan, bomb laptop, cell-phones, PDA, cell modem.





**NAME:** Goddess of the Server Room  
**PLAYER:**  
**CHRONICLE:**

**NATURE:** Rebel  
**P'O NATURE:** The Monkey  
**DEMEANOR:** Visionary

**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 ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Meditation ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Melee ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Stealth ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Survival ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### KNOWLEDGES

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

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Chi'in Muh ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Prayer-Eating ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### BACKGROUNDS

Followers ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Resources ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
Rites ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○  
○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### MITES

Behold the Spirit's Dookway  
Harmonious Shielding of the  
Guarded Home  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**DHARMA** The Face of the Gods/1

### HUN

● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

### WILLPOWER

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

### P'O

● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○



□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## FORMER COURT SCHOLAR

**Quote:** *Let's be reasonable here. I haven't tried converting anyone and I'm not akuma. Just let me go... you'll never see me again.*

**Prelude:** You were a good scholar, a student of socialist literature, an expert on Chairman Mao's maxims and among the vanguard of historical revisionists trying to reveal the truly heroic role of the Red Guard in the Cultural Revolution. It was a lonely life, and you were harsh and abusive to the world around you. You climbed over people to reach where you wanted to go and you discarded relationships when they became inconvenient. You were an uncompromising ideologue who believed that chosen path blessed you with the same immortality afforded to your heroes of the revolution. You died choking to death. A woman you'd been seeing was there when it happened, but she watched you die with the same indifference you visited on people before. You passed into the great darkness, realizing what a meaningless display this had all been.

Then came hell, which was just as meaningless and far more important to escape from than life. With a little ingenuity, you fought and struggled free from one of the countless hells of grinding machines and boiling steam, and returned to the world of the living. Thousand Whisper *chih-mei* trainers caught you and later brought you into the Resplendent Crane Dharma, which suited your ideological tenacity and prudish temperament well.

You shouldn't have been looking at those books, you admit. Your Dharma made you the assistant custodian of the Court's library so you could clean and preserve the texts, not so you could study them. Your sin? Reading *The Celestial Nail* and realizing it was true. Naturally they caught you, but you escaped. You're on the run now, staying one step ahead of those hunters the Quincunx put on your trail. Thankfully, you're small fish, so it's not likely they sent anyone too serious to deal with you.

**Concept:** You lost everything in life that once guided you, right down to your principles, but some intrinsic habits remain. You like assuming positions of power, so *The Celestial Nail* appeals to your inflated sense of self, especially since the Courts had you pursuing trivial work.

Unfortunately, before you can gather a cult, you must escape from the Quincunx's long arm, and that means survival takes precedence over every other concern.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You're a smart guy on the run, and you play that for all it's worth. Underneath, you're still the party climber that just won't quit, and immersion in Quincunx society hasn't changed that. You don't have a cult yet, but you're making plans.

**Equipment:** Library budget, 12 texts that seemed good when you grabbed them at random, and a Chinese-made Makarov knock-off.





**NAME:** Former Court Scholar  
**PLAYER:**  
**CHRONICLE:**

**NATURE:** Martyr  
**P'O NATURE:** The Slave  
**DEMEANOR:** Rebel

**BALANCE:** Balanced  
**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 ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Meditation ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Melee ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stealth ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Survival ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### KNOWLEDGES

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

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Blood Shintai ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Demon Shintai ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Prayer-Eating ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### BACKGROUNDS

Contacts ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Resources ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Rites ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### MITES

Behold the Spirit's Dookway  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### YIN CHI



### YANG CHI

**DHARMA** The Face of the Gods/1

### HUN

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### WILLPOWER

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

### P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## FACES OF THE GODS

### THE USURPER RADHA

Radha, known to many within the Celestial Tribe simply as The Usurper, is among the few *akuma* to steal a real goddess' name. The Celestial Tribe, however, has had little luck in dealing with her lack of propriety, especially since it means contending with her already enormous cult and proclaiming to mortals that someone within their pantheon is fallible. Instead, they leave the Usurper to her domains in Vrindavan... The City of Widows.

Radha, once known as Sadina, faithfully committed *sati* after her husband's death by drowning herself in the local river. After she took her Second Breath, however, she adopted the persona of Radha, firmly believing herself to be one of Lakshmi's incarnations (wife of Krishna). She journeyed to Krishna's birthplace in Vrindavan, slowly



gathering a cult of destitute women who had moved there to beg Krishna for protection.

When the government later abolished *sati*, many widows were forced into exile by their own families for outliving their husbands and not taking their own lives. These outcasts came to Vrindavan by the thousands to live out meager lives before they died. Radha opened her cult to many of these cast-off women, creating one of the largest cults in India.

Unfortunately, this also drew Radha into conflict with the Cainite Ratti-Ben, who also made her home in Vrindavan. Both women now regard each other as a bitter rival, and their battles often claim dozens of mortal widows in a night. Local Cainites and Kuei-jin have left the area alone, if only to avoid the two women who move like hurricanes.

Physically, Radha is a beautiful Indian woman, almost painfully so, who acts and moves with incredible sensuality. She is naked when she appears and only

manifests in the local river (since Krishna first saw Radha bathing naked). She uses Prayer-Eating like many of her kind and fulfils minor wishes as well. She occasionally drowns willing worshipers while they pray, however, deriving even greater sustenance and the ability to fulfill someone's last wishes.

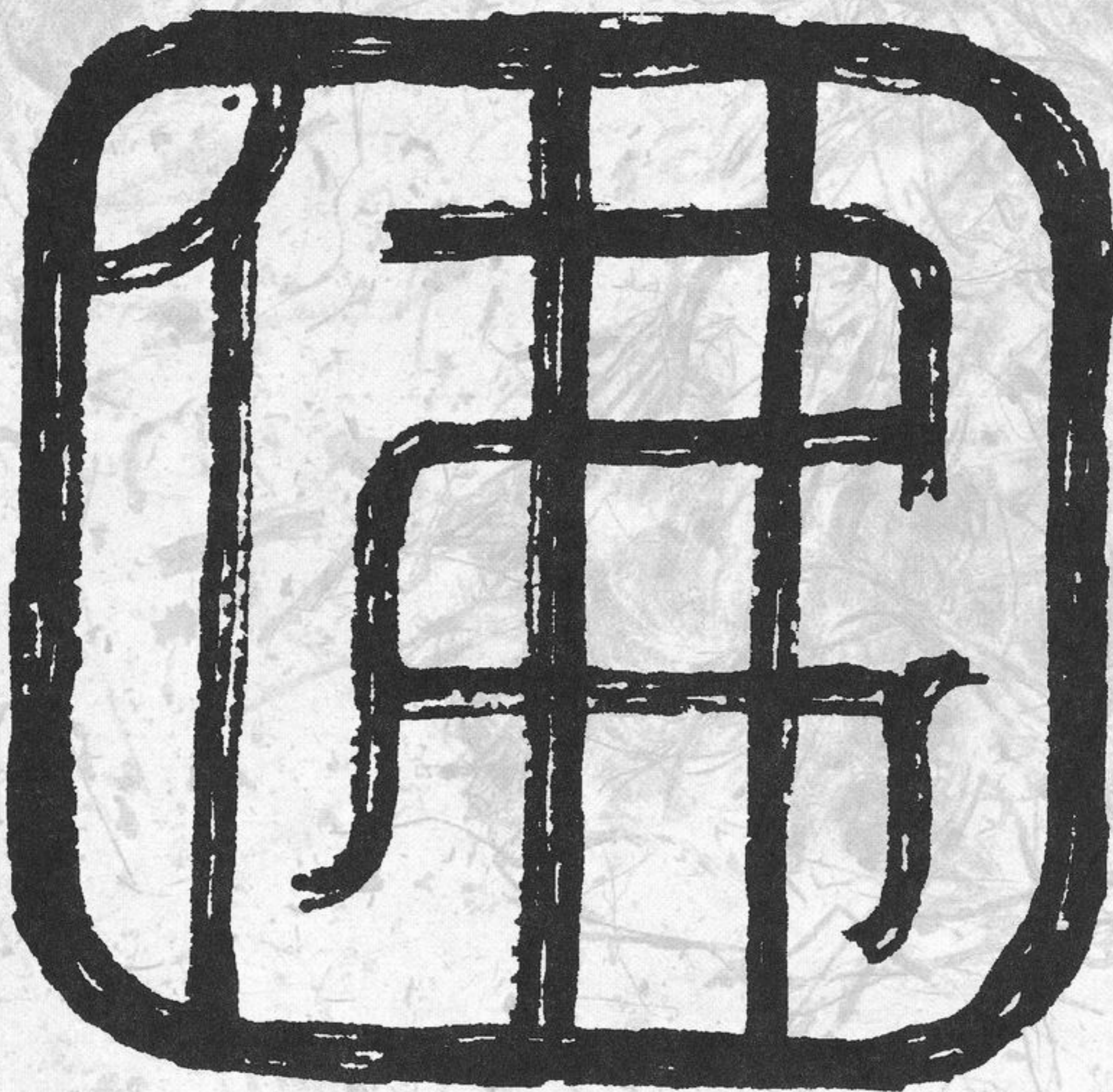
### HANUMAN

God and commander-in-chief of the monkey warriors (according to mythology), this Kuei-jin Hanuman is an enigma. Some say he's like the Usurper, brazenly assuming godhood at someone else's expense. Others within the Celestial Tribe, however, believe he's the source of the original legend, and may even have been whispering in Shiva-Ohm's ears when he penned *The Practice of Divinity*.

Hanuman, however, isn't saying.

Hanuman looks like a monkey with yellow fur, a red face and a long blazing tail. There are even rumors he isn't human, but in fact a monkey who took the Second Breath. While unlikely, the fact remains he appears more simian than mortal, and more divine than simian. He looks like a monkey king, with beautiful robes and a crown. He's also a poet, and well-read and well-versed in the ancient sciences. Many seek his advice, but few can penetrate his jungle stronghold to find him. Still, rumors of his cults persist, with some mortal worshipers claiming he holds court in an abandoned temple overgrown by vines and jungle canopy. The Celestial Tribe has had little luck, however, finding this lost shrine.







# CHAPTER FOUR: THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING EARTH

## PRELUDE

Pimiko stood at the river's edge, watching the dark, swirling waters. She'd been standing there for hours... observing, learning. The bridge above her head groaned and stretched into the darkness, carrying speeding cars across to destinations Pimiko wished she could visit. This was among the few roads leaving the city on this side, so it remained under the close supervision of a Quincunx Scarlet Screen. A street gang reporting to the Devil-Tigers, controlled the paved "turf" above, taking a cut on any black market traffic using the bridge; they even collected "protection money" when business was bad from travelers stupid or unlucky enough to slow down. The bridge would hardly do if Pimiko needed to slip away unnoticed.

"It would be the water then," she nodded to herself, but swimming the river was not an enticing prospect. The water was cold, but that no longer concerned her. In fact, a cold burst intense enough to shock her, to draw in her breath in mortal reflex, would be a welcome surprise. Spiritual cold was abundant in a vampire's existence, but a real physical chill would be exquisite, almost like being alive again. Almost.

Pimiko shoved the thought back deep into her brain. Pining and craving for things long past would only make the inevitable all the harder—spirits did not care for monsters who moped. Time was running out. Pimiko might need her escape route any night now, and this was a vital part of it.

While mortals watched the bridge, they did not guard the river itself. If Pimiko swam here, the bridge would help hide her from anyone looking out over the water. If only it were as

simple as it sounded. The current was fast here, and the concrete pilings supporting the bridge generated a vicious undertow, one easily strong enough to pull a swimmer under. She was stronger than before, and untiring, but Pimiko didn't want to contemplate what would happen if she were stuck here, mired in the muddy river bottom forever.

As the moon dipped in the sky, Pimiko finished her preparations. When it finally disappeared below the horizon, she flung out a length of white silk into the water and chanted the syllables of welcome. Her voice echoed and distorted with a metallic pang under the bridge's belly, and for a moment, Pimiko panicked—what if the echoes warped her call? She had not taken that into account. Despite her fears, however, the *kami* came.

Its body whirled up out of the water, twisting her silk offering into a robe. Its head took form from foamy sludge; its eyes were smooth brown stones and its teeth polished bits of glass. Pimiko bowed low, then clapped her hands twice. The *kami* evaluated her with its flat stare, then spoke with the gurgling voice of a drowning man. "What do you want?"

Pimiko stepped up to the water's edge, letting the ripples lap at her toes. "*Suijin-sama*, I seek safe passage through your domain."

"Why should I grant such a request?"

"I will perform a rite of offering for you," Pimiko replied. "Just name what you desire."

The *kami* spat a stream of foul water on the ground beside her. "I lack for nothing here." It gestured, and a small, swollen body surfaced, performing a torpid bobbing dance around the spirit's cloth feet. "I have delightful things like this child, which I found for myself. Can you give me anything as grand as this?"

Pimiko studied the tiny corpse, brushing away a twinge of remorse. "If that is what you require, *suijin-sama*, then that is what you shall have. Do you wish the child dead or alive?"

The kami twisted and dipped while considering its options. "No, that is not what I want. They come to reclaim these baubles back, in time, and they annoy me greatly with their boats and poles and nets. You may bring me fish, instead. Fish from the sea. And I like those that have eaten the silvery metal the best. Prepare it for me here, where I can see, and you will have your token."

Pimiko bowed and clapped once more. The silk fell to the water's surface with a slap, then floated away, downstream. She gathered her things, smiling — the kami's test was a simple one. It wished to see how she would carve up the fish while remaining pure enough to successfully make the offering. The easiest way would be having someone else up to his elbows in fish guts, but, who could be trusted? There was no time to find a reliable, close-mouthed assistant.

\* \* \*

The fish markets opened well before dawn. It wasn't hard finding contaminated fish, using a ward against poison as her guide. They were tainted enough to sicken a man and eventually drive him mad, but they were still stacked in the market, for those too poor to afford better. They were doused with enough soy to hide the foul taste, and served to families without a future to forfeit. Pimiko stole the fish. It made her feel a bit better.

Pimiko prepared as early as possible the next night, after tossing and turning all day while mentally familiarizing herself with, and practicing, the rite. Pimiko selected her oldest *shimenawa*, colored rope, to mark the boundaries of her ritual space — not to impress the kami with its age, but because its color had dulled with use from straw yellow to a quiet tan; it would be less noticeable. She purified the ritual ground with salt, then played the *tingsha* cymbals over bowls of rice and sake sitting at the four corners. The thin, chiming sound would lure any hungry ghosts to the proffered food, so they would leave the ceremony undisturbed. The last preparatory task was to light the fire. Pimiko always hated this part... the feeling of the warming wood between her flying hands, the creeping smell of smoke, the first few sparks of flame that were always a surprise....

It would be quicker if her P'o took care of this task, but this kami was unfamiliar to her; she didn't know how it would react to her Demon's smeared fingerprints on her aura.

Eventually, though, the fire caught, and she was ready.

Pimiko summoned the kami as she had done the night before. Tonight, however, she threw a heavy silk brocade onto the water. The spirit swirled into manifestation, looking splendid in its gold-print robe. Its foam face scowled when it saw the sacred fire, spattering it with scornful droplets that hissed. "What is this for? I do not want my meal touched by *this*."

Pimiko knelt beside the linen cloth on which the fish lay. "Do not worry, *suijin-sama*. The flames will not touch your fish."

Taking a long, sharp knife, she worked. The blade flashed and the water spirit bobbed, both reflecting the garish lights of the city skyline. Within five minutes, the fish was cleaned and cut. She presented the fillets on a porcelain platter while she set the guts, carefully garnished with fish heads, in a bronze bowl. Only the tail and spines were left. Pimiko cleaned the blood and scales from her hands with salt water and the linen, removing the physical impurities. She placed the linen and fish bones in the fire. Then, she took up a small wooden doll carved in her likeness, and rubbed it over her body to draw away death's invisible taint. The doll went into the flames as well. While the sacred fire smoked and guttered, Pimiko meditated

to deflect the kami's rising impatience and her own fears of the fire drawing attention to the rite.

When the fires reduced the refuse to ash, a pure and calm Pimiko began her rite of offering and request. When the last, thin syllables floated across the water and the saki splashed quietly in the cup, the kami descended on the meal in a rush of black water. When it withdrew, fish and cup remained, but were wet and subtly changed. It all glistened, as though misted with oil. In the bowl of entrails, the spirit had left a chunk of concrete larger than Pimiko's hand. She fished it out with some reluctance. She had hoped to keep the talisman in the small charm bag around her neck, but the kami's sense of humor dictated otherwise. The rite had proceeded as planned; the talisman should work, but there was no way to find out but try. That, however, would have to wait for another night... there was still work to be done here.

The kami floated away downstream, somehow managing to leer with its flat pebble eyes. "Enjoy the fish, vampire. I am done with it."

Pimiko sighed. To complete the ritual, she had to eat and drink the offering sanctified by the kami. Spirits that dealt with the undead rarely wanted sweet buns or decent sushi; no... they wanted heavy-metal tainted fish offal. She ate as quickly as she could. Day was coming, and it was easier not to taste that way. As so often before, success tasted awful.

## HISTORY

In the distant past at the end of the Fourth Age, the great Immortals received their curse and became the revolting creatures you see before you today. The most ancient stories tell us that the foulest and most black-hearted among them, those who abused their power and brought down the wrath of the August Personage of Jade, had no moral capacity or psychic framework from which to receive support in their time of crisis. While the Wan Xian who possessed codes of morality to fall back on survived the Great Curse without become insane, ravening monsters, the worst of the lot could not maintain their poise. They became beasts — *The Book of Sovereign Virtue* calls them the Great Devourers.

One of these creatures, whose Immortal name remains lost to antiquity, fell upon a host of kami — nature spirits — in a glade on the island of Honshu. Although this immortal's thirst for Chi was beyond measure, he barely sensed the spirits' presence; he could not feed on their energies, nor do anything more than howl incoherently in hatred and starvation. He was terrible to behold, but his great power meant nothing to kami made of breath and wisps of smoke. At the end of his first night in the glade — which we now call Name — the spirits pitied and guided him to a mountain cave, hiding him from the sun's scorching rays. This Immortal, who eventually named himself Riyan as one of the Wan Kuei, remained in that glade for nights, slowly fading from lack of precious Chi.

The kami sheltering Riyan, however, guided him too. The spirits agreed among themselves on a set of rules for Riyan to follow. At first, these rules were simple: the vampire could not enter certain parts of the glade, nor make sound during

certain hours. The kami punished Riyan for violating these rules much as a mortal might train a dog. Although Riyan was no more than an animal at this time, it took a mere seven nights for him to learn the simple rules that the spirits demanded. Still Riyan grew weak from hunger, but before he expired from starvation, a mischievous fox-spirit led a mortal child to the glade; Riyan feasted upon him.

Over the next months, the spirits of Name bludgeoned Riyan with their rules. This was not easy; the kami are more fractious than any mortal family, and they often enforce contradictory and seemingly incomprehensible rules. Surprisingly, though, Riyan was a cunning monster and quick student who eventually regained a semblance of rationality. Ever conscious of his actions, he still paid obsequy to the spirits in the way they taught him. In the first place, he had little choice; they had ground their harsh lessons into his very soul, and he could no more ignore their requirements than he could take a noonday walk. More than that, however, it was only through the spirits' teachings that he had regained his higher self: Riyan owed them a debt of honor. His P'o nature did not entirely agree, but it was largely powerless against the kami.

## RIYAN'S JOURNEY

In time, Riyan left the Name to see the world at large. The kami he left behind were jealous, of course, and refused to aid him in his encounters with the Middle Kingdoms' spirits of Yin and Yang. Some kami, in fact, made a special point of sending messages on the wind, telling other spirits that Riyan was a foul monster, come to feed on their Chi and despoil their homes. Upon leaving Honshu, Riyan discovered he had to pay homage to nearly every spirit he encountered, lest his unlife be in danger. Thankfully, Riyan encountered few spirits since most gave him wide berth – the August Personage of Jade's curse was well known among the ephemeral courts.

Riyan met several beings of importance during his journeys. Remember that in those days, the border between the living lands and the spirit worlds – both Yin and Yang – was far thinner or even absent in some places. Kami, demons, and ghosts all walked the Middle Kingdom.

One evening, Riyan encountered a lone demon on a dark road. Although Riyan knew stories of the countless Hells, he had never before met one of the Yama Kings' servants. The demon, reputedly a cackling, red-faced pawn of Yomi, taunted Riyan with prophecy. It told him that just as the sun and spirits chased and harassed him now, the other Wan Kuei would eternally harry his students and spiritual descendants.

Now, Riyan had never planned to take students under his wing; he believed himself the fortunate survivor of a great calamity who was doubly cursed, once by the August Personage of Jade and once by spiteful kami. He was no teacher, but the demon's taunts planted a seed in Riyan's

mind while he considered what knowledge he possessed that might prove valuable to other Wan Kuei. The demon was long gone when Riyan awoke the next evening, so unable to interrogate the creature, he continued wandering.

Periodically, Riyan encountered villages full of mortals. Naturally, when he did he fed on their blood as any vampire would, terrorizing and killing the mortals beneath the demands of his hunger and P'o. I include this comment so reader may never forget that Riyan was a monster, like all of us.

The stories say that at this point, Riyan left the great peninsula he'd been traveling across and entered the mainland proper. If his glade was really on Honshu, that would suggest he was traveling from Korea to Manchuria, but remember... this all took place thousands of years ago, before the world had assumed its familiar shape. It is not easy ascertaining exact locations.

As Riyan continued north, he encountered a group of five monsters. They were not quite demons, but appeared to be vampires like himself. They spoke of Dharma, however, of the Five August Courts and bodhisattvas. Riyan could barely understand these monsters' tongue, but their terms were even less familiar to him. The group, whose name is lost to us, spoke of belonging to the Court of the Black Tortoise. Again, it was another nonsensical term to Riyan, so the group at last accused him of being *akuma*. Riyan understood this term, however, having heard it from the demon a few nights earlier. He took offense, but sensing these five strangers were simply looking for a fight, Riyan fled into the wilds.

Riyan remained in the wilderness as much as possible from then on; he could scarcely afford another encounter with the doctrinaire Wan Kuei of the Five August Courts. He learned while traveling that kami were generally less hostile the further he ventured from his former home on Honshu, since few of them heard the rumors concerning his wickedness.

## REVELATION

A year into his self-imposed exile, Riyan had a fateful encounter with an ancient spirit called the Leech Child. The Leech Child, forever in the guise of an oversized mortal infant, appeared to Riyan in a dream while he slept in a cave. The Leech Child – who has many names – was an ancient spirit. It claimed to be the first product of sexual union between man and woman.

Riyan performed his usual routine of submission and deference to this strange spirit, but upon engaging in his rituals, the Leech Child twisted and changed in response. Riyan realized what was happening, but nonetheless, asked the Leech Child why it reacted as it did. The Leech Child bore many secrets, it explained, but, like all spirits, it was subject to laws that mortals and vampires did not have to obey. Riyan's rites of obeisance created a compulsion within the spirit, forcing it to treat him as an equal.

The Leech Child further explained that nearly all of Riyan's rituals of submission and appeasement evoked a response from within the spirit for whom he had performed them. Rites and rituals, it told him, were a two-way street. Once properly invoked and appeased, spirits found themselves drawn to a particular course of action, whether they wished to undertake that task or not. This was a great revelation for Riyan, who had assumed he was entirely at the mercy of the spirit world.

Thinking quickly, Riyan asked the Leech Child whether his earlier ritual had entreated it to answer his questions. The spirit reluctantly answered "yes." Riyan immediately interrogated the Leech Child about the proper incantations and rituals necessary to extract information and services from spirits. There wasn't enough time left in his dream to learn everything the Leech Child knew about commanding other spirits, but Riyan learned enough. He knew the power rites, the basic principles controlling the spirit world.

When he awoke that night, there was no sign of the Leech Child. Riyan returned to Honshu at once, finding an appropriate Dragon Line within a few nights and riding it to the distant island. There, Riyan performed his usual rituals of humility and appeasement, but turned those rites against the spirits that taught and tormented him for so long. Riyan could not make himself master of the glade's kami — they had too great an insight into his reforged soul — but no longer was he subject to their whims.

Finally home, and with great understanding of the spirits' true nature, Riyan longed for companionship, spending years looking for those he could exist with equally. He searched among his own kind, those cursed by the August Personage of Jade. The Five August Courts and their agents, however, treated him as a heretic and *akuma*; nobody extended him a welcoming embrace. Riyan entered the Yin and Yang worlds, but only found sterile ghosts and wild kami. Still, no companions.

Finally, Riyan entered Yomi Wan. He found the Yama Kings his equals — or at least capable of treating him as an equal — but they wanted pieces of his soul in return for his companionship. Reflecting upon his P'o, Riyan declared the Yama Kings had enough of his soul already. He fled the Ten Thousand Hells just ahead of scores of demonic pursuers.

Riyan finally decided he would have to harvest new *chih-mei* and teach them the way of the Cerulean Veil. With his contacts in the spirit world watching out for those who clawed their way back from Hell, Riyan took several students, the first being Liao Hong. Riyan taught them of his Dharma and the ways of the spirit world. Due to the Five August Courts' suspicion and persecution of his "heretical ways," Riyan remained forever on the move, traveling from one Court to another and teaching students from all lands. After continued confrontations with those following Xue's paths, Riyan told his students that, in coming decades when they took apprentices

of their own, they must never establish wu and territories the way other Kuei-jin have. They must, instead, gather together briefly for a period of weeks, passing wisdom from teacher to students before spreading out again and remaining hidden from undead authorities.

This became the way of things, then, through the Fifth Age. Our numbers swelled over time, until the rise of the Manchus in China, when the traditional ways feeding our population became suppressed; not long after that, however, the Japanese Emperor established Shinto as his nation's state religion. Shinto was not a proper reflection of our beliefs — and, as artificial as it is, it is surely not a proper reflection of the world's true state. The formalization of Shinto, however, crystallized the spiritual beliefs of many Japanese, and many of those who fought their way back from Hell found that the Spirit of the Living Earth provided the closest analog to their mortal beliefs; they discovered our Dharma to be relatively easy to grasp.

### RIYAN'S SWAN SONG

On the cusp of the 20th century, Riyan gathered together his eldest and most enlightened followers, including both Liao Hong and Otbeg Altan (despite Altan's relative youth). Riyan finally walked away from his soul-children, the followers of the Spirit of the Living Earth. He left no closing words, no final lesson; he seemed satisfied that others within his Dharma had achieved true enlightenment as bodhisattvas and, one morning, simply vanished.

It is here that my own tale ends. Since Riyan left us, I have become certain that the Sixth Age is upon us; I have withdrawn from both mortal and immortal affairs. I treat with the spirits of the living earth, those few who have yet to feel Hell's touch or man's poison, and consume the world's living Chi. I'm slowly seeing the true history, nature and boundaries of this realm, and hope soon to join Riyan in a world beyond this one.

— Hayashi no Toriko, January 11, 1904

### INTO THE 20TH CENTURY

*I am a creature of the 20th century, something of a modernist among my fellow Cerulean Veils. My name is Michael Leung, and I clawed my way out of Hell into Hong Kong on January 1, 1900. You don't need to know how I ended up there in the first place, nor how I got out. The first Kuei-jin who encountered me followed the Spirit of the Living Earth; he saved me from the madness of chih-mei.*

*In the following years, I watched the Sixth Age draw closer upon us. To be honest, many of my peers and I believed the Sixth Age had begun at the end of the Second World War. The decade or so leading up to that conflict was particularly turbulent, with countries across the world changing. Ten years of upheaval, destruction, death and war culminated in the most terrible weapon mortals have yet unleashed on one another. When I met Tanaka Hiroshi's student, Gonshiro, who had*

visited Hiroshima a few days after the bombing, I honestly expected him to say he'd seen the Demon Emperor sitting on a throne of skulls at Ground Zero, chuckling maliciously.

Forgive me, but I'm leaping ahead of myself. I'll try and trace my steps back to the start. I'm a traveler; in my mortal life I was a merchant ship's captain, and as a result, am familiar with the waters from Vladivostok to Vietnam. After my death, I poked around among the Spirit of the Living Earth community, learning where the centers of our activity lay. This information has all changed, roughly since the fall of the Soviet Union — I don't guarantee any of it holds anymore. Besides, I'm inventing names for all involved parties; the thought of just one Quincunx inquisitor getting a hand on this document is just too frightening to consider.

We don't gather in *wa* like the Kuei-jin of the Quincunx do. There aren't enough of us. Most of the time, we associate in groups of two: a teacher and a student. Sometimes the groups are slightly larger; a wise disciple of the Spirits might attract two or three Running Monkeys to learn from him. A *sifu*'s students often remain close by, if not in the same city, perhaps along a nearby Dragon Line, or within a short commute.

## OUR NUMBERS

At the turn of the century, as far as I know, only five of these semi-communities existed in eastern Asia. There was one in northeast China that drew wisdom from Liao Hong in Harbin and another in Sapporo revolving around Tanaka Hiroko. The third focused on the lessons of a former Mongolian shaman named Otbeg Altan, in Niyelel Huree (now Ulaanbaator); the fourth was Vietnamese, mostly, and exchanged rituals and spirit knowledge through Lan Truong — who claimed she wasn't the group's teacher, just someone who shared her knowledge with them. The last group was in Siberia, learning at the feet of a vampire calling itself Anzhel.

These five communities rarely cooperated or shared a common purpose. Most of them revolved as much around the teacher's ego as they did his wisdom, and they were all as territorial as you might expect from any group of vampires. I have to wonder if we would have been larger or better equipped to deal with the Quincunx and other *shen* had those circles cooperated.

Regardless, around the start of the 20th century, the intertwined histories of Mongolia, China and Japan became awfully confusing to someone who didn't exist through them. China was weak at the Qing Dynasty's end, and Manchuria, in particular, was a prize fought for by Japan and Russia rather than being a point for China to defend. Liao Hong and her students resided in this contested region, and remember these dangerous times well. The Quincunx's mongrels traveled in large packs throughout the night, rooting out so-called traitors and heretics like the Spirits.

The Boxer Rebellion took place at the waning cusp of the previous century. A group of rather admirable social conservatives tramped throughout China, destroying the political, mercantile, and religious holdings of foreigners. Although the Qing declared war on the Boxers, the Imperial throne was simply too weak to eliminate them, allowing the



rebels to seize northern China. The Boxer Rebellion left the Quincunx split, since many Kuei-jin maintained significant influence in Emperor Guangxu's court. Unfortunately, the fractious heretical Dharmas were too disorganized to take advantage of the chaos.

In 1905, Japan annexed much of Manchuria, facilitating contact and the exchange of ideas between Hong's students and those of the Shintoist Tanaka Hiroko. The two groups initiated a rapprochement of sorts and, in the spring of 1906, held a quiet memorial service in Riyan's memory.

In 1911, the tottering government of the Manchus — the Qing Dynasty — finally crumbled. The Nationalists under Sun Yat-Sen replaced the fallen dynasty and founded a republic, centered in Nanjing. Beset by power-politicking and corruption from the start, the Nationalists lost the Mandate of Heaven in only a few decades. Liao Hong and her students had also made a political gamble here and lost. They threw what little political influence they possessed behind the Nationalists in Nanjing, believing too eagerly that an overall change in government could only benefit the Spirit of the Living Earth.

That political backing brought Hong's group into conflict with Otbeg Altan's Mongolian Kuei-jin. While both sets of students followed the dictates laid down by Riyan and paid obeisance to the kami, Altan's group invested much of its power and resources into helping Mongolia secede from China around the same time that Sun Yat-Sen and his party seized power. Mongolia only marginally succeeded — while Outer Mongolia became autonomous, it was over a decade later, with Soviet assistance, that it became truly independent from China. Liao Hong and Altan Otbeg exchanged harsh words in the revolt's aftermath, leaving a chilly silence between the two groups in the decades since.

It was 1924 when Outer Mongolia declared itself the People's Republic of Mongolia with the Soviet Union's backing. Altan's group welcomed the independence. He hoped for a return to the halcyon days of old, where Mongolian warlords controlled the vast steppe and the Kuei-jin rode openly among them. What they earned, to their sorrow, was a mechanized and soulless "revolutionary" Communist government, which eventually destroyed the feudal warlords' holdings, suppressed religious communities and even closed Buddhist monasteries. Otbeg and his people went underground, hiding from Party and Soviet secret police as assiduously as they did from the Quincunx.

## PARTING THE RIVERS

Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931, ostensibly because it feared the USSR or Chinese government would cut its trading rights with China if it did not. The League of Nations ousted Japan as a result of the incident, but new military and civilian traffic between Japan and the mainland gave the Dharma more cover to move back and forth among them. This had some positive effects; students of Altan, Hong and Tanaka exchanged their views, rites and oral histories. Unfortunately, it also led to further closed-minded exchanges and some rather sophomoric cases of otherwise enlightened Kuei-jin setting

kami upon one another (each in the hopes of harming the other's ties to the spirit world). These disciples did not see one another's rites as evidence of the spirit world's glorious diversity, but rather, saw those rites through xenophobic eyes, calling any ritual that varied from their own tradition heresy. To this day there is bad blood between many of Altan's, Hong's, and Tanaka's students.

Civil war between the Nationalists and Communists in the 1930s led to many deaths, followed by a full-blown Japanese invasion in 1937. Then of course, there was WWII, which as you undoubtedly know resulted in more deaths, including the destruction of many Kuei-jin. During these conflicts, plenty of honorable men died, as did an equal number of bastards; we proudly drew our number from among the latter lot. In the modern nights, however, most mortals do not follow the animistic religions from whom we traditionally recruit, aside from the truly pious devotees of traditional Shinto, whose numbers dwindle daily.

Regardless, this means most Kuei-jin who took the Second Breath during the Second World War were predisposed to another Dharma thanks to their location. Any *chik-mei* we wanted to indoctrinate, we stole and forcibly taught them our way of thinking. This took much time and resources, naturally. Only large groups situated near the worst of the fighting, in the Philippines and Pacific Islanders, got away with it, as did some in Manchuria. Mostly, we received the sharp end of the stick. The Quincunx recruited new enforcer Running Monkeys to chase us down and pay us the Final Death, or drag us before a court of inquisitors to confess our sins.

Matters grew worse for Tanaka's people in Japan. The Allies — all right, the Americans — dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of '45. The resulting blast and radiation destroyed thousands; subsequent firestorms in Nagasaki killed uncounted numbers more. Biggest one-month population jump for undead I think Japan's ever seen, though many new Kuei-jin ended up occupying bodies other than their own piles of ash or irradiated corpses. Tanaka and her group destroyed about half a dozen *chik-mei* between 1945 and 1950 that were out-of-control beasts, their bodies and souls horribly damaged by ambient radiation. Most of them died at the moment of the blast or during the subsequent weeks.

Tanaka's group finally managed to recruit at least six new students following Japan's surrender. The end of the war brought much bitterness and anger to Japan, leaving plenty of spiteful spirits in Yomi Wan, many of whom forced their way back to the world to settle unresolved issues from life. Tanaka and her students kept watch for such *chik-mei* and, with the help of kami, snatched up new recruits before the Quincunx could enslave them.

## MIDDLE KINGDOM DRAPED IN RED

Mao and his people controlled China after the war ended, declaring it the People's Republic of China in '49. For the next, oh, fifty years, the central government in Beijing vacillated between insanely repressive psychological warfare on its own people and moderate openness. Few of the government's activities affected our people significantly, however.

The Quincunx still remains a far graver threat to us than any human government, and most of our population is in the hinterlands, far from Beijing. The Communists haven't had any reliable strength out in the far provinces through most of their history, so we don't fear them. Hong's group does occasionally duck and run from the Communists — like during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution — but generally, the Communists haven't been a problem.

The Chinese tested their first nuclear warhead in '64. This disrupted a Dragon Line in the immediate vicinity and resulted in a small horde of damaged kami rampaging through the region. Hong's group intercepted this plague of blighted spirits, eventually destroying those that were too far gone.

Now, I don't know the Vietnam situation particularly well; I never spent much time there, nor am I close to any of Lan Trang's students. Here's a summary of what I know concerning two decades of war there, and what it did to and for the regional Spirits.

In 1955 the French pulled out of Vietnam after losing a battle at Dien Bien Phu. This resulted in the country's division into North and South Vietnam, the North being Communist and the South being American... or rather, not Communist. The Americans built their forces in opposition to the North Vietnamese, though I hesitate to say they were really supporting the South so much as trying to eradicate the North. Several Cainites arrived with the Americans, over time maybe as many as a dozen. I think some of them are still there. Open warfare erupted between America and the North Vietnamese in 1968, and many of the unjustly dead joined Lan Trang's cluster of angry Kuei-jin.

Interestingly, I believe the American Kin-jin created Vietnamese vampires using the magic of their blood while in Vietnam. Some even fought alongside Lan's group during the few pitched battles in which they participated. The Americans finally left in 1973 (good riddance), and Vietnam reunited under Communist rule. I believe some Kuei-jin traveled to America among the wealthier groups of South Vietnamese refugees, but none from Lan's group did any such thing. I did hear, however, that this migration also thinned their enemies' numbers.

In March of 1969, China and Russia approached outright war, with shots fired over the border and troops massing on both sides. Fortunately for us, groups of soldiers are always a source of bounteous blood and Chi. War isn't too much of an issue, unless the war threatens to engulf truly enormous areas as it did during WWII, or escalate into a nuclear conflict... like WWII. From this perspective, more than thirty years later, it looks like there was never a real risk of nuclear exchange between China and the Soviets, but back then, we weren't sure. Most of Hong's and Anzhel's students fled for the back country, where they could feed in relative safety and not risk nuclear annihilation at the center of a city. They returned after peace was restored, but they were out of circulation for the better part of a year — I know I lost track of most of them, which is a testament to their craftiness.

## CHAIRMAN MAO, DEMON?

As in most cases when a mortal well known for cruelty and power dies, rumors abounded through the supernatural community that Mao Xedong had returned as Kuei-jin. This doesn't impact us too terribly, however, given that if it happened, it's unlikely as hell he'd end up following our path. Unfortunately, a few of our number say they have encountered a vampire claiming to be Mao in the last few years, quietly consolidating material power in Jinhua and the surrounding areas. Yeah, sure. Why the Yama Kings would let someone as terrible as Mao escape Hell, why an impostor would pretend to be Mao of all people, and why Mao would care about Jinhua are all questions that don't make sense.

It's probably a hoax or an impostor. I'm told that famously cruel (and dead) people often have some smartass Kuei-jin claiming to be them; this practice goes back as far as the beginning of the Fifth Age, or maybe even earlier. Hell, I know a few bastards claiming to be Xue.

## CHANGING TIMES

After the Americans left Vietnam, Southeast Asia was largely without Western influence. The main exception was Hong Kong, officially a British stronghold. Like many Kuei-jin, we had a relatively easy time slipping in and out of Hong Kong, even when it was part of the United Kingdom. Hong Kong's kami were quite hostile to vampires in general, as a result of their mistreatment at the hands of the neighborhood Cainites. I don't know much about these vampires, mind you. They rarely visit Japan, but the story I hear is that one Cerulean Veil, Thomas Lao, spent decades in Hong Kong. He was very knowledgeable, a wise teacher who knew dozens of rites and was familiar enough with Hong Kong's kami that most of them simply didn't bother him. Spirit of the Living Earth students, hungry for learning, frequently made the jump into Hong Kong and sought Thomas out. Rumor suggest he even had close acquaintances among the Kin-jin's wizards, but those remain unsubstantiated and rather unlikely, since Lao's students say he spent as much time avoiding the Kin-jin as he did teaching other Spirit of the Living Earth.

In the early eighties, under Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese government relaxed its restrictions on religious worship. Under Mao, China was officially an atheist state, and among the mortals, for the first couple of decades of Mao's reign that was just fine. Maoism itself was elevated to a status befitting a state religion, with the common folk quoting Mao's sayings and turning their attention to utterances from Beijing rather than from a religious leader. After Mao's death, though, religious groups that were absent, suppressed, or well-hidden made a resurgence. While the Communist Party didn't exactly embrace the groups — they are eternally suspicious of anyone else's attempt to collect power — they didn't suppress them quite as brutally as they had under Mao.

Since that time, we've quietly garnered support among the mortals of northeastern China. It hasn't always been easy. Even after Deng eased restrictions, groups of spiritualists, animists and, shall we say, unusual practitioners of more mainstream faiths have reaped abuse at the hands of the Chinese government. Even small gatherings can sometimes end abruptly with the arrival of the police. As Kuei-jin, of course, we have advantages typical cultists lack, but using Disciplines or vampiric abilities against the authorities would create more questions and fears than simply fleeing alongside the mortals.

## PROPHETS OF THE SIXTH AGE

In 1987, a Japanese mortal called Asahara Shoko founded a doomsday cult, *Aum Shinrikyo*, based on the expectation that a series of disasters would soon bring an end to the mortal world and inaugurate a new turn of the cosmic cycle. Does anyone else find this just a little curious? I don't want to suggest these mortals are merely pawns of the Kuei-jin or somehow mystically clued-in to the Wheel of Ages. I just find it's an awfully interesting coincidence, and think that more intelligent minds than my own might find something more serious if they dug deeper. Maybe the mortals really do know the Sixth Age is coming; maybe some like Shoko are trying to bring it here, now. Regardless, the world seemed to be changing rapidly, as evidenced by Soviet Russia's collapse.

In 1990 the People's Republic of Mongolia fell. It didn't really "fall," but with the Soviet Union in disarray, the Mongolian Communists really didn't have enough support to continue unilaterally. So they ceded power, drew up a new Constitution, all that stuff. They won a free election two years later, but lost power subsequently. It's almost like a real democracy there. The reason we care about this is we have a real presence in Mongolia, and it's growing now that Ulanbaator is not so oppressive. As the old Soviet Union, North Korea and China have shown us, it's not easy being a stealthy predator of the night in a paranoid, totalitarian state, which is probably why we avoided these countries when possible.

Outside of Japan, there are more Cerulean Veils in Mongolia than anywhere else. The Shinto-like aspects of our beliefs don't exactly resonate with the locals, but plenty of them still follow the old animistic ways; the spirit world's reality and the power of the kami ring true with local undead after the Second Breath. Even Otbeg Altan's group isn't the only collection of Spirit of the Living Earth Kuei-jin in Mongolia.

It's good we have a large presence there, for the spirit world in Mongolia, northern China and southern Siberia is very fucked-up. There are several Dragon Nests in that region that are so poisoned by infernal Chi, they're practically pits to Hell. Many of those are in the spirit-world's analogue to some Soviet-era factory, Gulag, or other atrocity... but not all of them. Some have been there for a very long time, while a few others were sealed ages ago. This last lot has recently reopened. Most of these pits aren't particularly powerful — thank the kami — but cumulatively, they represent an enormous, unpleasant blister on the world's surface.

More importantly, to those of us among the Cerulean Veils, the kami of Manchuria and the surrounding areas are very unpleasant. Most of them pervert the standard calling rituals we typically perform, deliberately misinterpreting response words or picking out synonyms with malicious subtexts. Many of them serve the Yama Kings, openly and deliberately, quietly, or in ways even they don't realize. Because so much of our nightly existence relies on the spirits for reinforcements, our unives are very difficult in Manchuria. Some among Otbeg Altan's students believe we should ask the Quincunx's Kuei-jin for help, but most others believe we have the problem in hand. Or, at the very least, believe that calling upon the Quincunx would result in our destruction first and the problem's solution second.

Me, I don't know what to think.

Thomas Lao, who I believe I mentioned earlier, was in the unfortunate position of dodging both the Kin-jin and the Quincunx due to his location. I suppose it comes as no surprise that he vanished not long after the turnover in 1997; the kami that knew him best seem to have disappeared with him, and the ones that remain aren't talking. Hong Kong is now a stronghold of the Quincunx, like most major cities are, and we avoid it when we can lest we inadvertently share Lao's fate.

Since then we've been dealing with the aftereffects of the Quincunx's Great Leap Outward, as called by its Kuei-jin. What an idiotic idea, honestly. We're Asian vampires. We claw our way back from Hell, but only if we actually die in Asia. I don't know of a single member of our Dharma that came back from Hell to end up in, say, Peru — much less California, despite what some vampires say. Sadly, the Quincunx's ancestors see many dissatisfied and angry young vampires lurking around Wuhan, Beijing, Tokyo and Seoul. So the ancestors point east and say, in some ridiculous, self-parodying, Fu Manchu fashion, "You go east! Take land from barbarian foreigner! We stay here, nod wisely!" And the idiots actually go! Part of me hopes the American vampires beat the P's out of them, except that it leaves the Quincunx with strongest survivors to return here when it becomes obvious they were sent on a fool's errand. Who do you think the Quincunx will send them after next when they realize the Running Monkeys could turn against them?

The Great Leap Outward does help us in some ways, though. In the past, the Bishamon and Genji sent young Running Monkeys to give our young disciples a hard time. Now, I'll be the first to admit that the great crusade hasn't exactly swept up every young vampire along the Middle Kingdom's eastern shores, but it has thinned their *wa* somewhat. This makes it easier for my people to survive from night to night. They don't have to spend nearly as much time dodging *wa* full of bored young Wan Kuei, and can instead spend their evening appeasing the spirits, hunting down appropriate-looking prey or whatever else comes to their minds.

Still, maybe too much time to ourselves isn't such a good thing. The worst harbingers of doom in our Dharma decided the Sixth Age began when Rivan finally left us, but, that was more than a century ago, and still... no Demon Emperor. At least, nobody's told us, and you'd think it'd come up in conversation. On the other hand, in the last few years,

matters have grown terrible all over. Yes, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were certainly signposts. . . "Last Exit Before Sixth Age" and all that, but I very much wonder, lately. Most of the prophecies are suitably fuzzy as to defy specific analysis. It isn't as though any of them say "And then, the Land of the Rising Sun will experience absurdly low central bank interest rates!" But things aren't quite right anymore. The kami don't respond the way you expect them to; some of them twist requests, manipulate interactions or demand strange new sacrifices. The spirit realms look different, and the Wall. . . it's almost impossible to see the Wall, but sometimes, it feels slick with blood. Stinks of the stuff too.

A couple of years ago, some kind of storm ripped through the Yin Realm. Turned the whole place upside down. I have no earthly idea what really happened there, but for a couple of weeks, ghosts were hiding in every nook and cranny and the Wall between here and the Yin Realm was badly damaged. It's gotten better since — though I believe I mentioned the whole bloody Wall effect up the page a bit — but the lands of the dead remain a mess. I don't know what effect this had on Kuei-jin, but it's probably quite bad. I haven't met any vampires who took the Second Breath since the storm, but of course, I'm part of a pretty insular community within a pretty insular community, so. . . it might mean nothing. Unfortunately, it's usually from "nothing" where misfortune blind-sides you.

## SOCIETY

### BEHIND THE CERULEAN VEIL

My name is Fukunaka Jiro, and I am a follower of the Spirit of the Living Earth Dharma. I have put brush to paper this evening to record my confession as required by the honorable ancestor of the Blood Court. I expect it will take several evenings to complete my confession

#### ANIMISM BEYOND SHINTO

The astute reader should notice that the Spirit of the Living Earth Dharma focuses heavily on its relationship with the Shinto faith, despite the fact the Cerulean Veils are not Shintoist, nor vice versa. It is entirely natural that Kuei-jin who obsess on kami and other spirits would gravitate towards the largest collection of mortals interested in the spirit world, and in Japan, the devout followers of Shinto certainly fit the bill.

That is not to say, however, there are no other Spirit of the Living Earth Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom. Those hailing from traditional cultures within Mongolia or Siberia might feel stronger connections to the spirit realm than the mortal realm upon taking the Second Breath. If experienced Cerulean Veils are nearby, it is entirely likely they will take the new Kuei-jin under their wing. These young vampires learn a belief system quite different from Shinto (as described elsewhere), but they still adhere to the primary tenets of the Spirit of the Living Earth. The same holds true for any Kuei-jin who might gravitate toward an animistic worldview after rebirth, whether they hail from Tibet or Polynesia.

to his satisfaction, so I begin tonight with a summary of my offenses and transgressions before proceeding with the details. Everything I write will be forthright and honest; these are qualities as valued by my Dharma as by the esteemed Kuei-jin of the Five August Courts. I have faith that the ancestor will be a fair and even-handed judge, and I place my fate entirely in his hands.

I confess, I do not follow the accepted Dharmas most favored by the adherents of the Great Principle of the Fivefold Way as revealed to Grand Arhat Xue. Neither do I deny the transcendent nature of the path he chose to follow on the Road Back. Once in my unlife, I found the five Dharmas quite useful in staving off the black hunger that is our basest nature, but I could not progress along any of the five paths set before me. For decades, I sought after *dharma*, or was motionless so it could find me, but to no avail. I found the enlightenment that eluded me by following the meandering ways of the kami.

I must respectfully dispute the charge that I follow a mortal religion in place of a Dharma. It is true we share concepts, and even ritual practices, in common with religions such as Shinto, Buddhism and Hinduism, but, according to our oral history, our Dharma extends much further back than any of these faiths. I believe you may attribute the similarities to a common animistic religion in primitive times, one perhaps even based on mortal observation of immortal dealings with the kami. It is also true we have adopted the terminology of these religions. This serves a dual purpose. It allows us to communicate amongst ourselves and with others without profaning our sacred words, thereby angering the *kotodama*, the spirits of the words. And it provides a bridge of understanding with those considering our path, nudging the phenomenal toward the possible for our potential converts. If it is required of me, I will declaim the sacred words to the ancestor following the proper preparation. This will demonstrate to all with eyes to see that our Dharma has far surpassed the incomplete understanding encompassed by mortal religions.

Kami are everywhere. Every thing, every place, has a spirit. Many kami are asleep now, as though in hibernation to survive the winter that is the downward turn of the Great Wheel. In earlier Ages, even the simplest of men could call the kami and expect a response, though very often the simplest of men angered the kami as frequently as earning favor. Now, it takes the knowledge of an ancient sage, the honeyed tongue of a practiced geisha, and the courage of a fearless warrior to call the surviving kami or awaken the slumberers.

The kami have something to teach us all, and the Cerulean Veils have made it our duty to learn. Some mortals still ask the kami for blessings like protection from harm or a good harvest, or even occasionally for advice. Only the mythically wise, however, the *shugenja* on the mountainsides or the wandering, wizened hermit, have thought to learn from the kami. This is because what the kami teach us, even those of the Yin World, is about life. Most living people mistakenly believe they understand life — they draw breath, they move, eat and feel. . . what else is there to know? The dead, bereft of living comforts, are quite aware of the knowledge they lack. Of course, we do not simply learn from the kami. They are useful in other ways, providing services or favors in exchange for pleasing rituals, offerings or bargains.



Our goal, our purpose in seeking enlightenment, is to transcend our dead flesh to become kami ourselves. Just as every thing has a spirit, every spirit has a soul, even though few suffer like ours the split into Hun and Po. The kami know, or more correctly each kami knows a small portion, how to preserve the individual soul without a body and without becoming a *goryo*, an angry ghost subject to the laws of the Yomi World or the lands of the dead. They have become pure spirit. The mortals enact rituals enshrining the dead as kami, but these rites do not work for us — possibly because our connection with death is unclear. Most of the enshrined kami I encountered are no more than highly regarded and well-propitiated ghosts.

Forgive me for straying from the boundaries set before me. I am not to write a treatise on the spiritual progression of my Dharma, I am to write a confession. For the remainder of this missive, I shall attempt to cleave more closely to my shortcomings.

I confess, I lured others from the Fivefold Way by offering advice and assistance freely to any who asked it. My Dharma requires no less of me than to assist another's quest for enlightenment in any way I can. It is, I admit, the only way our Dharma gains new followers. We do not casually associate with young Kuei-jin, whom you call "Running Monkeys." They are still experiencing *kibuku*, the period of mourning following death; the spiritual taint it causes is greatly intensified by the fact it is their own death they mourn. They, and anyone close to them, are unfit to interact with the kami without extensive *harae* rituals to purify the soul. Therefore, we do not voluntarily instruct those just inhaling their Second Breath; instead, we welcome seekers already taking their first steps toward enlightenment and, more importantly, who are trying to close the book on their mortal lives.

I admit I shirked my duties by refraining from any association with *chih-me*, whether to harvest the new Kuei-jin or put down monsters that fell from grace. The aura of death cloaking them pollutes their surrounding, and I selfishly preserved myself from that pollution and the extensive purification that must ensue. I am willing to make amends for this, if the ancestor allows, by devoting myself for as long as he requires to the rehabilitation of *chih-me*. I believe I can perform my absolution of this task without unduly influencing others away from the paths the Blood Court would choose for them.

It is true I stand accused of being *akuma* through a past transgression. The ambassador from the Green Courts is correct in his identification of me, but his version of the events that transpired are not as I remember them, and I would respectfully point out that the ambassador was not present. I had been asked to assist a vampire new to the Court in travel between worlds. My student and I had some difficulty communicating; I do not speak Korean well, and she did not speak Japanese at all. I spoke of traveling to *kakuriyo*, the spirit lands reflecting the material world, but she thought I threatened to drag her to *Kakuri* in the Yomi realms. I have never traveled to *Kakuri*, nor will I ever choose to — I had enough of the Hells before finding the Road Back. A matter that should have been at worst an embarrassment between teacher and student, one easily resolved by learning and greater

understanding, was instead fanned into a demon hunt by prejudice and fear. The Green Court offered me no chance to explain myself, an opportunity most graciously extended here by the Blood Court, and summarily pronounced me *akuma*. Fortunately for myself, the ritual of branding was aborted when the kami of the Court's ritual space heard my pleas of innocence and refused to recognize the rite. I thought it wisest to simply leave in the ensuing chaos.

I confess, I have associated with Kuei-jin who have been declared *akuma*. I must also confess, however, that I do not know why they were so called. I considered it possible they became *akuma* in the same manner that the Green Courts labeled me. I can only wish this were not so, and that one could be clear that those named *akuma* were dangerous servants of the Yama Kings, but this matter is not in my hands. It is true some members of my Dharma engaged in Lesser Commerce, and even Iris Bulb Commerce with infernal powers. According to our history and my own personal knowledge, however, nobody in my Dharma has ever sold his soul entire to agents of the Yomi kingdoms. Unfortunately, these so-called "lesser" transgressions have become more frequent in recent times — a matter that concerns us greatly. I see three reasons why this may be, if the ancestor will indulge my prognostication:

First, we Cerulean Veils are accustomed to dealing with spirits. I do not mean simply appeasing them and kowtowing to them, as outsiders so often expect of us. We command the kami when we can, forge deals when we must, and appease them when required. There are times when there is more to gain from irritating the kami than from making poetic requests: if the kami of the sky will not give rain when we ask it, we tickle their noses with torch smoke until they douse the flames... but I digress. Some of our number, who may be wiser than I, see no valuable difference between commanding, or striking an agreement with, a kami of the Earth or a servant of Yomi. I cannot answer to the wisdom of this practice, but bargaining with the *magatsuhi* is not something in which I indulge. I command them, yes, but only when I must otherwise battle them. I am not as skilled in fighting as I am in oration.

Second, our Dharma's followers are often closely tied to certain kami — the spirits of our birthplaces, where we died, or those locations we have long claimed as our own — by decades, if not centuries, of ritual. While the world turns inexorably toward the Sixth Age, the spirits of many places change, becoming tainted. Through close association with these hell-touched kami, a Kuei-jin may unwittingly truck with evil powers. It is this issue that brought me out of seclusion and set me on the path leading through the Blood Court's domains. I wish to study these poisoned kami, to learn what taints are leaking into the spirit world, how long it takes for this to unfold and if this change in nature inevitably leads to infernal contact — matters important for all who have taken the Second Breath, not solely the Spirit of the Living Earth. If the ancestor will be so kind as to permit me access to my notes on the investigation thus far, I can provide him with a clean and legible copy along with a proposal for continuing my research. Should the ancestor find my work sufficiently compelling and rigorous, I would be pleased to share the final results with the esteemed members of the Blood Court.

As for my third reason... the kami we entreaty must regard us with the highest respect, or they will not obey or trust our given word. To command the respect of the kami, it is necessary for our descendants to perform the rites of ancestral veneration consistently and properly. We are, after all, dead. So many facets of modern society now spurn the old ways that many Cerulean Veils barely maintain a proper standing with the kami.

Still, the prospect for those of us whose altars are covered with thick dust is not wholly dim. With suitable encouragement, the living can quickly re-learn to honor the dead. There are others whose lineages dwindle to nothing and have no one left to propitiate the ancestors. These ones, more than any others, are forced into bargains with the Yama Kings' servants. While those spirits also prefer dealing with the honored dead, they will make exceptions... for a price. Always, a price.

Finally, I cannot provide you with a list of my associates and their whereabouts. As I stated previously, I endeavor to submit to your wishes. I could give to you a list of names, and where last I saw the individual, but that would serve no value to you. I profusely apologize, but I believe this a futile effort in chasing such phantoms.

## THE MEANDERING PATH

*Learn these words well, for these are the traditional forms of our tenets. Each teacher recites these forms to new inductees, and expects them to remember it exactly so they may, in turn, transmit it to new followers. You will learn the nuances of each tenet under my watchful eye, but most students say finding the path is similar to the game of go: simple to learn, but difficult to master.*

### TENETS OF THE SPIRIT OF THE LIVING EARTH

1. Obey the will of the spirits.
2. Perform the proper ceremonies to remain pure.
3. Shun the defiled.
4. Tread across the Earth to absorb its full glory.
5. Pass wisdom to others freely.
6. Help others to surpass the shortcomings of the flesh.
7. Renew your thanks and commitment to enlightenment each day.
8. Observe your taboos rigidly, that you may overcome your curse.

### 1. OBEY THE WILL OF THE KAMI.

This rule only works as written while the pupil remains within the protected environs of her mentor's influence. The kami present and empowered to interact with the student will most undoubtedly speak with the proper authority. It quickly becomes obvious to all but the dumbest apprentice that most kami are not to be followed slavishly. Some are merely capricious and wish little good upon anyone; others are malevolent and only seek to inflict true harm. These sorts are to be appeased

when necessary, commanded when possible or simply avoided. The test of a Cerulean Veil's fitness to leave her mentor's side is the ability to distinguish which kami are which.

## 2. PERFORM THE PROPER CEREMONIES TO REMAIN PURE.

There are a wide variety of harae rituals that purify the physical body and the spirit. Water, salt, meditation and fasting are commonplace in such rituals, but the Kuei-jin's special status may require more dramatic rites with components like warm blood or bodily humors (substances that would pollute a mortal practitioner). Knowledge of as many variations as possible is wise, since it may be necessary to purify oneself at a moment's notice. Proper purification is mandatory after a period of time spent Yin aspected, upon recovering from shadow soul and after coming into contact with a *chih-mei* or *hin*. At other times, purification is simply a good idea.

## 3. SHUN THE DEFILED.

Riyan did not proscribe this provision solely to save the Dharma's followers from excessive time spent in harae ritual. It is also an observation that those who are defiled, whether Kuei-jin, kami or *shien*, have nothing to teach others on the road to enlightenment. Instead, they serve as object lessons of failure. Enlightenment will never be won through constant or deliberate transgressions, but only by progressing. It is better to seek positive examples than truck with negative ones.

## 4. TREAD ACROSS THE EARTH TO ABSORB ITS FULL GLORY.

The kami do not wander, as a rule. Each kami has its place and there it remains. The kami of a river do not flow to the sea, even though the rivers and seas mix at their mouths. Each kami has as its ever-changing domain this stretch of rapids, for example, or that quiet pool. Kami who do not follow this rule — angry ghosts, evil *magatsuhi* and kami forced from their homes — are those with the most potential to cause harm. In any case, it remains true that if one is to experience the true breadth of kami knowledge and the beauty of their realms, one must wear the dust of the Middle Kingdom on one's feet with pride.

## 5. PASS WISDOM TO OTHERS FREELY.

In truth, the wisdom we seek does not come from within ourselves. It is revealed to us, or blossoms in our soul from a seed planted by another and fertilized through wide experience. It is our duty to transmit what we learn, to pay back our karmic debt and acknowledge that we do not reach enlightenment by our own efforts alone.

## 6. HELP OTHERS TO SURPASS THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE FLESH.

Flesh is a trap ensnaring us all equally. If one does not choose to help another out of kindness, then he should at least help him grow and learn. If you free one Kuei-jin from the

chains of flesh to become pure spirit, we are all that much closer to achieving that grace.

## 7. RENEW YOUR THANKS AND YOUR COMMITMENT TO ENLIGHTENMENT EACH NIGHT.

Propitiate the kami nightly. The kami hold in high esteem the hermit with nothing to give in thanks but a carefully worded prayer, if only for his consistency and diligence. Similarly, remind yourself nightly of your progress along the Road Back and your final goal, whether in the ancient ways or with a ritual of your own devising. This is the best way to steel yourself against temptation and blindness.

## 8. OBSERVE YOUR IMI (TABOOS) RIGIDLY, THAT YOU MAY OVERCOME YOUR CURSE.

Failing to observe *imi*, whether those imposed by the kami or those chosen for yourself, is the surest way to stumble into the lost state of *diao*. Always remember, a single act of blindness may take decades to overcome.

## THE OTHER HERESIES

To join the Spirit of the Living Earth is to walk a solitary path. Like Riyan, we can only create our companions; neither the kami nor *Quincunx* will ever welcome us with open arms or truly understand our ways. That said, there is a strength in solitude that the flame of the Rising Phoenix never understood. Instead, they clutch at their mothers' aprons, closing their eyes to this terrible world in the hopes it will vanish. How lost these children must seem; guide them, when you can, but beware they don't drag you down with them.

Likewise, avoid the Tempest of the Inward Focus and the Scorpion Eaters, for they treat all existence with a disrespectful disdain. Everything is illusion or experience, a trifle affair or a feast for their mouths alone. They've angered enough kami through their disregard, so being seen in their company will surely win you little favor in the eyes of the spirits.

If you do seek allies, then do so in India, among the Celestial Tribesmen of the Face of the Gods. They alone appreciate our skills and understand our ways. Indeed, they may call it godhood, but they ultimately seek to join the Spirit World and transcend this one as well. Heed their council and pay them your respects, but be careful not to interfere in their practices. Like the kami, they can be temperamental and quick to anger.

## SYSTEMS

### MERITS & FLAWS

#### KAMI-TOUCHED (2 PT. MERIT)

A Kuei-jin with this Merit can communicate with spirits in the area without effort (the normal method requires a Hun roll against the rating of the immediate Wall). The vampire must still use the appropriate ghost or life-sight to detect the

## LEXICON

**Bon:** Rites performed to preserve and safeguard one's ancestors in the land of the dead.

**Goryo:** Angry ghosts; ancestor spirits not placated with the proper rites.

**Harae:** Ceremonies of purification. The ceremonies may be physical—using water, salt or another appropriate mediums to cleanse the body—or spiritual—involving meditation and other ascetic practices.

**Imi:** Taboo words or actions.

**Junrei:** A wandering pilgrimage; the stage of Dharmic progression during which the Kuei-jin travels to increase her knowledge of the kami.

**Kakuriyo:** The spirit world, the Mirror Lands. Not to be confused with Emma-o's Yomi realm *Kakuri*.

**Kannushi:** Literally priest; a rank roughly equivalent to mandarin.

**Kashiwade:** Hand-clapping performed to honor a kami.

**Kegare:** Physical or spiritual pollution.

**Kibuku:** The period of mourning and the impurity caused by contact with death. For the Kuei-jin, this usually refers to the period between the Second Breath and one's true progression along the Dharmic path.

**Kotodama:** Kami existing in words or songs.

**Magatsuhi:** Evil kami; servants of the Yama Kings.

**Matsuri:** A group ritual.

**Riyaku:** Benefits provided by kami. Certain kami are known to specialize in different types of *riyaku*—protection from accidents, aid in study, etc.

**Riyugu:** The "dragon palace," the unattainable Heavenly Realms.

**Sendatsu:** Spiritual leader, a rank equivalent to ancestor within the Dharma.

**Tatari:** Curse inveighed by a kami for a Kuei-jin's infraction such as rudeness or the improper performance of a ritual.

**Utsushiyo:** The physical world; the Middle Kingdom.

presence of spirits. Similarly, this Merit will not affect the disposition of the spirits in any way. Typically, an individual with this ability was somehow touched by the kami in life... perhaps as a temple oracle, a child with preternaturally clear sight or someone who played the part of a kami in a particularly successful ritual play.

## OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER (3 PT. FLAW)

While most of the Cerulean Veils find it difficult getting through an ordinary night without paying heed to the spirits and invoking simple rituals to appease them, something isn't quite right with someone bearing this flaw. This Kuei-jin can hardly work through ordinary tasks without feeling the compulsion to perform a minor rite—the sort of simple ritual few spirits even bother acknowledging. Perhaps the vampire enacts a spiritual cleansing before he can enter certain rooms, or can only gain the tranquility necessary for true meditation after repeating a mundane task dozens of times (until he gets it *perfectly right*).

While all Spirit of the Living Earth members suffer from a minor version of this Flaw—to appease the spirits, they must

accomplish many seemingly minor tasks—this Kuei-jin has no choice but to escalate that obsession with minor ritual. When the character is under sufficient stress, the Storyteller may require a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to avoid haring away from the situation at hand to perform his own ritualistic compulsion. Some obsessive behavioral habits include performing a minor rite, hand washing, tracing wood grain lines, counting or repeating a trivial task like flipping a light on and off. Players should pick one or two tasks their characters perform frequently, and integrate them into roleplaying situations; the Storyteller will inflict the Flaw in a crisis when she deems it appropriate.

## BARREN LINE (3 PT. FLAW)

This Kuei-jin's family tree has withered and died, and there is no one left to perform *bon* rituals to honor her. The kami somehow sense this lack of veneration, and are not shy in showing their displeasure at associating with such dishonored individuals. Whether the character achieved this unlucky state through ancestral inattention, downright malice or grave misfortune, the end result is the same: She suffers a difficulty penalty of two to all interactions with the kami involving her Social Attributes. On rare occasions, particularly hardheaded and tradition-bound kami may refuse to deal with her at all. Conversely, servants of the Yama Kings may eagerly overlook this Flaw entirely.

## RITUALS

The Spirit of the Living Earth Wan Kuei are masters of reciprocities and other ritual transactions between the Kuei-jin and the Mirror Lands' inhabitants. Certainly, the Bone Flowers are better prepared to treat with ghosts, while the Thrashing Dragons are best suited to handle wild creatures of pure Yang Chi (the rumors of Devil-Tigers trafficking with the demons of Yomi are best not propagated). The Cerulean Veils, however, call upon the inhabitants of both the Yin and Yang Worlds with equal facility; the greatest of them travel among these realms with little fear.

The Cerulean Veils are not restricted from learning any rite, but they specialize most frequently in Rites of Propitiation—those rituals requesting services from the kami in exchange for an offering. This set of rites is available as a specialization of the Rituals skill. Storytellers should feel free to develop their own rites; those below provide examples and templates.

## RITES OF PROPITIATION

### CONCILIATORY DOORWAY RITUAL (LEVEL ZERO RITE)

Every place has a kami, and the boundaries between places possess them as well: the *sae no kami*. This very brief rite appeases the *sae no kami* as the Kuei-jin steps through a doorway, gate or similar border structure.

**System:** The character makes no roll to enact the rite. The ritualist simply scatters a small pinch of salt or powdered jade as she passes the boundary. At the same time, she recites a short prayer, one from ancient tradition or one particular to the individual *sae no kami*. Most Cerulean Veils keep a small pouch of powder handy for this rite, but only the most traditional—or cautious—perform the rite at every doorway. Most reserve it for the kami of places they frequent, or for times when the spirits pay close attention. This rite's performance is crucial to the success of the Ritual of the Guarded Alliance, below.

## RITUAL SPACES AND TOOLS

Followers of the Spirit of the Living Earth Dharma enact rituals every day, whether for their ancestors, the spirits of their resting places, the kami who guard local Dragon Lines, etc. The list goes on. The Kuei-jin cannot just perform these rituals spontaneously, however. Even rituals allowing room for originality require some preparation, tools and carefully selected offerings.

Storytellers should assess a difficulty penalty when the Kuei-jin works under less than ideal conditions, or lower the rite's difficulty when the character invests particular care in ritual preparation. A penalty of one to difficulty may be appropriate when the Kuei-jin makes a suitable substitution to the ritual, like scattering bits of paper for salt. The Storyteller can incur a penalty of two or more when a tool or offering is missing and excluded from the ritual. In other cases, the ritual simply needs a specific requirement, or it will fail—for instance, a piece of jade when attempting to make a jade boat. The Storyteller may award cumulative bonuses of one a piece for performing the rite at an auspicious time (determined by a successful Intelligence + Portents roll (difficulty 6), not necessarily by the ritualist), and for securing particularly fine materials, such as the highest quality incense or rope hand-twisted by nuns.

What follows is a short list of ritual implements and areas. It is by no means complete. Most of the items' names are from the Shinto tradition (and therefore Japanese), while others are Buddhist (and from a variety of languages). The Storyteller or player may need to research names and words best fitting a given character's linguistic background. Generally, the Dharma tries using the same terminology to give the disparate groups some commonality.

The simplest spaces dedicated to the kami are natural settings left almost entirely pristine. A *himorogi* is a natural shrine of evergreen trees, with a sacred tree at the center. An *iwasaka* is another type of natural shrine, consisting of an open area encircled by sacred stones. These sites may be entirely unmarked, or enclosed either with a sacred rope called a *shimenawa* or marked with a *heihaku*, a pole carrying strips of paper, cloth or metal that signifies the presence of the kami. Shrines with buildings are often called *jinja*. The path to the *honden*—the inner sanctuary—is always a winding one, usually lined with pillars or arches called *torii*. Particularly developed shrines may have separate areas for supplicants or lay people to pray (the *haiden*) and for priests to conduct rites (the *heiden*), as well as outbuildings specifically built for purification rites. Shrines for ancestors, called *tamaya* or *butsudan*, are typically small and located in the house of a descendent, usually that of the oldest living family member.

## RITUAL OF THE GUARDED ALLIANCE (LEVEL TWO RITE)

The *sae no kami* can be fierce guardians when invoked properly and treated with respect. Spirits propitiated year after long year by wise Kuei-jin are likely to be fiercer still. This rite entreats and empowers the *sae no kami* of the vampire's resting place to serve as its guardian. The *sae no kami* is considered a base-level *nushi* (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 87), until the Kuei-jin commissions it to act as guardian. Then it gains appropriate abilities mentioned below.

**System:** The Kuei-jin must perform the Conciliatory Doorway Ritual (see above) faithfully for at least a consecutive lunar month in the same location before performing this rite. The ritualist must first cleanse the threshold of his resting place with salt water and clean linen, though Kuei-jin who follow Mongolian traditions must take great care not to step on the threshold directly, nor stand with one foot to either side; they must always be fully inside or outside the space. While the threshold dries, the vampire writes prayers of supplication and thanks on strips of paper, then hangs the strips on either side of the doorway, so the prayers are invoked whenever someone enters or leaves the space. The ritualist then calls the *sae no kami*, offering it three points of Yin or Yang Chi. The player rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 7); each success results in a full day during which the *sae no kami* will only allow entrance to those specified by the ritualist, or, if she chooses, to those speaking the prayer used in the Conciliatory Doorway Ritual. The *tatari* imposed for botching this ritual forces the failed caster to succeed at a Willpower test to cross through any gate or doorway in this area.

Additionally, the *sae no kami* is a base-level *nushi* with 20 Chi and seven points divided among Rage, Gnosis and Willpower. A successful casting of this ritual further empowers the kami as though it were a spirit equal to a "Nushi Cost" of three points. Two points automatically work toward purchasing a Charm appropriate to its duty (Storytellers discretion, see *Kindred of the East*, pgs. 211-212 for a list of appropriate Charms), while the remaining point can purchase one of the four remaining powers listed in the *Nushi Background*.

## RITE OF BESEECHING REMEMBRANCE (LEVEL THREE RITE)

Even words have spirits—and the stronger the words, the stronger the resulting *kotodama*. The kami created by sealed pacts and sworn oaths have a particularly long life; even centuries later, Kuei-jin who know where to look can read the exact terms of a long-forgotten bargain between kami and supplicant.

The Cerulean Veils keep the very existence of this rite a well-hidden secret. Belonging to a heretical Dharma is bad enough; possessing the ability to rifle through others' close-kept dealings ushers in a whole new level of danger. The Veils most often use this ritual to inform themselves of a kami's habits—can this rite bind it, does it have a preference for that offering? The potential for blackmail is impossible to ignore, however, and more than one Kuei-jin has kept her skin intact by clever use of this rite.

**System:** The ritualist must perform this rite in the same location that the pact or oath the ritualist wishes to review was pronounced. Before the rite, the vampire must personally make a sheaf of fine paper (pounding ritual prayers into the pulp while flattening and smoothing it), and a brush of fox-tail hairs. After laying these materials out for use, the ritualist strikes a bronze bowl three times, then fills it with her own Chi-suffused blood (sacrificing three points of Yin or Yang Chi). Before the spilling blood stills the ringing of the bowl completely, the Kuei-jin calls forth the *kotodama*, specifying what she knows of the bargain. The player rolls Charisma + Occult (base difficulty of 7); the caster of the rite must know the identity of at least one participant in the previous ritual, but, knowledge of all its participants grants a reduction of one to this rite's difficulty. The difficulty increases by one for each century between the inquired ritual and Rite of Beseeching Remembrance.



If the rite succeeds, the *kotodama* appears and takes the brush. While using the bowl of blood as ink, it absorbs the offered Chi. The spirit writes out the bargain or oath exactly as it was made, in whatever language it was fashioned (spoken agreements are transcribed). The ritual takes an hour to complete, and possibly longer in the case of extremely complex and legal agreements. Angering the kami, either by botching the ritual's roll, appearing bored or impatient or by falling asleep while the *kotodama* is completing its task, results in a *tatari*. For a period of time (Storyteller's discretion), any agreements that the ritualist enters becomes common knowledge in the Mirror Lands, with the newly formed *kotodama* spreading the information.

### STRENGTHENING THE CRAB'S SHELL RITE (LEVEL FOUR RITE)

The most powerful *sae no kami* are those standing between the worlds. Only the most erudite and practiced Cerulean Veils dare call on them for aid with any hope of success. Once summoned and mollified, the *sae no kami* may deign to either strengthen or weaken the Wall in the local area for a short period of time according to the petitioner's request. This is commonly referred to as "stepping through the kami's shadow."

**System:** While no specific propitiation rituals are required prior to this rite, the Kuei-jin must be in good standing with the

kami he intends to beseech. The rite is deceptively quick, and often used when time is of the essence. The ritualist places a jade token on the ground. If he must use an imbued jade talisman to follow in the crab's footsteps, he places that on the ground as well. He then quickly sanctifies the area using a purification wand, and intones a complex prayer. The prayer is ripe with nuanced tonal cadences and must be repeated exactly for the ritual to succeed; this requires a successful Intelligence + Performance (difficulty 7). Once the kami is summoned, the Kuei-jin makes his request to raise or lower the Wall. The player makes a Charisma + Rituals roll (difficulty 6); if the roll succeeds, the kami is satisfied with the jade token and fulfills the request. If the roll fails, the kami still honors the request, but requires an additional service to be revealed and performed at a later time. The *sae no kami* uses the Kuei-jin's Chi to power its effect on the Wall — the kami may raise or lower the Wall's rating by one point per Chi point donated, to a maximum of 10 or a minimum of 2.

When the Kuei-jin uses this rite to cover an escape, the *sae no kami* will strengthen the Wall after the vampire makes his way through. This effect fades at a rate of one point per minute, usually plenty of time for a good head start. Botching this roll during the ritual may result in a *tatari* preventing the ritualist from entering any spirit world for a period of time dictated by the Storyteller's discretion.

## THE REBELLIOUS DAUGHTER OF PRIVILEGE

**Quote:** *Is that for me? How sweet!*

**Prelude:** You are the daughter of a wealthy family who always got what she wanted. The older you grew, the more outrageous your desires became. You were involved with the bloodier and less pleasant aspects of animist nature worship initially, at first because you found it intriguing and later because it was obvious how much it irritated your parents.

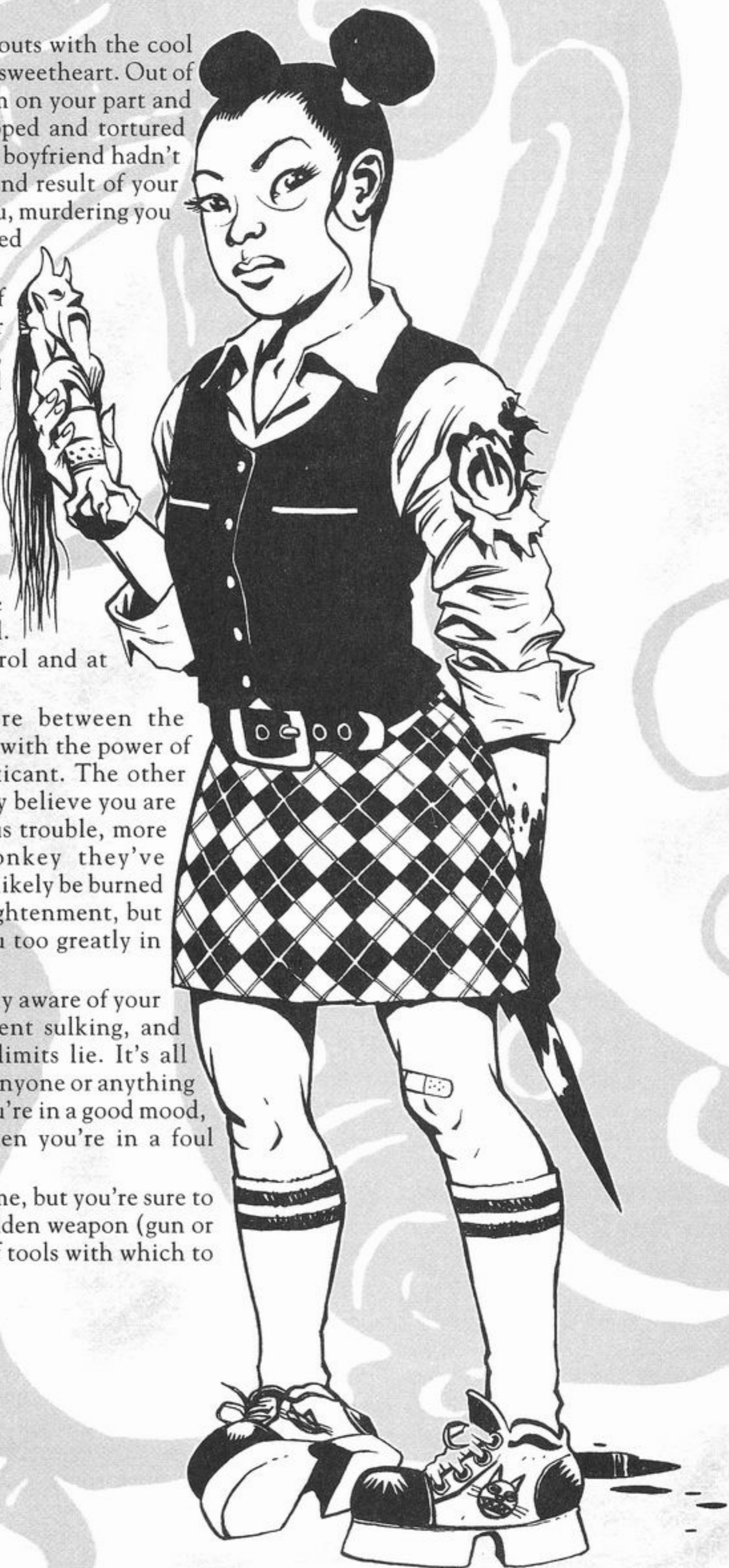
In school, you met a boy on the outs with the cool crowd who'd just been dumped by his sweetheart. Out of a combination of sadism and boredom on your part and desperation on his, you both kidnapped and tortured the ex-girlfriend to death. Seems the boyfriend hadn't considered death to be the obvious end result of your ministrations, and he lashed out at you, murdering you as well. With any luck, he committed suicide after the fact.

After fighting your way free of the demons who reenacted your murderous tortures on the poor girl, you took the Second Breath and naturally gravitated towards the Spirit of the Living Earth. The Dharma matched your living beliefs, such as they were, and its edgy and rebellious state suits your outlooks nicely. Besides, you could never survive the Quincunx's stifling autocratic-like hierarchy, not while you were at the bottom of the pyramid. You much prefer remaining in control and at the top of the food chain.

**Concept:** You exist somewhere between the rebellious teen and the spoiled brat, with the power of immortality acting as a strong intoxicant. The other Spirit of the Living Earth in your city believe you are most likely to land yourself in serious trouble, more so than any other Running Monkey they've encountered in a half century. You'll likely be burned badly before achieving any real enlightenment, but Heaven help anyone who angers you too greatly in the meantime.

**Roleplaying Hints:** You're keenly aware of your Dharma's propensity for self-indulgent sulking, and you couldn't care less where their limits lie. It's all about you and what you want; damn anyone or anything that dares step in your way. When you're in a good mood, you like to make things bleed. When you're in a foul mood, however....

**Equipment:** A schoolgirl's costume, but you're sure to deface it in some capacity, a semi-hidden weapon (gun or knife) most of the time, and plenty of tools with which to manipulate the spirits.



## IMBALANCE

## THE UNFORTUNATE BYSTANDER

**Quote:** *Honestly, I don't have any more of a clue than you do.*

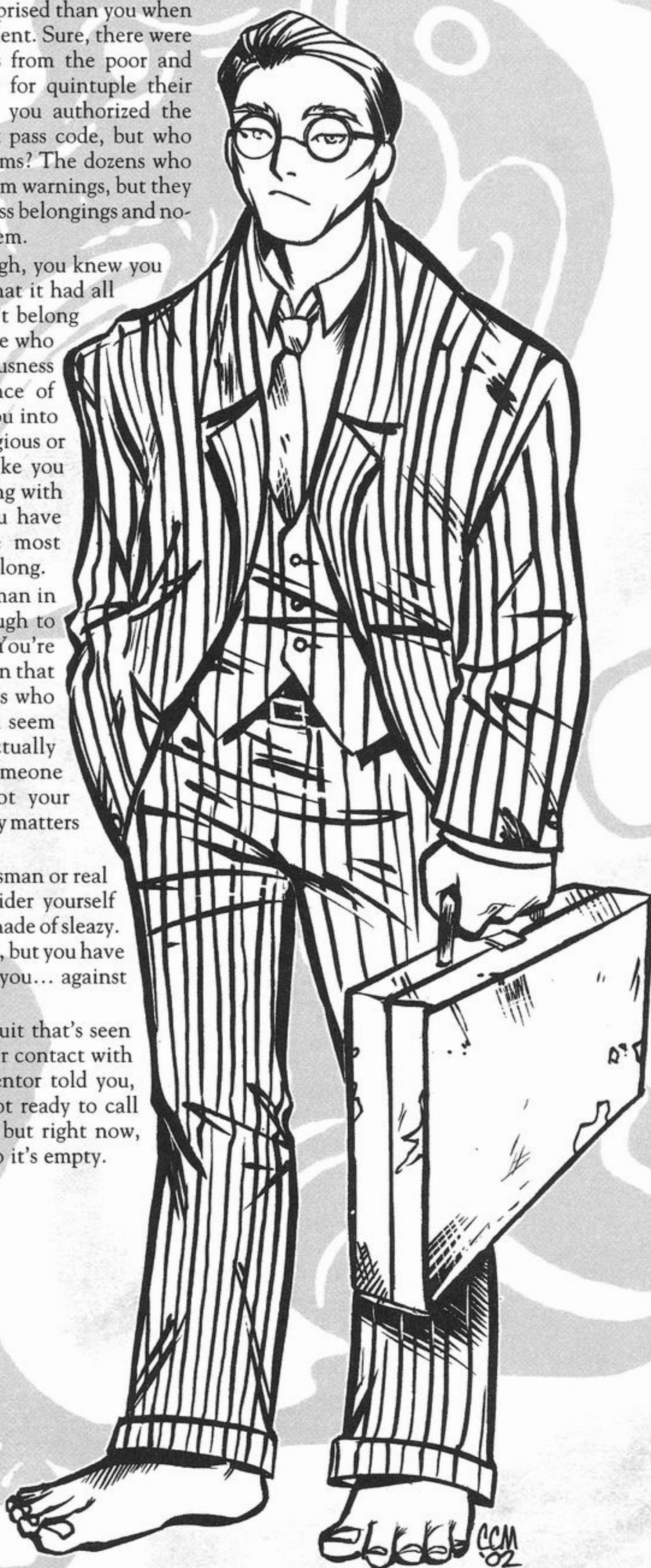
**Prelude:** Look, truth be told, you never thought you were all that bad a guy. No one was more surprised than you when you ended up in Hell after the car accident. Sure, there were land deals where you took thousands from the poor and evicted them to resell their property for quintuple their value. Certainly, there was the time you authorized the cheaper building materials that didn't pass code, but who could predict those intense spring storms? The dozens who died should have left right after the storm warnings, but they didn't. They had to gather their worthless belongings and no-prospect children first. Not your problem.

When you ended up in Hell, though, you knew you had to get out, if only to make clear that it had all been a terrible mistake, that you didn't belong there at all. You got out, and the people who brought you back to sanity and consciousness did so through drilling the importance of appeasing the nature spirits who got you into this bind. You weren't particularly religious or spiritual in life, but it doesn't seem like you have much of a choice except entreating with the spirits, now that you're dead. You have much to learn, and you aren't the most dedicated student, but you're coming along.

**Concept:** You're an Asian gentleman in his forties who was certainly bad enough to end up in Hell but remains in denial. You're an accidental member of the Dharma, in that you were swept into it by the vampires who found you in *chih-mei*. Otherwise, you seem like a nice enough person until it actually matters. Then you'll either screw someone over for the bottom line (again, not your problem), or not be around when it really matters because it isn't your fight.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Think car salesman or real estate agent. You're smooth and consider yourself charming, but you're really a common shade of sleazy. Even strangers don't get too close to you, but you have a way of finagling people into helping you... against their better judgment.

**Equipment:** You wear a business suit that's seen better days. Bare feet, though, for better contact with earth kami. It was something your mentor told you, which might be bullshit, but you're not ready to call him on it yet. You've got a briefcase, but right now, there's nothing to carry around in it, so it's empty.





**NAME:** Unfortunate Bystander

**NATURE:** Architect

**BALANCE:** Balanced

**PLAYER:**

**P'O NATURE:** The Barbarian

**DIRECTION:** East

**CHRONICLE:**

**DEMEANOR:** Conformist

**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 ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Politics ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Rituals ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Science ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Black Wind ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Obligation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Equilibrium ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### BACKGROUNDS

Contacts ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Resources ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Rites ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### rites

Trace the Dragon's Blood ☐  
☐  
☐  
☐  
☐

### XIN CHI



### YANG CHI

**DHARMA** Spirit of the Living Earth/1

### HUN

☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### WILLPOWER

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

### P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

☐  
☐  
☐  
☐  
☐

## THE WISE OLD MAN

**Quote:** *Come closer, and I will impart the wisdom of the ages.*

**Prelude:** During the wars with the French and the Americans — a lifetime ago! — you committed terrible crimes... horrifying things, really. You were familiar enough with the kami and their ways to know your acts stained your soul for eternity. You never repented. You knew the forgiveness of the dead was something you'd never earn. You did lead as good a life as you could, after '73. You married and started a family. You taught your children what you knew about the world of spirits, and the atrocities perpetrated by the Americans and the French against your homeland. Your children didn't care to hear it. They turned their attention eastward, over the Pacific. It didn't really matter, you knew. There was a stain on your soul, and that's all the spirits saw.

You died of a heart attack a few years ago and were initially resigned to the torments of Hell. You knew you deserved this bitter fate, deserved your punishment for the atrocities committed in the name of your country. After a few years of unrelentingly original cruelty and horror, however, it dawned on you... you could flee. There was a world awaiting your return and eventually, you escaped. Now, despite your relative youth among the dead, your long experience in life serves you well. The young — or apparently young — Kuei-jin are accustomed to deferring to someone of your aged appearance, so you have a little more status than you deserve. You fought for years against imperialist oppressors in your homeland, and you've now realized the Quincunx might make for a good next target.

**Concept:** You've always held the spirits and the old ways in reverence since your youth. Your worst crimes are long behind you, and you're not certain how comfortable you are reprising them in your new state. The Spirit of the Living Earth provides you with an opportunity to lay the past to rest and placate the kami directly for your part as a soldier.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Play up your role as wise, elder statesmen among your associates — even if some of them are older than you are. You carry a fair amount of knee-jerk resentment toward Americans and the French, and it doesn't take much to expand that to cover all of Europe. Fortunately, the Quincunx has less love for Westerners, and are doing their best to eliminate the Occidental *shen* in your part of the world. Since the Quincunx is distracted, however....

**Equipment:** An old spear carved and inscribed with small images sacred to the spirits, several talismans and fetishes, simple peasant garb, a wristwatch and a pair of glasses.





**NAME:** Wise Old Man  
**PLAYER:**  
**CHRONICLE:**

**NATURE:** Survivor  
**P'O NATURE:** The Bandit  
**DEMEANOR:** Traditionalist

**BALANCE:** Balanced  
**DIRECTION:** West  
**WU:**

## ATTRIBUTES

### PHYSICAL

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

### SOCIAL

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

### MENTAL

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

## ABILITIES

### TALENTS

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

### SKILLS

Animal Ken ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Crafts ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Etiquette ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Martial Arts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Meditation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Survival ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### KNOWLEDGES

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

## ADVANTAGES

### DISCIPLINES

Chi'in Muh ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Demon Shintai ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
Jade Shintai ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐  
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### BACKGROUNDS

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

### MITES

Trace the Dragon's Blood  
Behold the Spirit's Doorway  
Embrace the Spirit's Change  
Harmonious Shielding of the  
Guarded Home



**DHARMA** Spirit of the Living Earth/1

### HUN

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### WILLPOWER

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

### P'O

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐



☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

### DEMON CHI

### HEALTH

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

### IMBALANCE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## PERSONA

### OTBEG ALTAN, HERETICAL ANCESTOR

Otbeg Altan is currently the Spirit of the Living Earth's eldest and wisest ancestor in the northern parts of the Middle Kingdom. Since the Dharma's numbers remain a mystery — there is no roster anywhere — no one can say with any certainty whether Altan is truly the wisest of his Dharma throughout the world. It seems likelier that at least one of Riyan's other students walks the Earth as a bodhisattva even now.

Altan was born in 1677, a Khalka Mongol. He followed the old shamanistic ways, and even as a young boy was said to possess the Sight. He sensed when spirits were nearby, and often knew how to appease them without having learned any formal rituals. A quick student, Otbeg was fourteen years old and quite familiar with the shaman's world when his greater tribe pledged allegiance to China's Qing Dynasty.

For reasons of his own, however, Otbeg refused to bend his knee to the Manchus — not that anyone explicitly asked him to do so. Along with a dozen other young men, all hunters and warriors comfortable living on the steppe without support from civilization, Otbeg Altan fled the towns of Mongolia and the oppression of the Qing.

For the next thirty years, Otbeg and his band lived as guerilla fighters, after the old Mongolian ways, by harassing Qing outposts and soldiers and surviving off the land. Many other Mongols still resisted the Chinese occupation as well, so Otbeg's band received significant support and earned allies among the friendly tribes to whom they could turn to for aid.

Over the course of those twenty-five years, Otbeg's band grew increasingly desperate. At first they fancied themselves liberators, jolly pirates of the steppe and heroes of the oppressed and downtrodden. Over time and with each successive loss of territory and control, however, the band of brothers found it necessary to take more drastic measures to stop the encroachment of the Manchus. While they might once have engaged in daring raids on military outposts, they

now burnt the homes of innocent Chinese relocated into Mongolian territory, killing those within.

Otbeg Altan finally died surrounded by Chinese soldiers in Manchuria in 1735. His arrival in Hell — he rarely discusses his experiences there, nor how he fled — came as quite a surprise to him. After his escape and Second Breath, he returned to his revolutionary ways, using his newfound abilities to better resist the Chinese and Russians invading his country. He also developed a close relationship with the spirits of his homeland, and learned from the few Spirit of the Living Earth Wan Kuei he encountered.

Otbeg came into continued contact and conflict with the Blood Court of Beijing, which frequently sent its most unruly young Running Monkeys out into the provinces to "subjugate the heretics." As his unlife progressed and he gained greater insight into the practices of the spirits and their impact upon his soul, Altan also noticed most vestiges of his mortal life fading away. After a century of unlife, he realized the only constant relationships he possessed were with Wan Kuei he'd met since taking the Second Breath. Some were of Spirit of the Living Earth, but others belonged to other Dharmas.

Since that time, Otbeg has acted less like a revolutionary firebrand and been more a teacher of younger Kuei-jin. While he does not place any special significance on the Dharma's relationship with Shinto, he does his best to coexist with Shintoist followers of the Dharma (though he would be the first to admit he does not always succeed). He does not use Shinto terms for spirits, rites and traditions within the Dharma, however, preferring the traditional Mongol terms for them.

Otbeg has contacts within the Blood Court in Beijing, and on occasion, learns of impending action by the Blood Court against heretics in Mongolia. When possible, he shares this information with others without revealing its source, which he typically ascribes to the spirits.

Altan claims to be on friendly terms with any Cerulean Veil he encounters, but the truth is that he and Liao Hong have not spoken in decades, nor has he done more than exchange letters with Hiroko Tanaka since before WWII. He secretly believes Tanaka truly *akuma*, poisoned by the Demon Chi in Hiroshima and Nagasaki; he does not share his misgivings with his students, however, because he fears he might be wrong and commit yet the same crime commonly perpetuated by the Quincunx against those of his own Dharma. Regardless, Altan accepts truly inquisitive students of the Dharma, no matter who their other teachers.

Altan can be assumed to know Mongolian variations on most spirit rites below level six, including those listed earlier in this chapter as ascribed as Spirit of the Living Earth specialty rites.

### HIROKO TANAKA, AKUMA MANDARIN

Hiroko Tanaka is not the real name of this Spirit of the Living Earth Kuei-jin, but it will do nicely. Hiroko Tanaka is, in fact, merely the name of the body into which an ill-tempered peasant woman's spirit escaped as it fled Hell. It was an exceptionally convenient body, however, for Hiroko Tanaka, rather than being a semiliterate peasant with a penchant for drowning her newborn children, was a noblewoman of some repute. After recovering from *chih-mei*, Hiroko Tanaka had enough money to bribe family members and other contacts into





forgetting all about the fancy funeral her husband had given her. It was a hoax, she claimed; Tanaka's husband drowned just a few weeks after her return. This was a few decades before the Meiji Restoration began in 1868. Her husband's death gave Hiroko Tanaka enough money to pack up and leave her family estate near Edo entirely. Her husband's family did not learn to where she had fled, but assumed after a few years that she died, really died this time, or fallen in among foreigners.

The peasant woman inhabiting Tanaka's body had lived in a simple mountain village before her suicide and followed traditional methods of appeasing the spirits in her daily life. As Tanaka, she moved to Sapporo, to be closer to an elder of the Spirit of the Living Earth Dharma, a charismatic bodhisattva from the early days of the Fifth Age. Tanaka was one of his most attentive students, and when he finally left the mortal plane, she — just fifty years dead — began teaching other Dharma students where her master had left off.

Hiroko Tanaka rejected the division between Buddhism and Shinto, so artificially segregated during the Meiji Restoration, as did her master and most of her students. They realized the various kami traditions across Japan could not be easily unified into a single state religion whose main purpose was not to venerate the spirits, but rather, to venerate the Emperor. By the inception of the 20th century, however, many Running Monkeys within the Spirit of the Living Earth habitually used Shinto terms for many aspects of the Dharma's conventions. Tanaka did not disabuse those young Kuei-jin of their habits, though. She realized the Dharma needed to meet change as the world did.

Tanaka was instrumental in gaining the tacit disengagement of both Houses Bishamon and Genji regarding the Spirit of the Living Earth. Although the Quincunx's houses had long declared the Dharma heretical and downright dangerous to "right-thinking Kuei-jin," Tanaka's group had enough in common with both major Japanese houses that it wasn't hard to convince them to simply leave the Dharma alone. House Bishamon consists primarily of Japanese traditionalists, who believe enlightenment stems from holding fast to the old ways — something the Spirit of the Living Earth does as well. Members of House Genji, on the other hand, approached Tanaka more than once for help in dealing with kami; that house's many members have forged pacts with modern spirits of electricity and metal to help them with various tasks.

Just after the Imperial surrender to end the Second World War, Tanaka and her students acted as intermediaries for negotiations between the two houses regarding the hellholes erupting in both Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Unfortunately, during those negotiations, Tanaka first tapped into the tainted Chi near those two cities. Due to her unprecedented level of activity, she found herself using more and more Chi in her nightly travels and conflicts with the Yama Kings' servants. Finally, one night near dawn, Tanaka was low on both Yin and Yang Chi; rather than risk dissolution, she fed on the tainted Chi-infused mortals who'd fled from the firestorms of Nagasaki.

This seemingly trivial act had vast repercussions. Tanaka's P'o took over for a few nights. When next her Hun regained control over her corpse, she found herself facing a small group of Bishamon Running Monkeys who accused her of being *akuma*. Knowing the accusation to be both false and sufficient to destroy her reputation, Tanaka destroyed all three Kuei-jin, burned their bodies, then returned to her contacts in House Bishamon and pretended all was well.

Soon, however, events spiraled out of Tanaka's control. The negotiations were faring poorly and Tanaka found herself facing questions regarding the disappearance of the three Kuei-jin. Rather than run for the hills, she turned to the forbidden Ritual of the Black Peony. Tanaka contacted the Yama King Emma-o and offered up part of her soul in return for increased facility in the political and occult arenas. Emma-o, having just vanquished the Yama King Pika Don, had been secretly considering Tanaka as a candidate for *shikome* status. Emma-o granted the investment. Tanaka then ably extracted herself from the problems she'd been in, placating both Bishamon and Genji.

Over the subsequent half-century, Tanaka has schemed to escape Emma-o's influence, but has yet to succeed and will not likely do so; the Yama King sees Tanaka's final perversion as one of the keys to his ascension to the Demon Emperor's Throne. His pawns are in place and even now, they maneuver the Genji and Bishamon to drive Tanaka into Emma-o's waiting arms.



# CHAPTER FIVE: THE SCORPION EATERS

"You a *Kindred*?" Hollywood Yip asked in his smooth-clipped English.

The *gweilo* squirmed in his seat, barbwire digging through his Armani silk cuffs and into his wrists and the chair's arm rests.

"Bitch. Ask a simple question," Yip said, drowning a burning cigarette into the vampire's eyelid. He screamed. The horror-stricken restaurant patrons wailed in response. One-Ball Tony leveled his scorpion-imprint Uzi at the crowd huddling in the corner. That shut them up.

Yip took a drag off his cigarette, flaring it back up, and grabbed the *gweilo*'s jaw. He pointed the cigarette at his prisoner's other eye, threatening to burn it as well.

"I'm *Kindred*! I'm *Kindred*!" the *gweilo* confessed in fear.

Yip fell back into his seat with his movie-perfect grin. "Well fuck, man. Why didn't you say so? You could have saved yourself the ass-kicking."

"You're... you're going to kill me, anyway," the *gweilo* said, his dignity lost beneath hiccuped, dry sobs.

"That's not what I had planned," Yip said. "I was going to offer you a cut in my operations if you could help me move heroin through San Francisco's port authority." Yip gestured to the cowering humans. "I even brought food to celebrate our new partnership, but... now it looks like I'll be eating alone."

"What? Why?" the panic-stricken *gweilo* asked.

"Because you cry like a little Quincux bitch." Yip pulled his pistol and emptied the clip into the *gweilo*'s skull. "And I hate that."

# THE SCORPION EATERS

## VIRTUE: P'Ō

*Like a scorpion, this stuff will kill you if you don't handle it right. But, if you can't handle it, you're not fit to live, are you?*

— Ringo Chen, gangster

The Sixth Age is almost here and the corruption will only spread... that's the reality of the Scorpion Eaters. The Scorpion Eaters are a new Dharma, a product of the 20th century's push towards industry. In a world dying under the toxic cloud of progress and the impending arrival of the Sixth Age, some Kuei-jin are surviving on the changes rather than fighting them.

The first Scorpion Eaters emerged after learning to feed off the poisoned bile pervading the desolated Hiroshima and Nagasaki. With each toxic discovery of so-called progress, more Scorpion Eaters emerged. This was a rapid conclusion to a slower inevitability creeping throughout Asia already.

The drive for industry elbowed the Far East's nations to cannibalize their own resources; less than 10% of China's and Japan's forests survived the lumber industry's steel teeth, forcing these twin juggernauts into the Brazilian jungles for wood. Slowly the Earth dies, Chi grows more poisonous and more Kuei-jin learn how to feed off the feces of the world.

The Scorpion Eaters are the orphans of the hollow society that created them. They are children of the modern nights, welcoming everything today's culture offers: from her fastest cars to her deadliest drugs, from her soulless high-rises to the organized plunder of the ecology. More, bigger, faster. They act like thugs and gangsters, killing someone for looking at them the wrong way; John Woo, Ringo Lam and Tsui Hark are the Dharma's messiahs of violence, while the Scorpion Eaters, in turn, are their two-gunned acolytes. Still, there is a price to pay, and the Scorpion Eaters owe nominal fealty to the Yama Kings for giving them the ability to survive where no one else can. Thus, they cannot escape being eventually marked by Demon Shintai Characteristics.

While the Scorpion Eaters appear similar to the Devil-Tigers, they differ in terms of consequence. The Devil-Tigers understand cause, effect and responsibility, while the Scorpion Eaters do not seek to punish the wicked or act in accordance with some perceived role in the universe. The Devil-Tigers may cast shadows to contrast the light, but the Scorpion Eaters are the shadows. They are spiritually void, as empty as a mirror-cast reflection. Instead of relying on a spiritual ethos, they enjoy wholly physical pursuits. They embody hedonism, and ponder only the immediacy of their vices. There is rarely long-term planning aside from survival. Instead they live in the most physical, intimate moments.

The Yama Kings are aware of these Kuei-jin and tolerate them. It's simply not necessary to turn them *akuma* when they'll probably come looking for it themselves, and it's not worth the effort hunting them down. Regardless, by allowing the Scorpion Eaters to spread their poison and dependence on tainted Chi, the Sixth Age's arrival accelerates. Their actions lower the number of Kuei-jin dedicated to opposing the masters of hell. Just as the shark tolerates — and even

benefits from — the lamprey clinging to its skin, feeding on its blood and cleaning its body, so to do the Yama Kings tolerate the Scorpion Eaters who travel and feed in the wake of their corruption.

The ancestors excoriate the Scorpion Eaters for several reasons. First, and most immediate, by refusing to join the fight against the Yama Kings, the Dharma robs the Quincunx of allies and warriors in its greatest struggle. Secondly, while the Scorpion Eaters do not serve the Yama Kings, they nevertheless promote their agenda of decay and corruption. In the Quincunx's eyes, that makes them *akuma* and minions of Yomi.

By actively fostering the consumption of tainted Chi, they lure other Kuei-jin away from the path of righteousness and promote the further degradation of Dragon Nests, which deprives virtuous, hungry dead of necessary survival. Finally, the Scorpion Eaters actively turn aside from the path of enlightenment. They preach a gospel (if it can be called that) of short-term gain, physical pleasure and wanton destruction. Only their delight in sense and sensation prevents them from walking the Road Forward; they always seem a step away from descending into a permanent state of *chih-mei*.

Sadly, the Dharma's glamorous lifestyle and devil-may-care attitude seduces many young Kuei-jin, especially those who have taken the Second Breath in the last decade. As nihilism and hedonism overtake more young mortals and lead many to early deaths from overindulgence and violence, so too do the ranks of the Scorpion Eaters swell. By embracing the very essence of the modern age and rejecting the "antiquated and foolish traditions" that sustained Kuei-jin society for centuries, the Eaters are a walking affront to all right-thinking, hungry dead.

This Dharma has produced no bodhisattvas, nor likely will it. This is due in part to the Dharma's youth; it has only existed in the years following WWII. With few exceptions, its adherents are young and reckless. More telling, however, is that its followers reject enlightenment as a goal worth pursuing. They have decided that if everything is preordained by the August Personage, then nothing they do really matters; they might as well have a good time watching the Great Cycle crush society under the Wheel of Ages.

Conversely, if everything isn't pre-ordained... if the ancestors are right and the Yama Kings actually succeed in bringing the Great Cycle to a stop, then they still have the best chance to survive and prosper. They've encountered no opposition from the Yama Kings and no demands for servitude, so they figure: We must be on the right track.

Scorpion Eaters live the lifestyle of the archetypal, if not stereotypical, Asian gangster. Drawing their inspiration from the Hong Kong films of Woo, Lam, and Hark and modeling themselves on the ultimate suave of Chow Yun Fat, Anthony Wong, Simon Yam, and Anita Mui, they live violent, extravagant lifestyles portrayed only in movies. Working as mob bosses, pimps, assassins, pit fighters, bike gang leaders, and other extreme types, they feud, fight and fuck their way through the nights. Scorpion Eaters typically love technology and the symbols of humanity's "progress." As harbingers of corruption, environmental ruin, and the progress of the Great Cycle, the Eaters eagerly subsume anything bandying about the mantle of modernization.

Untroubled by antiquated notions of ethics or enlightenment, the Scorpion Eaters also give free reign to their P'o. The tainted Chi they feed on marks their bodies, but they regard such symbols of Demon Shintai as marks of power. They are not human, not do they care for the conventions of mortal life. The corruption they promote and prosper from does not bother them in the slightest.

**Training:** The Scorpion Eaters are experiencing a steady growth in numbers, especially over the last few years. Many are Kuei-jin faced with despair or succumbing permanently to the *chih-mei* state; when their only options are facing the sun or being destroyed, they eagerly choose instead to join the Scorpion Eaters.

As a whole, this Dharma isn't big on ritual. They consider such things childish and a relic of the ancestors' superstitious ways. The only two rituals the Dharma possesses allows them to poison existing Dragon Nests and to inhale tainted breath (what they call "eating shit"); it's when the Kuei-jin learns to consume tainted Chi and draw sustenance from it. This involves purging one's system of Chi and briefly giving in to fire soul. The Kuei-jin is then given tainted Chi to feed on. If the Kuei-jin regains control of herself, she's taken the first steps along the Dharma's path.

**Weakness:** The Scorpion Eaters willingly blind themselves to their souls' peril. While they are not actually *akuma*, their survival depends largely on the goodwill of the Yama Kings. Curiously, despite having turned away from enlightenment, the Scorpion Eaters found stability by embracing their P'o rather than trying to control it. The fact they haven't permanently succumbed to it leads some ancestors to believe the Yama Kings are spreading the Dharma, or perhaps that one or more *akuma* founded the movement, hoping to ensnare the weak-minded. Regardless, the Kuei-jin increasingly hate this Dharma as perhaps no other; its tenets are a direct affront to the August Personage and contribute solely to the agendas of the Yama Kings.

Additionally, many Scorpion Eaters have noticed that their Demon Shintai characteristics mark them even when they aren't in demon form. Reactions to this vary. Some wear these marks with pride, claiming them as proof that they're adapting to an increasingly corrupt world. Others regard their aberrations with horror, mostly for fear that being marked in this fashion virtually guarantees them unwanted attention from demon hunters and self-righteous Kuei-jin. A few more worry that these marks indicate servitude to the Yama Kings. Most Eaters, however, believe the demon marks simply the result of the corrupt Chi forcing its way through their bodies. The corruption spreads and eventually brands them (see *Demon Shintai Characteristics*, p. 122).

**Affiliations:** Scorpion Eaters generally congregate in gangs and shun any affiliations with old terms and concepts. They exist like their favorite "gangster," but their idea of what this life entails is a product of Hong Kong and Hollywood movies.

**Auspicious Omens and Symbols:** Scorpion Eaters pay little heed to omens and auspicious signs. Naturally, their symbol is the scorpion, which often finds its way into their tattoos and jewelry. A Scorpion Eaters' Demon Shintai characteristics are often marked by a scorpion-like



appearance (chitinous tails, pincers, compound eyes, chitinous armor, etc.). Among Scorpion society, these are often worn with a perverse sense of pride; symbols of the Kuei-jin's survival instincts.

The Dharma's other great symbol is technology. They favor any high-tech gadget or toy — the smaller, more expensive and sophisticated, the better — and many like leaving "calling cards" in their wake. The sect particularly admired the plastic cards with a holographic scorpion image used by "Limpy" Lo, late of Shanghai.

**Concepts:** Gangster, biker, assassin, professional fighter

## TENETS

1. Survive, regardless the cost.
2. Embrace change, for it's the nature of all things.
3. Turn your back on Heaven; the bitch turned its back on you.
4. Show no one mercy and expect none in return.
5. Forget the past. Don't dwell on the future.  
Live in the moment.
6. Serve no one, but respect the strong.
7. Defend what's yours; to do otherwise is showing weakness.
8. Spread corruption wherever you can. Force everyone to adapt to your standards.

## RIVAL PATHS

**Devil-Tigers:** So close, yet so far. Move over bitches, you had your chance to rule the world and blew it. It's our turn now.

**Resplendent Cranes:** You're kidding, right?

**Song of the Shadows:** Here, since you're so obsessed with death and detachment, let me give you some up close and personal experience.

**Thousand Whispers:** Wear a thousand masks, follow a thousand lies. Just means I have a thousand reasons not to trust your ass.

**Thrashing Dragons:** You guys are alright... but you're still too concerned with keeping your hands clean. It doesn't mean shit if you've experienced everything in the world, and still can't exist in it.

**Other Heresies:** Boo-hoo... the Quincunx doesn't like me... boo-hoo... they push me around all the time. Guess what, assholes. If you can't handle the Five Courts, then you're royally screwed in the Sixth Age.

**Kindred:** Fuck, these guys know how to party... and at least they don't hold to any stupid notions about their "purpose" in creation.

## SCORPION DREAMS

What do the ancestors teach? That the Great Cycle continues, like a cosmic wheel slowly spinning. Creation must pass through each Age, but, despite this, the Yama Kings want to stop the Wheel, trapping it in the Age of Sorrow so they can usurp the August Personage of Jade and rule... forever.

What does the Middle Kingdom teach? That the world is becoming more virulently corrupt, both morally and physically. Politicians and criminals rub shoulders until the difference between them vanishes. Mankind is destroying nature through logging, mining, overpopulation, aggressive harvesting of plants and animals, and pollution. Even mortals show signs of physical and spiritual depravities, with environmental contaminants and other poisons, from PCBs to HIV to brain-eating viruses, infiltrating their bodies.

As a result, sources of pure Chi are growing fewer in number. Dragon Nests are not as common as they once were, and the *shen* controlling them are less inclined to share their dwindling resources with a bunch of creatures they believe endemic to the pervasive corruption. Worse yet, some Dragon Nests are outright poisoned. The Middle Kingdom's ability to filter out the filth and impurities injected into her skin, blood and arterial flows of Chi have taken their toll.

What, then, is a Kuei-jin to do? Join the ancestors in their struggle against the Yama Kings? Even they say the Yama Kings' rule is inevitable. It sounds like a noble cause, but the corruption and venality of the elders make their pleas for noble self-sacrifice a poor jest indeed. More Kuei-jin are becoming *akuma* and betraying their comrades. Regardless whether the Yama Kings succeed in their plans, it makes no difference to individual Kuei-jin. If the ancestors are right and everything is pre-ordained, then it doesn't matter what you do. If you become *akuma*, it's because the August Personage of Jade wills it. If the Yama Kings stop the Great Cycle, it's either because the August Personage is consigned to his fate or because the August Personage can't stop it. In the end the differences don't really matter.

Becoming *akuma* isn't the answer, either. This simply places you in service for all eternity. The price demanded by the Yama Kings is too high and the dangers too great. Eventually, when the Great Cycle continues and the Sixth Age gives way to the Seventh, then Eighth, the *akuma* will discover their time has passed. The way to survive is not to back the winning team, but to ensure you can watch the game in comfort and safety.

The poisoning of the Earth's Chi in this acceleration towards the Sixth Age is a terrible problem for all *shen*, but for the Kuei-jin it is especially terrifying, for their very survival depends on it. The only answer, it seems, is to learn how to survive on Chi's poisoned blossoms. There are plenty of sources of it, and best of all, nobody wants to claim them — at least not yet. This means those who adapt now can guarantee their sources will be around for the long, bloody future ahead. It's become clear to some Kuei-jin that to survive, they must learn to feed on tainted Chi — without compromising themselves to the Yama Kings — regardless how distasteful the notion might seem at first. These Kuei-jin, born from a spiritually desolate Asia choking on its own industrial vomit and technological "progress," are the Scorpion Eaters.

## HISTORY

For nearly two hundred years, Asia served as playground for Western powers. After first one nation, then another forced its way into China, Japan, Korea, India, and other South-East Asian countries, the local populations learned some very hard lessons. The first, and perhaps most important,

was that the future was rapid modernization and industrialization. Only with a technologically advanced manufacturing base could any Asian nation hold their own politically, socially, economically, and militarily.

Various Asian nations ran the race to modernize and industrialize with differing success, but there was one constant throughout every country... the plunder and destruction of natural resources and the landscape. Understandably, by the end of the 1900s, there was a tremendous backlash against progress and a few ancestors happily supported the uprising. The brutal reality remained, however, that if a nation wanted to circumvent foreign domination, industrialization was a necessity.

The Second World War only worsened matters. Human misery reached new heights, and in the desperate struggle for resources and revved war production, many countries abandoned what little restraint they possessed. Finally, when Hiroshima and Nagasaki vanished in an atomic haze, it seemed that Hell had literally come to Earth. Jade Scorpion, a Devil-Tiger in Nagasaki, awoke on the evening after the nuclear attack and stared out over her ruined city. Retiring to replenish her diminished reserves of Chi, she made a terrible discovery. Not only was the city leveled, but its Chi had also become tainted. Starving and surrounded only by corruption, she had little choice but to feed on poison. While Jade Scorpion convulsed in agony from the toxins in her body, she experienced a *dên*.

The Kuei-jin, collectively, had failed in their purpose. The August Personage of Jade allowed them to return from hell and serve creation once more, but, they'd become so consumed with their elaborate schemes and self-destructive search for enlightenment that they forgot their first duty: to serve Heaven. Lost in the maze of their own making, they poisoned the Middle Kingdom's very life force. In doing so, the Sixth Age had surely begun. So conspicuous was their failure that the August Personage had turned its back on the Kuei-jin. All that was left now was to survive.

Rising, Jade Scorpion attempted to draw more tainted Chi into her body, but she could not. Choking and vomiting while her body recoiled from the toxins, she experienced a second *dên*. The iniquity of the ancestors spread and the Yama Kings' minions grew in power; the Middle Kingdom's corruption would continue, dwindling sources of pure Chi. Unless they could learn to consume this tainted Chi, the Kuei-jin would perish.

Jade Scorpion's body consumed itself, trying to purge the tainted Chi from its system. Panicked, she cried out to the Yama Kings. If they allowed her to feed on corrupted Chi, she wouldn't oppose their rule, nor would she aid the Quincunx. She only wished to survive. Her answer came almost immediately. A demon appeared before her, an intercessor for the Yama Kings. He bore a document, promising her the ability to feed upon poisoned Chi, thus rendering her as immune to it as a snake to its own venom. In exchange, she would teach others her gifts on condition they too neither hindered the Yama Kings nor aided the Quincunx. Jade Scorpion agreed; the demon forced her to chew a live scorpion and use its ichor to seal the pact. Immediately, her body stopped convulsing and accepted the tainted Chi; she felt a new-found strength coursing through her.

Jade Scorpion was the first, but Kuei-jin in other cities, including Hiroshima and Hong Kong (where, in the war's closing months, cannibalism was rampant and the Triads profited on the distribution of "white meat"), arrived at similar realizations and making similar pacts with the Yama Kings. They would not serve the Kings of Hell, but neither would they oppose their rule. To each of them, the demons addressed them as Scorpion Eaters.

For the handful of Scorpion Eaters emerging in this turbulent era, the wisdom of their actions was confirmed in the months immediately following the war's end. The ancestors' incessant feuding had seen them participate in petty conflicts to advance their own trivial agendas. Instead of working together to solve their differences and problems, they sought scapegoats to justify their fears and serve their taste for retribution. Once they realized Japan's Chi was fatally poisoned by the spread of radioactive winds, the ancestors retreated further into tradition and ritual, all but ignoring their internal problems in favor of heaping blame at the feet of Westerners or, worse yet, their own kind. Everything was a symptom of this heresy or that apostasy. Seeking retribution was far easier than seeking solutions.

Unfortunately, the wars and destruction continued. Chemical fogs permeated in the jungles of Korea and Vietnam; atomic sledgehammers slammed the anvil Pacific with radiation; chemical spills... deforestation... choking pollution... and still the ancestors ignored the obvious and blindly pursued their agendas like tin generals. None of it was their fault; they were cultured pearls lost in the filth pens of Westerners. Just watch, the Great Leap Outward would prove them right.

Jade Scorpion traveled the Middle Kingdom, meeting with like-minded orphans of the modern age. More so, the various wars killed many mortals who arose as *chih-mei*, and the Quincunx was having a difficult time tracking all the new Kuei-jin. Many had little wish in joining the Courts of the Ancestors. They had no faith in the prospect of enlightenment or serving Heaven when Heaven had so clearly turned its back on them. All that was left to do was adapt to the protean modern world and survive as best as one could. Jade Scorpion and the other heretical Dharmas prospered from these new vampires who cared little for the traditions that victimized their mortal years. Their numbers surged, though some slower than others.

The Quincunx discovered the Scorpion Eaters in the late '70s, but mistakenly believed them isolated incidents. The Scorpion Eaters were never organized to begin with and few Scorpions knew one another. So, when the Quincunx burned out a nest of these *akuma*, all signs pointed to their complete eradication. The Courts did not know of Jade Scorpion, or the fact she was creating a unified set of tenets to serve the Dharma. When the Quincunx's warriors and assassins swept through regions, the Eaters simply withdrew to their poisoned Dragon Nests, knowing few would follow them there. The Courts underestimated the extent of this Dharma's influence and membership.

It's only recently that the Quincunx discovered the Scorpion Eaters actually exist as an entirely new Dharma and threat. There is little they can do, however, since the Scorpions remain an enigma and essentially uncharted waters. The Quincunx only has the vaguest inkling of their

agendas and practices. They know the Dharma dwells on the fringes of Kuei-jin society, feeding on the Middle Kingdom's scabs and sores. Whenever a Dragon Nest becomes tainted, they move in and claim it for their own. They also congregate around Broken Mirrors (see p. 122 below and **Killing Streets**, pp. 104-107 for more information on Broken Mirrors) and other locations where human misery or misfortune perverts the natural flow of Chi. Otherwise, the Quincunx believes the Dharma are true *akuma* and products of the burgeoning Sixth Age. Unfortunately, everything else about them is cloaked in mystery and ignorance.

## JACKALS FEEDING ON THE CORPSE OF VIRTUE

The Scorpion Eaters' ability to feed on tainted Chi stems directly from the Lords of Hell. Why, then, don't they require the Scorpion Eaters to become true *akuma* by forswearing portions of their souls or by pledging complete fealty to them? The truth is that none of these measures are necessary. The creation of an *akuma* requires a certain investment of time, effort and supervision; to be truly effective, the Kuei-jin supplicant must actively seek out the Yama Kings and petition them for servitude.

The Scorpion Eaters are not interested in becoming vassals of the Yama Kings, but their end intent still serves Yomi in the most destructive manner possible — evil committed in the name of free will. The Yama Kings don't need to waste their energies in pacts since they'll eventually net the Scorpion Eater's soul regardless. By abandoning their search for enlightenment and spreading poisoned Chi through the physical world, the Scorpion Eaters usher in the Sixth Age and bring themselves closer to Yomi.

Many Scorpion Eaters even firmly believe that the Sixth Age has already begun, and are resigned to carving out their trivial territories. As Broken Mirrors (see page 122) appear and spread, as the world becomes more physically and morally bankrupt, the Yama Kings gain in strength and influence without too great an effort in the matter. The Scorpion Eaters are purveyors of free-willed corruption... why would the Yama Kings oppose them?

When the Yama Kings rule, the Scorpion Eaters' assistance will not be rewarded, but neither will their lack of formal allegiance be punished. The Dharma will just have to take their chances as they've always done. That suits both the Yama Kings and the Scorpion Eaters just fine.

## PHILOSOPHY

The Scorpion Eaters' philosophy is quite simple. The universe is always changing, and to survive, you must change with it. Those who don't, die.

While the Great Cycle turns and the Ages pass, the world is remade. In the First Age, creation was not yet formed; in the Second Age, the Ebon Dragon and Scarlet

Queen created the Ten Thousand Things with each breath; in the Third Age, the Wan Xian ruled creation; in the Fourth Age, the August Personage punished the Wan Xian for their excesses, and they became Wan Kuei; in the Fifth Age, the Wan Kuei hid from the sun and stole Chi from the living; in the Sixth Age, the Yama Kings will rule and again, the Kuei-jin must change to survive. During none of these eras has anything stagnated or remained the same; now, however, the ancestors seek to stop the advent of the Celestial Wheel? Haven't they learned anything?

Instead of adapting to the world while it modernizes and becoming harmonious with Heaven's wishes, the Kuei-jin squabble like petty children until the horrors of the Sixth Age overtake them. Many Scorpion Eaters firmly believe the twin bombs dropped on Japan marked the Age of Sorrow's beginning. Not only that, but the corruption of the Middle Kingdom's Chi marks the end of Kuei-jin as they view themselves now. The August Personage provided the Hungry Dead with the tools for survival, but they failed in their duties again, and must now face the consequences of their blindness. Only those with the courage and fortitude to adapt will survive, and only the Scorpion Eaters are prepared to face this new era, and the next, and the next.

This means coming to an arrangement with the Yama Kings, the moral logic of which is simple. The Great Cycle continues turning, which means the rule of the Yama Kings is inevitable. The best way to survive the coming Ages is to keep a low profile. Becoming *akuma* indentures one to the Yama Kings and their plans, but eventually, they too will pass. Feeding on tainted Chi is a minimal accommodation; it allows the Scorpion Eaters to survive, but it does not bind them to Hell's galleys. In all, the Scorpion Eaters believe themselves in a win-win situation.

## ENLIGHTENMENT IS NOT ENLIGHTENMENT

In some ways, the Scorpion Eaters are an anti-Dharma. If the best efforts of the most enlightened bodhisattva still leave Chi in Hiroshima and Nagasaki filthy with radiation, Beijing and Shanghai poisoned with filth and Bhopal and the Ganges toxic with pollution, then clearly, the Kuei-jin failed. The steady increase of contaminated Dragon Nests is the final proof.

Scorpion Eaters do not seek enlightenment; they have no use for virtue and they scorn wisdom. Instead, they hold fast to the simple material values of survival. They intend to be around when the Great Cycle ends... when creation is made whole once more... and they don't care what they have to do to get there.

The Courts' great failure, the Scorpions believe, lies in their unwillingness to adapt alongside modern times. Technological and social change is just another reflection of the Great Cycle turning, so to dismiss it is to dismiss the progress of creation. This means the Scorpion Eaters make a virtue of keeping abreast with the latest trends, technologies and information.

The Scorpion Eaters dismiss the taint inevitably affecting all Dharma members as the price of survival. The ancestors and their followers were unwilling to pay this price, which is why they're about to become extinct, just as the Wan Xian

became the Wan Kuei. Who knows what they'll become next? After all, each notch of the Great Cycle altered both creation and the Kuei-jin. Certainly, when it comes down to it, the Wan Kuei are more debased than the Wan Xian while the Scorpion Eaters, in turn, are easily more depraved than the Kuei-jin. For the Eaters, though, this is simply proof that they're "ahead of the curve."

## TENETS

The Dharma's central tenets are largely self-explanatory since the Scorpion Eaters are pragmatic, rather than philosophical in outlook. The only reason these are codified and widely practiced in this form, however, is thanks to the efforts of Kuei-jin like Jade Scorpion, who disseminated the information in her travels. Few Scorpion Eaters disputed her observations since these tenets already suited their temperament.

### 1. Survive, regardless the cost.

This is the faith's fundamental truth. The Sixth Age is here and the Yama Kings will rule, regardless what the Quincunx thinks it can do to stop the situation. Opposing Yomi is fruitless; the best hope anyone has is surviving the Great Cycle's grinding progress. The means are unimportant; only the ends matter.

### 2. Embrace change, for it's the nature of all things.

The greatest Kuei-jin failing was their refusal to change while the world around them did. Change is the dance of creation and the rhapsody of death. The Kuei-jin must embrace it. Reject it and creation will reject you.

### 3. Turn your back on Heaven; the bitch turned its back on you.

The August Personage showed the Kuei-jin they weren't worthy of the tasks set for them. Very well. Forget about virtue and purpose; these goals no longer matter. Forget the mandate of Heaven; it's no longer relevant.

### 4. Show no one mercy and expect none in return.

The Great Cycle always progresses forward, obstacles be damned. If you don't get out of its way, it'll crush you. Those too weak or too stupid to do what's necessary to ensure their survival deserve only destruction. Allies are useful. Enemies should be destroyed.

### 5. Forget the past. Don't dwell on the future. Live in the moment.

Let nothing distract you from survival. Make plans to ensure your continued existence, but don't become so enraptured by visions of the future that you lose sight of current circumstances. Likewise, the past is finished. Learn its lessons, but don't grow enamored with the outdated or dead.

### 6. Serve no one, but respect the strong.

Servitude is a dead end, for all conquerors are eventually brought low. Nevertheless, only a fool defies a power greater than his own; destruction can be the only result of such blindness. Make accommodations with the mighty to ensure your continued existence, but remember; Betrayal is a word, survival a reality.

### 7. Defend what's yours; to do otherwise is showing weakness.

If you can't defend what's yours, someone will take it from you. Predators smell weakness; To survive, you must

be strong. Only claim what you know you can hold, but hold it you must.

### 8. Spread corruption wherever you can. Force everyone to adapt to your standards.

Creation is already corrupted; this is necessary before the Ten Thousand Things can become one. Spread corruption, for this makes survival easier for us and harder for our rivals.

## SOCIETY

The Scorpion Eaters embrace an extreme lifestyle. They live like characters out of a Hong Kong Triad flick, laden with jewelry and guns, wearing the finest clothes and driving the fastest cars. They might be underground fighters, bikers, or assassins. Any profession emphasizing personal strength and a healthy contempt for society attracts the Eaters. They value freedom from any constraints save the few they place on themselves, and take perverse pride in monstrous acts.

The Scorpions are usually flagrant in their actions, especially in groups, and enjoy starting gunfights and brawls. More than a few, however, are also capable of considerable subtlety. They often triumph over more senior and rigid Kuei-jin through their use of technology and refusal to engage in the tedious rituals of a shadow war. This may eventually cost them, however, with the Courts' recent decision to attack these *akuma* without restraint (since they're so obviously lacking in honor).

## EATING THE SCORPION

Becoming a Scorpion Eater is not easy and it's certainly not pleasant. Most recruits are Kuei-jin disillusioned by what they saw in the Courts. Others are resigned to creation's fate, and simply decided that since matters will only grow worse over the course of the Sixth Age, then they might as well have ringside seats.

Scorpion Eaters, as a rule, do not seek out new recruits for the Dharma unless they find a *chih-mei* they can indoctrinate. They're not easy to find, given that the Scorpion Eaters and Devil-Tigers often dance in the same mortal circles. In fact, some Scorpion Eaters pose as Devil-Tigers and Thrashing Dragons if only to avoid detection. Once someone finds a Dharma member, however, joining is relatively simple for the same reason: the Dharma has little fear of infiltration. Initiation is a quick affair, and once a Kuei-jin "eats the scorpion," she cannot feed on anything but tainted Chi. This impedes one's return to the Courts, often forcing newly initiated Kuei-jin to become a Scorpion Eater in outlook as well. The specifics of the ritual are described later (see p. 127).

New Scorpion Eaters spend the first few weeks learning the basics of survival and Bile Shintai, the Dharma's corrupt version of the Shintai Disciplines. She then rejoins Kuei-jin society, perhaps feigning continued allegiance to a Court or, more likely, striking out on her own or with fellow Scorpions.

## TAKING LIFE BY THE TAIL

Once initiated, the Scorpion Eater generally builds a web of influence and power, presumably resilient enough to resist the ravages of the Age of Sorrow. The Scorpions' lifestyle is one of flashy excess. Their love for cutting-edge



technology is a reflection of their natures, a kind of modern totem, but they also gain practical advantages in defending themselves from potential rivals, like the ancestors.

Among all Kuei-jin, only the Bamboo Princes use technology with any facility approaching that of the Scorpion Eaters. When cellular phones first came to market, eager Scorpions snapped them up. These days they employ laptops, palmtops, cellular phones, high-tech body armor and every technological trinket known to man. The Scorpions don't just gather these items for show, but for their practical uses as well. As the world transforms, it behooves the prudent individual to keep abreast of the changes, to maintain his advantage in surviving the Great Cycle.

Scorpion Eaters are particularly fond of investing in or otherwise gaining control over technology-based companies. Not only does this give them access to state-of-the-art equipment and a steady cash flow from their ventures, but it also allows them to encourage the more unscrupulous businesses. These are the companies not averse to dumping their waste products illegally, scrimping on environmental safeguards and forgoing fair staffing policies in favor of graft and corruption. Such companies also have the advantage of remaining relatively "ancestor-free." The Quincunx's dithering champions of status quo generally concentrate their holdings and influence in matters they understand, like politicians, policemen, gang bosses and traditional manufacturing industries. In most cases, the Scorpions' main competition stems from Devil-Tiger rackets, but at least it's a fair sight easier than dealing with the whole damn Quincunx.

A common tactic for Scorpion Eaters is to run with criminal gangs in areas the ancestors don't normally frequent — like Broken Mirrors and other corrupt locations. Like any criminal fraternity, they are loyal to one another so long as there's a benefit. Since it's unlikely the Scorpions will find other Kuei-jin sympathetic to their unique feeding requirements, however, most Scorpion gangs have a relatively stable framework.

Some members prefer a solitary and often nomadic existence, often working as freelance assassins, martial artists, and gamblers. These individuals are among the most morally numb creatures in the Middle Kingdom, short of those actively serving Yomi. They exist only to increase their personal power and are careful not to let anyone or anything touch them too deeply. They maintain that this detached nature is a must in this changing world, for attachments can cause you to ignore your survival instincts. They reason that just as every creature dies alone, it's best to survive alone as well.

Not all Scorpion Eaters, however, are completely reprehensible. Some Kuei-jin sent to infiltrate the Dharma have become unwilling members of this fraternity. They aren't really Scorpion Eaters in spirit, but rather, tragic figures forced to feed on offal Chi just to serve Heaven and keep it safe. Aware that the Quincunx will no longer accept them because of their taint and unwilling to follow the Scorpion Eaters into Hell, these Kuei-jin operate as fifth columnists, damning themselves to protect the Quincunx from staining its hands. Those few who actually know one another form a far-stretched *wu* called the No Autumn Scorpions. They serve the Five August Courts, assassinating

some Scorpions when they can, or betraying others to the Devil-Tigers. Unfortunately, the Dharma knows they exist, and is actively seeking them out lest their presence annoys the Yama Kings as a breach of “good faith.”

## UNNATURAL HABITATS

To say Scorpion Eaters are paranoid is a considerable understatement. As a heretical Dharma, they risk destruction the moment someone discovers their true nature. As creatures that need corrupt Chi to survive, they're not difficult to unmask, either, especially to someone using the Chi'iu Muh's power, Chi Sight, on them. Thus, Scorpions usually possess several well-protected and secret havens, quite often connected to one another through sewage pipes or back alley warrens. They also locate them in the most inhospitable areas they can find; in desperate slums, over toxic landfills, in crack dens and penny bordellos, adjacent to sewage reclamation plants... all these are favorite choices.

The need for tainted Chi can be limiting, especially when Dragon Nests are so hotly contested and strongly defended, but tainted humans also serve as an excellent source of corrupt Chi. Broken Mirrors, where Hell lies closest to Earth because of moral entropy, are good locations to find these downtrodden mortals. These include areas where human misery and depravity are rampant because of poor health care, overpopulation, poor sanitation concerns, substance abuse, and corrupt politicians.

## THE STING OF THE SCORPION

This section covers the rules necessary to include Scorpion Eaters in a chronicle. The ingestion of tainted Chi has made it impossible for Scorpions to use the Shintai Arts available to other Kuei-jin; instead they have developed their own versions of the various “god body” powers. The rules for these Disciplines, as well as using tainted Chi, are discussed below.

### TAINTED CHI

Like any Kuei-jin, the Scorpion Eaters require Chi to survive. What makes them unique among all *shen*, however, is their ability, with the tacit approval of the Yama Kings, to draw sustenance from tainted Chi. Chi is the vital energy of creation. The flow of Yin and Yang Chi drives the Great Cycle, and it is the interplay between the two that determines the state of the Ten Thousand Things. In recent years, however, defiled energy continually seeps into existence, markedly changing these flows and thus the state of creation. Normally, the flow of Chi from Dragon Nest to Dragon Nest dissipates and purifies impurities resulting from natural radiation, decay and disease, much the same way the internal organs filter and expunge poisons in the human body.

The massive accumulation of such impurities, from repeated nuclear detonations, waste spills, air pollution and outbreaks of virulent diseases, however, stretches this system's capacity to cope properly. In some locales — like nuclear test sites and toxic waste zones, as well as the worst disease-ridden slums and settlements — the system is overwhelmed. The poisons enter the flow of Yin and Yang energies itself, tainting Chi. Fortunately, Chi carrying this taint cannot easily flow along Dragon Lines.

Corrupt Dragon Nests have a kind of “gravity,” which attracts and isolates toxins and taints within them. Clean Chi is repelled by tainted Chi, so the system acts to quarantine such pockets of foulness. Unfortunately, these unclean sites cannot be easily severed from the remaining “circulatory system.” As taint accumulates, it overflows the capacity of the Dragon Nests, and seeps into adjoining sites like a back-flow of sewage. This slow, but steady spread of poisoned Chi thus far resists all efforts to staunch it through Tapestry, Feng Shui and a host of other related Disciplines. The ancestors and bodhisattvas have no idea where the flow will eventually stop.

Chi inherent in living creatures is similarly, but not as drastically, affected. When various toxins and poisons accumulate in the ecosystem, they filter upwards, from the smallest organisms to the most complex. Some Kuei-jin with particularly refined tastes have said for some time now that an odd taste is creeping into the Chi of some mortals.

The taint is not merely physical. With psychological pressure and stress across the world mounting, more people experience stronger negative emotions; some even reach a breaking point, exploding violently and horribly. The Chi of such desperate individuals is also tainted, and they rarely live long. Once their Chi becomes unclean, either from physical or psychic stress, their vital flows malfunction, resulting in sickness and death (usually diagnosed as a “psychotic episode”).

### CONSUMING TAINTED CHI

Kuei-jin who ingest tainted Chi gain no sustenance from it and quickly grow violently ill while their systems purge the foul energies. The Kuei-jin's body expels its various humors, which must then be replenished from a clean source. Taking tainted Chi into one's system is not pleasant; until the Kuei-jin replaces all Chi lost while cleansing her system, all tasks involving a Mental Attribute incur a penalty equal to half the number of points of tainted Chi ingested (rounded down). To determine the effects of consuming tainted Chi, the Kuei-jin must make a Stamina roll (difficulty of 5 + the number tainted Chi points consumed) and compare the results to the following table:

Number of Successes	Result
Botch	Uncontrolled vomiting and bowel movements, weeping and sweating. The Kuei-jin's system purges itself of all Chi.
0	The Kuei-jin loses all but one point of Chi.
1	The Kuei-jin loses two points of Chi for each point of tainted Chi consumed.
2	The Kuei-jin loses one point of Chi for each point of tainted Chi consumed.
3	The Kuei-jin purges the tainted Chi, losing one point of Chi in the process.
4+	The Kuei-jin purges the tainted Chi, but no other Chi is lost.

## SOURCES OF TAINTED CHI

Tainted Chi is most readily found in corrupted Dragon Nests. Currently, perhaps one out of every 20 Dragon Nests is tainted through a massive influx of poison, radiation, chemicals, disease or other unclean substances. Taint can also occur when a powerful wave of negative emotion born from atrocity upsets the area's Chi flow, though this is extremely rare. The Wall rating of tainted Dragon Nests varies, but it is usually two to four points lower than that of the surrounding area. In cases when it is extremely low, it may form the wellspring of a Broken Mirror.

Tainted Chi in humans is much rarer. It isn't enough for a human to be sick; after all, sickness is natural. Some particularly virulent diseases, however, will taint an individual's Chi. These include man-made biological pathogens and some of nature's more disgusting plagues and viruses like Lassa Fever and the Ebola strains.

Psychological corruption is another source of tainted Chi, but such individuals often learn to live with their taint. Serial killers, particularly remorseless criminals and the violently insane, may be sources of tainted Chi. Scorpion Eaters learn to taint the Chi of their victims, however, so finding a suitable mortal font is rarely a problem.

## DEMON SHINTAI CHARACTERISTICS

After a while, the flow of tainted Chi through a Scorpion Eater's body has a deleterious effect. Constant exposure to corrupted and polluted energies warps the flesh and eventually leads to the manifestation of Demon Shintai characteristics (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 109). Among one another, Scorpion Eaters wear these marks with pride. They are a physical testament to the Kuei-jin's commitment to survival and to the Dharma. The Scorpions believe that with the coming of the Sixth Age, such marks will cease serving as signs of corruption and will instead indicate one's rightness and worthiness to exist in the Age of Sorrow.

For every three levels the Scorpion progresses along her Dharma's path, she gains one permanent Demon Shintai mark.

## TAINTED CHI AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

Scorpion Eaters can use tainted Chi just like "normal" Chi in most ways. They can aspect it towards Yin or Yang, passive like a pool of toxins or active like corrosive acids. In this fashion, the Scorpions are still susceptible to imbalances, and must spend the right type of Chi to power certain Disciplines as per normal. There are several specific differences, however, as noted below.

### Shintai Disciplines

When the Dharma's founders experimented with their powers, they discovered the various shintais did not function as they once did. This, they believe, is because the basic principle of the various Arts is the focus and manipulation of Chi throughout the body as a whole. With both the vessel and medium corrupted, however, the shintais... changed, becoming the collective Bile Shintais.

The five regular shintais (Blood, Bone, Jade, Flesh and Flame Shintai) are unavailable to Scorpion Eaters: the ingestion of tainted Chi makes their use impossible. The Scorpion Eaters, however, possess twisted versions of these

## BROKEN MIRRORS

Sometimes, when despair, suffering, and hopelessness overtake an area, the barrier between the physical world and Hell ceases to be. Such sites are called Broken Mirrors and they are the Yama Kings' delight. A piece of Hell literally comes to Earth, turning these places into nightmarish zones of horror and suffering. Currently, only Mikaboshi and Rangda have managed to establish Broken Mirrors, located in the most soulless skyscrapers and desperate slums respectively.

The Broken Mirror disturbs the natural order in such places; Equilibrium attempts add two to the difficulty; Tapestry malfunctions severely, attracting demons and potentially transporting the Kuei-jin directly to Hell; and Rites generally don't work at all. Bile Shintai is not affected at all, however, allowing Scorpion Eaters to function normally. Their other Arts remain unimpaired as well, enabling this Dharma to turn Broken Mirrors into admirable bases of operation. Whether the Yama Kings mind these squatters or not remains to be seen (for full details on Broken Mirrors, see *Killing Streets*, pgs. 104-107).

Arts (Poison, Decay, Radiation, Disease and Burning). Whether this is a corruption of the god bodies or a secret gift from the Yama Kings to further their own agendas remains unknown. Knowing the Yama Kings, however, the latter is likelier.

### Chi Disciplines

**Equilibrium:** This Discipline functions normally since it's based on manipulating the Kuei-jin's own internal Chi balance.

**Tapestry:** Tapestry can only be used to contact demons or malignant spirits, and to manipulate tainted Chi and Dragon Lines.

**Yang Prana:** Yang Prana functions normally, except that it causes boils and sores to erupt on the Scorpion Eater's flesh whilst in use (penalty to Appearance-based rolls equal to the Chi expended). If the Scorpion spends a point of temporary Willpower, he can suppress this effect for the remainder of the scene.

**Yin Prana:** Similar to Yang Prana, Yin Prana functions normally, but, is usually accompanied by the distinct odor of decay. Spending a temporary Willpower point before using these powers negates the smell for an entire scene.

### Soul Disciplines

**Cultivation:** The Scorpion Eaters greatly favor this Discipline, but it functions no differently for them than for other Kuei-jin.

**Chi'iu Mui:** This Discipline functions as stated, except the fourth power, Purification, only uses the P'o's effect. It cannot heal. Likewise, the third eye, if developed, bears some mark of corruption, like being bloodshot, milky or even compounded like an arachnid's.

**Internalize:** Although the Scorpion Eaters rarely study this Discipline, it functions as per normal.

**Obligation:** There are no changes to this Discipline.

#### Demon Arts

**Black Wind:** This Art functions exactly as described in the *Kindred of the East* rulebook.

**Demon Shintai:** This Art functions exactly as described in the *Kindred of the East* rulebook.

## BILE SHINTAI

Over the decades, the Scorpion Eaters have studied the shintai powers fueled by their unique diet. Called the Bile Shintais, they encompass five unique Arts, each one roughly analogous to one of the five elemental shintais practiced by other Kuei-jin. Scorpion Eaters cannot learn these normal shintais, aside from Demon Shintai and Bile Shintai. Conversely, other Kuei-jin cannot learn Bile Shintai unless they abandon their Dharma, undergo the Eating the Scorpion rite and become Scorpions.

In such cases, points in existing Shintai Arts do not transfer to the equivalent Bile Shintais; they are lost and the student must begin learning anew. Tainted Chi interacts with the body in a fundamentally different way from pure Chi, and the techniques for one are not applicable to the other. Storytellers, however, may rule otherwise.

## POISON SHINTAI

Equivalent to Blood Shintai and thus the element of Water, this Art gives the Scorpion Eater control over various vital fluids and humors within his body or that of the target. As with Blood Shintai, the vampire can attune these powers to Yin, Yang or Balance.

**Chi Attunement:** Dexterity

### • STINGING TOUCH

The first power learned draws the body's various poisons, acids and waste products to the surface, particularly to the fangs and claws. This enables the Scorpion Eater to deliver extremely painful, stinging attacks against opponents. When activated, the body parts concerned take on a sickly, yellow-green hue.

**System:** For each Chi point expended, the Kuei-jin may coat one body part (fists, claws, feet, head or fangs) in bile, stomach acid and the like. If the Scorpion successfully hits the target with the coated area, the poison delivers an additional two dice of aggravated damage.

### • • INHARMONIOUS EXCRETION

This power allows the user to manipulate a target's bodily humors. Stomach acids burn, bile floods the system and the bowels spasm violently. The results on mortals are unpleasant to say the least, while for Kuei-jin, the effects are rarely fatal but are extremely inconvenient.

**System:** The Kuei-jin must touch her target, spend a Chi point and make a successful Stamina + Medicine roll (difficulty 7). If successful, the victim must roll Stamina (difficulty 7) to ameliorate the effects. For each success the attacker rolls over the defender, the target heaves and retches, suffering a penalty of two to the difficulties of all actions. This effect lasts for a number of turns equal to the

attacker's final success tally. If the victim fails her roll, she is incapacitated while her system purges itself of the offending fluids. If the target botches the roll, she is hospitalized and suffers one health level of bashing damage (no soak allowed) for each of the attacker's successes.

### • • • FLOW LIKE SEWAGE

The Kuei-jin suffuses her body with corrosive fluids, melting her own hard tissues like bone and turning her flesh, muscle and organs into a soft and pulpy mass. This allows her to resist bashing and lethal damage more easily, and flow through tight spaces. Whilst in this form, the Kuei-jin also stinks like an open digestive tract.

**System:** After spending a point of Yang Chi, the Kuei-jin turns her body into a soft mass that retains its basic shape for up to three turns. In this state, the Kuei-jin gains an additional five dice to soak bashing or lethal damage. She may also push (slowly) through gaps like dough through a crack, but the space must be at least an inch wide. The Kuei-jin can move no faster than walking pace while in this form.

### • • • • BILIOUS EXPECTORATION

The Kuei-jin can eject a sickening bolus of mucus, blood, phlegm and bile. Mildly corrosive to metals and stone, it bores into flesh with horrifying intensity.

**System:** The Kuei-jin spends a point of Chi and one action generating a sufficient mass within his mouth. The Expectoration has a range of double the vampire's Stamina in yards, and inflicts his Strength in aggravated damage against inorganic materials like armor. Flesh, however, takes Str + 3 damage (all aggravated), though any dice of protection from armor are eliminated from the attack's Strength dice first. If the Strength dice fail to penetrate the protection, the attack is stopped for that turn.

Once the attack hits, it continues burning for three turns with lessening effect. Each turn after the first reduces the damage — first to Str + 2 damage, then finally, Str + 1 damage.

### • • • • • PHLEGMATIC STING

This enables the Kuei-jin to transform any fluid inside the target (living or dead) into a virulent, toxic slush. The effects on living creatures are immediate and dramatic; death is often instantaneous when the target's own blood, phlegm, water, and other fluids attack his internal mechanisms. Organs rupture and arterial membranes crack open, leaking caustic fluids everywhere. The target becomes a living toxic spill. Fortunately for *shen*, while similarly affected, the results are generally more debilitating than fatal.

**System:** The Scorpion Eater must first touch the target, spending a point of Yin Chi and Willpower before making a Willpower roll (difficulty 6). The target suffers a level of lethal damage per success the Scorpion rolled on Willpower, plus one additional level per Yin Chi spent. The target can still soak the damage, but for every health level inflicted, one point of the target's Chi becomes tainted (requiring a Stamina roll).

## DECAY SHINTAI

The Scorpion Eater's analogue to Bone Shintai and the element Metal, this Art focuses on the entropic powers of decay and corruption inherent in tainted Chi.

Chi Attunement: Strength

### • STINK OF THE GRAVE

The Scorpion Eater infuses her flesh with Yin Chi, causing her body to undergo rapid deterioration, like advanced decay. She becomes a walking corpse in appearance; her stench is nearly overpowering and her countenance so horrific that most mortals flee in terror.

**System:** Spending a point of Yin Chi, the Scorpion's Appearance drops to 0 immediately for the duration of a scene. Any mortals encountering the vampire must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) against both the sight and smell of the Scorpion Eater. A botch indicates the victim is paralyzed with fear, while a simple failure causes the target to flee in terror. Otherwise:

**One Success:** The victim flees, but quickly regains his composure once the Kuei-jin is out of sight.

**Two Successes:** The target retreats, but can still fight back; all actions against the Kuei-jin are at an additional two difficulty.

**Three Successes+:** The target acts normally, but all actions have an increased difficulty of one due to the choking stench (Kuei-jin and other creatures who do not need to breathe are not affected). The effect lasts for an entire scene.

### • • DEADLY WAFT

Similar to White Tiger Corpse in effect (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 112), the Scorpion instead radiates a strange smell that betrays her location.

**System:** The Kuei-jin is invisible but a strong smell remains, allowing anyone who makes a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 5) to follow the Scorpion around. Expending an additional Yin Chi point allows the Scorpion to contain the smell to a faint odor. Animals and any other creature with heightened olfactory senses, however, may still track the Kuei-jin.

### • • • BONE SHRAPNEL

This heinous power enables the Kuei-jin to detonate penny sized portions of a target's skeletal structure, shredding the victim's internal organs and tissues with bone shrapnel.

**System:** After successfully touching her intended target, the Kuei-jin may then spend two points of Chi flooding the target with tainted energy and causing micro-explosions along the surface of their skeletal structure. The Kuei-jin rolls Stamina + Medicine (difficulty 7) to determine the lethal damage, but the victim may also soak the attack as per normal. Each level of damage inflicted stems from penny sized bone fragments exploding and lacerating the surrounding tissues, though the Scorpion has no control where the explosions take place.

## • • • • SPLENETIC EXHALATION

The effects are the same as Five Poison Cloud (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 112), though the cloud in this case is more akin to toxic pollution.

## • • • • • HARBINGER OF DECAY

This power enables the Scorpion Eater to infect animals and mortals with a dose of virulent Chi, transforming them into a mindless servitor. It's like rabies but on a psychic level, turning the servitor into a decaying engine of destruction. Of course, when the police finally bring such creatures down, they often claim "he must have been on PCP."

**System:** The Kuei-jin must spend three points of Chi before successfully biting the target. If the Kuei-jin is not successful, the Chi is lost. The Scorpion injects a poison into the victim, resulting in paralysis after a number of turns equal to the victim's Stamina. Afterwards, the victim falls into a coma, their body ravaged by toxic-laden endorphins. The next evening, the victim awakes with her Physical Attributes increased by one each and three additional health levels. Additionally, a mindless, maddening hunger for flesh consumes the target (whether she's animal or mortal). She will attack anything or anyone who looks appetizing, regardless where she is, and will consume her victims like a mad beast.

The target also suffers two levels of aggravated damage every night from the toxic Chi consuming and decaying her preternaturally. She will die if someone doesn't put her down first. If the victim makes a Willpower roll she can control herself for a turn, but she will eventually perish unless healed through powers like Blood Atemi (which, in this case, purges the victim's blood of toxins; see *Kindred of the East*, p. 110).

## RADIATION SHINTAI

Radiation Shintai replaces Jade Shintai, and thus acts as the element of Earth for the Scorpion Eaters. It shows the Kuei-jin that even the most ancient rocks and mountains may contain poisonous, corrupting substances capable of eroding life.

Chi Attunement: Strength

### • TREACHEROUS EARTH

By disrupting the flow of natural Chi through the earth, the Scorpion Eater can root an opponent to the ground, preventing them from leaving the spot. This has no effect from the knees up unless used on a prone target.

**System:** By spending a point of Yang Chi and succeeding in a Manipulation + Intimidation roll (difficulty 7), the Kuei-jin anchors a target to one place for a scene. If the victim is standing (in which case only their feet are immobile), he makes all attack and defense rolls with a penalty of two to the difficulty. If the target is prone or kneeling, he suffers a penalty of four to all related difficulties. *Shen* can overcome this by expending a point of Chi to deflect the effect, but must spend an action concentrating.

## • • REPULSIVE TOUCH

By making her entire being abhorrent to the Ten Thousand Things as an undeserving, corrupt entity, the Kuei-jin may move through objects as though insubstantial. Actually, matter glides over the Scorpion, or her own flesh parts to allow matter through; either way, her very touch is anathema to creation itself and thus repulsive to everything around her.

**System:** The Kuei-jin rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty 6) and spends two Chi. If successful, she becomes insubstantial for the duration of the scene, neither affecting nor being affected by any physical effect around her. She can walk through walls or gunfire with equal facility, though powers that target the mind or soul will affect her normally. If she rolls three successes or more, the Kuei-jin can double her leaping distances and swimming speed since even water and air are repulsed by the presence of her foul body.

## • • • THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH

This has the same effect as Placate the Earth Dragon (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 113), except the Kuei-jin requires tainted earth.

**System:** The same as Placate the Earth Dragon, except the Kuei-jin rolls Dexterity + (Chi Virtue), with difficulty depending on the surroundings. At a toxic waste dump, the vampire requires no roll to succeed. In Calcutta's slums, the difficulty would be 4, in Hong Kong, 6, while in Singapore, the difficulty to slip into the earth would be 8.

## • • • • BURNOUT

The Kuei-jin can harness the Earth's ambient radiation, thanks to global warming, to power any machine, regardless of its normal power source.

**System:** By tapping into effects like global warming and the electromagnetic fields being generated by too many power lines, the Kuei-jin can activate any man-made device from a computer to a vehicle, as long as he can touch it. By succeeding in a Stamina + Meditation roll (difficulty 6), the Scorpion can power a cellular phone or walkman with just one success; three successes will get a car going, while five is enough to power a jetliner or 18-Wheeler. The machine then operates at peak capacity for a number of hours equal to the Kuei-jin's Stamina, plus an additional hour for every two points of Yang Chi expended.

When the device finally "powers down," it is ruined; the components are rusted, the casing rotted and the fuel cells empty. That's why most Scorpions don't hotwire their own gadgets with this power.

## • • • • • DESTROY WITH A TOUCH

This power grants the Kuei-jin near complete control over the earth. By drawing upon weaknesses and impurities in this element, she can cause stones to break, walls to crumble, and if sufficiently skilled, the earth to shake.

**System:** The Kuei-jin must be in physical contact with the object or ground to wield Destroy with a Touch. She may then spend a point of temporary Willpower and a varying quantity of Chi to empower the effect. The Kuei-jin can manipulate or destroy one cubic yard of earthen-based

material for every Chi point expended. She can make it flow like mud or crumble it into dust. With the requisite Knowledge rolls and by spending a point of temporary Willpower and three Chi points, the Scorpion can also elicit other effects. For example, Intelligence + Craft (construction) might enable the Kuei-jin to locate the key point in a stone building's structure to collapse it; Perception + Science (geology) could allow the Kuei-jin to locate a fault line and cause a very minor and localized tremor (difficulty 6 for a 4.0 on the Richter Scale, with each .5 increment increasing the difficulty by one).

## DISEASE SHINTAI

Scorpion Eaters cannot study Flesh Shintai, so they learn the nuances of disease instead, which is a Wood analogue. Similar to Flesh Shintai, the manifestations of this Art are generally quite disgusting to behold.

**Chi Attunement:** Strength

## • ACRIMONIOUS FLESH

The Scorpion afflicts the victim with vile-looking boils, weeping sores and strings of pulsating warts that cover his entire body.

**System:** By touching the victim and expending a point of Chi, the Scorpion Eater contaminates him with skin conditions. Over the next six hours or so, the target breaks out with the most hideous infections imaginable. Boils, patches of acne, flaking skin, warts, and sores all conspire to reduce the victim's Appearance to zero. The victim can function normally, but any tasks involving Social rolls receive an additional penalty of three to related difficulties.

The affliction lasts for a number of days equal to the Stamina of the Kuei-jin responsible. The target can expend three Chi to cure the effect; otherwise, a single success with any supernatural healing power will also do it.

## • • DEAD HANDS

This power functions exactly as Detach Limb (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 115).

## • • • FEVERED DELIRIUM

This power functions exactly as Lotus Clouds (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 115), except, the effect is more akin to fevered delusions than pleasant euphoria. The weakness is likewise illness-related, as though the victim has a bad cold.

## • • • • SERVILE PLAGUE

This power functions exactly as Pelesit (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 116), except most Scorpions vomit out a swarm of gastrointestinal maggots or mosquitoes.

## • • • • • SOUL OF SICKNESS

At this level, the Scorpion Eater becomes an embodiment of disease, a walking vector of humanity's modern fears. Although he appears no different, his presence and touch are enough to infect mortal and shen alike with plague.



**System:** The Kuei-jin spends two points of Yang Chi to activate this power and carry any one active disease within him for the duration of a scene, be it a flesh-eating virus, STD, hemorrhagic fever, insect-born plague or bio-weapon pathogen. The Scorpion may then use any of the previous powers mentioned in Disease Shintai to vector the contagion to a victim, as through Servile Plague or Fevered Delirium, for example.

All mortals who encounter the vector must roll three successes on Stamina (difficulty 8) or contract the illness. If infected, the mortal loses one health level and one die per day from all Physical Attribute-related dice pools until he dies or someone mystically cures him. Standard medical treatments will not work. Shen must make a similar roll or suffer the same consequences, but they can make up for any deficiency in successes by spending two Yang Chi per success required (or two Gnosis, Quintessence, etc). Fortunately, the diseases are all mules and cannot spread beyond the original target.

## BALEFIRE SHINTAI

Of all the Bile Shintais, Balefire is perhaps the most hated, for it allows Scorpion Eaters to taint Dragon Nests, Dragon Lines, and mortals. Its use is always accompanied by a stink reminiscent of burning flesh, rubber, or garbage. Balefire is also aspected to the element of Fire.

**Chi Attunement:** Strength

## • BURNING KISS

This power allows the Scorpion Eater to taint a living creature's Chi before (usually) consuming it. The imparted taint does cause the target some discomfort, but most living creatures are robust enough to dispel the corruption.

**System:** The Scorpion Eater spends a point of Chi (any kind will do) and touches the target. Over a number of turns equal to the victim's Stamina, the poison works its way through the victim's system. During this time, the victim feels ill, and pursues all actions with an increased difficulty of two. After that, the victim's Chi is sufficiently tainted for flesh or blood consumption. If the victim survives the feeding, she will still experience bouts of nausea and dizziness for a number of hours equal to the Chi taken during feeding.

If the Scorpion Eater uses this power on another Kuei-jin, the victim can make a Stamina + Survival roll (difficulty 6). Each success allows the target to retain one point of untainted Chi while also purging one point of poisoned Chi. The victim is sick if there's any toxin remaining in his system, however, and suffers a penalty of one to all difficulties for each poisoned Chi point still present.

## • • BALEFUL LIGHT

This power functions exactly as Goblin Spark (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 118).



### • • • DEATH BREATH

This power functions exactly as Goblin Scorch (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 118).

### • • • • INVADING THE DRAGON

This power is similar to Ride the Dragon (see *Kindred of the East*, p. 104), except the Scorpion Eater injects herself like a shot of heroin into the veins of the Middle Kingdom. Her presence is also corruptive enough to temporarily “short” out the system by infusing tainted Chi into the otherwise pure flow. The effect isn’t permanent, but it does cause one hell of a traffic jam.

**System:** As per Riding the Dragon, except that the Scorpion Eater leaves tainted Chi behind along the Dragon Line, like land mines. Each point of tainted Chi that the Scorpion spends at the moment of transit negates the amount of successes someone else using Ride the Dragon might enjoy when determining distance traveled. If the Scorpion spends five Chi points, however, he disrupts the Dragon Line sufficiently that it requires travelers to roll against an increased difficulty of 10. The disruption, in either case, lasts for one day per Chi spent.

Unfortunately for the Scorpion, his passage leaves a stain, like a greasy oil slick on water. Other *shen* may roll Perception + Occult (difficulty is Scorpion Eater’s highest Chi virtue) to track him.

### • • • • • BODY OF BURNING FILTH

This power is similar to Goblin Lantern (see *Kindred of the East*, pgs. 118-119), except it also enables the Scorpion Eater to corrupt a Dragon Nest (though the vampire must also perform the rite of Shitting Down the Dragon’s Neck to make the corruption permanent). Regardless, even a temporary corruption can cause massive problems for the local *shen*.

**System:** In addition to Goblin Lantern’s effects, if the Kuei-jin meditates at the heart of a Dragon Nest she becomes a conduit for tainted Chi, poisoning the very wellspring around her with the offal of her presence. The Scorpion must roll Stamina + Meditation (difficulty 9); each success and hour spent in meditation allows the Scorpion Eater to defile the site for two days, effectively preventing others from drawing Chi there. Otherwise, the Storyteller can rule that the local Wall’s rating increases by two for every Chi point the Scorpion spent infecting the place, to a maximum rating of 10. Nothing prohibits *shen*, however, from expediting the site’s recovery time back to normal through Chi cleansing abilities like Broom of Heaven (see *Kindred of the East Companion*, p. 64).

## RISES AND RITUALS

The Scorpion Eaters do not generally have much patience for rites and rituals, believing them largely part of the ancestors’ outmoded panoply. There are only two rituals of value to the Scorpion Eaters: Eating the Scorpion, by which a Kuei-jin becomes a Scorpion Eater (and hence able to consume tainted Chi) and Shitting Down the Dragon’s Neck, by which the Dharma can permanently corrupt a Dragon’s Nest.

### EATING THE SCORPION (LEVEL ONE RITE)

This is the ritual that creates a Scorpion Eater. It essentially involves the Kuei-jin purging her system of Yin and Yang Chi at a tainted Dragon Nest. The Scorpion Eaters submerge the manacled or chained vampire (who should be in fire soul at this point, whether willingly or not) into a pool of tainted Chi. Raw sewage is popular, as is the toxic runoff from a factory or illegal landfill. If the Kuei-jin can ingest the polluted Chi and emerge from her fire or accompanying shadow soul, she becomes a Scorpion Eater. All that remains now is to eat a live scorpion suffused with toxic Chi (through Burning Kiss) to officially seal the pact and enable the new initiate to imbibe poison Chi. If the Kuei-jin remains trapped in fire or shadow soul for too long (too long equaling the span of time it takes the other gang members to grow bored of the game), the Scorpion Eaters dump her in someone else’s territory for “disposal.”

### SHITTING DOWN THE DRAGON’S NECK (LEVEL FIVE RITE)

This is the ritual that permanently pollutes a Dragon’s Nest. The central element is a team of at least three Scorpion Eaters with the level five Burning Shintai power, Body of Burning Filth, to overwhelm the Dragon Nest with tainted Chi. They must infect the area with a cumulative minimum of 40 corruptive Chi points before beginning the ritual, though the Chi can come from either poisoned victims upon whom the Scorpions feed or from other Dharma members assisting the ritual.

The participants using Body of Burning Filth must each succeed in two out of three Stamina + Rituals rolls (difficulty 7) and two out of three Intelligence + Occult rolls (difficulty 7). If one person fails, all the Chi expended is lost, and the Scorpions have to start back from scratch. If they succeed, however, the Wall rating of the Dragon Nest drops by two, and it becomes a permanent and unrecoverable source of taint.

# HERESIES OF THE WAY™

## Let the Heavens Tremble

Cast down and spit upon, the four heretical Dharmas have long remained at the Quincunx's whipping posts. Now, a new age looms on the horizon, one that portends a terrible reckoning. The heresies are gaining strength and followers... but at what cost? The heresies claim that accusation alone condemns them, but the Quincunx says they unknowingly propagate the will of Hell. Who is right and who is wrong? Time will tell — but the price of truth may be too terrible for Heaven or Earth to bear.

## Scorpions in the Mist

*Heresies of the Way* delves into the history and secrets of the heretical Dharmas. It offers extended coverage on The Flame of the Rising Phoenix, The Tempest of the Inward Focus, The Face of the Gods and The Spirit of the Living Earth. Included are new rites, Disciplines, persona and character templates. **Heresies of the Way** also introduces a brand new apostasy, a herald of the troubled times ahead... the toxic Scorpion Eaters and their reviled Bile Shintai Disciplines.

WWW.WHITE-WOLF.COM

ISBN 1-58846-232-3  
WW2922 \$19.95 U.S.

51995



9 781588 462329



PRINTED IN USA

