

SHADOW WAR™



A Guide to the Warts of the Shadow War
for Vampires: The Masquerade



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SHADOW WAR

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Bask in the author generosity and 132k skills

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to Rob Hanz, who never got the chance to strut his Shadow War stuff. This one's for you.



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INTRODUCTION: WELCOME TO LIFE AFTER MIDNIGHT

The Kuei-jin are creatures of rage and power, majesty and pride. As a result, it is not at all uncommon for Cathayans to come into sharp, brutal conflict with one another. Anything from the destruction of a Kuei-jin's ancestral homestead to an imagined slight at court can be enough to set a vampire on the trail to vengeance and bloody retribution. And as a Cathayan travels down that road, he inevitably brings destruction with him—sometimes on his enemy, sometimes on his allies and all too often on Kuei-jin and mortal society.

In other words, because of who the Kuei-jin are and more importantly, what they are, the potential exists for them to inadvertently destroy their society and anything else in range simply by indulging their built-in need for conflict. It is imperative, therefore, for there to be some limits placed on the nature of war between Kuei-jin, lest every minor disagreement over etiquette escalate into a centuries-long blood feud that lays waste to nations.

Hence, we have *Shadow War*, the guide to conflict between those who have drawn the Second Breath. These are the rules of civilized warfare, the list of rituals and procedures that must be followed in order to have Heaven smile on one's cause—and to keep the rest of one's court from deciding that one is a disrespectful upstart who needs to be taught a fatal lesson.

So pay careful attention, all you who would call down the fury of a midnight war or raise the banner of the Bamboo Princes. Learn these lessons well, lest you make an error when Addressing the Hells and bring the fury of the mandarins upon you and your allies. Pay careful heed to which nights are

propitious and how to best employ one's Scarlet Screens, and perhaps you will survive your first war among the Kuei-jin.

Then again, perhaps not.

WHAT IS THIS BOOK?

Shadow War is a guide to warfare among the Kuei-jin, including the formalized forms of warfare that are acceptable for hunting *akuma* or resolving conflicts between Kuei-jin and details on the less-than-civilized conflict raging between Kuei-jin and Kin-jin in California. The book runs down the formalities of both twilight and midnight war, and examines the underground war the youngest of the Gui Ren wage in hopes of modernizing their elders before the Sixth Age.

WHAT IS SHADOW WAR?

The technical definition of shadow war is any formal conflict between Kuei-jin that is short of total, all-encompassing war. In theory, shadow wars are supposed to be hidden from normal view, so that the remainder of court can go about its business in the middle of even the most vicious conflict without a hitch. The reality is sometimes messier than the theory, but the intention of the name shadow war is honorable.

CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

Twilight War is a guide to the forms and tactics of non-lethal combat between Kuei-jin. When a debate becomes insolvable, but those involved do not wish one another's deaths, then twilight war is the best solution. This chapter details how one calls twilight war, the degrees of conflict, the victory terms and the tactics that are considered appropriate.

Midnight War details more serious matters, namely, the sort of conflict once designed for the eradication of *akuma* but now turned to resolving feuds of honor and blood. This chapter echoes the previous one, with notes on formalities and procedures, winning allies and making enemies, warfare in the field and proscribed tactics. Also included are notes on bringing non-Kuei-jin into the fray, notes on generalship and more.

Underground War is not about a formal sort of conflict. Rather, it is the name given to the struggle of the so-called Bamboo Princes against the elders and mandarins. Tactics for dealing with older, more powerful Kuei-jin are a part of this chapter, as are a brief history of the Bamboo Princes movement, a look at its goals and aims and a quick examination of some of the group's surprising advantages.

Scarlet Screens are the mortal organizations Kuei-jin use in both business and war. This chapter examines what makes a good Scarlet Screen and examines tactics for using Scarlet Screens in battle. There are also examples of some of the more notorious Scarlet Screens out there.

Crimson War is the final full chapter of the book. It is a detailed examination of the war in California, wherein the Kuei-jin have launched a savage, sudden attack on the Anarch Free States. What follows is anyone's guess, but the beginnings of the war are here.

Finally, the **Appendix** lists both some of the more useful tools and rites a shadow warrior might use and runs down some of the most famous practitioners — and victims — of shadow war.

LEXICON

IMMORTAL MILITARY TERMINOLOGY

Addressing the Earth: The period between Addressing the Heavens and Addressing the Hells during which the combatants prepare strategy and the court prepares for the upcoming war.

Addressing the Heavens: The first rite in the declaration of a midnight war. Addressing the Heavens takes place at midnight on a new moon.

Addressing the Hells: The closing rite in the declaration of a midnight war. Addressing the Hells takes place at exactly one lunar month after Addressing the Heavens.

Awaiting the Rain: The period between the Gathering of Clouds and the Breaking of Clouds during which the *Ganshezhe* decides the shape of the twilight war.

Beigao: The accused. The Kuei-jin against whom a midnight war is called.

Breaking of Clouds: The meeting at which the *Ganshezhe* informs the *xuezhe* of the rules and goals of their twilight war.

Ganshezhe: A mediator who determined the details and goals of a twilight war in the era of the Five August Courts. Now used to refer to any Kuei-jin mediator. Called *simpan* in Korea.

Gathering of Clouds: The initial meeting of Kuei-jin formally declaring a twilight war on each other.

Gentle Rain: A *wu* sent out by the court after the end of a midnight war in order to retrieve lost talismans and clean up the sites of the fighting.

Kyouji: A court-appointed referee for twilight war among the Bishamon.

Lianfang: A coalition of *wu* and unaffiliated Kuei-jin who have joined together to declare war on a common enemy.

Midnight Ceremonies: The ceremonies by which a midnight war is declared.

Praising the Heavens: The ceremony where the victor of a midnight war is proclaimed and the war is officially finished.

Precepts of the War: The set of rules and goals defining a specific twilight war.

Revealing the Heavens: The ceremony in which the victor of a twilight war is recognized.

Ryogumi: Gang of elite warriors. The most skilled of the warrior Scarlet Screens.

Sarugumi: Gang of warriors. Also called *inugumi*.

Tamashiido: "The Way of the Spirit" — the martial code of honor of the *gaki*, particularly the Bishamon.

Tanwu: Corrupt, degenerate. The official term for *wu* under the influence of the *akuma*.

Tiaozhan Ye: Challenging the Night — the early term for limited conflicts among the Wan Xian. Currently used to describe an unofficial, unmediated twilight war.

Usagigumi: Punks. Warriors with no real skill. Also called Triumphant Hares.

Wayang Kulit: Penanggalan warfare using Flesh Shintai to confuse the enemy. Named after the Javanese shadow plays.

Xiang-qi: Elephant Chess. An old board game similar to chess used in certain forms of twilight war. Called *chang-gi* in the Green Courts.

Xuezhe: "Student" — a Kuei-jin engaged in a twilight war. Sometimes used derisively to imply that they are not ready for "real" war.

Yangao: The accusers. The Kuei-jin who collectively call a midnight war.

RUNNING MONKEY-SPEAK • THE LANGUAGE OF UNDERGROUND WAR

Bamboo Princes: The organized forces of the underground war, who try to bring innovation to Kuei-jin society.

Dame-sama: Old-fart Kuei-jin. One who forbids anything new. Also, *lau-tai-tai* ("old woman"), *duan-lu* ("brain with a short circuit") and *satsu* ("policeman").

Eunuch: Old-guard Kuei-jin.

Ichimi: "Ring," Cell. Group of Bamboo Princes.

Jiang Hu: Running Monkey rebellious gang behavior. *Jiang hu* refers to both the lifestyle and the individual Kuei-jin.

Ketoujin: Westerner.

The Man: Short for "mandarin." As a group, mandarins are often seen by young Kuei-jin as the worst of Kuei-jin society.

Seiyougaki: Kuei-jin who feels that Western ways are the best.

She: "Snake." A mistrusted Kuei-jin who claims to want to join the Bamboo Princes.

Shifuku: Plain-clothes Bamboo Prince. One who pretends to work for a court.

Shima: "Island" — the area an *ichimi* considers its protectorate.

Taigum: Chinese word for Eunuch.

Takeouji: Japanese name for Bamboo Princes.

Tsuppari: People who are hostile to society. Elder name for the Bamboo Princes.

Yotarou: A naïve dupe. A new Kuei-jin who follows tradition blindly.

Zhu Wangzi: Chinese name for Bamboo Princes.

Zuboshi: "Bull's-eye" — a Bamboo Prince whose identity is known among the *dame-sama*.



CHAPTER ONE: TWILIGHT WAR

Esteemed Minister,

It is with extreme pleasure that I report that Ogawa-sama will certainly admit the folly of engaging you in this war in twilight ere the full moon rises again. Even as I write this, my agents in Kobei are courting his shachō with fine sake, geisha and membership to the golf course of his choice. There is little doubt that within a fortnight, he will be more than happy to overlook a few discreet stock transfers.

THE HISTORY OF THE TWILIGHT WAR

Three persons together are the foundation of a quarrel.

— Traditional Japanese Proverb

Kuei-jin are creatures of power, violence and passion. No being who fights her way up from the Thousand Hells and passes each night harassed by her personal demon can be dismissed as "mild" or "placid." As a Cathayan's Dharmic studies progress, she learns control, restraint and discipline, but she will always be a creature of extremes in whom the Hun and the P'o and Yin and Yang do nightly battle. Born of such tempestuous forces, Kuei-jin naturally find it difficult to turn the other cheek, and when the immortals of the Middle Kingdom assemble, a misspoken word, an unwelcome criticism or even a trifling matter of etiquette can easily incite enough anger to drive Kuei-jin to battle.

In earlier Ages, many Wan Xian cheerfully took leave of their duties to the August Personage of Jade for a decade or two to divert themselves with a war against the Immortal in the next city. As times changed and the power of the Yama Kings grew, the Wan Xian discovered that they could no longer spare the time for such indulgences. Nor could they accept the constant drain on their numbers and resources that this infighting produced, especially when added to the drains of fighting the minions of the Lords of the Yomi Worlds. From these needs, the Wan Xian developed the ritualized warfare called war in twilight or, more recently, twilight war.

With the fall of the Wan Xian, Kuei-jin across the Middle Kingdom inherited the tradition of the twilight war. They have used it ever since as a less destructive method for resolving conflicts among themselves than all-out warfare.

WAN XIAN AND HONORABLE COMBAT

When they were first created by the August Personage of Jade, the Wan Xian had no need for a code of war. Their reason for existence was the protection of the Ten Thousand Things from the attentions of the Yama Kings. They derived their honor from performing that task rather than from the intricacies of etiquette; their concern was with victory, not with forms and graces. In a war against such fundamentally dishonorable forces, a formal code of warfare would have served little purpose other than to give the armies against which they fought an undesirable advantage. Additionally, by waging war against Yomi, the Wan Xian were fulfilling the mandates of the August Personage of Jade. How could they do other than what was proper? When Wan Xian fought bakemono, combat was vicious, unconstrained and invariably lethal. Being eternal, the Wan Xian did not preoccupy themselves with such matters as injury, mortality or even the affairs of their mortal families. They were now beyond such concerns. Instead they devoted their efforts to the destruction of all that threatened humanity and the Middle Kingdom. Their approach was one of total, all-out war.

As time passed, though, the Wan Xian had greater chance to interact with each other, and with this contact, came the

THE SHAN-BO HERESY

Shan-bo, the most famous Devil-Tiger philosopher ever, asserted that there was a fundamental flaw in the August Personage of Jade's plan for the Wan Xian: They were not created for compromise. As creatures who could not appreciate moderation or the need for temperance in the fulfillment of their purpose, it was inevitable that they would discover the ability to drain others of their Chi. And once that process was discovered, there was nothing they could do but exploit it. The August Personage of Jade's subsequent punishment of the Wan Xian was an admission of his own error, and it was for that reason — shame — that he retreated from the Middle Kingdom.

The Quincunx censured Shan-bo for proposing that the August Personage of Jade made an error and that the draining of Chi was inherent in the nature of the Wan Xian rather than a perversion taught by the Yama Kings. They demanded that he recant his proclamations on pain of Final Death. True to his creed, Shan-bo declared that compromise was for weaker creatures and that he could no more change his mind than a tree could march across the Gobi Desert. Shan-bo declared that he would find the August Personage of Jade and ask him the truth of the matter. He then departed across the Wall to quest for the August Personage and was never seen again. Though Shan-bo has not been seen for centuries, his heretical philosophy is still popular among certain Devil-Tigers.

inevitable discovery of differences. Where one immortal thought that demons were best fought with sorcery, another favored swords; one might prefer to hunt the fiends through divination, but her ally on the other side of the mountain felt her trained hounds were the best way to flush them out. Worse, while the Yama Kings had long sought to draw the warriors of the August Personage over to their side, rumors began to circulate that they had succeeded.

While Mahanaga Visparakni is universally reviled as the first *akuma*, only the Yama Kings themselves know if he was truly the first traitor of his kind. What is known is that Chien-shih Zhi claimed to be the third Wan Xian to serve Ravana. Before his destruction at the hands of Zhong-Kui, one of the most renowned Wan Xian demon scourges, Zhi swore on the throne of the August Personage that another Wan Xian, whose loyalties would never be suspected, had introduced him to the Rajah of Demons. He also averred that one other had been inducted in this manner before him. News of the unknown traitors spread from immortal to immortal until it had crossed the length of the Middle Kingdom. Wan Xian began to question any unusual behavior on the part of their fellows, even the most reverential and auspicious, for the immortals knew they must now mistrust especially those who seemed the most honorable. It was only a matter of time before Wan Xian began to fight Wan Xian over how to fight the Yama Kings.

SWORN BROTHERHOODS

The tradition of the *wu* evolved in the Fourth Age, well after the fall of the last Wan Xian. Previously, Wan Xian who were close to each other swore great oaths of loyalty and brotherhood to one another. In many ways, such ties of sworn brotherhood were even stronger than true familial ties, and there are many tragic tales told of Wan Xian who were forced to chose between their oath ties and the honor they owed their families.

The first combats between Wan Xian were simple duels to the death. The arrangements were made between the individual Wan Xian, and there was no set protocol. Each immortal fought with her preferred weaponry in her preferred style, using whatever ploys and devices she might. Since the purpose behind the duels was to demonstrate which of the two combatants was the better warrior, none felt the need to limit themselves with the ephemera of their mortal etiquette — at least as far as the duel itself was concerned. In the heady nights of the Third Age, each of the Ten Thousand Immortals was willing to stake her life on the knowledge that she was a better warrior than her opponent. Not only was a warrior who feared death a liability in the war against the Yama Kings, but death represented a chance for the defeated to return to the cycle in hopes of becoming an even better servant of the August Personage of Jade.

THE FIRST WAN XIAN DUEL

According to the records at the Great Library of Jade Court, the first Wan Xian to do battle with each other were Ho Wei-min and Lung Lei, immortals from neighboring cities, each of whom claimed the right to destroy a demon that had been ravaging their respective cities. After debating the issue for three nights, they agreed to meet on the bridge over the river that is now known as Huang Ho, which flowed between their cities, and engage in a duel to the death. On the fourth night, they met on the bridge, each armed with a halberd. Each swore that if she were victorious, she would slay the demon and protect the humans of her sworn sister's city as well as her own. The battle lasted almost the entire night, but Lung slew Ho just before the light of dawn. In deference to Ho, Lung slept beneath the bridge, and on the fifth night, she rose and destroyed the demon.

As the Third Age progressed, the Wan Xian found themselves fighting among themselves more and more. Hsien began to comment on their fractiousness, and hengeyokai bards created an entire class of saga, the *gakikettou*, for telling the tales of duels between two Wan Xian. It even came to the point where, between their war with the Yama Kings and their duels with each other, the Wan Xian were dying at a faster rate than new ones were being created. Fortunately, three sworn brothers devised a plan for resolving these problems without resorting to fratricide.

THE THREE GOLDEN EGRETS

Before their elevation to Wan Xian, Fa-tang, Jin and Jing were friends from the town that would one day become the city of Sanxingdui. With their induction into the ranks of immortals, they swore oaths to one another that together they would serve the August Personage of Jade, and together they would die when their services were no longer needed. They then took the name the Three Golden Egrets. After five centuries of doing battle with demons, the Three Golden Egrets discovered that the host of infernal creatures who had been tormenting Qin Ling were led by Srimuang, a general of the Yama Kings, and declared that they would see him destroyed. Unfortunately, they could not agree on a plan for doing so. Jin wanted the other two to engage the demon armies in battle while he circled them on his ki-rin and took Srimuang from behind. Fa-tang insisted that a direct assault by the three of them on Srimuang's lair was the only possible course of action. Jing was convinced that they would prevail if Fa-tang feigned an assault on the citadel to draw off Srimuang's armies while Jin and Jing sneaked into the demon's lair and took him by surprise.

Since the Three Golden Egrets had sworn to serve the August Personage together, they could not engage in a duel to the death — for one of them to kill another would break their oath. Instead, Jing suggested that they could compete in a contest, and the winner of the contest would determine how they attacked Srimuang. After a little more meditation, the Three Golden Egrets conceived a plan. They would part on the night of the full moon, each would slay as many demons as he could for the next month, and when they met again at the next full moon, whoever had killed the most demons would be declared the victor. After one month's hunting, Fa-tang had killed 34 demons, Jing had killed 37 and Jin had slain 42. After three nights of celebration, the Three Golden Egrets set off to the lair of Srimuang, where everything worked according to Jin's plan, and when they returned, Jin carried the demon general's severed head as he triumphantly rode his ki-rin.



They proposed that Wan Xian who disagreed could each undergo a test — specifically a test that would gauge their martial prowess — and they called these tests *tiaozhan ye*, Challenging the Night. Wan Xian, tired of the jests of the *hengeyokai*, adopted the Three Golden Egrers' invention and strove to turn their internal aggression outward once again. Early tests involved slaying the pawns of the Yama Kings, with the victor of the contest being the Wan Xian who could bring back the largest head of a demon, who could slay a *bakemono* the most quickly or do so with the fewest blows. Once again, the Wan Xian represented the pinnacle of honor.

As the Third Age progressed, though, the *tiaozhan ye* began to take on a different flavor. With the discovery that *shen* could be a source of Chi, Wan Xian began competing against one another to see who could accumulate the most Chi. They crafted special ceremonial jade amulets called *wu shi*, which were ritually drained of Chi at the beginning of the contest and then compared to one another when the contest was over. The holder of the *wu shi* with the most Chi was declared the winner. No one is certain where the change originated, but toward the end of the Third Age, the philosophies of the Wan Xian changed as well. Not only did Challenging the Night focus less on the slaying of demons and more on the accumulation of power and wealth — either mundane or in the form of Chi — but they no longer ventured out to see who could destroy the greater threat to the Middle Kingdom. The competition of the *tiaozhan ye* was seen as more vital and pleasurable than fulfilling

the mandates of the August Personage of Jade. At the height of their decadence, the Ten Thousand Immortals even contrived to set the disparate *shen* against one another so that their dragon nests would lay open for plunder. Though the evidence is far from complete, there are scrolls dating back from the beginning of the Fourth Age that hint that the War of Shame among the *hengeyokai* was begun as a part of an elaborate duel between the Conquering Winds, a clan of Wan Xian in Ying, and the Claws of the Dragon, from the mountain kingdoms to the north. Elders scoff at such claims, but the whispers do persist.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE KUEI-JIN

Finally, when events had reached such a state that the Wan Xian almost outperformed the Yama Kings in plundering the Middle Kingdom, the August Personage of Jade took notice and pronounced his curse. Across the face of the Middle Kingdom, the Wan Xian found their immortality exchanged for eternal unlife. For a time, the Kuei-jin were too busy discovering how to survive their new circumstances — including their new enemies, both within their ranks and without — to waste time on recreational warfare. In China, the Five Emperors created the first courts of Kuei-jin, and vampires in the areas beyond also organized themselves. As part of this process of incorporation, the new courts instituted codes of conduct and tradition that reflected their understanding of the

HONORABLE WAR IN THE FIVE AUGUST COURTS...

The Five Emperors realized that the Kuei-jin needed a form of ritualized combat in order to survive as a people without their celestial patrons. To this end, they reinvented the *tiaozhan ye* so their subjects could settle disputes without compromising their duties or the strength of their court. Each of the Five Emperors devised a form of competition that reflected his vision of the strengths he wanted to impart to his court.

The Impenetrable Shell of the Tortoise: Within the Court of the Black Tortoise, competitions focused on endurance — the ability to withstand the trials of unlife without surrendering to weakness. A common contest would pit two Kuei-jin against the rising sun — whoever lasted the longest was declared the winner. Other competitions involved fasting from the taking of Chi, self-mutilation and enduring extreme weather conditions (such as waiting out a blizzard while standing on a mountain peak).

The Hypnotic Gaze of the Dragon: Yu, the Emperor of the Court of the Azure Dragon focused his attention on the works and foibles of humanity. He felt that the role of the Kuei-jin was to cultivate the mortals' ability to fight the Yama Kings and commanded his subjects to develop their skills in manipulation. Contests in the Court of the Azure Dragon often involved determining the path of a mortal's life or the relationship between two or more mortal families. Many Kuei-jin scholars point to this practice as the origin of the war in twilight as it exists today.

Dance of the Scarlet Phoenix: Within the southern court, the Kuei-jin took their fights to the realm of the arts. They rendered terrible and exquisite acrobatic dances for the spirits of the Yang World, letting the spirits themselves determine the victor. As the Age progressed, it became increasingly common for the dancers to incorporate each other into their performances, sometimes transforming the competition into a glorious display of martial artistry.

Yellow Emperor: Ever pragmatic, the Yellow Emperor saw no need for elaborate trickery when the heart of the matter was two Kuei-jin who disagreed. He declared that his subjects could settle their matters by dueling to the first blood. Such duels were to be carried out in an octagonal arena of balanced *feng shui* and witnessed by a *Ganshezhe*, a mediator, to determine both that propriety governed all actions and that the agents of the Yama Kings in no way interfered.

White Tiger: There are no known surviving records of the *tiaozhan ye* of the Court of the White Tiger. The few Kuei-jin who remember its halls and rituals refuse to speak of the matter and deal harshly with any who broach the subject. Despite this vast silence, there are apocryphal tales of macabre ritual combat carried out in the Yin Realm beyond the then newly formed Wall. Some renegade Bone Flowers claim that these rituals yet shake the westernmost frontier of the Yellow Springs.

...AND BEYOND

Kuei-jin beyond the dominion of the Five August Courts developed their own refinements of Challenging the Night. Though such traditions were fervently held, they never achieved the recognition of the *tiaozhan ye* of the Five August Courts.

The islands that would eventually be known as Japan saw such duels take on a formal tone. *Battoujutsu* was a duel fought with a single draw of the sword. *Shinobijutsu* involved the stealthful removal of a specified token from the home of the opponent. Finally, there was *shodoubutsu*, a long-lost form of magical combat using a Discipline through which the opponents drew calligraphic characters so vivid that they tore themselves off the page and fought for their creators.

In the land of Lolang, which would later be called Korea, the Gui Ren employed different styles for resolving disputes. In *Gong Bang Beop*, each opponent chose a proxy, usually a descendant or ally, and his opponent employed whatever means he could to injure the proxy. The practice of *Yeonghon Taegum* — spirit flute — foreshadowed the close relations the Green Courts would have with their dead ancestors in future Ages. In *Yeonghon Yebeop*, each opponent recruited an army of Yin spirits through his mastery of the flute and sent them to do battle against his opponent's servants. In both cases, a *simpan* was employed as a referee.

In the Jungles to the south of the Five August Courts, the early *penangallan* clung to the original ways of the *tiaozhan ye*, engaging in bloody contests to see who could claim the most or the largest demon corpses. Rumor has it that certain Kuei-jin in these lands learned to strike arrangements with Yama Kings or their agents to gain the bodies of their lesser minions in exchange for services as they rose in power.

role of the newly created Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom. Though the Five August Courts started out as allies, different facets of Kuei-jin society as a whole, they soon lost track of their common purpose. The Kuei-jin drifted even further apart from the union they had once held in their days as Wan Xian.

By the time the Grand Arhat Xue brought forth the Great Principle, each of the courts had its own points of etiquette, rules of conduct and favored modes of combat. As the Great Principle gained adherents across the Middle Kingdom, the

courts adjusted themselves to the new philosophy. Court doctrine came to see Challenging the Night as more than a means of resolving differences, rather describing it as a tool for perfecting one's Dharma. The ability of a Kuei-jin to limit her wrath to the confines of a prescribed set of actions represented the Hun's mastery over the P'o. The Five August Courts as a whole refined their traditions, emphasizing those aspects that fit with the Fivefold Way and removing or altering those that did not. Though the courts did not turn the full weight of their

attention to the *tiaozhan ye*, the *Ganshezhe*, the ritual mediators of the Court of the Yellow Emperor, gained both esteem and power as arbiters and interpreters of the Great Principle with respect to the ways of limited war. It took very little time for the *Ganshezhe* to spread beyond the territories of the Court of the Yellow Emperor, bringing the other courts into line with their interpretation of the teachings of the Grand Arhat.

Over the course of centuries, the *Ganshezhe* codified the principles behind warfare among honorable Kuei-jin. They outlined the proper role of the *Ganshezhe*, and established rules concerning how she should pursue her duties. They also took what they found admirable from the different forms of *tiaozhan ye* and merged them together into the Three Proper Hours, the three different degrees, and Five Auspicious Branches the five forms, of twilight war. Hong Pei-pei, the Heavenly Duchess of the *Ganshezhe*, compiled all of this and published her work as *The Three Books of the War in Twilight*.

THE THREE BOOKS OF THE WAR IN TWILIGHT

The Wan Xian Challenged the Night, but lost their honor. We Kuei-jin must learn from their error and return ourselves to Dharmic balance. We must not fight only in the night, for that begets a surfeit of Yin. We must not fight only in the day, for that begets a surfeit of Yang. We must make war in twilight, so we can perfect ourselves and uphold the mandates of the August Personage of Jade.

— Hong Pei-pei, *The Three Books of the War in Twilight*

In addition to originating the phrases twilight war and midnight war, *The Three Books* detailed the philosophy, rituals and practical concerns of using honorable combat between Kuei-jin as a means toward furthering one's Dharmic studies. Originally presented at the First Grand Assembly of Harmonious Warriors (toward the end of the Shang dynasty), Hong's magnum opus proved immensely popular among the mandarins and ancestors of the Five August Courts. They saw it as an enlightened answer to a difficult, but inescapable conundrum. It was not as popular among the less advanced scions of the courts, though. Many of them wanted their combat to be simple melee rather than another educational experience. Others saw the enforcement of new rules as little more than a clever ploy by the *Ganshezhe* to increase their prestige. As is often the case in the Middle Kingdom, the elders of the courts prevailed. In a series of proclamations, the Five Emperors replaced the old, barbaric rites of *tiaozhan ye* with the twilight war, declaring that any who engaged in unenlightened dueling would be viewed as enemies of the Great Principle and dealt with accordingly.

THE FIRST BOOK

As creatures of Yin and Yang, of matter and spirit, Kuei-jin find themselves to be incarnations of different, opposing forces. As creatures seeking enlightenment, Kuei-jin must learn to balance these forces, to integrate them into the perfect beings that they must become. As subjects of the August Personage of Jade, Kuei-jin must make themselves both worthy and able to carry out his mandates. Therefore, the wise Kuei-jin uses the Ten Thousand Things to perfect himself.

— Hong Pei-pei, *The Three Books of the War in Twilight*

The first of *The Three Books* dealt with the philosophical underpinnings of the war in twilight. Hong declared that Kuei-jin needed to know how to do battle well in order to fulfill the mandates of the August Personage of Jade. Unfortunately, all too often the P'o was able to take advantage of the bestial energies created by acts of warfare. Letting the P'o gain such power, it went without saying, was a considerable detriment to the Cathayan's progress toward enlightenment. It was therefore necessary for Kuei-jin to structure their conflicts in such a manner that all facets of their essence were properly developed by the process. To this end, the *Ganshezhe* declared that a Kuei-jin engaged in honorable conflict needed to exercise all aspects of his self to conduct the conflict with propriety and a harmonious disposition toward the Middle Kingdom. And for this reason, she used the term *xuezhe*, meaning "students," to refer to the primary combatants in a twilight war.

According to the First Book, the impulse behind an attack in any well-executed twilight war had to come from the Kuei-jin's P'o. Denying the P'o's efficacy not only deprived the vampire of a fundamental element of her power, but it was also an act of foolish blindness. The P'o was always present; attempting to deny or hide its existence would only leave its power unmonitored. However, Hong declared, all such attacks had to be carefully reviewed by the *Ganshezhe* to verify that they were in fact appropriate to the situation. Left unchecked, the P'o could too easily launch an dishonorable attack against an honorable opponent. Therefore, the Hun needed to be employed as a regulating presence, binding the will of the P'o to what was acceptable to Cathayan society. According to Hong, such careful integration of the Hun and the P'o through controlled conflict could not help but promote Dharmic development. *The Three Books* also endorsed the development of a Kuei-jin's Yin and Yang. Both participants were expected to devote time to cautious, meticulous planning — a proper exercise for their Yin virtues. Once it had been appropriately rendered, the plan needed to be executed with unflagging energy — an application of the Kuei-jin's Yang energies. Thus, a wise Kuei-jin used all of his faculties and virtues in the prosecution of war in twilight, and thus, the wise Kuei-jin grew from his efforts in the struggle.

AN EXCESS OF BALANCE?

Many Kuei-jin philosophers have looked askance at Hong's willingness to cultivate the P'o alongside the other virtues. Though Hong specified that the goal of cultivating the P'o focused on maintaining the Kuei-jin's awareness of its presence, lest it grow strong without the vampire being suitably prepared, many ancestors declared that such a practice was pure folly and a certain recipe for increasing the ranks of the *akuma*. Accordingly, all copies of the First Book of the War in Twilight produced after the Ch'in dynasty have been rewritten with no mention of the cultivation of the P'o. All copies of the original version were to have been destroyed, but several are reported to have survived in private libraries.

The First Book also saw the first formal writings on the artistry of honorable combat. Though cultured Kuei-jin had spoken appreciatively of those who managed to conduct their affairs with elegance and efficiency, Hong was the first to equate such precision with Dharmic evolution. According to the First Book, an unbalanced, unrestrained creature would naturally employ the means most likely to defeat his enemy even when such means were clearly excessive. It took a wise being to judge the proper amount of force to use and an enlightened being to limit himself to the use of only that amount of force.

THE SECOND BOOK

The tiger and the monkey eat different food and live different lives. So too must they learn different lessons in order to fulfill their roles. Just as different are the Kuei-jin who walk the Middle Kingdom, and just as different are the lessons they must learn. Therefore, let the Kuei-jin choose their conflicts with an eye to what can be learned therein, and not just an easy victory.

— Hong Pei-pei, *The Three Books of the War in Twilight*

The second of *The Three Books* examined the proper forms of war in twilight and the proper manner with which to pursue such matters. According to Hong, there were Three Proper Hours of Twilight War: Sharpening the Blade at Dawn, Swinging the Sword at Noon and Piercing the Heart at Sunset. There was a fourth hour for battle as well, but it was neither auspicious nor proper for use in honorable combat. Hong chose not to dwell upon the so-called midnight war, except to say that it was not fit that Kuei-jin should wage it against Kuei-jin. Sharpening the Blade was the least dangerous of the Three Proper Hours — it was used between comrades who had no grievance against one another, but desired to hone their faculties. It represented a ritualized rivalry more than an actual conflict. Significant disagreements were to be handled through Swinging the Sword — a mediated duel with a definite goal. Whom ever achieved the goal first was declared the winner under the eyes of Heaven. Finally, there was Piercing the Heart, honorable combat which continued until one of the sides surrendered, declaring itself defeated. Each of the Three Proper Hours were intended to serve as an arena for strengthening the Kuei-jin and as a salve to prevent festering conflicts from growing more severe.

In addition to the Three Proper Hours, the Second Book offered the Five Auspicious Branches, or styles, of war in twilight, each named after a different tree. Since different Kuei-jin had different needs, it was mandatory that the *Ganshezhe* craft the twilight war to the natures and Dharmas of the combatants. As a result, the Third Book contained explicit guidelines on the selection and coordination of the Branches and goals to best illuminate the *xuezhe*.

War of the Willows: One of the more chilling Branches, War of the Willows called for the students to complete a quest in the Yin World. The nature of the quest was selected by the *Ganshezhe* to be a test of the *xuezhe*'s strength, courage and understanding of the ways of the Yellow Springs and to provide a chance for constructing alliances with the dead. War of the Willows was designed to strengthen the Yin virtue, and was associated with the west.

War of the Lotus: For the subtle and devious, or those who needed to cultivate such traits in themselves, *The Three Books* recommended War of the Lotus. In this Branch, the *Ganshezhe* chose a local mortal potentate, either a scholar or a minor official, and named him the Lotus Bearer. The *Ganshezhe* then gave each of the *xuezhe* the name of either a place or a person within the region, which were designated the opponents' gardens. The goal was to manipulate the Lotus Bearer into visiting one's own garden before one's opponent could draw him to his. The trick was that neither vampire was allowed to directly influence the Lotus Bearer. War of the Lotus was seen as favoring the east and the virtue of Yang.

War of the Sakaki: The early Kuei-jin recognized the danger of the word. War of the Sakaki was utilized to sharpen the skill of using words as blades — and to develop the ability to recognize when another person was trying to do the same. At the beginning of the twilight war, the *Ganshezhe* gave each combatant a specific goal and a small, enigmatic verse hinting at the goal of her opponent. The *xuezhe* then wrote verses and essays trying not only to bring about their respective goals, but to determine and prevent their opponents from succeeding at theirs. War of the Sakaki was seen as aiding in the development of the Yin and Yang faculties. It was commonly associated with the south.

War of the Pines: The most formal and rigorous of the Branches, War of the Pines was essentially a living enactment of a game of *xiang-qi*, elephant chess, with unwitting mortals taking the role of the pieces. Each of the combatants chose her own pieces, but the *Ganshezhe* kept the board and reviewed the moves to determine that they were all legal. This Branch was seen as well fitted for exercising the Hun and was associated with the north.

ELEPHANT CHESS

Xiang-qi, or elephant chess, has been played in the Middle Kingdom since the first century C.E. Though it resembles Western chess in many ways, it is a different game on many levels.

Xiang-qi is played on a board marked with nine vertical lines and 10 horizontal lines and is divided into the northern territory (whose pieces are marked with blue) and southern territory (red) by an open space in the middle. At the center rear of each territory is an area called the palace that also has diagonal lines to indicate its location. Pieces sit on the lines rather than in the squares.

Each side has a general, two chariots, two horses, two counselors, two ministers and five foot soldiers. These pieces move in manners similar to pieces in Western chess, but with certain geographical constraints. The general and counselors are confined to the palace, and ministers are not allowed to cross the river. The game ends when one side takes the other side's general.

A new piece per side, cannons, were added to the game in the Tang dynasty (around 839 C.E.), but have yet to come into fashion in the Courts of Quincunx. (Players interested in learning more about elephant chess can find more information in *Chinese Chess* by H. T. Lau.)

War of the Bamboo: Bamboo War was seen as the most complete of the Five Branches and was held to represent the center direction and exercise all of the virtues. A Bamboo War was expected to last an entire year, starting in the spring. The *xuezhe* spent the first season developing alliances and servitors among the mortal population of a town chosen by the *Ganshezhe*. At the beginning of summer, the *Ganshezhe* presented the combatants with conditions of victory, anything from the complete destruction of the opposing forces to being the first to construct a new temple. The rest of the second season was spent preparing the pawns and forces necessary to achieve the specified goal. The third season, autumn, was the season of action, when the real battles were fought and deeds performed — when victory and defeat were earned and reaped. And winter was spent cleaning up, returning the allies and troops to their natural disposition. The Second Book stressed the winter season as being crucial to the entire effort, and specifically warned that a Kuei-jin who won the first three seasons, but failed to properly complete the winter season would, in fact, lose the War of the Bamboo.

The Second Book also mentioned other forms of limited warfare, albeit less common ones. Some had been local traditions, while others were known (if not always used) throughout the Five August Courts. Hong explained that such styles were less well suited for Kuei-jin who sought enlightenment. She

relegated the peculiar War of the Apples, the bloody War of the Oaks and the rest to the rank of Inauspicious Branches and admonished all honorable Kuei-jin to avoid partaking of their folly.

THE THIRD BOOK

Whereas the Wan Xian tradition of Challenging the Night arose from their duty to protect humanity from the predations of the Yama Kings — and degenerated with their declining discipline — the enlightened Kuei-jin must use the task of honorable combat to hone his understanding of his Dharmic role.

— Hong Pei-pei, *The Three Books of the War in Twilight*

The *Ganshezhe* were the key to a properly executed twilight war. Their proper role and conduct, as well as the rituals and etiquette that surrounded a properly executed war in twilight were the Third Book's topics. Hong declared that unmediated war in twilight would lead only to strife if allowed to go unmediated. After all, even the most honorable mandarins were still subject to the temptations of the self and the desire to attain victory, even at the cost of honor. It was only through the actions of a wise, impartial mediator, a *Ganshezhe*, that a twilight war could be executed so as to satisfy the mandates of both the combatants and the August Personage of Jade.



THE FIVE QUALITIES OF THE ACCOMPLISHED GANSHEZHE

Though there was never a school or a formal regimen for becoming a *Ganshezhe*, it was an exclusive society. Entrance was restricted to those who demonstrated enlightenment and understanding of the Dharmic needs of the Kuei-jin. In the Third Book, Hong memorialized five qualities that were necessary to be a *Ganshezhe*. Though there was never a recorded policy of gender discrimination, many Kuei-jin noticed that the leaders of the *Ganshezhe* were almost entirely women, a fact which disturbed several of the more patriarchal elders.

First, the accomplished Ganshezhe should be dedicated to the Great Principle and understand its precepts and principles.

As the entire concept of the war in twilight was born from a desire to integrate the Great Principle into the theater of honorable combat, it was critical that the mediators have a firm grasp of Xue's teachings.

Second, the accomplished Ganshezhe should understand the nature of Kuei-jin and be able to discern their strengths and weaknesses.

It was expected that the *Ganshezhe* would set the Auspicious Branch and conditions of the twilight war to challenge both of the *xuezhe*. To this end it was necessary for her to understand her clients very well. In many cases the criteria for the twilight war reflected what the *Ganshezhe* perceived as a shared weakness, an area in which both of the students could grow through their striving.

Third, the accomplished Ganshezhe should recognize the teachings of the Five Dharmas and respect the natures of these paths.

Since Dharmic advancement was the goal of the enlightened Kuei-jin, the *Ganshezhe* needed to select twilight war criteria that would not contradict the tenets of the specific Dharma. No Shining Ice Guardian should be asked to harm the ghosts of his family any more than a Devil-Tiger should be made to act with caution and restraint.

Fourth, the accomplished Ganshezhe should be conversant with the ways of the Middle Kingdom and the Ten Thousand Things.

In order to prepare the most educational twilight war possible, the *Ganshezhe* needed to be aware of what tools she could employ in the wars. She needed to know the lay of the land, the lives of the mortals and the doings within the Yin World and the Yang World. Mediators were also expected to be able to cast horoscopes and determine the will of the Heavens as part of their preparations. No *Ganshezhe* wanted one of her *xuezhe* to fall to an enraged Hakken or anger the ancestor of the court in the course of her twilight war. Therefore, the mediator was expected to stay aware of the world around her.

Fifth, the accomplished Ganshezhe should control her own Demon and strive to act with impartiality in all things.

As imperfect beings, *Ganshezhe* could easily fall into the trap of preparing a twilight war which favors one of the *xuezhe* over the other, especially in cases where one was more popular than the other or shared some common trait with the mediator. Hong exhorted all *Ganshezhe* not to succumb to this temptation, for the lessons it taught were flawed.

The history of the Kuei-jin contains numerous cautionary tales in which a prideful *Ganshezhe* lacked one or more of the five qualities and caused disaster for herself, her clients and sometimes even an entire court.

CHAN AI-LING DRAWS HER COURT INTO WAR

Chan Ai-ling enjoyed her status as a senior *Ganshezhe* of the Court of the Azure Dragon. Her skill with words, knowledge of the *Ki Chuan* and esteemed family earned her the respect and admiration of much of the court — and were a source of great pride.

One night, Chan Yu-wei, a mandarin and distant cousin, and Tan Szeto, an aspiring jina, visited her. The two of them disagreed over how to treat the hengeyokai court to the south and had determined to settle the matter in a twilight war. Though the horoscopes warned that War of the Willows was the preferred Auspicious Branch, Chan Ai-ling favored her cousin. She chose War of the Sakaki for the twilight war, knowing that, though he had made no use of his skill since taking the Second Breath, Chan Yu-wei had been a skilled poet in life.

Chan easily won the twilight war, and Tan gracefully acceded to his plan of action. The court sent a war party to demand tribute from the hengeyokai and was repaid with the loss of seven Kuei-jin warriors. It was years later that Chan Ai-ling learned that one of her ancestors in the Yellow Springs could have warned her cousin of the folly of such a plan had he made the journey to the Yin World that a War of the Willows would have forced.

According to the Third Book, a twilight war began when two vampires in conflict sought — or were ordered to seek — the counsel of a *Ganshezhe*. This meeting was called the Gathering of Clouds. It was followed by a period of three days to two weeks, called Awaiting the Rain, during which the *Ganshezhe* decided on the nature and planned the details of the twilight war. After the form of the twilight war had been determined and the proper waiting time had elapsed, the *Gui Ren* met a second time and the mediator laid out the rules and goals of the war in twilight for the *xuezhe*. Finally, after the twilight war had concluded, a celebration was held to recognize the victory of the winner and to praise both students for their learning and enlightenment.

For the initial meeting, called the Gathering of Clouds, both prospective *xuezhe* brought identical token gifts to the mediator as a symbol that neither was to receive any special favor. Tea, gold and porcelain were considered auspicious gifts; jade was considered particularly unlucky, in memory of the fall of the Wan Xian. During the meeting, the three Cathayans would sit, discuss the matters of the world and enjoy tea and wine. During this time, the *Ganshezhe* was to assess the natures and abilities of her clients. Eventually, after no fewer than three hours, the mediator would turn the discussion to the conflict and learn which Proper Hour the Kuei-jin wanted for their twilight war. Then she would cast the horoscope of her clients and, after reflection, instruct them on when to return. As they parted, each of the Wan Kuei swore that she would not break with propriety by seeking to turn the twilight war to her advantage.

The period after the Gathering of Clouds was called Awaiting the Rain. During this time, the *Ganshezhe* was expected to seek auguries and meditate on the virtues and weaknesses of the *xuezhe*, in order to determine which Auspicious Branch was best suited for their conflict and what the goal should be. Awaiting the Rain was expected to last at least three nights for a Dawn War, seven nights for a Noon War and 14 nights for a Sunset War, but the mediator could specify a longer time if she felt the situation was particularly complex. Throughout this period, the *Ganshezhe* and the students were not allowed to have any contact with each other, even through intermediaries or letters, nor were they expected to speak of the matter with others.

At the time declared by the *Ganshezhe* at the end of the Gathering of Clouds, the Kuei-jin involved in the twilight war met again for the Breaking of Clouds. Unlike the Gathering of Clouds, which was a private ceremony, Breaking of Clouds was a public affair, and was often conducted within the confines of the court itself. The Breaking of Clouds began with the *xuezhe* explaining the nature of their difference and announcing that they had sought the services of the *Ganshezhe*. The mediator then stepped forth and publicly stated which Auspicious Branch she had chosen for the students and what the special goals and rules for this particular twilight war, called the Precepts of War, were. She then presented each of the *xuezhe* with a silk scroll containing the Precepts for his twilight war. The *xuezhe* then offered gifts to the court and retired to make their plans.

During the twilight war itself, the *Ganshezhe* took it upon herself to monitor the course of the activity to ensure that neither of the students were prosecuting the war dishonorably

QI-CHEN DEFINES THE TWILIGHT WAR BETWEEN LIU AND KON

Esteemed Ancestor, honored members of the Court of the Two Red Tigers, know that Liu Wei-hong and Kon Jung-su, being honorable members of the Wan Kuei, have decided to settle their differences in the noble and honored trials of the twilight war.

Their wrath is not so great that they desire the injury of each other, but they feel that their difference begs resolution, so they have elected to Swing the Blade at Noon, and let the Heavens declare whose cause is most just. This humble *Ganshezhe* has consulted the Heavens and the spirits of the Ten Thousand Things. She has determined that Kon is skilled in the ways of the Yin World but Liu is a master warrior. Therefore, it is most auspicious for honorable Kon and honorable Liu to engage in the War of the Lotus, strengthening their understanding of the ways of the eastern quarter and their appreciation of the nobility of the mortals.

This humble *Ganshezhe* has selected one Chan Jing-shuan, a treasurer in the neighboring city of Taiyuan, as the Lotus Bearer. For Liu's garden, this humble *Ganshezhe* has selected Fai Gan, the apprentice monk at the Temple of the Refreshing Spring to the north. For Kon's garden, I have selected the bedchamber of the widow Su-chu. This humble *Ganshezhe* is certain you will agree that the selection of gardens and the Lotus Bearer will provide a challenge to the honorable *xuezhe*.

As the Heavens and the spirits of the Ten Thousand Things stand witness, this humble *Ganshezhe* asks that none interfere with the honorable and enlightened execution of this war in twilight. May the August Personage of Jade smile upon both *xuezhe* in their continuing quest, and may victory go to the righteous.

and that no outside influences were disrupting the didactic process. Also, as much as a twilight war was intended to teach the *xuezhe*, it was also intended to instruct the mediator in how to be a better *Ganshezhe*.

Finally, with the victory of one of the *xuezhe*, the twilight war was brought to a close with the ceremony called Revealing the Heavens. This lavish party, which was thrown by the victor, was intended as a celebration of his success and a tribute to the honor and continuing quest for enlightenment of both of the *xuezhe*. Both of the students were expected to attend Revealing the Heavens, offering elaborate gifts to their *Ganshezhe* and expounding upon the lessons they learned.

THE FALL OF THE GANSHEZHE

Tainted by the suspicion evoked by their early declarations that a developed but monitored P'o was beneficial to a Kuei-jin, the *Ganshezhe* slowly fell from favor with the members of the Five August Courts. Elders questioned their enlightenment, mandarins were jealous of their power and even the jina and disciples had heard too many stories of *xuezhe* who had been entrapped or destroyed by the ill will or incompetence of their mediators. Others claim that the patriarchal forces of the court felt threatened by the preponderance of women among the ranks of the *Ganshezhe*. As the August Courts devolved into infighting and petty bickering, many of the Wan Kuei placed the blame on those who should have been directing their anger into growth: the *Ganshezhe*.

The Court of the Azure Dragon was the first to declare the mediators useless. In the 81st year of the Sung dynasty (1041), Emperor Xiao officially disbanded the *Ganshezhe* in the Proclamation of the Stone Bear, declaring that such disputes were "better handled by court ancestors than a self-appointed caste of meddlers." In time, the Courts of the White Tiger, Yellow Emperor and, finally, the Scarlet Phoenix curtailed and eventually terminated the activities of the *Ganshezhe*. Only in the Court of the Black Tortoise did the mediators retain any acceptance, and even there, they were placed under the scrutiny of the Grand Ministry of Auspicious Warfare.

With the loss of their positions, some mediators adopted other posts or careers, while others chose the life of the outcast, wandering the Middle Kingdom in search of enlightenment or revenge. Most of the *Ganshezhe* fled the courts, eventually taking up residence in either the Court of the Black Tortoise or one of the outer regions. In many cases, they brought their favorite texts with them and spread their learning throughout the Middle Kingdom. In many ways, this exodus did as much to spread the culture of the Chinese *Gui Ren* as any of the August Courts more militaristic schemes. To this day, many of the libraries in the Golden Courts, Green Courts and Japan owe their most sacred texts to the migration of the *Ganshezhe*.

THE QUINCUNX

With the Council of Dragons in 1304, the Five August Courts were dissolved and replaced by the Quincunx. Once again the Kuei-jin had a direct and visible enemy — the Kin-jin. Though they had not forgotten their original foes, the Kuei-jin now devoted much of their Chi to keeping the Middle Kingdom free of the unwanted *gewilo*. Ironically, the face of honorable combat turned full circle to the purpose originally designated by the Three Golden Egrets. The *tiaozhan ye* experienced a renaissance, only this time, the target of their fury was more often the "white devils" than the minions of the Yama Kings.

In the Bone Court of Beijing, the inheritor of the institutions of the Court of the Black Tortoise, the Grand Ministry of Auspicious Warfare was reconstituted into the Reverend Tribunal of the August Personage. The Reverend Tribunal was then given the task of assuring that conflicts among the Wan Kuei did not spread out of control and threaten the more serious matter of the wars against the Kin-jin and the Yama Kings. Still entrenched in tradition and loath to allow any

Kuei-jin to lapse in his Dharmic progress, the Reverend Tribunal adopted many of the institutions and ideas of the *Ganshezhe* but discarded many others. The Three Proper Hours are still in use, encouraging Kuei-jin to handle their disputes with the minimum amount of disturbance, but most of the Five Auspicious Branches have fallen out of favor. Throughout the Quincunx, only War of the Bamboo is commonly employed, though, with no reason to distinguish itself from the other Branches, the name itself has fallen from use. Only the oldest Cathayans refer to it as anything other than twilight war.

As the Fifth Age progressed, the Ancestor of the Blood Court adopted a policy of slowly encouraging the other courts to use the Reverend Tribunal for mediation of their disputes. He even adopted a stance of requiring the members to take oaths of confidentiality, swearing that they would reveal the details of a twilight war only if it was apparent that the Yama Kings were involved in the matter. When asked why he had implemented this policy, cutting himself off from a valuable source of information, he is reported to have stated, "Propriety should not be hostage to political expediency." Some Kuei-jin fear that the ancestor has a method for extracting such information despite these oaths, but nevertheless the Reverend Tribunal has become immensely popular, even being used by some Kuei-jin beyond the Quincunx. So busy is it that it can hold session only once a year, for the lunar month after the New Year. At other times, the members must either attend to their own business or travel throughout the Middle Kingdom. This limitation has resulted in several twilight wars escalating to midnight war status over the past decade, as the Ministers of the Reverend Tribunal were not available to keep things within the realm of propriety. The Ancestor of the Blood Court is reputed to be reviewing the possibility of calling the Reverend Tribunal to session for one month in the autumn as well, but no proclamation to this effect has yet been made.

OLD TRADITIONS NOT YET FORGOTTEN

Though not currently in vogue, the old Auspicious Branches are still employed by certain Kuei-jin with an eye toward history. Ancient Yin-unbalanced vampires still opt for War of the Willows, and Resplendent Cranes who know about it — or remember it — are yet fond of War of the Pines. Most modern *Gui Ren* do not even know of the old forms and see these odd activities as yet another manifestation of the inscrutable nature of the elders.

Oddly enough, the more elemental combats of the early Five August Courts period are still remembered and used. It is fairly common for modern Kuei-jin to employ the Challenge of the Impenetrable Shell of the Black Tortoise or one of the other forms of *tiaozhan ye*. The unnamed combat of the Court of the White Tiger has completely fallen from use — or so the elders who remember its nature hope.

MODERN NIGHT TWILIGHT WAR

The rituals behind the twilight war yet exist, but in abbreviated fashions. Without the presence of a convenient *Ganshezhe* in every court, the *xuezhe* must select and agree upon another Kuei-jin to fulfill that role. In the Blood Court, it is expected that the selected Kuei-jin will be a member of the Reverend Tribunal, and some courts have a designated Minister of the War in Twilight or a similar post. In other areas, though, any elder or acceptably impartial Cathayan will do, and occasionally the antagonists must provide a significant payment to convince the desired mediator to accept the burden of duty.

Gathering of Clouds now often takes on the form of the *xuezhe* and their mediator trying to come up with a suitable set of Precepts for the twilight war. Elders and other Kuei-jin of power and renown may issue the conditions by fiat, but usually impromptu mediators often have their hands full trying to construct a suitably fair set of terms. Once the specifics of the twilight war have been set, the Kuei-jin involved present the situation to the court. Different courts have different traditions and protocols for the Breaking of Clouds, and the austere propriety of the Blood Court is vastly different from the anticipatory celebrations of the Flame Court. In places such as the Flesh Court, where the court does not exist as a stable entity, the mediator makes an effort to get word of the twilight war to at least those *Gui Ren* she considers important; the rest can fend for themselves once things get interesting. When the court has been informed, the twilight war begins. The two opponents commence devoting their energies to defeating each other according to the precepts of their twilight war.

THE SIX INJUNCTIONS

Though the Reverend Tribunal does not have authority across the Middle Kingdom, it has issued a list of six rules concerning proper behavior for Kuei-jin engaged in a twilight war that is more or less generally accepted. Owing to their universal nature, the Six Injunctions are often used in areas even beyond the Quincunx, but Cathayans in foreign lands would do well to inquire as to the local ground rules should they find themselves embroiled in a twilight war.

- **Every action must obey the Great Principle.**

Twilight war is intended as honorable combat. To betray the Great Principle is to go against everything honor stands for and, therefore, cannot be tolerated. Since many twilight wars are begun over debates on the finer points of the Great Principle, the First Injunction has been the cause of more escalating twilight wars than any other single factor. In most cases, the word of the mediator is expected to resolve disputes in this area.

- **Respect the judgement of the mediator.**

In order for twilight war to stay civilized, it is important that both opponents recognize a higher authority — and one who is more accessible than the August Personage of Jade. For this reason it is important that they respect the judgements of the mediator as being binding. In areas where the intermediary is a court-appointed position, this is rarely an issue, but in other areas, the mediator only has as much power as his strength, and his clients' honor, allow him.

- **Be civilized — Confine matters of the twilight war to the twilight war.**

Opponents are expected to behave with honor, propriety and civility toward each other while engaged in a twilight war. Similarly, the combatants are expected to leave matters and people not embroiled in the twilight war uninvolved. In a properly conducted twilight war, the antagonism of the opponents should be confined exclusively to the twilight war. In all other matters, the rivals should be as allies. In fact, this degree of civility is difficult for all but the most enlightened to maintain, and followers of certain Dharmas may find it contrary to their nature. How well this Injunction is followed generally depends on the degree to which honor and propriety is stressed in the court to which the *xuezhe* belong.

- **Do not seek to expand the twilight war beyond its Precepts.**

Though many see this as a repetition of the Third Injunction, it is in fact a warning not to escalate the twilight war beyond its set conditions. If the twilight war concerns financial matters, it is considered ill mannered to bring street gangs into it. This Injunction is also interpreted to represent a warning against involving other *shen* in the dispute unless they are specifically mentioned in the Precepts. Once again, adherence to this Injunction depends on the nature of the court and the nature of the allies of the *xuezhe* involved.

- **Act with honor, restraint and decorum — twilight war is not the province of barbarians.**

As the Wan Kuei represent forces of civilization and balance within the Middle Kingdom, it is important that they act with appropriate effort. This Injunction represents the often unspoken artistry behind honorable combat — the notion that anything worth doing is worth doing elegantly. Though the Golden Courts may have differing ideas about such oblique points of refinement, much of the rest of the Middle Kingdom looks more favorably upon a Kuei-jin who fought skillfully and honorably but lost than one who won through brute force.

- **Accept the end of the twilight war. Whether you have won or lost, act with decorum.**

Also tied to the artistry of the twilight war, the Sixth Injunction serves to warn Kuei-jin against continuing hostilities beyond their proper end. There should be no dishonor in losing a twilight war, but refusing to accept an obvious defeat is mere foolishness. Similarly, gloating and other unseemly displays cause other Cathayans to look down upon even the most skilled victor. Unfortunately, even with this Injunction in place, many *xuezhe* refuse to accept defeat, and thus, last night's twilight wars sometimes become tomorrow's midnight wars.

Except in areas where the court has a strong say in the handling of twilight wars, social pressure, personal honor and the power of the mediator are the main enforcers of the Six Injunctions. This may be sufficient, since a *xuezhe* is often too busy with his twilight war to be willing to risk the ire of other Kuei-jin. In cases where these pressures are not sufficient, however, the twilight war may spin out of control. In such cases, one vampire after another gets drawn in until it either expands into a midnight war or some higher authority intervenes.



BEYOND THE QUINCUNX

Thanks to the exodus of the *Ganshezhe* at the end of the Fourth Age, many of the Quincunx' traditions for twilight war have been spread throughout the remainder of the Middle Kingdom. Nevertheless, local tradition remains strong. An important factor for visiting Kuei-jin to consider is that local tradition may be more strongly enforced than the broader mandates of Kuei-jin society as a whole. While the Green Courts may not think anything of ignoring the Fourth Injunction and involving the native wraiths in their twilight wars, neither *joss* nor the Heavens will defend a *Gui Ren* who offers a handkerchief as a gift to the local court. He had better be beyond the reach of the court by daybreak or be prepared to Face the Eye of Heaven.

JAPAN

Twilight war in the courts of the Bishamon is perhaps the most rigidly formalized twilight war in the Middle Kingdom. In addition to employing *kyouji*, formally designated referees, any breach of the code of *Tamashiido* is considered enough to forfeit the entire war. This adherence to hoary etiquette often presents a problem for foreign Kuei-jin and the newly emerged from Yomi alike, but the Bishamon would not dream of forsaking their traditions. They were forced to compromise and flee

once before, and they will never do so again. Because of this focus on propriety and art, a *gaki* who loses well is better appreciated than anywhere else in the Quincunx — though he is still considered a loser.

TAMASHIIDO THE WAY OF THE SPIRIT

Tamashiido grew from the same martial traditions of honor and skill as *kyuba-no-michi* and, later, *bushido*, demanding of Kuei-jin the same rigor the mortal warriors' codes demanded of their adherents.

Tamashiido calls for a Kuei-jin warrior to be unfailingly loyal to his master, honorable to his word, true to the August Personage of Jade and skilled in the ways of war. It also expects the Kuei-jin to follow the five virtues of duty, inner resilience, restraint, resoluteness and perception.

The Bishamon still practice such arts as *battoujutsu* and *shinobijutsu* (See p. 13), but they far prefer the classic twilight war where the *kyouji* presents a mission or task and the two opponents must vie to complete the task first and most elegantly. In a rare acknowledgement of the modernization of the Middle Kingdom, the Bishamon have begun to accept finan-

cial and business matters as goals in twilight war. Previously, maneuvering an opponent into a position of martial or spiritual vulnerability were the only honorable options.

Among the Genji, the codes of war are less exacting, and the pace of twilight war is more rapid. Though they still employ a mediator, the role is an informal one. Most Genji twilight wars focus around financial concerns, but hacking and other forms of technological ones have come to be in vogue. Whereas the Bishamon expect twilight war to be carried out with exacting propriety, the Genji look for *iki*, or style. A disciple who can undermine his opponent with clever use of new technology or innovative boardroom maneuvering is more appreciated than one who counts on steady attrition from a position of safety.

Between the most powerful courts, the other *uji* strike a sort of middle ground, mixing some of the Bishamon adherence to etiquette with a little of the Genji grasp of the modern world. Each clan has its own rituals befitting its role in Japan's unliving society.

THE GREEN COURTS

In direct counterpoint to the Genji fascination with style, the members of the Green Courts do not feel that they have the luxury of contemplating such niceties. Efficiency, speed and the ability to maintain positive relations with the Yin World are the key attributes of a twilight warrior in Korea. The importance of their necromantic relations is such that many twilight wars are conducted with a *simpan* from the Yin World as well as well as from the Wan Xian. Under the watchful eye of the *simpan*, the opponents are assigned a task that the ancestors feels needs doing. Whoever accomplishes the task first is counted victorious. The loser is offered a chance to save face by completing a second, usually more difficult, task, but even if she succeeds, she is considered to have lost the twilight war. Such tasks often take the *xuezhe* to foreign shores, either in search of jade, as an escort for some well-paying creature who seeks the refuge of the Parallel Path or as a spy to discern the weaknesses of the courts surrounding Korea.

THE GOLDEN COURTS

Within the jungles the *penangallan* call home, there is no more honorable form of battle than that against the demon servants of the Yama Kings. Accordingly, twilight war still consists of visiting a mediator who casts lots to determine an auspicious location for hunting demons and seeing who comes back with the most carcasses after three nights' worth of work. In certain areas, such as Thailand and Malaysia and the ancient temples of Sri Ksetra and Angkor, the ancient Dance of the Scarlet Phoenix is still practiced, much to the joy of the jungle spirits.

Though there are some constants to the styles of waging twilight war across the face of the Middle Kingdom, it is even more accurate to say that each twilight war is different. Each twilight war involves different Kuei-jin in different circumstances fighting for different goals. Despite this, the institution of twilight war as honorable combat among the Kuei-jin stands as an important unifying tradition and one that has lasted from their race's earliest nights up to the end of the Fifth Age.

THE ARTISTRY OF TWILIGHT WAR

The Great Principle and the Dharmas that embrace it transcend the realms of utility. The Path Back will not be traveled by those who seek the straightest road. In the arena of the war in twilight, it is important to remember that the deportment of the xuezhe as much as the meeting of the Precepts are the measures by which the Kuei-jin's true enlightenment will be measured.

— Hong Pei-pei, *The Three Books of the War in Twilight*

In a midnight war or a battle against the minions of the Yama Kings, only her abilities and the environment in which she fights limit a Kuei-jin. twilight war, on the other hand, enforces restrictions based on propriety and even aesthetics. The excesses and necessities of midnight war are out of place in honorable combat among the Wan Kuei. To this end, there are certain principles that can guide the wise and certain habits and skills that are essential for the Kuei-jin who seeks to be victorious.

THE TIMELESS DANCE

To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.

— Traditional Chinese Proverb

When a wise Kuei-jin realizes that she is to enter into a twilight war, she should pause and meditate upon how important the point of conflict is and what she is willing to sacrifice to ensure her victory. In friendly disputes, matters of polite disagreement and the occasional clash of egos, Swinging the Sword at Noon should suffice. After all, the idea is to settle the conflict without unduly disrupting Gui Ren society. In cases where the Kuei-jin involved feel that honor is truly at stake, they may select Piercing the Heart at Sunset. Such twilight war can be long and painful for the Cathayans involved, but it is

THE TRAGIC TALE OF CHURAI, NIKOM, SOMPRON AND MALIWAN.

In the time of the great Siamese Empire, Churai and Nikom, two goldsmiths, lived in the same city as Maliwan, a woman renowned for her elegance and wit. As sometimes happened, the town was attacked and destroyed by warlords from the empire to the west. All three died and all three took the Second Breath. Over time, Churai and Nikom fell in love with Maliwan and secretly decided to engage in Sharpening the Blade at Dawn to determine who should have the right to court her. They chose Sompron, their closest friend, as their mediator, and set to work to see who could craft the most beautiful jewelry. Sadly, Sompron had also fallen in love with Maliwan, and he sought to aggravate the twilight war, so he could have her for himself. It was only after Nikom had slain Churai that he realized how Sompron had manipulated him. After he had killed Sompron with his own claws, Nikom chose to Face the Eye of Heaven. In the end, only Maliwan was left to mourn the loss of her friends.

still preferable to the destruction of midnight war. Sharpening the Blade at Dawn, the least harsh of the Proper Hours of honorable combat is formally declared only on rare occasions. In most cases, the *xuezhe* are sufficiently amicable that they can set the terms of their sparring to a level that they can both accommodate. Nevertheless, wise Kuei-jin still employ a mediator to prevent such friendly rivalries from intensifying. In such cases, it is important that the intermediary not be a close friend to the opponents, lest some apparent favoritism aggravate the situation.

SWINGING THE SWORD

In cases where the Kuei-jin involved choose Swinging the Sword at Noon, the severity of the dispute is reflected in the difficulty of the Precepts assigned to it. A minor disagreement over how a certain battle with the court's enemies was handled may call for a contest to see who can first arrange for the defection of the leader of one of the opponent's gangs. A more serious disagreement, perhaps over a matter of honor, might see the Precepts calling for the *xuezhe* to fight to drive one of each other's businesses to bankruptcy. And even worse, possibly after a fundamental disagreement on the strategic handling of some *gweilo shen*, the opponents might be asked to show who can bring the greatest political pressure to bear and seize a family holding of her enemy.

Wherever possible, mediators prefer to have some poetic symmetry between the cause of the disagreement and the Precepts of the resulting war in twilight. Martial conflicts should result in martially oriented twilight wars; philosophical disagreements should be reflected in battles of a more reflective

nature; arguments centered around etiquette and social matters should be settled through fights over public opinion and so forth. Inexperienced mediators may have difficulty concocting an appropriately metaphorical conflict, but certain masters have achieved fame throughout the Middle Kingdom for the clever insight of the Precepts they devise.

Once the Precepts have been announced at an appropriate Breaking of Clouds, the *xuezhe* are expected to conduct their war in twilight in such a fashion that it in no way impinges upon the workings of the court. Despite this ostentatious discretion, court gossip often centers around current twilight wars, and many Kuei-jin enjoy placing wagers with unofficially appointed "Ministers of Joss" on who will be victorious, what means they will use to achieve victory and how quickly they will win. It is considered the height of impropriety to allow the *xuezhe* to know how people are betting, and even members of the *xuezhes'* *wu* are expected to keep such matters private. In at least one case where the winner was almost assured, a loose-tongued jina revealed the odds to the opponents while they were waiting for an audience with one of the court's ministers. Taken aback by the undesired information, the favored combatant forfeited on the spot, losing the twilight war, but winning the admiration of much of the court nevertheless.

Throughout the twilight war, the *xuezhe* are expected to keep the mediator apprised of their activities, to ensure that no improper actions are taken and that the war stays within the confines of the Precepts. Naturally, the mediator is supposed to keep all such matters in the strictest of confidence, not only with respect to the other *xuezhe* but also with respect to the entire court, especially those who are betting on the outcome. Gamblers are expected to find their own sources of information.

THE CHALLENGE ITSELF

Throughout the history of the Middle Kingdom, few points of etiquette have been so subject to change as the manner in which one Kuei-jin challenged another to honorable combat. In the courts of the Bishamon, before the arrival of the original Genji, merely sitting with one's feet pointed at another Kuei-jin was seen as a challenge, while in the Court of the White Tiger, it is recorded that challenges had to be made with the ghosts of the opponent's ancestors rather than with the opponent herself. Ignorance of such customs caused many unwanted battles, as visitors all too easily committed some minor breach of etiquette. In the modern Middle Kingdom, there are three common means by which a challenge is declared: the Communion of Tigers, the Crowing of Cocks and Leading the Dogs.

In the Communion of Tigers, the most civilized form of challenge, the two opponents meet in private and quietly discuss their differences. If they discover that they must do honorable battle to resolve their conflict, they seek out a mediator and proceed from there. Elders often praise those who act with such discretion, for it is the least disruptive to the court as a whole.

When one side issues a public contradiction or insult that the other is honor-bound to respond to, it is called the Crowing of Cocks. The nature of such insults varies from court to court. In the Green Courts, one offers a handkerchief as a gift to one's opponent. Among the Bishamon, one points one's unsheathed sword at the other while pretending to clean it. In the Blood Court, the challenge must be issued as a questioning of the other's propriety. Other courts have their own traditions. Once the challenge has been issued, the target must demand a twilight war or accept a serious loss of face. There are, of course, exceptions to this. A sufficiently ancient Cathayan may ignore the challenge of a young pup without repercussions; such wastes of time are brushed off by all concerned, and the inappropriate challenger is the one who loses face.

When an elder of the court has grown tired of the apparent enmity between two Kuei-jin, he is allowed to order them to see a mediator and begin a twilight war before the next full moon. This command is called Leading the Dogs and reflects poorly on the *Gui Ren* so ordered, for if they were truly honorable, they would either have seen the need for such action on their own or have kept their rivalry within the bounds of propriety.

When one of the opponents has attained victory according to the terms of the Precepts, he must prove his victory to the mediator and the other *xuezhe*. It is considered a special coup to have won without one's opponent being aware that one has done so. Such subtlety is much lauded and earns the victor respect above and beyond what his triumph ordinarily would garner him. Once the winner has been confirmed, the involved parties schedule Revealing the Heavens with the court. In modern days, Revealing the Heavens has taken on an even more celebratory atmosphere than before, with gifts exchanged between the winner and the loser, as well as congratulatory gifts from other members of the court. In many places it is traditional for those who did particularly well in their wagers to give anonymous gifts to both *xuezhe*. The deportment of the oppo-

nents at this ceremony sometimes has as much effect on the opinions of the other Kuei-jin as who the actual victor is, and a gracious winner or loser is appreciated by all.

After Revealing the Heavens, all of the Kuei-jin involved in the twilight war are expected to accept the victor as being correct in the matter concerned and to treat the matter as being a thing of the past. Harboring ill will because of a lost war in twilight is unenlightened indeed. In certain cases, a loser may feel that the mediator gave her opponent an unfair advantage. It is almost always better to simply let the matter pass, but if she cannot, she is free to challenge the mediator to a new twilight war. This is advisable only in cases of blatant and recognized misconduct, though. Otherwise, challenging one's mediator is usually seen as sour grapes.

UNSPOKEN RULES

Though not officially codified into the Six Injunctions, there are several rules of which all who engage in war in twilight should be aware. As with much that has to do with twilight war, the weight given to these rules varies from place to place.

- **Killing your opponent is not the goal of twilight war.**

Unless the opponents have chosen a simple duel to the death, it is considered quite inauspicious for a twilight war to result in the death of one of the *xuezhe*. In such cases, the survivor is often expected to undertake some form of extreme quest for atonement.

- **Do not involve Kin-jin in your wars.**

It is often considered criminal to invite Western vampires into twilight war, even as pawns and sacrifices. War in twilight is supposed to be honorable, and the Kin-jin, most assuredly, are not. This is especially true in such locations as the Flame Court of Hong Kong and the courts of Clan Bishamon.

- **Do not involve the Shih in your wars.**

The Shih are dangerous to all Kuei-jin. Drawing the attention of one of these demon hunters is an act of sheer folly, no matter what sort of a tactical advantage it may give. In recent years, Strike Force Zero has also been added to the list of people not to invite to the dance of twilight.

- **True crises are more important than twilight wars.**

If a midnight war, an invasion of Kin-jin or some serious action on the part of the Yama Kings erupts, Kuei-jin are expected to allow their twilight wars to drop so they can devote their full attention to these matters. In such cases, it is considered quite dishonorable to attempt to use the crisis to further one's twilight war; it is either resumed *in medias res* later or dropped entirely.

- **Never wager against your *wu*-mate.**

It is considered inauspicious, even treacherous, for a member of one of the *xuezhe*'s *wu* to wager against him, and very few Ministers of Joss will accept such bets, both for the ill fortune it portends and for fear of the treachery it implies.

PIERCING THE HEART

In cases where both parties consider the other an affront to their very dignity, but still wish to act with honor, they may opt for Piercing the Heart at Sunset. In such cases, the mediator's role is different: She is intended to see that the *xuezhe* continue to act with honor and to ensure that the scope of the conflict stays within acceptable bounds. Under the eyes of the mediator, the opponents establish their own Precepts, listing the resources, financial institutions, Scarlet Screens and the like they will bring to the twilight war. In a fair battle, the resources should be more or less evenly matched, and an honorable Kuei-jin agrees not to use some of his forces if she is in a better position than her opponent. The opponents may also agree to hold back some of their resources for use in emergencies. This is especially common in courts where the Kuei-jin face regular threats from some external force. Gui Ren with no or few forces at their command may use members of their *wu* — with their

THE BREAKING OF CLOUDS ON A SUNSET TWILIGHT WAR

Despite their long enmity, Nguyen Dhom-Phu and Khuc Nguyet have chosen to act with honor and settle these matters by Piercing the Heart at Sunset. 7, Nguyen Hanh, have been called upon to serve as intermediary.

Dhom-Phu brings two Scarlet Screens to the battle: the 67 70's and the Eight Red Talons. He also brings the Dong Noi River Patrol. He acknowledges his patrol house and his two warehouses as havens and forts.

Nguyet brings three Scarlet Screens to the battle: the Sons of Minh, the Dancing Lightnings and the Three-Handed Monkey. She swears that her other Scarlet Screens, the Lotus Scourge and the Fists of Victory will never enter the twilight war. She acknowledges the tunnel complex to the north as a haven and fort.

They have chosen to fight until one surrenders. At that point, the winner may claim one of the loser's involved Scarlet Screens, if any survive.

Both Dhom-Phu and Nguyet have sworn to act with honor and not to burden the Court of the Lost Fris with their battle. May joss favor the righteous!

permission — but this practice is felt to bring misfortune. With the forces involved tallied, the opponents may set a limit on acceptable losses or specify a prize that the winner may claim, though such customs are more common outside the Quincunx. Finally, once the Precepts have been determined, the mediator and the opponents announce the twilight war to the court, and from there matters commence in the usual fashion.

In this form of twilight war, more so than in any other, it is important to try to maintain the favor of the court, since the war's open-ended and indirect nature leaves ample opportunity for other members of the court to subtly express their opinions of the *xuezhe*. Indeed, many places consider adjusting the course of a twilight war to be an art in and of itself. Of course, such meddling must be done with the utmost discretion and subtlety — it is a major gaffe for one of the combatants to be able to figure out who is playing with his twilight war. In such cases, the meddler is expected to perform an even greater service on behalf of the wronged party. Many combatants find themselves devoting much time to maintaining their popularity in court, if only to keep unwanted dabblers from making things more difficult for them. As with Swinging the Sword, many members of the court make wagers on the outcome and developments of the twilight war. It is considered dishonorable in the extreme for a Kuei-jin to both meddle and wager at the same time.

While it would seem obvious for the opponents to simply set their Scarlet Screens against one another and see who comes out on top, such practices are employed only by novices, and the *xuezhe* often go to great lengths to keep their forces apart. Instead, students focus on third-party manipulations and pulling strings from behind the scenes. Why risk one's own gang when one can trick one's opponent's gang into a fight with the police. Better still is arranging for an ambitious police lieutenant to plant an agent provocateur in the opponent's gang to incite it to attack one of the opponent's other gangs. Finesse is judged based on how little action is required to inflict the maximum damage to the opponent's resources. In most cases, the mediator is informed of plans in advance of these schemes. It would be unseemly for a twilight war to be won entirely through outside meddling or happenstance; also, most Kuei-jin want an official record of their cunning plans so they receive the recognition they deserve for their cleverness.

In time, one of the *xuezhe* finds his resources tapped as far as he is willing to allow — or totally decimated — and is forced to surrender. The official surrender is made to the mediator, but it is usually also presented to the victor in hopes of preventing any further losses. The form of the surrender varies from place to place, from the formal poems extolling the mastery of the victor popular throughout the Quincunx to the sending of a trophy designated in the Precepts as is practiced in the Golden Courts to the gift of the broken katana favored in Japan. Once the surrender is delivered to the mediator and the victor has been informed, only the basest and most dishonorable Kuei-jin would continue the attack and risk drawing the displeasure of the court. There have been several cases where third parties, sometimes *akuma*, have intercepted the token of surrender, causing the defeated to feel that the winner was acting dishonorably and to respond with more direct violence. In such

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The various denizens of the Middle Kingdom have different opinions concerning the war in twilight. Some see it as an affectation by creatures who would rather play than confront the real problems. Others see it as a means of safely releasing aggression or an elegant pastime. Below are samples of the different attitudes this custom inspires.

Ac-Cha Soo Hyun, Minister of Learning of the Blood Court of Beijing, enlightens her audience:

If you have never partaken of the joys of the war in twilight, I sincerely suggest you find a suitable disagreement and draw yourself into one at the earliest possibility. In no other endeavor do the beauty and power of the Kuei-jin manifest so precisely.

Kanou Makoto, yet another Running Monkey from Chiba City, speaks his mind:

It's fucked up, man. We've got enough problems without having the eunuchs playing these stupid little wargames. Who cares if Ikegami-fucking-san can seduce Kameda-fucking-san's great-great-great-granddaughter with a single haiku when we're up to our asses in Kim-jin!

Woo Sung Ju-il, Bamboo Princess of Seoul, offers a different perspective:

Kuei-jin are predators. Without such an outlet, we would be tearing each other apart like fighting fish in a small bowl. twilight war survives, because it helps us survive. Fortunately, it keeps the dame-sama busy enough so we can get some real work done, too.

Janamejaya Vedya, Nagah Leaf, passes judgement:

Once, the Wan Xian allowed their blindness to befool the Middle Kingdom. Now, they pretend that these petty pageants can keep them from repeating their previous atrocities. I think not.

Sidra Masters, a visiting Toreador emissary, presents her observations:

I must admit that I find the refinement with which the Kindred of the Golden Courts resolve their disputes to be rather refreshing, but there are times when it seems as if one is walking across a tightrope over a pit of vipers. I have not felt this way since I left Paris.

instances, much harm has been done before the guilty parties have been discovered.

Once the victor has been officially recognized as such, Revealing the Heavens is scheduled. The loser must present the winner with any trophy that was named in the Precepts — if it is control of a Scarlet Screen or some other institution, a deed or some article of clothing bearing the emblem of the institution is usually given rather than bringing the mortals involved to court. Any who may have meddled in the twilight war are expected to provide anonymous gifts for the Gui Ren involved as an apology for the trouble they may have caused. It is considered extremely bad form to attempt to discover where these gifts came from. Both *xuezhe* are expected to praise each

other's honor and wisdom and swear that all disagreements are lost to the past. Even more than in the case of Swinging the Sword at Noon, the behavior of the *xuezhe* is scrutinized throughout the celebrations, and ungracious displays are seen as certain signs of future troubles. Particularly unhappy "celebrations" may invite preventative measures from ancestors and the like in attendance.

In some rare cases, opponents in a twilight war of this nature have developed an unexpected admiration and respect for each other. The *xuezhe* involved often declare that they have each been defeated by the honor of the other. Mutual defeats of this nature are always seen as auspicious occasions, and the court often holds a special celebration called the Eclipse of Wrath. On such occasions, the *xuezhe* are both roundly praised, but the mediator is the true star, for it is through her efforts that these opponents were made into allies. Any mediator who has brought about two or more Eclipses of Wrath is sure to be praised throughout the Middle Kingdom.

THE TACTICS OF THE TWILIGHT WAR

The actual ploys and stratagems a Kuei-jin may employ in twilight war are almost infinite. The second chapter of this book contains a general overview of tactical thinking which any suitably fiendish person may adapt to the theater of the war in twilight.

NEW MOVES

Intelligence consists of recognizing opportunity.

— Traditional Chinese Proverb

There is always room for innovation and unexpected tactics, even in as regimented a milieu as war in twilight. It is merely important to consider what can be done without appearing dishonorable. While it would certainly be improper to call in some unmentioned mercenaries to augment the Scarlet Screens specified by the Precepts, if the opponent is unaware that one of the Scarlet Screens has a couple of trained special services operatives in it, that only represents poor research on his part. Similarly, forgetting to mention a hidden weapons depot in the casino is crass, but not explaining that the research facility is working on air-borne sedatives is within the realm of plausibility. A cautious *xuezhe* should always remember to ask questions such as, "Does the gang have any specially trained members?" or "What is being researched at that facility?" Honor is important, but it was never intended as a crutch for the stupid.

SURPRISE ALLIES

One of the key elements of twilight war is manipulation. While the targets and goals of the twilight war are stated in the Precepts, the means used to attain them are not. So long as subtlety and discretion are employed, anything is fair game. Mystically powerful Kuei-jin often summon spiritual aid to

THE VIEW FROM OUTSIDE

It is important to remember that the drama of the twilight war also extends beyond the participants. Mortals and lesser Kuei-jin are accustomed to receiving enigmatic commands from their masters, and many of these orders serve the need of some forgotten twilight war. Young members of the court may find themselves swept up in the subtle machinations of two dueling mandarins, or they may try their hand at subtly influencing the course of the battle, using modern means that the mandarins are simply not aware of. Some enemies may attempt to take advantage of the circumstances of such honorable combat to strike at the court or its members. Other *shen* may be baffled or insulted by the effects of these seemingly irrelevant maneuverings. One way or another, the effects of twilight war continue to subtly shape the course of the Middle Kingdom.

either strengthen their forces or harass their opponents. More modern Cathayans may use Internet buddies and "business" contacts. In keeping with the style of modern twilight war, these allies are not expected to do actual harm to the opponent's forces but to lead them to make mistakes that harm themselves. In one case, a young Running Monkey managed to use a friend to sell his opponent's bank financial software that was not Y2K compliant and then arranged for the overseeing commission to audit the bank for just such a matter. The loss of face for the bank was almost enough to bring the Running Monkey immediate victory.

COURTING THE COURT

War in twilight is very much a social form of battle, and the tradition of making the opposition look dishonorable or otherwise repugnant has been a part of it almost since its inception. This can take many forms. Some try to cause the opponent to lose confidence by making her unpopular in court. Others like making their opponent appear obnoxious enough that those who enjoy meddling in twilight wars want to take her down a couple of notches. Caution is important in this, though, for if the members of the court discover that they have been manipulated, they waste neither time nor effort in taking their revenge on the guilty *xuezhe*.

LOSING WITH ELEGANCE

In certain circumstances, winning a twilight war is simply not worth the effort. In those cases, a clever Kuei-jin may try to milk defeat for all he can. He may contrive some heroic mission that calls him away from the twilight war at the crucial moment that allows his opponent to win. He may allow himself to be tricked into becoming a target for hostile meddling. He may fight so honorably that the opponent is able to seize a commanding advantage. In each case, though, it is important that the Kuei-jin not allow himself to appear weak or incompetent,



merely the victim of circumstance. It is crucial to this ploy that when the Kuei-jin is defeated he act with complete honor, Praising the Heavens for their wisdom, his opponent for his cunning and swearing that he will learn from the twilight war and be even more enlightened in the future. And if it appears

that he lost the twilight war while working on the behalf of another Cathayan, his sacrifice could very well win him a new ally. After all, in the war in twilight, how you play the game actually is whether you win or lose.



CHAPTER TWO: MIDNIGHT WAR

Attaining one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the pinnacle of excellence. Subjugating the enemy's army without fighting is the true pinnacle of excellence.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Remember this: As much as the twilight war is an invigorating challenge, its forms and strictures are a part of our society. They allow us to resolve our disagreements in ways that do not distress the Middle Kingdom. Those who underestimate the value of twilight war may find themselves taken beyond it onto the pathways of the midnight war — pathways that can be very short for the weak, the inexperienced and the unlucky.

— Ae-Cha Soo Hyun, Minister of Learning of the Blood Court of Beijing

WHAT BEGINS AFTER THE SUN HAS SET

When an insult is too grave to be endured, when honor can tolerate no more, when every ancestor demands retribution, the penalties extracted by a twilight war can no longer be considered sufficient. When an offense is that extreme, the unbridled ferocity of midnight war is the only answer.

The havoc of a midnight war can shake the heavens and devastate the countryside. Thousands of mortals can perish, and the shape of the very land can change. Any weapon created by *shen* or human may be used in midnight war, and at one time or another almost all have. From teeth and claws to missiles, from duped newspaper reporters to Nezumi assassins, the weapons of the midnight war encompass all five elements and are limited only by the dark imaginations of the Kuei-jin themselves.

The declaration of midnight war should never be taken lightly, for a midnight war can harm far more than the vampires involved. It can destroy ancient alliances with other *shen*. It can kill entire families and nations of mortals. Dragon nests can be harmed and even destroyed in the course of a midnight war. In short, the carnage of a midnight war can threaten the very foundations of the Middle Kingdom. For this reason, immortal society has placed certain obstacles in the path of those who would declare a midnight war rashly or quickly. Wise Cathayans

study the wills of their neighbors and the lay of the land well before they proceed to the Midnight Ceremonies — the formal rituals by which a midnight war is declared.

Though individual Kuei-jin can command resources beyond those of mere mortals, it is rare for a single vampire to initiate a midnight war. Not only does immortal society find a single person causing this amount of trouble to be bothersome, the possibility of an *akuma* bringing a court into such violent circumstances is too great a risk to be borne. If they are extremely well respected, a single ancestor, or maybe a mandarin, may initiate such a war without too much censure, but any lesser personage is likely to find the wrath of his inconvenienced neighbors fatal. Unless he can produce flawless evidence that the *beigao*, the targets of his midnight war, are fully deserving of extermination, it is almost certain that the remainder of the court will side with the *beigao* to remove the instigator before he can cause more trouble.

Wu are more likely to call midnight wars than individuals, but they can still be weak enough to bend to the will of their court if public opinion weighs strongly against war. Courts discourage *wu* of disciples from undertaking such portentous matters. Such young Kuei-jin are considered too inexperienced to recognize situations that truly warrant the midnight war, too young to have cultivated proper judgement about Kuei-jin concerns and too new to their Dharmic paths to fully appreciate the gravity of such actions. Even *wu* of jina may be seen as too superficial or too volatile to make such a decision, but when

a *wu* of mandarins or ancestors speaks of midnight war, the whole court has no choice but to listen and to go along.

Sometimes, a coalition forms among different *wu* who perceive a common foe, and this coalition instigates a midnight war. Such coalitions are called *lianfang*. *Lianfang* have superior numbers as an advantage but often suffer from divided leadership. In cases where one of the *wu* or member Kuei-jin clearly possesses higher rank than the others, leadership is given to that *wu* or individual. If there is no obvious ranking member, the Kuei-jin with the most military experience is given the rank of General of the *Lianfang* and proclaimed the leader. In cases where there is no clear military master, some other means is used to assign the rank of general, such as horoscopes or ritual combat. *Lianfang* whose leadership is not based on ability often suffer from internal power struggles, and the general must devote much of her time to keeping the coalition together (as opposed to fighting the actual war). In many cases, the different *wu* of such *lianfang* act on their own rather than adhering to the plans of their general. Nevertheless, the *lianfang* is often the only recourse the lower ranks of Kuei-jin have when they feel a midnight war is necessary. With the growing division between the elders and their disciples, midnight wars called by such groups are becoming more common.

Even entire courts may declare midnight war *en masse*, having the numbers to stand on their own and the sense of tradition to be offended. Only the court ancestor may make such a declaration and only with the approval of his ministers. When an entire court goes to war, it is a terrible time indeed. The spiritual, financial and martial power of a court is awe-inspiring, and the mobilization of such an overwhelming amount of resources has serious repercussions throughout the Middle Kingdom. Such midnight wars may be over in days, such as when Dae Kyung-wook led the attack of her entire court against a coterie of Kin-jin who had bought their way into the protection of the Parallel Path for the purpose of looting a local burial ground. These midnight wars may also last for decades or even centuries, as does the continuing hostilities between the Flesh Court of Shanghai and the *gaki* invaders.

Midnight wars are dangerous times, and to prevent them from becoming commonplace, Kuei-jin who declare war are required to present their reasons as a part of the declaration. Toward the end of the Eastern Chou dynasty, Yuan-Te, a mandarin of the Bone Court, set himself to the task of identifying the circumstances under which it was justifiable to declare a midnight war. After sequestering himself at the top of Mount Hua for eight years, Yuan-Te determined that there were only three justifiable reasons. Since the codification of the Three Laws of Yuan-Te, almost all *yangao* have phrased their accusations in terms of these laws.

Unfortunately, the Three Laws are now used more as a guideline for what accusations to make when Addressing the Heavens than as a screen to prevent the license of the midnight war from being exploited. In certain corrupt courts, if the *beigao* is unpopular, the *yangao* are content to use formulaic accusations based upon the Three Laws rather than worry about details such as accuracy and truth. In more honorable courts, the *yangao* make certain that their accusations are tailored so that at least one of the criteria of the Three Laws is met.

THE THREE LAWS OF YUAN-TE

1: It is justifiable to eliminate a *wu* entirely if it has been determined and proved that its members are *akuma*, for any who follow the precepts of the Yama Kings are an affront to all the works of the August Personage of Jade.

2: It is justifiable to eliminate a *wu* entirely if it can be proven that the members of the house seek to undermine the Great Principle and destroy the laws that hold society together, for it is the five Ways of The Great Principle that guide the Kuei-jin to their mandated destiny.

3: It is justifiable to eliminate a *wu* entirely if it is seen that it has so defiled its heritage that its own ancestors cry for its destruction, for a *wu* that so offends the honors of the past can only bring turmoil in the future.

The Three Laws of Yuan-Te were quickly accepted by the Five August Courts and soon found their way to the other courts. In one form or another, they are still followed even in these defiled times.

Throughout the Golden Courts, the Three Laws have been reinterpreted to favor the *penanggalan* over the Great Principle, and it is far more difficult for a male Kuei-jin to successfully accuse a female than it is in all other parts of the Middle Kingdom.

Other variations on the Three Laws are mostly local interpretations. In the courts of the Bishamon and among the membership of Hong Kong's Victorious Whirlwind, Cathayans see all Kin-jin as seeking to undermine the Great Principle, which bestows upon those Kuei-jin the duty to destroy all Western vampires. In Korea, on the other hand, Cathayans of the Green Courts are more likely to invoke the Third Law, seeing threats to their departed ancestors as particularly abhorrent.

Few courts take kindly to those who are too eager in declaring a midnight war. Though areas away from the Quincunx have traditionally been less strict in these matters, even the Golden Courts do not want to have Kuei-jin and their Scarlet Screens showering each other with napalm every time a Running Monkey forgets to show proper deference to a jina from a neighboring *wu* — or every time a mandarin makes a supercilious comment to an errant disciple.

While the ruling court cannot prevent the declaration of a war, it can make the ritual declaration more difficult. Since the Midnight Ceremonies must be performed on the night of the new moon, the court may elect simply not to meet that night. *Yangao* unwilling to let the matter rest could still seek the ancestor and commence the ceremonies, but it would certainly be an inauspicious start to the war. Before the war has been declared, the court can also offer hints about which side would receive assistance from the court's allies. All courts have a crest or badge, called *mon* by the Japanese courts, which is worn by the ancestor and ministers and used to seal official documents. If a Kuei-jin receives a letter with the court's crest affixed in pink rather than the more favorable red, he should reconsider

his plans. If the *yangao* lacks the subtlety to take heed of this suggestion, one of the court's ministers may visit and speak warmly of the intended targets. If all that fails to stop the declaration of war, it is almost certain that the court will back the accused and the *yangao* will have the worse of it.

Starting an undeclared midnight war is a certain way to offend immortal society as a whole. Some Cathayans are tempted to attack their enemies first and declare war afterward. Those who do not feel it is necessary to declare midnight war properly often find that others of their court — even those they thought of as cousins in spirit — taking the time to declare war on them under the auspices of Yuan-Te's second law. Few Kuei-jin or *wu* can stand up to the righteous attack of an angry court.

Even though the traditions of the midnight war are dangerous and open to abuse, elders agree that it is important to have the rules of society govern such extreme circumstances. Otherwise, desperate Kuei-jin whose last recourse is open battle will be driven away from the Great Principle and possibly into the waiting arms of the Yama Kings. Abhorrent as it maybe, there are times when even the righteous must commit all-out war for the good of the Middle Kingdom. The midnight war stands as a means of doing so without sacrificing one's adherence to the Fivefold Way and the society of the Kuei-jin.

THE MIDNIGHT CEREMONIES

Midnight war is not declared overnight. In almost all cases, it takes one full lunar month to declare the war, no more, no less. Kuei-jin call the series of rites for declaring a midnight war the Midnight Ceremonies. Though there may be months or years of preparation beforehand, the initial declaration, called Addressing the Heavens, is made to the ancestor of the local court at midnight on the night of a new moon. Over the course of the next lunar month, the court's ministers spread announcements and warnings to the *shen* of the area and the neighboring courts. The war comes into effect at the conclusion of the Midnight Ceremonies, called Addressing the Hells, which is performed the night of the next new moon.

These ceremonies exist for many reasons: They serve to placate the spirits of the lands in which the war will be fought, to prevent otherwise honorable *wu* from committing treacherous acts and to prevent a Kuei-jin under the control of her P'o from decimating honorable *wu*. The Midnight Ceremonies limit the ways in which Kuei-jin can manifest their wrath. A Kuei-jin who must wait a month before declaring war is a Kuei-jin who has a month to calm down and reconsider his anger.



BEFORE THE CEREMONIES

When at war, one should keep an eye to the peace that will follow. When at peace, one must watch for the war that will surely come.

— Sun Li, *Eight Immortal Strategies*

If the elders of a faction intent on undertaking a midnight war against their rivals are wise, they consult the heavens and cast the I Ching to determine an auspicious time for their declaration. The annals of the Middle Kingdom are heavy with tales of Cathayans who allowed their impatience and anger to draw them into battle without properly consulting the oracles. When reminded of the ill-favored saga of Chin Suck Kang-Dae or the brief and humiliating crusade of the Scions of Three Cranes, many ancestors shake their heads sadly and reply that the portents were there, but the warriors were blind.

It is very rare for such an auspicious date to fall upon the night of a new moon. It is even rarer for the next new moon to be equally auspicious. Shin-Cho, a mandarin who studied the Song of the Shadow once explained, "It is difficult to find auspicious dates to start a midnight war because midnight wars are rarely auspicious." Kuei-jin who survive a midnight war often discover that the struggle has impaired their Dharmic progression or caused unforeseen harm to their allies or nushi. Even the victorious find there can be a high price to pay for the destruction of their enemies.

THE ASTROLOGERS' DILEMMA

Many Kuei-jin astrologers have noted that the forthcoming years of the Dragon, the Snake and the Horse (2000-2002) have a surfeit of dates and locations where it is propitious for immortals to commence war. What worries them more is that the following years of the Sheep and the Monkey appear disastrous for such martial pursuits, and it is unlikely that the Kuei-jin will be able to conclude all their wars before joss turns against them.

Cautious *wu* take the time before the declaration of war to prepare for the upcoming struggle. Since war has not been declared, Kuei-jin are officially prohibited from attacking one another, but many wait for their auspicious night by stocking up on weapons and jade. They also discreetly approach other local Kuei-jin to determine how they feel toward the *beigao* and whether they would be willing to give aid to the aggressors or their enemies. They may also make ready for war by courting the favor of local *hengeyokai* and *hsien*; in times of war, it is always helpful to have allies in unexpected places. *Hengeyokai* assistance can often be bought with promises of warriors for their own battles, the gift of some potent talisman or directing a business or the local government toward greater ecological propriety. With the *hsien*, the best most Kuei-jin can hope for is to persuade them that their enemies are more abhorrent, though in some cases a *wu* may form an alliance with the *Daityas*. Finally, the would-be *yangao* can spend the time studying their enemy's weaknesses and strengths and scrutinizing the area for appropriate sites for battles and ambushes.

Wu preparing for war must act with subtlety or run the risk of their enemies figuring out what they are planning. A *wu* that notices another *wu* making frequent visits to black-market arms dealers, training its allies in the gangs and police or making unusual visits to court ministers and the other local shen would do well to consider undertaking similar preparations. Even if the aggressive *wu* is not targeting that particular group, midnight war can be quite dangerous for bystanders. A *wu* who believes it will be the target of a midnight war will certainly want to get its own weapons and allies into line. Sometimes a simple show of strength or solidarity will stop the aggressors from pursuing the war. In other cases, the targets may feign weakness and ignorance, trying to lull their enemies into a false sense of confidence. Either way, the success or failure of a midnight war can often be attributed to the planning and preparation that took place long before the actual declaration of war.

ADDRESSING THE HEAVENS

When the offended *wu* or *lianfang* believes that the time is auspicious — or when it has stockpiled enough weapons to believe it will be victorious — it sends a letter to the ancestor of the court formally stating its intention to declare a midnight war at the next new moon. The letter includes no other details, but, if the aggressors have been seeking allies or testing the opinions of the court Kuei-jin, the ancestor will almost certainly be aware of their designs already. Though it is not required — only the court ancestor need witness this — the *wu* often invites elders from other houses, even the enemy's faction, to witness the address, in an effort to explain its position and solicit as much admiration or sympathy as it can. Such invitations are strictly informal. They are handled by word of mouth rather than in writing, for a written invitation could conceivably be seen as a challenge to the ancestor's position.

When the ritual is performed properly, the *yangao* aggressors send three of their most esteemed members to speak with the ancestor of the court and Address the Heavens. This ceremony exists to warn the spirits as well as the Kuei-jin that a war is about to erupt. Tradition calls for one of the representatives to stand for the north and speak for justice. Another stands for the south and speaks for war. The third stands in the center and speaks for the Great Principle. Other members of the house may also attend the court, but it is the three elders alone who Address the Heavens. In cases where those declaring war do not have the three appropriate representatives, fewer or lesser vampires may Address the Heavens, but doing so is considered most inauspicious. (Left unsaid is the fact that a *yangao* without sufficient strength to Address the Heavens properly most likely doesn't have enough strength to wage war properly, either.)

In the Golden Courts, it is considered more proper for elders to represent the east and west rather than the north and south. The reasons for this have been lost over the Ages, but Quincunx scholars believe that it may have been intended to represent the just passage of celestial bodies across the heavens, implying that this war fits with the order of the Ten Thousand Things. Another theory claims that the different directions represent the movement from birth (the east) to death (the

west) that so many of the soldiers in the war will take. Regardless of the origin of this point of etiquette, it is another element that sets apart unlife in the lands of the *penangallan*.

THE REVEREND TRIBUNAL

When a court declares war, the court ancestor does not Address the Heavens in his own court. Instead, he and his ministers are expected to travel to Beijing to Address the Heavens before the Reverend Tribunal of the August Personage of Jade. Since this Tribunal only meets once a year for one lunar month directly following the New Year, its meeting rarely coincides with the necessities of war. For this reason courts are allowed to carry out the tasks of war as necessary so long as the court elders travel to the next meeting of the Reverend Tribunal and Address the Heavens then. Failure to do so, however, brings censure and perhaps worse.

The elders of the *wu* bring their charges to the ancestor of the court, pronouncing them at midnight and declaring that with the next new moon, they will be at war with those who have offended them. They use their speech to list the evils done by their enemy, the damage their enemy has done to the other *shen* and even the Middle Kingdom itself. Such rhetoric can take hours as the elders enumerate crimes against each of the paths of the Fivefold Way, decry the ways in which the *beigao* have brought about the wrath of other *shen* and draw attention to their dealings with unsavory spirits or servants of the Yama Kings. If they can, the elders offer proof that the faction is controlled by *akuma*.

After the three elders speak, they make offerings to the court. These offerings often include jade talismans, works of art and other ancient treasures intended to demonstrate that their house respects the Great Principle as much as their enemies abhor it. Each gift is described and its history recounted. Often, the most eloquent of the elders works a parable of some sort into the description of the gift to highlight the virtue of his house or the villainy of his enemy's. These gifts are strictly to show the *wu*'s esteem for the Fivefold Way. Only the basest Running Monkey would suggest that the gifts are intended as bribes to ensure the good will of the court's ministers and ancestors. Similarly, it is unheard of for the elders or others from their *wu* to offer gifts to the other members of the court who are present; such unofficial guests' only role at this ceremony is as observers. Besides, if the *wu* is properly prepared for this ceremony, they will already have offered gifts to those whose favor they desire.

Once the elders have given their *rangible* gifts, each elder grants a gift of Chi to the court, either to a jade talisman or in blood to the ancestor herself. Once the Chi is given, the ancestor rises and announces that the Heavens have been addressed, and that at midnight on the next new moon, the named parties will be at war. This pronouncement closes the court for the rest of the night, for it is considered highly inauspicious to continue the business of the court after the declaration of a midnight war.

WAR ON THE AKUMA

There is one condition under which the lunar-month hiatus between Addressing the Heavens and Addressing the Hells is waived. That is when the accusers are capable of producing irrefutable proof that the enemy is controlled by *akuma* or otherwise in the service of the Yama Kings.

If the court ancestor accepts the elders' proof, she may declare the other *wu* *tanwu*, corrupt, and call for all members of the court to join the war against them. How this is handled varies from court to court. In most of the older courts, the ancestor's word is law. In some courts, a council of ancestors must agree, and in a few, very westernized courts, the matter may even be subject to a vote. This is a very serious decision, and most ancestors follow a prudent path or at least the path that causes the least turmoil within her demesnes.

Should the *wu* be declared *tanwu*, no time is wasted. War parties prepare themselves and sally forth to destroy the evil and all that it may have tainted. Where the *akuma* are concerned, traditional wisdom dictates that it is better to let the war *wu* address Hell in person than to give the *akuma* a month to prepare. In cases where the attacking house believes that it has enough evidence to have its enemy declared *tanwu*, they rarely invite members of the opposing *wu* to the Addressing the Heavens. There is always the chance such witnesses could allow some warning to escape.

After the elders have completed Addressing the Heavens, it is difficult for them to call off the midnight war without suffering a serious embarrassment — a loss of face which can be comparable in severity to losing the war itself. There are no official penalties for withdrawing from a war, after all, for war is most disruptive of Kuei-jin affairs, but that does not mean the repercussions for doing so are not serious. Despite the lack of official punishments for withdrawing a declaration of war, the abortive *yangao* may find themselves subject to lingering hostility from those they had accused. Additionally, their reputations may suffer serious damage. Unless they can present convincing reasons for canceling their declaration, other Kuei-jin grow to perceive the *yangao* as cowardly or frivolous. Even if they can present valid reasons for abandoning their war, such as the receipt of false testimony or the discovery of new facts, the aggressors appear incapable of considering things properly in the first place. After all, if they'd done their homework properly, they never would have been deceived by the spurious reasons for war — or so the logic goes. It is a sad fact of Kuei-jin existence that many midnight wars occur only because the *yangao* fear the loss of face withdrawal would cause.

ADDRESSING THE EARTH

With the arrival of the next night, the court sends emissaries to all within its dominion, neighboring courts and any other *shen* with which it has cordial relations or treaties. Officially, the purpose behind these emissaries is only to warn any *shen* who might be affected of the upcoming fighting, but ancestors, mandarins and some audacious emissaries may use their visits to reveal hints as to which side the court favors. Such allusions must be made with great subtlety, for the rules of the midnight war prohibit targeting neutrals only, and if the recipient of the warning appears to be favoring one side over the other, it invites reprisal from the less-favored *wu*. Experienced Kuei-jin can employ an entire repertoire of formulaic praises to convey their true opinion of the combatants in language that only a similarly schooled Cathayan might be able to interpret properly. At no point are these hints ever set in writing.

FEINT PRAISE

Kuei-jin etiquette includes a wide array of civilities which convey different nuances to the initiated. When bearing information about a forthcoming midnight war, emissaries often use phrases like the following to suggest the court's perception of the state of affairs.

"Their fight is certainly righteous." — They are justified in declaring midnight war.

"They will fight with great enthusiasm." — They started this war because they are easily angered.

"Their tactical acumen is quite impressive." — They started this war for political reasons, but the court approves.

"Their leader is quite skilled." — They started this war for political reasons, and the court disapproves.

"Their power is quite impressive." — They are untrustworthy. They may be *akuma*, but it has not been proven.

"They will fight as if the August Personage of Jade is on their side..." — ...though he is most certainly not.

Emissaries to other members of the court are merely expected to present a summation of the elders' Addressing the Heavens, since such Kuei-jin can attend the court or communicate with one of the court's ministers to learn whatever details they need. Trusted disciples or newly formed *wu* are often sent on this duty. For some it is their first taste of the labyrinthine world of Kuei-jin politics. Perceptive emissaries can discern the relative importance of those they go to inform by noting the order in which they are to be informed. The most important Kuei-jin are always told first. The ministers and officials of the court are summoned to audience with the ancestor, where they discuss the matter and compose the summation that is sent out by the emissaries — including the subtext and hidden hints. The emissaries are then brought in and carefully schooled in exactly what to say and whom to inform. Once the emissaries know what to do, they are sent forth. The emissaries seek out the senior members of the

important *wu* of the court first. In some cases, the ministers of the court may advise particularly consequential *wu*, but it is rare for such personages to not already be court officials. If no representative of the *wu* that is being warred against was present at Addressing the Heavens, a trusted emissary is sent to that *wu* before all others — unless its Kuei-jin have seriously offended the powers at the court. Even if the *beigao* are unpopular, their finding out through word of mouth rather than from court emissaries represents a serious breach of etiquette that reflects poorly upon the court as a whole. When the important *wu* have all been informed, the emissaries locate and address the remaining *wu* until all the court's Kuei-jin know of the forthcoming war.

Unless it is a signatory to treaties that stipulate more timely reporting, the court waits until all affiliated Kuei-jin have been warned before sending emissaries beyond. Neighboring courts are almost always given precedence, followed by *ch'in ta* and *hengeyokai*, but the vagaries of the relations between these *shen* and the court may significantly change the order. Because of continuing hostilities, the *hsien* are rarely addressed. If the ancestor is seeking to foster a better alliance with a certain court, *sentai* or whatever, she makes every effort to see that they get the information as soon as possible. Conversely, the court may find reasons to defer informing those with whom they have a strained relationship.

Though still only compelled to present a summation of the elders' Addressing the Heavens, emissaries to neighboring courts and *shen* are expected to display more savvy than those who visit only the local Cathayans. Kuei-jin visiting neighboring courts are often expected to act as spies, bringing information back to their court on any circumstances there which could affect this midnight war or the court itself. Emissaries to the other *shen* of the region face greater challenges. Not only must they warn these powerful creatures of what to expect, they must do it in a fashion that does not weaken the Kuei-jin as a whole or the court in particular. Larger courts often have ministers who speak to the *hengeyokai*, the *ch'in ta* and, occasionally, the *hsien*, but others are not so regimented — or lack experienced Kuei-jin to carry out these functions.

It should be obvious that these emissaries do not inform the Shih of specific upcoming developments — at least not officially. There are tales of meddling mandarins deciding on their own to drop hints to a local Shih, usually with disastrous results. Regardless of whether or not the Shih are informed in advance, midnight wars are rarely subtle enough to evade their notice, but Shih who have been warned arrive on the scene early and prepared to deal with any Kuei-jin they come across. The combination of an incursion of well-armed demon hunters and a brewing midnight war is usually more than any court can take in stride, and the results of the collision are often disastrous.

While the court is sending emissaries across the Middle Kingdom, the combatants themselves prepare for the upcoming bloodshed. Though battle before Addressing the Hells is officially proscribed, the warring houses usually take this time to woo, bribe and bully others, hoping to augment their own power — or at least interfere with their enemies' preparations. To add to the confusion, other *wu*, factions, courts and *shen* are quite willing to take advantage of the confused circumstances

to further their own goals and redress old slights — especially if their actions may be attributed to one of the warring houses. Kuei-jin may disappear and minor skirmishes may break out, but such improprieties are frowned upon and subject to discipline from the court. Naturally, the court's punishments are often harsher than usual during such tense times.

ADDRESSING THE HELLS

Under the eyes of Ananta Thewi, I and my sisters of the Wu of the Eternal Khon declare that we will drive the hia of the Wu of the Clouded Leopard from the face of the Middle Kingdom! The five directions will not hide them. The five elements will not protect them. The five sacred beasts shall shun them. This we swear in the names of the Ebon Dragon and the Scarlet Queen, and for this, we ask their blessings.

One lunar month after Addressing the Heavens, the court meets to witness Addressing the Hells. Unlike the previous ceremony, which is all pomp and pageantry, Addressing the Hells is brutally short. The elders of the *wu* declaring the war appear before the ancestor of the court at midnight and swear that they will destroy their enemies and all who aid them. They then shed blood into a burning fire (Chi is not necessary), pray for the blessing of the Ebon Dragon and the Scarlet Queen and depart.

Though the halls of the court are declared inviolate, all who attend Addressing the Hells traditionally wear full battle regalia and come prepared to fight. Midnight wars are dangerous, and honor is not as pervasive as it was in previous ages. In the event that a brawl does break out, protocol demands that the Kuei-jin who started the confrontation be punished by loss of Chi. Once the fighting is contained and the instigator is identified, he is restrained. If the instigator is one of the combatants, a member of the opposing force is allowed to drain half his Chi. He is then expelled from the court and left to fend for himself. If the instigator is neutral to the conflict, the ancestor or an appropriate court official may designate a third party to receive the Chi, usually a Kuei-jin who was injured in the fight.

Should the elders not make it to the court in time for the ceremony, the war still begins at midnight. It is considered very inauspicious for a war to start without Addressing the Hells. Interestingly enough, beginning a war under such circumstances is felt to be unlucky for all parties involved, for if the Hells are not propitiated, they may feel slighted and seek to become involved on their own. The court often puts great effort into assuring that the elders are present at midnight and threatens grievous punishments for any who would prevent this ceremony from being properly performed. Sometimes, the court summarily sides with the *yangao* if their elders are prevented from Addressing the Hells. This has led some desperate or cunning Kuei-jin to stage their own delay, but when such a ruse is penetrated, the wrath of the whole court is quickly turned toward the would-be tricksters.

Regardless of the details of Addressing the Hells, after midnight a state of war exists within the court domains. All Kuei-jin — and all informed *shen* — in the area must take this simple fact into account. They must be careful in their dealings, lest they be seen as working for one side. They must be aware that if they are perceived as being allied with one faction, they become fair game for the other.

WHAT TRANSPIRES IN THE DARK OF NIGHT

When war becomes necessary, the general must remember that he is fighting not just against what is wrong, but for what is right.

— Sun Li, *Book of Auspicious Swords*

With the declaration — and preparations — made, the war itself begins, often with the first attacks taking place at the very stroke of midnight. Even though a state of all-out open warfare exists, the Middle Kingdom is a land of tradition and order, and certain standards of behavior are still expected of the warriors. These standards exist to remind Kuei-jin that they are still bound by the Great Principle and that their duties must not be forgotten regardless of circumstance.

THE SIX STRICTURES OF WAR

There are six rules that apply to midnight war. Not laws so much as suggestions for keeping other parties from becoming angered and joining the battle against you, the Six Strictures date back to the Third Age, though none are certain who authored them.

IN ALL THINGS, HONOR THE AUGUST PERSONAGE OF JADE AND HIS SERVANTS.

Even in times of war, Cathayans are expected to follow the Fivefold Way. This stricture is made all the more important since it is in defense of the Great Principle that the midnight war was surely called.

Reality: This stricture is broad enough that it is almost meaningless. Many Kuei-jin see times of war as instances when they can, or must, go outside the Great Principle. Such behavior is always remembered though, and after the war, warriors may find that they have new enemies and rivals because of their actions.

DO NOT BRING THE FORCES OF DESTRUCTION TO THE DRAGON NESTS.

The Kuei-jin recognize that the dragon nests are vital to their well-being and that of the Middle Kingdom. The Chi these places provide and the spiritual potency they represent is critical to staving off the Sixth Age. Also, defiling dragon nests is guaranteed to anger any *shen* that may learn of such barbarous deeds. Only a madman wants *hengeyokai* and *hsien* war parties out for the blood of any Kuei-jin they meet.

Reality: Cowardly Kuei-jin have tried to claim sanctuary in dragon nests, with mixed results. Desperate Kuei-jin on the losing end of a midnight war have even destroyed nests in spiteful last attacks on their vanquishers and the rest of the Middle Kingdom. Invariably their fortunes turned from bad to worse, as any sympathizers they may have had turned hostile. Even Sun Li, the first and foremost Cathayan tactician wrote about using dragon nests in warfare, though she advised great caution, both because of their fundamental importance to the Middle Kingdom and because of the wrath that damaging them would incur.

DO NOT WAR IN THE HALLS OF THE COURT.

The court and its ministers and ancestors are deemed to be above the midnight war. To bring the battle within its walls is disrespectful of the ancestors and the institutions for which the court stands.

Reality: The court is another place in which cowards are fond of hiding, though one without a sympathetic source of Chi for them to draw upon. With that in mind it is easier to wait out anyone who seeks refuge in court. Sometimes, ministers offer secret aid to one side of a war. This is considered very unlucky and usually results in the midnight war spreading in unexpected directions rapidly.

DO NOT STRIKE AGAINST THOSE WHO ARE NOT IN LEAGUE WITH THE ENEMY.

It is inauspicious to attack those who are not at war with you, for doing so gains you new enemies and makes you reviled in the eyes of the righteous.

Reality: While this stricture may seem obvious, there are myriad accepted stratagems that involve the destruction of someone who is not working against you. Kuei-jin rarely hesitate to employ those ploys in times of midnight war.

DO NOT INVITE THE YAMA KINGS AND THEIR SERVANTS INTO THE BATTLE.

Accepting demons and the denizens of the Yomi World into one's *wu* defies everything the Great Principle stands for. To do this is to invite all Kuei-jin to strive for your complete destruction.

Reality: In many cases, one of the fighting *wu* is already aligned with the Yama Kings. In other cases, the desperation of the battle drives the warriors to seek assistance wherever they may find it — even from the Lords of the Thousand Hells.

ACCEPT THE HONORABLE SURRENDER OF ALL BUT THE AKUMA.

If an honorable Kuei-jin is willing to surrender and swear allegiance to your house, accept the surrender, for it is better to have a new servant than a dead enemy.

Reality: Many Kuei-jin doubt there can ever be honor in surrender, so this stricture is almost never considered. Most Cathayans view the rare vampire who surrenders as a worthless cur, unsuited for survival. Paradoxically, the surrender of certain enlightened Kuei-jin is seen in the opposite light. They say that only one who is truly attuned to her Dharma could perform an action of such meager honor.

OTHER LAWS OF WAR

Beyond the Six Strictures, there are a handful of lesser rules, mostly based on local history or politics. In the Green Courts, it is frowned upon to utilize either Japanese or Chinese *shen* as soldiers or aides. Bishamon expect their Kuei-jin to fight according to the precepts of *Tamashiido* — the way of the spirit.

MIDNIGHT THEATERS

There are three fronts across which the shen battle: The world of the swords and mountains, the hearts of warriors and farmers, and the realms of spirits and gods. The wise warrior carries the battle to all three.

— Sun Li, *Eight Immortal Strategies*

Every general knows that strength and tactics are the keys to winning on the field of war. Having the right force in the right place at the right time is the mechanism to winning battles. Unless a general intends to rely on joss — and such generals rarely triumph — this requires tactical skill and cunning. Mortal strategists also know that any successful general must have the respect of his subjects, the loyalty of his warriors and the fear of his enemies. Having skilled soldiers does little good if those soldiers do not follow their general's orders. Similarly, a feared leader will have an easier time gaining assistance and provisions from neighbors than one with a reputation as being of little consequence. These are the fundamentals of mortal strategy, and they have been studied and written about since time immemorial.

Some jina wonder why these studies are still mandated. After all, why should modern warriors be concerned about the strategies and tactics of the Chou dynasty? Why should one worry about how to direct archers against chariots? Beyond the fact that learning such things honors the ancestors (propitious behavior in and of itself), the philosophies behind such tactics can often be applied to the modern world by any who possess a quick mind and a reasonable grasp of metaphorical thought. And, of course, there are still places beyond the Wall where archers and chariots rule the battlefield.

Over the years, the Kuei-jin have learned much about fighting across the Middle Kingdom. The best of what they have learned has been written down in the works of Sun Li, Anuman Chah, Masao Iwase and others. In addition, the Gui Ren have not been afraid to adopt parts of the philosophies of mortal warriors and strategists. But the Middle Kingdom is ever-changing, and tactics that worked three centuries ago are often sadly out of date as the Fifth Age draws to a close. Also, the wisest strategists never reveal their greatest ploys, for they are aware that they may need to use them at some later date. This is especially true of the Kuei-jin — immortality can be a long time to regret offering your secrets to your rivals' studies. (On the other hand, it may be a very brief time indeed.) All this mandates that a leader who intends to be victorious in a midnight war should devote time to studying the classic texts on strategy, such as Sun Li's *Eight Immortal Strategies*. He should study them not only to recognize the classic ploys when they are used against him but so that he can understand the spirit behind the stratagems and be ready to create new strategies of his own.

Since they commonly fight against supernatural enemies, Kuei-jin must adapt the areas of mortal warfare, the tactical and the social, to encompass the many powers and philosophies of the *shen*. In addition, they must war across a third front — the realms beyond the Wall, the realms of mystical power. Sun Li called these three areas of battle the Three Theaters, and her successors have adopted her terminology. It is difficult for any single leader to keep track of all Three Theaters at every

moment, but for any *wu* to succeed in its war, it must have some strategy worked out for each. If it does not, the *wu*'s enemies will surely locate its weaknesses and strike through them.

WAR IN THE WORLD OF THE SWORDS AND MOUNTAINS

Even with immortals, the heart and head can only last so long when the body has been scattered to the four winds.

— Anuman Chah, *The Three Books of Blood*

Most of the fighting in a midnight war takes place in the First Theater. The "world of swords and mountains" is the so-called real world, where mortals are born, live and die. War on this front is fought with swords and automatic rifles, with defoliants and fuel-air explosives, with poison, plague and petty officials. War on this front is similar to that found in most history books. The difference is that it is carried out against other immortals and their property.

Any attack on this front should serve at least one of three purposes: It should destroy the enemy's property, it should injure or kill the enemy or it should have an advantageous effect on one of the other Theaters. Targeting the enemy's property is tactically sound because it forces the enemy to spend time and energy replacing what was destroyed or at least devoting some of her resources to preventing its destruction. Property destruction can also have a demoralizing effect, especially if the target is the enemy's home or some other item of sentimental value. Though many Kuei-jin consider the death of their enemies to be the ultimate goal of a midnight war, defensive Disciplines and healing magics make such achievements more difficult against *shen* than against mortals. In many cases it is necessary to wear the enemy down through protracted battle before one can finally deliver the *coup de grace*. It is also possible to use war in the world of swords and mountains to effect a change in the spirit worlds. Attacking the remains of the enemy's ancestors is one of the most common tactics for striking at the enemy's forces in the Yin world, but there are others. What is important is that any military action in the real world have a strategic purpose. Meaningless destruction is the purview of the Yama Kings, not the Kuei-jin.

In areas where the supernatural elements must be more discreet in their maneuverings, such warfare rarely extends beyond a handful of bodyguards, armed to the teeth but few in number. This limitation does not exist in the Middle Kingdom, where Cathayans may control infantry squads or possibly even tanks, though their weaponry is rarely state of the art. Even if the combatants are not in command of a military or revolutionary force, it is fairly easy for them to acquire hardware. In many cases, inventory in the supply arm of the military is not as well monitored as in the West, and bribery is a well-established tradition throughout much of the Middle Kingdom. Beyond that, the breakup of the Soviet Union has opened up many exciting new arms bazaars for those willing to risk crossing the border. Most weaponry acquired in this fashion is in poor condition and functions about as well as one might expect. Nevertheless, there's always the chance that one will get lucky.



DRAGON VS. DRAGON

Taking advantage of mortal aggression across the lands of the Green Courts — the so-called Korean War — Ho-Sook Joo Kim took midnight war into a new era. Using the Soul Discipline of Authority, she commanded Frederick Brice, an American fighter pilot, to fire a couple of his F-80C's five-inch rockets into the mountain cave in which her *wu*'s nemesis, Hyun Woong Yee, was performing a potent ritual. Yee became the first, and last, Kuei-jin to be destroyed by an air-to-surface missile.

Though her *wu* won the war, Kim was destroyed by artillery fire two months later while trying to regain the good graces of the mountain spirits injured in her attack. Her *wu*-mate, Ho-Jun Yoon witnessed the deadly fusillade and swears that he saw a dragon direct the path of the shells to the location where Kim was praying. Wiser heads nodded and surmised that the dragons had been offended by her taking the war into their domain.

Cathayans are not limited to military machinery in their attempts at destruction. Ironically, so-called civil engineering has proved to be one of the more subtle and destructive tools in the arsenal of these immortals. Though no one has taken credit for it, the Three Gorges Dam project of Sichuan will result in the complete submersion of at least four dragon nests, as well as immense inconvenience for almost a hundred Kuei-jin. Blame is currently directed at the Yama Kings, but some unsubstantiated rumors still suggest that it is a move by the Bone Court in Chongqing against one of the outlying courts. Such extreme feats are well beyond the means of any but the most powerful courts, though. Attacks of this kind are more likely to be on the level of sending a construction crew to demolish an enemy's house in the middle of the day or using Scarlet Screen logging companies to threaten the domains of hengeyokai or *hsien* who are allied with the enemy.

A Kuei-jin who has some aspect of the local military under her thumb may use her forces to cause large-scale construction or destruction that alters the *feng shui* of an area to benefit the Kuei-jin or inconvenience her enemy. She can force entire villages and tribes to flee, removing them from the enemy's influence. She can redirect third party military forces to occupy the enemy's domain, giving him other matters to contend with. Her troops can destroy shrines and graveyards, reducing the power of the enemy's spirit-allies. In times of atrocity, she can even draw different spirits — spirits of war, pain and blood — to the area, perhaps influencing them to aid the vampire who made the area so comfortable for them. The general's business is the art of looking at the available resources and constructing uses for them that further her cause and injure her enemy.

OVERKILL

In 1964, a new horror reshaped the dragon lines of Western China, and many Kuei-jin blame Tien Lu.

Fearing that Tashpulat Niyaz, a Uighur mandarin, was on the verge of deciphering the rituals he had used to gain power from one of the Yama Kings, Tien declared midnight war upon the mandarin. Since most Chinese Cathayans disdained the Uighur minority, the Blood Court of Beijing was glad to offer Tien the support he needed. It is currently believed that, either through contacts provided by the Blood Court or through personal intervention with the wife of one of the generals involved, Tien was able to select the site of the first Chinese nuclear weapons test. On October 16th, the Chinese army detonated a 22-kiloton nuclear air-blast, in Lop Nor.

The first test's ground zero was the halfway point of a dragon line between the Bukadaban Feng and Dzungartan dragon nests. Both nests were destroyed, and all *shen* present suffered great injury or Final Death, including Tashpulat Niyaz. Tainted Chi passed down connected dragon lines causing what came to be called the Green Plague of October, a poison that infected much of Western China for years.

Since then, the Blood Court has kept very careful watch over the nuclear program, both to prevent other *shen* from gaining control of it and to ensure that there is never a repeat of the Green Plague. At present, no less than three *wu* — the Eyes of Jade, the Nine Hundred Cats and the Fierce Sword of Jiang Shang — monitor the nuclear agency and each other. A fourth *wu*, the White Cicadas, was destroyed when the Eyes of Jade discovered that it had pledged its allegiance to the Bamboo Princes, a group of revolutionary Running Monkeys. Recently, both the Nine Hundred Cats and the Fierce Sword of Jiang Shang have noticed a new supernatural presence stalking the halls of the nuclear program. They are not certain who or what it represents, but the few clues they have managed to gather point to the interloper's origins as being in India.

The damage a dedicated Cathayan can do to the physical world is truly terrible. Often the drive to accomplish the destruction before a counterattack can be mounted and the desire to not gain more enemies are the only factors that limit this devastation. Finally, Kuei-jin who dedicate all their efforts to war across the physical world will certainly find themselves attacked from other, more subtle directions.

WAR IN THE HEARTS OF WARRIORS AND FARMERS

When your enemy can see his own death in your eyes, your victory is already assured.

— Anuman Chah, *The Three Books of Blood*

Psychological warfare has been practiced almost as long as there has been a survival instinct. The ability to appear more fearsome, making one's warriors feel that the Heavens are on their side and encouraging desertion and treachery among the enemy's ranks, has been prized by generals throughout the centuries. It is an essential part of midnight war as well.

War in the hearts of warriors and farmers, as explained by Sun Li, centers on making yourself appear powerful, righteous and unfathomable in the eyes of all. Many Kuei-jin, typically Thrashing Dragons and Devil-Tigers, focus on building their reputations to the point where others fear to attack. Resplendent Cranes and followers of the Song of the Shadow are expected to demonstrate elevated morality and a refined understanding of the Great Principle. Those who walk the Path of a Thousand Whispers are masters at inscrutability. At least, these are the common perceptions.

In fact, it is common for a Shadow to inspire terror in all who know him and for a Resplendent Crane to be so proper that none can fathom her ways. It is not difficult for a Cathayan to achieve one, or even two, of these reputations, but being able to demonstrate all three virtues is a daunting task under even ordinary circumstances. Under the burden of a war, this is even more difficult, yet such times are when true heroes rise to the occasion and legendary reputations are made.

SUN LI SPEAKS ABOUT WAR IN THE HEARTS OF WARRIORS AND FARMERS

You must appear powerful so your enemies will be overcome with fear and make mistakes, so that your enemies' allies and followers will want to flee, surrender or turn traitor and so that your allies and followers will feel safer aligned with you than with your enemies.

You must appear righteous so that your neighbors will trust you over your enemies, so that your armies will feel that the mandate of justice is on their side and so that those who would work against you will feel shame for their actions.

You must appear unfathomable so that your enemies will not know where your strengths and weaknesses lie and so that your servants will not lie to you in an attempt to gain your favor or act without your permission.

Fear is the key to many battles. Since fear lies within the mind of the enemy, it is important to understand the enemy and what he fears. If an enemy is trying to forge an alliance with another *wu*, a general may send a messenger to that *wu* with the head of the enemy's last ally — if that will intimidate the *wu*. Against a different *wu* the general may do better to pay a polite visit to his potential enemies, displaying no fear at the possibil-

ity of their joining the other side. Many people find a calm enemy more terrifying than an angry one.

The enemy's civilian forces can usually be intimidated with simple threats or violence, but their soldiers may require more extreme measures, such as knowledge that their families will suffer or that their souls will be fed to ghosts when they are defeated. Cultivating fear in the enemy's general is the hardest and most rewarding application of terror. There are no set rules for bringing forth this fear, though. A general must study and understand her enemy. She must unearth what it is that frightens him — loss of face, physical pain, confinement — each Kuei-jin has his own horrors. Then she must convince him that it is easily within her power to bring about that dreaded state of affairs. She must make him appear foolish if he fears losing face. She must use weapons that hurt more than they injure if he fears pain. She must ensnare him and restrict his movements if he fears confinement. No matter what he fears, she must provide it. Fear is a versatile tool. In certain cases, such as when it is important to provoke the enemy into frustration, it is better to have the enemy's foot soldiers more afraid than their generals. In other cases, it is good to make the general appear cowardly before his troops. Finally, lest a general's neutral neighbors should begin to fear her, and side with her enemies, she must prove that her wrath is only for her enemies. She must display righteousness.

A general should never allow herself to appear threatening to the Middle Kingdom as a whole. For Kuei-jin, this means that a general must visibly adhere to the Great Principle. A general should never hesitate to display her enemy as a beast who would bring down Kuei-jin civilization. At the same time she must hold her side up as exemplars of the Fivefold Way. The general must assure those who are not involved in the conflict that she will not only see that her troops do not harm them, but she will protect them from her enemies when (not if) they become desperate enough to attack even noncombatants. A general should be ready to explain all of her actions to the court — specifically demonstrating how they were required by the Mandates of Heaven. Needless to say, a general who demonstrates skill at Hellweaving or other Demon Arts will have trouble convincing others of her righteousness. A general must also be cautious in her righteousness. She must not be so virtuous as to gain an enemy by inadvertently making another lose face. Nor may she make the court fear that she sees them as venal and corrupt — the next targets of her holy war. She must ensure that only those who would be her enemies fear her.

It is also important for a general's troops to have faith in the righteousness of their cause. Every soldier, even a mercenary, wants to think of himself as the hero. The general must convince her soldiers that this is the case, since heroes are less likely to turn traitor or flee when faced with outrageous odds than mere conscripts. If he is fighting a battle in the name of Heaven, for the honor of the ancestors or to drive out the foreign devils who would pillage his country, it is far easier to adopt the role of hero than if he is fighting only for a quick HK dollar.

With the court pacified and the troops ready to fight to the death, the general must guarantee that the enemy not only fears her but is unable to fathom her designs and strategies. She must hide her fears so that her enemies cannot use them against

her. She must also hide her goals so the enemy cannot deny her them. A general may make an all-out attack to gain some territory or item which has no obvious use, only in order to make the enemy feel that they have missed some important part of her tactics. In other cases she may direct her troops to adopt strange weapons or ceremonial clothes for no other reason than to sow confusion. The key to such maneuvers is for the general to prevent the enemy from understanding her strategies and to provoke him into making mistakes based on false interpretations. Such confusion can be a double-edged sword, though, for it can easily disturb and alienate allies as well as enemies. A general must be careful not to lose her true goals in the subtleties of her feints.

Generals who are clever with their tongues and who can deal easily with others have a power that can be used in many ways. Their eloquence can encourage a resurgence of religious piety, bringing joy to spirits and ancestors. It can cause loosely bound warriors to defect and dissatisfied armorers to sabotage weaponry. It can forge alliances with other *shen*, gaining skilled spies and warriors with mighty supernatural powers. It can convince the guardian of the dragon nest to restrict the enemy's access. It can weaken the reputation of the enemy's soldiers, encouraging local brigands to target them. It can cause an uprising that the enemy's forces must put down. A truly charismatic Kuei-jin can even form armies of religiously inspired zealots who will fight and die for her. The hearts of warriors and farmers are a powerful force for a general who knows how to command them.

Kuei-jin accustomed to the games of the courts often find the forging of friendships and sculpting of opinions to be easy and pleasurable, granting war the elegance of a friendly chess match. Such an attitude can be dangerous at times, however; a Kuei-jin who is too much at ease during wartime may receive a truly unpleasant reminder as to the true nature of his business. Even the most potent Cathayan may fall to violence or sorcery if he spends too much time chit-chatting and not enough time watching his back.

WAR IN THE REALMS OF SPIRITS AND GODS

The good general honors his Ancestors and propitiates the Gods of the Heavens. The great general knows how to call the Ancestors and the Gods to his cause.

— Sun Li, *Eight Immortal Strategies*

As spiritual creatures, Kuei-jin naturally extend their wars into the Yin World and the Yang World. The existence of these worlds adds another level of complexity to the wars of the Kuei-jin. Cathayans must expect their wars to include these realms, and any who disregard this theater will pay for their oversight.

If the embattled *wu* does not possess someone knowledgeable in the ways of the Yin World and the Yang World, it is essential to perform warding ceremonies to protect its domain from Umbral attacks. Naturally, knowing the ways of only one of the worlds beyond the Middle Kingdom is not as good as being skilled in both — it does no good to guard the west if the enemy attacks from the east. The leader should see that any weak directions are as well protected as possible. For this reason, it is vital to have at least one Kuei-jin skilled in the Chi Arts of Tapestry and Feng Shui. Those Disciplines can provide

protection from spiritual attacks or at least offer insight suggestions about locations that are better protected.

The most common use of the other worlds in midnight war is for transportation. Skilled Kuei-jin may use dragon lines to move quickly throughout the Middle Kingdom. Also, if an enemy is only guarded in the physical world, Kuei-jin may enter the Yin World or the Yang World in order to sneak past physical defenses and attack by surprise. Masters of Feng Shui can even open up portals to allow a handful of troops to enter one of the neighboring worlds. Beyond the power required to accomplish such feats, such actions are rare for two reasons: Even the most loyal mortal troops have trouble maintaining their morale in the face of the otherworldly wonders and horrors of the Yin Realm and the Yang Realm, and the travel of such forces through those worlds may earn the unwanted attention of the native inhabitants. It does little good to sneak your elite troops through the Dark Kingdom of Jade if roving *kuei-go* devour half of them en route.

Though movement within the Yin Realm and the Yang Realm presents many perils, there are moments when such places are better suited for rapid maneuvers than the world that lies between them. Sending a force of hand-picked Kuei-jin through the Yin World to strike from behind while a battle rages in the world of swords and mountains can give the enemy a very unpleasant surprise. Dragon lines are even more useful for getting troops from place to place. Educated Kuei-jin are aware of most of the different dragon lines within their region and how to access them, but the Middle Kingdom has many surprises, and not all such paths are known to every Cathayan. A general who knows of a hidden dragon line should easily be able to devise a strategy to exploit such an advantage. Even in the case of well known dragon lines, the ability to move miles between two beats of a mortal's heart is nothing to be scoffed at. Though it is difficult to move armies in this manner, the ability to move one or two chosen warriors thus is an enviable tactical edge.

JIAN-PING ATTACKS BY RETREATING

In her nights as a Running Monkey, Jian-Ping, a Devil-Tiger from Kowloon, discovered a forgotten dragon line that ran only 100 meters down one of the nameless back alleys. Naming it *Duande Jiedao*, Short Street, she kept the secret of the tiny dragon line to herself. 15 years later, during a midnight war with the Cunning Magpies *wu*, she allowed herself to be chased down the alley. With her pursuers behind her, Jian-Ping took a walk on *Duande Jiedao*, and appeared behind them, gaining complete surprise.

The Yin Realm and the Yang Realm are also excellent spots from which to spy upon the enemy. Some Kuei-jin can change themselves into Yin or Yang energy and travel across the Wall. In this state, if they are cautious and clever, such

Kuei-jin are well suited for surveillance and related duties. Though such vampires are invisible and intangible, they must still contend with whatever arcane senses and wards the enemy may have established. Additionally, the enemy may have a nushi, spiritual allies or other forces that could entrap or harm the spy on the other side of the Wall. A Kuei-jin who uses the Umbra to spy on his enemies must be ready to flee or engage in spiritual combat as the situation dictates. In most cases, it is safer and wiser to use the Umbra to watch the enemy's mortal allies and environment, but even that much is a huge edge if applied properly.

In the battlefield, an eye on the spirit world can warn of many of the enemy's plans. If ghosts are congregating at a narrow pass, they know that there is going to be a battle there and are waiting to welcome the newly dead. If nature spirits flee or become agitated, then the enemy has a weapon which will cause pain to the fields and forests. The arrival of demons is always a foul sign, and a general observing such should consider leaving the area. A wise leader watches the movements of the spirits and can take his cues from them.

Even if members of a *wu* do not have the ability to travel beyond the Wall, they may use allied spirits, such as nushi or the spirits of their ancestors, to spy or act as messengers for them. Creatures of the Yang World can be hired with gifts of Chi or promises to perform actions in the Middle Kingdom which benefit them on their side of the Wall. Spirits of war and honor may call for sacrifices to be made in their name in forthcoming battles, and nature spirits may call for the cleansing and protection of their domains. Good relations with nature spirits may help create alliances with the *hengeyokai* (or vice versa), and many such spirits can aid a Kuei-jin in unexpected ways, such as weakening the enemy's weapons, causing the land to hinder his troops' movements or terrifying the enemy's warriors. Some can even pass across the Wall and attack in their own monstrous forms. In all cases, the Kuei-jin should remember that the more potent the spirit, the more expensive its service is.

Some Yin spirits are willing to aid Kuei-jin who are their descendants simply out of familial loyalty. Most ghosts are not so generous, however. They require sacrifices of Hell money and relics, care of the family shrines and burial grounds or even carrying out strikes against the burial grounds of their enemies in the Yellow Springs. Throughout the Green Courts, most Kuei-jin already have complex treaties with the local wraiths. In other regions where the relations between the Yin World and Cathayans is less entrenched, Kuei-jin should study the political climate of their family's position in the Yin World before employing the ghosts of ancestors, as it is highly troublesome to learn that the ancestors are not allowed to perform certain deeds because of their own obligations.

Diplomacy, negotiation and knowledge of history are necessary ingredients for success when courting spiritual allies, and a wise leader always balances what the ally requires with what it has to offer. A Kuei-jin should never place a spirit in a position where it must act against its nature. Spirits of glory should not be expected to sneak past the enemy no more than hummingbird spirits should be asked to fight against trained warriors. It is also important to know what a spirit desires when bargaining with it. A hummingbird spirit may make an excel-

THE YOMI WORLD

Desperate or audacious Kuei-jin may also use the resources of the Yomi world, reasoning that the enemy would never prepare for such a dangerous maneuver. Needless to say, such tactics are foolhardy at best. The denizens of the Thousand Hells are universally dangerous. Even those who do not attack outright (or worse, offer aid) are working against the Mandates of Heaven. It is rare for any being who enters Yomi Wan to come out unchanged, and such changes are invariably for the worse. Even if a Kuei-jin succeeds in his plan, there is a good chance that he will be declared *akuma* for even daring to contact the Yama Kings—especially if he is known to have received their aid.

lent spy in exchange for the gift of a single fragrant orchid, whereas sacrificing a noble warrior to it will serve no use whatsoever. Another danger of warring on the other side of the Wall is that the inhabitants of the Yin Realm and the Yang Realm have their own political agendas, and it is very easy to get drawn into their struggles. A classic cautionary tale of the Green Courts speaks of General Soon Chang-Hee, who had almost defeated his enemies when his ancestors demanded assistance in their efforts against the minions of Emperor Qin Shihuang. Soon was soon torn between two wars, with the result being that he lost them both.

The effects of spiritual warfare can be even more insidious than those of the other theaters. Troops' morale suffers when they are haunted, especially by their own ancestors, and weapons' spirits can be convinced to turn against their wielders. Allies avoid visiting the enemy if the *feng shui* of his citadel disturbs them. Spirits can grant visions to prefects, causing them to support one side and move against the other. By limiting the type of Chi on which his opponent can feed, a vampire can shape the very personality of her enemy. A general who can deny her enemy access to Yin Chi soon has an impatient enemy, prone to careless mistakes. If she can prevent him from receiving Yang Chi, her enemy will become increasingly lethargic, missing opportunities he would have seized were his Chi more balanced. These behavioral changes can be even more devastating if the general has taken them into account but the enemy's allies have not. For these reasons, a general who can employ the realms of spirits and gods is a general to be closely watched.

Though it is necessary to be aware of the spiritual worlds of the Middle Kingdom, and their proper exploitation can bring potent allies and weapons to a midnight war, Kuei-jin should temper their efforts on the other side of the Wall. The forces of the Yin World and the Yang World can be as distracting as they are potent, and throughout most midnight wars, the main objectives are on this side of the Wall, not the other. It is important to avoid being blinded by the benefits of spirit warfare to the dangers of physical combat, for a wise leader remembers that the most clever wizard may fall prey to the humble ax or the neglected friend turned resentful.

NECTAR OF THE OTHER WORLDS

There is one final use for the denizens of the Yin World and the Yang World: sustenance. As creatures of Yin energy themselves, ghosts can be drained to give the Kuei-jin Yin Chi. The same can be done to Yang spirits for Yang Chi. Chi gained in this fashion is called Yin nectar or Yang nectar, depending on the source. Such an act invariably results in the destruction of the drained spirit, for the rush of Chi taken this way is so sudden and overwhelming that only the strongest of Kuei-jin can resist devouring the entire spirit.

Should other Yang spirits discover that a Kuei-jin has been feeding on them in this fashion, they will almost certainly turn against her, both for revenge and for their own protection. Word of the Kuei-jin's offense will spread throughout the Yang World and all spirits will work to destroy this threat, either directly when he is in the Yang World or through their powers when he is back in the Middle Kingdom. Such attacks can be quite dramatic, and even if he is able to weather them, they often draw the attention of the Shih and Strike Force Zero to the errant vampire.

Though Emperor Qin Shihuang of the Yellow Springs is very possessive of his subjects, there are factions and families who gladly hand captured enemies over to a Kuei-jin in exchange for some deed in the lands of the living. In some cases they may even do this simply to see their enemies utterly removed from the Yin World. In China proper such an activity guarantees a trip to Hell for the offending ghosts and their families harassment from beyond the grave for the Kuei-jin. Even the Society of a Thousand Eyes and Hands is currently too cautious to avail itself of this possibility. In the conquered territories, the situation is different. The intimate relationship between the wraiths of Korea and the Green Courts has allowed them to develop secret protocols for indicating which wraiths the Kuei-jin should feed upon and how to do so without attracting unwanted attention. In other occupied territories, the situation is more haphazard and more subject to local conditions, but in general, the further from the Jade Palace a Kuei-jin is, the more likely he is to be able to feed in this manner.

Though it may be tempting to target spirits of the Yomi Realms, the Chi gained from the destruction of such demons feeds only the vampire's P'o, a dangerous proposition in the best of times and even more hazardous under the conditions of the midnight war. Kuei-jin desperate enough to feed on demons may also develop temporary access to more advanced Demon Arts. Most elders believe that this is a plot on the part of the Yama Kings to encourage greater interaction with their forces, perhaps seducing such Kuei-jin over to their side.

WAR ACROSS THE REALMS

The hearts of men listen to the land of their ancestors. The hearts of men govern the worlds of Yin and Yang. The lands of the Middle Kingdom take their form from the world of spirits. Thus are the three fronts linked. Thus can you strike at one through the other.

— Sun Li, *Eight Immortal Strategies*

Balancing efforts across Sun Li's Three Theaters is a taxing undertaking, but the Ten Thousand Things are all intertwined. Attacking from one theater to another can be as simple, extreme — and foolish — as ordering a car-bomb strike on a dragon nest. Even if the true power lies beyond the Wall, the flow of Chi cannot help but be disturbed by violence on this side. Such plans can also be far more complex: A vampire could use her military power to give herself a social edge in mortal society — she could use mercenaries in her employ to kill a provincial magistrate, so she could replace him with one under her control. She could then wield her improved secular power to strengthen her allies in the Yin World by erecting a memorial to local war heroes. Then, bringing the plan full-circle, she could use this spiritual boon to obtain military power when the wraiths who receive honor (and Pathos) from this memorial act as scouts for her war parties.

The more complicated the ploy, the greater the chance for a part of it to go awry and thus cause the entire plan to fail. At the same time, it is usually possible to do things with an elaborate plan that would be impossible with a simpler one. Such plans can also be difficult for enemies to recognize. Did she give the gold to the architects so they would not build on the graveyard or so that the new plant would redirect the Chi flow along the river?

In composing these plans, it is important that the Kuei-jin be honest with herself about her capabilities. Kuei-jin should look for ways that their current power can affect the other theaters, but if a plan is beyond her abilities, she must be willing to let it go rather than dooming herself to failure. If a general is uncertain, she should analyze the different elements that could affect her plan as well as the plan as a whole. If she intends to use her police contacts to harass some monks in a local monastery who act as intermediaries between her enemy and the Yang World, she must look at each of the components of the plan. What could prevent the police from interfering with the monks? Are any of the police affiliated with the monastery? Do the monks have other forms of protection from the police, like friendly city magistrates or martial training? Would the harassment of the monks actually prevent their acting as intermediaries? How would the Yang spirits react to the harassment of the monks? Is the aid of the Yang spirits important enough to call the police into action? If the Kuei-jin cannot adequately answer any questions she may have, she should adjust her plan till she has one that will withstand the opposition.

If a vampire knows what weapons and forces he can bring to bear and how they can be employed to damage the enemy, he is on the way to being a worthy warrior. He should be able to avoid the most obvious blunders. Beyond this knowledge is another realm of understanding, one that separates the soldier from the general. Beyond tactical knowledge is the understanding of how individual units form a cohesive force and how best to use that force to maximum effect.

FORBIDDEN MANEUVERS

He who rides a tiger has difficulty getting off.
— Traditional Chinese Proverb

Most ploys can be made even more unexpected and devastating if the Kuei-jin is willing to enter into alliances with dangerous forces such as Namebreakers, Kin-jin or demons.

Kin-jin are always willing to barter favors for a chance to expand their influence. Certain Namebreakers are willing to offer Cathayans devastating weaponry, whether technological or mystical, in exchange for "some minor assistance at a later date" or even the body of the vanquished enemy. Most Kuei-jin realize that seeking this aid may produce serious embarrassment or inconvenience in the future — but some are foolish, desperate or greedy enough to decide that the price is worthwhile.

Even more troubled is the Kuei-jin who is willing to invite demons into the war. Though their powers are massive, only a vampire of astonishing pride or stupidity believes that she will be anything other than a servant after seeking the help of the Yama Kings' brood, and it is from the ranks of such fools that many of the *akuma* are drawn.

The Yama Kings can aid a Kuei-jin at war in several ways. They can teach new Disciplines. They can offer rituals that taint a region's Chi so that when the enemy feeds only his P'o gains sustenance. Denizens of the Ten Thousand Hells can even provide hellish foot soldiers or offer the support of others already in their grasp. Though any of these can tip the balance of the war to defeat the enemy, it is unlikely that the champion who avails himself of such can be considered truly victorious. Once the Cathayan has won the war, he often finds himself owing a heavy debt to the Yama Kings. Should he try to escape that debt, they have but to threaten him with revealing their involvement — and not aid him when his remaining court-mates start a midnight war against him — to bend him to their will. Whether the vampire should fulfill his debt or not, he is never beyond their grasp. They can still reveal their previous aid or arrange for other situations to arise in which the Kuei-jin must seek more assistance from them. Depending on their whims, they may even remove the Kuei-jin from the Middle Kingdom for a brief stay in the Hiruko, the Hell of Unspeakable Delights, to demonstrate the other benefits that come from eternal servitude. For a Kuei-jin who has sought the aid of the Yama Kings, some believe the only escape from their servitude is death. Most believe that even Facing the Eye of Heaven is not enough.

For more information on what the Lords of the Yomi Wan can offer a Kuei-jin who seeks their help, see *The Thousand Hells*.

MIDNIGHT STRATAGEMS

The warrior must know how to wield his sword. The captain must know how to direct his troops. The general must know where to place the captain and his troops, what actions they should take and how to make them take those actions to achieve victory. The general must know how to use the mountains and the rivers to achieve victory. The general must know how to use the benevolent smile of Heaven and the malevolent scowl of Hell to achieve victory. The general must know how to use fortune, both good and bad, to achieve victory. Above all, the general must know how to use the enemy to achieve victory.

— Sun Li, *Eight Immortal Strategies*

Even if a vampire has a fair grasp of tactics, there is still the matter of applying that knowledge in the field. If a general must use his Yakuza clan Scarlet Screen to fight his enemy's neo-ninja clan Scarlet Screen, he must also bend his efforts to make certain that his Scarlet Screen triumphs. That is the art of strategy. While a Kuei-jin may understand what he can attack with the Yakuza, there is more to war than having rival forces exchange bullets beneath the autumn moon. A general who would win a midnight war should realize that there are times and places and conditions in which even a weak neo-ninja clan can out-fight a strong Yakuza clan. Unless he is planning on victory through other means, he should learn to recognize and avoid such instances, lest he throw away his advantages through carelessness.

Beyond knowing when not to fight, a general should know how to entice the enemy to fight in places where she is at a disadvantage, how to make her think he is weak where he is strong and strong where he is weak. He should know how to make the enemy think he knows more than he does and how to make the enemy think he knows less than he does, and when to do one and not the other. A general must be able to make the important seem insignificant and the insignificant seem important. He must be able to make the enemy drive away allies and mistrust wise advisors. He must do all this and more, and he must prevent the enemy from doing the same to him.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF STRATEGY

There are several fundamentals of strategy that are worth reviewing. Most advanced tactics are built around these, either taking advantage of them or seeking to alter the situation to emphasize those circumstances that favor your side.

A leader who seeks victory must exploit those areas in which his force is stronger. He must also prevent his enemy from exploiting those areas in which he is weaker. If he has a small force of Nezumi going up against a large force of inexperienced conscripts, he must arrange circumstances so that the enemy's numbers are of no benefit and his troops' powers are utilized to their fullest.

Which strategy the leader adopts must depend on the resources he commands. If he knows of such convenient terrain, he may seek to engage the enemy in confined sewers or a cramped junkyard where the hengeyokai can take advantage of their familiarity with the environment and ability to adopt a smaller size. If he has a secure, well-provisioned stronghold, he may adopt a defensive strategy, forcing the enemy to contend with his defenses or run low on provisions. If he has the ear of

ALL OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL:

A defending force will defeat an attacking force.
 A veteran force will defeat a green force.
 A powerful force will defeat a weak force.
 A force with strong morale will defeat a force with weak morale.

A rested and fed force will defeat a tired and hungry force.

An organized force will defeat a disorganized force.

A force whose leader knows the enemy will defeat a force whose leader is ignorant about the enemy.

A force whose leader is loved, respected or feared will defeat a force whose leader is despised.

A force that follows the plans of the Heavens will defeat a force that works against the Heavens' wishes.

There are other factors that can make forces unequal. Most are evident to one who thinks about them, but they are easily overlooked by those who see only numbers of soldiers.

the people, he may undertake a campaign to make the enemy leader look foul in the eyes of his soldiers.

If he can, the leader may choose to adopt more than one strategy, but he must make sure that one stratagem does not interfere with another and that all work toward achieving his ultimate ends. A leader who employs strategies for the sake of proving how clever he is will only lose his army and his unlife.

Once the grand direction of the strategy has been chosen, the leader must determine the means by which it is to be carried out. Knowing that you can defeat the enemy's army if it attacks from the east is useless if the enemy is determined to attack from the south. There are basic methods for leading the enemy to do what you want, but a wise general must always temper such plans according to the heart and mind of his enemy, for different enemies are led astray by different strategies.

Certain courts have attained renown for their use of specific strategies, and the informed leader will take history into account when conducting war against those courts. The *penanggalan*, skilled as they are at Flesh Shintai, are prone to employ strategies that emphasize their mutability, such as using detached limbs as distractions or impersonating their enemies to sow confusion and allow them to get close enough to attack. They call such tactics *wayang kulit* after the shadow plays of the Javanese. The Green Courts almost always seek to use their ghostly allies to the greatest advantage, employing the denizens of the Yin World as scouts, spies and sometimes as shock troops. Kuei-jin of the Jade Court of Changan are known for their abstruse strategies that make use of texts and theories that even the best educated generals of the other courts of the Quincunx have never heard of. Cathayans fighting *wu* from the Jade Court sometimes discover that the plans they thought made sense are totally out of place once their enemies make their moves. Another facet of Jade Court warfare that wins them few

friends is the propensity for Jade Court "correctors" to declare war on a *wu* just long enough to force its members to adjust their lives. Once the *beigao* have become what they desire, the "correctors" surrender, leaving the often-enraged victors wondering what it was all about.

Midnight war in Japan takes two very different forms, depending on whether the Bishamon or the Genji are involved. If the Bishamon are in the war, they fight according to the tenets of *Tamashiido* and demand that honor is served. This is not to say that they will not employ spies or pretense, for there is honor to be found in a well-executed deception, but that even the lowliest soldier will be expected to display total loyalty and always be true to his word. Desertion and betrayal are never an option when Bishamon fight. House Genji, on the other hand, is noted for their use of cutting-edge technology. If a Genji Kuei-jin has a choice between resolving a midnight war with a sniper rifle or Ghost-Flame Shintai, she will almost always save the Chi and use the rifle. Though a wise general should be aware that these strategies are common to these courts, he should never assume that every tactic will reflect these strategies. No military leader has achieved victory by being predictable.

THE RUDIMENTS OF DECEIT

In war, nothing is too deceitful.

— Yu Xu

Strategy is based on deceit. It is the art of making the enemy think that a disastrous course of action is the best one he can take. Instructions on deceit must, by their very nature, be vague, for half of the art of strategy lies in knowing which deceit to use for the situation one is in.

In most cases, it is best to employ a lie that is close to the truth — like spreading the rumor that your best warrior has been destroyed rather than injured in a battle — since little lies may be corroborated by other evidence and witnesses. On certain occasions, though, it is better to use a lie that would make the moon blush — like revealing that you are truly a mandarin who has been living in disguise for the past two centuries, when you are really only a scholar of history with but a handful of years since you took your Second Breath. If you know when to tell "the Big Lie", the reward can be great. If you are wrong, perhaps your death will at least be quick.

Below are listed a handful of the more famous strategies that have been used across the Ages. Though these are well known, they still sometimes work, for a great leader always makes the enemy wonder whether he is truly using the famous ploy, or just pretending to. And a truly great leader uses the famous stratagem without the enemy recognizing it for what it is.

Wang Yun's Chain — To create dissension among the enemy, a general can arrange for one among them to receive something that will be desired by one of his comrades. True jade amulets and famous weapons are ideal for this stratagem, though a general should tailor the gift to the situation. The highest form of this stratagem convinces each of the enemies that the gift should rightfully be theirs and that the other has stolen it from them.

Inducing the Army — When a general has superior power, he can use secret orders to make it appear as if her forces are disorganized and fractious. This draws the enemy out from his defensive position. When the enemy emerges to attack, the general's forces can regroup according to plan and conquer the enemy. Hengeyokai sentai are often excellent at this strategy, shifting from a squabbling mob to an elite force in mere seconds.

Sacrifice a Plum to Save a Peach — Be willing to suffer a minor loss in order to deal the enemy a critical blow. If the sacrifice is a person or troop, an honorable leader will tell the sacrifice of the role they are to play, to give them time to prepare themselves. The Bishamon are renown for their willingness to sacrifice themselves for the good of their clan, but the Green Courts are more likely to sacrifice lesser jade amulets in order to capture greedy scouts and spies.

The Bridge of Chang Fei — When the general retreats, she must make it appear as if she has set an ambush for her enemy. This slows his pursuit and gives her more time to escape. On the other hand, obviously, when she does lay an ambush, she must hide it so the enemy suspects nothing.

The greatest power of deceit is that it works even when not in use. If a general is known as cunning, her enemies will waste a good deal of time trying to unravel her latest stratagem, even when she is acting in a straightforward manner. This turns her enemies' minds against themselves, and the power that is no longer theirs is now hers. The general must beware, though, lest her cunning cause her allies to fear her too much. A cunning Kuei-jin whose allies are now enemies will soon be a cunning ghost.

THE BONDS OF HONOR

To destroy the enemy is a good feat. To get the enemy to destroy himself is a great feat.

— Tien Lu

Strategies that do not depend on deceit are uncommon but can be potent nevertheless. In most cases, these strategies depend on the enemy's having a sense of honor or at least a willingness to look beyond the obvious scope of the midnight war to other concerns. Though these strategies are not deceitful, they are often considered dishonorable, and their use can have long-term consequences should the perpetrator survive the war.

Attack Wei to Save Zhao — Should the enemy be moving after something important, a general can send her troops to go after something unrelated but valuable to the enemy. This forces the enemy to cut short his maneuver and rescue his property. This strategy depends on the general's besieged force being able to hold out long enough for the enemy to decide to pull his forces back. Dragon nests are popular targets of this stratagem, but the general must be careful not to actually threaten damage or destruction to the site. Doing so could draw the enmity of all shen.

Tempt the Crane with Flesh — This strategy, which Sun Li referred to as "attacking the enemy's Dharma," calls for some sacrifice in order to weaken the foe spiritually. The general places something the enemy wants in a place where the enemy can get it, but only if he acts against his Dharma. Force a Devil-Tiger to be subdued and show restraint, or a Whisper to act with



LIFE AMONG THE TROOPS

The general may create the strategies and choose the tactics, but it is the soldiers, Kuei-jin and otherwise, who must implement them in the field. If a leader has decided that a dragon nest controlled by hengeyokai must be taken, he sends Kuei-jin out there to battle the shapeshifters. If the attack on the dragon nest is only a feint, his troops will need to fight and then retreat, even if they are winning. What matters is that the troops follow orders explicitly. The annals of the Middle Kingdom are full of stories about soldiers who seized great "victories," only to learn that by doing so, they had brought ruin on their cause.

In most cases, the Kuei-jin on the front does not know why she has been ordered to perform a certain mission in a certain way. All she does know is that her general is expecting her to follow orders to the best of her ability, no matter how peculiar or painful those orders might be. This can be especially traumatic for a soldier who thinks she is in a position to do some real damage, but has been given explicit orders to fight a defensive battle. She may not know that her defense of the empty warehouse distracted the enemy long enough for another *wu* to Construct the Dragon Bone Prison around the enemy's most trusted lieutenant. She will only know that she could have easily taken out the mortal gang opposing her but had been ordered not to. She may never learn why. It can be even worse for a soldier who has been sent away as part of a sacrificial maneuver. If she survives and returns, more power to her, but her real purpose was to go out there and die convincingly while the real battle was fought somewhere else. Indeed, her survival may end up being a detriment to her leader's cause in the long run. Honorable generals may inform their soldiers that they are going on a suicide mission, but it can be so much more convincing if the soldiers do not look like they expect to die. When your general has decided to *sacrifice a plum to save a peach*, the fact remains that someone must play the part of the plum.

Even if the soldier is not placed in a deliberately sacrificial role, wars are interesting times indeed. In the course of her duties, she may be called upon to perform acts she would never have considered in times of relative peace, ones that seemingly make no sense or are abhorrent to her moral sensibilities. But a general needs the utmost effort of every soldier, for until the fighting ends he cannot know which soldier will bring triumph.

excruciating consistency. If the enemy is aware of what he is doing, and the general is particularly sadistic, this strategy can have even sweeter reward.

The Gift of Duty — Whether a leader is certain of his own soldiers' loyalty or not, it is wise to spy upon them from time to time to ensure that loyalty. Consider the effect on morale if he explains to a captain that he is rewarding her loyal service by giving her the money needed to cure her ailing father, especially when the officer had been debating whether to tell her leader about her problem. Not only does this remind the general's warriors of his wisdom and insight into their lives, it establishes his concern for his warriors.

UNITY OF THE BODY, MIND AND SOUL

A general who calls his armies to the east and then to the west will exhaust his troops. A general who calls his armies to where they must fight by the most direct road will have rested armies. A wise general does not move his armies without reason.

— Sun Li, *Eight Immortal Strategies*

When a leader knows how to array his forces and how to keep his enemy confused, he is ready to enact the plans that will bring victory to his side. At this point, he must consider how to arrange his stratagems so as to use his forces most efficiently and most effectively damage his enemy. Though he may have a troop of elite warriors who can destroy any single army of the enemy's if meeting them on even terms, if he forces them from engagement to engagement without giving them time to rest, their mounting fatigue inevitably spells defeat. A general must decide where to use his best troops and where to use the lesser. He may decide that he can afford to lose a certain battle or a certain village. He may even decide that he must lose that battle or village for the sake of his future plans. If that is the case, he will certainly not want his best troops to be defeated. Ultimately, what he must do is come up with a grand plan for exploiting his enemies' weaknesses and his own strengths.

Once this overall strategy has been decided upon, the general must review his situation and decide which tactics and forces to use to bring it about. In an offensive war, it may be best to use the newer forces to guard the rear; in a defensive war, they may be used to lure the enemy into a foolhardy attack. If the enemy is close to alienating his allies, they may even be used to elicit sympathy. If the enemy is easily intimidated, the general may even slaughter them himself to demonstrate his own power and overawe his opponent. Whichever strategy is chosen, though, the general should be consistent in its execution — it is a rare general who gains sympathy by slaughtering his own troops.

WHAT IS LEFT WHEN THE SUN RISES

The wise general remembers that the intent of war is not defeat for the enemy, but victory for one's self.

— Sun Li, *Book of Auspicious Swords*

While Sun Li's words are worth contemplating, the terms of a midnight war declare that one side is victorious only when the other side is destroyed. At the end of any midnight war, at least one Kuei-jin must die the Final Death, often along with his *wu* or possibly even court. In order for the *yangao*, the accusers, to be victorious, they must vanquish each of the Kuei-jin they named when Addressing the Heavens. Technically, vanquish can take different forms: oaths of subservience, surrender, banishment or even imprisonment. In fact, few courts or *wu* are satisfied with anything less than Final Death. Kuei-jin are immortals, and less permanent solutions too often give the defeated time to plan their revenge. In cases where the *beigao*, the accused, are victorious, they must vanquish each of the *yangao*. Like the *yangao*, the *beigao* rarely accept anything less than the utter destruction of their enemies.

In cases where other parties have been drawn into the war, their destruction may not be required. The victors customarily forgive lesser *wu* that acted out of loyalty and any other *shen* who were involved because of prior treaties, though they may be asked to give a token of apology for any harm they have caused. Willing allies and subordinates are a more difficult matter. In some cases, a formal apology at court along with gifts of contrition may smooth over old wounds. In other cases, the war continues until all the comrades of the defeated have been exterminated as well. In still other instances, the conquest is so narrow that the champions doubt their ability to destroy all their enemy's allies; in such cases, they often make a show of forgiving these opponents in hopes that their magnanimous act grants them the time they need to recover. The victors also traditionally inherit the Scarlet Screens and mortal pawns of the defeated, but in some cases, where the relationship was more than Kuei-jin to pawn, such organizations may be disbanded or destroyed instead.

The choices the victor makes after her triumph often determine the shape of court unlife after the war. *Wu* that destroy all who stood against them may find that the remainder of the court resents their heavy-handed stance and is now contemplating their destruction — or they may find the court grateful that they purged it of troublemakers. Lenient *wu* may be praised and appreciated for their benevolence or they may discover that they have new enemies biding their time until they can strike back at those who killed their friends. For the sake of the court, most Kuei-jin hope the victors make the correct choices.

PRAISING THE HEAVENS

Once one side has won, the victors return to the court to announce the end of the war. At this point, the ancestor sets the date of the final ceremony of the midnight war, Praising the Heavens, for midnight on the next full moon. *Wu* and Kuei-jin of the court often spend the nights between the declaration of

victory and Praising the Heavens assessing the new political situation and trying to make certain that the victors do not bear them any grudges.

During Praising the Heavens, the elders of the victorious *wu* make a speech proclaiming their conquest and thanking the Heavens for seeing the righteousness of their cause. They point out the crimes of their enemy, restating them if they were the ones initially Addressing the Heavens. If they were the *beigao*, they present their side of the case, casting the *yangao* as the villains. This speech often encompasses the events of the war, laying the worst activities on the heads of the now-destroyed enemies and speaking of the victors and their honor in the most glowing terms.

EVERY MIDNIGHT WAR IS FOUGHT AGAINST THE AKUMA

The Kuei-jin have a saying: "Every midnight war is fought against the *akuma*." Like all Kuei-jin sayings, this is true, but its truth is not the obvious one. The implied truth is that no honorable Kuei-jin would ever consider allowing the situation to get to the point where the only option was unleashing the poison and destruction of a midnight war across the face of the Middle Kingdom. And yet, these midnight wars do exist, as any student of Kuei-jin history can testify. Since no honorable Kuei-jin could have started these wars, someone else must have. Therefore, each and every midnight war must have been caused by the *akuma*.

Only fools truly believe that.

Even after the atrocities of the all-out battle of midnight war, the Kuei-jin need their polite fictions to prevent further escalation. They need scapegoats. So they point to the losers — who can no longer protest — and call them *akuma*. The victors can then claim that they have protected the Middle Kingdom from another insidious threat, cloaking their actions in nobility.

After the speech, the triumphant party gives gifts to the court and any others they see fit to favor. In turn, the court and other factions within it present congratulatory gifts to the victors. Traditionally, these gifts honor the victors' courage and wisdom. In truth, they are usually given either in thanks to those who aided the victors or as tokens of forgiveness and propitiation to any who may have worked against them. In the Third and Fourth Ages, there was a code to the gifts given when the Praising the Heavens, with certain items, such as original poetry, expressing admiration while other gifts, like suits of armor, suggesting that the triumph was a matter of luck rather than honor or skill. This custom has fallen into disuse for the most part, for too many new wars were started by those insulted by their gifts, and after the horrors of a midnight war, the last thing most courts desire is new hostilities between the victors and the friends of the vanquished.

Once the gifts are exchanged, the court celebrates the end of the war with fine food, composition of poetry and, among the Genji, karaoke. Just before dawn, the Kuei-jin return home to rest in a land free from the midnight war, and the next evening, emissaries are sent to all who were informed of the outbreak of war to let them know that it is now over.

THE DAWN OBSCURED BY CLOUDS

When the path is clear, a child can lead an army. When all the paths are hidden, then only a true general excels!

— Anuman Chah, *The Three Books of Blood*

Nor all midnight wars have a clear-cut victor. Sometimes the leaders are slain, but their followers survive. Sometimes new evidence comes to light that changes the situation. Sometimes a new, greater enemy arises. How can a Kuei-jin change his path once he has addressed the Heavens and the Hells?

Despite the sixth stricture of midnight war, "Accept the honorable surrender of all but the *akuma*," it is very rare for a midnight war to end without the utter destruction of one or both sides. Many in the Middle Kingdom feel that surrender can never be honorable and would rather die than bow their heads to those they once called enemy. This often extends to servants, who feel that they must either fight their lords' battles as long as they are able — or slay themselves in atonement for having failed to protect their masters.

Mercenaries and allies have more freedom, since the war is not really theirs. If a side has lost, those who were its allies may retire in peace, and no one honestly expects mercenaries and other hired troops to stay around once there is no more money for them. On the other hand, mercenaries sometimes find the location of their most recent employment more congenial than the lands they came from and need to be encouraged to go back home.

Occasionally, through miscommunication or through the trickery of another, two *wu* discover that they are at war with each other without good reason. This is a tragic situation, for there is no honorable way for them to call off the conflict. Occasionally, one *wu* will surrender to the other, accepting the dishonor as the price for doing the correct thing. Less frequently, one side will abdicate, forsaking the land of their ancestors and the society of the courts for roles as heimin. Usually, the war just goes on until one side or the other is regrettably defeated.



THE TALE OF OKUI MEGUMI AND OKUI MIYU

Early in the Heian Period, two sisters, Okui Megumi and Okui Miyu, were kidnapped, raped and slain by their father's enemy, the Watanage clan. After enduring their time in the Yomi World, they took their Second Breath together.

They fought as a team, working against the clan that had destroyed their lives and tried to destroy their family. Though they were young girls at the time of their deaths, they had learned the warriors' code from their father and brothers, and so they fought honorably in the name of their clan. In the century it took to destroy the Watanage, they achieved a reputation as fierce and noble fighters.

With the true enemies of their clan destroyed, they turned their attention to the *akuma* and set to work cleansing Western Honshu of the demons. After another century of fighting demons, a subtle Kuei-jin by the name of Mizogami Katsuji, secretly in the service of the Yama Kings, managed to convince each sister that the other had fallen under the sway of one of the demon lords. The two sisters declared a midnight war against one another and set out to redeem the Okui name.

In the course of the war, each realized that she had been tricked, that her sister was faultless and that Katsuji was the author of this deception. Though still considered to be at war with each other, the two performed Addressing the Heavens, swearing vengeance against Mizogami, and within a fortnight, he was dead.

Then, as each had sworn that she would see the other die the Final Death and could not accept the shame breaking the oath would bring to their family, they traveled to the clan burial ground and, hand in hand, awaited the rising of the sun.

Another event that may interfere with the completion of a midnight war is the arrival of another threat that temporarily unifies the warring houses — but only temporarily. Whether the houses team up because they agree that the new threat is more odious than each finds the other or because one side refuses to let another destroy their sworn enemy, this alliance is characterized by painfully formal relations, with the possibility of betrayal hidden behind every move. As soon as the outside threat has been handled, the war recommences — if it ever really stopped.

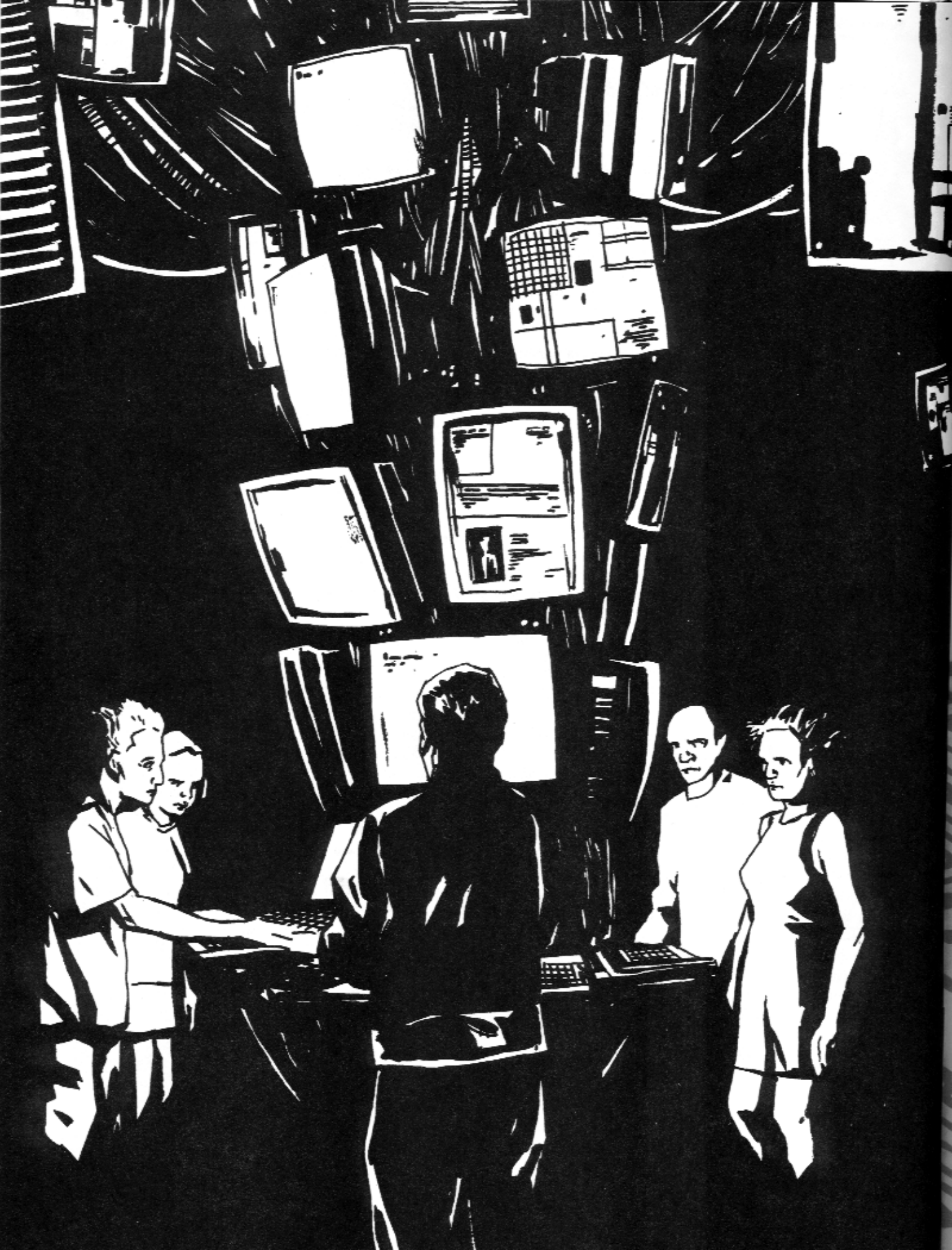
Praising the Heavens has a very different feel when the war does not end in complete victory. Because of these possible complications, courts dislike it when a midnight war is not finished neatly, and the sense of impending turmoil can add a great deal of tension to the political atmosphere of a court. Throughout the celebration, the members of the court wait for vengeful underlings suddenly to attack those who slew their lords or for the missing elder everyone's whispering about to arrive with an army of ghosts. The poetry and feasting is still there, but everyone present spends more time looking over their shoulders than enjoying the festivities. Such feasts often feature demonstrations of martial prowess and other excuses to keep weapons at hand. These displays never involve mystical feats, though — the Chi might be needed later. If the situation is particularly uncertain, select *wu* may be directed to celebrate in the garden or on the balconies — or other positions where they can act as lookouts throughout the revels.

THE AFTERMATH

The general sees peace as but another theater of war, but a theater in which bloodshed is subservient to the written word.

— Sun Li, *Eight Immortal Strategies*

Once Praising the Heavens is complete, Kuei-jin unlife returns to its familiar ways. But even as it settles into normal rhythms, it does so with another war added to the history of the Middle Kingdom. Perhaps there are hidden vendettas left undiscovered. Perhaps some of the battles saw the death of neutral parties or friends or kin whose ghosts cry out for vengeance. Perhaps some other *shen* were angered by the war. The night after Praising the Heavens, the court sends out Gentle Rains, trusted *wu* sent to clean up the sites of battle. These *wu* are expected to retrieve any lost talismans or treasures left behind in the fighting. They are also expected to try to mend the *feng shui* of any of the combat sites. Obviously Gentle Rains must have members experienced with Feng Shui or Tapestry to fulfill this duty, but they must also have Gui Ren able to protect themselves from the other scavengers who inevitably show up at the end of a war. Another, less publicized function of the Gentle Rains is to see that all the evidence agrees with the official version of events. In theory this is in order to discover any evidence of interference from the Yama Kings, but it is also done to prevent dissatisfied Cathayans from creating a pretext to start another war. After all, even as the scribes record the official history for future ages, they realize that the words detailing the end of this war may only be the prologue to the next.



CHAPTER THREE: UNDERGROUND WAR

A worthy man and a mere mortal are equally busy; but because their aspirations are different, their gains will also be different.

— Jiang Shang

A BULLET THROUGH THE PAST

Kennichi wa.
Neihou.
Nyeb zee.
Suer sdei.
Annyeung hasimnikka.
Alavidaa.
Mingala ba.
Helle.

For four Ages, the Middle Kingdom has dominated the continent of Asia as a world unto itself. For millennia, the lands from Mongolia to Borneo and from Hekkaide to Xinjiang have encompassed all that we knew, all that we wanted to know, all that we needed to know. In the Third Age, who could dream of what lay beyond these boundaries when such wonders as the great Fuji-san, the glorious Wat Po, the mysterious Huang Shan and a thousand other wonders lay within? In the Fourth Age, who could take the time to listen to the approaching babble of barbarians? Our ancestors called this place home, and all wisdom and beauty lay within it.

But even if we turned our backs on the rest of the world, it did not turn its back on us. First by land, and then by sea, gaifin and gweille, the pale men from the lands beyond the setting sun came to our shores, greedy for spices and gold. We tried to drive them away. We tried to shut our doors to them. But they returned, and they returned again, each time bringing more men, different ideas, new devices. And now they are here. They will not leave. Though we did not ask for them, they are a part of the future of the Middle Kingdom.

In the past five centuries, the mortal sector of the Middle Kingdom has been all but overrun by Western ideas. Businessmen dress in suits rather than yakutas or the chogen and pajj. People talk about democracy, Madonna and baseball. Cell phones, automobiles, television and Coca-Cola are everywhere.

No, this is no longer the Fourth Age. The Middle Kingdom is no longer the entire world. But it should not surprise you when I say that most of our mandarins do not grasp either of these facts.

Our mandarins and ancestors see that there is change, but they see it as only the turning of the Great Wheel—the changing of one Age into another and then to the Age beyond that. They see the gaifin as little different from akuma, as demons that come from

beyond the mountains or beyond the seas rather than from the Yomi World. They do not yet realize that these gajjin are different men, not different demons, that what they are doing is no different from China's ancient plan to dominate Vietnam or Japan's war on China. These are wars of people, not wars of demons. And as long as they do not understand this, the Middle Kingdom is doomed.

Our ancestors and mandarins continue to act as if this were the Fourth Age, as if tradition were the solution to all the woes of the Kuei-jin. They do not understand that these traditions are what brought the Middle Kingdom to where it is now, with the Yama Kings growing stronger every night; dragon nests weakening and falling deeper into the invisible worlds; hatred, pollution and the so-called Hundred Forbidden Vices poisoning the people. If we are to see the other side of this great cycle, we have no choice but to change ourselves as well.

Do not mistake me. I do not say that we should mimic the Westerners — they are still barbarians in many ways, after all. We must learn from them, though. We must learn their strengths and use the wisdom that our ancestors have forgotten to avoid their failings. We must shape their science to our spirit.

When we have done that, we will have the strength, the Chi, to claw our way up past the Sixth Age and into a better tomorrow.

But we are not yet ready. Ancestors, mandarins and jina bar our way; inefficient and self-destructive traditions are entrenched in our society, and the Kuei-jin of the Middle Kingdom lack the vision to take them beyond the Sixth Age. If we cannot find that vision, if we cannot learn new ways, if we cannot find leaders who will take us forward, we will fall to the Yama Kings, and the Middle Kingdom will face an eternal living death in the form of the Sixth Age.

So this is our choice: We can follow our elders to a future where the Middle Kingdom and the Yomi World are as one, or we can seize control of our own destinies and find our own way to a glorious future. No matter what the elders say, the choice is yours to make. As for myself, you know the choice I have made.

Burakumin, 21 April 1997

Enraged Minister,

The so-called Herald of the Revolution's rhetoric is as inflammatory and ill-considered as ever. He still fails to see that the Western influence is one of the primary causes of the forthcoming Age of Gorrow. It is only through strict discipline and adherence to tradition that we can hope to preserve the sanctity and righteousness needed to return to the grace of the August Parenage of Jade.

I have written to Kanamari-sama, Guardian of the Western Gate, on more than one occasion, but she continues to ignore my pleas that we each out and remove this offensive car before he causes irreparable damage.

I ask that you consider this matter and see if you can persuade Kanamari-sama to act with wisdom and expedience.

Your grateful servant,

Omaru Hideo

A BETTER TOMORROW

In many ways, the Middle Kingdom is alien to the rest of the World of Darkness: Its history has been separate throughout antiquity. Its societies are based on different philosophies. Monsters that are unknown anywhere else stalk the Middle Kingdom's nights. But despite these differences, the Middle Kingdom also has much in common with the rest of the world. People need to eat. Politicians are corrupt. And the young and the old just do not see eye to eye.

Amid the more visible battles, those against the Yama Kings, the gweilo and rival courts, the Kuei-jin are fighting another battle, one between the old guard and the newly returned from Yomi. For Five Ages, the Middle Kingdom has been a land of tradition and reverence for the old ways. In this Fifth Age, however, those who have only recently entered the ranks of the Kuei-jin no longer believe that the old ways are the only ways, and they are willing to fight to prove it.

WELCOME TO THE REVOLUTION

"Your Eminence!" Chu slammed open the doors and ran into the Minister of War's audience chamber. "Bakemono, eight of them, are prowling around the university. Wang and I saw them. Wang stayed behind to keep an eye on them. I came here to warn the court."

Inside, seated on a chair of ebony carved in the form of a reclining dragon, the minister continued to savor his tea.

"Your Eminence! What —"

"Silence! I am contemplating the cup of tea."

"But...."

"Leave. I will forgive your rudeness once, not twice."

Some Kuei-jin want to change the world. To a Westerner, that may not sound like a radical idea, but the Middle Kingdom has been a world unto itself for millennia. Its societies have grown from a foundation of ancient polytheism, Confucianism and Taoism. It has been a place where elders are honored and

the old ways are revered, where the foreign is distrusted, the innovative ignored and the different shunned.

Of course, it is this way because it is the elders who are in power. Everywhere you go in the Middle Kingdom, you are taught to honor them and inculcated with the notion that they have the learning, experience and wisdom of years that are the prerequisites for power. Naturally, it is the elders who teach you to think like that, just as their teachers, parents and family taught them.

New Kuei-jin — *him*, Running Monkeys, disciples — are fully aware of this reverence for the ancient. In most cases, their living years were shaped by the conflict between these same forces and the frenetic change that has marked the 20th century. But where mortals are concerned, even the most respected, or feared, grandmother eventually dies of old age. Her presence may still be felt in the family shrine and in the memories of her children, but her corporeal power is a thing of the past. The new generation incorporates the changes in the world into their traditions and moves along. In the society of the Cathayans, ancestors and mandarins do not die of old age. They become older and more powerful. Their influence strengthens and spreads, and they demand more reverence and respect. A new Kuei-jin who had struggled through life according to the dictates of parents who could not program a VCR now finds her unlife dominated by creatures who were around when gunpowder was new. The elders like what they grew up with, no matter how long ago it was that they were young or how antiquated it may seem to modern folk. To them, if it was good enough for the Tokugawa shogunate, then it is good enough for today. The *him* and disciples had better get used to it. To advance in the courts, a Kuei-jin must learn the classics, master ancient etiquette and develop skills that were out of date before the fall of the Qing dynasty. This fixation on the past can be annoying for new Kuei-jin, but many of them are not seriously troubled by it. Not only was it a part of their life, but many inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom, even modern ones, see these traditions as a part of their culture, something that sets them apart from and above the rest of the world.

The elders' fear of the new is a more vexing matter. Much as many older mortals fear change, the older Kuei-jin find such developments particularly discomforting. While an appreciation of the past can be a wonderful, if occasionally inconvenient, attribute, most modern Cathayans see an unwillingness to accommodate the world as it is now as a serious problem. Few *jina* are known for their appreciation of rap or canto-pop. Similarly, an elder who sees the Legalist system as the pinnacle of organizational development will certainly not be favorably impressed by a call for a more democratic court. In more practical concerns, a mandarin's unwillingness to accept documents that are not properly calligraphed — much less faxed — or accept the use of assault rifles in next moon's attack against the *akuma* who have moved into the abandoned temple is inflicting serious, and possibly fatal, hardships upon his modern subordinates. Among the ranks of the Running Monkeys, the term *dame-sama* is used to mock the elders' constant forbiddance of anything new.

The ancient Kuei-jin are not about to step down and let the new generation of undead handle things, either. They see the Running Monkeys and disciples as far too undisciplined to

handle the tasks set for the Wan Xian by the August Personage of Jade. No amount of impassioned debate about maximized returns on investments or the voice of the people will convince them that the old ways are anything less than faultless. The *dame-sama* consider it impossible that anyone who has not studied the *Ki Chuan*, devoting at least a decade to each of the Ways, in the original *kaja*, has any idea what he's doing. They say that, since the Kuei-jin are fulfilling an ancient mandate, it is obviously best for them to be governed by those who have studied the mandate the longest and have the most familiarity with the Middle Kingdom, its *shen* and "other matters that pertain."

Some new vampires adapt to their status within the courts with ease, enjoying the security of having tradition and their superiors make the difficult decisions. Others, influenced by the changes of the Fifth Age and their own natures, rebel against these outdated notions and seek to bring Kuei-jin society up to speed with the rest of the world.

A Kuei-jin may rebel against the courts for any number of reasons. It takes a strong person to claw his way out of the Yomi World, and some of these people have trouble bowing down to any form of authority. Some newly returned souls bring vendettas from their living years into their unlife — there are several tales of Shih taking the Second Breath and being most unwilling to join the society of those they had dedicated their lives to battling. An increasing number of vampires, such as the Bamboo Princes, see the Cathayan community as obsolete and incapable of handling the problems now facing the Middle Kingdom. Some may even leave the courts out of loyalty to another friend or relative who has chosen such a path. It is not rare for such rebels to ally themselves with each other as they struggle through unlife outside the courts, even if their true goals are very different, for it is easier to trust another outcast, even a dangerous one, than to work with the enemy. In the end, each Kuei-jin has her own reasons for her actions, and those reasons dictate the direction in which those actions take her.

JIANG HU

Yusuke waited behind the white Nissan as the sarariman, drunk from a night out with the boys from the office, staggered down the narrow street. The sarariman had almost stumbled upon Yusuke's hiding place when he stepped out. With the help of his P'o, Yusuke contorted his face to its most horrific configuration: bulging, yellow eyes; huge, jagged fangs and shaggy, green hair that waved in a wind that no mortal felt.

The sarariman stopped, dumbfounded, as Yusuke placed a taloned hand on his chest. "Evict any orphans today, Inoue-sama?" he spat the words past his fangs.

"Yu-Yu-Yusuke?"

Yusuke smiled. He was glad that Inoue remembered him even months after his death. Perhaps there was hope for him after all.

The most obvious form of rebellion among the Kuei-jin is called *jiang hu*. It is even considered a traditional form of revolt in some circles, the Cathayan equivalent of "that awkward phase." *Jiang hu* is not really much more than gang-banging Cathayan style. It is a free-floating unlife in which gangs of Kuei-jin (and occasionally others) band together to raise hell, right wrongs and generally spit in the face of authority. Sometimes they fight for a cause — like the Burmese who keep



the SLORC from wiping out the National League for Democracy in Myanmar — but most of them just get together to “protect” a neighborhood or fight the *jiang hu* on the other side of the prefecture.

Young, disaffected Cathayans who were killed violently before they felt any connection with society at large and who see their new unlife as a chance to wreak havoc upon the world that treated them so poorly are the most likely to indulge in *jiang hu*. Other likely candidates include those who died with exceptionally strong and violent ties to the mortal sphere. In either case, *jiang hu wu* rarely concern themselves with greater shen society unless it directly impinges upon their turf.

The local court may see the *jiang hu* as unrefined and inconvenient, but they do not worry about them. Going *jiang hu* is often seen as no more than another facet of that particular stage. While the mandarins and jina say that they would prefer Running Monkeys to behave with “a little more decorum,” being *jiang hu* for a while is hardly a rare thing. Furthermore, spending time as *jiang hu* is often seen as an efficient method for new Kuei-jin to acquire skills that they’ll need later on.

Fraught with random violence and disrespect for elders, *jiang hu* would seem to invite the ire of courts throughout the Middle Kingdom. Instead, it is seen as natural behavior, a stage that some must pass through in order to move on to more civilized roles. The courts would rather have Running Monkeys resolve this stage of their lives so that, when they enter proper Kuei-jin society, there is less unfinished business to distract them from their adherence to the Great Principle. Also, despite the brutal and undirected nature of Kuei-jin in this stage, elders often look back at this stage of their own existence with a sense of nostalgia — and their P’os make sure to keep reminding them of how much simpler times were back then.

This is not to say that disciples, jina and mandarins do not find the *jiang hu* vexing. A gang of angry, undisciplined immortals can stretch the patience of even the most disciplined elder, though Kuei-jin further along their Dharmic path tend to be more tolerant of their antics. If a Running Monkey does something stupid, few mandarins think twice before knocking him down a couple of notches. Though *jiang hu* are rarely punished for what they are, they are regularly punished for what they do. Most *jiang hu* do not fully appreciate the distinction, at least not until they are ready to take on the responsibilities of joining Kuei-jin society as a full and adult member.

Though there are some enlightened Kuei-jin who act as shadowy mentors for *jiang hu*, nudging them away from serious danger and into situations where they may learn, many vampires see them as little better than foot soldiers, one step above Scarlet Screens. The truth is that *jiang hu* are pathetically easy to manipulate, at least in the eyes of creatures with more subtle agendas. Many elders enjoy using them to take care of their dirty business while staying offstage themselves. It is not uncommon for a newly-formed *wu* to be approached by a jina who explains that she is secretly disgusted with whatever they are fighting against, whether it is the local police chief, Laotian immigrants, *gaijin* or whatever. She offers to give the *wu* aid from behind the scenes, information that would normally be unavailable to them and whatever tricks and baubles she can, in order to help the cause. It can take anywhere from a month to decades for the *wu* to discover that the jina has really been

A DIFFERENT MASTER

As far as the Running Monkeys of Shanghai are concerned, one of the most tragic stories of any Kuei-jin is the tale of Liew.

Liew's father was a fisherman. Father and son worked on Liew's father's boat, setting out before the sun rose and often coming back after it had set. Competition among the fishermen of Shanghai was fierce, so it was important to work hard. Liew was honorable in all ways. His word was his bond, and he always strove to honor his family.

One hot night, after an exhausting day, Liew and his father were returning to port when they heard the sound of engines behind them. Liew ran to the back of the boat and saw a large yacht surging across the ocean, bearing straight for them. It was a clear night and the lanterns on Liew's father's ship were all working, but the yacht kept heading straight for them. Liew rang the bell and waved the lantern back and forth, but the yacht did not turn. Liew called for his father to turn the boat, but it was too late. The yacht crushed the small fishing boat, and both Liew and his father drowned.

Liew eventually dragged himself into Shanghai harbor, with salt water in his lungs and the memory of having to abandon his father in his mind. In time, Liew fell in with a band of *jiang hu* who haunted the Shanghai waterfront. He developed a reputation as a hard worker and a fierce fighter. And word of his search to find his father's killer spread throughout Shanghai.

One night when the moon shone red over the harbor, Tsao-Leh, a mandarin from the Flesh Court visited Liew and told him that he could help Liew find the owner of the yacht — in exchange for some assistance from Liew. So Liew worked for Tsao-Leh for three months, at the end of which time Tsao-Leh told Liew that he would take him to the yacht if Liew would swear to serve Tsao-Leh from that night onward. Liew swore the oath.

When Tsao-Leh's men brought Liew to the yacht, Liew was surprised to find the crew missing. Undaunted, he made his way to the captain's cabin, where he found Tsao-Leh. To his horror, Liew realized that he had sworn service to his father's killer. But he was a Kuei-jin of honor and could not break his word. He was trapped by his honor and is trapped there to this night.

feeding them propaganda and tools for the sole purpose of furthering her own goals. Some elders pretend to reveal their Machiavellian natures, luring the Running Monkeys into believing that they know how they are being manipulated, when in fact it is just another, more subtle ruse.

Even the Bamboo Princes try to manipulate the *jiang hu*. Since they are often contemporaries, and they share a common language and experiences, it is only natural for the *Takeouji* to want to educate and recruit their less globally aware brethren. If a *wu* looks like it might be receptive to the ideals of the Bamboo Princes, a nearby *ichimi* will often send a member to

join — infiltrate — the *jiang hu*. They then try to draw the *jiang hu* to their cause through rhetoric and sharing information, such as tidbits on local politics and traditions and warnings about the manipulations of the court Kuei-jin. Sometimes they succeed; sometimes they just piss the *jiang hu* off. Though they feel that they are more sophisticated than their more parochial counterparts, the *Takeouji* lack the elders' sophistication at manipulation and recruitment. Many times *Takeouji* insiders come across as preachy and alienate the *jiang hu*, and no *wu* likes to discover that its so-called friends are just trying to convert them. Another problem is that some elders make more sympathetic Bamboo Princes than the actual Princes do, and a *jiang hu wu* may discover that it has allied itself with The Man only too late. Some Bamboo Princes are suggesting that the *Takeouji* should practice what it preaches and adopt a more egalitarian, less manipulative stance toward the *jiang hu*, but others fear the compromise of security. In either case, many Bamboo Princes believe that the *jiang hu* are the key to reforming Kuei-jin society and put a lot of work into getting them on the side of the *Takeouji*.

Jiang hu wu rarely have long-term political agendas where the *shen* are concerned. They start out more interested in using their new power to resolve the affairs that affected them while they were alive. Ironically, this disregard for the supernatural usually draws them into Kuei-jin society as they run afoul of *hengyokai*, *hsien* or other Kuei-jin or discover that some mystical force impacts their new unives. Once a *wu* lets itself become enmeshed in the tapestry of *shen* relations and machinations, it often finds itself pulled back to the local court either for protection or because, as the Japanese say, *snakes follow the way of serpents*. Other *jiang hu wu* seek to fight against the established order when they realize what the Kuei-jin have done to the Middle Kingdom. They may continue their *jiang hu* ways but direct their anger at the local court. They may try to leave and seek other options, or they may organize and work to change Kuei-jin society, perhaps by joining the Bamboo Princes.

THE BAMBOO PRINCES

"You heard what happened in court last night?"

"Pathetic." Li Peng snarled. "Minister Chiu is more worried about his meditations than he is about Wang getting killed by the *bakemono*."

"You know we have to deal with this. They won't."

"They'll deal with it, but it'll be too late for Wang if they do it their way."

"So!"

"So we'll get them to deal with it our way."

The Bamboo Princes, the *Takeouji*, are the Running Monkeys who are trying to bring Cathayan society into the 20th century. Soon, they will be trying to drag it into the 21st century. Though not all of them buy into the Wheel of Ages, most believe that the world is headed for some kind of disaster, either ecological or spiritual, and that the old ways are not adequate to handle the situation. Though they are not very powerful yet, the *Takeouji* are surprisingly well organized and have representatives across the Middle Kingdom. They also have resources, like cell phones and relational databases, that most older Kuei-jin do not understand or recognize.

BAMBOO PRINCES AND BAMBOO PRINCESSES

The name *Takeouji* was coined by Burakumin in his first manifesto, back in 1968. While warning that the traditional methods and values of the Kuei-jin were hopelessly outdated and ineffectual in the modern world, he called for a new breed of Kuei-jin to come forth. He said that this new breed must have all the excellent qualities of bamboo. While bamboo was a traditional raw material throughout the Middle Kingdom, it was always being used in new ways to build new things. It was used in buildings, paper and food, so it represented practicality, learning and sustenance. He pointed out that the original firecrackers, bamboo thrown into fire, were used to drive away evil spirits and that bamboo stayed green through the winter, just as the Kuei-jin need the spiritual fortitude to withstand the winter of the Middle Kingdom.

Many, but not all, of the Bamboo Princes are aware of the irony of calling themselves princes when their two founders, Maoxian Mao and Watanabe Kimiko, were women. Some female Kuei-jin have blamed Burakumin, claiming that he must have a secret desire to see control of the *Takeouji* in the hands of men. Burakumin has only addressed this complaint once, on a series of bills in Ho Chi Minh City, which complained that, as long as the Middle Kingdom was so patriarchally oriented, the name Bamboo Prince would inspire more awe than Bamboo Princess. Nevertheless, some feminist Kuei-jin in Japan insist on referring to themselves as *Takehime* — Bamboo Princesses.

Though they claim that their mission is not to westernize the Middle Kingdom, most *Takeouji* come from regions where Western influence is strong, especially Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Macau and Taiwan. Also, many of their ideas for improving things are obviously of European or American origin. They claim that they only acknowledge that the *gajin* have come up with a couple of good ideas, ideas that they can use. When something went wrong, the August Personage of Jade fixed it. He did not leave it as it was, claiming that what had worked before was still working. They continue, pointing out that he did not use a straightforward solution like removing the Wan Xian's ability to feed on Chi from other *shen* or taking away the Wan Xian's free will and making them into holy automatons. They argue that he did not do this because if the Middle Kingdom is to follow its cycle, the immortals must grow as well. They cannot function as if they are still trapped in the Third Age.

After the August Personage of Jade left, the Scarlet Queen and the Ebon Dragon also departed, but they left behind hints for the Kuei-jin on how to return to grace. Yueh's *Book of Shining Words* says they "secreted the answers to the Ten Thousand questions in the clouds and stones of the Middle Kingdom, that the true postulant could learn the ways of returning to Heaven." For this reason, many *Takeouji* secretly admire them more than they admire their creator. After all, the August Personage of Jade cursed the Kuei-jin; the Ebon Dragon

GARDEN AT SAMCHOK

The Garden at Samchok in South Korea has developed a reputation as a place where scholars can come and discuss more unconventional interpretations of Kuei-jin scholasticism, myth and history. Soo-kyung Ahn, the proprietress of the garden has, at different times, claimed to be a dragon, a goddess who accidentally ended up on the wrong side of the Wall when it cut off the Yang World and the bastard daughter of the Grand Arhat Xue. All that is known about her is that she made some enemies among the Same-Bito, and her garden is tranquil even when a Bone Court Resplendent Crane and a *Takeouji* Devil-Tiger are debating how to properly embody the Way of Obligation.

Among the younger Kuei-jin, it is rumored that Ahn has located some as yet undiscovered fragments of the hints left behind by the Scarlet Queen and the Ebon Dragon before they left. She is purported to have incorporated them into the garden itself. Though the courts deny the veracity of these rumors, even elders occasionally visit Ahn and her garden.

and the Scarlet Queen gave them hope that they could regain their lost grace.

Most elder Kuei-jin feel that the clues left behind have all been deciphered over the Ages — mostly by the Grand Arhat — and that they are reflected in the Fivefold Way. One of the other heresies suggested by the scholars of the Bamboo Princes is that the Kuei-jin have not yet apprehended all of this wisdom. They argue that the Middle Kingdom is a large and constantly changing place and that such powerful beings could have secreted this wisdom in such a way that it was only revealed when the Kuei-jin needed it. After all, if their wisdom was so straightforward, they could have just written it down in a book.

WISDOM FROM THE BONES OF THE EARTH

I always thought that satori came when you were meditating, or shit like that, but that's not how it worked for me. It was early in the night, but I knew that Nu's mooks would be after me as soon as they picked up my trail. So I fed — sucked some Chi from a passing soldier — and started heading for the border. I don't know why, but I figured if I made it into Laos, Nu would find someone else to lean on. I was running along one of those jungle trails, trying to avoid the snakes, when everything ended — the trail, the jungle, the ground.... Someone, probably the buddies of some general in the SLORC, had started strip-mining in the middle of the jungle. For a second I was pissed, 'cause it was gonna be a pain in the ass to sneak across a strip-mine, but then I saw: I was looking at the naked bones of the Middle Kingdom. I knew that they had been placed there Ages ago as a message for anyone who looked. The message said, "This must not be done," and I will never forget that as long as I walk the earth.

Some time after the Ebon Dragon and the Scarlet Queen left, the Grand Arhat Xue stepped into the spotlight. He had existed since the Third Age, and though he was not the sort to just write down his wisdom, his disciple Ki was. He taught the Kuei-jin that all they had to do to get back into the good graces of the August Personage was to follow his Great Principle. His codified philosophy for immortal existence gave strength, inspiration and moral direction to the traumatized Kuei-jin. The courts recreated themselves in the image of Xue's Great Principle, and Kuei-jin society as it exists today was born.

Though most *Takeouji* follow the Great Principle in their own manner, those who worry about the past question how much of the *Ki Chuan* is actually Xue's and how much is Ki's. Several Bamboo Prince scholars have voiced the desire to subject the *Ki Chuan* to modern textual evaluation. Unfortunately, the courts are loath to allow such *kyonshi* access to their most sacred texts, usually demanding oaths of loyalty before one is allowed to even look at the text. On the one occasion a *wu* of *Takeouji* scholars was permitted to examine the Bone Court's original copy of the *Commentaries of Ki*, they were granted only six hours to examine it, during which time they were under constant scrutiny, and forbidden to copy anything. In the end, the experience was completely frustrating, for their understanding of *kaja* was insufficient to do more than guess at the meanings of some of the more obvious passages. Even those Bamboo Princes who accept the *Ki Chuan* doubt the conservative interpretation most elders place on its tenets. Way for Way, the *Takeouji* offer interpretations of the Great Principle that support their call for social evolution over the courts' order to maintain conservative custom.

OTHER PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONS

The Bamboo Princes are not the first to try changing the Middle Kingdom through revolution, but they are the first to work across the entire region. Throughout the Fourth Age, the *Sgausapua* fought to keep the Karen tribes free from outside domination, the *Zhenrong Gang* struggled to free China from the Mongols during the Sung Dynasty and Kampuchea constantly battled to keep the Vietnamese out. The major differences between those revolutions and that of the *Takeouji* are that the revolutions of the Fourth Age were fought against political or military enemies and on a limited battlefield. Those revolutions came and went, rarely changing more than the name of the ruling family before they faded into history. The locals may remember those battles, but they rarely affected anything beyond the local courts. The Bamboo Princes are working across the entire breadth of the Middle Kingdom and for a change to the social structure of Kuei-jin instead of military ascendancy — though there are Bamboo Princes that would not mind that either.

One problem that those ancient revolutions pose for the Bamboo Princes is that they are often still remembered by the local *shen*. Especially in the hinterlands, court elders remember how to stir the hearts of their comrades with the old battle cries and slogans. They are always willing to use such ancient sentiments against unwanted intruders with peculiar ideas, intruders like the *Takeouji*.

THE FIFTH AGE

At the beginning of the Fifth Age, the *gweilo* came to the Middle Kingdom, the Wheel of Ages turned again, and the Kuei-jin changed as well. When the Westerners first arrived, some Kuei-jin, called *seiyougaki*, were so enthralled with their new and different ways that they fought against the courts, trying to modernize the Middle Kingdom, to make it more like the West. The *seiyougaki* were defeated, but these battles opened the eyes of the Kuei-jin to the power of Western ways, particularly technology. Though the *seiyougaki* were defeated, the Kuei-jin who had fought them had to acknowledge that there were powers out there that matched even theirs. A few were intrigued. Most were outraged. Since that time, most of the courts have had a deep antipathy toward Western ideas and technology.

KUEI-JIN OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Not all of Mao's Kuei-jin have been accounted for. At least two *wu*, the Fist of the People and the Claws of October yet roam the lands of the Quincunx, aided by secret assistance from the Communist families of the Yellow Springs. Long since declared *akuma*, the Communist *wu* live as terrorist revolutionaries, still fighting to bring the Communist vision to the Kuei-jin. They sometimes ally themselves with a band of *jiang hu* or the local Bamboo Princes, but such cooperation never lasts for long.

In addition to the true Communist *wu*, many Chinese Kuei-jin who took their Second Breath during the Cultural Revolution were drawn into the service of the Yama Kings, where they have served as shock troops and recruiters among the Running Monkeys. The *akuma* Communist Kuei-jin continually seek to seduce their few remaining Maoist brethren to the service of their demonic leaders, and there is some occasional cooperation among them.

Without the benefit of the Kuei-jin's power, the mortal population of the Middle Kingdom soon found their world invaded by the Westerners, their ideas, their ways and their technology. This meant that the mortals dying in the Fifth Age who returned after taking their Second Breath were entering Kuei-jin society with more and more Western ideas.

The violence of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution created hundreds of new Kuei-jin with ideas of using immortality to further the Communist vision that had defined their lives. Their lack of respect and understanding for the old ways proved to be a great weakness, for they made enemies of everyone from jina to ancestor, as well as the other *shen*, with their uncultured ignorance. Deriving power from numbers rather than ability, they caused trouble throughout the Quincunx in the 70s and 80s. True to the Cultural Revolution that created them, they fought blindly for change. But it soon became apparent that the changes they were fighting for were little more than their being in power rather than the elders. For the most part, they were destroyed or assimilated into the courts.

THE BAMBOO PRINCES

One of the ironies of the Middle Kingdom is that the *Takeouji*, as it now exists, arose from the Flame Court of Hong Kong, the court most dedicated to purging all Western influences from the Middle Kingdom. The chance meeting of Maoxian Mao, a dedicated Kuei-jin hunter, and Watanabe Kimiko of Clan Genji lead both to realize the futility of the courts' blind adherence to the traditions of another Age. Still operating in their old roles, the two began actively chronicling the foolishness and inefficiency of many of the courts' ways and making alliances with Kuei-jin they came across who shared their views. By the end of the '60s, they had a network of 50 Kuei-jin, mostly in Japan and Hong Kong, but no strategy for how to change things.

Then Burakumin hit the scene with his Mod New Age manifesto and got the courts all stirred up. The Bishamon blamed it on the Genji. A Genji task force traced it back to Watanabe-san, and all the Japanese Kuei-jin were at each other's throats once again, with Watanabe in the middle. Less than a week later, Burakumin struck again, this time with a radio rant in Taipei, and everybody agreed that it wasn't Watanabe, since she had been confined by the Bishamon of Kyoto. The Genji demanded apologies and the release of Watanabe-san, and for two weeks in the August of 1968, it looked like the Bishamon and the Genji would go to war. After a series of bills went up in Hong Kong, the Clans of the Sun decided that Burakumin was the Quincunx' problem, and Watanabe was released.

Watanabe fled Japan and took to the road, continuing her roles as diplomat and preacher. Mao moved to Singapore — just beginning its climb to modernization and far enough away from the courts of the *dame-sama* to be safe — and started consolidating their power base. Though Burakumin never explicitly stated that Mao and Watanabe were his allies, their fame spread, and disaffected Running Monkeys began to seek them out as the leaders of the group he had called the Bamboo Princes. Over the next couple of decades, Mao and Watanabe talked to the dissatisfied, battled *akuma*, fought for tempering tradition with innovation and kept their heads down enough to avoid the serious wrath of the courts. In her travels, Watanabe found that she had allies in places she had never visited, young Kuei-jin who found truth in the words of Burakumin. Neither Watanabe nor Maoxian Mao have ever claimed to have met Burakumin but have publicly wondered who their mysterious ally is.

In 1991, Watanabe disappeared while traveling from Okinawa to Taipei. Though no court has taken credit for her disappearance, most Bamboo Princes suspect the Flame Court. Her disappearance was followed by a sudden attack against Kuei-jin known to have sympathies for the Bamboo Princes. Many of the attacks seem to be centered around businesses or people with ties to Hong Kong, adding to the suspicions of Flame Court involvement. The *Takeouji* retaliated against the Kuei-jin of Hong Kong, enraged by Watanabe's disappearance and the subsequent attacks. Resentment and distrust exists between the Bamboo Princes and the Kuei-jin from Hong Kong to this day.

Since then, the Bamboo Princes have kept busy building their power, making alliances, battling the Yama Kings and trying to make the elders themselves see that their way leads straight to the Sixth Age, not beyond.

A QUICK AND DIRTY GUIDE TO QUICK AND DIRTY SURVIVAL

Five Ages of tradition are dragging us down into the Sixth Age. If we can't come up with some newer, better traditions, we will never see a Seventh Age.

— Burakumin

Being Kuei-jin is dangerous. Following the path of the *jiang hu*, existing outside the confines and protection of the courts, is even more so. A Bamboo Prince trying to break away from centuries of outdated traditions has an even greater array of threats to deal with. The elders have the *Takeouji* pretty much outgunned in the mystic arts, and they also have more experience in tactics, diplomacy and any other arts that matter. The *jiang hu* try to make up for this with guts, passion and a better understanding of modern weapons. *Takeouji* bring a more global perspective and an appreciation of modern scholarship to the table. All of this does not necessarily make the Running Monkeys' lives safer, it just opens up more options while they wait for the Chi to start flying.

Some Running Monkeys worked in Interpol, the Yakuza or Special Ops before their deaths, but they have still logged fewer hours in the trenches than the court Kuei-jin. The *dame-sama* have more experience when it comes to timeless matters of the soul. To their advantage, the Bamboo Princes know the new, more westernized Middle Kingdom and have real grasp of the current scene. But that is how it has to be, for this is a battle for the future of the Kuei-jin. If the ideas of the future cannot stand against the ideas of the past, what are the *Takeouji* fighting for?

HIT THE BOOKS

"Heh." Ming-hua flipped her cell phone shut. So Fai-Chung had sent his goons to the Po Lin monastery to put the hurt on Sook. It was a classic example of "attacking Wei to save Zhao." She would have to pull the Golden Tigers off their hunt for Fai-Chung's toad of a lackey or risk Sook's death.

She turned to Hop, her lieutenant, and made her decision. "Get the Golden Tigers and get your ass to Po Lin. Fai-Chung's going after Sook."

After Hop had grabbed his gun and left, Ming-hua opened her cell phone again and punched in Sook's number. Fai-Chung's bootlicker might have gotten away, but only Hop thought Sook was hiding out at the monastery, and that meant that Hop was about to have an accident.

The first thing a Kuei-jin has to do is get educated — at least if he does not want to Face the Eye of Heaven early on. The court elders have all read the whole Sun family, Li, Tzu and Pin, and they have probably also read Murasaki and Soong — hell, it is possible they even knew them — but they haven't read Tacitus, von Clausewitz or Guevara. When you think about it, the average Tom Clancy novel has a handful of espionage tricks laid out so that even a *gaijin* could understand them. The *Takeouji* need to understand the tactics the *dame-sama* use, so they should at least be familiar with *The Art of War*. At the same



time, they need tactics the *dame-sama* would never expect, even if they were cribbed from *The Hunt for Red October*.

War does not stop with gangs and guns, and the *Takeouji* know that they cannot stop there either. Sometimes The Man uses money to get at his enemies, sometimes he uses the mortal legal system. Even the Bamboo Princes get dragged into the occasional twilight war, and when that happens, it is good to know something about the modern business world and the local laws (including how to ignore them without getting in trouble). Some of the Bamboo Princes' greatest triumphs have been economic, a fact the courts do not yet realize.

The Karoshi League is a clan of ex-sarariman, white-collar workers in Japan's cutthroat high-tech business world who have dedicated themselves to subtly undercutting the elders' financial holdings since the early '80s. The Karoshi League has a better command of Japan's Byzantine regional tax laws to strike at the holdings and Scarlet Screens of the Bishamon. Since the Bishamon usually have great influence over the prefectural governments, the Bamboo Princes do not expect that much from the Karoshi League, but they have almost wrested the site of a minor dragon nest away from the elders by having it declared a National Trust.

GET CONNECTED

Mariko walked cautiously into the cramped room. The dim light and the scent of stale incense that mixed with the usual smells of Tsingtao and yakitori told her that what she had heard was correct — Kosuke-sama had come here, to her cousin's apartment. "Youta-kun?" she growled as she stepped past the tiny washing machine.

"He is indisposed," the jima murmured quietly as he stepped from behind the divider. "You should not have involved the poor boy in your petty revolution."

Mariko could not see her cousin, but she could see Kosuke-sama's reflection in the single picture window. With a cold sneer, she looked at the dame-sama, answering, "And you should know better than to hurt a boy whose older brother is a police lieutenant," and waited for the bullets.

The second thing to do is get connected. The courts have shintai and rites and ancient spirits that can get a message from one side of China to the other in less time than it takes a Yakuza to chop off a knuckle. How can the *Takeouji* compete with that? Actually, pretty easily. They completely outclass their elders with cell phones, e-mail, video-conferencing and the rest of the array of modern communications systems. And even if they decide to go low-tech, the Bamboo Princes can use FedEx to send stuff with more confidence than the elders have in their most trusted personal couriers.

The Bamboo Princes also do well in the language department. Most of them speak English as their second language, while there is barely one elder in 20 who understands it. As a bonus, English is spoken by most of the world, not just most of the Middle Kingdom. The *Takeouji* can get allies and information from places the *dame-sama* consider totally outside their concern. They can order guns and surplus ordnance from Germany, and none of the traditional court spies, informers and allied spirits have a clue of what is coming.

Another part of being connected is not losing touch with friends from back when a Kuci-jin ate more than Chi. The *Takeouji* try to keep their living friends as well protected as they

can without drawing too much attention to them. Friends keep the Bamboo Princes in touch with the world, which is vitally important. After all, the Bamboo Princes spend so much of their time watching their backs that they do not have the time to keep up to date on the latest developments in hacking or the Nikkei Stock Exchange. A Running Monkey who knows how to play the game finds that her old contacts, comrades, cousins and cohorts are glad to do some research in exchange for a little help from beyond. She just has to be careful not to let the *dame-sama* figure out who's helping her, or her allies could end up either dead or under the control of her enemies.

C. Y. A.

The elder was dressed in a gown from the Ming dynasty. Asnee did not know the dame-sama's name, but he recognized the self-indulgent smile as the elder gestured toward the slaving chih-mei, chained to the far wall by thin links of silver. "I would like to introduce you to some friends of mine," the mandarin calmly announced as he moved to release the monsters.

"That's OK, I brought some friends of my own," Asnee sneered back as he drew his gold-plated Desert Eagles.

Third? Get padded. Even without Disciplines, an elder with a katana or a darn-do can probably do the whole Ginsu routine on a *Takeouji* before he has gotten his sword out of its scabbard. Kevlar doesn't completely stop swords (or claws), but it does a whole lot better than silk and leather. A smart Running Monkey will get a couple of good sets of body armor that fit well under whatever he wears. A smarter Running Monkey will wear it whenever he thinks he might be going into a dangerous situation.

Pick up a good gun and practice. Remember, even if you find yourself in a facedown with a master of the naginata, you'll feel a lot better with an automatic weapon and he'll feel a lot worse. Many Running Monkeys studied martial arts in life, and more pick it up after the Second Breath. After all, fists and nunchakus do not attract as much attention as a sawed-off shotgun. Unfortunately, the *Takeouji* have learned that the eunuchs often have a couple more centuries of experience, so firearms are still the weapon of choice when facing an elder in combat.

THINGS TO DO WITH CHI

Even the oldest *Takeouji* or *jiang hu* has less than half a century of experience, living and dead. Also, since they are more concerned with the world around them than their Dharmic progression, almost none of them have progressed beyond disciplinehood. This means that it is very rare for a Kuei-jin of less than a century to have mastered more than the rudimentary katas of her Disciplines. Even so, any Kuei-jin who has gone through *ré* has discovered that, in addition to not needing to breathe and being able to see who has cancer, she has some hot new magical powers that the elders call Disciplines. Most of these are pretty good, and even the lamer-sounding ones can save a Running Monkey's ass when she is up against a gang or an unhappy kamui. But in the fight against old age and senility, several of these just stand out as really useful.

Chi Ward

The mandarin's expression was priceless. Makoto watched as his enemy stared at his hands, probably wondering why fire or blood or something did not shoot out and send the Bamboo Prince flying over the Tokyo Tower's railing.

"Having a bad Chi day?" Makoto asked as he adjusted his business suit so that the elder could get a better look at the pistol in its exquisitely tailored holster. "Perhaps you would care to talk about it?"

The top of the list is Chi Ward. There is nothing out there that can level the playing field as much as this little trick.

The elders have had several lifetimes to learn really badass Disciplines, things that turn a *Takeouji's* intestines to dust, call the blood out of his veins to strangle him and worse. The Bamboo Princes have not had the time to learn all the tricks the eunuchs have, but with Chi Ward, they can throw the old rules out the window. Most Disciplines require the focused use of Chi. But Chi is a spiritual thing, and it gets damn near impossible to use if the Wall is too strong. That is what the Chi Ward gig is all about: Lure the *dame-sama* into some modern place and strengthen the Wall. If the elder is not looking, she won't realize what is happening and will be surprised as hell when she learns that she cannot turn the Bamboo Prince's skin inside out. Conveniently, assault rifles and hand grenades don't care how strong the Wall is.

A word of warning: Some Disciplines don't need Chi, and some *dame-sama* know tricks for using Chi no matter how strong the Wall is. Like Sun-Li said, a *Takeouji* should always try to know his enemy. Another thing to watch out for is spirits. They don't like it when the Wall gets too strong — it hurts them. When the show is over, a wise *Takeouji* weakens the Wall and offers the spirits a little something for their trouble.

DETATCH LIMB

Mai watched from the shrine as the Mercedes sped past the gates and disappeared into the night. The phantom feelings of her left arm, bouncing around in the trunk of the car, disturbed her. It just felt wrong for most of her body to be standing in the gentle autumn breeze while her forearm was jolted by every bump the Hoshina-san's dhampyr son hit as he clumsily fled into the night.

With a feral smile and as much of a shrug as she could muster, Mai tried to prepare herself for the impending shock as her distant hand wiggled the pin out of the grenade.

It might not be the prettiest Discipline, but it is great for scratching those hard-to-reach itches. A Bamboo Prince who is willing to lose her arm for a while can give it a gun, stash it somewhere out of the way and wait for just the right moment. Low-recoil guns are better for this, since arms on their own handle recoil a lot worse than arms attached to bodies. Bamboo Prince gunsmiths in Bangkok have been working on custom pistol designs that a crawling arm can use, but they have not developed anything that offers a serious advantage over the standard firearms available in black markets across the Middle Kingdom. Even with a sweet weapon, an arm with a gun is only good for blind covering fire or creating a diversion, though, unless its owner has a way to aim it. Since most *Takeouji* lack the mystical experience to project their vision to their hand, they have come up with a couple of technological solutions.



The cheapest solution — which still costs an arm and a leg — is to fit the pistol with a laser sight. If there is a red dot between the mandarin's eyes, the Running Monkey knows it is a good time to pull the trigger. A more expensive and subtle trick is to get an infrared laser sight so the target does not see that he is tagged. Of course this only works if the *Takeouji* can see IR, and the target cannot. The third option is to mount a tiny digital camera on the pistol and watch where the gun is pointed on a computer monitor. This costs even more than the other options, but sometimes the increased stealth is worth it.

A *Takeouji* with Yin Chi to burn, or no other choice, can combine Detach Limb with White Tiger Corpse, just turning her arm and the gun invisible. This trick is especially important in areas that lack adequate places to hide an arm holding a gun. Another trick for detached limbs is to use Harnessing the Dragon's Breath to get the arm into really difficult places or to get it into place faster than it can crawl. Finally, a Running Monkey who is willing to spend some time growing back her arm can use it to deliver messier packages like hand grenades. Those who have tried it say that the burst of pain as the arm is destroyed is quite unpleasant, but there are times when no other tactic will do.

In certain areas of the Middle Kingdom, like Hong Kong and Japan, court elders have learned to be suspicious of meeting young Kuei-jin who are missing an arm. The *Takeouji* have responded by investing in prosthetic limbs.

BLOOD AWAKENING

"Your toy was a pleasure to construct. It has been many years since someone brought me such a challenging project."

Yuki barely heard the old man's words as he looked at the tiny contraption on the armorer's bench. Half fu dog and half .45, the oddly elegant little device looked as if it was ready to walk across the table and fire a bullet from its adorable, round mouth. Of course it was just a statue — for now — but Yuki had to admire the craftsmanship and attention to detail the old man had put into it.

Slipping a small handful of large bills onto the workbench, the young Kuei-jin thought about the years he had dedicated to learning this little trick — he was going to like his new pet.

It takes a real student of Blood Shintai to reach this level of mastery; only a handful of Bamboo Princes have managed to master this Discipline. Their success has inspired others who have the dedication, for Blood Awakening is one of the most versatile Disciplines a revolutionary can learn.

The *dame-sama* like to use Blood Awakening to bring their statues to life or make their chairs carry them about the room when they want a couple of parlor tricks to awe their guests. *Takeouji* prefer using it on more practical items, like guns, cars and computers. It is a pain in the ass that these have to be hand-crafted toys, but a Kuei-jin who plans on learning this has the time to find a worthy gunsmith or mechanic, someone who's not afraid to make it all from scratch.

However, even if a Running Monkey has managed to learn Blood Awakening, he has other problems to overcome. For

example, most pistols aren't designed for walking, and even Kuei-jin raised on anime may not have the imagination to use Blood Awakening effectively on things that aren't shaped like animals. But if a vampire has the will and the vision, Blood Awakening can make for an even better surprise than Detach Limb.

RUMORS, WARNINGS, AND TIPS

Momo fired off a few more rounds, but the wizened Devil-Tiger just laughed. He strutted toward her, and Momo felt the temperature plummet at his approach.

"Kuso!" Momo realized that he was using that fucking Eight-fold Yin Mantle Kenji had told her about. Bullets were useless, as were knives, hair-pins and anything cold. As she backed up, Momo frantically patted the pockets of her leather jacket, praying to Buddha, Jesus and anyone else who would listen that she had remembered that clip of incendiary rounds.

Both the Bamboo Princes and The Man use the same Disciplines, but the elders are more likely to have studied their shintai up past the third level katas. This leaves the Running Monkeys fighting to use their powers in innovative, or at least unexpected, ways against the forces of yesterday.

Goblin Spark is an undervalued power. It can be used to fake out electric eyes and temporarily blind video cameras. Also, with enough practice, a Running Monkey can use the flash to fake someone into thinking she has got a gun with a silencer. The *Takeouji* even tell tales of a *kawarimon* named Camu who carried around a toy gun from an Ultraman episode and tricked people into thinking he'd gotten his hands on a real ray gun from some high-tech research lab. It worked until people noticed that the gun's "plasma bolt" never actually hurt anything.

Some Bamboo Princes have also discovered an affinity for the new Smoke Shintai, perhaps as a reflection of their often urban origins, perhaps as a remembrance of the cigarettes to which many of them are still addicted. Though Smoke Without Fire has proved useful for creating diversions and hiding movement, it is for Words of Smoke that the *Takeouji* truly appreciate this shintai. Many a Prince has found a mandarin's questions easily answered with this little gem.

INDUSTRIALIZED REVOLUTION

Give the guy a gun and he's Superman. Give him two and he's God.

—The Superintendent, *Hard Boiled*

Technology is one of the Bamboo Princes' edges. Gunpowder was developed in China way back when, but they really didn't do squat with it — other than make firecrackers. Firecrackers might have scared away demons back in the Five Dynasties, but *akuma* just laugh at them today.

Since the *Takeouji* have a fair number of ex-soldiers, criminals and cops in their ranks, they have contacts in most of the black markets from Singapore to Yen-chi. They also have a fair number of weaponsmiths, so they are not hurting for guns. On the other hand, the eunuchs have a lot of the army under their claws, but there are not that many mandarins who have figured out how to work firearms into their battle plans — they still think they are playing with chariots and polearms. The

OBsolete Tactics and Morale (OR WHY IT SUCKS TO BE IN AN ELDER'S SCARLET SCREEN)

The elders' Scarlet Screens usually understand modern tactics better than their leaders. Lieutenants in the Peoples' Liberation Army usually have at least rudimentary training in tactics and troop deployment using modern weaponry. Local gangs and the old ninja clans have plenty of experience. They have also learned better than to ignore the orders of their Kuei-jin patrons — most of whom still perceive initiative as disobedience, which is something best handled by decapitation.

Such a rigid attitude helps the *Takeouji*. When things get serious, while the *dame-sama*'s forces are busy maneuvering into close combat, the Bamboo Princes' snipers can pick them off. This only works if an elder is actually commanding the unit, though. Modern troops who are simply assigned a task, rather than being instructed specifically on how to carry it out, often use more current tactics and don't do foolish things like expose themselves to enfilade fire for the sake of putting on an impressive show.

Another effect of the eunuchs' outdated military stylings is that troops they are leading often suffer from low morale, since they know their efficiency is shot. On the other hand, troops led by an elder often make up for their low morale with sheer desperation, since no one wants to look bad in front of an angry Kuei-jin.

Takeouji have to be careful, though. After all, there are still plenty of young *yotaru* who follow the courts and are more than willing to use their tactical skills for the courts' benefit.

Shooting at things is not the only thing that tech is good for. Surveillance equipment gets more sophisticated each year, and the eunuchs' rituals to prevent clairvoyance do nothing against a bug or a laser-shotgun microphone. The Bamboo Princes do not even have to be that subtle. Most mandarins might check a suspicious gift for a hidden spirit bound into it to spy on them, but electronics are way beyond them. And since most of the *Takeouji* have cell phones (ideally with a cryptopackage installed), once one Bamboo Prince knows what the *dame-sama* is up to, they can spread the news among themselves faster than the eunuchs can instruct their lieutenants.

The Bamboo Princes also have Deita-Maebure, the Database Project. The brain-child of Takeo Muramoto and Mizuki Nakao, Deita-Maebure is an electronic archive of everything the *Takeouji* have been able to learn about the *dame-sama* across the Middle Kingdom. They keep track of which elders have used which Disciplines, which elders hate which other elders' Chi-filled guts, elders' personal habits, known history, financial and military resources and any other information they can enter. Ideally, this makes for a perfect cross-referencing guide to every Kuei-jin the Bamboo Princes have ever met, fought or heard rumors of.

Of course, the project is not perfect. One drawback to the database is that much of the information comes from unreliable

Subject: Hideo Omorii

Affiliation: House Bishamon. Court of the Blood Peony.

Title: Assistant Minister of the South

Dharma: Jina of the Resplendent Cranes. South aspect.

Disciplines: Omorii has been seen using Yang Mantle on two occasions. He has also been seen using the Ghost Flame Shintai up to the fourth kata (using Yang-flame).

History: Born around 1835 in Sendai. Achieved rank of Prefectural Magistrate in 1889. Killed in boating accident in 1875 (Murdered?). Inducted into Blood Peony Court. Fire nature seems to have kept him from advancing.

Holdings: Omorii owns a large apartment in Kanda and a smaller apartment in Kyoto, which he rarely visits. His family was scattered during WW II, and he has made no effort to track them down. He has financial control of Hitotsubana Industries, a small machinery manufacturing company in Shinjuku; also a pair of tea houses in Kyoto. He is not known to control any Scarlet Screens.

Description: Japanese Male. Appears to be around 40. Hair style from Meiji Restoration. Wears turn-of-the-century business suits.

Personality Profile: Omorii is unimaginative, arrogant and firmly entrenched in traditional norms. He is easily angered by disrespect for his authority. Ai has noticed an obsession with the families of the other members of the court, which seems contrary to his lack of interest in his own family.

P'o Profile: When under the influence of his P'o, Omorii seems to be even more hostile toward those beneath him in court and displays almost paranoid behavior. Okuda believes that he may suffer from low-level megalomania.

Alliances: Omorii is under the protection of Akiko Takamura, the Minister of the North. He is also well regarded by Susumu Nakao of the Kyoto Court, though no one has figured out why.

Enemies: Omorii unsuccessfully tried to get Katsuhiko Eguchi declared *akuma* in 1947.

convoluted scripts on the planet. Since it can take upward of a century to learn how to read the basics, and over twice as long to get fluent, there are no *Takeouji* who come close to understanding it. Fortunately, some cyber-Kuei-jin in Shinjuku have worked up an optical character translation system just for that. They scan any *kaja* text they get their hands on and let the linguistics matching software hack away at it. It takes a minute or so per character on the latest multi-processor Pentium IIIs, and it only has an 85% accuracy rate, but the Bamboo Princes are pouring a lot of work into this one. They figure it is a lot better than spending a century they don't have trying to learn how to read and appreciate obsolete poetry.

The *Takeouji* have their technology, and the eunuchs have their magic. It still takes people to fight a war, and both sides of the underground war have different ideas about what sort of people and allies they need for this war.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY

No war has ever been won by a single man — or woman. And in the fight against ancient senility, the *Takeouji* need all the help they can get. The *dame-sama* have all the old power on their side. The courts have ancient alliances and treaties with all sorts of *shen* that date back to before mortal history, but they also have enemies that are just as old. The *Takeouji* know who the big players are in the 90s, while many of the elders do not even know who is who in the 20th century.

MORTALS

The Bamboo Princes know that there are certain people that are good to have on their side. It is always good to be pals with a biker gang. They can get to places quickly, they know where to get useful stuff like explosives and black-market passports and they don't mind getting their hands dirty. *Takeouji* also try to have a friend or two in the local Yakuza or tong. On the other hand, it is good to have friends in the police and military. They like to leave the commissioners and generals to the *dame-sama*, since they are not the ones who do the real work. A desk sergeant who knows which way the wind is blowing is more useful and less expensive. Knowing someone in the Department of Public Works or the local equivalent is also helpful. Every *wu* also tries to have a friend who really knows computers, one who understands weapons and someone with a boat. Finally, if they can find one that trusts them, and whom they trust in return, an *ichimi* who has a priest it can call on is blessed indeed.

The Lightning People confuse the Bamboo Princes. Many Kuei-jin are at a loss to reconcile the mages' mystic insight with their apparent stupidity. Without the historical perspective of the courts to guide them, the *Takeouji* are only beginning to grasp the different factions of the Ascension War as it manifests in the Middle Kingdom. They have learned that some of the Chi'n Ta are as wise and clever as the old tales would have them, but others are flat out clueless. They have also learned to steer clear of the Wu-Keng, Wu Lung and the Five Metal Dragons, though they do not really understand the motivations behind any of these groups. So far, the only Chi'n Ta they have had any luck with have been techno-wizards like the Gon Lo and the Five Rings Gama, who have collaborated on some of the more arcane aspects of the *kaja* interpreting program. But

sources. Another is that Muramoto and Nakao may have attracted the interest of Strike Force Zero, which always seems to have a way of finding out about this sort of thing. For now, Deita-Maebure is only readily available to the *Takeouji* of Tokyo, Taiwan and Seoul, where access terminals have been set up in safe locations, but Nakao has plans of moving the database onto the Internet, where any *Takeouji* who has an account can access it or submit new information.

Another sore point with the Bamboo Princes is that most of the ancient texts are written in *kaja*, one of the most

all too often, the wizards are too busy with problems that the *Takeouji* just do not comprehend.

THE OTHER SHEN

The shape moved through the woods with a speed that Charlie Wong found astonishing. One second it was at the top of the cliff, then it leapt to the trees below and began careening from branch to branch, moving through the forest with a speed that awed Charlie's city-bred mind. It was only when he realized that the form was swinging around to come in his direction that it occurred to him that this might be the creature he was supposed to meet.

It had better be, Charlie thought, 'cause there's no way I'm walking out of here if it doesn't want me to.

The *Takeouji* have learned that they cannot count on the *hengeyokai* and the *hsien*. Most of the courts have ancient pacts with the other *shen*, at least those who are not trying to destroy the *Kuei-jin* as a whole. Fortunately, at least for the Bamboo Princes, the younger ranks of the other *shen* have the same trouble they do — their elders are working with last year's wisdom.

Among the *hengeyokai*, the *Takeouji* have made a few alliances with some of the younger *sentai*, and every now and then, one of the older changers will lend a claw if they are doing something that screws over some *jina* who pissed her off a couple hundred years ago. It would help if the Bamboo Princes knew more of the local supernatural history, but it is rare for them to have the time to do the research — or a trustworthy source of information. In any case, alliances with the *hengeyokai* rarely last for more than a season. The *hengeyokai* are not too appreciative of change and technology, and many of them still see the *Kuei-jin* as enemies. Often, the best the Bamboo Princes can do is learn what lands they consider sacred and try to stay the hell away.

Of the *hengeyokai* who are willing to listen to the Bamboo Princes, the latter have had the best luck with the *Kitsune* and the *Tengu*. Both breeds have an interest in the world of man and are not above considering new ways of doing something. No *Tengu* has ever explained why he was willing to consort with the *Takeouji*, but according to one *Kitsune* in Macau, the foxes are the youngest of the *hengeyokai*, so they are still naïve enough to trust Running Monkeys. For obvious reasons, the *Takeouji* find that proclamation questionable. The other *hengeyokai* are usually too stuck in their ancient, tunnel-vision codes of honor to try the new tricks the Bamboo Princes have to offer.

The *hsien* are a different story. Many of them hold an ancient hatred for the *Kuei-jin* as a race, even those who have only recently become Cathayans. While the *Takeouji* understand the historical reasons behind this hatred, few of them can understand why the *hsien* are still holding a grudge. In the 70s, the Bamboo Princes unsuccessfully tried to establish relationships with the *hsien* courts, but they were totally unsuccessful. Several *Kuei-jin* died wooing the *Shinma* courts, and official *Takeouji* policy — as official as *Takeouji* policy can get — has been to stay far away from the face of the Middle Kingdom. Despite this overt hostility, the *hsien* do not seem intent on actively destroying the *Takeouji*. As long as the Bamboo Princes steer clear of *hsien* affairs, the *hsien* courts seem willing to leave

them alone. Unfortunately for the *Takeouji*, knowing where *hsien* affairs begin and end is a skill they have not yet mastered.

WESTERNERS

Mortal *gaijin* are all right as contacts and pawns, but those who know enough to be worthwhile as allies are few and far between. Still, a friend outside the Middle Kingdom is a friend whom the eunuchs can't easily reach. Another advantage to allies from outside the Middle Kingdom is that the eunuchs don't grasp their strengths, weaknesses and habits very well, often dismissing them as "just another set of barbarians." On the down side, your average *gaijin* can accidentally ruin months of planning just because he offends the spirits by handling his chopsticks incorrectly. *Gaijin* are a double-edged sword. They can be very useful, but their ignorance can be truly dangerous to their associates.

KIN-JIN

As they approached the rendezvous point on the bridge, Tetsuo continued to whisper to the American beside him, "James-san, when you meet Omori-san, bow. Hold your hands at your side and bend 45 degrees. Right?"

"Right," the man smiled easily, "No sweat."

"And you do not look him in the eye. It is rude."

*"No eye contact, not a problem." The *gaijin* seemed completely relaxed, almost arrogant.*

*Tetsuo saw that Honda-san and the rest of his *sentai* were waiting beneath the *mutsu* trees as arranged and felt the familiar pang of terror that he had not taught the American well enough, that the *Kin-jin* would somehow offend the *hengeyokai* noble.*

Like the rest of the *gaijin*, the *Kin-jin* come in all shapes, sizes and colors. The *Takeouji* realize that they are separated into hereditary families, rather than following individual *Dharmas* — a fact they find ironic, considering that *gaijin* always accuse Asians of not appreciating individualism. Of the different clans, the *Burujoa* have the most in common with the Bamboo Princes. They seem to be fighting a battle similar to the underground war in America against the *Benturu*, the *Kin-jin* equivalent of the *dame-sama*. The *Takeouji* have a cautiously friendly relationship with some *Burujoa* coteries, but recent *Kuei-jin* expansion into America's Pacific states is causing some serious friction, and the Bamboo Princes are divided over whether to offer aid to their revolutionary comrades or to keep their loyalty with the *Kuei-jin* as a whole.

The *Burujoa* are not the only *Kin-jin* who seek the favor of the *Takeouji*. The *Benturu* are quite willing to help them, but it is obvious that they are only trying to wrest control from the elder *Kuei-jin* so they can take over. In general, the *Takeouji* are cautious when availing themselves of *Benturu* aid, and promptly introduce the *Benturu* to their *Burujoa* friends once their usefulness is ended. Some *Genji* work with the *Sabato* clan, but they often prove even more erratic than the rest of the *Kin-jin*, and there is evidence that they have secret alliances with the *Yama* Kings, so the *Takeouji* as a whole try to avoid them — or send them after the *dame-sama*. Though the Bamboo Princes have heard that there are other clans, details are sketchy at best, except for the *Tsuremiru*, the sorcerers of the *Kin-jin*.

In 1988, a Tsuremiru named Calliste approached a ring of *Takeouji* in Macau with a proposition: They would show him the house of one of the court elders and he would remove that elder. All he asked for in return was access to the elder's library. After a bit of debate, they decided to accept the Kin-jin's offer and brought him to the palace of Kun Iam, a Bone Flower mandarin who had taken great delight in tormenting them through the ghosts of their friends. The vampiric sorcerer destroyed the elder as promised, using strange magics the Running Monkeys had never seen, but instead of only looking through the library as he had promised, Calliste summoned six more Tsuremiru who attempted to pillage the palace of all mystic artifacts and writings. The *Takeouji* fought off the Tsuremiru long enough for one of their number to summon other Macau Kuei-jin. Though they prevented the Kin-jin from stealing the treasures of the Middle Kingdom, the *Takeouji* were declared *akuma* for having brought in the Tsuremiru in the first place. They were forced to flee Macau for their unives. To this day, the Bamboo Princes have loathed the Tsuremiru and gladly work against them at any opportunity.

Like mortal *gaijin*, the *Takeouji* find Kin-jin can provide assistance that the elders are not expecting. But they also find Kin-jin motives to be untrustworthy and unpredictable. Even more than working with mortal *gaijin*, they have discovered that allying with a Kin-jin can blow up in your face at any moment.

NAME THAT KIN-JIN

Since they are not immersed in Cainite society or Western linguistics, few Running Monkeys who are not directly involved in the crimson war really understand the names of the Kindred clans. Below is a list of the names common to the Japanese *Takeouji*, which have come into common usage among all Bamboo Princes:

Benturu: Ventrue

Burujoa: Brujah (Ironically, this word means "bourgeois," which gives some Bamboo Princes an entirely backward understanding of the Rabble.)

Kamarira: Camarilla

Marukabu: Malkavian (This is usually translated as "Circle Turnip," much to the delight of those Malkavians who understand Japanese.)

Sabato: Sabbat

Tsuremiru: Tremere

DEMONS

"It was perfect. I was in that apartment complex over by Yushima Station, watching the temple, you know. I'd just come from the range, and the sniperscope alignment was sweet.

"So I was watching the temple, and there was Hinegi, in the rock garden, meditating. He couldn't have been more still if he was dead. No wind. No distractions. I could have clipped his stupid topknot and pegged him in the eyes before he had a chance to Zen down, when I saw a fucking bakemono just ooze up from the rocks like an oily centipede. I don't know how Hinegi slept through it, but that bastard must have been five meters long, and it didn't really look solid.

"I was gonna let it take out Hinegi — after what he did to Kyonusuke, he sure as hell deserved it — but, Kuso, I didn't know if it would stay solid, and there was no way I was letting one of those fuckers get away. It took three shots, right between the eyes — all five of them — but that bugger went down.

"Of course, by the time the bakemono was splattered across the rocks, Hinegi had run off like the dog he was. Ah, well, I'll pincushion his ass next time."

No matter how blind, no matter how ass-backward, dog-stupid and cow-brained the *dame-sama* may be, the Bamboo Princes try to remember that they are just obstacles. The Yama Kings are the true enemies of the entire Middle Kingdom. The official *Takeouji* position is that if a Kuei-jin has to decide between taking out a demon or some *dame-sama*, she should go after the demon. Of course, if the eunuch is working for the Yama Kings, she should kill them both.

No one knows how many *Takeouji* pay attention to this rule, since they are more careful about keeping track of the *dame-sama* than they are of themselves. It is easy to see a hated eunuch as being in league with the Yama Kings, and saying an elder is *akuma* offers great justification for putting a double-barreled load of birdshot between his eyes. Though the Bamboo Princes are trying to make the Middle Kingdom a better place, they are only Kuei-jin, and it takes a lot more than good intentions to crawl out of the Thousand Hells.

Nevertheless, the Bamboo Princes consider all demons their enemies and fight them with any resources they have. They fight the *akuma* even if it forces their work at reforming Kuei-jin society to the back burner. After all, it would be one hell of a fuck-up if they defeat the eunuchs only to turn the place over to the demons.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

The Bamboo Princes are a revolutionary organization that seeks to bring immortal society in line with the Middle Kingdom of the 20th — soon to be the 21st — century. What that means is that the powers that be, the courts, do not like them at all. Like any group fighting against a stronger enemy, the *Takeouji* must shape their procedures and tactics to the twin goals of working against their foes and not being destroyed in the process.

Despite the fears of the *dame-sama* who take them seriously, the *Takeouji* do not have any secret leaders. Even Maoxian Mao, the most visible of them, is more a guide than a general. This helps the Bamboo Princes, because the capture or death of one Kuei-jin cannot cripple the entire organization.

GAIJIN SHEN

The Middle Kingdom does not have a monopoly on *hengeyokai* or *hsien* — or demons. Sadly, the Bamboo Princes find their behavior and codes of honor to be even more alien than the Kin-jin's. They have learned that many Western *hengeyokai* are at war with the Kin-jin, but they do not know why. Worse, some of the *gaijin hengyokai* are too stupid to distinguish between Kin-jin and Kuei-jin. Many *Takeouji* would love to try to build an alliance with these creatures, but none know how to approach them safely.

On the other hand, even with their interconnectivity, they have no single vision or big plan for how to bring Kuei-jin society into the present. The general feeling is that what they've got isn't working, but no one has yet put forth a coherent plan for what they can replace it with.

THE BELL OF ZHI BO

Back in the Fourth Age, a general named Zhi Bo wanted to invade the mountain kingdom of Yao but needed a road constructed into it to get his army in. He ordered his blacksmiths to construct a huge bell, which he then left at the side of a road near Yao's border. While on patrol, the King of Yao discovered the bell and decided to take it back. Over the objections of his advisors, he ordered a road constructed to bring the bell back to his kingdom. Nine days after the king brought the bell back, Zhi Bo led his army up the road and destroyed Yao.

Whenever possible, the *Takeouji* try to get the *dame-sama* to do their work for them. If there are *akuma* in the city, it is easier and safer to arrange for the courts to learn about them and destroy them than to take on the task themselves. This not only handles the problem, but it keeps the eunuchs occupied. Sometimes this plan backfires and the Bamboo Princes are assigned by the court to handle the situation, but such are the ways of joss.

There are also certain situations that the *Takeouji* just do not trust the elders to handle properly. No *ichimi* is likely to get the local Bishamon to handle nuclear waste dumping — the elders would just make a bigger mess of it. They might, however, arrange for the elders to learn who was causing the local Chi to be tainted while they dealt with the actual waste.

Even without real leadership, they have learned that some things work and others don't. Tricks and tactics that work are relayed by fax, through the Internet and even by word of mouth across the Middle Kingdom, along with intelligence on what The Man is up to. Deciding what to do and how to do it is a process reserved for where the action is.

ZUBOSHI, SHIFUKU AND HEIMIN

Shu kept his features calm as Maoxian Mao strode into the hall. He wished he dared to watch the elders, to study their shock and loathing as she walked calmly up to them, but he could not. For now, he was the "loyal disciple Shu, Undersecretary to the Minister of the North." It would be most inauspicious, as they would say, if they were to discover where his true allegiance lay.

There are three types of Bamboo Princes: *zuboshi*, *shifuku*, and *heimin*. *Zuboshi* are Kuei-jin who publicly declare that they are *Takeouji*. *Shifuku* are closet Bamboo Princes; they pretend to work for the courts. Those *heimin* who work with the Bamboo Princes exist outside court society, but do not publicize their true allegiance. There are also *she*, snakes, but those are not really Bamboo Princes.

Since it is unhealthy to be a known *Takeouji*, there are not that many well-known, publicly acknowledged Bamboo Princes. Maoxian Mao and Aung Sint are the most famous these days,

but there are others. They call themselves *zuboshi*, Japanese for "bull's-eye," since they are effectively walking targets. Some, mostly Resplendent Cranes, have chosen this path out of dedication to their Dharma and a need to publicly stand for what they believe is right. Others wake one night to discover that their life has taken an interesting turn: The courts have discovered their true allegiance. Some truly worthy *zuboshi* have arisen from their accidental incrimination, but most Bamboo Princes are not ready for that degree of fame and try to set up a new identity in another place or flee and take up the unlife of the *heimin*. In those cases where an unwilling *zuboshi* must flee, the *Takeouji* do their best to fit him in with another ring, far enough away that he will not be recognized.

Being a public symbol of the Bamboo Princes is trying as well as difficult. Many Kuei-jin see the *zuboshi* as the leaders of the Bamboo Princes, and willing *zuboshi* work to inspire all Kuei-jin with their dedication to the welfare of the Middle Kingdom. Nor can they allow any suspicion of affiliation with the Yama Kings, for that would reflect poorly on the *Takeouji* as a whole. Since *zuboshi* are usually under the scrutiny of the *dame-sama*, it is hard to imagine that they would have any time alone to betray the Middle Kingdom. It also means that they need to be incredibly discrete in their dealings with the *shifuku* or risk blowing their allies' covers — and the *shifuku* are the true force of the revolution.

Most *Takeouji* work within the courts with their secret loyalty well hidden. Sometimes such *shifuku*, or plain-clothes men, are subtly able to sway the courts toward more progressive behavior or at least sabotage their more *baka* plans. It is challenging, because even if the *dame-sama* are trapped in the past, they have had centuries to hone their craftiness. Sometimes the *shifuku's* best defense is to feign clumsiness or ignorance when they are caught doing something they shouldn't — or to say that some other elder told them to do it. The complexity of politics within the courts means that there is almost always a good scapegoat, some distrusted *jina* or ambitious mandarin, and *shifuku* of a court share observations regularly so they can present the most plausible explanations when they have to. Then again, the best plan is not to be suspected in the first place.

Rings of *shifuku*, called *ichimi*, meet from time to time in semi-public places, like yakitori, night clubs and parks that the elders do not frequent to share observations and news, make plans and prepare for missions. Some Kuei-jin like to have their in-court *wu* consist of the same people as in their *ichimi*, finding it easier to associate with those they know they can trust. This also means that it is not suspicious if they are seen regularly associating with their *Takeouji* comrades. Other *ichimi* prefer to spread their members across different *wu*, spreading their range of influence, but also increasing the risk of discovery. In most cases the *wu* are created by the court, so the Running Monkeys must make do with what they are given. This occasionally means that part of a *wu* is working for The Revolution while the other part is loyal to the *dame-sama* — a total pain in the ass for the Bamboo Princes.

Takeouji keep in touch, both on a local scale and across the Middle Kingdom, but *shifuku* and *ichimi* have got to be ready and willing to take matters into their own hands. There is no higher force on which they can call. *Ichimi* try to keep their

nearby comrades up to date on their actions, but they still sometimes get in each others' ways. When they do *Takeouji* business, *shifuku* tend to use *noms de guerre*, drawn from manga or whatever. Some *ichimi* even share these roles, allowing the different people who take on the aliases to make it harder for the elders to discern what is going on. It is safer to have the *dame-sama* hunting Kei and Yuri, those two outlandish Bamboo Princesses, than looking for three Kuei-jin who only show up when Mai, Yuki and Haruko are out of town. Sometimes an *ichimi* calls in non-local *Takeouji*, usually *heimin*, to take on their *noms de guerre* so that all the local *shifuku* can have public alibis.

There are a fair number of Kuei-jin who live outside the court system but are not publicly associated with the Bamboo Princes. While they do not have the access to the *dame-sama*'s secrets that the *shifuku* have, they are not as carefully watched as the *zuboshi*. In olden days — the '70s and '80s — these *heimin* were the *Takeouji*'s main couriers and messengers. Nowadays, they only perform that function when encrypted e-mail or cell phones are nonviable. Some *heimin* are members of *ichimi* who, for some reason, cannot deal with court life on a night-to-night basis. Working with such Kuei-jin must be done discretely. The *dame-sama* distrust those who do not fit into the world of the courts, nor do they trust those who associate with them. Other *heimin* are strict loners who only interact with other Bamboo Princes in times of emergency.

Some *heimin Takeouji* in Japan created *kumiai*, associations, that perform specialized services. Membership in these associations is very difficult to obtain; very few Kuei-jin — even those who use their services — know they exist. Each *kumiai* has secret gestures and rituals to allow members to identify each other and members of the other *kumiai*. Nevertheless, like most *heimin*, they are solitary by nature. In most cases, a promising *heimin* is approached and inducted in a sort of apprenticeship. Tradition has it that the apprentice serves under three separate *kumiai* members before being told the secrets of who and what she has been working with. Otherwise, the associations try to stick to the background, quietly doing what they must.

The most famous is the *Kabuki Kumiai*, which specializes in impersonating local Bamboo Princes, usually so they can establish alibis when something big goes down. The *Kabuki Kumiai* is the only association that is not solitary by nature. Members of the *Kabuki Kumiai* rarely use *shintai* in their impersonations, preferring the subtlety of conventional make-up, misdirection and acting to the spiritual dedication required to alter their appearance. The *Kabuki Kumiai* also use the Rite of the Gracious Courier, a subtle, secret rite that lets others be aware of the presence of the Kuei-jin, while discouraging them from interacting with him. Other *kumiai* include the *Kyuushi Kumiai*, which carries items to places the *Takeouji* do not want FedEx visiting, and the *Mokugekisha Kumiai*, which spies on agents of the Yama Kings. There are always rumors of an assassins' *kumiai*, but no one has ever proved that it actually exists.

THE ICHIMI

A well-prepared *ichimi* has at least two safe houses, each with a stash of weapons and tools. Safe houses can be apartments, boats on the harbor, forgotten rooms off of subway

tunnels or whatever else is available, but they have to be large enough for the *ichimi* to meet and plan in. An *ichimi* should also have secure communication with other *ichimi* of the area, preferably electronic as well as in person. Most control a useful Scarlet Screen or two, but some just have a handful of contacts and friends. Finally, an *ichimi* should have a well-thought-out escape plan, usually to the territory of another court, should something go wrong.

The Bamboo Princes do not have the time and the resources to make sure that each *ichimi* has a member representing each of the five directions, but they try to make sure that among the members someone has some expertise in guns, languages, mysticism and electronics. They have to balance the need for self-sufficiency with the need for security. Large *ichimi* are too bulky for this sort of revolutionary work. Three- to six-member *ichimi* seem to work best; if there is need for a larger group for a particular mission, two or more *ichimi* can team up.

In general, each *ichimi* has its own *shima*, turf, in which it operates, but they are not that particular. *Shima* can overlap in dense areas as long as no one minds. In places where there are got a lot of *ichimi*, like Tokyo or Singapore, certain groups specialize in certain areas. One *ichimi* specializes in recruitment another covers surveillance, demolitions, legal matters or whatever else needs doing. Out in the country, though, there may only be a couple of Bamboo Princes covering hundreds of square kilometers. The *Takeouji* must work with what they have.

NEW BLOOD

Recruitment is a dangerous game for the *Takeouji*. They have plenty of cunning enemies, so they have to be careful with who they bring on board. A new Kuei-jin is only brought in after a respected Bamboo Prince has vouched for her and someone trustworthy has performed a complete background check on her. It takes a while, but it is better to be cautious than dead.

Every year or so, some *jina* decides to pretend to be a disciple or dupes some *yotarou* into trying to infiltrate the Bamboo Princes. This used to be pretty easy, and the *Takeouji* suffered a lot of setbacks early on. Since they started setting up databases, they have been able to foil this sort of thing more easily; they can now link the missing mandarin in Macau with the new guy in Nanking. Of course, most *jina* have no grasp of modern culture, so they are pretty easy to catch. It is the newly dead pawns, those Kuei-jin who have just taken their Second Breath and who believe the *dame-sama*'s story that give the Bamboo Princes the most trouble.

If the Bamboo Princes do not think a Running Monkey is on the level, or just do not know him well enough, he does not get the full welcome party. They call such Kuei-jin *she*, snakes, and keep them isolated. Every Bamboo Prince in the area is warned about the *she*, and information is sent to the Deita-Maebure. One of the *ichimi*'s more devious *Takeouji* takes the role of the *she*'s contact. She gives the *she* occasional assignments and "secret" information. If the assignments get completed to the best of the *she*'s ability and the information stays confidential, the *she* sometimes gets accepted as a full member. If the secret information ends up in the hands of the *dame-sama*, everyone gets warned that the *she* is just a pawn, and the

contact starts using him as a tool, feeding him information and disinformation designed to manipulate his masters into doing what the Bamboo Princes want.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The *Takeouji* are strongest in the places with the most Western influence. Living by medieval rules makes less sense to people who study the latest theories in macroeconomics or watch *Baywatch*. Right now they are pretty well placed in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Japan, and they are doing all right in big cities like Hong Kong, Bangkok, Shanghai and Manila. The countryside is a different story, though, as are Laos and North Korea. The *Takeouji* have a few sympathizers in the rural areas, but for now, the *dame-sama* are in charge.

Many people confuse the *Takeouji* with Clan Genji in Japan, but it is not that simple. There are plenty of Genji who think that Kuei-jin should avail themselves of modern conveniences but keep the social structures of the Tokugawa shogunate. The Running Monkeys claim that the two do not mix. Clan Bishamon still causes the Bamboo Princes some troubles, and they are touchy enough that they could start another Black Kites purge. Still, there are several well placed *shifuku* among the ranks of the Bishamon who should be able to sound the alarm if they go on the warpath again. The main missions of the *Takeouji* in Japan are to weaken the Bishamon and make sure the Genji do not just turn into shoguns with computers. Japan has come to be the fulcrum of the *Takeouji*'s plans because it is still the most technologically advanced country in the Middle Kingdom. It also helps that it is small enough for a few *ichimi* to bring about real results. The Bamboo Princes have their work cut out here, though. Not only are the Bishamon very strong and well connected with the mortal powers, but the Chi is dying. They know that some of the *dame-sama* have woken up and are trying to fix the damage done by the Burnings, but their ancient books and proverbs do not say anything about how to fight this, and the Bishamon just are not interested in learning new things.

It is doubtful that there is a single Bamboo Prince in North Korea, even along the Parallel Path, but they have a bigger presence in the Green Courts than anyone suspects.

Singapore is still really progressive, at least technologically. But the Quincunx and Bishamon pretty much ignore it. Its power is too recent. The *Takeouji* have been active there since Lee Kuan Yew took over. It is still one of their strongest bases, but something has gone wrong recently. Kuei-jin, Bamboo Princes to be specific, have been disappearing over the past couple of years. It is as if someone decided to wipe the Bamboo Princes out in Singapore. At present, the courts do not realize that the missing Gui Ren were all *Takeouji*, but the Bamboo Princes fear that could change, resulting in more intense monitoring of the local Kuei-jin community. Though they still have a large power base and over a dozen *shifuku*, the *Takeouji* of Singapore are getting paranoid. The only clues anyone has are the tiny broken rings of white jade that have been found in the dwellings of the missing Kuei-jin. Unfortunately, no one has any idea what this means.

In cities such as Bangkok, Manila and Taiwan, the Bamboo Princes fit right in. After all, these are cosmopolitan cities, where innovation is a way of life. Even Shanghai, with its



Nippon-phobic, ancestorless Flesh Court, needs Kuei-jin who can get things done efficiently, outside the normal channels. The main drive of the *Takeouji* in these cities is "business oriented." They help other Kuei-jin do their business, showing them by example that things work better when they are willing to use a little innovation. Shanghai's Ministry of the Scarlet Vessel is a particularly sore spot — it presents the façade of innovation and efficiency in its most heinous form. Anyone who wants to win admiration among the Bamboo Princes could do so by finding a way to remove this monstrosity or prove that the Ministry is in the service of the Yama Kings.

These are just their home bases, though. The truth of the matter is that the Bamboo Princes can be anywhere there is an airport — or, if push comes to shove, anywhere a helicopter can land. And, through their contacts or through their money, they can make things happen anywhere a phone call can reach, even if they cannot get there themselves.

THE SECRET MASTERS OF THE BAMBOO PRINCES

Goodness shouts. Evil whispers.

— Traditional Balinese Proverb

Goodness speaks in a whisper, evil shouts.

— Traditional Tibetan proverb

The greatest strength of the Bamboo Princes is also their greatest weakness: They are making this all up as they go along.

All *Takeouji* know that they are working to make the Middle Kingdom a better place. They know it involves change. They know that the *dame-sama* are not doing the job right. They almost know what not to do. They are just not so sure of what they *should* do.

The Bamboo Princes are a revolution divided, held together more by pressure from the outside than by agreement within. Some Princes believe that they just need to unify the traditions of the Middle Kingdom and everything will fall into place in some new Shambala. Most Running Monkeys consider that view to be pathetically naïve. Others see wisdom in the mechanized, utilitarian humanism of the West. Most *Takeouji* fall somewhere between the two and try to imagine a way of synthesizing Western innovation with Asian spirituality. Many Running Monkeys have passed their early mornings discussing what to do with Kuei-jin society should the Princes finally oust the *dame-sama*, fully realizing how far off even that goal is.

On a more practical matter, as the Sixth Age approaches, many *Takeouji* are pressing for a more active stance, arguing that hiding in the courts is not working fast enough. They call for direct confrontation and the coordinated seizure of key dragon nests across the Middle Kingdom. They could be right. It might be too late for caution. On the other hand, the Bamboo Princes are nowhere near as strong as the courts, and such an action could easily result in the utter destruction of all of the *Takeouji*, which could ultimately lead to the victory of the Yama Kings. No one's quite ready to risk that yet.

The leadership of the Bamboo Princes is not strong enough to face this challenge either. Even famous *zuboshi* like Maoxian Mao are more spiritual leaders than generals, and Burakumin seems intent on posing more questions than answers. Too

THE PROPHECY OF THE JADE SNAKE

As The Wheel turns the Fifth time and the Dragon rules the seasons, the Jade Snake shall rise from the Bamboo. The Songs of the Metal Star will harmoniously defeat the Kings of Dead Jade. The Auspicious Wind from the East will breath upon the Middle World and the Blood of Midwight will be lost.

often, a *zuboshi* will appear and declaim what he sees as the solution to all the Middle Kingdom's woes, only to have his ideas torn apart in a brief, clever rebuttal by the Herald of the Revolution. Recently, *Takeouji* have begun to hear the Prophecy of the Jade Snake, a cryptic passage that many Princes believe might contain omens of their future. The origin of the Prophecy of the Jade Snake is completely unknown, so many Kuei-jin discount it as apocryphal. But others see it as a symbol of hope in a world where the Sixth Age is just around the corner.

THE LOYAL OPPOSITION

On the surface, things appear smooth and serene and it is only those who are familiar with states ruled by inefficient dictatorial regimes who are able to see what is really going on.

— Aung San Suu Kyi, *Letters from Burma*

Everyone agrees it is good to know one's enemy, and the *Takeouji* have made an art form of it. Some of them like to debate whether classical Asian and European thought processes are fundamentally different, but they agree that the traditional Asian paradigm — that of their ancestors and the older Kuei-jin — has different priorities and foci than their current one. After all, if it were the same, there would not be any Bamboo Princes.

The first thing a Bamboo Prince has to realize is that people are different. Kuei-jin are different. Even mandarins who have undergone centuries of conformity-encouraging socialization are different. If a certain mandarin seems to act differently from her cohorts, take those differences into account.

ANCIENT WISDOM, ANCIENT NEUROSES

Most Kuei-jin of jina rank or higher have grown up with a strong Confucian element in their environment. This includes trappings such as reverence for ancestors and tradition, strong ideas of virtue and discipline and a veneration of classical learning. These values have been worked into the minds of most Kuei-jin to the point where they experience extreme cognitive dissonance when they encounter situations that require innovation or newer strategies. That is to say, they get freaked out when they have to try to think like a modern person.

Among mortals, behavior becomes increasingly fixed with age — you cannot teach an old dog new tricks. This is even more pronounced in multi-century-old immortals. *Takeouji* psychologists are not certain whether this is a result of following a set Dharmic path or simply the way Kuei-jin age. In

general, personality traits become more extreme with age. This is true of all Dharmas, even the Rootless Trees, who adopt more extreme personas more rapidly as time passes.

One factor that seems to complicate this process is the P'os. As the Kuei-jin ages, her Demon may grow, either alongside her Hun or independent of it. Certain P'os seem to add a random element to the personality of the Kuei-jin, counteracting, or at least altering, this process. In other cases, the P'os seems to speed it up, limiting the Kuei-jin's Hun's versatility. Though it is difficult, the *Takeouji* try to learn all they can about the elders' Demons.

It is easy for the *Takeouji* to see the ranting of a mandarin demanding proper placement of the screens in a room as a sign that he is not present in the world as it now exists. This is a mistake. Though certain elder Kuei-jin may display childlike traits, Kuei-jin do not seem to experience senility. Instead, as the world changes, they become less comfortable with the new and more fixated on making the old work in situations for which it was simply not designed. This means that a mandarin who is ranting about a breach of etiquette is probably fully aware of her environment and still capable of thinking and recognizing threats. He simply feels that the old social formulae — those he was brought up with and has used for centuries — are those that should be followed. A Bamboo Prince should not underestimate this mandarin's ability to recognize patronizing behavior or obvious ploys.

The Bamboo Princes have learned several methods for using the personality quirks of the *dame-sama* to their advantage. First, elder Kuei-jin are often favorably impressed by "youngsters" who show an appreciation for their ways. While the basics of court etiquette may be mandatory, cultivating an understanding of tea, calligraphy or opera can make a *shifuku* seem closer to the eunuchs. Many elder Kuei-jin add a sense of nostalgia to their fixations with the past, especially since the past is moving further and further away. With a little research, a *Takeouji* should be able to exploit these sentiments, either to increase an elder's appreciation of her or to entice him into some foolish action that lessens the respect others have for him.

FAMILY AFFAIRS

Lien moved deferentially to the side of Magistrate Kwan, knelt by his chair and whispered in his ear, "I bring good tidings, honored and esteemed mandarin. I have located your lost grandson."

Kwan raised his eyes from the scroll on the table. He almost smiled. "Indeed? How is he doing?"

"He is doing well, magistrate. He is in Los Angeles, where he is the president of a small software company."

Kwan furrowed his brow at Lien's words, and she smiled inwardly. Not only did he not know what a software company was, but he did not know what Los Angeles was....

The elders have treated their families pretty well; familial loyalty is a strong component of Confucian ideals. Many eunuchs make a second career out of cultivating their family's power, arranging alliances, disciplining the irresponsible and eliminating enemies. They are accustomed to handling threats in the form of rival clans, brigands and imperial edicts but often have little knowledge of how modern families live and what

their current concerns are. As with almost everything else, this behavior becomes more pronounced and distressing as the immortal gets older. The elder feels that her experience has brought the house to where it is and that her family owes her both loyalty and deference, whereas the family must balance their respect and fear of her with the increasing distance between the *dame-sama* and the world of mortals.

A modern Kuei-jin can take advantage of this in many ways. One obvious technique involves currying favor by offering to help the elder's family out of some trouble which she does not understand. The other side of the equation calls for distracting the elder by targeting her family with a threat that she will not recognize. The latter ploy can also distance the elder from her family, paving the way for future attacks through her family. Remember that there is a good chance that some of the members of the elder's family are getting tired of having an immortal telling them what to do. Also, many of the *dame-sama*'s families have moved overseas, effectively beyond their control, but easily within reach of the Bamboo Princes. One warning though, manipulating an immortal through her family is dangerous. If a Bamboo Prince is discovered, it is a safe bet that the elder will not rest until the transgressor has Faced the Eye of Heaven.

PLAYING THE GAME

One of the oddest elder neuroses involves their becoming so jaded with the Middle Kingdom that they start to see it all as a metaphor or a chess match. They perceive themselves as being too refined to operate in such a vulgar world, so they manipulate others into acting out their designs in an involuntary game of some sort — *xiang-qi* is the most common. Yin-aspected Kuei-jin are the most prone to this abstraction, but even Yang Kuei-jin have demonstrated it from time to time. Of all the Dharmas, Resplendent Cranes adopt this behavior the most frequently; they like it when things follow predictable rules.

When a mandarin or ancestor takes on the role of general in this game, he starts to view Kuei-jin and other *shen* as pieces to move about some board in his mind. Some even go so far as to play against another elder, bringing people into contact and conflict based on their assigned positions in the game. These games are usually years into play before anyone discovers why the court's intrigue has suddenly turned so treacherous, mostly because no one expects such trivia to become a matter of unlife and death.

It is frightening that the eunuchs can be this dangerous when they are only playing, but a Bamboo Prince who knows what to look for might be able to turn such a game to her advantage. First, the elders are rarely subtle about this. They often leave the gameboard out, imagining that their guests could never guess that their lowly position was represented on the board. Another warning sign is when the *dame-sama* mix *xiang-qi* metaphors into their regular speech and seem to view the world as an abstraction. Finding an elder with these traits does not guarantee that he is using the court for his *xiang-qi* game, but it is something that the *Takeouji* have learned to look out for.



A *shifuku* who discovers that she is part of her mandarin's game can take advantage of it in several ways. First, she should study the board whenever she can and try to figure out which piece corresponds to which *shen*. Once she has figured out who at least some of the pieces are, she can start playing her own game. If she sees that two pieces — two *Kuei-jin* — are about to be maneuvered into conflict, she can warn them anonymously of a plan to set them up. Or she could impress the other mandarins with her insight into court politics by forecasting upcoming troubles based on the available moves on the chessboard. As with all such ploys against the *dame-sama*, the *Takeouji* need to be careful, this type of elder can take his games very seriously — seriously enough to become murderous when a mere Running Monkey messes up his nice, orderly game.

OLD AGE AND TREACHERY

The reverse side also has a reverse side.

— Traditional Japanese Proverb

Though the Bamboo Princes are painfully aware of their shortcomings, their adversaries are not so clear. Nor is there a unified understanding of what these rebels represent. Many elder Cathayans have no grasp of how pervasive the *Takeouji* have become. They see them as another collection of Running Monkeys who will eventually come around to the right way of thinking after they have passed a few decades among the *shen*. Some bodhisattvas and ancestors even seem sympathetic to the cause. Other court *Kuei-jin* see this rebellion as another secret society under the control of the Yama Kings. The Quincunx

Enraged Minister,

I believe I am getting closer to the perfidious Bamboo Prince who most certainly infects Tokyo. I have been grooming Inoue Kenichi, one of my disciples, to be accepted by these revolutionaries as one of their own. Recently, he has been contacted by a Kuei-jin who goes by the name Inazumi. He was told that he would be presented with an opportunity to prove his loyalty and by granted eventual entry into the ranks of the Bamboo Prince.

I have advised him to report all that he learns to me but to act out his assigned role, in order to better gain the confidence of these traitors to the Great Principle.

Your grateful servant,

Omori Hideo

and House Bishamon present the most serious Cathayan threat to the Bamboo Princes. They have made no secret of their distrust and loathing of these young, uncultured upstarts. After all, the notion that any route other than obedience and discipline could stop the Yama Kings is positively heretical.

While the Bamboo Princes have youthful enthusiasm and a better understanding of the mortal world, the so-called *dame-sama* have a better understanding of the mystic lay of the land, far more experience and personal power that can outstrip a mechanized infantry squad. For now, the conflict has been kept on a subtle, almost civilized level. If the *Takeouji* take their revolution to the streets or the courts decide that they must be eradicated once and for all, the Middle Kingdom may well see a war worthy of the Third Age.

COUNTERINTELLIGENCE

In some cases, the courts recognize certain *shifuku* Bamboo Princes for what they are. After all, these immortals have been playing at court intrigue for a long time — a game that does not favor the unobservant. In a few cases, they destroy the traitor outright, but often, they keep their awareness of the *Takeouji*'s allegiance secret and happily feed the *shifuku* disinformation of their own. Mandarins and jina may also secretly use advanced powers of Obligation to enslave *shifuku* or to implant suggestions that undermine the camaraderie of the *shifuku*'s *ichimi* or to maneuver the *Takeouji* against other enemies that they consider more serious.

Another trick elders use is the deployment of spiritual spies. Bamboo Princes are still fairly naïve about the denizens of the Yin Realm and the Yang Realm and do not always notice the mosquito spirit that has been trailing them. The drawback to this technique is that Bamboo Princes conduct most of their secret business in areas where the Wall is high enough to interfere with such spying. This may be inconvenient, but even so, the eunuchs are usually able to glean some information, such as where the suspect went and whom they met there. In time, a *dame-sama* with centuries of experience at intrigue and subterfuge can build up a startlingly accurate picture of the local *Takeouji* — if she bothers to take the matter seriously.

Finally, even if the elders themselves do not understand modern technology, they are quite capable of hiring specialists who do and sending them after suspected Bamboo Princes. In these cases, they often like their mortal families to handle the matter, since they realize that many local security firms could secretly be Scarlet Screens for their targets.

THE DRAGON AND THE FLEA

In cases where an elder and a Bamboo Prince come into direct conflict, the elder almost always tries to move the battle to an area where the Wall is particularly low, seeking to employ whatever mystic allies he has. If the Bamboo Prince allows herself to be lured into such a fight, her destruction is nearly assured, as the elder almost certainly has more Chi, more potent Disciplines and more experience fighting Kuei-jin. The Bamboo Prince is unlikely to have mastered a Discipline above

the third rank, but a mandarin with only a couple of rank five Disciplines can use Chi twice as quickly as she. In an area where the Wall is low, the mandarin's power stands an excellent chance of overwhelming any technological tricks the Running Monkey can use.

Some elders try to extend this advantage even further by drawing the conflict into the spirit world. Once there, not only do they have access to those spiritual allies they have cultivated over the centuries, their enemy will almost certainly be disoriented by the change in terrain. Few *Takeouji* have a real understanding of the Yin World and the Yang World. Some elders take use this opportunity to repay the spirits who aid them, sacrificing their opponent to the spirits after the battle is won. This heinous act utterly destroys the Kuei-jin in question. The performance of such an act is enough to have one declared *akuma*. Nevertheless, many elders do not consider Kuei-jin to be real people until they have reached jina status.

UNSPEAKABLE WEAKNESS

Pravat was thrown against the rough stone wall of the ancient wat by the power of the Minister of the Moon's blow. Before he could get to his feet, his assailant raised Pravat up by his neck and he saw his shadow fall across the ancient stones. He could not force air through his throat, so he made his lips shape the word: "Why!"

The Minister of the Moon peered into Pravat's eyes as he drew his ceremonial knife from its sheath. "Decha heard you speaking with the Japanese. He did not like the words 'hostile takeover.'"

Hostile takeover? They had been talking about the American company Pravat's sister worked for. There were going to be layoffs soon. Pravat struggled to get the words out, to explain the truth before the Minister of the Moon removed his head.

But even though the mandarins and ancestors have power and experience far beyond that of the Bamboo Princes, they have some serious flaws as well. In many cases, the Kuei-jin of the courts have no idea what the Bamboo Princes are doing. They may spy upon a *shifuku* and her associates only to hear them discuss leveraged buyouts, biotechnology and Internet service providers, none of which mean anything to the elders. They know that the *shifuku* is up to something, but they do not know what. This communication barrier increases the unease elders feel about Running Monkeys, sometimes to the point where they strike out against them even when the young Kuei-jin are not actually planning anything beyond their old mortal concerns.

Another weakness on the courts' part is that they are as fragmented as the Bamboo Princes. Mandarins and ancestors are often more interested in their own position within the court than continuing the mission of the Grand Arhat. A mandarin who discovers a *shifuku* is more likely to use that knowledge to maneuver the young Cathayan against one of her rivals than simply to destroy her outright. This can buy the Running Monkey some time, but it can also add to his list of enemies. If the *Takeouji* is clever or fortunate, he may discover how and why he is being used and try to devise some strategy to take advantage of the situation, or at least to minimize the damage.

Of course, there is always the fact that in many ways the Bamboo Princes are correct. The courts no longer seem adequate to the task of combating, much less defeating, the Yama Kings. Some *dame-sama* suspect that it might be time to listen to the young Kuei-jin, since they understand today's Middle

Kingdom — but before that notion can get too far, the P'o is more than willing to nudge or bludgeon the errant Kuei-jin back onto the path of tradition.





CHAPTER FOUR: SCARLET SCREENS

Under a powerful general there are no feeble soldiers.
— Traditional Japanese Proverb

Under the eye of the sun, Zizhong, General of the Third Army of Heaven, stood on the balcony of his palace and looked at the army assembled below. All wore the ebony and scarlet colors of his house, and the sun gleamed off the polished blades of their halberds. He nodded firmly to his lieutenants, and at their cry, the drums pounded forth the order to begin the march to the west. Zizhong's heart swelled with pride as he watched the Third Army of Heaven leave for battle. Tomorrow, the blood of demons would stain the plains of Xiajiu.

As he departed for his chariot, Zizhong's sole regret was that his duty to the August Personage of Jade should force him to leave his beautiful consort once again. But Ai-ling was but a mortal, and battle beside a Wan Xian was not her lot in life.

The roots of the practice of maintaining Scarlet Screens — organizations of mortals under the orders of a Kuei-jin — dates back to the time before Kuei-jin themselves existed as such. The prototypical Scarlet Screens were the families, tribesmen or villagers of the Wan Xian. Such mortals recognized the righteous power — and the potential safety — of serving one of the protectors of the Middle Kingdom and willingly (more or less) adhered to such entities' service. As the Third Age progressed, Wan Xian learned to select and keep mortals to serve them in a variety of roles: as ministers and consorts, as treasurers and scribes and, of course, as warriors to handle those minor annoyances that did not call for an immortal's personal intervention. At the height of the Third

Age, the Wan Xian chose only the boldest, most noble, wisest and most beautiful mortals for their court, but such times did not last. As the Wan Xian descended from their lofty state, so too did the quality of their followers. After the August Personage of Jade's interdict, Kuei-jin valued mortal servants all the more, not only for their talents and skills, but because even foot soldiers could defeat a bakemono, if there were enough of them. The vampires also realized that even if their mortal allies could serve in no other way, they could be a source of Chi.

As time passed, Kuei-jin continued to use mortal servants, but in ways that reflected the changes in the Middle Kingdom and the role of the Gui Ren. Ministers became advisors, treasurers became accountants and soldiers stayed soldiers.

THE ORIGIN OF THE NAME

It was at the end of the Fourth Age that the term Scarlet Screen came into common usage, popularized by Kumamoto Midori, the Rootless Tree poet, with her immortal line, *As scarlet screens that shield our boudoir from the eyes of careless devils*. When a callow Running Monkey asked her the source of her words, she brought him to a room in her estate where the mummified bodies of three of her soldiers lay, slain while defending their mistress.

Some Kuei-jin cultivated families of merchants to augment their monetary resources, eventually taking an interest in many different fields of commerce. In the modern Middle Kingdom, it is doubtful that there is a single industry, trade or sector of commerce that has not at one time or another had a Scarlet Screen active in its endeavors.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

Chu Han-wu paused to stroke his hand along the trunk one of the large stone elephants that lined the way and smiled. Nanjing had always had a peculiar sense of humor — there was something of the fox here. But he had business to transact, and the memories of his breathing years were not a part of that business. He turned and walked to the pagoda — the strange one that had been designed by a gweilo — and gave a small bow to the leader of the men there.

The man bowed back, more deeply. "We have news for you, Mr. Chu, news from Japan."

"Speak." Chu wondered if this would be the information that finally led to the expulsion of the cursed gaki. It almost certainly was not, but any news from those hideous islands had to help.

There are many reasons for Kuei-jin to keep such fragile creatures as mortals in their employ. Kin-jin and some younger Cathayans commonly assume that the primary explanation is that there are some places and times where a Kuei-jin cannot venture. This is incorrect. The real reason is that it is proper for immortals to have mortals as servants. Warriors have always been served by the peasants they protected, and the relationship between the Wan Kuei and their Scarlet Screens is much the same. Kuei-jin know that the masses of humanity have always provided for, advised and even fought for their leaders. This has always been the way of the Middle Kingdom, and it always shall be.

In many ways, Scarlet Screens help to perpetuate this natural order. The knowledge that the Dancing Lightnings are more than just another street gang — that they are chosen warriors of Nguyet, the Beaucous Hag of the Forgotten Temple — remind everyone who the true kings of the night are. They keep the presence of vampires from seeming too distant, without allowing familiarity to breed contempt.

Beyond the matter of propriety, no Gui Ren would disagree that Scarlet Screens are convenient as well. There are times when a vampire wishes to conserve her Chi. There are places that are warded from all manner of *shen* but not mortals. There are people who will not listen to a Kuei-jin but will listen to a still-living emissary. And of course, there are times when it is useful to have a dozen angry punks with guns and nunchakus running through the streets at your behest.

DOGS OF WAR

Bakemono swarmed like cicadas across the fields of the peasants, but Myint-san had no time for the likes of them. Their akuma master waited within the shell-cratered ruins, and Myint-san knew by the stars that he — it — would be attempting the Ritual of the Defiled Lotus. She raised her voice in the harsh cry of one of the many birds, and the shouts of her warriors answered from the surrounding forest. With guns and machetes, they leapt from the foliage and rushed the demonspawn, leaving the penangallan free to deal with the true monster hidden among the crumbling statues of honest demons.

Though the fine points of Scarlet Screen deployment have changed through the millennia, certain general distinctions remain. According to the later works of Anuman Chah, there were four broad categories of Scarlet Screens, and prudent Kuei-jin would take care to employ them appropriately. According to Anuman Chah, the four categories were: Family, Soldiers and Support, Spies and Merchants and Artisans and Peasants. However, Chah acknowledged that a Scarlet Screen of one class might, in cases of dire need, fulfill the function of one of the other classes.

FAMILY

Many Kuei-jin still hold the original Scarlet Screens as by far the most important. In some cases, this is because they feel that they hold more complete control over mortals bound to them by blood. In other cases, the Wan Kuei look upon their families as links to their living origins or as necessary to their quest for Dharmic evolution. Regardless of their philosophical reasons for clinging to their families, many Cathayans have taken the time to direct their mortal lines into the form they desire or need over the generations. After all, if you cannot trust blood, who can you trust? Thus, Kuei-jin can count on their families to fulfill many roles better than specialists of less known lineage.

Many Kuei-jin are overly protective of their familial Scarlet Screens, refusing to risk them in any but the most critical of twilight wars. Other Kuei-jin consider their family their best troops, and see that they are active in all wars that erupt, midnight or twilight, in order to ensure that they do not lose their edge.

THE MIURA OF KYOTO

In the 450 years — 23 generations — since Seiji Miura took his Second Breath, he has precisely, painstakingly sculpted his family tree like a fine bonsai. Arranging a marriage here, chilling an undesirable romance there — not to mention causing the occasional "accidental" death of a less promising child — the Grand Minister of the Laws of Heaven of Kyoto's diminished Genji Court has made the Miura family into the most respected crafter of kimonos on the island of Honshu. In fact, it was his association with the famed artisans that spared his unlife in the Black Kites purge. Seiji gains no small amount of prestige thanks to the elegant kimonos he offers as gifts to various prominent Kuei-jin. He also gains quite a bit of information from the gossip of the politicians, socialites and businessmen who chat while being measured and fitted.

Less well-known is the side-clan Miura started with his great-granddaughter — the Tomori — one of the more discrete, but efficient Yakuza families in Kyoto. Seiji is almost as proud of this line's achievements as he is of the Miuras'.

SOLDIERS

At the sound of gunfire, Jae-bong ducked and ran past the stairs to the temple. Someone was after last night's guests, and while Jae-bong had no love for the foreign *doltaegari*, a contract was a contract. Until they had moved to the next town, their safety was his concern. He made his way up from the burial ground — it was always good to keep these fights away from where they would disturb the ancestors — and zigzagged between the trees. Up ahead, he could make out the bright Yang energy of his men, exactly where he had told them to wait. Jae-bong had not been certain he could deal with whatever was chasing the court's client, but he felt sure he could take care of it now that he had 20 men with guns backing him up.

Fighting troops are often the most memorable and most lauded of the Scarlet Screens. In many cases they are also the most transitory. Such troops range from the almost useless gangs recruited off the city streets with empty promises and then cast off on suicide missions to elite units whose training and welfare are carefully orchestrated.

Kuei-jin use the term *usagiumi* to refer to those gangs or squads whom they value for numbers only — not tactical prowess or loyalty. Even other Scarlet Screens recognize these losers as expendable, and few put any effort into developing ties with the *usagiumi*. In fact, it is rare that the vampires even remember the names of these gangs, referring to them with the euphemism "Triumphant Hares" — gangs whose victories come from fleeing combat. Nevertheless, some of the fiercest warriors in the Screens of the Kuei-jin come from the ranks of the *usagiumi*, for it takes a tough, vicious and lucky fighter to survive the suicide missions the Gui Ren send these unfortunates on. It is also rumored that not a few Kuei-jin have arisen after meeting their first death on just such a quest. But such ignominious origins are hardly appropriate fare for polite conversation, so such revelations are usually saved for the most potentially damaging moments.

Above the Triumphant Hares are the *sarugumi*, monkey gangs, also called *inugumi*, dog gangs. These are troops a Kuei-jin can expect not to faint at the sight of a *bakemono* or flee at the first sounds of gunfire. Most Kuei-jin remember the names of their *sarugumi* and may even recognize the leader of a given gang. The survivors of decimated *usagiumi* are often incorporated into *sarugumi* as reward for their courage and loyalty.

At the top of the heap are the *ryogumi*, dragon troops, elite squads and cadres who not only will not faint at the sight of a *bakemono*, but stand a good chance of removing one from the field of combat without taking too many casualties. Each *ryogumi* is different, shaped by their personal history and the needs of their master. Some were recruited from special operations units, others hail from the few clans that still train their youths in the ways of *shinobijutsu*, while still others are composed of those hardened in the crucible of the streets. One may find the odd *gwailo* serving in the *ryogumi*, but as a rule, even the most modern Kuei-jin are leery of adding such foreign interlopers to their Scarlet Screens.

KHUC NGUYET'S DANCING LIGHTNINGS

Born from the mixture of harsh Viet Cong repression and the recent loosening of social and economic reins, the Dancing Lightnings would be just another gang of Triumphant Hares, except for one fact: Their leader, Tu Ngo spent almost a decade as a deep-cover operative for the CIA. Though Tu's name never appeared on any official reports, and he has never been beyond the borders of Vietnam, he received extensive training in espionage and guerilla warfare thanks to one of the Company's many unpublicized contingency plans. Times change, though, and one night, Tu's contact, a Westerner he knew only as Quinn, dropped out of sight. Tu figured either the Viet Cong had caught him or America had abandoned Vietnam once and for all. Rather than worry about it, he turned his band from guerilla to mercenary and went on with the show.

Nguyet knows of Tu's past and is aware that while the Dancing Lightnings may have good leadership, they are not the most disciplined warriors on the planet. She tries to employ them in situations such as ambushes and kidnappings, where a little careful planning can make world of difference, rather than send them into the field for straight combat. In time, Nguyet believes Tu may shape his band into a worthy *inugumi*, possibly even a *ryogumi*, but that time is a long way off.

SUPPORT TROOPS

In the old days, support troops were suppliers of weapons, tools and medicine. They gave the soldiers whatever was needed to keep fighting. Sometimes they kept safe houses and provided creature comforts for the warriors as well — the role of "camp follower" has a long and convoluted history. The modern Kuei-jin is less likely to need a blacksmith and hostler for his troops than a good relationship with a black-market arms dealer, though, and many Cathayans feel that this type of Scarlet Screen is slowly being merged into the others. Nevertheless, there are still some who like their troops to have access to a good mechanic or a brothel where the *baita* are guaranteed not to be spying for the enemy.

SPIES

"Well, Mr. Yao, I think we've been able to dredge up quite a bit on your... business partner. It appears he has been investing heavily in several foreign concerns, concerns affiliated with the della Passaglia family of Bangkok. You've heard of them perhaps?"

Yao had indeed heard of them, and while his consultant brought out facsimiles of documents and other pieces of evidence, Yao tried to imagine what could have moved his honored associate to do business with those graceless Kin-jin.

Though older Kuei-jin bemoan the loss of most of the old ninja clans, the constant need to uncover secret information has meant their replacement with intelligence agencies, detective agencies and information brokers. As this change has occurred, elders have felt more and more at odds with state of the art intelligence gathering and the people involved in it. Many fondly recall the days when you knew the entire lineage



YAMAGUCHI INVESTIGATIONS

One of the more respected investigative outfits in Akihabara, Yamaguchi Investigations specializes in criminal investigation for well-to-do people and businesses who do not believe that the police are properly addressing their needs. They are especially respected for their discrete and efficient handling of blackmail and kidnappings. None of their clients know that Yamaguchi-san is the son of a vampire or that the detective agency moonlights at providing special information for the owner's father. In addition to doing the occasional surveillance run or data mining job for his father, Yamaguchi-san sees that the Kuei-jin is kept up to date on his other projects. One never knows when knowledge of the dirty habits of a businessman's daughter will come in handy, after all.

The relationship is not entirely one-sided, though. Yamaguchi's father has been known to provide mystical assistance on difficult cases. This was common in the early years of Yamaguchi Investigations, but it is only occasionally necessary now. Yamaguchi's father does not provide this help out of any feeling of affection for his dhampyric son, but out of practicality. The more difficult the assignments his son's agency completes, the more prestige it obtains, and the more interesting assignments it receives in the future. It does not hurt that such assistance also keeps Yamaguchi-san aware of how much he owes his father.

of all your spies and knew that they would support you quietly and elegantly for the good name of their clan. Nowadays, they sigh, the detectives and spies are efficient and professional, but their loyalty is ever in question, and their appreciation of the old ways has almost entirely vanished. For this reason, the elder Kuei-jin who does not have the allegiance of one of the few remaining traditional spy clans or a family well versed in the ways of espionage are counting more and more on their Disciplines and allies from across the Wall. Though they do not truly count as Scarlet Screens, several mandarins have managed to strike covenants with the ghost families of the old ninja clans.

On the other hand, Running Monkeys and other young Gui Ren shake their heads at this sort of ossified longing for the past. Modern spooks have access to surveillance techniques beyond the imagination of the ninja, and as long as they are well paid, loyalty is not an issue. While the elders have been moving away from spying Scarlet Screens, the younger ones have been embracing them with a passion, both for their traditional utility and their ability to get the dirt on the *dame-sama* in ways that the elders do not even realize exist.

MERCHANTS

Beads of sweat adorned the high, shiny forehead of the bank's president. Genjo Minase of House Bishamon needed no Soul Arts to determine that the man bore ill tidings. "Minase-san..." the nervous man began, but the Kuei-jin was not listening. He knew that Shimazu-san had somehow compromised the bank's security using his damned Genji trickery and that the contents of his account had

been withdrawn — probably donated to some whimsical charity as well. While the president smiled in embarrassment, Minase prepared himself for Revealing the Heavens and the trial of being gracious in the face of Shimazu's success.

Forever is a long time to be poor. While it is possible for a Kuei-jin to parlay his talents and powers into money, such activities take time and effort — time and effort that many Kuei-jin need to devote to other matters. For this reason, the tradition of keeping mercantile families as Scarlet Screens arose early in the Fourth Age. In addition to being sources of financial power, merchants can be used to get rare or difficult to obtain commodities, like weapons or luxury goods to be used as bribes. Beyond the obviously commercial businesses such as banks, importers, transportation firms, brokers and insurance companies, Kuei-jin classify gambling establishments, nightclubs and sports arenas as falling under the mercantile heading. In many cases, a combat-oriented Scarlet Screen has traditional ties to one or more commerce-oriented Scarlet Screens, possibly as customers, possibly as hired protection.

Though their primary purpose is usually financial (in other words, their mission can be summed up as "make enough money to bankroll all of the other Scarlet Screens"), mercantile Scarlet Screens are sometimes listed in the Precepts of twilight wars as designated targets for the opponent's control or destruction. Many such battles are fought with the intention of ruining or weakening the opposing *xuezhe's* economic power, often as represented by these fronts and businesses.

McNAMARA AND DELANCEY IMPORTS

Despite the thoroughly Western name, M&D Imports has been controlled by Chow Loo since the "accidental" death of its *gweilo* founders in 1955. Though its facilities are limited to a warehouse on the bad side of Kowloon and a handful of boats, this small company does a brisk business smuggling Chinese out of China and weapons back in. Chow is aware of the dangers of this trade and has two *inugami* on payroll to see to the protection of this dirty little business. The gangs get better guns and the smugglers get a little extra muscle; everyone's happy with the arrangement.

In addition to using it as a source of money and weaponry, Chow has utilized M&D Imports to help several important pawns of other Kuei-jin escape to America, including one family member. Chow is very careful when he helps such potentially hazardous cargo escape; if it were discovered that he was behind these disappearances, he knows that he would be in serious trouble. Nevertheless, no one has yet associated the disappearances with Chow's Scarlet Screen, and Chow perversely revels in the inconvenience he has caused by helping mortals achieve their lifelong dreams.

ARTISANS

Fu Han-wu kowtowed as he presented the delicate porcelain urn to the Minister of Pearly Righteousness. "I have heard that you appreciate such items as this and hope that you will find it in your heart to accept this amateurish offering." He knew it was better than

ATORJE NO SHIROIHOSHI

Atorie no Shiroihoshi — Whitestar Studios — is one of the up and coming special effects houses in the Japanese film industry. Specializing in CGI and other advanced effects, Shiroihoshi has done work on a number of music videos, futuristic commercials and occasional over-the-top fight scenes for Japan's smash *Para-Natural Power Knights* TV series. Despite its success, Whitestar's true artistry is only seen in its most lucrative, and secret, projects: the forgery of incriminating films.

Nanami Hasegawa, newly inducted into the Genji, has lead the Shiroihoshi crew to pioneer the art of getting compromising film without the fuss of actually filming the subjects of the video. With only a dozen photographs of their targets, the crew of CGI modelers can easily create an impolitic tryst between a Member of the Diet and an adult video starlet (or another politician's wife or a male prostitute or something truly unsavory should the situation require it). Though the images are not quite video-realistic yet, a little copying and some bad duping hides the imperfections and produces a wonderfully amateurish piece. To date, Hasegawa has only shown a couple of films from her private collection, but each showing has reaped millions of yen and a couple of key votes on bills that have caught her attention.

anything in the minister's collection, but one had to use the right words for these things.

The minister took the urn and examined it cautiously. Fu could see the old bat's greed growing by the second. "It is not without merit," he finally pronounced with a disdainful sniff. "Where did you discover it?"

"It was made by a man from my village — I have been supporting his studio."

"He shows a certain promise. Let me know if he creates anything else of worth." The minister turned to take the urn to his chambers.

Fu kept his forehead pressed to the floor. "As you will it." When the elder had left, he raised his head, but he kept his smile inside. Who would have thought it would be so easy to plant a bug in a minister's chambers?

The unliving citizens of the Middle Kingdom have always had a fine appreciation of beauty and craftsmanship. Those who can create works of art — from calligraphy and pottery to gardening and sword making — have been admired and acclaimed, and those who patronize such talented individuals reap no small amount of prestige as well. Though a single individual may be seen as the creative genius behind a shop or troupe, no single man can craft a magnificent blade or erect a glorious temple without the help of his apprentices and others who prepare the raw materials. Even modern media such as pop music or fashion design require the teamwork of many talented people. While a lone poet does not qualify as a Scarlet Screen, an advertising agency that manages to turn the building next

to a mandarin's favorite garden for meditation into the most popular and noisiest nightclub in the prefecture does.

Artistic Scarlet Screens serve two purposes for the Kuei-jin: They can be used to shape popular sentiment, and they bring prestige to their keeper. It takes a clever and subtle master to use such groups, but the results can be far greater — and far more memorable — than those born of simple violence. A jina who loses face because the police arrested his *ryogami* need only recruit another troop of warriors. A jina whose name has been incorporated into the embarrassing but catchy chorus of a canto-pop tune will still feel the sting years later when introduced to new Kuei-jin who cannot help smiling because they remember the song.

For reasons that he never explained, Anuman Chah classified scholars and temples as belonging to the artistic class of Scarlet Screens. Though it is a rare Cathayan who has a temple of martial monks at her back and call in the Fifth Age, many modern Kuei-jin have invested in research, both scientific and historical, hoping to discover some new weapon to use against the minions of the Yama Kings — or other Kuei-jin.

PEASANTRY

"Do you really believe you can stop Hu's trucks?"

"I do."

"And how will you accomplish this miracle? Your soldiers are all in Nanchang?"

"It is the harvest season for the mortals. The roads will be full of buffalo and peasants — and there is a town north of Pingxiang that he must pass through. And in that town, the buffalo are my buffalo and the peasants are my peasants..."

In the Third Age and much of the Fourth Age, the immortals would sometimes place entire villages under their guardianship. All they asked in return was rice and loyalty. Rice was important because it was necessary for feeding soldiers and as an item of trade throughout the Middle Kingdom. Peasant loyalty was important because it gave the immortal a haven and a source of recruits.

With the turning of the Wheel into the Fifth Age, much of the peasantry of the Middle Kingdom has moved to the cities or been relocated due to the never-ending series of wars that has scarred the land. Nevertheless, the masses remain a source of power for a Kuei-jin willing to invest the effort into making them hers. Older Gui Ren are more likely to avail themselves of this sort of Scarlet Screen, since they are more likely to remember a time when most of the population of the Middle Kingdom was peasantry. In the countryside, a Kuei-jin's village may offer her protection from others *shen*, possibly even a Shih. Additionally, peasants can be a safe source of Chi or recruits. The city's peasantry has similar gifts to offer, but is crammed into a far smaller space, and thus there are additional risks and reduced benefits to relying upon them. In many cases, the peasantry is still close to its ancestors, so a Cathayan who takes good care of her village may find herself with unexpected allies in the Yin World.

Kuei-jin also refer to any political organization of less than national scope that does not obviously fall into one of the other categories as peasantry. Some Gui Ren delight in this arbitrarily demeaning classification and enjoy casually alluding to the political might of their "peasantry."

KEEPING THE SCREEN

The mandarin scrutinized the three mortals who stood before him with a dispassionate curiosity. "Your family has served me loyally for centuries. I do not understand your request."

The nervous brothers looked at each other, seeking assurance where none had any to give. It took a couple of minutes, but the oldest brother finally addressed their family's ancient patron, "Times have changed, Your Eminence. We can no longer afford to devote our lives to maintaining your gardens." After a pause that seemed longer and emptier than it really was, he concluded, "We have decided to go to America."

The mandarin considered this for a moment, acted and then turned to the two surviving brothers. "Your ancestor swore that his descendants would serve until death. I have saved your brother from dishonoring his word. You must now choose which honorable path you will take."

In the old days, mortals would gladly live and fight for the Wan Xian just for the honor of serving the protectors of the Middle Kingdom. But the Middle Kingdom has changed. The Wan Xian are now the Wan Kuei — vampires rather than immortals — and mortals want more than a nice speech about the protection of the Middle Kingdom in exchange for their loyalty.

THE HEART OF THE SERVANT

Moemi eyed the monster intently. It was difficult to tell that the creature was dead, but as she stared, she noticed that it had forgotten to breathe, that its eyes stared back with an almost reptilian calm. It was a monster, but it was more human than that shaggy beast that had torn her sister to pieces on the night of the full moon. Moemi made her decision. "I'll do what you say. I'll get you the records you want, but you have got to help me kill the creature that murdered Akane."

As the Fifth Age draws to a close, mortals and groups of mortals find myriad reasons for doing the will of the Kuei-jin. Some of the reasons are flattering to their Gui Ren keepers, others are almost insulting. Wise Cathayans have learned how to use these different motivations, even if they are not what the vampires would consider ideal.

Some mortals still believe the Kuei-jin are the defenders of the Middle Kingdom, the emissaries of the August Personage of Jade, whose mandated purpose is the salvation of all from the evil of the Yama Kings. Some serve out of a sense of tradition: Their ancestors served the Kuei-jin and they feel they must follow in their path. These are the honorable reasons that the elders appreciate in their Scarlet Screens. Many ancestors and mandarins claim that these are the only honest motives for serving and, indeed, the only motives that allow a Kuei-jin to feel assured of the loyalty of her Scarlet Screen. Younger Kuei-jin may appreciate the idealism of the first reason but often find the blind adherence to tradition of the second reason to be almost offensive — especially since a Running Monkey who has only been among the Wan Kuei for a handful of years has hardly had the opportunity to establish a generations-old tradition of servitude.

Other mortals serve the Gui Ren for more straightforward reasons. Some do it for the money. Some do it because it is more interesting than working in a factory. Some do it because the Cathayan is the biggest badass in the neighborhood and it is better to work for him than against him. Some stumble into

service through circumstance and never bother to leave. Older Kuei-jin consider these motives to be less honorable, but that rarely stops them from taking advantage of mortals who succumb in this fashion. Younger Kuei-jin have less trouble understanding these motivations and, in many cases, identify with them.

Finally, there are those odd people or groups whose motives are unexpected. Every now and then, a warrior will ask to join a Kuei-jin because he desires revenge on some powerful common enemy and sees serving the Kuei-jin as the most likely route to success. Other reasons may be less fathomable. Some Cathayans, particularly *fang shih*, find themselves acquiring servants with no apparent reason for serving. Some have even reported that they sought out the Kuei-jin at the behest of voices in their heads. Most vampires are cautious of such unexpected and unpredictable assistance, but others are desperate — or conceited — enough to accept anybody.

Many younger Kuei-jin believe that controlling the leader of a Scarlet Screen ensures the loyalty of the entire group. Reality is more complicated than that, though. An experienced Gui Ren learns to balance the apparent loyalty of the leader to his keeper with his loyalty to his troops. It does no good to own the heart of a general if his soldiers will not follow his orders, and they will not follow his orders if they do not believe he has their best interests at heart. So in addition to courting the loyalty of the Scarlet Screen's leader, the resourceful Cathayan also ensures that his troops (or workers or apprentices) feel that they are important as well. After all, a Scarlet Screen that does not serve its keeper is a waste of resources and a hindrance to all that the Kuei-jin attempts.

THE WILL OF THE MASTER

Cho stood atop the crate and looked down at his men in the light of the warehouse's single dim bulb. They looked tired and a little frightened, but they were determined to fight to the death. In his own way, Cho loved them for that. He raised his hand dramatically, capturing the attention of both *sarugumi*, and smiled down at them. "Tsao's dogs outnumber us two to one tonight!" He laughed easily. "They will be here in less than an hour, and do you know what will happen?" He laughed confidently. "They will die. They will die and we will be victorious, because I will not let you be defeated and because you will not let me down!" Cho laughed again at the thought of the destruction of Tsao's forces, and as he laughed, the men who served him joined in his laughter.

Regardless of the type of Scarlet Screen employed, different Kuei-jin have different styles of leadership. Though individual nature is certainly a factor, Kuei-jin scholars like to attribute the different styles to different Dharmas and directions.

General consensus agrees that east-aspected Kuei-jin are the most proficient at keeping Scarlet Screens, for they are the most connected to the pulse of mortal existence. Northern Kuei-jin can keep Scarlet Screens that thrive on discipline and regimentation, such as warriors and peasantry. South-aspected Kuei-jin are the opposite of their northern comrades — they do well with creative and innovative groups like guerillas and artists. Central-aspected Gui Ren are not particularly good at handling any form of Scarlet Screen, but they have no real weaknesses either. In very few cases are Kuei-jin of the west

able to gain the trust and loyalty of a Scarlet Screen well enough to use it efficiently; the most they can usually hope for is to rule through a sense of obligation or fear.

There is no single Dharma that is renowned for its skill with mortal pawns, though followers of the Song of the Shadow and the Path of a Thousand Whispers are known for being particularly ill-suited to the task. In most cases the Bone Flowers are too Yin-oriented to inspire the living with more than terror, and the Rootless Trees are too inconstant to offer the steady leadership mortals seek. Devil-Tigers often excel at leading shock troops and running some of the more exhilarating sports arenas. They have also been known to keep some superb, cutthroat finance companies. Thrashing Dragons are felt to be adept at keeping all sorts of entertainment and artistic Scarlet Screens, as well as some of the more enthusiastic paramilitary groups. But like the Searing Winds, they are not inclined to handle Scarlet Screens that call for disciplined and cautious leadership. The Shining Ice Guardians, on the other hand, are as talented at encouraging regulated, well ordered behavior among their Scarlet Screens as they are loath to employ their mortals for any immoral action. Resplendent Cranes have kept some of the most impressive *ryogumi* in the Middle Kingdom, but their track record with the more creative Scarlet Screens has been less than impressive.

Beyond the constraints of direction and Dharma, different Kuei-jin have different ways of leading the Scarlet Screens that they keep.

THE SUM OF THE PARTS

The Chinese and hangul characters on the papers the scientist had handed over made some words that Choon-yei recognized and others she did not. After a couple of minutes spent looking at the script, she returned her attention to the scientist, sitting quietly across from her and asked, "So what does it all mean?"

The scientist nervously cleared his throat and spoke about polymers and enzymatic reactions and catalytic agents till Choon-yei asked, "What can we do with it?"

When the scientist said, "It's lighter than steel, but almost as strong," Choon-yei smiled and asked, "Could it stop a knife?"

Though Kuei-jin are indeed powerful, their power is ultimately limited, both by the hours in which they can exercise it and in its reach. Properly employed Scarlet Screens can extend the reach of the vampire in time and space. A skilled warrior can magnify her power through the judicious employment of *ryogumi*, and a master politician can spread her influence through the deft use of a spy network.

More substantially, if a Kuei-jin is willing to allow her mortals enough autonomy, she can extend her power into areas that would otherwise be blind spots or vulnerable points. A Thrashing Dragon without any understanding of monetary matters can become a financial power if he is able and willing to cultivate a good mercantile Scarlet Screen — and to allow it to do what it can without undue interference. The biggest obstacle to this sort of power is the loss of control the Kuei-jin experiences. He is forced to rely on the opinions and advice of mortals whose knowledge he does not understand. In many cases, the P'o seizes this uncertainty and cause the Kuei-jin to doubt his Scarlet Screen, confining the Cathayan's power to those areas that he himself comprehends.



CHAPTER FIVE: CRIMSON WAR

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

The corridors of the Underground City are often dark. This is because so few of the inhabitants retain any regard for the light. Such unconcern for illumination is not a consequence of vampirism, for as with every other place in the world, here mortals far outnumber the dead who walk among them. Rather, it is that the tunnels and chambers beneath Beijing house the unacknowledged refugees from the Mao dynasty, those who have drifted through the cracks of Communist China and discovered that even in the perfect society, there is not room for everyone.

Here, in converted air-raid shelters and endless corridors, they have carved out a safe haven. Every city needs a hidden place where certain matters of business can be conducted safely away from the eyes of officialdom. For Beijing, the Underground City is that place. It is not a ghetto, but it is a home for those willing to take up the mantle of the free outsider.

Such freedom comes at a price, however. Making the Underground city one's home makes one perfect prey for the dead who belong to the Yama Kings of the West — the beings whom the mandarins call Kin-jin. The Italian, della Passaglia, wallows in the corruption of the Underground City, and it has often been said that his very presence shatters the celestial balance while inviting demonic influence. Then again, it has also been said that he was merely attracted to the darkest souls in Beijing and that his corruption pales next to what he found

upon his arrival. The Blood Court is prone to rumormongering, you see, as a way of passing the time.

It is no matter which of the rumors are true, thinks Ancestor Ch'ang, as he sits on his ancient throne. Della Passaglia is being brought to him in the middle of what passes for the Kin-jin's domain, and that carries a message stronger than any rumor. The room around him is dark, crowded with the unbreathing presence of the most important mandarins of the Blood Court. Another message.

When della Passaglia finally arrives, he is perfectly groomed and exceedingly well-dressed. He wears the business suit of the West, in sharp contrast to the traditional robes of his escort. He is, annoyingly, totally calm. His obeisance is not perfect, but it is very good.

"How may I serve you, Ancestor?" Della Passaglia speaks Mandarin fluently. That comes as something of a surprise.

"I have heard," says Ch'ang, "that you have been conducting research concerning the Second Breath." His eyes are absolutely black, and they are fixed on the foreigner.

"I have," says della Passaglia, carefully. "I know that you have forbidden this."

"So I have," says Ch'ang. There is a pause.

Della Passaglia fills the silence. "My family's research is more important than my life, and if I believe that I have a chance of success in this matter, that success is more important than our position here."

"Would it not, then, be our best course of action to remove that position now, so that you can no longer be tempted?" The ancestor clicks his fingernails together, staccato.

"I believe that your analysis is correct, honored Ancestor."

"I am not your Ancestor, Kin-jin. You are leading up to something, are you not?"

"Indeed, I believe," and he slows, picking his words carefully, "that I may have discovered why the Second Breath takes place only in Asia."

Five mandarins lean forward; one makes a sound. Della Passaglia almost smiles.

"And," he continues, "I think that with my family's assistance, I can tear down the Wall between the living and the dead and let those who must walk the earth again return. I think that the golden shores which we call California would be perfect for such experiments. And I think that my family would aid you in this."

It is not just one mandarin who fails to contain his reaction now. Indeed, Ancestor Ch'ang can feel the dark currents of Demon Chi flowing behind him. He flicks one hand and cuts the current off at the source, but that is only one angry mandarin, and there are more who might take it upon themselves to punish the Westerner. Della Passaglia senses something is wrong, but he has no idea what. He looks confused.

"It would be best, I believe, if you were to leave us to confer."

Unenlightened, but not stupid, della Passaglia bows quickly and backs out of the chamber. His escorts are visibly upset, but they follow him regardless. Ancestor Ch'ang turns to his mandarins, prepares himself and shouts a wordless cry. It gets their attention.

"Ancestor Ch'ang," protests brave Mandarin Hao, "It is an abomination! Does the foul creature not understand that we are cursed and that the Second Breath is nothing at all to be desired?"

The ancestor smiles, without mirth. "Perhaps, or perhaps he means to provoke a reaction from us. It is no matter. Consider that if he is correct, it is knowledge that might benefit us against the *akuma*."

Mandarin Hao begins to say something, then stops, then says, "If he is incorrect, he has failed and may be honorably dealt with." It's not quite a question.

"Yes," says Ch'ang. "And no matter what, it is our first step outward."

The discussion continues for some time; not long by the standards of the ancients who rule the Blood Court. It cannot be decades before this matter is resolved, because the pace of events in the modern nights is far too quick for such patience. More than once, Ancestor Ch'ang must shed blood to remind his fractious companions of this fact. In the end, the mandarins send for della Passaglia again, and they inform him that they have accepted his plan.

With certain modifications.



INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the form of the Great Leap Outward, as revealed by the Quincunx' plans for the Jade Invasion of Los Angeles. The Great Leap Outward may be the single most ambitious and daring action taken by the Kuei-jin of the Fifth Age. It is the largest cooperative effort ever undertaken by the Five August Courts; without a doubt, its success or failure will change the face of Kuei-jin culture forever. If it succeeds, the new frontiers of North America will relieve the crowded tensions of China and give youthful and aged alike room to breathe; if it fails, the power of the Five August Courts will be severely curtailed for decades.

Particular attention is paid here to recent events in the Anarch Free States of California, the aspect of the Great Leap Outward known in the courts of the East as the Jade Invasion. The Anarch Free States receive the majority of the Five August Courts' attention, and it is in Los Angeles that the Great Leap Outward will succeed or fail. Thus, Los Angeles serves, as it often does in mortal affairs, as a bellwether of future events. Further, while isolated Kuei-jin and *wu* are pushing into other areas of the world, the Anarch Free States are the only place where any court is making an organized effort to take and hold ground.

The outcomes suggested herein are, of course, subject to Storyteller modification — this is your game, and you should make changes as needed for your chronicle. In particular, if your chronicle is set in the Anarch Free States at the time of the Great Leap Outward, your players' characters' actions should have an effect on what takes place; no players like to feel as though their decisions are irrelevant to the world.

And what of della Passaglia's promises and rituals? Ancestor Ch'ang does not believe that the Necromancers can achieve such heights of power, and so he does not concern himself with the matter. But if they can, if the shores of California suddenly permit the Second Breath...

...then the Sixth Age may arrive sooner than anyone expects.

Storytellers may find it useful to reference *Los Angeles by Night*, which outlines the Kindred population and politics of the Anarch Free States. However, it is certainly not required; this chapter contains enough information for both Kuei-jin and Kindred stories. *A World of Darkness: Second Edition* is a good overview of Cainite politics and populations worldwide, and *Dark Alliance: Vancouver* describes the complex relationships between Kuei-jin, Cainite and Garou in a single city.

KNOW THINE ENEMY OF HISTORY AND PRECEDENT

As the world enters a new millennium, the predominant characteristic of the cold war between the Kuei-jin and Cainites is ignorance. For thousands of years, the two cultures have existed in relative isolation; as with so many aspects of vampiric existence, their ability to interact was defined by mortal habits — in this case, the extent of human exploration.

The two regions where Kuei-jin and Cainites might have interacted saw little contact for different reasons. In Russia, vampiric obsessions were focused toward Europe and toward the rest of the Kindred; neither Baba Yaga nor her temporary successors had interest or time for the strangers to the east. As for the courts of China, they quickly found that those unfortunate individuals venturing into the chill wastes beyond Mongolia did not return.

The Ravnos of India had more opportunity to meet the Kuei-jin of the Infinite Thunders Court, but — as more than one Ravnos elder has pointed out — what good does it do for a Ravnos to tell the other clans anything he knows about anything? Other Kindred dwelling in India, assuming they survived the experience, were also distrusted as a bit odd by their blood kin back home, their reports disregarded as exaggeration. On the other side of the ledger, the Infinite Thunders Court, isolated by geography and custom from other Kuei-jin, chose to live in peace with their strange cousins rather than borrow trouble.

While the travels of Marco Polo marked an important change in mortal attitudes toward contact between East and West, both Kuei-jin and Kindred took some time to get used to the idea of such voyages. The dangers of travel — both natural and supernatural — further hampered the ambitions of any vampires with a mind to follow in the Venetian's footsteps. Sea voyages were plagued by pirates and storms, and land voyages invited hardship, brigandage and disease. Those bold Kindred surviving the trip were more likely to meet a wandering Shih than a Kuei-jin, given the degree to which they'd stand out. Any Kuei-jin going in the other direction (a more difficult task in the first place) found that the shapeshifters of the West had a definite taste for P'o tainted walking corpses.

Eventually, transcontinental travel became much more commonplace. Don't be misled by modern perspectives, though; as late as the turn of this century, a trip from London to Hong Kong was still unusual, expensive and dangerous. Furthermore, once one had arrived, there was no way to send messages or reports back home quickly. It was not until after the Second World War that technological advancement and economic interest combined to make it easy for East to communicate rapidly with West.

EARLY CONTACT

The general pattern of Kuei-jin meetings with Cainites hasn't changed much in a century and a half. It is a fabric woven of disbelief, rumor and misapprehension. The Cainite Masquerade has held for a very long time, and it's not much less effective against other supernatural beings than it is against humans. While the Kuei-jin have the advantage of knowing that such creatures as walking dead may well exist, they're lacking hard data; what are a few Kuei-jin in a strange city likely to accomplish when decades of mortal investigators have failed to turn up any lasting traces of the Kindred?

Both Kin-jin and Kuei-jin have known for some time that *something* exists in the lands they themselves do not control, but the vast majority of each race tends to assume that this something is merely a rather odd branch of their own kind. There's a multitude of strange bloodlines and odd Dharmas in the world; it's easy for even the most cosmopolitan Kuei-jin to

Prince Rodrigo sneered, making no attempt at all to hide his disdain. The primogen members present at the San Francisco Black and White Ball mirrored his manners, excepting Francis — but none were ever sure of his feelings, for his horribly melted skin obscured too much of his expression.

"You mean to tell me," said the Prince, "that there's some sort of new bloodline — that walks by daylight and lives on human breath — and they're living among the Chinese railroad workers, but we haven't even noticed? What next? Perhaps the old tales of a three-eyed ancient?"

The frail Kindred before him gritted his teeth. "I am sorry, my Prince, but I only repeat what my Oriental servants have told me. I know it seems unlikely, but I have heard these rumors more than once."

Roderigo laughed. "Well, MacArthur, once you've spent a bit more time in my city, you'll find that the gold rush breeds all manner of rumors and wild tales. It's the nature of the kine; they can't help but whisper among themselves. I knew permitting you to take the washerman for a ghoul would be a mistake."

MacArthur shook his head, but not with determination. "If that's your will, my Prince, I'll speak no more of it. But I think —"

The pause was palpable; Rodrigo's mirth had vanished on the single word "I think."

"I think," continued MacArthur, "that there is a ball to enjoy. I apologize for keeping you from even a moment of pleasure."

Roderigo smiled graciously. "It is no matter, and better you should speak too often than remain silent at the wrong moment. Farewell."

decide that the stories of vampires who can rip their shadows off and send them against their enemies are simply distorted versions of some Soul discipline.

Here and there, of course, a few Nosferatu and Bone Flowers learned more about their strange counterparts from the other side of the world. In recent years, the *Rotting Corpse Diaries* of Yu Hongyan have become precious manuscripts in the Five August Courts; the *Diaries* detail Yu's meticulous dissection of a creature which could only be a Cainite in torpor. At the time she wrote them, however, her peers scorned them as bad metaphor and worse poetry.

As the new millennium approaches, the Kuei-jin and Cainites rub shoulders more often than ever before. With the new contact comes friction and an inevitable increase in curiosity. While strangers live thousands of miles away, they can be ignored; when they're trying to take over your underworld contacts, they're a matter that must be dealt with — and despite the rantings of some Thrashing Dragons, the best way to deal with a problem is to thoroughly understand it. Destruction is never more than a temporary solution.

The Kuei-jin began their journey toward understanding earlier than the Cainites, probably because of the differences between the cultures from which they came. Several of Caine's descendants came to Hong Kong with the British, most notably Robert Pedder, but the attitudes of the kine flavored the Cainite approach to dealing with the natives. On the whole, most Hong Kong Kuei-jin were content to let the unwashed natives stay a mystery, for what could possibly be gained from dealing with the primitive Chinese?

On the other hand, the Five August Courts (and particularly the Flame Court) were quick to realize that these strangers would affect the future of China. The Opium Wars, the influence of the foreign traders and the indignity of the Hong Kong treaties saw to that. By the early 1950s, the Kuei-jin of China had infiltrated Hong Kong's power structures and had gained a basic understanding of their new neighbors. Their research was slowed by the bodhisattva faction that believed any contact with the Westerners was akin to associating with *akuma* and just as dangerous; still, cold necessity dictated some interaction, regardless of risk.

The process was similar elsewhere; in particular, House Genji of Japan was eager to expand its operations and learn more about their Western cousins. For better or worse, initial Genji contacts were with roving Sabbat packs, several of whom have taken up residence in Japan. These Sabbat aren't completely forthcoming, and their information comes with a healthy dose of propaganda, but the Genji have still learned much of Cainite ways. House Bishamon is less inclined to parley with the Westerners, but they have created a niche for themselves in Vancouver, and secrets flow from Vancouver to Tokyo at a rate that would alarm Vancouver's Cainites if only they knew of it.

TODAY'S SECRETS

It's impossible to detail exactly what's known about whom by whom; after all, neither the Kuei-jin nor the Cainites are a monolithic group with a single database containing all their accumulated knowledge. The suggestions provided in the remainder of this section are just that: suggestions, open to modification by the Storyteller as she sees fit. Indeed, since they are only general guidelines, the chances are that any given Court or city will know more about some topics and less about others. Fine-tuning is not only acceptable, but recommended.

KUEI-JIN

Camarilla

The Five August Courts and the Houses of Japan both know that the Camarilla is the guiding intelligence behind the vampires of the West. Neither know very much about the Camarilla's organizational structure; the tendency is to assume that there's a single ancestor behind the entire thing who sends out mandarins to rule the Western cities in his stead. It's difficult for Kuei-jin, accustomed to the regimented hierarchy of their courts, to comprehend the relative anarchy of the Camarilla.

Sabbat

Most Kuei-jin outside of Japan haven't heard of the Sabbat at all; few Sabbat packs want to risk the unknown territory of Asia when there's so much to be done in North America and Europe. Those who do know of the sect tend to

assume that they're somehow akin to the *akuma*, possibly even sponsored directly by some Western equivalent of the Yama Kings. What other conclusion could be reached from the horror stories the Kin-jin tell?

House Genji is quite happy to allow that impression to stand. From their point of view, the Sabbat is clearly a sect much like themselves, determined to redefine the rules of unliving existence for the modern world. For Genji, the Sabbat are the repressed youth of the West, natural allies against the weight of ancestors.

POINTS OF CONFUSION

Note that Kuei-jin often see Cainite clans in terms of Dharmas and astrological direction. For example, they don't necessarily perceive the Tremere as Blood kin but rather as a collection of north-oriented Bone Flow-ers. This viewpoint is yet another barrier to true understanding and communication, as a single-clan coterie looks like a broken *wu*, aspected to only one direction.

CAINITES

The Courts

It is only the most exceptional of Kindred who could name even one of the Five August Courts, let alone tell you where the Green Courts or the Golden Courts are located. The Bishamon and Genji are better known, but only because of the Japanese presence in Vancouver; in any case, those who know of the Japanese Houses believe that they are some sort of clan rather than sects.

In the Camarilla, the Flame Court and the Flesh Court are the best known of the Five August Courts, if any of them can be called well-known. Even so, the princes and justicars who concern themselves with Asian politics tend to treat these courts as guerrillas and terrorists rather than as equals. The Sabbat is better informed, due to the information flowing back to Mexico City from the Sabbat packs resident in Japan.

The Dharmas

The concept of Dharmas makes little sense to Camarilla Cainites; the closest analogy in the Western paradigm would be a Path of Enlightenment, and most Camarilla Kindred have

never been introduced to the idea that there are alternate ways to hold back the Beast. Thus, the Dharmas sound more like esoteric philosophy than the central elements of Kuei-jin existence.

The Sabbat understand the concept much better, unsurprisingly. Dharmas are not the same as the Sabbat Paths, but they're sufficiently similar to provide a point of commonality. This is undoubtedly one reason why the Sabbat packs of Japan have had a relatively easy time interacting with House Genji.

BATTLING THE CHILDREN OF CAINE

PHYSICAL CONFLICT

The Great Leap Outward is punctuated by physical conflict. The anarchs of Los Angeles are stereotyped as violent, uncouth bloodsuckers; often, the image is not that far from the truth. Jeremy MacNeil possesses a rich political acumen, but even he needs to know how to wield a claymore in order to maintain the respect of his people. The invading Kuei-jin are mostly as young as the anarchs, and the majority of them are just as hungry for open conflict.

So when a Kuei-jin faces a Cainite, what happens?

Would that the answer was as simple as the question. In physical battle, Kuei-jin and Kin-jin have roughly equal potential; the Demon Arts of the Kuei-jin are fearsome indeed, and their use can quickly reduce an unprepared Westerner to torpor—but the same is true of the Cainite Disciplines. While Celerity has its flaws and limitations, Black Wind is imperfect as well. The Bone Shintai have devastating potential, but so does Protean. The comparisons could go on for days.

In the final analysis, there is no answer. The Kuei-jin are well prepared for battle, trained in their arts, but the anarchs have honed their blades and minds against each other. One night, in Los Angeles, the Flatbush and Stockton Posse wreaked bloody havoc upon the sadly unprepared Walter and Millie Gasparis; a week later, Louis Fortier swept down on Long Beach with an army of ghouls and slaughtered the entire Yellow Dragon Society. The outcome of any battle depends largely on the abilities of those involved.

NUMBERS

In the end, the deciding element of the struggle between the Kuei-jin and the Kin-jin will likely come down to numbers. The raw power of the ancient mandarins and the elders balances out; although a puissant Thrashing Dragon might send a handful of Brujah anarchs to their Final Death here, it's just as likely that a Gangrel archon will slaughter an entire *wu* over there. The calculus of the Great Leap Outward is the brutal truth of subtraction: Which side has more bodies to lose?

The answer is becoming regrettably clear to the vampires of Asia. Until recently, the majority of contact with Westerners was with the Camarilla, leaving the courts of Asia unprepared for the Sabbat mass Embrace tactics used with such loving frequency. When the Devil-Tigers of South America first probed the Sabbat cities of Mexico and Central America, they were completely unprepared for the violent speed with which the Sabbat reacted; the latter, assuming that this was

THE P'O VERSUS THE BEAST

The Kuei-jin P'o and the Kindred Beast are not the same, despite their many similarities. Kuei-jin are intimately connected to the Shadowlands, in both their origin and their ongoing existence; the P'o behaves almost exactly like a wraith's Shadow, and the Giovanni necromancers who've been able to investigate the connection confirm that relationship. The Beast, as far as anyone can tell, has nothing to do with the Shadowlands at all.

The comparison between the two leads a few inquisitive Cainite sorcerers to wonder exactly where the Beast does come from. If the Kuei-jin and the Cainites are ever at peace, they may be able to find out.

simply another Camarilla probe, sent dozens of newly created war parties out after the intruders.

Most of the new Sabbat Cainites met their Final Death, as always, but the Devil-Tigers died as well. Similar scenarios have played themselves out in Australia and the United States. To the Kuei-jin, such behavior is abominable — forcing the warped Western equivalent of the Second Breath on a dead man is bad enough, but doing it only to sacrifice the newly risen is madness as dark as an *akuma's* soul. And even if the mandarins wanted to mimic Sabbat tactics, they have no ability to do so.

Camarilla cities won't play such tricks, but with the Camarilla attitude toward ghouls they hardly need to. Ghouls were less of a surprise to the mandarins, since they had observed Camarilla activities in Hong Kong and Tokyo for some time. Such luminaries as Pedder and Thrace were not without their ghouled servants. Still, it was easy for the courts to underestimate the loyalty of a blood bound servant. While certain Chihuh Muh and Obligation powers can ensure loyalty, the ease with which the blood bond can be instilled and the fact that it is so strong, even when its source is a relatively weak Kin-jin, was an unpleasant surprise.

The Jade Invasion of Los Angeles paid dearly for this lack of comprehension. Mandarin Hao was not concerned about his daytime sleeping habits when he first came to the shores of California, and his warriors shared that lack of concern. A week after the first strike into Los Angeles, the Ventrue Louis Fortier sent his ghouls down on Venice Beach like a tsunami and wiped out the entire Bone Polishing Faction to a man. The Bone Polishers thought that changing their sleeping quarters each night would be enough to protect them during the day. Since then, the paranoia of the invaders has grown strong and deep.

While the Camarilla doesn't produce ghouls as quickly as the Sabbat produces new vampires, and while ghouls don't have the same potential as vampires do, it's easier to direct a new ghoul and the pool of potential candidates is wider. If a Sabbat pack Embraces a cop, that cop isn't going to be able to keep his job afterward; this drawback doesn't apply to ghouls. That's also a notable advantage in terms of potential influence, of which we'll discuss more in the following section.

Finally, bear in mind that the Kuei-jin can create dhampyres, which to a certain degree make up for their lack of ghouls. However, an old Kin-jin could easily create twenty ghouls in a week, in a pinch — and dhampyres must be bred as slowly as any human. Existing dhampyres are useful for daytime tasks, but they can't be replaced on the spur of the moment.

POLITICAL STRIFE

The real battle, the battle that matters, takes place under the cover of the violence and blood of the streets. The mandarins of Asia are well-aware that physical conflict is not the route to victory. Regardless of what the propaganda might say, the Cainites are no more or less fearsome than the Kuei-jin, on average, and there's nothing more foolish than attacking an equally powerful enemy on his home turf.

Moreover, as noted earlier, the Camarilla's access to ghouls and the Sabbat tactics of mass Embrace provide them with a huge supply of fresh troops with which to resist Kuei-jin warriors. In the long term, the Kuei-jin — far away from their

homes, with supply lines stretched out across half the world — cannot prevail with physical might.

What's left? Politics. The courts of Asia are only too happy to follow the lead of their mortal relatives and extend their social influence into the realms of the West. The influx of Asian influence and money into the Western nations sets the stage for such activities and leaves much scope for covert advancement.

The clichéd version of this behavior is criminal activity. Everyone's read the books and seen the movies about the Chinatown gangs; a triad here and a tong there and Yakuza influence in the streets of San Francisco. It's easy to imagine the Kuei-jin slipping in with the young toughs of San Francisco's Chinatown and using them as instruments of power; Scarlet Screens can work in the West as well as the East.

And indeed, this is a fairly common scenario. The Kuei-jin have a relatively easy time of it in the criminal underground; unlike the crime families of the Mafia and the cocaine cartels of Columbia, Asian organized crime often includes a strong spiritual component. The triads and tongs began as rebels with strong religious backing fighting against oppressive invaders, and those roots are still visible in triad rituals and practices. As such, Kuei-jin wishing to work with or even lead a triad or tong can exploit her supernatural abilities toward her ends.

The Yakuza are closer to a Western-style organized criminal group, but the Yakuza organization is still sufficiently ritualized so as to make it possible for the clever Kuei-jin to ride those rituals into a position of leadership. It requires a certain degree of ruthless determination, but that's a commodity common in the courts of Japan.

So, then, more than one Chinatown — in both North America and Europe — has a Kuei-jin lurking behind the façade of a street gang or two. The clannishness of most Chinatowns means that it's hard for the native Cainites to figure out what's going on. In some cities, a wise elder or ancilla has spent the time necessary to establish contacts and influence in Asian ethnic communities. This is an exception more than it is a rule. In general, as long as the Kuei-jin in question stick close to their homes and resist the urge to make their mark upon the city, they're able to go unnoticed. Many of the youthful Kuei-jin who're most prone to using this version of the Scarlet Screen, alas, are ironically those who are least prone to patience.

Less violent avenues are more useful in the long term, and this is where the older Kuei-jin and mandarins make their serious plays. Particularly on the West coast of North America, many cities have Asian populations large enough to represent a significant voting block. For example, on the west side of San Francisco, a local Asian-American homeowners' association has become a key factor in city politics in the last two years. Is there a Kuei-jin at the center of it? Probably not, but chances are someone's been whispering in the ears of the association's members from time to time.

Similar associations, ad hoc and otherwise, have been making their weight felt in New York, Los Angeles, Boston and across the Atlantic in London. It's not that these associations are new; rather, it's that they've only recently been paying much attention to city-wide politics. Up until now, most

neighborhood associations have been content to organize on a small scale.

Oddly enough, Chicago is a notable exception to this trend. While it boasts a sizable Chinatown, and certainly has the reputation of being a hotbed of city politics — dirty and otherwise — there's been little attempt on the part of the Chinatown residents to affect politics at large. Some mandarins ascribe this to the tight-fisted rule of the legendary Lo-Dan; some murmur of other, darker powers that have claimed the city's Chinatown for their own.

The mortal influence of such associations is perfect for the Kuei-jin. They don't need to exercise night-to-night control when they can use these mortal groups as a tool to guide city affairs in an appropriate direction. It's exceedingly useful to be able to encourage a city council to rezone the old warehouse that happens to be the Brujah's favorite location for their rants. Humans have been playing such political games as long as vampires, and it's generally a matter of pointing and getting out of the way.

To date, those participating in the Great Leap Outward have not attempted much political activity on a larger scale. The Scarlet Screens serve well for distractions, but sponsoring a mayor, for example, would require more knowledge of a city than is available in a few month's residency. Furthermore, such activities would inevitably result in direct conflict with the Kin-jin; the advantage of working on a smaller scale is that one is unlikely to directly run afoul of the long-term plans of the Westerners.

THE SPIRIT REALMS

The greatest single advantage the Kuei-jin have over the Kindred is their ability to enter the spirit realms. With this power, the Kuei-jin can vanish without a trace when a pack of Cainites is at their heels or transport themselves over great distances without passing through enemy territory. It's not so useful on the offense, since few are able to slip out of the Mirror Lands wherever they wish, but mobility is still a vital advantage in this war.

Most warriors of the Great Leap Outward use the jade replicas produced by the Rite of Imbuing the Jade to visit the spirit realms. Anyone can use them, and they're a relatively safe method of travel. Regrettably, there are not so many who know this Rite as to be able to provide an infinite stream of the replicas, so their use is reserved for emergency situations. The mandarins of the invasion would love to be able to let their warriors hide in the spirit world during the day, to avoid any chance of being discovered by the servants of the Cainites, but it's a luxury they cannot afford.

A handful of the invaders have mastered the Yin or Yang Pranas to such a degree that they can enter the Mirror Lands at will and exit at a place of their choosing. However, it's few indeed who have mastered the Discipline, both physical and spiritual, required to attain the Semblance of the Scarlet Queen or the Semblance of the Ebon Dragon. These few are the elite assassins of the Great Leap Outward, targeting Kindred leaders.

Finally, some daring *wu* enter the spirit realms at Western dragon nests. This is one of the less useful tactics in the Great Leap Outward, as the Garou are fiercely unwilling to tolerate

Zeng Yuling gathered herself in readiness, taking the three breaths of preparation. She was fairly certain that the being before her was among the more important of the demon-tainted Kin-jin. The spirits of her ancestors were with her. She let go of her Yang nature all at once, and as the Scarlet Queen left her, she became one with the material world.

In the same moment, she allowed her Yang Chi to take her away, her body contorting in the leaps of her martial dance. The smells of the warehouse office drifted from her perceptions; the stink of the close quarters no longer affected her. Her Chi flowed out of her to give her total control and awareness as she pivoted with frenzied precision. A moment more and her foot would intersect with his neck in a perfect arc.

He wasn't there. A gunshot rang out, the sound stretching out for eternity: the single incandescent light went out. Darkness flooded in, leaving her with only the uncomfortable awareness that her opponent was moving with the same unerring grace as she.

Then, a low, nasty dark chuckle. "Jack's too old for stupid tricks; you think I've never faced a wolf before?" The words made no sense, but the ones that followed did: "Unfortunately for you, I can see in the dark."

Yiding was not about to waste her breath on an Western *akuma*, no matter how fast he was. He might be as quick as her, this Jack, but he would not be as skilled. No matter what. With all her skill, and the power of her Chi informing her movements, she joined the battle.

In under a minute, she discovered that he could be as skilled, and it was not much more time before she discovered that his strength was that of the mountains. With one arm broken, half of her kata were useless; when the knife sliced through the tendons of her leg, his victory was complete.

She died to the sound of his laugh. It was a cold thing indeed.

Wurm-tainted visitors to their caerns. The first few *wu* who use this technique in any given region usually manage to slip through without being killed, but after that the Garou are on guard.

This increased paranoia has hurt the Kindred more than the Kuei-jin, in the end, as the Garou don't care about the subtle differences between the two *shen*. An unliving creature of the Wurm is an unliving creature of the Wurm no matter where it comes from. Kuei-jin attacks tend to drive many anarchs out of their usual territory, into areas claimed by the Garou, and those anarchs suffer the consequences of Kuei-jin actions.

Kithain freeholds — which are also dragon nests — are easier to attack, but it's still not at all safe. In Los Angeles, Duke Jayson of Hollywood has been researching Kuei-jin frantically and now knows how to use fae magic to affect them. The results, coupled with troll might and sluagh espionage, has the potential to be startlingly effective, and Jayson has no compunctions about sharing his techniques with his fellow nobles of Concordia.

THOSE WHO TAKE THE LEAP

THE FIVE AUGUST COURTS

The mandarins of the Five August Courts are a fractious lot, and they have not acted in unison since they signed the Treaty of the Quincunx. The Great Leap Outward is only partially an exception to this rule. None of the courts are wholly uninterested in the outcome of the Great Leap Outward and each of them has sent representatives to aid in the struggle, but the main burden of the attack falls to the court which originated it: the Blood Court of Beijing.

While the Flesh Court has gained power since the end of Shanghai's war against the Cainites and the Japanese Kuei-jin, the Silent Mandarins have made it clear that appropriate action requires the consolidation of power. It is too risky to send the youthful strength of Shanghai into yet another battle; while the Kin-jin have all fled the city and the Japanese are licking their wounds, there is no guarantee that either will remain uninvolved with Shanghai should it suddenly become vulnerable. Showing weakness now could undo the labor of decades.

The Flame Court is of a similar mind and if anything is more reluctant to aid in the battle. Shanghai has resolved its war, at least for the time being, but Hong Kong is still locked in silent bloody battle. Not only is much of Hong Kong under Cainite control, but the Righteous Devils of Kowloon continue to resist the rightful rule of the Flame Court. Until these matters are settled, there are no bodies to spare for uncertain ventures in the West.

The Blood Court pressured both the Silent Mandarins and the Flame Court to at least share their knowledge of Cainite weaknesses. After all, few Kuei-jin know more about the best ways to fight the Westerners. Both courts sent advisors in response, perhaps because the Blood Court made sure to make it clear that both courts were asked.

In this quiet little competition for status, the Flesh Court has come out ahead; the Flame Court's representatives are good for theory, but the sad truth is that the Victorious Whirlwinds spend more time fighting Kin-jin than anyone from the Flame Court. Meanwhile, the Flesh Court has years of direct experience, which they put to good use.

The Jade Court's policy of isolationism has not changed despite the Great Leap Outward. This doesn't actually bother the Blood Court, although the mandarins of the Blood Court use it as another opportunity to slander the Jade Court; there are few combat effectives in the Shaolin Monastery, and as long as the Jade Court doesn't condemn the invasion, the Five August Courts continue to at least seem in agreement on the matter. Meng Liuchun, a bodhisattva of the Jade Court, prophesies that the Chi of the Blood Court will flow thin and pale on Western shores — but outside the Shaolin Temple, nobody listens to him.

The Bone Court is likewise inclined toward isolation. Their mandarins are willing to send a few Kuei-jin to help, but relative to the Blood Court, the contribution is very small

indeed. The mandarins of the Bone Court hope that the mystic side of the Great Leap Outward will result in new roads by which to approach the holy sites of Tibet.

Of course, individual Kuei-jin and *wu* may choose to accompany the forces of the Blood Court on their own initiative, and many have. Some are content to place themselves under the command of the Blood Court mandarins, and some seek glory in their own ways. Some simply seek to profit from the crumbs that always fall to scavengers in times of war. California is, for the moment, home to all manner of Kuei-jin, and it is a foolish Kindred indeed who assumes that every visitor is an enemy.

OTHER COURTS

Other Courts in Asia are staying well clear of the Jade Invasion and would do so even if the Five August Courts were foolish enough to ask for aid. The Green Courts and the Golden Courts would rather die than serve as the pawns of the Chinese Kuei-jin; besides, they're preoccupied with their own battles. The general opinion among these courts is that the Jade Invasion is a game of the Blood Court, meant to benefit nobody but the Chinese. Perhaps if it succeeds, there will be a time when Southeast Asia will look to the West — but not now.

Japan's Bishamon are in a similar situation. The traditionalists have enough to do in Japan itself without lending support to the hated Five August Courts. However, the Genji find much of interest in the Great Leap Outward. While they haven't been invited into the main body of the attack, of course, they have sent forces to California and are quite prepared to throw their weight into battle one way or another, as circumstance demands.

Meanwhile, the Bishamon sit in their cities and contemplate the benefits of escalating their efforts to free Japan from Chinese influence. The mandarins of the clan are speaking to certain parties in the Golden Courts about raising distractions on China's southern frontier; it remains to be seen if anything will come of these discussions.

LEADERSHIP

The official leader of the Great Leap Outward is one Mandarin Hao, former resident of Beijing, master of Bone Shintai, Yin Prana and the Art of Tapestry and follower of the Way of the Resplendent Crane. The whispers of the Forbidden City say that he is more than half a millennium old and that he has been present at every great meeting of the Quincunx for several centuries. There are no whispers of what he has done at those meetings, and to some, that is the most powerful evidence of his influence.

Hao is an extremely deliberate being. In his life, he was a minor member of the bureaucratic multitudes, but the Second Breath focused his mind marvelously; it is possible that he could have been among the great minds of China if only he had not needed death to awaken him to his own potential. Hao revels in subterfuge and double meanings and is as patient as dust when the need arises. Unsurprisingly, he is aspected toward the north.

It amuses him greatly to use the youngest and brashest of his kind as his warriors. He believes that their enthusiasm will

THE SHEN

Few of the shen can afford to ignore the actions of the Five August Courts. In conjunction, they are as powerful as any other interest group in Asia; as such, their idle actions can send a swallow tumbling, thousands of miles away... and the Great Leap Outward is far more than an idle action.

The hengeyokai are, for the most part, of the opinion that the more time the Kuei-jin spend on foreign shores, the fewer of them there are to pollute the air of Asia. And if their foreign cousins are affected by the Great Leap Outward, well, if they weren't barbarians and idiots they might have been able to smell this coming. In the meantime, it's a good moment to exert influence back home.

The hsien are more concerned; as gods, it may be necessary to restrict the Hungry Dead from eating souls that do not belong to them. Alas, it is wholly unclear how that might be accomplished. In the meantime, the hsien watch and worry.

Similarly, the Shih are quite unhappy with current events. It is clear that the order of things does not include wholesale invasions, yet it cannot be denied that there are those in the West whose spiritual heritage lay in Asia. But will the Kuei-jin restrict their depredations to their natural prey? Several Shih have made the voyage to California to investigate and watch. Meanwhile, Strike Force Zero has no idea what's behind the sudden drop in demonic activity in China.

Finally, the Zaibatsu believe that the actions of the Kuei-jin cannot prevent the masters of reality from exerting their will. Whether or not they are correct, they are content to sit by and exert economic dominance over California to the degree that the rest of the Technocracy will permit.

The wraiths of the Yellow Springs have more of an interest in the Great Leap Outward than one might think. As Yu Huang drives his empire toward war with Stygia, an alliance with those who are contemplating a Skinlands invasion of Stygian territory would seem to be a mutually beneficial arrangement.



serve him well in obscuring his true tactics. By distracting the disgusting Cainites with the violence they know so well, he plans to gain the necessary space to infiltrate his more subtle followers into the very fabric of California until they cannot be unwoven from it.

His allies and immediate aides are the members of the mandarin *wu* known as the Temple Square Denizens. For centuries, the Denizens have served as executors of the Blood Court's will; the Great Leap Outward is simply another in a long line of challenges they have met and defeated. The leader of the Temple Square Denizens is a boisterous Thrashing Dragon who calls himself Monkey Trip Wu. Wu's darkly humorous nature makes an excellent counterbalance to Mandarin Hao's icy cynicism, as both Kuei-jin freely admit.

GROUPINGS

The Jade Invasion is no monolithic action; it is not a war that will be fought with troop movements and grand battles. In all of California, there are no more than 300 Kindred, and that is a very generous estimate. Los Angeles itself, when combined with San Diego, has the majority of these, at 175 Kindred; around 65 more watch nervously from San Francisco and Silicon Valley, while 15 or so dwell in the state capital of Sacramento. The others are spread out among the smaller metropolitan areas of the state.

The Kuei-jin number even fewer; at most, 150 Carhayans made the voyage to California's shores. The Five August Courts do not and cannot command armies. While the ancestors in a court theoretically have the absolute loyalty of their subjects, it is wise for them to consider the direction of a *wu* before commanding it. A *wu* of the center, dedicated to studying the ways of the *hsien*, is unlikely to travel further down its path if it is sent to kill Kin-jin in Los Angeles — and commanding a *wu* away from its direction could be most disharmonious.

Thus, the mandarins of the Five August Courts chose only those *wu* suited to the Great Leap Outward. Many Devil-Tigers eagerly joined the fray, hungry for new experiences on the shores of California. Certain factions of the Bone Flowers were only a little less interested than the Devil-Tigers, not so much for the battle itself but for the learning opportunities that might follow. The Resplendent Cranes filled out the ranks, determined to bring order and structure to the chaotic lands of the West. Of course, the Jade Invasion was not limited to those three Dharmas; several Centipedes and Thrashing Dragons chose to follow Mandarin Hao, some for their own reasons and some because it was the will of their *wu*.

LEAPING TO SOLID GROUND

NORTH AMERICA

As noted elsewhere, North America is fairly quiet (at least, as far as the Kuei-jin are concerned) outside of the Anarch Free States. Kuei-jin have established a presence alongside most of the major Asian immigrant populations in the United States and Canada, but the Five August Courts are waiting to see what happens in Los Angeles before taking further action, and the

other courts of Asia are more than willing to let the Quincunx take the initial risks.

LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles will never be the same, and it will never recover from the bloody war forced upon it by the Five August Courts. By the winter of 1998, the impact of the initial clash was blunted by the anarch defenses, and the Jade Invasion reached an undesired equilibrium. Today, the Kuei-jin and Cainites of Los Angeles live under the shadow of conflict, neither actively fighting nor anything close to at peace.

About a third of the invaders are dead, leaving under 100 Kuei-jin to carry on the battle. The Cainites of Los Angeles suffered in far greater proportions; more than half of them have gone on to the Final Death, with many more in torpor. However, it's the youthful and weak among them who suffered the most; Jeremy MacNeil and his companions escaped the worst of the violence. So did the majority of the "barons," the regional leaders of the city.

The real success of the anarchs does not lie in numbers, however. MacNeil concluded early on that his best chance for resisting the invaders lay not in his physical might, or in the soldiers he could bring to bear. Nor did he particularly wish to test his control of the *kine* — he believed, correctly, that the anarch distaste for blatant leadership would inevitably hamper any attempts to use the institutions of Los Angeles against the invaders. Besides, the Kuei-jin were already firmly ensconced in Chinatown, and MacNeil didn't think he could pry them out.

Instead, he took the tack which had brought him success in the past: propaganda, political philosophy and rants. If the Chinese vampires wanted to take territory, that was acceptable, but the rank and file among them would take the brunt of the counterattacks and, whenever possible, would be the targets of MacNeil's request for parley. His message was constant; within a few months, most of the Kuei-jin in Los Angeles knew the story of how MacNeil and his comrades broke the power of the Camarilla and created a haven for their kind.

Mandarin Hao dismissed these tactics as cheap and ineffectual, in part because Monkey Trip Wu painted him a picture of fanatically loyal Thrashing Dragons ignoring everything MacNeil had to say. This was, of course, a lie; alas for the Jade Invasion, Kuei-jin are as capable of underestimating an opponent as any Cainite. Mandarin Hao took MacNeil's measure and deemed him an unintelligent barbarian, while MacNeil picked Hao's pocket of his most trusted lieutenant. Mandarin Hao is not yet aware of this betrayal.

At present, Monkey Trip Wu has just been named the Baron of Chinatown. This is a meaningless title while Mandarin Hao controls the Jade Invasion, but who knows how much longer that will last? MacNeil, somewhat to his own surprise, has admitted that the anarch style of leadership won't work for the Kuei-jin. Even more surprisingly, the rest of the anarchs agree. Wu is inclined to name his court the Quicksilver Court.

SAN DIEGO

The weight of the Great Leap Outward was not directed against San Diego, but given its proximity to Los Angeles, several *wu* took on San Diego as a personal project. The San

Diego naval installations make the city attractive for those interested in temporal power, and it's large enough to be a valuable territory in any case.

The initial assault met with the same success found elsewhere. The Violet Path Posse quickly created a traditional Scarlet Screen, providing the San Diego tong presence with valuable aid against the Colombian drug smugglers in exchange for loyalty and fear. Meanwhile, the other *wu* attacked the local Cainites directly, distracting them from their weakening powerbase.

Unfortunately, many of the Kin-jin killed in these initial stages were precisely those who opposed Camarilla rule over the city; once the Brujah Tara realized what was going on, she quickly declared herself Prince of San Diego and demanded aid from the Camarilla. While the Camarilla was unwilling to actively intervene in the Anarch Free States, they could not afford to refuse the gift of a major North American city; according to Violet Path intelligence, a Cainite of the rank "justicar" was sent to reinforce Tara and her troops.

This proved enough to turn the tide, and since everyone in Los Angeles has quite enough to do as is, neither the mandarins nor MacNeil have seen fit to interfere further. San Diego has repelled the Great Leap Outward, and the remnants of the Violet Path Posse crouch in San Diego's Chinese neighborhoods trying to decide whether to flee, wait or explode in one final glorious defiance of death.

POINTS NORTH

San Jose is the northernmost extent of the Anarch Free States; it exists in an uneasy truce with the Camarilla city of San Francisco. Mandarin Hao believes that the San Francisco Bay Area, while very rich and quite important, will require a delicate hand — certainly his youthful forces risk damaging the valuable economy of the region if they utilize too much violence. In the original plans, this region was to be the next target after the Great Leap Outward succeeded.

At this point, it will be difficult to establish a real court in Los Angeles, and without that strong guiding influence, there should be no direct action against the Bay Area. However, the time is ripe for influence; if Mandarin Hao can survive the aftermath of his failure, there will be time to slowly extend tendrils of power into the Asian population of Silicon Valley.

The counterbalance to these plans is both the Kin-jin inhabitants of the region — and rest assured that at this time the anarchs and the Camarilla will put aside many of their differences — and the more subtle influence of the Green Courts. Over the last few years, the Korean population of San Francisco has grown notably, and the quiet schemers of the Green Courts came with them.

ELSEWHERE

Besides Los Angeles, the only major concentration of Kuei-jin is in Vancouver, where the Bishamon continue to ride the wave of Asian immigrants into the city. The Hong Kong expatriate community in Vancouver grew exponentially after Hong Kong returned to Chinese rule; two distinct vampiric factions came with the new arrivals. The Hong Kong Kuei-jin who disliked the idea of living under Flame Court rule intend to make their own place among the Genji *wu*, while the

Cainites who found Hong Kong too risky a residence have a great store of knowledge to share with Vancouver's Kindred. It remains to be seen if Vancouver will become a more hostile place for Kuei-jin as a result.

In the rest of the continent, there's little aboveground Kuei-jin activity. As discussed earlier, several courts of Asia have begun to infiltrate the political scene in North American cities. However, this is more a consequence of increasing immigrant populations than it is a concerted effort to take Cainite territory.

HAWAII, AUSTRALIA AND THE PACIFIC

The Pacific has never been an area of great concern for the Camarilla; the islands are isolated, and while the Kindred don't move around much, they do require a human population with some degree of mobility. Static populations get to know one another, and there's too much curiosity for comfort.

HAWAII

Hawaii, of course, has a large tourist trade; Honolulu has a population of half a dozen Kindred led by Prince Sanderburg, an expatriate Brujah from San Francisco. These Kindred subsist well enough on tourists and the occasional local, careful never to risk affecting the tourist industry itself.

The Cainites of Honolulu, however, are not strong enough to keep the islands free of Kuei-jin even if they wanted to. Sanderburg has never felt more than theoretically affiliated with the Camarilla, given his distance from the Inner Council. As long as he and his people do not come under violent attack, there's no reason to rock the boat by inviting Camarilla attention — especially when help is unlikely.

So far, Kuei-jin influence in Hawaii has been fairly benevolent. The Genji have sent several representatives to the islands, to oversee their financial interests, but only one of the Easterners, Ikodo Donji, is in Honolulu proper. Since the Genji wisely waited for Japanese mortals to invest in Hawaiian property before extending their own reach, there's little for the Westerners to fight. The economic forces generating Japanese economic interest in Hawaii are larger than any Ventrue plot.

AUSTRALIA

Similar conditions hold for Australia... except that the political situation was less than stable even before the Kuei-jin arrived in force. The Cainite population in Australia is more significant than that of Hawaii, but the country is too far away from Europe to be really important to the rest of the Camarilla. This is, most likely, the reason the Sabbat have made such inroads in Australia in the 20th century and the reason that Sydney has remained an independent city for so long.

When the Genji sent their representatives, following the wave of Japanese investment, they found a continent ripe for plucking. Accordingly, they were far less subtle than their compatriots in Hawaii. The first indication most Cainites had of the Kuei-jin presence in Australia was a sudden, brutal attack: the Razor Blossom Youth *wu* assassinated Prince Miranda of Adelaide five minutes after sunset on a perfect December summer evening.



Encouraged by their success, the Razor Blossoms made an attempt on Archbishop Camille in Brisbane the following week. They did not try to conceal their identities, and when their attack failed, the similarity of methods led to some very hasty discussions between Camille, Prince Sarrasine of Sydney and Prince Taylor of Melbourne. The result was a tenuous truce between the independents, the Camarilla and the Sabbat — all three Kindred were well aware that the Kuei-jin of Asia were not very far away, and the possibility of a full-scale invasion was too dangerous to ignore.

The Truce of Sydney lasted two months, surviving a bloody war fought in the streets of Australia's cities, before the opportunists of the Green Courts arrived to see what scraps might fall off the table. Seok Kwan Sook, the *penangallan* leader of the Green Court arrivals, offered Prince Taylor her assistance in exchange for concessions after the war was over. The other two Cainite leaders protested bitterly, but Taylor found Kwan Sook's bargain to his liking, and the war devolved into vicious squabbles between half a dozen warring factions.

At present, the Genji control Adelaide with an iron hand. Prince Sarrasine continues to hold Sydney, but the Green Court Kuei-jin have pounded their way into a precarious position in Brisbane. The remainder of Australia's Sabbat lurk on the Gold Coast, preparing to return. The political landscape is a morass of shifting alliances, with little regard for national origins. Australia is the closest thing the Great Leap Outward has seen to the Cold War of the kine; espionage, assassinations and subtle maneuvers are the order of the day.

SOUTH AND CENTRAL AMERICA

SOUTH AMERICA

The heterogeneous nature of South America's Kindred population leaves a sizable niche for aggressive young Kuei-jin to exploit. Several *wu* have moved to South America of their own accord; these are mostly those Kuei-jin who chafe under the restrictions of the courts. They follow the recent waves of Asian immigrants to South America, looking for new ground on which to make their fortunes.

All in all, this has been a great success for the Kuei-jin. In South America, nobody cares much about the grand sweep of sect politics; what matters is the purely local, and the Kuei-jin *wu* are as good at local politics as any Kindred coterie. Almost every major South American city has at least one Kuei-jin resident, and few of them bother to conceal their origins.

The benign arrival of individual *wu* is not the only Asian presence in South America, however. The Devil-Tigers have decided to colonize South America supposedly; while nobody outside the inner circles of the Dharma knows the details, rumors fly in the Five August Courts. If one believes everything one hears, the Devil-Tigers have moved their very oldest bodhisattvas to Rio de Janeiro — they've sworn to kill any follower of another Dharma they find in Argentina — the Dharma has split, and South America was given to a heretic sect of Devil-Tiger *akuma* — and so on.

Such rumors are only now spreading among the powerful Lasombra and Toreador masters of Rio. Their reaction is likely to be strong.

CENTRAL AMERICA

The Sabbat rule Central America with stark brutality. Mexico City is the heart of Sabbat power. Some foolish Kuei-jin have allowed their curiosity to lead them into Sabbat territory; none have returned.

EUROPE

Europe is dangerous ground for an ambitious Kuei-jin. The cities of Europe are old by Cainite standards, if not by the standards of Asia, and the vampires of Europe are old by any measure. What's more, Europe's kine are often prone to bigotry and racism; there's a large Asian population in Europe, but immigrants find life there hard indeed.

The Princes of Europe hold their cities in a very tight grasp. Unlike their counterparts in America, European Princes generally consider the Traditions inviolable; they thus pay far closer attention to the vampiric population of their cities. A smart *wu* can sneak into an American city and pass itself off as a group of anarchs or Caitiff, but the Europeans are less likely to even permit anarchs in their city, let alone allow them to go about their business more or less unquestioned.

The result is what one might expect. A very few Kuei-jin have successfully infiltrated London, and it's rumored that the Giovanni permitted a representative of the Blood Court into Venice as partial compensation for della Passaglia's status in

Beijing. With these few exceptions, though, Europe is completely hostile territory.

Unfortunately for many young Kuei-jin, China and Japan are abuzz with reports of clever young Devil-Tigers and Thrashing Dragons coming to Europe, deliberately breaking the Masquerade and getting away with it scot-free. Indeed, several Kuei-jin have been parading around *Rijins* and *Talors* showing off the trophies of their visits and dining out (as it were) on the stories of their exploits. This has prompted any number of eager followers to head off along the Silk Road to try and top their idols.

They'll find only death. Prince Wilhelm of Berlin captured a small *wu* from the Blood Court in the fall of 1998, and instead of slaying them out of hand, he took the time to thoroughly investigate these strange visitors to his city. The powers of the youthful Kuei-jin were no match for his aged mind; a little charm and a lot of mental force later, and Wilhelm found himself in possession of perhaps the best store of information about the Kuei-jin in the entire Camarilla. If anyone rivals him in this regard, it's the Tremere Council of Seven, and they are disinclined to share their knowledge.

Prince Wilhelm sent the *wu* back to their homes with implanted memories, hoping to lure more of their kind into his clutches. This scheme has been fairly successful so far, although some of the mandarins of the Five August Courts wonder how a few motley Kuei-jin could so effectively disrupt the Masquerade when the Camarilla is well-prepared for the same tactics on the part of the Sabbat. Still, it's only a very few mandarins who know enough about the Camarilla to ask such questions... for now.

APPENDIX: GODS OF WAR

ARTIFACTS OF WAR

WU SHI

The skill of creating *wu shi* was lost at the end of the Third Age, but nine of these miraculous amulets are known to still exist. The words *wu shi* mean five stones. Each of these egg-sized artifacts is made of five pieces of different-colored jade crafted to balance and augment each other spiritually. *Wu shi* are capable of holding up to seven points of Chi, either Yin or Yang. Furthermore, the *wu shi* grow heavier as more Chi is stored within them. Though the actual gain in weight seems to be random, a *wu shi* that has Chi will always weigh more than one that has none.

The nine known *wu shi* are carved into the likenesses of beautiful women, and legend has it that they represent the handmaids of the Scarlet Queen. Since the Scarlet Queen was said to have 33 handmaids, Kuei-jin believe that there are 24 more *wu shi* hidden throughout the Middle Kingdom. Of the nine known *wu shi*, four are known to have names, though their owners guard the names assiduously, for the amulets offer even more potent powers to those Kuei-jin who know how to unlock their secrets. The only *wu shi* whose name and powers are well known in these times is Ai, Peacock Mistress of the Eight Bells, which is currently in the possession of Hsu Chong-yee, Minister of the Labyrinthine Songs of Heaven in Taipei. Ai is known

to emit a soft chime whenever someone attempts to lie to its owner or whenever a disguised creature enters into her presence. Though there are many who covet Hsu's *wu shi*, her skill at deception has so far kept her safe — so much so that some Kuei-jin believe that this skill is another effect of possessing Ai.

RISES OF THE SHADOW WARRIORS

RITE OF THE GRACIOUS COURIER (LEVEL ONE RITE)

This rite allows a Kuei-jin to function within a formal court setting without drawing undue attention. Though she does not, and in fact cannot, contribute to the court proceedings in any substantial way, those in attendance remember the Kuei-jin's presence and the fact that she behaved with decorum.

System: Starting at the beginning of the session of court, the Gracious Courier quietly chants a mantra while standing away from the focus of attention. The Kuei-jin is allowed to move slowly should protocol dictate but must keep chanting and not speak to anyone or otherwise draw attention to himself. For the duration of the chanting and so long as there is no serious disturbance in the court, no one engaged in the

court's proceedings will disturb him. If court business requires that the Gracious Courier be addressed, questioned or otherwise interacted with, the addressing Kuei-jin must succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty 8), otherwise the Kuei-jin forgets to call on him. Should the Kuei-jin cease chanting, or combat or some other unusual development disrupt the normal flow of court proceedings, this rite ceases to provide protection. This rite has no effect outside a formal court setting.

REFLECTING THE INNER FACE (LEVEL THREE RITE)

This rite reveals and then strips away magical alterations to a person's appearance. By maneuvering a creature between two mirrors aligned according to the principles of *feng shui*, Kuei-jin can temporarily circumvent a disguised creature's illusory appearance.

System: Properly positioning the mirrors calls for a roll of Rituals + Perception (difficulty 6). This positioning is good until the next sunrise, after which the currents of *feng shui* will have shifted just enough to require the repositioning of the mirrors. As long as the mirrors are properly aligned, any creature whose appearance has been altered through magical means runs the risk of being detected should he pass between them. Assuming the mirrors have been positioned properly, the creature's true appearance manifests in whichever of the two mirrors he is not looking at.

Kuei-jin or other creatures who have an understanding of *feng shui* may figure out that the mirrors serve some purpose, though most will not know what it is. Improperly positioned mirrors may reveal nothing, false images or, in the case of only slight misalignments, the disguised creature's true appearance, but only in the mirror he is currently facing.

GODS OF WAR

Throughout the history of the Middle Kingdom, certain Kuei-jin are recognized as having shaped the art of warfare, whether through honor, scholarship, fate or audacity. Below are some of the more important. Some of them are known by every Kuei-jin with an interest in war or history. Others are virtually unknown — though that may change in the future.

GODS OF TWILIGHT WAR

CHOW QI-CHAN, ELOQUENT SECOND DUCHESS OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED LESSONS

Born the second daughter of the second wife of a minor Ming dynasty noble, Qi-chan spent her childhood as a pawn to her mother's continuing plots to remove the first wife from favor. By the time of her death — she was poisoned by an unknown party — Qi-chan had learned much from her mother. Specifically, she had learned how not to bend people to her will.

Qi-chan proved to be less subservient in death than in life, and after she drew herself from the Yomi World and took her Second Breath, she proved to be quite outspoken for a woman. Some blamed her propensity for advising Kuei-jin on how better to manage their unives on the extreme contrast between her Dharma, Resplendent Crane, and her aspect, south,

and they may have been correct. Her need for propriety and excellence has always been focused on driving Kuei-jin to improve, whether through cajoling, shaming or educating them. Her career as mediator began with some injudicious words to Tso and Fook, a pair of bickering, jaded mandarins. Rather than being affronted, they were bemused by this petite disciple's chastisement and suggested that she act as their mediator. Though they meant it as a jest, Qi-chan smiled and nodded. Three nights later, she presented them with a set of Precepts that was too intriguing to pass up: a horse race through the Yang World to the Shrine of the Ten White Maidens and back. They declared a twilight war against each other merely to see what would happen. The pundits of the court wagered that the race would end in disaster. But the two mandarins returned, and though they still bickered, they both displayed a far greater appreciation of the wonders and terrors of the Middle Kingdom.

With news of the race of Tso and Fook spread far and wide, others requested Qi-chan's services. She enthusiastically obliged and quickly gained a reputation as a skilled mediator. Later, when Fook achieved the status of ancestor, he saw that she was granted the title, Eloquent Second Duchess of the Eight Hundred Lessons. Qi-chan is still known as a skillful mediator, but over the centuries, she has neglected her own Dharmic progress and been surpassed by many of her clients. Worse, she has occasionally taken to maneuvering Kuei-jin she feels need a lesson into situations where they are more likely to get into a twilight war. She has made several enemies this way — enemies she has helped develop power and Dharmic understanding that outstrip her own. Tso and Fook have been trying to devise a means of forcing Qi-chan to devote more time to her studies, but neither of them are anywhere near her level as manipulators. Only time will tell whether Qi-chan will heal herself — or whether she will fall to the enemies she herself has trained.

PAK YUNG-LEE

For Yung-lee, the exuberance of her life on the streets of Hyamung in no way prepared her for an unlife with the *ch'ing shih* of the Green Courts. Her survival instincts and natural wit enabled her to endure the seemingly eternal *ré*, but within months of achieving the status of *kôa*, the young Thrashing Dragon was determined to find a way to escape the Yin-heavy ways of her elders. A haughty Bone Flower from Seoul provided the opportunity by challenging her to a twilight war over some incautious words about the Parallel Path. Yung-lee and her opponent were ordered to travel to Nanjing and to return with 10 kilograms of jade each.

Though Yung-lee lost the twilight war, she exulted in her freedom, and when she returned, she wasted little time in provoking another. In the seven years since her Second Breath, Yung-lee has been involved in over a dozen twilight wars, even winning a couple. She has been sent to more of the Middle Kingdom than many elders of her court have seen, and some jina fear that her loyalties do not lie with the courts. Nevertheless, Yung-lee has always completed her missions and still behaves with propriety when in Korea. The mandarins and elders seem content to use her wanderlust to their advantage.

Everything changes, however, even Yung-lee's take on unlife. She met up with some Bamboo Princes on her last



twilight war, a spying run to Singapore, and has begun to entertain thoughts of joining the renegades' battle for the future. Yung-lee may be found anywhere in the Middle Kingdom, either pursuing the Precepts of her latest twilight war without undue haste or — if she is in Korea — looking for another chance to escape.

Hsu Chong-yee, Minister of the Labyrinthine Songs of Heaven

In the four centuries since Hsu Chong-yee took her Second Breath, she has participated in over 200 twilight wars. She has lost only two. Though she has caused the dissipation of monks, the embarrassment of generals, the exaltation of drunken fools as wise poets and the rise of her mortal family to a position of wealth and power in Taipei, Hsu has always been careful to not appear too clever. She has always made certain that her stratagems were obvious to all but her opponent — so that her next opponent would underestimate her, of course. It is reported that she has never employed the same ruse twice, but that is almost certainly an exaggeration. It has also been suggested that she is truly Sun Li in a (relatively) modern guise, but she merely laughs whenever someone broaches the possibility to her.

Hsu Chong-yee came into possession of the *wu shi* named Ai in the year 1629 under peculiar circumstances: A young boy ran up to her in the streets of Chilung, told her that she had dropped it and ran away. She never saw the boy again. Since it

appeared, the *wu shi* has been both a blessing and a curse. It has enabled her to see through her opponents' plans on several occasions, but as time has passed, Hsu has begun to wonder how much of her success is her own and how much she owes to Ai.

Though she has never had any trouble accepting that she lost her first twilight war — a war against one of the court mandarins when she had just completed her *ré* — Hsu's second loss still rankles her. It gnaws at her not only because she lost, but also because she has never again even heard of the heimin who so easily defeated her. Though Hsu Chong-yee has recently mentioned that she feels the world of the twilight war is hampering her Dharmic studies, the lure of defeating the Minister of the Labyrinthine Songs of Heaven has ensured that there is no shortage of challengers willing to take her on in a twilight war.

Gods of Midnight War

Sun Li

Though her original name has been lost to history, Sun Li is well known as one of the earliest and best Kuci-jin tacticians. Sun Li's story began as one of the King of Wu's favored concubines. She was chosen to be one of the "officers" in Sun Tzu's famous demonstration of his leadership skills. When she and her "troops", other concubines, ignored Sun Tzu's orders, the great strategist had her beheaded as an object lesson.

In that moment she was enlightened.

She returned from the Yomi World with an intimate understanding of the nature of war and the necessity of discipline therein. From her Second Breath onward, she followed the Dharma of the Resplendent Crane. She stayed in the background and studied the ways of "the greatest affair of state" — warfare.

RUMORS OF VENGEANCE

It is rumored that Sun Li was waiting for Sun Tzu in the Yin World upon his death, and that is why he has not been seen since, but there is no evidence to support this tale.

Since then, Sun Li has said and written much on matters of warfare as they apply to Kuei-jin. Her *Eight Immortal Strategies* and *Book of Auspicious Swords* are read by Cathayans much as the works of her inspiration are read by mortals of the Middle Kingdom, though it is reported that her best tactics have never been recorded in print.

Sun Li disappeared around the beginning of the Fourth Age. It is rumored that she decided that the "unknowability" called for by her tactics inherently contradicted her following the Way of the Resplendent Crane and that she chose to follow the Path of a Thousand Whispers. Though there are no conclusive reports of encounters with her, rumors of an ancient beauty appearing from nowhere and offering a line of tactically insightful poetry to the occasional *wu* in dire straits continue to haunt the Middle Kingdom.

T'EN LU

No one is certain when Tien Lu took the Second Breath, but the infamous Devil-Tiger arrived at the Jade Court toward the start of the Ch'ing Dynasty (c. 1650). Despite his savage nature, Tien was skilled at speaking with the *hengyokai* and became a trusted advisor to the mandarins of the court.

He took long trips through China, developing an understanding of his Dharmic path with a scholastic bent rarely seen in a Devil-Tiger, and most Kuei-jin believe that it was during these trips that he entered the service of the Yama Kings. Others believe that he was their servant even before he approached the Jade Court, but there is little evidence either way.

Tien progressed to the rank of a minor mandarin, fighting in numerous twilight wars and several midnight wars, but no more than many other Devil-Tigers. He fought against the Kin-jin in the Sino-Russian War and the Clans of the Sun in the Second World War, all the while acting as envoy to the Courts of the Emerald Mother.

It was not until one of Tien's agents was able to specify the site of the detonation of China's first atomic bomb so that it accomplished the destruction of over 50 *shen* that the Devil-Tiger's treachery was revealed. Yip Lixue, a jina of the Bone Court, realized that Tien had been systematically destroying Cathayans who had been studying potential weaknesses of Wu Hua, Lord of the Pit of Salt and Iron.

When the Quincunx realized what had happened and finally deduced that Tien Lu had planned it all along, they pronounced him *akuma*. But by then, Lixue and the texts he was studying were destroyed, and Tien had fled to his master and the Yomi World. Great rewards are promised to any Kuei-jin who utterly destroys him.

ZHAO RAO, DOWAGER MOTHER OF DEMONS

Though she has taken the name of, and claims to be reincarnated from, one of the most reviled women in Chinese history, Zhao Rao has been instrumental in the war to push the *gaki* out of the lands of the Quincunx. Her unflagging determination and ability to ride her P'o to the edge has earned her the name, Dowager Mother of Demons. Those who speak so of her are unaware of how accurate this title really is. Each day the *shikome* of Emma-o visit her in her dreams and offer her advice, guidance and torture. Though she has never entered into congress with the Yama Kings, in dream or otherwise, Zhao Rao has found her demonic advisors' advice true and useful on too many occasions and is very worried by it. She has no idea what part she is intended to play in Emma-o's games — whether she is being set up for a traumatic defeat, whether she is being used as a lure to draw the Japanese Kuei-jin into the Daimyo of the Dark's clutches or, worst of all, whether she is still tied to the Yama King through an agreement from some past life. Even with these fears, she uses the hatred she feels when she wakes each night to fuel her war against the Japanese.

Recently, Zhao Rao has learned the identities of two of the Ministers of the Scarlet Vessel. Her *shikome* advisors have told her that the "storerooms" will be vital to future efforts against the Japanese, and Zhao Rao accepts their claims. But more and more, she is coming to wonder what the price of that acceptance will be.

GODS OF THE UNDERGROUND WAR

BURAKUMIN, HERALD OF THE REVOLUTION

Known as the Herald of the Revolution, Burakumin is a mystery to his admirers and his enemies. His — or maybe her — manifestoes and proclamations have taken the form of backtracking on pop music records, computer virus messages, bulk-mailed leaflets, public-service radio announcements, messages carved into jade tablets and who knows what else. Interestingly enough, each message has been mystically purified to prevent elders — or anyone else — from tracing it back to its origin.

Burakumin manages to communicate with Kuei-jin from Singapore to Ulan Bator without ever being identified. Cathayans claiming to be, or accused of being, Burakumin appear from time to time, but invariably, another pronouncement or manifesto bearing Burakumin's characteristic rhetoric appears thousands of miles away, breaking through the charade and revealing the impostor for what he is. The final fate of someone revealed as a false Burakumin is both predictable and messy. It's just a question of who gets to him first.

IMPOSTOR!

The most famous would-be impostor was a Bishamon who studied all of Burakumin's known works for seven years in order to gain the confidence of a local *ichimi*. The night of the impostor's self-presentation to the local *Takeouji*, a set of bills appeared on the *shinkansen* station near the *ichimi* instructing the local Bamboo Princes to listen to track eight of the previous year's Les 5-4-3-2-1 CD. When the impostor arrived, he was completely unaware of the message hidden in the lyrics of the pop song. He was never seen again.

Many court elders fear that Burakumin may be an agent of the Yama Kings, sent to sow discord among Kuei-jin society. Others believe that the name hides an entire secret society working under a single *nom de guerre*. Among the Bamboo Princes, the most common theory is that Burakumin is really an ancient bodhisattva who has decided to act as the patron muse for their cause.

The truth of the matter may never be known. After all, no one has ever seen Burakumin's face or heard his voice. All that the Kuei-jin have of him are his words, words which demonstrate a mind of uncommon agility and scholarship.

JUNKO INOUE

Inoue lived the academic life. Working under the eye of such linguistic masters as Tsujimura, Mizutani and Suzuki, Inoue achieved a modest degree of recognition for her theories on the development of Nihon-go — the Japanese language. It was never as much recognition as her male colleagues received, of course, and that just was not fair. The disparity in credit had just pushed her to begin exploring the Japanese feminist movement when she was killed by a drunk driver. After her Second Breath, Inoue was brought to the Bishamon Court, where she almost got herself killed immediately through a failure to show what some members of the court felt was proper respect. Once again, she was pulled into a male-dominated, repressive society, where she would be expected to do good work and appreciate without irony the occasional scrap of praise they deigned to throw her way.

As fortune would have it, one of the mandarins recognized her scholarship and put her to work in the court library. Rather than meekly heeding the words of her *sifu*, though, Inoue began looking for other modern *gaki* — she could not believe that *all* of the rest of the young Kuei-jin were willing to tolerate this anachronistic bullshit. It took months for the *Takeouji* to decide she was safe and to contact her. Then, after more months of preparation, it took her less than an hour to vanish from the court library with over a dozen of the collection's most sacred texts.

Now Inoue has all the recognition she could ask for: The Bamboo Princes of Shinjuku have nothing but admiration for her linguistic skills — and the Bishamon have declared her *akuma* and placed a lofty price on her head. Inoue still gets annoyed when people call her a Bamboo Prince rather than a Bamboo Princess, but the thrill that the etymological challenge of *kaja* represents keeps her retorts relatively civil for



now. Also, Inoue has found her attention drawn to the copy of the *Red Book of the Iron Bridge* that has caused the computers so much trouble. There is something about the mad poet's writings that calls to her, though she does not know where that call will lead.

MAOXIAN MAO (ADVENTURER CAT)

It was just before the Cultural Revolution that Maoxian Mao and Watanabe Kimiko almost met their final death at the hands of a family of bakemono. Instead, the Kuei-jin and a pair of Kin-jin who had also been after the bakemono, spent the last hours of the night working together, trying to free themselves from the building that had collapsed during the fight. The fallen beams and framework were certainly enough to make it difficult to gain freedom, but none of the unliving trusted the walls' ability to keep the sun out — and heaven forbid someone come along to see what had happened to the old warehouse. With only minutes to go before dawn, the four vampires escaped the deathtrap of a structure and — very cautiously — parted ways. Though they never saw the Kin-jin again, the two Cathayans encountered each other on a couple of occasions over the next month. As they talked, they realized that their courts' hostilities were blinding them to the true problems of the Middle Kingdom and decided to take steps toward forging a more sensible society.

While Watanabe traveled and gained allies, Maoxian Mao found herself drawn to Singapore, which was just beginning its move toward prosperity. In her own way, she subtly aided the formidable Lee Kuan Yew as he built the small islands into one of the most prosperous nations in the world, and a secret haven for the Bamboo Princes.

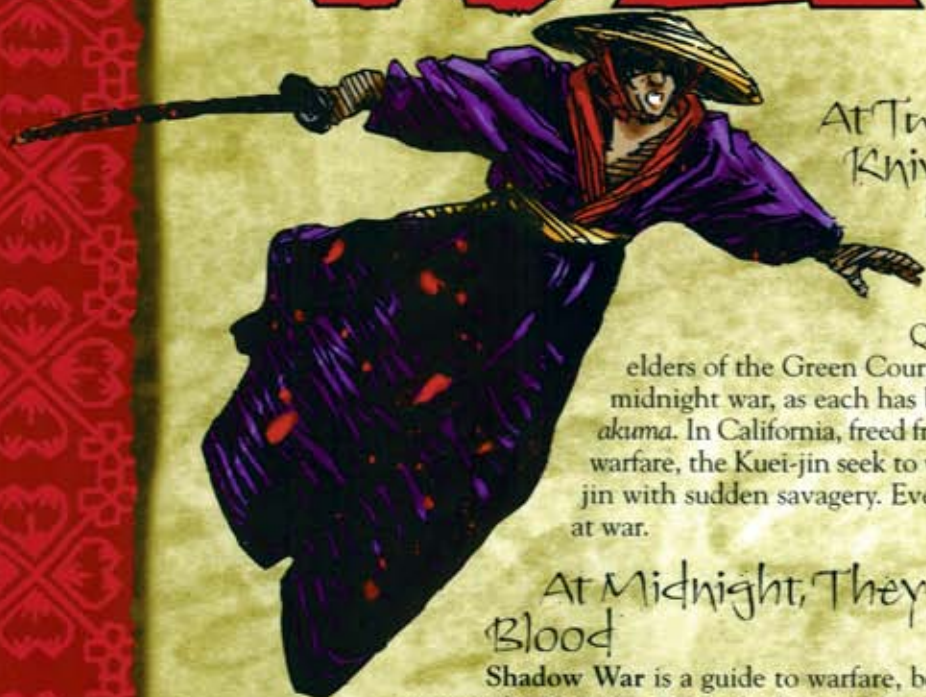
Though she originally favored slowly building up strength, the Adventurer Cat has been stung by the loss of Watanabe and the strange disappearances in Singapore. Increasingly, she finds herself thinking that the Bamboo Princes should take a more aggressive role in the Middle Kingdom.

YUU DOI

To this night, Doi claims that the true reason he forced his way back from the Yomi World was that he had to have the quarterly reports on his boss' desk by the next morning. Whether his words are meant in jest or not, the disillusionment he felt when he discovered that he had been dead for weeks and the Tokyo Stock Exchange had not imploded in his absence struck a strong blow to his ego. To this night, Doi also claims that this shock probably saved his unlife, for he claims that the docility that this trauma wrought was mistaken for respect by the Bishamon, so he survived his *ré* without making any enemies.

But after having spent his life as a *sarariman*, Doi was not about to waste immortality in the same fashion. Instead, following a carefully formulated plan of action, he made contact with the *Takeouji*, offered his services as a financial advisor and began the unlife of a *shifuku*. Since joining the Bamboo Princes, Doi has been inducted into the Karoshi League — an idea that he enjoys since that not-so-august body accidentally caused his death in the first place. Now he ministers to the obsolete needs of the Bishamon one night, then reallocates their influence to the Bamboo Princes on the next. Doi enjoys the feeling that his talents do more than shore up the economy of another gerontocracy, but he is starting to feel confined by his role as a vampiric financial wizard. He died with so much unexplored — maybe now is the time to start experiencing all that the Middle Kingdom has to offer.

SHADOW WAR



At Twilight, the Knives Still Shine

In Kowloon, the Bamboo Princes stir insurrection against the bloodless, ancient mandarins of the Quincunx. In Korea, two

elders of the Green Courts swear ritual enmity in a midnight war, as each has been told that the other is *akuma*. In California, freed from the dictates of civilized warfare, the Kuei-jin seek to wash away the hapless kin-jin with sudden savagery. Everywhere, the Kuei-jin are at war.

At Midnight, They Are Red with Blood

Shadow War is a guide to warfare, both formal and otherwise, among the Kuei-jin. From the honorable strife of the twilight war to the relentless savagery of midnight war against the Yama Kings' servants, from the battles outside the Middle Kingdom to the means the youngest Wan Kuei use in their struggles against their elders, everything a Kuei-jin needs to know about taking the field of battle is here.

Shadow War Includes:

- The true story of the Kuei-jin invasion of California
- Tactics and rituals for declaring midnight war
- Wars of the Kuei-jin against their elders, the secrets of manipulating Scarlet Screens and more!

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