

WENGEYOKAI™

SHRIMPSTERS OF THE EAST

亦
夕
化
妖
怪

A Sourcebook for Werewolf: The Apocalypse™

Credits

Authors: Hengeyokai: Brian "Ratkin" Campbell, Harry Heckel, Heather Heckel, Deena McKinney, Ethan Skemp;
Legends of the Garou and Kitsune: Kathleen Ryan

Additional Material: Aron Anderson, Aileen E. Miles

Developer: Ethan Skemp

Editor: Aileen E. Miles

Art Director: Aileen E. Miles

Art: Andrew Bates, Michael Gaydos, Steve Prescott, Jeff Rebner, Ray Snyder, Ron Spencer, Richard Thomas, Drew Tucker, Melissa Uran, Kanji by Kathleen Ryan and Joshua Gabriel Timbrook

Comic Book Art: Joshua Gabriel Timbrook

Back Cover Art: Andrew Bates

Layout & Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles

Cover Design: Aileen E. Miles



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

©1998 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews; and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages and Mage the Ascension are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Hengeyokai Shapeshifters of the East, Werewolf Players Guide, Freak Legion, Book of the Wyrms, Umbra the Velvet Shadow, World of Darkness Combat, Stargazers Tribebook and World of Darkness Sorcerer are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

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

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

Check out White Wolf online at
<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf
and rec.games.frp.storyteller
PRINTED IN USA

HENGEYOKAI

SHAPESHIFTERS OF THE EAST

Contents

<i>Legends of the Garou: An Inauspicious Burial</i>	12
The tale of one Stargazer's journey to the East	
<i>Introduction: The Changing Phantoms</i>	16
An introduction to the shapeshifters of the East	
<i>Chapter One: Lands of the Emerald Mother</i>	22
The history of the hengeyokai and the tales of their lands	
<i>Chapter Two: The Tapestry</i>	40
The Umbra of the East	
<i>Chapter Three: Lords of the Beast Courts</i>	54
The individual races of the hengeyokai	
<i>Chapter Four: Weapons and Antagonists</i>	106
The hengeyokai's arsenal of magic and infamous enemies	
<i>Chapter Five: The Nine-tails</i>	122
An introduction to the Kitsune	
<i>Chapter Six: Birth of the Youngest</i>	126
The origin and history of the Kitsune	
<i>Chapter Seven: The Courtly Dance</i>	144
The werefoxes' society in Asia and around the world	
<i>Chapter Eight: Opening of the Eyes</i>	154
Kitsune character creation	
<i>Appendix: Nobles Among Nobles</i>	175
Kitsune templates and heroes	

LEGENDS OF THE GAROU

An Inauspicious Burial

Michael Walks-on-Ashes walked slowly up the rise, drinking in the unfamiliar smells of Yunnan China, blinking in the last light of the autumn sun. His chin was thick with stubble. His wiry brown hair grew ragged and untrimmed. His plain blue jeans and hiking boots were dusty and well-worn. Yet, in deference to his passenger, his nut-brown face was scrubbed clean and his white cotton shirt shone spotless, fresh from the wrapper. Under one arm he cradled a jar of smooth reddish stone, securely bound with strips of raw silk and split reed.

As the sun set, the Stargazer vaulted a cracked, crumbling wall and landed quiet as feathers in the weeds on the other side. A doorless storehouse gaped to his right; rapeseed and barley ravaged the stone floor. Meadow grew where the courtyard had been, and the main house walls stood roofless in tile-spotted ruin. Michael slipped quietly through the tangle.

Behind the house lay the garden. Ancient, barren fruit trees grew wild here, and one twig caught in the jar's wrappings as he passed by.

"I'm bored."

He froze. The voice came from just ahead; it was thick, slow, deep and slurred its Mandarin badly. Michael freed the jar and waited.

"It won't be much longer, Shan," someone — a girl, a little farther away — replied. "Sun's gone home now."

"Dice with me." A new speaker: male, confident, young. "It'll pass the time faster."

"Don't know how."

"Oh, we'll teach you. Huo Qiyun? Jimi? Hong Tan?"

"No. I'll keep watch." The answer — gravelly, curt — was frighteningly close and unexpected.

"As you please."

Michael leaned forward carefully, bracing himself against the trunk. Through the screen of branches he saw a short, hunched-over, beady-eyed man crouched alertly on a fallen tree. Next to him, a smiling pig-tailed girl was just standing up, her gaze on the handsome features of a youth on the other side of the clearing. He sat tailor-fashion on a carved granite slab, close by two other young men — one giant sprawling lazily, one perched lean and hawklike at the stone's edge. The giant picked up a die, and tried to bite it.

Michael frowned. The Li compound was supposed to be abandoned. Trespassers. Gradually he eased back from the tree. Then, just as the last ounce of weight came off his front leg, he looked back to the man on the tree — to see the tiny black eyes focused directly on him.

"Spy! Spy!" hissed the watchman.

"Haaaaurgh!" growled the sprawling man. He launched himself at the tree, neatly uprooting it, attempting to pin the intruder in the spiky crown. Michael twisted free, turned to run clear of the orchard, and found the hawk-faced one blocking the way. Michael heard the other four close in around him. He held the jar tightly to his side. Without it, he would have broken free and changed to a faster form; with what Roadrunner had taught him he was sure he could outrun anyone...

"I smell wolf, nobles," said the handsome boy. "One of yours?"

The hawk glared at Michael. "I've never seen him before."

...almost anyone. The Stargazer narrowed his eyes and drew in the wind. No taint — close by. He wondered what tribe the hawk came from, and what the handsome boy — apparently no Garou — could be doing with four of his kind.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"No, no, stranger. This is our territory," said the boy. "You go first."

"I am Michael Walks-on-Ashes, son of Blood-on-the-Water. I am Theurge of the Stargazers, bound to the Waking Seals Caern of California, packmate of the Second Seven."

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to bury this," said Michael, *presenting the jar*, "the mortal remains of my teacher's oldest, best friend, a sage and astrologer who did great service to Gaia —"

There was the faint sound of someone *spitting*, and Michael's hackles rose.

"— and to our sept. My teacher charged me with the duty of traveling here and performing the rite."

"Why here, 'Gazer?" came the suspicious voice of the watchman.

"This was his family home. His ancestors are strongest in this place. He asked to rest here. This will happen," said Michael, with finality.

"Wait a minute...you have the bones of a Li in there?" asked the girl.

"Yes. Li Feng."

"My grandfather knew a Li Feng," she began.

"Sure. So this cur knows a name and he brought a vase. The Lis were wiped out by the People's Republic, and I don't see one here to vouch for him," snapped the watchman.

"Enough, Hong. Let her speak," said the youth.

"Grandfather's Li Feng had crossed eyes and second sight. His branch of the family left in the wake of the Nationalists."

The Stargazer's face fell. "He must have been a different Li of the same name. The Master had perfect eyes, but could read only books and the sky. He wouldn't have known a ghost if it bit him."

The girl laughed gently behind him. "That's the one."

Michael's brow furrowed in confusion, but the circle around him relaxed and broke. The young man strolled easily toward him, and the confrontation seemed to be over.

"I pass?"

"For the moment."

"Then it's your turn, I believe."

"You're an American," said the stranger, returning to the tomb. "Our names and lines would mean nothing to you."

Michael sat and gently placed the urn before him. "Mine meant something to you."

"Five for one is hardly a fair trade."

"It's a courtesy, not a bargain."

The Garou and the young man locked eyes, and when the stranger spoke Michael felt he'd passed another test.

"I'll give you what names we've given each other."

The beady-eyed watchman hissed as he resumed his post. "We're in a hurry, pretty boy."

"Change as you will, nobles. I'll treat with our guest." Absent-mindedly he gathered up the dice. "Your native tongue is English?"

Michael nodded.

"They call me Wu Bingshu, the Witch's Sword. My second, here —" he gestured at the hawk-faced one, "is Huo Qiyun, the Burning Skyscraper — a cousin of yours, I think. Our lovely lady friend, Jimi, the Strictly Secret. On watch, Hong Tan, the Red Altar. And last, but never least, Shan, the Mountain. Say hello, Shan."

"Hello," rumbled an earthquake into Michael's ear. He turned to stare into the enormous, spiky maw of a tiger as large as the granite slab. The corners of the beast's mouth curled slightly, and the startled werewolf recognized the slow grin of the giant.

Michael spun to face the rest of the strangers. Each one had shifted; each held a different shape. He saw a raven where the girl Jimi had been. Hong Tan stared back evilly from the eyes of a giant rat. Across the great bulk of the Bastet, Huo Qiyun's familiar wolf-Crinos form came as a relief. The Stargazer nodded to his "cousin" and turned to the young man.

Michael, by then, was hardly sur-



prised that Wu Bingshu had a large fox head. The Kitsune scratched his claws along his chin, raised a whiskered eyebrow, and shrugged.

"You five are a *pack*?" Michael nearly yelled.

"Yes," said Wu Bingshu.

"No!" shouted Hong Tan.

"Temporarily," growled Huo Qiyun.

"It depends on how it works out, really," piped up Jimi.

Beside Michael, Shan's muzzle twitched and wrinkled. "What?" the Mountain finally asked.

"Sentai," said the Kitsune. "I don't think there's a word for it in English."

"We're a war party," said Huo Qiyun. "No totem. No bond. Tonight we fight, tomorrow we go our ways." He leapt across the tomb to stand by Michael. "Burning Skyscraper. Glass Walker. Ahroun. Seven Sacred Cedar Sept, in Kunming City. My *pack* is dead."

The Ratkin hissed. "Yes. Very nice. Go ahead and sniff each other's asses. How long are we going to dance around the problem here?"

"Oh, Hong," said Jimi. "Be polite."

"He's right, though," Wu Bingshu sighed. "Michael, I'm afraid you're going to have to leave."

"No," said the Stargazer. He flexed his hands, watched them grow, and looked down on the Kitsune from Crinos height. "I must bury Master Li tonight."

Wu Bingshu flicked his tongue over the tips of his small, pointed teeth. "Come back tomorrow, and I myself will stand honor guard for him."

"Me, too," said Jimi.

"He was an astrologer. Tonight."

"What's wrong?" mumbled the tiger, lazily. "Why can't he?"

"Oh, Shan, if they get here and there are six of us, they're going to think we broke truce."

"They?" asked Michael.

"We're here to meet another sentai," she answered. "Kuei-jin."

"Walking dead," snapped Hong Tan.

"Vampires," snarled Huo Qiyun.

"Yin spirits," temporized Wu Bingshu. "Minor demons of retribution."

"And you have a...an alliance with them..."

"No," said the Kitsune. "There's a dragon-nest — a caern. We've been fighting the Kuei-jin over it for centuries. We hold it awhile, they take it, we take it back. No one wins, but we keep the war...civil...and the caern itself survives because we value it for the same reasons. They're not defilers."

"Now there are other things —"

"Bakemono."

"Wyrn creatures."

"Yomi forces."

"Bad meat," murmured the Bastet.

"— closing in. Neither side wants them to capture the caern. Our elders arranged these two sentai for the dragon nest's defense — five hengeyokai, five Kuei-jin. Equal forces. Equal power. Equal terms."

Wu Bingshu went on gravely. "You must leave, or we'll lose face, and probably our claim to the caern."

"Step sideways, Michael," the raven whispered. "We'll watch Master Li for you."

The Stargazer rose, slowly. One huge claw tapped gingerly against the side of the stone jar.

"I promise," said the Kitsune.

Michael clenched his jaw, stripping the shreds of the clean, white, funeral shirt free of his torso. After a minute of silence, he spoke:

"Master Li would not have wanted a caern lost for my teacher's — or my — honor. I don't understand, but I will go."

Huo Qiyun clapped him on the shoulder and held out a small mirror.

"Too late," Hong Tan cried softly.

Wu Bingshu rose. Jimi fluttered back, into the shadows.

"They're here," she faltered.

"I'm sorry," said Michael. He sought the Fox's eyes, and saw a hardness there he had not expected — and realized with a shock that it was not directed at him.

Wu Bingshu's gaze flickered briefly toward the Garou.

"Stay. Turn. They are here."

"And they are seven."



Introduction: The Changing Phantoms

Let your rapidity be that of the wind, your compactness that of the forest. In raiding and plundering be like fire, in immovability like a mountain.

Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*



Asia is not without its stories of the beasts who walk as men. There are myths aplenty in the East about those who Change — of where the fox-spirits keep their souls, or how the tigers conducted their business when the world was young.

And those myths are wrong.

The snowy mountaintops and steaming jungles of Asia, like the wild portions of all the World of Darkness, are the last refuge of Gaia's Changing children. Like all the Changing Breeds, the Asian werebeasts obey a culture older than recorded history and quite unlike human fable. However, here the shapeshifters have grown somewhat... apart from their cousins from Europe, Africa, the Americas and even Australia. They obey a mysticism that is both familiar to those Westerners who speak with them, and is yet somewhat different. Strangest of all, when the Garou manage to gain an audience with these distant cousins and speak urgently of the Apocalypse, the Eastern shapeshifters merely shake their heads, as if being berated by an arrogant child.

They are like the Westerners, and yet they are different. They fight the same battles, and yet they fight in a strangely

alien war. They take tea with their enemies and treat their friends with coolness rather than passion. They are the Changing Phantoms — the hengeyokai.

Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East is a supplement concerning the wercreatures of Asia, and the courts in which they abide. Unlike the Kuei-jin, who are an entirely different breed than their Cainite "cousins," the hengeyokai are very much the same form of shapeshifter as their more widespread relatives. However, centuries of life with a spirit world that outsiders would find alien and a cooperative court system have led the hengeyokai down a decidedly different road.

The hengeyokai are very different from their Western brethren, and at the same time they are very alike. The word "Gaia" exists in the hengeyokai's tongues, and they acknowledge that even the First Age was birthed into being by the Mother. They understand the work of the Triat, and revere Luna as their Western brethren do. For the most part, they share a common origin with the "Sunset People" (although the tales of that origin vary wildly) — it is the events following the Impergium that set them apart. For

instance, the War of Rage never burned its way across Asia — instead, the Asian shapeshifters lost many of their number in great battles with the Bane-lords called the Yama Kings. As a result, the hengeyokai cooperate amongst each other as do the Western Garou tribes — with all the politicking and caution that implies.

Interestingly enough, the hengeyokai have been slightly less particular about keeping their existence secret from the local human populations. As a result, the Kitsune, Tengu and the rest all appear frequently in Asian myth, although the hengeyokai have been careful to assure that the humans *learned little of the werecreatures' true nature*. Those who think they know a Kumo's tabcos because they know the human culture of his territory, or those who believe that a Hakken is bound by a strictly human code of *bushido*, typically leave the dust of the earth knowing no more of the truth than they did when they were born.

What is a Hengeyokai?

Shapeshifters are of many species, but of one spirit. They are not affected by humans' beliefs, nor are their powers derived from their culture. A Bastet is a Bastet, whether a Pure Lands feline of lynx stock, or an African human-born lion-changer. So what makes the hengeyokai different from their brethren?

Long ago, the hengeyokai policed the world as did the Sunset People. However, the War of Rage never fully spilled over into the East — and when the Eastern shapechangers did turn on one another and spill their own cousins' blood, their war was a war of courts, of multiracial septs making war on each other.

What's more, the hengeyokai, though territorial as any other Changing Breed, owe much of their social structure to the precise court system that they claim was given them by Heaven itself — meaning Gaia and her ministers. At the beginning of the world, all supernatural creatures were on speaking terms — there were no vampires in the East, the fae spoke often with the Changing Courts, and the Ten Thousand Immortals were friendly to all. The Umbra itself hummed with the activity of all *shen*, and its patron spirits — the Dragon Princes, Ministers of Heaven and more — grew powerful from the focus of belief and loyal service. As the Middle Kingdom grew, subtle changes began to creep over its Changing denizens. The Mokolé began to tap into the dreams of the great dragons and were themselves shaped by the dreams' power. The hengeyokai drew up courts of cooperation, and began to follow a common law. Even some of the reclusive Rokea were brought into the courts, and learned a measure of civility quite different from the primal life to which they were accustomed.

Of course, war came to this place, and the minions of the Wyrms began to work their corruption before long. But as the history of the Middle Kingdom unfolded, it molded the shapeshifters there into what they are today — the changing phantoms; the hengeyokai.

Theme and Mood

Hengeyokai is a book about unity and sacrifice in the face of oncoming disaster; about spirituality both exotic and universal; about the vitality of life and the courage to risk it; about tradition and change, duty and paranoia, despair and the dim light, however impossibly faint, of hope.

Although the hengeyokai do not look upon the coming Apocalypse in quite the same manner as do their Western counterparts, the sense of impending doom should be no less present in hengeyokai chronicles. The Sixth Age is not the end of all things — but it is inevitable, and it is almost here. The cycle *will* turn. The Earth *will* be plunged into an age of evil, cruelty and chaos. And unless the Yama Kings and their minions are prevented from chewing through the Wheel's axle, the Wheel will stop in this Age for all time, rather than proceeding again to the Twelfth Age as it should.

Hengeyokai therefore do not fight to stave off the Apocalypse — in fact, some seek to hasten it, all the better to encourage it to pass as quickly as it came. The coming Age *must* come if the Wall is to topple, and Heaven and Earth are to be reunited once more. The desperate struggle of the East's shapeshifters is therefore to be prepared for the turning of the Wheel, so that they may perform their duties in the Age to come. As in most **Werewolf** games, the players should feel dread for the future — but some measure of acceptance and duty as well. However dark their fate, the hengeyokai will meet it with proud souls and sharp talons.

How to Use This Book

Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East is a book in two parts. The first part deals with the Changing children of the East in general, and the particulars of their setting that have shaped them into their slightly unfamiliar forms. It discusses the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, the races that populate those courts, and adds both character creation rules and a few antagonists for players and Storytellers alike.

The second half of this book is essentially the Kitsune Changing Breed Book; the Kitsune have been heavily influenced by their setting, and their fate is irrevocably intertwined with that of the other hengeyokai. It contains full rules for playing the clever werefoxes, as well as a study on their society and origins.

Caution!

A word of warning: Although hengeyokai characters can be blended into groups of Westerners, you should do so *very* carefully. If hengeyokai immediately start popping up in septs and packs across the West, the flavor of the book — the flavor of exoticism — is lost. After all, how special can the Kitsune be when every group of players has at least one in their ranks? It also tends to stretch the plausibility of the game world; although the hengeyokai work well together, they don't care for the company of Westerners, who they find foolish and misguided, little more than cubs.

Hengeyokai travel beyond the Middle Kingdom very rarely, if they do so at all. Although it is tempting to immediately throw them into your usual Werewolf game, we strongly recommend you wait until the moment is right. Remember, most Garou never see so much as a Western Bastet in all their lives — meeting a hengeyokai should be an even more special and memorable event.

Glossary

The following phrases are in common use among hengeyokai of the Beast Courts; although some Breeds have their own slangs and dialects, these terms are recognized by all shapeshifters of the East.

Age of the Dawning — The First Age; the time when matter and spirit were still whole, when all things were one with Gaia.

Age of Legends — The Third Age; a time before history, when the hengeyokai first went to war against the Wyrn's forces.

Age of Shadows — The Fifth Age or modern age; believed to have been heralded by the coming of the Westerners.

Age of Sorrow — The Sixth Age, the age yet to come. The hengeyokai's name for the Apocalypse, which they believe may or may not be the end of all things.

Age of the Ten Thousand Things — The Second Age, when matter and spirit split from one another. The hengeyokai claim to have been born in this age.



Age of Testing — The Fourth Age, which began in prehistory and continued until the present millennium. A time of war and strife.

Bakemono — A fomor; fomori.

Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother — A formal term for hengeyokai society; all Eastern shapechangers who follow Gaia are honorary members, while some pledge themselves entirely to the Courts' law. Often shortened to *Beast Courts*.

Centipede, centipedes

— Slang for the Wyrn or its servants; probably inspired by battles with the noisome Mukade.



Court — A hengeyokai sept; courts are often very formal by compare to Western septs, although nowhere near as formal as the human courts of Asia.

Court of Ancestors — The collective society of hengeyokai Ancestor-spirits.

Courts, the — Hengeyokai shorthand for the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother; considered disrespectfully terse by some elders.

Dragon Line — A line of strong Chi connecting dragon nests, either equivalent to a Moon Bridge (a Yang dragon line) or a Byway (a Yin dragon line).

Dragon Nest — A poetic *shen* term for a caern.

Emerald Mother, the — Gaia.

Fifth Age — The current age, a time of rising evil; reckoned by many to change soon to an even blacker age.

Fist — The auspice of the warrior; Ahroun.

Gai'nan — A hengeyokai word that roughly translates into "magistrate"; a ranking court official. The accent is on the second syllable.

Gaki — A loose term for Japanese Kuei-jin.

Hengeyokai — "Changing Phantom." Any shapeshifter of the East; in particular, those bound to the Beast Courts.

High War — The formal, courtly ways of making war, such as honorable combat.

Kin-jin — Western vampires.

Kuei-jin — Eastern vampires; souls from Hell reborn into corpses.

Lantern — The auspice of leadership and judgment; rough equivalent to Philodox.

Leaf — The auspice of stealth and information gathering; rough equivalent to Ragabash.

Low War — Less honorable forms of making war; pacts with Kuei-jin are often considered the province of Low War.

Marawa — The Destroyer; totem of the Yin Kumo.

Minister of Heaven — A polite form of address for an Eastern Incarna (save for Wyrms Incarna, who are called *Ministers of Hell*).

Mirror — The auspice of mediation and mysticism; rough equivalent to Theurge.

Mirror Lands — The Penumbra.

Mountain sentai — A war party bound by a common totem and a common code of conduct; a rough equivalent to a Garou pack.

Namebreakers — Hengeyokai term for mages, usually contemptuous.

Nareau — The Spider Lord; totem of the more balanced Kumo.

Okuma — The Gurahl of the East; killed in the War of Shame.

Pillar — The auspice of support and unity — very rough equivalent to Galliard.

Rati — The Insatiable Lady; totem of the Yang Kumo.

Sentai — A hengeyokai war party, typically five in number; they may be temporary in nature, or bound to a common totem as is a *Garou* pack.

Shen — Any Asian supernatural or Awakened being.

Sixth Age — The Apocalypse; not considered by hengeyokai to be the end of all things, but merely the nadir of the Cycle.

Sunset People — Western shapechangers; the term references their fatalism almost more than their place of origin. One acid proverb states that "the Sunset People do not believe that the sun will rise again."

Susanowo — Lord of Storms; a Hakken totem now possibly corrupted by the Wyrms.

Talon — An elemental role within a sentai, such as "Fire Talon" or "Moon Talon."

Tapestry, the — A *shen* term for the Middle Umbra; also used by the hengeyokai to differentiate the spirit world they know from the Umbra with which the Sunset People are more familiar.

Tsuki-yomi — A Hakken moon totem; another name for Luna.

Wall, the — The *shen*'s name for the Gauntlet.

War of Shame — A great war like the War of Rage, fought among hengeyokai in the Fourth Age and instigated by Wan Xian manipulation.

Wave sentai — A temporary sentai, arranged from convenience more than anything else.

Wheel of Ages — The great cycle of all time, believed to begin with the birth of the universe: As the Wheel turns to its lowest point, the earth suffers times of increasing misery, until it reaches its nadir and the world begins to ascend to a time of harmony once more.

Wind — A sentai member's alignment with one of the cardinal directions, such as "Center Wind" or "South Wind."

Yama Kings — Massively powerful Banes that rule their own pocket domains in the Yomi World.

Yang World — The "higher" spirit world of life energy; the Near Umbra.

Yin World — The "lower" spirit world of death energy; the Dark Umbra.

Yomi — The power of the Wyrms. Yomi spirits of Yin are Spectres; Yomi spirits of Yang are Banes.

Yomi World — A Wym corrupt Realm made of equal portions Yin and Yang worlds; a Hell for *shen*.

Chapter One: Lands of the Emerald Mother



he only light in the caves was the guide's paper lantern, and it was revealing little of the surroundings. Su Hou rubbed his arms for extra warmth; his leather jacket was fairly warm, but he was a hot-blooded boy and didn't care at all for the chill, dark air.

"Hey!" Su Hou bit back a shudder and shouted again. "There's nothing down here! It's too cold in these damn caves to hold any such thing as a court!" His eyes bored holes into the back of the man leading the way through the cold limestone caverns. "What kind of barbarians are you people? Why can't you hold your courts back in Guilin, instead of down here in the dark?"

His guide, a broad-shouldered Japanese man, replied in textbook Mandarin. "Keep walking, cub."

Su Hou snarled and swelled up into his war form, and advanced quickly on his guide's back. "Hey, damn you!" he roared. "You listen to me! I'm no child to be treated like this! I was killing Ivory Princes in the Cat Street Market before I was fifteen, and now I have claws that have tasted demon blood! You better treat me like the warrior I am, or I'll—"

The backhand blow was as sudden as it was painful, and it knocked the young werewolf sprawling. He shook his head and tried to scramble to all fours, but his guide, now nine feet of black fur and shining teeth, seized him by the collar and lifted him effortlessly. Su Hou felt his fangs rattle in his snout as the older werewolf shook him violently, then slammed him into the limestone floor.

"What arrogance is this?" The guide's voice was thunder in the echoing cave. "You have torn a bakemono apart and think you are as deadly and wise a warrior as any in our Mother's Courts? You have killed humans and think you are the greatest of all predators?"

Su Hou shrank, becoming a wiry youth once more. He glared back up at the towering figure above him, although there was a touch of fear in his eyes. The massive werewolf growled deep in its throat, and its paw gathered up a handful of Su Hou's leather jacket. Effortlessly lifting the Hong Kong youth off the ground, the black-furred werewolf shook its head. Then its gaze went downwards, to where the paper lantern flickered by the edge of a puddle — and something deep in Su Hou shifted. He almost cried out, and then he had no breath left to shout.

Suddenly there was light in the cavern — if it could be called the same cavern, for surely it wasn't. The stalactites and stalagmites had been worked into masterpieces of delicate ornamentation, and the warm glow of brass braziers suffused the place. Great red hangings worked with gold thread hung from the ceiling — wasn't that ceiling lower before? — and the scent of water and jasmine filled the air.

And then there were the beast-folk.

The massive werewolf released Su Hou, and the Hong Kong youth immediately fell to his knees, bowing his head before the immense dragonlike creature that coiled around a fat limestone pillar. Flanking the great reptile were a man and a woman, each wearing a peculiar blend of modern fashion and

Communication Barriers

One of the greatest difficulties that the hengeyokai face is the language barrier. The hengeyokai represent a diversity of species, cultures, and creeds. Add to this dilemma the fact that each species communicates with each other in a language particular only to that race. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that each species has difficulty understanding another breed's communication; for each shapeshifter tongue is a mix of body motion, scent release, and sound emanations, all peculiar to the werebeasts in question. Even within a Changing Breed, the separation of the Middle Kingdom has subtly changed the methods of speech; a Western Corax may have some difficulty adapting to his Tengu cousin's dialect, to say nothing of the communication difficulties between the dragonlike Zhong Lung and the more primal Mokolé.

To overcome this hurdle, the hengeyokai make extensive use of the Gifts: Mindspeak and Waking Dream of Unity. This focus on mental speech allows them to communicate ideas, images and abstract thought, with other willing *shen* as well as the Sunset People. With the waking dream-speech as the official language of the courts, the beast-folk maintain a universal language of ideas and beliefs that goes beyond the limitations of species boundaries.

Nonetheless, although the hengeyokai are fully capable of conversing with the Sunset People, they rarely bother to do so. Even given that mental speech conveys connotation and emphasis far better than any translator, the hengeyokai do not feel that they have time to spend educating their fractious cousins. One may speak clearly and without fault, and still the listener might not understand; and what if the honored listener attacks a Kuei-jin delegate during the time of instruction, or initiates any other number of uninformed discourtesies? Far easier to simply tell the Sunset People that their wars are not welcome in the lands of dragons, and to bid them a courteous farewell. Although this isolationist policy may eventually prove to be untenable, the hengeyokai just cannot be bothered to invite the bull-headed Westerners into their courts and hope that they don't destroy centuries of planning over the course of their education.

imperial regalia; he carried an antiquated halberd, she sat tailor-fashion, a staff across her lap. Other people — or creatures — milled about, quietly whispering to one another but their eyes always fixed on the newcomers. Some had sharp eyes but seemed otherwise human; others were great wolf-creatures like Su Huo and his guide. One woman, her silken robes falling open to reveal leather clubwear beneath, had the bright eyes and curious face of a fox. All grew quiet as the dragon raised its head and spoke, its voice resounding in Su Huo's head.

"So. This is the Glass Walker you told me of, Tensui?"

Su Huo's guide dropped to one knee and bowed his head. "Yes, Raging Floodwater." His voice also sounded in Su Huo's head, felt rather than spoken. "He should be the last."

Su Huo carefully sneaked a glance around him at this. Most of the beast-courtiers had drawn to one side or another, and only he, Tensui, and four others remained kneeling before the dragon. His brow furrowed; the four were all young like himself, although they weren't all Chinese; the skinny girl on one end was definitely Korean, for one.

"Boy." Su Huo looked forward into the golden suns of the reptile's eyes, and froze at the sight. The voice in his head came again. "Boy, tell me why you are here."

Because I was brought? he thought. *Because I'm—no, that's not it.* "I... I don't know," he stammered, bowing his head again.

The creature snorted. "In that, at least, you are correct. You do not know, and you show no desire to mend your ignorance. You discovered your power only a month ago, and you believe that all you have learned since then will suffice."

"No!" Su Huo's exclamation surprised even him. "No, please, sifu... I want to learn. I want to be a part of this."

The dragon nodded, and uncoiled itself from the pillar. As it did so, its bulk fell away into the form of an old woman with a peasant's strong build, clad in saffron robes, a jade dragon pendant at her throat. She smiled a little, and her eyes flashed, and the booming voice of the dragon resounded in Su Huo's head again. "Good. Then that is exactly what you will do. You will sit there, and wait with the other young ones who have been gathered. You will show respect for your elders, and you will listen. In this way you will improve yourself, and discover who you are. You will all discover who we — and you — are."

Su Huo nodded quickly. "Yes, sifu," he said, and he wasn't surprised that he was echoed by the other young ones to his side.

History of the Ages



aging Floodwater speaks:

We live in a time of dying. Surely you have seen this — the slow death of the spirit that occurs in the great cities, the quicker death of the wild places as the humans desperately break all the ground they can to feed their innumerable children and their ever-greedy wallets. Know also that you are born into this decaying age for a purpose, to fight this death of things and make the world a place where unsullied life may again be born one day. But you must know exactly who and what you are if you are to fulfill this purpose. Listen, then, as I explain the root of all things — the ways of the Middle Kingdom, the land where we live. And to understand the ways of our world, you must first understand the ways of the cycle.

The Great Cycle of Being

All things run in cycles; nothing is immutable. The world follows the seasons. Spring, summer, fall and winter follow one another, and the animals live in harmony with the seasons. In spring, they mate. In the summer, they bear their young. In the autumn, they nurture their young and prepare for winter. In the winter, they follow their duty, such as migration or hibernation, but it is all a part of the natural order of things. This order of all things follows a cycle of change also. This we call the Great Cycle.

We who Change are creatures of balance. We are of animal and human, of spirit and flesh, of immortality and mortality. The Great Cycle guides our lives and dictates the progression of our soul. The directions that the cycle gives are subtle and are ordained for the individual; no one being's fate is the same as another's. Every being has its place in the cycle and is a part of an ever-flowing dance of transformation. The actions that one takes in the journey of life determine the direction of one's future. This is not one journey: It is an ongoing process of internal evaluation that is adjusted at each step in one's life. As one changes and new lessons are required, the path one takes through the Great Cycle transforms. The greatest challenge that one faces in life is the ever-renewing awareness of one's place in the Great Cycle.

To act in accordance with the cycle is to embrace one's nature and experience a refinement of the soul to a purer state of existence. There is a great deal of speculation by the various beast folk on what is the purpose or progression of the soul. Our Stargazer brethren teach that when one is in complete harmony with the cycle, a new state of existence is achieved called the True Gaia Realm.

The Great Cycle is much more than a simple philosophy — you need but look within your own breast to understand that we are creatures of passion and vitality, and have little use for whimsical conjecture. The cycle is real, even though you cannot touch it as you would stone or wood. It affects all things, although not all things obey it. Time itself turns on its axis, and I and my kind are gifted with the ability to dream visions of its turning. That is why we are keepers of the history of the world, and through the Middle Dragons we are all custodians of the Wheel.

The Wheel of Ages

The Great Cycle plays itself out on the tapestry of life as a series of different ages. To envision this, picture in your minds a wheel. Each of the wheel's various spokes represent a different age by which we divide our history and measure the passage of time. But, for us this wheel is not just a measure; it is the manifestation of a series of lessons that make up our various incarnations. This wheel we refer to as the Wheel of Ages and as it turns, it brings all things with it into new experiences, growth, and learning. From these experiences we can hope to glean the wisdom of the ages.

Since the dawn of time, we of the hengeyokai have told tales of our ancient history and grand accomplishments. But for us these tales are more than a collection of stories and epic deeds; they are lessons that teach a greater truth than exists beyond the simple lessons of a single story. All time follows a vast succession of ages that has existed from the beginning of all creation. Many of the various shen have also learned of the Wheel of Ages, and does this not prove that it is so? Even the foolish Kuei-jin, who lost a kind of godhood and fell from enlightenment for their pride, recognize the four ages that have come, the age in which we now live, and the ages which are yet to come.

The Emerald Mother decreed at the dawning of time that there were to be twelve ages in all before the Wheel had fully turned. For countless generations we have numbered these ages

Gaiadhama: The Way Beyond All Illusions

— Sifu Whispers On The Wind speaks:

To be of the Changing Ones is to be a creature of divine nature, much more so than man, animal, or spirit. We perceive the spiritual essence of the universe at work in all things and interact with manifestations of these essences throughout our lives. To not recognize this truth is to be blinded to the nature of existence. Our connection to the spiritual worlds gives us capabilities that many of the other shen lack. The spirits themselves grant us our very Gifts; wondrous powers and abilities. We have a talent to see beyond veil of the material world and peer at the secret workings the universe itself; the True Gaia. We of the Stargazers have long taught a profound lesson that many of the hengeyokai here in the Middle Kingdom have adopted.

To discover the truth, we must first understand the lie that envelopes us. The external battles for the material and spiritual realms that we wage against the Yama Kings, servants of the Wyrin, and other hengeyokai. The war to save Gaia, the struggle to stave off the coming Apocalypse, the hatred and bigotry from the War of Rage. All these things and more are blinding us to the true matter at hand. We see these things as the heart of the matter, the driving forces of our existence, and frequently fail to address the real threat. One must come to realize that these challenges and others are only a by-product of the greater struggle we face. We must be destroyers of illusions and cast off the Web of Ignorance that exists in the mind.

The Weaver is a powerful spiritual force that is at work within our selves. It moves through our minds and pushes us into losing sight of the greater struggle. Sometimes this happens when we lose control of our emotions, such as when we are overcome by Rage, Harano, or other emotions. Other times we use duty as the excuse for our every action, but lose sight of why we even have duty in the first place. There are infinite strands to this, the Web of Ignorance.

The True Gaia is the totality of the universe and all things in creation. When one overcomes the world of falsehoods and destroys the Web of Ignorance; then one may become a part of the True Gaia Realm. The realm is not a different land so much as an exalted state of existence. To do this thing is no easy task, and may take a lifetime or many more. To become enlightened is much more than to be in balance with one's self, and in harmony with all things. It is more than an attitude or a practice, it is a state of being. The steps that one must take are beyond any teaching and are only known to those who have reached the True Gaia Realm. It is believed that one who has reached this state may now move on in the Great Cycle, or perhaps stay at this state of existence in order to aid others in achieving such a sacred place. We call this philosophy the Gaiadhama.

and studied the lessons they teach. Do not believe that the calendar notes how many years each age may contain! We can never predict when an age will pass — we can only recognize when one age has moved into the next. In the ancient days, when the Middle Kingdom and the Yin and Yang Realms were closer together, the Ministers of Heaven would commune with those who were sagacious and teach of the Great Cycle and its



passage. Now we must rely on our own memory to decipher the lessons of history. Listen well, for the universe has hidden many jewels of wisdom within its folds, even in the times when there was no universe at all.

Age of the Dawning

What can I say of a time before my birth, before even the great memory that is my sacred gift, and before existence of anything of which we can conceive? I can only share with you that which I have been taught and believe of this primordial time. I have come to understand this time as the time of Ten-Thousand Truths, for there are limitless tales of how things began, how we were created, and what came before us. Things have a way of changing, and what was once truth, becomes true no longer and what might have been the past becomes a myth. I believe that there was no beginning, for the passage of time is a creation "after" the singularity of Gaia. At some juncture, time was created, and a beginning now exists. But do not dwell on this thought, for you will come to your own understanding and decide what is true for yourself in time. All things may come to pass....

What I will say of this age is that it was a time when spirit, mind, and body were as one. All things were as one. This is the primordial age that we call the Dawn Time; when all that was was Gaia's womb. The hengeyokai were not yet born, for what need was there for those who balance matter and spirit when matter was not matter and spirit was not spirit? We understand the First Age as a time of perfection, when all was Heaven and

there was no need for Hell. It ended when the worlds separated — an event that many say was caused by the birth of the San Yuan, or the Triat.

What we learn from this age is the lesson of divinity — Gaia began in perfection, and all things were born of perfection. What is more, in all things remain the spark of perfection, and the universe has the potential to return to this wondrous state once more. However, if the Wheel is stopped — and yes, it can be stopped — then that spark of divinity will eventually die in all things, and the universe will rot without its soul.

Age of the Ten Thousand Things

As all things began to divide their material selves from their spirit selves, it was a time of great change. Lands formed in the oceans, and other lands floated away or were even destroyed. The new beings of flesh and spirit found perches throughout immense expanses. The various spirit beings fell to bickering and the world was constantly being torn apart. Much of the world was in turmoil, partly because the Weaver was set on Naming as much as she could to set the world in the order she desired, and the Wyrn and Wyld resisted her to varying degrees. Humans were born to intelligence in the Second Age, and still many argue whether this was a good thing or not.

Amongst all this chaos dawned several powerful factions of spirit beings, each fueled by the mixed essences of the San Yuan. Some factions stayed within the early world, and many others disappeared into faraway lands or to other worlds. Of those that stayed two factions became exceptionally strong: the

Yama Kings and the Ministers of Heaven. Of course, they quickly fell to war with each other. The Yama Kings were twisted and obscene beings that coveted anything that another had. They had no real organization, but they had numbers and power. They made it quite clear that they meant to take these new things called "Heaven and Earth" and shape them to their liking. The depredations of the Yama Kings are taught to be the first sign that the Wyrms had fallen from its role of the Great Serpent of Balance and become the Devil-Centipede of Corruption.

And so the defenders of this world were formed.

The August Personage, one of the greatest Ministers of Heaven, chose humans to be his champions. He imbued them with the powers of spirit, and he set them on Earth as the Wan Xian, the Ten Thousand Immortals. The Wyld spat out its own creations, the *hsien*, to serve its own inscrutable purposes, and it made them of pure spirit wrapped in the tiniest amount of earth and flesh.

But wisest of all was Gaia! She carefully chose the finest among humans and beasts and gathered the purest of spirit to bind the two together. Then She took all the new children into Her hands and called Her brother Sun and sister Moon to bless the babes. The Moon breathed on Her left hand and the Sun on Her right, and the children opened their eyes.

And so we were born. In the Second Age we learned who we were, and we struck the great Pact of brotherhood with the spirits of the world. In the Second Age we were given our responsibilities, and when we were ready to fight for the first time in the Emerald Mother's name, truly our loyal souls were the sign that a new age was nigh.

From the Second Age we learn the lesson of creation. Each thing was born into the world for a purpose, and we were no exception. We shall never forget that we were born to defend our Mother from those who would sully and pervert all the Ten Thousand Things that She created.

Age of Legends

We came into the Third Age ready to do our duty for the Emerald Mother, and that is exactly what we did. For the first time the mountains and valleys knew the *hengyokai's* war cries and bright banners. The Yomi devils and centipedes paused as they saw us, sons and daughters of human and beast, and we cut them down. The children of the Wyrms quickly learned to fear and hate us, and the war we fought was High War at its most glorious. In this we had allies, the Wan Xian, but ultimately they were not part of our courts and we were not part of theirs.

There was no greater time for heroism than the Third Age; we were fully formed and well-armed, and our enemies were many and strong. This much is certainly true — we waged war against the Yama Kings, and we drove them back from Earth into the spirit world.

Today, the Kuei-jin speak of how the Wan Xian struck down the Yama Kings back into Hell. This is so, but it is not the whole of the truth. They have carried the tales as well as one would expect from such creatures, but without *chuming*, they forget. I have not forgotten the deeds of their allies. We all

fought the demons in those days, but the most resplendent war host was that of my ancestors, the first of the Middle Dragons.

We were many in those days, and should it not have been so? Those were the ages when dragons shook the mountains and spat thunderstorms when they were angry. And we were their children in spirit, blessed with a knowing of things that stretched back until the times before humans had descended from the trees. The wolves were few and far between, and the Mother required warriors to slash the Yama King-boils from her sides. The wolf-children answered the call to battle, and so did the Khan. But to

San Yuan: the Triat revisited

Shindoshi Wisdom-of-the-Shadows speaks:

The Triat is the San Yuan and the San Yuan is the Triat. Each is a vital part of the other, but you would be surprised how many people confuse them or see only part of what is there!

The Sunset People speak of the Weaver, Wyld and Wyrms — great forces of the universe, whose birthing struggle changed creation forever. They recognize an intelligence, even if unknowable, to each one, and they think of each as great entities with unimaginable power. This is true.

The Namebreakers understand the forces of the San Yuan. They see the order of the universe and the firmness of that which shall always be; they see the lifeblood of change that stirs the cycle, and they see the eventual decay and fall of all that is, the resting point at the end of the universe's journey. This too is true.

The sutras written by the scholars of our Courts name the San Yuan as Ching, Gui and Qui — essence, spirit and vitality. Each is necessary in some portion to the growing soul, and a creature who lacks any of the three is doomed to perish unenlightened. This too is true.

I hear your cries of despair. How can each of these be true? you lament. The answer lies on the path of inner knowing. Those who walk this path — which I hope will include all of you — feel the presence of the Triat in the forces within themselves. The Weaver is not simply a great Spider-spirit that madly throws webs across all the land — she is also the force of will within us that empowers us to make our desires reality. The Wyld dies as the wild places and sacred caerns die — and it is also the Gnosis within us that grants us power to create things of spirit and virtue, that dies when it is starved by the death of the wilderness. The Wyrms gnaws madly at its bonds, and it is also the furnace of Rage within us that permits us to destroy that which should not be. They are the Triat and they are the San Yuan. Is that so difficult?

So if we are to be creatures of balance, we must look within ourselves. We are beings of threes — of animal, human and spirit, of sun, moon and earth, of the San Yuan. The fight lies within as well as without.

But be careful not to ignore the threats of the external world while you contemplate your navels! If you are killed by *bakemono* while you are in meditation, perhaps you die enlightened, but I would call you very foolish!



attend the needs of their Mother, the great dragons asked us, their younger cousins, to enter the battle as well.

And we did so, and the war-host was grand and splendid and terrible beyond all words. From the marshes and rivers we came, gathering in numbers such as we'd never gathered before. Our war songs rattled the trees and terrified the humans for *li* in all directions. We fell on the demons wherever we found them and crushed them beneath our mighty talons. We rent them to tiny pieces and bellowed our triumph to the sky, so that even the Wan Xian would hear us and tremble. We even stood against the Yama Kings themselves — and with the Wan Xian the hammer and we the anvil, they had no recourse but to flee into the Yomi World. In our arrogance, many of us pursued them to finish our work.

And there we died.

Listen and understand. When we marshaled ourselves for war, we were doing what any dutiful child of the Mother should do when she is in peril. All must be ready to fight when the trials of any age are upon the world. However, we were prideful when we leapt after the Yama Kings, challenging them in their own fortresses. In our pursuit of glory, we had forgotten — forgotten — the dictates of the First Mandate. We strove to be warriors, but failed because that was not the task chosen for us.

Our ancestors had never been to the Yomi World before, so we had no picture of it in our memory. We did not heed the Tengu's warnings as warriors should, so we were caught in a realm of which we knew little. There we stood against tens of thousands of demons, and there the blood of devils ran in rivers wide enough to choke the Dragon King himself. But so many of us died, and so few escaped. To this day, I remember our failure to obey the Mandates, and I share it with you — for you can see the cost in the Zhong Lung's waning numbers, but you must also know the cause.

What was the lesson of this age? It was a lesson of acceptance and cooperation. We should not grow too arrogant in our duties to the Emerald Mother that we would overlook our own limitations or presume ourselves the sole defenders of Her lands. We formed formal truces with the Wan Xian, which later became pacts to help one another guide — and control — the growth of human settlements. Little did we know then that the Ten Thousand Immortals, the imperfect blend of human and spirit, would grow to be our rivals as much as our allies. But even this should not cloud the lesson of the Third Age, for even the Kuei-jin may be dealt with fairly.

Age of Testing

When the Fourth Age came upon us, only a fool could not see that the ages of Sun had passed. The Wheel had turned into its second quadrant, and was at the beginning of the darker, lower half. Blood marked this age — the red blood of humans, the shining blood of our own kind, the black blood of the Centipede's offspring.

The Fourth Age began before human history, but human history was born within this age. You see, until this time we had kept the humans' numbers in check in accord with the pact struck between us and the Wan Xian. Their ministers of roads and huts would prevent the humans from birthing more children than they could feed, and our ministers of mountain and jungle would

keep the humans from building their homes on our sacred sites. Things were in balance — but the Fourth Age dawned when the Wan Xian, greedy for more than their share of the earth's blood, toppled the balance and emptied the scales.

The Sunset People speak of a War of Rage, of a time when they were set against each other and when the wolves tore their siblings to bits. It is shameful to remember, but we too had such a war. And it was the Wan Xian who set us against our brethren.

Why would they do such a thing? *We thought them our truest allies then, and were not suspicious when they came to our courts with tales of the Centipede's taint. Only after the war did we see that they were greedy, and that they thirsted to drink the Chi from our sacred places. So they set hengeyokai court against hengeyokai court, and fell upon the abandoned caerns afterwards. We call this time the War of Shame — shame that we were so easily tricked into killing one another, shame that we let caerns fall while focusing on this false war, shame that we soaked our claws and teeth in our cousins' blood. Gaia wept as Changing blood fell upon the soil, and finally she could bear no more, and cried out in pain. That cry was the doom of the Wan Xian. It tore the life from their breasts, dooming them to existence as dead Chi-drinking devils — the Kuei-jin.*

Oh, we had our revenge when we discovered their deceptions. We fell on their civilizations and slew the humans that gathered in death cults, worshipping their fallen masters. Indeed, our ferocity was such that even today the humans remember our attacks, and flee when they see us take our war forms. We tore many of the Kuei-jin to pieces, and hurled their souls into the harshest of hells. Never again will we forget their treachery, and never again will we trust them as we did once before. But it was a lesson learned too late.

It was in these days that we saw the last of our brothers, the children of Bear, the Okuma. They had always kept their own counsel, and when the wars raged from court to court the bear-folk withdrew into the mountains. Who can say why? They never explained why they left us. I can but presume that they considered this another "useless war," and refused to ignore their duties as my own ancestors had done long ago. Alas, this action did not save them. Many of our courts feared that they had fled their duty, or turned to the Centipede's bidding. The Nagah slithered into their dens; the Hakken caught them on the cliffsides; the Khan leapt on their backs. And the Kumo, ever thirsty for a new opportunity, caught the rest in their webs and feasted on their hearts' blood.

Nakoko the Tengu tells me that this was so in the West as well, that long ago the bear-folk there were slain by the claws of the other Sunset People. I do not know why it is that the healers were the ones to accept the greatest suffering in this kingdom and in all others, but such was the way of things. I accept that it was, but I do not think that it must have been.

I do not know the tale of the last bear-changer's death. I think nobody does. Nonetheless, you must always remember that he died.

What is the lesson of this age? It is that there is no one constant answer to problems. We attacked our brethren in the name of duty; this was wrong, yet will not the Emerald Mother suffer if we neglect or ignore our tasks? *We know from the Third Age that we must have allies, but the Fourth teaches us not to*

follow their counsel blindly. There are many roads to virtue, and only a foolish person would refuse to set foot on more than one.

Age of Shadows

Most men agree that the Fifth Age, the present age, came to be with the arrival of the Westerners. It is futile to set a human date on the turning of the age; it is enough to know that the Age of Shadows is upon us. The Kuei-jin have become demons; the hsien are fading with the spirit world. The Weaver's webs stretch further across the Middle Kingdom each day. The tigers are dying in the jungles, and the humans are losing their spirits to their new gods of luxury and industry. The Mirror Lands are beginning to rot, and the High Dragons have fallen into a sickly slumber. I need tell you little of this age, for you will learn of its evils all too quickly.

What lesson shall we learn from this age? I fear that once we know the truth, that shall be the turning point of the Sixth Age. *How can one know the lesson of an age before the teaching is complete? If you would learn from the age you live in, then learn to better yourself, to train for the great wars to come. The shift will come soon, and we must all be prepared.*

Age of Sorrow

The worst is yet to come. The Sixth Age will be a time of such misery and suffering that many will believe that the world is ending. Indeed, the Sunset People have seen this age in their visions, and they say that there will be nothing left of Gaia when it arrives — that there will be no more ages.

This, I fear, is possible.

Many are the forces that gnaw at the axle of the Wheel of Ages, hoping to stop the turning of the Great Cycle. The Yama Kings strive to halt the Wheel in the Sixth Age, that one of their number may ascend to be the Demon Emperor of all. The Wyrms chew madly at the Wheel, attempting in its madness to destroy the cycle completely. The Stargazers murmur that the accumulation of karmic debt will weigh the Wheel down entirely, snapping the Wheel in the Sixth Age and bringing about the "Apocalypse."

We are charged to prevent this. The Emerald Mother has decreed that it is our task to ensure that the Wheel yet turns, and we will do what we must to see the Sixth Age ends as quickly as possible that the Wheel may turn again to the ages of the Sun. Do not ask me what lesson we shall learn from this time of Earth made Hell — we shall be busy enough in our tasks that enlightenment will surely have to wait.

Ages Yet to Come

I cannot speak of the ages further along the Wheel. What we hope for, pray for, is that the Wheel shall continue to turn, and that eventually the Twelfth Age will come. With the Twelfth Age's arrival, matter and spirit will again be made one. The universe and all the things in it will have achieved the True Gaia Realm, and the Emerald Mother will be one with all Her children once more.

Keep that thought in your breast at all times. Though we may die, though we may see our friends and lovers and family perish, though the skin of the earth crack and the seas boil, we fulfill our tasks in Gaia's name, that she may know peace once more.

The Lands of the Courts



hanh Orchid Wings speaks:

As you can see from the faces gathered around you, a court's members may have traveled many miles to come to their new home. I'll warn you now: If any of you have prejudices against certain of your neighbors—"oh, the Japanese are no good," "I don't think the Koreans know what they're doing"—you had better swallow them now. To be hengeyokai is to be of the Courts and of no particular human nation, but we have Kin in many countries, and most of us don't care to have our bloodlines insulted.

The Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother claim territory from the reaches of upper Mongolia down to the island chains of the Philippines, from the fringes of India to the mountains of Hokkaido. All in all, this place is what the *shen* call the Middle Kingdom—for it certainly seems to be halfway between the ignorant lands of the Earth and the enlightenment of Heaven.

But what of the lands of the Middle Kingdom? What do they mean to us? What a question! I could spend ages discussing the history of each court of each mountaintop and how they dealt with the humans around them. But that would be a waste of your time and mine. The best way to learn of a court and its territory is to go there, humbly present yourself, and discuss matters with the courtiers.

Now pay attention! This is a very quick version of an entire continent, but you should probably know where our priorities are.

China

I'll start with the land under which we've gathered. I don't generally care much for singling out countries for attention, but this one is so huge that it demands it. Zhongguo. China. What a divine old country this is, and how many things it holds! Mountains from the north to the south, rivers and plateaus, limestone pinnacles and labyrinthine caves, vast deserts and mighty monsoons! Ninety percent of their humans are crammed into twenty percent of their land, leaving many a bleak desert for us. Here is where you find the revered Middle Dragons in as great numbers as you'll ever find. Here is where the White-Faced One touched her paws to earthly soil for the first time. Here there are Khan and Tengu still stalking the mountains and Nezumi running through the slums of these impossibly large cities—even a very few Nagah in the Yellow River, if you believe that. It is a vast land of splendid history, and the humans here constantly do the most fascinating things. You'd think this would be a paradise for our kind. Perhaps it was once, but no longer.

If the Emerald Mother were to take me on Her lap, and tell me that She would allow me one favor, I would ask for all the hengeyokai to have it a little easier when making babies of their own. China is trouble for us—well, not as much trouble for Tengu like me, or those hell-born Kumo, but if there aren't enough warriors to go around, we scouts suffer too. With the government encouraging one child to a family, the odds of Kinfolk families producing new shapeshifters are fairly slim.

And if we do have many babies, there is less food to go around—you need only look at the famines that strike all too regularly. Perhaps our Nezumi brethren would find it only fitting, but I have grown a little too fond of the humans to take delight in suffering and starvation.

And that doesn't even count the problems the Khan have with their tiger Kin, or the difficulties the Zhong Lung are going through. What do you do when one half of your relatives is slaughtering the other half for food and good luck medicine?

We keep largely to the wilderness in China. The mountains still hold many sacred caerns, and the government makes city life difficult at best. The Kuei-jin and centipedes are numerous here—they find plenty of human prey to hide among, you see. There's plenty to see and do here—pick a province and start walking, and something will find you soon enough.

Korea

Here's a tale for you: They say that the Land of the Morning Calm was founded by Tan'gun, a king whose mother was once a bear but who became a woman. There was also a tiger in this tale who wanted to become human, but didn't have the patience.

That story may or may not be true. What is true, sadly, is that the Khan and the bear-folk no longer rule in this land of so many mountains. The Khan have lost their tiger Kin entirely here, and although a few bears remain, none of the bear-changers do. The pine-forest courts here are largely Tengu like myself, with a few homid Khan and the occasional newcomer. It doesn't make for a very martial court, I'm afraid, and the Korean hengeyokai are quite interested in having warriors from other lands move into their courts. There are plenty of Kuei-jin to fight there, for the Green Courts devour their jade as if it were *kimchi* and are not above calling on us to provide them with more, whether we agree to or not.

Japan

If there is a land where things are most different from the rest of the Middle Kingdom, it would be Nippon. When a people have a sea between themselves and their cousins, they grow very apart. The Hakken are hardly the same creature as their other wolf-changer brethren, wouldn't you say?

And oh, how the Weaver has come to the island kingdom! The Mirror Lands of Tokyo are as dangerous a place as the spirit world has to offer, barring the Yama Kings' toilets, unless you happen to be one of the Weaver's pet spider spirits. And the Wyrms—

Know this much: It is a very bad idea to travel the Mirror Lands near Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Although the physical world may seem to have healed, the spirit world is a raw, bleeding wound. Fat Man and Little Boy (how charmingly innocuous the Westerners are about their genocidal toys!) detonated above major dragon lines, and not even if all the bear-folk returned together could they heal this injury before the Sixth Age came. Another riddle for you: If the atomic poison shot out by the Wyrms in 1945 did not bring the Sixth Age into being, what do you think it will take to do so?

All of that is as it is, but there are still courts that rule free of the cities; Hokkaido is the spiritual stronghold of the Hakken, even though they are firmly entrenched in Tokyo, Osaka and

Kyoto as well. Mount Fuji is a place of great power, and the most secretive Cherry Phoenix Court does its best to beat away the spiritual decay of the land there. There are Tengu aplenty in the cities, and we find so much to watch, from the technological racing of the factories to the yakuza's ever-increasingly corrupt spiderwebs of crime. Same-Bito skulk through the coastal waters, and Kitsune play their games with the Japanese people as enthusiastically as they ever have. Nezumi and Kumo are here in numbers as well, and they manage to find plenty with which to amuse themselves.

To the Kuei-jin, Japan is a flawed paradise of sorts. We spend more time in the spirit world, and we see the decay that is upon the land. Tread most carefully if you would go there, for there are a thousand dooms that await the foolish.

The Himalayas

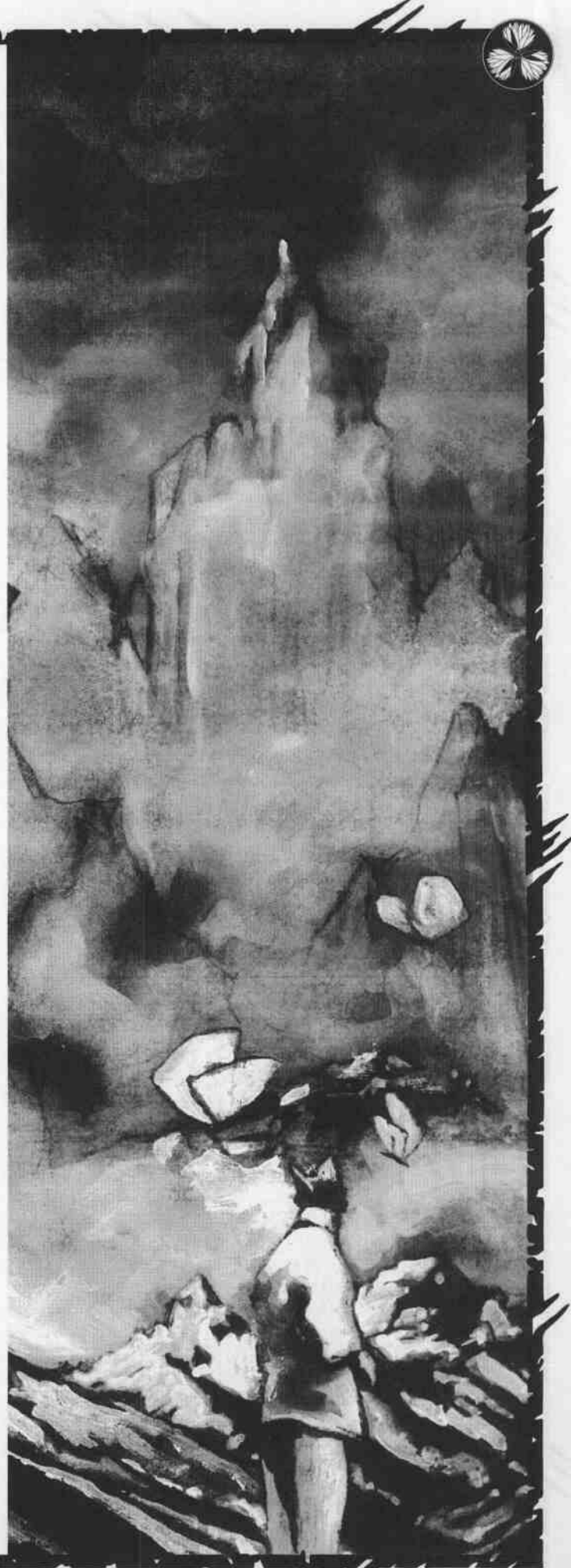
The Himalayas are one of our traditional territories, although we have lost so many sacred sites there of late to the Wyrms that I wonder how much longer we can hold these Bones of the Mother. How majestic these mountains are! To be practical, you must admit that they offer little by way of animal Kinfolk, but many of us nonetheless spend much of our lives tending to the sacred areas among the peaks and valleys, returning to more populated areas only once in a while to breed.

Or at least such was the way of things in the past. Now the Centipede's armies have come to the Himalayas. They have already overrun the Stargazers' Shigalu Monastery, home of the Sept of the Snow Leopard and one of the greatest caerns known. The loss is painful. As if this weren't enough, the occupation of Tibet has led to rather more government troops being stationed in the area than any sane hengeyokai would prefer. When the Wheel turns to the Sixth Age, war will wash over our final haven — and blood will soon cover the ground in our sacred areas.

Southeast Asia

Oh, this peninsula is filled with death and dying hopes. Where the Mirror Lands of Tokyo are choked with the Weaver's webs, the Mirror Lands of Bangkok are a stinking river of the Wyrms' sewage. I sometimes like to direct visiting Sunset People here, for they all seem to want something to do, but are very useless at the proper courtesies of court life. To be sure, they find plenty to occupy their claws with in Bangkok — the clever ones even learn to get out before they stir up the wasp's nests of Kuei-jin that rule there.

Vietnam and Cambodia, Thailand and Laos — all have contributed so many damned souls to the Yin Realms and Yomi World that it is painful for the spiritually sensitive even to tread the soil there. Banes boil up out of the ground there, and the hungry ghosts that haunt the lands are some of the most savage creatures ever to thirst for blood. Although we still have surviving courts hidden deep in the jungles there — yes, some things survived the bombing runs of the Vietnam War, and a few squads vanished oh-so-mysteriously during the war — this is a place where we are losing the war. These lands require warriors of great strength and sorcerers of impeccable strength of character. I hope that you prove to have such strength, and I ask the Ministers of Heaven to bless you should you go to these countries.



Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines

Beyond these islands, our territory ends. The few courts we have here are mostly the domain of Zhong Lung and Same-Bito, and they are powerful defenders indeed. There is energy aplenty to be had here, and it lacks the taint too often found in Japan and the war zones of Southeast Asia. Do not hear me incorrectly; the Centipede's brood have found their way here as they have everywhere else. But the hengeyokai who live here are masters of fighting battles in the sea, and are not quite as hard-pressed as the rest of us to survive from day to day. Not quite.

India

India isn't really part of the Middle Kingdom as the *shen* reckon it. But we go there, and we have a few courts remaining there, and our allies the Nagah call it home. The jungles there conceal us rather well, and the Khan have a long history with the land. However, the humans are simply managing themselves rather poorly here. Disease chokes their streets, they blithely kill the animal Kin of Nagah and Khan alike, and they are constantly preyed upon by Kuei-jin, bakemono, Western vampires, Banes — all manner of demons and goblins that flock to overcrowded cities and roll around happily in the despair they find there. What's more, I understand that the Scarlet Talon tribe of Sunset Wolves have chosen to avenge the deaths of Indian wolves by slaying villagers in kind.

There's much work to be done in India, and plenty of deadly enemies for those who grow bored easily. If anything, I think that the Beast Courts do not fully consider India their territory because it would be that much more of a drain on our capabilities. If the Sunset People need to prove that they can come to the East and change things for the better, let them start here. I would love to see some of India's wounds healed before the Sixth Age comes — but I gravely doubt that such a thing will come to pass.

Shen: The Limitless Forms of Divinity

ensui Shining Fang speaks:

We have mentioned much of other *shen* and their ways, but we have not formally spoken of these other beings and the dealings that we have with them. When we speak of the *shen*, we are referring to the various races of beings that are more than human and animal. The Mother and her attendants, the Triat, the Ministers of Heaven and Hell — these great beings, gods to some, created all the various *shen* with some intention in mind.

The *shen* are as diverse as the mortals they live with, but are also empowered to varying degrees beyond their mortal kin. We keep an uneasy accord with each of them; the Kuei-jin may well be our enemies, true, but when we battle them we do so with all the courtesy due them. We are not above making pacts with *hsien*, ghosts, even Kuei-jin or Namebreakers should it prove necessary.

You would do well to keep these civilities in mind when you meet other *shen*; they may win you an ally or save your life.

Kuei-jin

Once, when these beings were known as the Wan Xian, the Ten Thousand Immortals, they too had a sacred duty. But they have long since lost their purpose and struggle to remain the divine beings that they were created to be. In this age, we find that the Kuei-jin's purposes and our own are often at odds. We all vie for the dwindling caerns and places of power. We all are very territorial and wish to have secluded "homes" out of the sight of mortal eyes in lands that are rife with overpopulation. Some of the Kuei-jin battle the Yama Kings; many more serve them.

In spite of such differences, there are those among Kuei-jin who are more attuned to our beliefs. Some of them embrace their divine nature and have returned to the sacred duties that were once their kind's providence. These bodhisattvas are the ones that, more than any other of the "Hundred Corpse Families," we find might any commonality with. But always remember their treachery, when they set us against one another in the Fourth Age. Their tongues may drip with heady wine, but sweet words are not the proof of true allies. Always watch them, and always be ready to fight.

Asien

You should always speak respectfully of the *hsien*, those born of the Wyld. They are very like so many of our spirit allies, although these once-divine messengers have been given flesh bodies, which seems to be a prank of some sort. Even after all this time, they seem slightly uncomfortable with their earthy forms; but then, when one is accustomed to Heaven, how can one live perfectly on Earth?

Many of the *hirayanu* are brothers to us in many ways, and the Tengu have had their games with this. They tell mortals that the Kitsune are *hirayanu*, or that the tanuki are shapeshifters, or that the Cats are some form of Kuei-jin. The beast-*hsien* are of proud and fierce nature, and are somewhat easier for us to understand. When the *hsien*'s courts would send emissaries to our own, they prefer sending the badgers and the cats — as is proper.

They are hunted by Kuei-jin and Namebreaker alike, and that makes us their allies. However, they hold their own beast-brethren to be of lower caste than their more "human" numbers, and this tastes poorly to our tongues. If they understood the nobility in the animal, we would be friends; as such, we give them aid when they ask, but only if they ask properly.

Namebreakers

There are sorcerers in the world whose power goes beyond proper Taoist alchemy or the knowledge of *feng shui*; beings who can reweave the very cloth of the universe itself. Kuei-jin call these wizards "Lightning People," and give them a wide berth. We call them Namebreakers, and watch them as a mongoose watches a cobra. The magi have taken possession of a power that was not meant to be theirs — the power of Naming. Let me tell you a story, and you will see what I mean.

It was one man who stole the secret of Naming during the Second Age. None remember his name, but this cavalier was proud as the Sun itself, and with good reason. He was as



handsome as the dawn, as fierce as the desert wind, and as fearless as a mountaintop. So dashing was he that the chambermaids who kept Gaia's palace in order would often pause in their duties to look down from Heaven and watch him, leaning on their brooms and sighing wistfully.

Eventually, he drew the attention of a goddess, a Minister of Rivers and Streams. She was beautiful beyond all words, so when she descended to call on him, he offered no resistance. She carried him up to her bed in Heaven, where they dallied for a day. Eventually, she fell asleep smiling, and he pretended to do the same.

But he was consumed with curiosity, and he left her sleeping on her bed to go walk the halls of Heaven and wonder at what he found there. Soon he found himself in a library, and he resolved to read the poetry of Heaven for himself—for what woman could resist such divinely sweet words? But the books he chose were the books of all Names, and the cavalier learned much more than he should have that night.

The cavalier was returned to Earth the next day, his mind boiling with his new insight. Impatient to test this knowledge, he walked up to a boulder and spoke its Name—but he pronounced the Name differently, and it flew into bits. Delighted with his new power, he danced away, and began to play with it.

Of course, eventually the Weaver noticed that this cavalier was disrupting the precious order of all things. Immediately she ran to the Emerald Mother, and told Her that a human had stolen the power of Naming and must be punished. Gaia stopped and listened, and then She felt a tug at Her being; at this time, you see, the cavalier had called the lightning to dance for his amusement.

The Emerald Mother shuddered at this tug at the weave of Her skirt, and spat a curse which fell on the cavalier, boiling him inside his skin. But the Weaver had been too late; already the secret of Naming had been passed on to other humans—a courtesan, for one, for the cavalier talked in his sleep. To this day, the Namebreakers are punished by sendings of the Weaver and the Emerald Mother, and such is only just.

We have little love for those who work what they call "True Magick"; it is offensive that even today humans practice a stolen art to change the Names which the Mother gave to all things. Worse, the magi often plot and scheme to wrest the energy of the dragon lines for themselves, energy to which they have no lawful right. If only the humans had been content to work the sorceries and rituals that had been given them... but such is never the way of things.

Kuei

The spirits of the wandering dead are best avoided. Those who do not move correctly with the Great Cycle are suffering a form of banishment and must come to terms with their karmic debts. Those who do not correctly reenter the cycle face possible obliteration, and must search long and hard to find the path of the righteous once again. Some of us traffic with these unfortunate souls. A few amongst the Kitsune and the Tengu are known to do this, as are some of the skinchangers of other lands. My advice is to leave the dead to their own functions. They must return to the Great Cycle on their own. The debt that they must pay to return to the cycle is their own duty and not ours to alter.

The Sunset People

We are of one blood, but not one mind. We refer to all of our various cousins as beast-folk, but the Sunset People have grown apart in a land very strange to us. The differences between us and them are often matters of values and integrity. Our interactions with the Sunset People are made all the more difficult by the fact that they do not adhere to the same customs and traditions that we do. They are fractious and warlike, clannish and fatalistic. They do not understand why the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother exist in the form that they do — and this knowledge is so instinctive to us that the Sunset People seem ignorant and blind.

Some of our Breeds meet cautiously with their relations, to share information or to find common ground, like the Khan and the Tengu. Others admit to harboring a strong disdain for their strange reflections — the Hakken and the Kumo are examples. In no case, however, do we allow them to dictate their rules to us. We are bound by the Mandates of the Courts, not by their various codes of honor. We are ordained by the Emerald Mother Herself, as much as they are, and it is not their place to instruct us in our tasks!

My own cousins, the Western Garou, are certainly the most common visitors to the Middle Kingdom. If they respectfully enter our lands, honor our ways and traditions, and do not seek to take that which is not theirs, then will we permit their intrusions. Of course, many hengeyokai have heard the tales of their War of Rage. We hengeyokai have never understood what drove the beast-folk of other lands to such foolish disregard of duty in the face of the great cycle; never have I heard it said that they had other allies that might have manipulated them into such a war. We of the Middle Kingdom received those who fled this ancient disaster and have hence regarded the Garou with great wariness. For countless generations it has been debated by the Courts that perhaps the Garou have lost their proper place observing the Great Cycle. Some even postulate that the Garou may have become cast out; like our own Kuei-jin. To this I say: Do they not have their own totems? Do the spirits not heed their calls? It would seem that the Mother has forgiven them to some extent. Time will tell whether we do the same.

Of course, there are certain members of their tribes who have made oaths to the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, and who are as much hengeyokai as you and I. They are not found in great numbers, but many of them have lived in our lands for generations. Their ancestors journeyed here long ago, and although their tribal customs have not undergone the same evolution as those of my clans, their loyalty to the Courts is unquestioned. The greatest concentration of these Garou — apart from the Stargazers, who are so much akin to us that it seems odd to call them Sunset People — has been in Hong Kong. The most predominant of these breeds is the Boli Zousizhe, who were once known as "Glass Walkers". Also to be found there are the Wangtong, who are related to the tribe called the "Bone Gnawers." Other such colonies have existed, but they come and go with the passing of the seasons.

Others

Many other *shen* may yet dwell in the Middle Kingdom: Taoist immortals, spirit creatures, mythic beasts and more once wandered our lands, and still may dwell in the bleakest wilder-

nesses. It is a hard thing to know the proper civilities for encounters with such a diversity of beings. If the fading of all things has not slain the wondrous beings that once roamed the continent, then perhaps you will one day meet with such an unexpected stranger. May you honor the Courts with your behavior if that comes to pass.

The Young

The Hakken fell silent, and only the faintest whispers broke the silence of the court. Su Huo's knees ached from the long lecture, but he didn't speak a word of discomfort. Finally, the voice of the Zhong Lung echoed once more in his head.

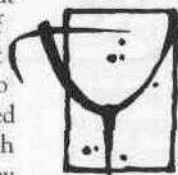
"It is time. You five may rise; then you may follow General Tearing Lightning, who will set you on the next step of your education."

Su Huo painfully rose, as did the other youths beside him. The massive man with the antique halberd stepped forward, and his blazing eyes swept over all five. His mouth moved into something that might have been a smile, but probably wasn't.

"Now you five learn why *you* are here," he rumbled. "Now you find out why the Emerald Mother gave you your gifts — who she intended you to be, and what she intended you to do."

Su Huo's heart skipped with fear — and also with excitement.

The Beast Courts



You are born to human, to beast.

You are not born human nor beast.

Peel away the flesh of birth and you will find yourself beneath.

— Cautionary proverb of the Zhong Lung

Certainly the most distinctive thing about the hengeyokai is the manner in which they gather in courts. To Westerners, the very thought of cooperating with other Changing Breeds is often startling, particularly to the races who still bear modern Garou a grudge for the actions of their ancestors. However, the hengeyokai have kept to a common system of cooperation since before human history began. They refer to themselves in whole as the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother — a society that crosses racial and geographical lines to unify the shapeshifters of a continent. Among the Beast Courts, caerns are communal property, open to any hengeyokai sworn to the Mother's service, and septs are often a mix of Hakken and Khan, Tengu and Nezumi, Zhong Lung and Same-Bito.

Of course, not all Asian shapeshifters belong to the Courts. The Kumo are notable for rejecting the Gaian ideal in favor of serving the Great Centipede, but they are hardly the only exceptions. Many Khan give their loyalty to the Bastet ideals and reject the common law of the hengeyokai, and the Hong Kong Glass Walkers maintain cordial relations with — but not fealty to — the Beast Courts. In short, being a shapeshifter born in Asia does not necessarily pledge one to the Courts any more than being a Garou born to a Fianna father makes one Fianna. To truly be a member of the Beast Courts, a shapeshifter must pledge his loyalty to the Emerald Mother and to the court system which, in Her wisdom, She decreed the hengeyokai were to follow.



Hengeyokai who are fully of the Courts differ from other members of their Changing Breeds in a few significant ways. The most obvious is that they uphold a communal Renown system, the Way of Emerald Virtue, that rewards hengeyokai for following their auspice roles. Unlike the auspice system of the Garou, the hengeyokai's auspices are discovered through ritual divination, and do not necessarily correspond to moon signs or positions of the sun. Not all shapeshifters loyal to the Courts follow this system, of course — there are many who continue to uphold the virtues of their Changing Breed while still offering their services to the Courts. But the hengeyokai who have entered into a permanent court position at one of the sacred caerns, as well as those who join together in the bonds of a mountain *sentai*, usually adhere to the communal Renown rules.

Another significant difference is the common code of behavior, called the Mandates. Those who adhere to Court law are expected to follow the Mandates without question. This sometimes causes trouble when individual hengeyokai find that the Litanies of their kind and the Mandates conflict on a certain matter, but for the most part the Mandates have been an unswerving and fortifying part of hengeyokai law for as long as the Beast Courts have existed. Again, hengeyokai who adhere to the Way of Emerald Virtue are expected to have set the Mandates before their tribal laws; however, such hengeyokai can often justify honoring their racial Litany by invoking the First Mandate.

Court Organization

Although the hengeyokai don't practice a formal caste system — there are too few of them to require such stratification — they acknowledge that each Breed has its own task, set in the Second Age before the birth of the first shapeshifter. Even the Nezumi, the plaguebearing Children of Rat, serve their own purpose in the hengeyokai courts; not even the most arrogant Khan can deny that the Mother fashioned them with their own role to play.

Perhaps the sole exception to this unity is the Kumo, the Goblin Spiders. The Kumo never swore fealty to the Emerald Mother, and the other hengeyokai view them as enemies. Of course, the Courts give the Kumo as much respect as they do to any enemy; Kumo ambassadors are never turned away from our courts, although they are carefully watched, and the hengeyokai will sometimes strike pacts with the Goblin Spiders to destroy a mutual enemy of even greater spiritual foulness. Nonetheless, it is almost unheard of for a Goblin Spider to reject the ways of the Wurm and join with the Beast Courts. If ever any have done so, history does not speak of them.

Each caern has a court to defend it, and in most ways a hengeyokai court is identical to a Garou sept. Many of the members live at the caern, there is a definite hierarchy of officials, and each court strives to maintain packs of shapeshifters suitable for pursuing necessary quests. In the twilight of the Fifth Age, however, the courts are but mere shadows of their former glory. Where once there were many ministers of all manner of affairs, now only four offices remain constant from sept to sept. Where once there were mighty war bands ready to slay entire legions of the Centipede's spawn, now each court must struggle to maintain two or three *sentai*, if that many.

The ranking personages of a court are usually referred to as Gai'nai—a shapeshifter word literally meaning “Gaia’s liegemen.” There are a wealth of connotations put on the word when spoken in proper shapeshifter fashion, few of which condense well into a single human word. The closest human approximation is magistrate; however, the term Gai'nai doesn’t imply government appointment as much as it does responsibility, fairness and honor.

There are only four Gai'nai offices that remain constant from court to court; although each court may present minor offices to their courtiers (such as Minister of Human Benevolence, Herald of All Tongues or Questioner of the Laws), the smallest courts simply do not have the numbers to maintain more than that. As a result, each Gai'nai’s office includes a host of minor responsibilities and necessities, as well as shouldering one-fourth the weight of the court’s duty. Such responsibility is frankly tremendous, and should a magistrate betray his post, the punishments are never lenient.

Regent

The regent is essentially the highest-ranking caern elder; the ultimate authority figure of the court. He is the keeper of the laws, the arbiter of disputes, the one who ultimately decrees the court’s responsibilities. The regent is typically chosen by the court’s acclaim and by petitioning the Court of Ancestors to recognize the most worthy candidate. It is an office few ask for, as the temporal influence gained is nothing compared to the burden of justly overseeing the affairs of a court. The eyes of all are upon the regent, and he must cleave the closest to the Mandates or lose face before his courtiers.

The regent can be supplanted in times of crisis by the other Gai'nai. In accordance with the Mandates, this must only be done if the regent is clearly ignoring the recommendations of his fellow magistrates, instead embarking on a plan of action sure to cripple the court. Removing the regent from power, even temporarily, can lead to great losses of Renown if the other Gai'nai cannot prove that it was absolutely necessary. The regent is never chosen lightly, and circumstances must be grave indeed to go against the will of the Emerald Mother.

General

The general, or warmaster, fulfills a role similar to that of a Garou caern Warder. Her duty is to ensure that the hengeyokai of the court are properly trained in war and are prepared to defend the caern should it become necessary. Of course, in modern times the general’s particular preference of tactics can vary widely; depending on the general involved, the court’s hengeyokai may find themselves required to learn the tactics of Sun Tzu, practice arts of stealth that would shame ninja, or undergo instruction in the latest Red Army commando tactics and weapons training.

The general’s influence with the court is not invariable, but most can call on a great deal if need be. As the Hakken proverb runs, “Peacetime is a pretty poem, but the world is illiterate.” With the hengeyokai almost incessantly at war to varying degrees, the general can count on her talents being constantly in demand and her advice rarely ignored.

Seer

The seer of a court fulfills a role much like the Master of the Rite. He is the keeper of the rites, the one who dictates to the spirits, the master of summonings. The seer is usually the

courtier who summons spirits to ask favors, bind sentai, teach Gifts or perform other tasks.

As could be expected, the seer wields a great deal of personal power. It’s not unheard of for a seer to become overproud of his importance, and thereby corrupted. Such individuals can easily play the role of the archetypal wicked vizier, using their influence to turn the regent into a puppet figurehead. What’s more, the position of seer is one with many innate risks. As the court’s representative to the spirit community, the seer is highly visible in all Umbral affairs; he is often the first one marked for temptation or elimination in a Yama King’s scheme.

A seer will almost always have at least one potential successor in training, if a young hengeyokai with promise is available at all. It would be too easy for a seer to be carried off by powerful demons before he had passed on even as much as half his lore; therefore, ensuring that the seer has an apprentice is a high priority to any right-thinking court. If more than one potential candidate exists, the court may well assign both or all to the seer, in the hopes that he will be able to weed out the most worthy successor over the course of their training. A great number of rivalries start this way....

Historian

Like all shapechangers, the hengeyokai keep an oral tradition that stretches back to the days of prehistory. It is the historian’s task to learn and know the story of the caern and its court from the very beginning, as well as to know the tales of the battles fought against the Mother’s enemies. The historian is a necessary reservoir of legend, but also the person to whom the scouts report. By analyzing the patterns of what has gone before and comparing them to current events, the historian provides the other Gai'nai with all the knowledge they could require.

Obviously, retaining all this information is a monumental task. Some historians are trained to accept the role almost from the day after their First Change. Zhong Lung are found in the role of historian in many courts, for obvious reasons. In many others, the historian is a metis of varying race; the advantage of being raised in the court from birth makes metis a natural choice for such an office.

Sentai

Although a court’s war parties are not as high-ranking as the Gai'nai, they serve a highly distinguished purpose. Members of mountain sentai are traditionally excused from holding any formal offices; their active duty is considered to be too important to weigh them down with unnecessary conflicts. As expected, wave sentai serve no real long-term purpose in a court’s hierarchy, and are often gathered from the hengeyokai of several courts. Mountain sentai are far rarer, and those that pledge themselves to the defense of a given caern earn a great deal of respect from their fellow courtiers.

Courtiers

Compared to the Gai'nai, the hengeyokai who choose the courtier’s path have rather limited responsibilities. Although they must still uphold the Mandates and defend the caern in whatever way is required, the lesser courtiers are largely free to follow their own paths. The regent will often assign minor offices to such courtiers, partly to distribute the responsibilities of the court and partly to ensure that each member of the court has a duty with which to occupy his time. As creatures born to responsibility, the hengeyokai are distinctly uncomfortable or



erratic when at loose ends. A wise regent ensures that each of his courtiers has valuable tasks to perform; not only does this keep the court running smoothly, but as the hengeyokai slowly die out, the court can use all the help it can get.

The Mandates

All shapechangers are creatures of purpose. No less so are the hengeyokai. When the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother were formally drawn into being, they set down the ultimate laws that would guide their kind — the Mandates.

According to all reliable sources (including the Zhong Lung), the Mandates were handed directly to the regent of the First Court by the Emerald Mother Herself. Consequently, the Mandates are treated with all the reverence one would expect. Like the Litany of the Garou and the codes followed by the other Changing Breeds, the Mandates are considered Gaia's own laws, to be obeyed as if the Mother had spoken them to the Courts only last week. But unlike the Litany, the Mandates are held in accord by many Changing races at once, and in many cases are the only thing holding a fractious court together. Of course, the hengeyokai interpret individual edicts to suit their individual purposes, but as a whole they treat the Mandates with a reverence that would make any Philodox envious.

The First Mandate and the Final Mandate are considered to be the cornerstones of all hengeyokai law. Obedience of the First Mandate is necessary to the understanding of all mandates, as well as the duty all shapeshifters bear. And the Final Mandate may never be ignored, altered or forgotten, for if the hengeyokai fail to uphold it, the lifeblood of the Mother will

drain away forever. Violations of the other edicts are punished rigorously, but few can flaunt the First and Final Mandates and escape without suffering protracted and brutal retribution.

Shirk Not the Tasks Which Have Been Given You

In essence, the First Mandate requires each Changing Breed of the Courts to serve the Mother in the manner in which She intended. No Garou of the courts may turn from the path of battling the Wyrn; no Tengu may neglect his duty to uncover the secrets of the enemy; no Zhong Lung may forget even the most painful of memories. In Her sagacity, Gaia granted each shapechanger with a duty; to insult Her wisdom by choosing another path is a dreadful offense. In particular, this mandate forbids hengeyokai from abandoning the Courts to live "a normal life" as a human or animal — the Mother's gifts were not meant to be ignored or squandered.

Those who violate this fundamental mandate, whether through sloth, cowardice or other failings of virtue, are punished by the Rite of Quiet Burial. As creatures literally born into a life's purpose, hengeyokai have no patience for dilettantes.

Reality: There are, of course, hengeyokai who break the pattern. A Hakken might be frail of body, more suited to a courtier's life or that of a stealthy agent. A Zhong Lung might take an active role in a sentai, rather than spending many hours in dreams. This mandate doesn't prohibit hengeyokai from breaking the stereotype of the "perfect warrior," or "consummate spy," or what have you. So long as the greater purpose is served even obliquely, the Courts will probably be content.

Guard the Wheel That It May Turn in Fullness

The Wheel of Ages' turning is certain, but it is not invulnerable to sabotage. Many *shen*, particularly the hell-born Kuei-jin, would be happy to see the Wheel stop in the age of their choice. The *hengeyokai*, creatures of balance, were created in part so that they might ensure that each age would rule in turn, and then be succeeded by the next. The *hengeyokai* have been promised that if they are successful in this, the Wheel will eventually turn to the Twelfth Age, when Heaven and Earth will again be made one. Gaia will be healed of all Her ills, and Her faithful servants' bodies and spirits will be made one with All. Such a perfection of the universe seems very far away — in fact, nothing more than a pipe dream in the bloody, stinking Fifth Age. Yet it is the one true hope of the Courts that this may yet come to pass, and thousands of *hengeyokai* have given their lives for just that purpose.

Reality: A few *hengeyokai* believe it a superior purpose to stop the Wheel and turn it back to the First Age, without ever enduring the slaughter of the Sixth Age. However, these secretive dissidents are few and far between. The Courts have faith in the wisdom of the Mother, and generally do not seek to offend Her by presuming to know a better way to order Creation.

Presume Not to Instruct Your Cousin In His Task

Each must be trusted to perform his duties fittingly, or the Courts would devolve into a swirling mass of chaos where progress would be impossible. This mandate forbids *hengeyokai* from ignoring their own work to criticize their fellows'; on general principle, a warrior should not instruct a sorcerer in how best to work a ritual, and a spy should not correct a diplomat in his manners. Of course, this mandate doesn't prevent a spy from warning a general of forces that would make a given plan of attack suicide, or any similar *hengeyokai* from sharing wisdom relevant to a given field. It mainly reminds the *hengeyokai* that superior expertise should be heeded, and that each Breed is presumed to possess such expertise in the task for which they were created.

The *hengeyokai* least bound by this mandate are the Nagah, those who judge and punish. To honor the First Mandate, they must carry on their appointed duty as the magistrates of the Courts, ensuring that none betray their positions. However, even they are not entitled to punish *hengeyokai* for performing "poorly" or "inadequately" — they may bring retribution against traitors, but not against the merely unsuccessful.

Reality: Court politics being what they are, this mandate is often bent just a little. Many courtiers gossip about the judiciousness of their comrades' decisions, or the efficacy (or lack thereof) of the latest *sentai*. Few *hengeyokai* care to openly challenge their rivals (if they are of different Breeds, of course), but one *does* hear things, such as the latest Nezumi plot, or the Hakken's rapidly paling wolf-blood, or...

Honor Your Territory in All Things

There are numerous ways to interpret this mandate, but a few things are consistent from court to court. *Hengeyokai* are expected to keep their lands in a proper state, the best to honor the spirits, maintain a healthy flow of energy and ensure that



Gaia's skin remains pure and unsullied. The Courts also tend to classify treatment of Kinfolk and even local humans under this mandate, ruling that a territory is the sum of *all* things within its boundaries. Naturally, each of the hengeyokai interpret "proper and honorable treatment" of humans as suits them best — the Hakken school their Kin in the lower affairs of the Courts, whereas the Nezumi act as gardeners to their human charges in a slightly different fashion.

Reality: Many a bloody conflict has been started between *shen* as a result of obedience to this mandate. The hengeyokai share the territorial instincts of most shapechangers, and often consider themselves the best qualified to oversee any given sacred area. Considering the Chi-thirsty Kuei-jin and power-drinking magi, the hengeyokai may well be right in their thinking.

Let Mercy Guide You in Our August Mother's Court

More than anything, this mandate was decreed to prevent bloodshed between hengeyokai. Although logic dictates that all are equal servants of the Mother, logic and enlightenment are all too easily overridden by the power of Rage. There are enemies aplenty thirsting for hengeyokai blood; there is no point to losing it to an ally's blade.

Reality: Most hengeyokai consider other *shen*, particularly Westerners, to be outside the Mother's Court. When dealing with Kuei-jin, Western vampires, *hsien*, Namebreakers or even Sunset People, the hengeyokai do not consider this edict sufficient cause to ignore a slight.

Honor Your Ancestors and Your Elders

Without the wisdom of those who have gone before, the beast-folk would be no greater than their animal kin. Just as humans in various Asian cultures go to great lengths to propitiate their ancestors, the hengeyokai perform many rituals to properly honor their Ancestor-spirits, whom they refer to collectively as the Courts of the Ancestors.

Similarly, the hengeyokai must be of reverent demeanor when dealing with their elders. With age comes wisdom, and with wisdom comes strength. Just as the Courts encourage one to learn the lessons taught by the Wheel of Ages, it is deemed only proper to listen to the "voice of experience."

Reality: This law is not a difficult one to follow, and most hengeyokai are willing to make at least a little time to maintain proper relations with their ancestors. The younger shapeshifters, particularly those homids raised with Western ideals, are usually the ones most frequently violating this mandate. However, disrespecting one's elders is usually a poor idea among shapeshifters of any culture, and those who are rude or discourteous usually learn the error of their ways soon enough.

Honor the Pacts with the Spirit World

All rites and rituals are to be performed in the proper fashion, and proper obeisance must be made in the presence of the great powers of the Yang World. As creatures partly spirit

themselves, the hengeyokai must always be true to their nature by honoring the spirit world, a vital part of their own being.

Reality: This mandate is stretched most by young homids, particularly those who grew up fascinated by Western culture and find more antiquated traditions unnecessary. However, since the spirits respond well only to those who honor them in turn, most hengeyokai learn to faithfully follow this mandate in the interest of keeping valuable allies happy.

War Not Upon Human nor Beast

Some might see this mandate as a simple rule of survival, much like the Western vampires' Masquerade — humanity is so numerous, and so destructive, that if they learned of the hengeyokai, they would be able to wipe the shapechangers from the face of the Earth. However, this mandate was composed long before the Chinese had gunpowder, in a time where *humanity was hardly a threat. Instead, this edict is meant to remind the hengeyokai that their nature contains that of human and animal, and that neither side must be abandoned.*

This mandate does not forbid violence against humanity or other animals — it forbids active campaigns against species, settlements or the like. The Impergium was deemed a failure, and there simply are not enough hengeyokai to reinstate it in this age without dooming themselves to extinction. In performing one's duties, it may transpire that many human deaths are necessary — but those deaths should never be the first object of a hengeyokai's mission.

Reality: This mandate has failed in at least one case — the Hakken have interpreted it so strictly that in maintaining a peaceful coexistence with the Japanese humans, they have lost contact with the fullness of their wolf natures. The other hengeyokai have remained mostly free of this trap, although the Tengu's growing fascination with the modern world's wonders is causing some concern among the Courts.

Unsurprisingly, the Nezumi interpret this mandate as a forbiddance against High War alone. The First Mandate commands them to keep the humans in check, so surely they could not disobey the mandate by abandoning their constantly waged Low War. Worse, with the near-extinction of their tiger brethren, many Khan are questioning the wisdom of a decree that forbids making war on humans when the humans have clearly declared war on the beasts.

Let No One or Nothing Violate the Sacred Places

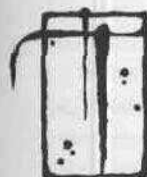
Of all the mandates, the Final Mandate is the most inviolable. The sacred sites of the Earth were entrusted to the hengeyokai in the Second Age, and betraying that trust — thereby abandoning the world to a fate of decay — is unthinkable.

Betrayal of this mandate is punished with nothing less than the Rite of Hell made Flesh, and often by other measures besides.

Reality: The hengeyokai have not rid themselves of corruption completely, and sometimes traitors arise in their midst. However, the suffering that awaits those who betray the Final Mandate is so excruciating that few consider the rewards of success worth the price of failure.

Chapter Two: The Tapestry

*When all the mountains have been shaken
Then where will all the dragons go?*
— Tengu riddle



his is the land of dragons.

Although the greatest spirits have fallen into Slumber, and the fading of the Fifth Age bleaches the color from the highest spirit mountaintops, the Tapestry is still a dramatic world unto itself. The Umbra, the shadowy dream land, home of the spirits, retains far stronger ties to the physical world in the East than it does in the West. Dragon lines lie buried below the surface — but not too deeply. The spirit world yet lives in Asia in the beliefs and memories of the peasants and common people. Many still trust simple rituals and ancient charms more than science or technology. Although some westernized city dwellers may scoff at folk tales of dragons and powerful spirits, they do so quietly; even many corporate presidents carefully honor tradition and show respect to the spirits. The people have not completely forgotten what once was.

The hengeyokai are strongly attuned to the Tapestry — they hold many of their courts in the spirit world, and some have even been changed by their long contact with its energies. Those who seek enlightenment and understanding do so by parting the Velvet Curtain; similarly, the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother insist on maintaining good relations with their Incarna allies. Homid hengeyokai often have far less difficulty comprehending the Umbra than their human-born Western counterparts; their human relatives have kept the knowledge of the spirit world better than one might expect.

As the Wheel turns, however, the Tapestry continues to fade. Some hengeyokai harbor secret doubts that there will even be a spirit world left by the time that the Sixth Age passes — in these darkening times, it becomes very easy to believe that the Umbra will choke and wither away, its host of secret and beautiful things lost on the Yellow Wind. Only time will tell if the spirit world of the East will be born anew, or if it will wither and die on the vine. As long as there is breath left in the hengeyokai, they will fight to preserve this greatest of all treasures.

The Wall

The Wall, the *shen*'s name for the Gauntlet, stands between the Umbra and the physical world just as it does elsewhere. And like the Great Wall of China, the Wall is many walls, not just a single constant barrier. There are areas of great ambient energy, where human skepticism has not yet sterilized the hidden world. The ways of the Weaver have not taken hold in the countryside. Some spirits of great power, particularly on nights of the full moon, have been known to slip through from the other side to work their will upon the physical world — or to draw mortals of exceptional energy over the Wall the other way.

The Wall, of course, is thinnest along the dragon lines and in the dragon nests. It's rumored that a handful of gates even exist between the physical world and the Umbra — or at least that they did as little as a century ago. Hidden in natural glens or in the back of strange, mystical shops, gates would by

necessity be fragile and dangerous. If any exist, no doubt they are held by powerful spirits or *shen* with their own personal ambitions, and use of such gates would never be free.

It should be noted that in the places where the Wall is strong, such as laboratories or microchip manufacturing plants, it is almost impossible to cross into the Umbra, even to use some Gifts. The standard ratings for the Gauntlet apply in Asia, but due to the incredible variations of human belief, the Storyteller is free to raise or lower the Wall's rating by one where it seems appropriate (such as a site of pilgrimage or a sterilized factory).

The Mirror Lands

The Mirror Lands, as the *shen* call the Penumbra, are the places in the Umbra closest to the physical world. They are named for their reflection of the material, a reflection which reveals the underlying meaning in the physical realm. They can be frightening, confusing places, warping the physical world in most exotic ways, but the wise have learned their language. Although Westerners might be confused by the foreign symbology that is often made real in the Mirror Lands, the *hengeyokai* are quite capable of reading the Mirror Lands to reveal the true nature of the Middle Kingdom and its denizens.

The conflict between the strong Weaver areas, such as modern research facilities, and the strong Wyld areas, such as well-tended ancient shrines or groves, creates fluctuations in the Mirror Lands. These vibrations, the secret pulse of the spirit realms, strain the threads of the Tapestry in places. They also cause storms in the Mirror Lands which can damage the spirit analogues of entire city districts. Those who are sufficiently advanced in the skills of meditation or *feng shui* are reputedly able to feel the vibrations of the Umbra and sense disturbances in the spirit world.

The spirits of the Orient retain stronger ties to the physical world than those in the West. They have strongholds and bastions in the Mirror Realms, which sometimes lead to deeper paths in the Umbra. According to shapeshifter dogma, all things have a spirit. However, the spirits of the Mirror Lands are much more active than their Western counterparts, and a greater number of them are awake. Some are tricksters, some terrors, but all have a place in the spirit courts and a role to play. *Hengeyokai* must be cautious in dealing with the spirits of the Mirror Lands; although the awakened spirit of an antique family stool may seem irrelevant or harmless, it may well be a servant of the Dragon Prince of Wood, who would be quite offended if *hengeyokai* were to harm his proxy.

Like the Penumbra of the West, the Mirror Lands are lit primarily by the light of the moon. However, ten distant suns, the smallest not much larger than the brightest star and the largest only thrice that size, are also visible during the day. The *Zhong Lung* pay reverence to the largest sun as the one true Sun, and rumble that the other nine are siblings, stillborn in the physical realm but not forgotten here.

Although each individual understands the Umbra in her own way, seeing things that others might not, the experience of the Mirror Lands remains fairly constant for all. The corresponding physical locations affect the appearance and contents of the Mirror Lands more than the *hengeyokai* who travel to them. *Hengeyokai* are likely to encounter other *shen* in the

Walking the Mountain's Shoulders

Mountain *sentai* enjoy a special advantage when it comes to traversing the Wall and walking in the Umbra. As with Garou packs, the *sentai* may nominate a leader to draw the other members of the *sentai* through, making the *Gnosis* roll for the entire war party. However, if the *sentai* members have held true to their aligned roles, and the spirits are pleased with their dutifulness, even members who are normally unable to step sideways on their own are drawn through to the other side. Thus a *Hakken* may lead his *Khan* and *Zhong Lung* teammates into the Mirror Lands, even though they would be normally incapable of such a journey. The potential to step sideways is innate to all Changing Breeds—the power of the *sentai* simply acts as a catalyst. Naturally, this ability only functions when the *sentai* is together; when separated, the members must fend for themselves.

Wave *sentai*, of course, enjoy no such privilege. Those members who can normally step into the Mirror Lands may do so, and the rest will simply have to find another means of travel.

Mirror Lands; even the vampires of the East, the *Kuei-jin*, can develop the ability to enter the Umbra.

The physical laws of the Mirror Lands for the most part remain the same as on the other side of the Wall. What goes up, still comes down. A *hengeyokai* who walks five *li* in the Mirror Lands and exits the Umbra will arrive five *li* from where she entered the Mirror Lands in the physical world. Of course, there are exceptions. The Mirror Lands contain many domains, places where spiritual energies have become strong enough to alter the environment. These domains are much like those found in the Western Umbra, but there are a few significant differences.

Unfortunately, Blights are all too present in the Mirror Lands; their unholy mix of Wyrms and Weaver energies often appears in the reflections of crowded cities such as Bangkok and Beijing. Here the power of the Wyld ebbs, and the stench of rot clings to the spirit webs. And as the Fifth Age draws to a close, the Demon Lands (Hellholes to Westerners) are increasing in number. True to their name, these places are often ruled by demonic spirits who breed monstrosities to terrorize the Mirror Lands. Some of the most powerful Banes build mockeries of the spirit courts and rule from these domains.

The Epiphs, the strange domains which represent abstract ideas and concepts, are equally present in the East. The *hengeyokai* tread carefully near them, knowing full well that within Epiphs, the rules of reality break down. Nonetheless, some shapeshifters go to the trouble of contacting the abstract spirits within, struggling to find enlightenment from these living koans. Westerners find many of the Eastern Epiphs even more incomprehensible than usual, although a few Epiphs have sprung up with a decidedly Western tang to their concepts. Many *shen*, particularly the hidebound *Kuei-jin*, consider these places corrupt and strive to destroy such domains.

As elsewhere, the Glens of the Mirror Lands were once the most common domain there, although their numbers have declined with the expansion of man. Many still survive in the

high mountaintops, deep jungles and sere deserts, each one a locale of breathtaking beauty. Every Glen is a scenic vision of a perfect natural environment, corresponding with its physical equivalent. Weaver-related Gifts are harder to perform in Glens (+1 to all difficulty numbers), while Wyld and Gaia related Gifts are easier (-1 to all difficulty numbers). Many a court convenes their affairs in the serenity of a Glen; youngsters who are disrespectful to such an environment are stringently punished.

The Weaver's blitzkrieg on the Mirror Lands is keenly evident in the profligation of Webs. The coming of industry to the East has altered the Mirror Lands forever in places; now areas such as Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul, as well as the numerous factories and research facilities, have bedecked the spirit world with glistening metal spiderwebs. Few hengeyokai, even Kumo, feel safe in such places.

A list of all the physical locations of interest in the Mirror Lands would take several exhaustive volumes, but one region deserves special mention. Swirling mists fill the border between China and Russia, and a great barrier stands between the two countries. A powerful force, spoken of only in whispers, separates the Russian Penumbra from the Mirror Lands, and travel through the spirit world between China and Russia is not possible. Many shen stand sentinel on this border, diligently guarding against whatever threats may break through from the other side.

The Tapestry



The Tapestry extends beyond the Mirror Lands. It is a place of moon tracks and dragon paths, where time loses its meaning. The laws of the physical world hold less sway. Power becomes a measure of Chi and wisdom. Westerners know this place as the Near Umbra, but they do not know it as well as they would like.

The hengeyokai divide the Tapestry into Yang Realms and Yin Realms. Life and energy fill the Yang Realms, whereas Yin Realms are places of death and darkness. The hengeyokai feel greater ties to the Yang Realms, and it is there that they do most of their interactions with the Umbra. Yin Realms are considered domains of ghosts and demons, and as such, most hengeyokai try to avoid them. Although all hengeyokai agree on the basic nature of Yang Realms and Yin Realms, they have many disagreements on the number and placement of these places in the Tapestry.

Travelers can reach the Tapestry from the Mirror Lands by following moon paths or dragon tracks. Most of

Stork-spirits

The Stork-spirits that glide through the Tapestry have no particular allegiance to anyone other than the Mother herself. They are willing to aid friendly hengeyokai, but must be somehow compelled to even speak to Kumo, fallen shapeshifters, Kuei-jin with powerful P'o energy or any other suspicious character. They appear as beautiful herons, cranes and storks of all kinds, and their feathers glisten with a radiant sheen.

Willpower 6, Rage 3, Gnosis 5, Power 30

Charms: Air Sense, Healing, Reform, Updraft



the Tapestry is a dark swirling place of fog and mist. Strange sounds echo there, and scents of a hundred different spices mix in the air. Some hengeyokai seek signs and symbols in the patterns of the swirling vapor. Benevolent and malicious spirits wander through the mists, and clever hengeyokai who have somehow lost their way summon Stork-spirits to help them find a way out of the mists. The Stork-spirits have a long tradition of aiding lost travelers, and their assistance is always welcome.

Dragon paths, roads created long ago by the passage of mighty dragon spirits often lead between the Mirror Lands and the Tapestry. These roads tend to be safer and more direct ways to reach the various Realms than wandering through the Tapestry. If someone is standing on a dragon path, then they are under the protection of the dragon who created the trail. Though the great dragon spirits are now mostly in slumber and rarely seen, even spirit servants of the Wyrms will not pursue hengeyokai who keep to the dragon paths. The dragon paths are well-marked and appear to the discerning eye as roads inlaid with gold, jade, finely carved hardwoods, or other precious substances. The type of substance indicates the influence of the dragon who made the path; pearl indicates the tracks of a sea dragon while precious woods imply the passage of the ruler of a forest domain, for example.

Moon and sun trails also penetrate the mists, leading hengeyokai between Realms. The Hakken are the most common travelers of moon paths, while Zhong Lung prefer the less common sun trails. Other hengeyokai stress that dragon paths

are the safest ways to move through the Tapestry, for both the moon and sun trails change and shift as the moon and sun rise and set, while dragon paths remain as eternal as the spirits that once created them. However, many young hengeyokai have noticed that servants of the Wyrms and nobles of the spirit courts commonly move along dragon paths and while they do not fear conflict, neither do they wish to draw attention to themselves. Prudence may well demand seeking out other ways to travel through the Tapestry.

In addition to the great Realms, hengeyokai may visit many other locations in the Tapestry. They are familiar with several of the Realms and locations known to the Western shapechangers, although certain areas such as the Tribal Homelands and Erebus are completely unfamiliar to them (see *Werewolf*, pg. 172 and *Umbra: The Velvet Shadow* for more details).

Spirit Courts

Many spirits have their own domains in the Tapestry. Although each noble spirit has a place and duties in the grand scheme, many of the Ministers of Heaven have begun ruling in a more feudal manner, seeing themselves as an absolute power within their own spheres. However, they have not forgotten their place and even the worst act properly (for their duties) if reminded. Even some of the Eastern Banes are not completely corrupt; many of them are trustworthy and honorable, their dark goals notwithstanding.



Each spirit court is different, but all nobility retain some characteristics in their realms. Most of them have a palace with a great tower wherein they dwell. All visitors must enter through a main gate, which is always guarded by powerful spirits, such as lions, tigers, even small dragons or other creatures. Water, diverted from the great river of life and abundance, flows through the courtyard of every noble. A bridge of marble, ivory, jade, pearl, or another valuable substance crosses the river, often guarded by other spirit sentinels.

When visiting a spirit court, a hengeyokai should be on good terms with the noble spirit or have a good reason for the visit. Some spirit nobles have great carved poles where petitioners can hang their pleas or requests for the spirit to consider over a day. If they deem the request worthy, then they will allow the hengeyokai an audience the next day.

Young hengeyokai should be warned: The nobles of the courts are tied to each other in many ways. If a hengeyokai should offend a lord in a spirit court, he may find himself facing the enmity of many Ministers. Proper behavior is exceedingly important to many of the spirits. At all times, a hengeyokai should be careful with what he says and how he acts in the courts of the spirits. By the same token, if a hengeyokai shows wisdom in her words and actions, she may earn the aid of not only the court she visits, but many others throughout the Umbra. It is also worth noting that too favorable of an impression may lead to a prince offering to wed a hengeyokai, an offer that is not easy to escape without risking offense. Caution should be the wise one's guide.

Yang Realms



Yang realms are places of light and power where many spirits allied to Gaia gather or hold sway. Hengeyokai say that there are thousands of Yang realms, and that as shen become more enlightened they can perceive more realms. Ancient hengeyokai even postulate that all living things have a domain of their own, much like the Den-Realms of the Khan or the Nagah's Ananta.

Each of the Yang realms has its own spirit ruler, whom shen can call on and possibly even summon. The spirits of the realms are extremely powerful, likely on the level of Incarna, although within their own realms, they can seem more like Celestines. Of course, nobody knows the names of all the Yang Lords; the Courts had to use much diplomacy and bartering to uncover even a few.

The best known and most often perceived of the Yang Realms follow.

The Realm of Fighting Spirits

One of the most visited of the Yang realms is The Realm of Fighting Spirits, a vast plain of carnage where spirits of the unhallowed dead go to do battle. Remnants of countless battles throughout history mix to create the most horrific battle scene ever witnessed by man or shen. Tribesmen with sticks bear on the metal sides of modern tanks. Kamikazes dive into hordes of



Mongol cavalry. Terror and fanatical zeal, smoke and blood reign supreme here. Laughing in the face of logic and moderation, the battle continues ceaselessly. Neither night nor day, *endless numbers nor death even slows the conflict*. Spirits tear one another apart, and the dead rise again to fight on, reattaching missing pieces as they go.

Amid the chaos, three distinct forces guide the battles. A pennant of a great spider flies over the first, snapping in the wind. Its followers execute meticulous plans, and are the most easily noticed by their discipline amid the insanity. Well-formed ranks march across web-like bridges, using modern weapons. The spider legion destroys all in its path, its warriors showing no passion, no feeling, no emotion. Pattern Spiders and other Weaver spirits often join the spider legion's relentless slaughter of the opposition.

Defying the spider legion, a horde of monstrosities fights under the standard of a great serpent or centipede. These brutes corrupt and defile all they touch, poisoning and twisting their enemies. They are cruel beasts and demons with no sense of honor or ethics. They struggle, not to triumph as the servants of the spider strive, but to cause pain and suffering. Some say that on rare occasions, one of the Yama Kings will appear in the Realm of Fighting Spirits to lead the followers of the centipede banner personally. Any hengeyokai can easily recognize the Mukade, Banes and other Wyrms spirits fighting with the centipede's horde.

An obstreperous throng of shapeshifters and eddies of energy form a loose third host. Though responsible for most of the *turmoil and chaos*, they *do not fight under a banner and are as likely to attack each other as they are the other forces*. These berserkers have limited technology, relying on rocks, spears, nails and teeth to overcome the enemy. Fighting animals serve in their ranks. Although the tides of the spider and centipede crash against this host, the throng seemingly has no limit to the souls who rise to fight against the twin banners. The very Realm itself sometimes aids these masses, as mudslides bury tank columns and sudden thunderstorms wash the poisons of the Wyrms away from the mob. Wyld spirits appear in the melee with a crack of energy, summoned by the violence and madness of the conflict.

Hengeyokai often come to the Realm of Fighting Spirits to learn the arts of war and recruit allies. War-spirits from this Realm are often willing to be placed in fetishes or talens. Many legendary fetishes, particularly weapons, contain spirits from this Realm.

Those who know the way find it a simple matter to tread a path leading from the Realm of Fighting Spirits to the Battleground Realm known to Western Garou, though few of the hengeyokai feel the inclination or need to do so.

Sample Denizen: Screaming Spear

Named for the horrific wails they let loose and their ever-bloody weapons, the Screaming Spears rage across the Realm of Fighting Spirits, *plunging into any battle they find with berserk vigor*. They appear to be skull-faced, bloody humans in broken, antiquated armor, carrying diamond-bladed, black-lacquered spears. As long as they remain in their native Realm, they cannot be permanently destroyed, as they always reform

with full Power on the morning of the next day. Screaming Spears attack anyone they come across with wild abandon, although they can be compelled by ritual and Gift to serve hengeyokai. As War-spirits of the first degree, they are often bound into fetishes of bloodshed and madness.

Willpower 6, Rage 8, Gnosis 5, Power 25

Charms: Armor, Ice Shards (via spears), Reform (special)

Umi, the Dragon Kingdom of the Sea

The Dragon Kingdom of Umi claims the entire Pacific Ocean of the Mirror Lands as its domain, though other spirit realms and noble courts dispute this claim. From his palace deep in the Umbral ocean, the Dragon King presides over typhoons and calms, amusing himself and making the spirit sea even more capricious than its physical counterpart — or at least so he has for centuries.

Squadrons of Zhong Lung and schools of Same-Bito serve the Dragon King; many of these are ancients who spent so much time in the Tapestry that they exist only in spirit form, and have no duty other than service in Umi's legions. Many hengeyokai believe that the Dragon King requires a tour of duty in his private army from those who wish his favor. Spirit sharks and jellyfish, with representatives from the many other creatures of the sea, form the rank-and-file of the Dragon King's army, along with spirits of sea monsters that once kept ancient sailors awake at night.

The Dragon King's seneschal Gajyra commands the denizens of the Dragon Kingdom. He is one of the few great dragons still awake; his power extends over the waters surrounding him and boils from his mouth in the form of fire that devours even metal and stone. Many whisper that nuclear tests in the Pacific have angered Gajyra beyond reason; others claim that Banes have seduced the seneschal, leading him down a path of corruption.

It has been 50 years since the Dragon King has been seen in public. Despite the seneschal's efforts to control speculation, many tales circulate through the court, indeed, throughout the Umbra as to the fate of the Dragon King. Most say that the Dragon Princess of Hiroshima was his love, and the Dragon King grieves still over her loss. A few say the Dragon King lay with the Dragon Princess on August 6, 1945, and although the A-bomb did not destroy the mighty Dragon King, it has left him twisted and insane. Outside Umi, some even say that Gajyra has slain the Dragon King and his merciless nature is a testimony to his guilt.

Despite Gajyra's fearsome reputation, he still manages to hold Umi together and act with honor. The Dragon Kingdom of the Sea is one of the most important and largest of the Yang realms. Hengeyokai often seek out Umi to ask favors from sea spirits and to learn the secret wisdom of the sea.

Sample Denizen: Crab Soldier

Although not as mighty as the Zhong Lung or Same-Bito, the hulking Crab Soldiers are nonetheless fearsome shocktroopers in the Legions of the Sea. Apart from their ceremonial sashes, decorative (but very functional) halberds



and a tendency to walk on hind legs, there is nothing humanoid about these chitinous spirits. Their voices are a low, sussurant clicking — when they have need of speech. They are sometimes dispatched to the mortal world when the Umi lords have been convinced of such a necessity; some Zhong Lung and Same-Bito also bear fetishes of strength and invulnerability that contain these loyal soldiers.

Willpower 5, Rage 8, Gnosis 6, Power 35

Charms: Armor, Flood, Materialize, Whirlpool (as Umbraquake, but usable only in the Umbral seas)

The Mountains of Heaven

Rising toward the vault of heaven, a great chain of mountains, dwarfing even the mighty Himalayas, crests above a sea of clouds. Some wise hengeyokai believe that pagodas and hidden cities lie in the mountain range beyond the reach of most spirits. Those daring to try discover they can walk on the clouds, and find themselves walking with spirits of all manner of flying creatures. The light of the moon shines brilliantly upon those who enter this Realm.

Many great dragon spirits are said to hold court in the Mountains of Heaven, but their courtiers no longer understand their rulings. Some of these spirit courtiers believe that a malady has afflicted the Dragon Lords and Princes of the Firmament, and whisper that Western thought seeping into the Realm has blinded or paralyzed the great dragons.

Frequent visitors to the Realm believe that a great gateway to the farthest realms exists here, but that fearsome spirit beings

with power beyond the comprehension of most *shen* guard it. Stargazers say that the Mountains of Heaven are part of the Aetherial Realm known to the West, and that it is possible to reach the Deep Umbra as well as Weaver, Wyld and Wyrn Realms by following the proper paths.

Many *shen* travel to the Mountains of Heaven to seek advice and guidance from the ancient Dragon-spirits. Stargazers climb the Mountains to find meditation places, to communicate more easily with the celestial spirits, and to revere Tsuki-Yomi.

Sample Denizen: Cloud Butterfly

These delightful, sapphire-winged creatures are about as large as a man's head. They enjoy beauty, and often cluster around hengeyokai of great personal beauty who come to call on the Princes of the Firmament. However, they should not be brushed aside or angered, for when they set their minds to anger, they are capable of creating great storms. Some hengeyokai shamans bind these creatures into fetishes of wind and cloud, although never against the butterflies' will.

Willpower 4, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Power 20

Charms: Airt Sense, Create Wind. If three or more are present, they may also use the Charms of Lightning Bolts and Updraft.

The Tiger Lands

Somewhere in a place between the mountains and the sea where the rivers run backwards lie the Tiger Lands. The spirits of wild forests, valleys and jungles taken or destroyed by man seek refuge in the Tiger Lands. And yet not all of those spirits survive; even the Tiger Lands fade with the deepening of the Fifth Age...

The Tiger Lands contain vast tracts of wilds. All of the environments of the East are represented. Great mountain peaks, vast river valleys, deep jungles, and mysterious river deltas are all found in this realm. Nowhere is there a trace of plow or rail or any of the things of humans.

Tiger-spirits roar through the Tiger Lands, seeking vengeance on all who smell of humans. Though the tigers are the most fearsome of creatures in the Realm, mighty elephants, great serpents, even giant pandas have places in the Tiger Lands. Great councils of the animal spirits often meet to grieve for Gaia and sing songs of the Ages to come.

Each of the animal species has a palace and a spirit court in the Tiger Lands. The Princes and Princesses of the Tiger Lands hold the Dragon spirits of the Umbra in reverence, and both Dragon Lords and Yama Kings have been known to take brides and husbands from their ranks. Each of the different nobles has her own personality and rank in the realm; the Tiger Princess, for instance, treats her visitors far more lavishly than would the Prince of the Snow Monkeys.

The spirits of the Tiger Lands are suspicious of strangers, as they all have reason to fear man. The resident spirits may cautiously accept hengeyokai visiting the Tiger Lands, though other *shen* find it nearly impossible to be welcomed. Hengeyokai often seek to bind the spirits of the Tiger Lands into talens with great curative properties. The hengeyokai can convince many of the spirits to be bound willingly into talens; those who make

a habit of forcibly binding the spirits of the Tiger Lands return only at great peril.

Sample Denizen: Tiger-spirit

These massive beasts are truly the rulers of this Realm. They bow their heads to no hengeyokai, treating even Khan with only grudging respect. Although they accept praise and respond to courtesy in kind, they do not accede to be bound into fetishes.

Willpower 6, Rage 9, Gnosis 7, Power 40

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Healing, Reform, Tracking

The Gardens of the First Age

Most Western shapechangers equate The Gardens of the First Age with their legend of Summer Country. Like Summer Country, no trails lead to this Yang Realm. It is said that only those who have an important role to play in the Cycle find the Realm, and then only when the time is right, so that they may know the meaning of the vision. Many young hengeyokai doubt that the Gardens truly exist. Others dedicate their lives to finding this Yang Realm, in hopes of learning as much as possible about the Ages.

The Gardens of the First Age capture the essence of the First Age, when spirit and physical were one — and yet they are unlike the First Age, for all the creatures of Gaia fill the Realm. Harmony fills one's soul in such a place, and the Gardens of the First Age please all of the senses.

Those who have arrived in the Gardens of the First Age have always known exactly where they are. All things around them seem crystal clear, and yet the entire experience has a dreamlike feeling. Although this sounds like a dichotomy, for those who visit the Gardens, the experience feels completely natural. Most hengeyokai feel compelled in the Gardens to meditate on Gaia and the Cycle of the Ages. During this meditation, many secrets are revealed, and it is said that one can know oneself and one's place among all things, although such knowledge is forgotten upon departure. Once this sense of revelation and enlightenment washes over a hengeyokai, he will know what actions he must take. Some hengeyokai claim that spirits of Gaia will visit them as they complete their meditation in the perfect gardens to give them advice or weapons.

Many legends tell of hengeyokai who found themselves in The Gardens of the First Age before having to undertake a major task, such as facing a mighty foe or cleansing a fallen caern.

Sample Denizen

Statistics are irrelevant for the myriad of peaceful spirits that populate the Gardens. At no point do they raise their hand against the visitor, and hengeyokai who would threaten them never find their way into this Realm.

The Goblin Jungle

A place most shen avoid, the Goblin Jungle lies on the border between the Yang and Yomi Worlds. Darkness and twilight are the rule here, as a thick multi-layered canopy



protects the jungle floor from the dim suns above. Poisonous insects and spiders crawl over the sweet sticky flowers and rotting wood of the jungle floor. At times, the Goblin Jungle is alive with motion, but it becomes silent in an instant. Spirit bats hunt through the forest, and these beasts tear one's eyes out as easily as they pluck a moth from the air. Mists fill the jungle air carrying strange smells and making it even harder to see. The damp heat of this realm soon makes even the hardest travelers uncomfortable.

The greatest danger of the Goblin Jungle comes from its inhabitants. Malicious deceitful creatures, generally called goblins but known by all names for evil spirits, inhabit this realm. Each one is an individual, but they all share certain characteristics. The goblins are physical creatures, relying on misshapen body parts borrowed from a variety of animals to tear their victims apart. A goblin might have the voice of a beauty, the arms of a squid, the body of a monkey and the tusks of an elephant. Each also has a weakness, such as a deformity, handicap, a fear or vulnerability to a common item, like wood. They often use tricks to lure victims, such as digging pit traps or playing musical instruments. All goblins have a taste for the flesh of physical creatures, and respond well to sacrifices. One story tells of a Hakken who defeated a goblin by offering to feed it his own flesh without a battle, but only in small portions and only if the goblin agreed to eat all of his flesh. The spirit creature agreed, and the hengeyokai ripped piece after piece of himself off, always waiting long enough to regenerate until the goblin's stomach burst from the huge quantity of skin it had consumed. However, another version of the same story said that the goblin had a stomach with no end and that the Hakken remains in the Goblin Jungle feeding the spirit creature to this day.

Although goblins have a fearsome reputation, they do not always attack hengeyokai. The Kumo ally easily with goblins. Some say that goblins have a sense of honor and will serve those who survive their traps or defeat them in physical combat. Many believe that goblins are spirits of Gaia who are lost to madness. Others say that they are exiled servants of the Yama Kings. A few speak of paths to chimares and believe that goblins are nightmare spirits, which have been forgotten by humans.

Many fetishes and artifacts are rumored to lie hidden in the Goblin Jungle, amid the bones of victims of the realm.

Sample Denizen: Goblin Tribesman

These statistics represent a "typical" mostly humanoid goblin. The creature uses no weapons, relying instead on its supernatural powers to defend itself. Its body is a hideous patchwork of mismatched animal parts, but its eyes have an all-too-familiar gleam of mad intelligence to them. No hengeyokai in service to the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother has ever willingly bound a goblin into a fetish, so it is unknown exactly what powers they might lend to one.

Willpower 7, Rage 6, Gnosis 4, Power 25

Charms: Incite Frenzy, Tracking

Temple of the Ancestors

There is a Yang Realm which takes many forms, but is believed to be a single place. The Temple of the Ancestors lies

between the Tapestry and the upper reaches of heaven. The Realm is sacred and protected from harm by the Cycle itself.

To find the Temple of the Ancestors, all one must do is seek out the spirits of their honorable and respected ancestors in the Umbra. Though the way is usually straight and well-marked, sometimes challenges lie along the way. These "tests of the ancestors" may challenge the heart, the mind or the body. For most hengeyokai, the type of obstacle they face depends on their auspice role.

Finally, when the journey is complete, the traveler will come upon a place sacred to her family. A homid usually arrives at a temple although he may find himself at an ancient home site or a place where his ancestors had great success. For other breeds, they may come to a forgotten water hole or a great rock on a mountain. Whatever the place, the traveler will know that she is in the presence of her ancestors.

A guide always appears to the seeker, taking the form of a spirit animal or a human priest. The guide never asks who the hengeyokai seeks; he simply directs the traveler over to a figure in meditation, the spirit of her ancestor. The ancestor looks up and greets the traveler.

Ancestor-spirits aid the hengeyokai in many ways. They usually give insight and information as to the location of forgotten fetishes or the weaknesses of the family's enemies. They advise and counsel. On rare occasions, an ancestor-spirit teaches gifts or actually gives an item to the hengeyokai.

The guide reappears when the visit ends. The visitor does not always have enough time to ask all that she desires, but the ancestor invariably agrees with the guide when the time has ended. The guide takes the ancestor away to another place in the temple, and the hengeyokai finds herself buffeted by the Umbral winds and carried back to the Mirror Lands. However, after such an experience, a hengeyokai always finds her Gnosis restored and may find within herself abilities that she did not realize she possessed.

Those who seek out the Temple of the Ancestors to do harm to the spirit of their ancestors or for other dishonorable reasons will never find the Realm. Even acting in a disrespectful manner once there is forbidden; stories abound of the foolish who attack the guide to stay with their ancestor, but find themselves lost in the Umbra, stripped of all Gnosis.

Sample Denizen: Ancestor-spirit

The Ancestor-spirits of this Realm take no action against their descendants, nor do they allow themselves to be bound into fetishes; their wisdom must remain free for the generations yet to come. Nonetheless, they are a potent source of Gifts, and can often instruct hengeyokai in any Gift taught specifically by Ancestor-spirits.

Yin Realms



The Yin Realms are dark places of death and stillness, and the hengeyokai, creatures distilled of purest life, are decidedly uncomfortable there. Western shapechangers rarely have the ability to travel to the Yin Realms, which they know as the Dark Umbra. However, to attain wisdom, many hengeyokai even-



tually venture out of the light of the Yang Realms into the depths of the Yin Realms. In the Umbra, the external voyage reflects the internal journey, and no shen escapes the touch of darkness. Balance requires yin and yang in harmony.

The Cave of Centipedes

The Cave of Centipedes is a dark underworld that reaches deep below the soil of the Tapestry. The entrance is a great cave which appears blocked at first by many giant stones, but if a traveler climbs up into the rocks, there are cracks between the stones through which a shen may crawl through into the Realm. The natural light of the cave is a faint phosphorescence which allows only indistinct features to be made out, even with the sharp eyes of a hengeyokai. Those who bring their own sources of light into the Realm will draw the attention of the spirits which dwell in the darkness. Hengeyokai are best served by relying on their other senses. The realm itself is a dark cool place of endless tunnels twisting, turning and intersecting in a complex maze. Visitors must be careful to check their bearings or risk being lost forever in the labyrinth. Some have tried marking their way with rope or string, but they almost always find themselves holding on to a snapped rope or feeling a faint tug as something searches for them.

Centipedes, worms, and spirits of the dead wander through the caverns and corridors of this realm. Kumo track through these tunnels looking for things lost, hoping to find some secret knowledge. Some believe that a Yama King has a fortress deep within the Place of Worms, where he tortures hengeyokai,

burying them alive or cutting them open and chaining them down so worms and maggots can devour their flesh. Screams echo through the dark winding tunnels of the realm from sources far below. All who have visited the realm believe that it is allied to the Wurm, a breeding place of evil and darkness.

Those who venture deep enough into the Cave of Centipedes come across unlucky spirits of the recent dead. Many crawl or limp about with the injuries or diseases that snatched their lives still evident on their spirit bodies. They cry and moan, begging for help and attention. They are best avoided, for even the wisest has difficulty determining which spirits simply want their pain eased and which ones will offer another living soul to the land of the dead for their own life. However, those whose spirits are slain in the Umbra by the Wurm's minions are tortured in this realm before they receive their true judgment. Banes try to force them to reveal the names of their allies and give their spirits over to the Wurm.

The green glow of balefire dances over the torture pits. Many legends exist of hengeyokai journeying into this realm to save the spirit of a friend or lover, some even say that if the hengeyokai succeeds in rescuing the spirit, then their ally will be returned to the living.

Sample Denizen: Hungry Ghost

These pitiful wretches are the remnants of those who died unfulfilled, with curses on their lips. Unlike the mostly harmless denizens of the Cave of Centipedes, these creatures hunger for fresh spirit-flesh to devour, and usually gang up on lone hengeyokai to quench their bloodthirst.

Storytellers familiar with **Wraith: The Oblivion** may want to use that game's rules for Spectres to represent these damned souls; the difference, after all, is largely one of semantics.

Willpower 7, Rage 6, Gnosis 4, Power 15

Charms: Frozen Breath

Lord Spider's Web

Dark and mysterious, Lord Spider's Realm is a quiet place far from the other Realms of the Umbra. It is a titanic web that crosses a gulf so vast that one edge cannot be seen from the other. Unlike the metallic webs commonly associated with the Weaver, this place is more of a natural cobweb, gently fluttering with a cold wind. Lord Spider's Web catches many spirits and objects. Some believe that Lord Spider is a benevolent spirit, trying to save the lost of the Umbra from the Void. Many hengeyokai have found mummified corpses of Banes and centipedes, even Pattern Spiders, along the web. Some say that Lord Spider was once the lover of the Weaver herself, and now weaves his cobweb in mourning, hoping that he can catch the spirit of his lost love. The Kumo murmur the name of Marawa, and superstitiously avoid this place for fear of offending their great totem. Many hengeyokai say that Lord Spider is long dead; none living have ever seen the spirit. But sometimes, those who have traveled along this webway feel the web shake and vibrate with incredible force and hear distant screams.

The hengeyokai agree that Lord Spider's Web must span the Abyss, but at what point no one is certain. They know that Lord Spider's Web extends beyond the bounds of the Yin Realm, and the brave have followed the webs to other Realms and secret places. The Tengu say that the web is not just a single layer, but rather an immense basket, growing thicker and stickier toward the center. They also say that the webs vibrate violently close to the center, as if a titanic struggle were being waged in the center of the web.

Sample Denizen

There are no spirits native to Lord Spider's Web, and those that enter the Realm are usually discovered in the form of desiccated husks along the web's strands.

Desert of Visions

A few hengeyokai elders know of a place in the Yin Realms where they can receive visions and guidance. The Desert of Visions is a harsh place, and it is a journey that the hengeyokai do not undertake for trivial reasons. The trip invariably leaves them changed, and some decide that the price paid was not worth the benefit.

The light of Tsuki-Yomi shines here, though it is not the warm comfort hengeyokai expect. Rather, her light castigates the very soul of the traveler. The first sight of this vengeful Tsuki-Yomi has pushed more than one hengeyokai into Harano.

The Desert of Visions is a place of solitude. Wanderers there never meet another living being, and groups who try to enter the Realm find themselves separated when they arrive. Each soul must undertake its own journey and find its own enlightenment, far from the distractions of its companions or the physical world.

As she wanders through the desert, the hengeyokai finds herself assaulted by spirits and visions, replaying her past misdeeds and transgressions. She suffers constant agony, drained of Gnosis, and filled with Rage by the cold light of Tsuki-Yomi. She finds the desert made of small grains of silver, or fire, or whatever substance causes her the most pain. She has a skewed perception of time, and when she leaves the Realm she discovers that anywhere from seconds to decades could have passed. After some time of wandering, seeming to her like several days, she begins having more structured visions, one set showing her transgressions of faith, one her acts of violence and anger, the next her jealousies and rivalries.

The traveler can never kill the spirits who play out these visions, and attacking them prolongs the suffering of the tormented hengeyokai. Only by viewing them and accepting them as part of herself can she hope to progress. As the penitent comes to terms with her acts and thoughts, she is cleansed of the stain they have left on her soul. She may at this point see visions giving her the answers she came to seek, especially if it will require her to make a moral or ethical decision.

After having her offenses laid bare, and coming to at least an uneasy peace with them, the hengeyokai finds herself topping the crest of a high dune, to find a lush oasis. The waters of this oasis restore all her Gnosis and Willpower, and the familiar warm light of Tsuki-Yomi brightens this relief from the desert. As she enters the area of the oasis, a brilliant dragon path opens at the center of the water. When she is ready to leave, the dragon path will transport her to any point she desires.

Sample Denizen

The spirits of the Desert of Visions have precisely whatever shape or Charms the Storyteller finds necessary to play out the visitor's visions; apart from that, they play no part in the greater ecology of the Umbra.

The Forbidden Lands

At first glance, one would take the Forbidden Lands for a Yomi Realm. And yet, they are not so; they serve a definite purpose of enlightenment by heralding the time of pain and suffering to come. The blasted plains of this realm lie under a stormy midnight sky. Lakes of colored glass pool around the melted remains of cities. Little grows here, only a few thorny scrubs and weeds. Grass and trees are things of the past. Sand and cracked clay rule this realm. Poison clouds bring corrosive rain. Hot, acrid air burns the lungs and stings the throat and eyes.

At first sight, Banes and other twisted minions of the Wyrms seem to be the only things that live here, hunting down any survivors they locate. These spirits have a patchwork of modern items, but ultimately the most reliable weapons here are claws, teeth, and a good length of pipe. Many of these creatures, resembling both humans and animals, have mutations displaying their corruption. Upon an initial visit, the Forbidden Lands appear to be similar to the Realm of Fighting Spirits, just on a smaller scale. Greater Banes and even the Yama Kings themselves come to this realm to gloat about the next age of Gaia.

Yet, if one looks, things of beauty yet survive. A few small flowers bloom on the edge of a rock. The sunsets are made more

colorful by the polluted skies and multicolored clouds. All is not lost. Life and Gaia's children still survive.

Stories are told of underground cities in the Forbidden Lands, where humans have preserved themselves and the creatures of Gaia. Beneath the soil they lie, waiting for the toxins to wash clean from the earth and the cycle to swing back towards life. The untainted survivors supposedly whisper of the return of magic and spirits. And every once in a while, a traveler may find a small hidden shrine secluded from the Banes that ravage the surface. These are nothing but rumors, for no records exist in the Courts of hengeyokai actually finding such things.

Some travelers have gone into the Forbidden Lands and learned how this age will end. The knowledge has led to madness and suicide in some cases. Other hengeyokai deny the Forbidden Lands, maintaining that the entire realm is a trick of the Wym to break their spirit. A few who explore the Forbidden Lands have found purpose and hope in the visions of devastation, either recommitting themselves to their role in the cycle or looking forward to a time when Gaia can purge the civilizations of the world and recreate the ancient times. They believe that although the age may end, life will not.

Hengeyokai seek the Forbidden Lands for many reasons. Some test themselves against the poisons of the Wym, building up their resistance. Others seek ways to help their Kinfolk survive the coming age. Some Hakken view the Forbidden Lands as a test of strength meant to help them learn if they are worthy of surviving in the times to come.

Sample Denizen: Ten Scorpion Devils

These hideous beasts stride the wasted plains of the Realm on spidery legs, moving with tremendous speed. They are hunters *par excellence*, running down lesser Banes, whipping them from the choked skies and devouring them whole. Each one boasts a host of chitinous appendages, lending them their name. They are not above making a meal of unwary hengeyokai, and are quite capable of threatening a shapeshifter's life.

Willpower 7, Rage 9, Gnosis 7, Power 45

Charms: Airt Sense, Armor, Blighted Touch, Reform, Throw Glass

Personal Realms

Some say that the spirit of each individual creates a spirit world all their own, reflecting their hopes and dreams, memories and fears. These places are not the same as chimares, or dream realms, for they have strong ties to the one they represent. The stronger or more powerful one's spirit, then the greater one's personal realm. Many Sunset People do not believe in the existence of personal realms, but the hengeyokai find such a thing a distinct possibility, particularly when considering that Gaia granted the Khan and Nagah the ability to make their personal realms manifest.

One cannot find one's own personal realm with ease; in fact, there is no guarantee that one exists. There are, for instance, no personal realms for ordinary mortals, and it is doubtful that even other *shen* can manifest such things. The only proven way to find



a personal realm (and even this does not always work) is to allow intimate friends to aid in the search. Both the one whose realm is sought and the allies who can see her most truly must search for the site. To understand one's self well enough to locate a personal realm is exceedingly difficult. However, with years and years of reflection and meditation, the wisest can search their own spirits for the location of their realm.

Within reside all of one's personal demons, memories, fears, secret desires, and the dark side of the self. Ancient ones say that the greatest challenge in any life is the test of the self. So it is for those who seek the realms of their own spirits. Yet, by overcoming the challenges of a personal realm, a hengeyokai can conquer his own spirit, empowering himself both in greater Gnosis and with a deeper understanding of themselves and their place in the greater whole. Stories are told of those who faced down their own limitations and by so doing, exceeded them. Other tales speak of heroes who freed their friends from grief, depression, or fear by facing down the dark spirits of their soul.

It is well known that only with an individual's permission can entrance be gained to a personal realm. Without the permission of the creator of the realm, the personal realm can neither be found or entered. Permission does not have to be voiced, only granted within the spirit itself. Banes always seek entry into personal realms, for it is there that they do battle for control of a soul.

Dragon Lines/Caerns



Caerns in the East are often more potent than their Western counterparts. They are usually older sites, well-kept and maintained by local Kinfolk as well as the hengeyokai. Unfortunately, constant war between *shen* has drained many great caerns dry, and there are no longer enough to go around. The wars over such sacred sites and their flow of Chi have lasted for centuries, partly contributing to the all-inclusive nature of the Beast Courts' society; better that all hengeyokai cooperate to defend one caern, and that all share access.

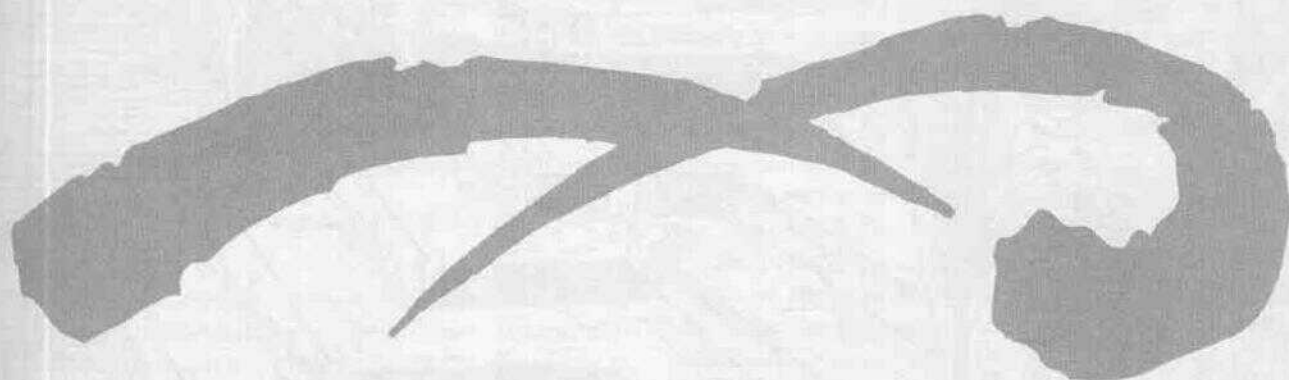
Perhaps the greatest difference between Eastern and Western caerns lies in the Mirror Lands. Each caern has its own domain within the Mirror Lands. These caern domains may be part of a larger domain, such as a Glen, but they possess their own distinct nature. In many ways, they are the court of the caern spirit.

The caern domain often resembles the caern itself, so much so that it is often referred to as the true caern. The nature of the caern defines the type of domain. A spirit of Wisdom may have birds flying into her domain whispering secrets about the world, while the Umbral caern takes the form of a monastery where attendant spirits practice calligraphy and meditation. On the other hand, a spirit of Leadership might dwell in a regal palace, dwarfing the Mirror Lands around with a army of spirits at his beck and call.

Although the caerns of the East may be powerful, they can also be dangerous. Some caern spirits, pressured by the constant wars for their favor and resources, have become arrogant or even insane. They may demand blood sacrifices or ask sept members to perform impossible deeds, such as bringing them the heads of all the Yama Kings. In a few instances, caern spirits have even attacked members of their own septs. Most blame the breakdown of the celestial bureaucracy, but others say that the pain of Gaia or the corruption of technology has twisted the caern spirits.

Eastern caerns are not only connected to each other through the moon bridges known in the West, but also through dragon lines. Dragon lines are stronger versions of the dragon paths, only connecting the caerns of the Middle Kingdom with the realms of the spirit lords. In days past, the dragon lords sent observers through the land to view the different caerns and report to their lords and ultimately, the Celestines on the state of the Middle Kingdom. Maintaining the flow of Chi between the spirit world and the physical was deemed exceedingly important, though few living can remember the last time a minister of the dragon spirits even attempted a circuit, much less completed one. Dragon lines work almost exactly as moon bridges to transport hengeyokai, but the nature of the caern spirits determines the difficulty of travel. If the line is well-used and the caern spirits are allied, travel is very easily (difficulty of 3 or 4). If dragon lines are used to travel to the caern of enemies, it becomes much harder (difficulty 8 or 9). Failure to properly use the dragon lines means that hengeyokai become lost in the Mirror Lands between the two caerns. A botch indicates that they have drawn the attention of a powerful spirit, which could be both good or bad, depending on how they handle themselves.

In all other respects, caerns remain much as they are through the rest of the world.



Chapter Three: Lords of the Beast Courts


What would we do with all things of the human world?

You carry all creation within your body.

In all things, Three — Mothers, Thunders, Worlds, Fires.

Choice is undesirable and unhealthy. Select nothing, and receive all.

— Nagah maxim

 The Sunset People find the hengeyokai strange and unfamiliar, but in essence they aren't incredibly different. The majority of differences stem from the communal society of the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, which has altered the hengeyokai spiritually and socially over the years.

All hengeyokai cause the Delirium in Crinos form, save for the Kitsune. For the Tengu and Khan, the effects are somewhat lessened; witnesses react as if their Willpower were two points higher, due to the fact that these Breeds did very little marauding in Crinos during the Fourth Age. However, the Khan cause full Delirium in their Chatro form, and the hideous Kumo (whose depredations never stopped) invoke the Delirium in Lilian and Aghora forms alike. Also, unless otherwise noted, silver affects all hengeyokai with the same detrimental effects that it wreaks on Garou.

Sentai

The most startling evidence of cooperation between the courts (at least startling to Western eyes) is the tradition of *sentai*, or war parties. *Sentai* are formed in accordance to strict tradition — always with a purpose, and always in a

manner pleasing to the spirits and the Court of Ancestors. But although a *sentai* can be as tightly knit as a pack, they almost always include shapeshifters of two or more different Breeds — a concept unthinkable to the Sunset People, who still keenly remember the War of Rage.

The traditional number in a *sentai* is five. There are five cardinal directions, five faces of the Moon and five elements. Each of these must be represented in the *sentai*, or the spirits may find the war party inauspicious and unworthy of aid. Therefore, each member of a traditional *sentai* is aligned with a direction, an element, and most importantly, a task. These alignments are each chosen separately — although the Kuei-jin would presume that fire is inextricably linked with the direction of south, the “south wind” of a *sentai* is not necessarily its “fire talon.” The tasks roughly correspond to the Garou auspices, although the duties of each one vary somewhat from the Western norm.

Some *sentai* are fully devoted to the Courts of the Emerald Mother, and act with unswerving unity. These *sentai* are almost as effective as Garou packs, because each of the members is expected to set aside personal ambition and Breed loyalty in devotion to the higher cause. They adhere to the common Renown system of the courts, and

enjoy many of the privileges of a pack. Such war parties are known as mountain sentai, and are as enduring and spiritually blessed as their namesake.

By compare, a wave sentai is meant to last only until its purpose is completed, and asks less of its members. Like the waves, they form and dissolve as the situation requires, and enjoy the advantage of great fluidity, if not great strength. Wave sentai choose no totems, and members do not have to abide by a common Renown system. Wave sentai are usually chosen from whomever is convenient at the time — some rare few have even included certain trustworthy non-hengeyokai, such as *hsien*, Western shapechangers, sorcerers or even Namebreakers. Wave sentai do not enjoy all the social privileges that mountain sentai do, but their advantage of convenience is unmistakable.

Auspices

The house shall have
a well
a hearth
a fire
a roof
and a pillar
to hold them upright
and keep them apart.

— Hengeyokai proverb

The root word of “auspicious” is “auspice.” It should come as no surprise, then, that the hengeyokai concept of a balanced and well-ordered sentai closely matches the Western Garou ideal of a pack — each one has members to fulfill five vital roles. However, the hengeyokai place less import on the moon-sign of one’s birth (which influences relatively few hengeyokai other than the Hakken), emphasizing more the roles assigned to the sentai members at the time of the war party’s formation.

Unlucky Behavior

Here and there, various practices throughout this book are said to be “considered unlucky” or “inauspicious.” This is no idle matter to the hengeyokai, who depend on the good will of spirits to perform their rites and serve the Emerald Mother. Consequently, it should be stressed that hengeyokai are very reluctant to undertake “unlucky” endeavors, as the consequences are more than a simple breaking of superstition. Storytellers should enforce the mystical feel of Hengeyokai games by punishing, indirectly or directly, hengeyokai who ignore the traditions of auspicious behavior — they may be shunned by their courts, lose Renown or be treated poorly by spirits. These punishments shouldn’t be too stringent, but should certainly leave the offender with the realization that the traditions are there for a purpose.

Essentially, the difference between a sentai and a simple band of hengeyokai is the Way of Emerald Virtue. In a sentai, the various members are sworn subjects of the Beast Courts, and gain Renown as appropriate for their auspice roles. Loosely affiliated hengeyokai who gain Renown according to the guidelines of their *Changing Breed* are considered wave sentai at best, and more often simple “packs” (not the Garou definition, since the Garou are a minority among the Courts).

Mountain sentai are the definition of the traditional war party; members take a common totem (as per the Background), one hengeyokai is present for each auspice, and many Breeds are usually represented. If a court doesn’t have enough available hengeyokai for the full five members, a mountain sentai is still possible, although the spirits tend to look on it as half-formed and incomplete. Those courts lucky enough to have extra available shapechangers will sometimes assign a hengeyokai or two to assist a mountain sentai, creating a war party of six or seven, but usually only the core five members are bound by the Rite of the Harmonious Journey. Generally speaking, if more or less than five hengeyokai are available for a war party, the courts will instead form a wave sentai.

Wave sentai do not have to include a member of each auspice, but ignoring this tradition is considered unlucky — and in a setting where the spirits react poorly to inauspicious behavior, with visible results, luck is worth quite a bit. Unfortunately, sometimes an unlucky sentai is all that’s available. Although members of such sentai may have to work twice as hard to overcome the low expectations that the Courts show them, individuals may prove themselves worthy of respect by overcoming this handicap.

Lantern

The heart of the war party is the Lantern; he is the beacon that guides the paths of his fellows, and the heat that draws them together. He often leads the sentai, coordinating the actions of his comrades into an effective whole. However, the Lantern may also temporarily relinquish command to the sentai member more qualified to lead in a given situation — letting the Fist take over battle tactics or the Leaf coordinate a stealth mission. The Lantern is expected to be wise and just in all his actions, and follows a most exacting path; but if he distinguishes himself in such a demanding role, then his renown is assured.

Concepts: Judge, mediator, sergeant, sifu, detective, crusader, everyman hero, noble, executive, student

Fist

A sentai without a Fist is doomed indeed — in the World of Darkness, violence is constantly a threat, and the Fist is the sentai’s first line of defense. Like the general of the court, the Fist is the martial arm of the sentai. He may be the weapons master of the team, the fiercest fighter, or even a physically weak warrior with a talent for tactics. Whatever his specialization, he is responsible for ensuring the safety of his sentai in

Elemental Wind

The Europeans recognized four elemental forces: air, earth, fire and water. Asian thought put it at five primal elements: earth, water, fire, wood and metal. Who's a hengeyokai to believe?

Well, the truth of the spirit world is that both sides are right, to an extent. A hengeyokai who uses the Gift: Create Element may conjure up metal or wood, if such is his attunement. Alternately, a more Western-minded shapechanger might be attuned to the classical four. Certainly the spirit world supports both theories; elementals of all sorts have been in existence for as long as people have had words for earth and water.

In the interest of formality, the Gaian Court recognizes the five elements as wind, water, fire, earth and moon. Wind is the breath of the world, or so the maxim goes; earth the bones, water the blood, fire the heat that beats in the heart and moon the cool spirit of the land. Players may choose to have their hengeyokai characters be attuned to this "aspect" of the elements, or may opt for their characters to be more closely aligned to the more humanistic set of earth, fire, water, wood and metal. In a cosmic sense, it makes really no difference at all, so long as the hengeyokai honors the appropriate elemental spirits.

Symbolically, though, what do the elements mean when applied to hengeyokai personalities and auspice roles? It depends. The following are just a few examples of ways that the elders might associate a young hengeyokai's personality with an element.

- **Air** is often associated with the winds, as well as clouds, vision, breath (and thereby life), music, birds, ghosts, freedom and even Kailindo. It is often given to Leaves, but certainly not all the time.

- **Earth** can mean many things to shapeshifters, from the Mother's flesh to the unyielding power of mountains. Among other things, it has ties to stone, steadfastness, willpower, metal, tools, wood, caves, fertility, luck, roads, meditation and endurance. A hengeyokai who is strong in earth often exudes a feel of being rooted to the world wherever he goes.

- **Fire** is pure Yang, hot and energetic. It can imply aggression, destruction, warmth, instinct, speed, violence, Rage, "hard" martial arts, thunder and lightning, even sorcery. Most hengeyokai recognize at least a little of themselves in the element of fire.

- **Water** is one of the classic Yin elements, and may alternately imply healing, creativity, adaptability, compassion, tranquillity, or in some cases, simply being female (the lifegiving symbolism of water is not restricted to Western culture). It also has associations with weather, travel, "soft" martial arts like judo, ice, blood, cleansing, and even divine retribution (in the form of floods).

- **Moon** has obvious connotations of spirituality, and is tied to many Mirrors. However, moon as an element also implies night, shadows, enigmas, Gnosis, trickery, light, metal (particularly silver), love, vanity and elusiveness. The moon has a strong pull on the tides of the shapeshifters' blood.

So should players change perfectly good character concepts in order to make the perfect sentai? No, they shouldn't. Think of it as an exercise in creativity — look at the hengeyokai involved as the elders would, and see which would be best suited for which element. The results can enrich the sentai's personality tremendously.

times of battle. Considering the shapeshifters' penchant for Rage and bloody combat, this role is usually easy to fill.

Concepts: Soldier, predator, gunsmith, enforcer, weapon master, goblin slayer, martial arts sensei, gun runner, supercop, hit man

Mirror

The Mirror is the sentai's tongue. She is the one who calls spirits, who bends strangers into allies, who pronounces sorceries. Like the reflection on a still pond, she is the link to the spirit world, and like a silvered looking glass, she is the cool presence that disarms the prideful. The Mirror performs a dangerous role; like a court's seer, she is the one singled out by spirits as the sentai's representative. Nonetheless, this role comes with a myriad of opportunities to prove one's wisdom, and most Mirrors are glad to accept the challenge.

Concepts: Healer, mystic, negotiator, sorcerer, seducer, medium, ritemaster, animist, outsider

Leaf

Like her namesake, the Leaf rides the wind into the deepest forests, passing unnoticed above the mightiest camps of the enemy. The Leaf serves as the sentai's eyes, and quietly gathers information to aid her comrades. Whether jester or cold-blooded murderer, this auspice is the way of stealth and stealing-in. The most accomplished Leaf is one who dares much and acts with great cleverness; and if the rest of the sentai must act to draw her out of the trouble she discovers, such is to be expected from time to time.

Concepts: Spy, orphan, trickster, computer hacker, sentinel, Umbral scout, assassin, wild cub, detective, teacher

Pillar

Perhaps the least glamorous of the sentai roles, the Pillar serves as the legs of the war party. His is the role of support, of the strong back that can bear a fallen comrade or the optimistic voice that rouses the spirits of the sentai. The Pillar is often a skilled fighter as well, and is in many cases a jack-of-all-trades, capable of aiding each of his teammates in their tasks if necessary. Although not always highly visible, the Pillar holds an honored position and can enjoy great Renown for his role in ensuring the sentai's efficiency.

Concepts: Bard, pilot, medic, artist, machinesmith, strongman, artisan, salt of the earth, sage, Zen master

Changing Auspice

The auspice of a hengeyokai is often considered foreordained in some respects; a Hakken Ahroun is obviously best suited to the path of the Fist, for instance, while a Tengu can serve as a Leaf nonpareil. However, it's entirely possible to switch from one path to another, particularly with the dissolution of a sentai and the need to take on other duties.

The changing of auspice is carried out via the Rite of the Second Face. It is considered unlucky for a hengeyokai to undergo this more than once, and in any case it is often difficult to accumulate sufficient Renown to prove that one is well suited to one's new task.

However, a hengeyokai who wishes to turn from the Path of Emerald Virtue to the service of his own tribe, or vice versa, must undergo the Rite of the Great Burden. This is in all respects like the Garou Rite of Renunciation, and the shapeshifter may never learn the Gifts of his abandoned road again. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of hengeyokai are perfectly content to serve either the Courts or their Breeds for as long as they live. Such is the way of things.

Other Tribes

There's no reason that Garou of the Thirteen Tribes, or other Western shapechangers, cannot join the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother. However, such a thing is virtually unheard of, at least where born-and-bred Sunset People are concerned. Most of the Garou in the Courts have been in Asia for generations upon generations, growing more in tune with the Beast Courts than with the Garou Nation. Although they may have originally been of the Red Talons or Stargazers, Bone Gnawers, Children of Gaia or Glass Walkers, the Garou present in the Beast Courts are hengeyokai through and through, almost to the point where they feel more comfortable around Khan and Tengu than they do around Western members of their own tribes.

A Western shapeshifter who enters fully into the Beast Courts' service undergoes the Rite of the Great Burden, stripping away her former life and assigning her a new auspice. Needless to say, many of her tribemates may find this an act of betrayal; even though she still serves Gaia, she may prove a security risk to her former family. In truth, there are no known records of the hengeyokai asking a former

Sunset Person to divulge the secrets of her ilk, but the tension of the Final Days encourages the possibility that anything could happen.

Gifts and Rites

The hengeyokai of the Beast Courts keep a wealth of common magics, and provide training to those who prove themselves worthy. They share a number of Gifts and rites among themselves in order to further the efficiency of the Courts as a whole. Although a hengeyokai cannot always be guaranteed that a teacher will instruct him in the common Gift he requires, the degree of cooperation is nonetheless much higher than that of the Sunset People.

The "communal" Gifts and rites can be learned by any hengeyokai, provided they follow the Way of Emerald Virtue. They aren't as easy to master as the Gifts granted by birthright, but they are decidedly easier to learn than foreign Gifts such as those of other Breeds or the Sunset People. Most hengeyokai in service to the Courts begin play with at least one of these communal Gifts, and may also choose rites from the common body of lore.

Those who follow one of the five active or sentai auspices may also choose the auspice Gifts of the Garou in lieu of a common Gift; for instance, a Mirror may choose to learn a Theurge Gift instead of a more courtly trick. In such cases, the experience cost is the same as if the Gift were communal. Naturally, if the auspice Gift in question is cheaper to purchase due to one's Breed, the player need not pay the "court" cost; this is one reason that Ahrouns drift to the Fist auspice, and so on, and so forth.

A listing of the Courts' shared Gifts and rites appears in Chapter Four.

Renown

The shapeshifters of the Middle Kingdom, loyal as they are to either their tribe or to the greater society of the Beast Courts, have a distinct choice in the roads their lives may take. They may dedicate themselves to their betterment of their Breed, in which case they use Renown rules similar to those of their Western cousins (Khan concern themselves with Cunning, Ferocity and Honor, for example, while such Tengu follow the more Wisdom-oriented pattern of other Corax). However, the majority of hengeyokai involved in the Beast Courts adhere to a Renown system shared by all Changing Breeds of the Courts — the Way of Emerald Virtue. This system makes little provision for the variety of races involved in the Courts, and instead rewards those who follow the common law of the Mandates, obey their court-divined auspice, fight in sentai or defend the caerns belonging to the Courts as a whole.

Renown is accorded to the role each hengeyokai plays in the court. There are six auspices — the five "active" auspices that are represented in a sentai, and the path of the courtier. Courtiers remain in the court year-round, applying their talents primarily to the maintenance and defense of

Experience Chart

Trait	Cost
Gift	Level of Gift x 3
Common Courts Gift	Level of Gift x 4
Gift from other breed/auspice/tribe	Level of Gift x 5*
*Shapeshifters cannot learn Gifts above Level Three from outside their Changing Breed.	

the dragon nest rather than actively pursuing tasks and missions outside the court's territory.

Like so many other things, Renown is a three-part entity. However, the three aspects of hengeyokai Renown are not mutually exclusive; there is much Virtue to be found in following the paths of Glory and Wisdom, while it might speak well of a shapeshifter's Glory to dare much in the name of Wisdom. As a result, the Storyteller can award a temporary point or two more of Renown after a great deed; the hengeyokai know that in following one's path, one honors all paths.

There is a down side to this generosity, however. Losing Renown is a grave affair among hengeyokai; they consider trespasses of such nature highly barbaric behavior. Of course, their definition of barbarism doesn't match the human ideal—to the hengeyokai, a barbarian among shapeshifters is one that is out of balance, relying overmuch on his human or animal nature while ignoring his duties as a shapeshifter. In the eyes of the Courts, a Hakken computer hacker who cultivates contacts among high society may well be seen as less advanced as a Same-Bito hermit who shuns human and shark society in order to learn the ways of the spirit world. Consequently, Renown losses are often more significant among hengeyokai, sometimes even double the penalty a Westerner might suffer—the hengeyokai loses Renown for her offense, and further Renown for the embarrassment of losing Renown at all! The Storyteller should feel free to award hefty penalties to hengeyokai characters who behave poorly; after all, the downside to such an elevated society is a similarly elevated standard of conduct.

• **Glory:** There is no question that bravery is a virtue. The willingness to lay down one's life for the Emerald Mother is one of the most honored traits among hengeyokai. However, this doesn't include idiotic deaths; the Hakken never took to seppuku as readily as did the humans, because the shapeshifters are few enough already. Hengeyokai Glory represents valor, ferocity, steadfastness, loyalty to the courts and martial skill; those without Glory receive little respect from those who are willing to die for the Mother.

• **Virtue:** Like the Garou concept of Honor, Virtue embodies dignity, integrity, honesty and loyalty to the Mandates. The hengeyokai, however, rank these qualities as signs of virtue rather than honor largely because honor is highly subjective; what a Hakken finds to be honorable behavior is rarely what a Nezumi considers proper conduct. Virtue represents the ability to act in accordance to Gaia's

Renown Chart

Lantern

Rank	Glory	Virtue	Wisdom
1 (Wood)	0	3	0
2 (Iron)	2	5	1
3 (Steel)	3	7	3
4 (Gold)	4	8	5
5 (Silver)	6	10	7

Fist

Rank	Glory	Virtue	Wisdom
1 (Wood)	2	1	0
2 (Iron)	5	3	1
3 (Steel)	7	4	2
4 (Gold)	9	6	3
5 (Silver)	10	8	4

Mirror

Rank	Glory	Virtue	Wisdom
1 (Wood)	0	0	3
2 (Iron)	1	1	5
3 (Steel)	2	2	7
4 (Gold)	3	3	9
5 (Silver)	5	4	10

Leaf

Rank	Any Combination
1 (Wood)	3
2 (Iron)	9
3 (Steel)	14
4 (Gold)	19
5 (Silver)	25

Pillar

Rank	Glory	Virtue	Wisdom
1 (Wood)	1	1	1
2 (Iron)	3	2	3
3 (Steel)	4	4	4
4 (Gold)	5	6	5
5 (Silver)	7	8	7

Courtier

Rank	Glory	Virtue	Wisdom
1 (Wood)	1	1	1
2 (Iron)	2	3	3
3 (Steel)	3	5	4
4 (Gold)	4	7	7
5 (Silver)	6	9	9

Damned if We Do, Damned if We Don't

Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East is designed to be used as a player and Storyteller sourcebook, preferably with a minimum of page-flipping between it and the **Werewolf Players Guide**. To that purpose, we've repeated some of the basic material on shapechangers in the **Werewolf Players Guide** for convenience's sake: most notably, the form Traits and a few Gifts and rites that are quintessentially Eastern. However, in the interest of giving priority to those differences that make the hengeyokai the recognizable-but-not-familiar creatures that they are, we haven't repeated *everything*. Although Nezumi, for instance, are perfectly capable of using common Ratkin Gifts, we didn't reprint the Ratkin Gifts from the **Players Guide** because it seemed like the space could be put to better use. The Gifts you see that are repeated are repeated simply because they are highly appropriate to the setting, and because the hengeyokai use them as frequently (if not more so) than do their Western cousins.

Ultimately, this book is meant to give quick and easy guidelines for running games set in the East, or incorporating hengeyokai into ongoing chronicles. It's our hope that this compromise between completism and originality will allow you to run games without too much cross-referencing, while not charging you five extra bucks for wagonloads of rules that you already own.

laws, to cooperate with other hengeyokai without compromising one's own duties. Those without Virtue are considered disrespectful of the Courts' harmony and potential troublemakers.

- **Wisdom:** In all things, one must cultivate Wisdom. It is the call of the spirit world, the promise of enlightenment, the potential to be one with one's duty, ancestors, surroundings and the Mother. Hengeyokai standards of Wisdom are notably high, and those who do not cultivate this virtue are considered barbaric creatures, too much of human or beast.

Rank

The hengeyokai recognize five steps of Rank, as do Western shapechangers. Their titles for the various ranks are phrased in the form of various materials, and are used as general modifiers rather than out-and-out titles; thus where a Western Garou might introduce himself as an Ahroun Cliath, a hengeyokai would refer to herself as a Gold Courtier.

Hengeyokai wear the colors or materials of their rank openly, as a visual cue for their fellow shapeshifters or to the spirits. They traditionally pair the material or color in question with a symbol, glyph, mon or badge representing their sentai or court; for example, a Silver-rank Nezumi of the Biting Rain Court might wear a white armband embroidered with the emblem of his court (since a silver mon would be obviously impractical). Hengeyokai who have yet to pass their Rite of Passage are called Stone, and their color is gray. In ascending order, the five Ranks beyond are Wood (brown), Iron (red), Steel (blue), Gold (yellow), and Silver (white); silver is considered paramount, due to its association with the Moon. Those legendary heroes who rise to the equivalent of Rank 6 are called Jade, and their color is green; those entitled to wear a jade badge are respected throughout the Middle Kingdom.

What's to stop a pretender from wearing the colors of a rank to which he's not entitled? Although few hengeyokai care whether or not a Rank One Tengu wears silver jewelry or white clothing, if the same Tengu tried to wear a silver or white badge of rank, the spirits would most assuredly notice. Just as the spirits act as witnesses to rites of Renown, the communal memory of Gaia's heavenly servants knows full well who is exactly of what station. True, a Gaffling might not notice the difference immediately, but it would be sure to mention the Tengu's rank in passing to a Jagglings, and the gossip would spread from there. Those who aspire to an unearned station quickly find their rites impotent as the spirits ignore their calls, and discover that no spirit teachers for Gifts are available.

Of course, hengeyokai legend tells of a few instances where great heroes had to resort to such bluffs to save their caerns and families. However, such heroes often had to work off their karmic debt afterwards in order to regain the spirits' blessing. It is a tactic that has worked before, but that holds no guarantee to work again. To be on the safe side, it is more prudent to disguise oneself in the color of a lower Rank than your own, should such tactics become necessary.

Obviously, with all these formalities, the amount of titles heaped on one hengeyokai can be staggering. It's not uncommon for a Hakken's formal title as a court regent to run something like "The Iron Pillar Motomuchi Slashes-Heaven, Theurge to Clan Yomitachi, South Wind and Moon Talon to the Forest Shaker Sentai" — and that doesn't even include the possibility of listing his deeds! Since shapeshifters are a generally impatient lot, such titles are frequently abbreviated. The most common exception is when dealing with the spirit courts, when an extended recital of one's faithfully obeyed duties is important to making a good first impression.

Hakken

Laughing Daughter of Night

Even in a time of peace, when the Land of the Rising Sun rested content under the wise rule of shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, the Hakken practiced the art of war. Each clan wished to be the best and wisest of all; to this end, the lords and ladies carried on quiet battles behind silken screens or in bright gardens. A whisper here, a murmur there, the competition for quality continued.

Yet on the estate of Lord Taira Akio and his wife Taira Kaneko, great Lady of the Hakken, chaos reigned. They had two strong sons, Taro and Jun, who were betrothed to noble

Hakken daughters of allied clans. Then there was Sayo, their only daughter, their only child of the moon, born on a night when Tsuki-yomi had no face. From her birth, Sayo laughed at everything. Even when she prowled on four feet instead of two, she laughed.

Father and mother tried to teach her the ways of the Hakken, but life was a game to Sayo. Her brothers showed her mastery of the sword as befitted a samurai, but even as Sayo bested them, she laughed. Father, mother and brothers despaired. If called to serve the clan, would Sayo stain them all with her lack of reverence? How far would her laughter take her when bushido required straightforwardness?

An answer was not long in coming. The daimyo, hearing of Sayo, sent for her. While her father and mother trembled inside, Sayo paid graceful honor to the daimyo and brought a smile to his lips with her clever stories. Then the time for business came.

"Taira Sayo, I have a task for you to perform." The daimyo held out to her a lotus blossom.

"You are to take this to the clan shrine of the Yotomi family and leave it on their steps. Forget not your laughter, daughter of the clan, and your name shall be honored."

Father and mother did not even blink, but they knew the sad tidings: that the Yotomi clan had fallen into the destructive clutches of the Coiled Serpent, the Wyrn of Destruction. They knew their child was asked to give her life for the clan, and they worried not that she would never come home, but that she might die dishonorably.

Did their daughter have any idea what her duty was to be?

But knowing or not, Sayo took the blossom with a sweet smile. That very night, she ran on her four swift legs to the distant temple of the Yotomi, clutching the blossom in her sharp teeth. When the rising sun touched her eyes, she stood two-legged on the threshold of the fallen clan's shrine. She laid the blossom down just as stinking, corrupted warriors poured out from the earth's bowels to confront



her. Sayo had never forgotten the teachings of her brothers, so she felled many with single strokes of her blade. She remembered the command of the daimyo, and loyally and obediently followed his orders not to forget her laughter. As more and more of the Wyrn's warriors overtook her, Sayo laughed at them and their foolishness in straying from the path of bushido. The kindly servants of Tsuki-yomi who listened to the fateful battle agreed that never had they heard such perfect laughter, so inspired by wisdom. When Sayo fell dead, they bore her away, just as the magic lotus flower blossomed into a great fire, destroying the entire Yotomi estate.

The daimyo told Lord and Lady Taira of their daughter's noble death, and they were ashamed they had thought so little of her in life.

"Let this be a lesson to you, then," he replied. "For the path of warrior is to strive for quality in all things, not just those which bring us the greatest glory and honor in battle. This is truly the way of the Hakken."

Description

At first glance, some *gaijin* werewolves think the Hakken merely to be typical Shadow Lords in samurai guise. Shadow Lords with honor? Many Garou laugh uproariously at such a notion. But the Hakken and their world view go far beyond Shadow Lord stereotypes. To Western eyes, Hakken goals are often incomprehensible, while their actions make perfect sense in terms of *bushido*, the way of the warrior (also called *budo*). All loyal Hakken follow this path and consider themselves samurai in the most traditional sense. For all intents and purposes, they are a unique group unto themselves with only tenuous ties to the Shadow Lords. In fact, most Hakken consider Western Shadow Lords crude and distasteful, though they're generally too polite to say so. It's not the political dabbling or backstabbing that are turnoffs; these things happen among Hakken, too. No, it's that most Shadow Lords lack any real finesse, polish or code of conduct for the whole process that's unappealing to their Japanese cousins.

But where is the wolf in this tale? Why do the howls of Gaia's warriors grow softer each new season? What has caused the human half of the Hakken to dominate the wolf? The answers lie within the events of the Fourth Age.

Hakken Lexicon

- Ashigaru: Lowest rank of Hakken; Rank 0.
- Bushido: Way of the warrior.
- Chushin: Loyalty.
- Clan: Family of Hakken; has nothing to do with vampires.
- Daimyo: Head of a Hakken clan.
- Mon: Family crest.
- Naru-kami: Lord of Thunder; a Hakken totem.
- Shintoku: Divine virtues of benevolence, straightforwardness and wisdom.

As the wars raged between *hengeyokai* courts, and between shapeshifter and human, the lupus and homid Hakken made a solemn pact: that Tsuki-yomi's lands and peoples would be protected. The Land of the Rising Sun was at that time small, relatively weak and isolated; the Hakken believed that all beings, Garou and human, should work together to preserve the islands. To this end, they began to strengthen their ties with mortals. The werewolves made alliances with human leaders, fought in their armies and served in their governments. The numbers of human Kinfolk swelled — and the Hakken's society gradually began to drift away from the Garou's tribal structure, instead imitating the way of the feudal Japanese mortals. Forgotten in this plan, though, were the wolves. Their Kin became fewer and fewer every passing year. Finally, the lupus werewolves also dwindled in number; now, most live only in the extreme northern islands. A few homid Hakken realize loss of the wolves will cause dire consequences, but they're puzzled about what to do.

One solution, of course, is simple: the Hakken must resist their intolerance to change and bring in new lupus blood. While the overly human customs of the Hakken repulse the lupus of some tribes, others are intrigued by Japan's beauty and mystery, both natural and supernatural. Possibly, lupus from Siberia or the Pacific would be willing to move to the Hakken's islands, especially to strengthen the blood of the wolf. But at least for now, the Japanese werewolves will have none of it. Other tribes are *gaijin*, foreign, inferior. What do they know of the highest demands of honor, family and duty? But sooner than later (it is hoped), the Hakken will have to face the terrible truth: they are losing the wolf. Without that lupus connection, they are losing touch with the primal side of being shapeshifters, instead aping their preferred human society in a manner most would associate with the parasitic vampires.

For the Hakken, the way of the warrior has several key tenets (though the average Hakken would be loath to admit outsiders could grasp these concepts). Some Hakken believe that human warriors learned these codes from the werewolves; others believe that the human and Garou codes developed simultaneously. Whatever the truth, homid Hakken follow the tenets closely; they adopted these customs to successfully interact with humans during the Fourth Age, and now, these tenets are a way of life. Lupus Hakken are less inclined to take the code as seriously.

• **Benevolence and unselfishness** — The Hakken's two swords, *katana* and *wakasashi* (collectively called the *dai-sho*), are the symbol of his authority and rank. To the Hakken, using a sword (even a finely crafted blade like a *katana*) is a sign of mercy among his fellow werewolves; although drawing a weapon is a sign that the Hakken intends to shed blood, the *dai-sho* are far less lethal (to other *hengeyokai*) than the tooth and claw that are still the primary weapons in a Hakken's arsenal. Wearing the *dai-sho* reminds the Hakken that the warrior should remember to

check his power and show mercy as appropriate; as a result, the Hakken never bind spirits into their blades. Power is a serious responsibility; to use it judiciously is a wise thing. A true warrior wouldn't turn away those hungry or in need of his help, nor would he strike without provocation. (Note that provocation has a different meaning among werewolves!)

- **Straightforwardness** — This is a tricky concept that understandably leaves a lot of *gaijin* scratching their heads in confusion. The idea behind this notion is *appearing* to be straightforward, unruffled or forthright; however, this facade may or may not penetrate into the layers of a warrior's soul. In truth, most Hakken are deft politicians; a typical outsider would never realize she'd been brutally insulted, thanks to a Hakken's use of straightforwardness. After all, the Hakken are still Shadow Lords to some degree. The symbol for this tenet is a jewel, somehow appropriate since it appears to be simple on the outside but has infinite depths.

- **Wisdom** — The mirror is the symbol of wisdom, for it is a tenet that begins with knowledge of the self. A Hakken must know her own strengths and limitations. Moreover, as a famous Hakken once said, "Others are merely mirrors of the self. How can you love or hate something about another unless it reflects something you love or hate about yourself?"

Together, benevolence, straightforwardness and wisdom complete *shintoku*, the divine virtues.

- **Loyalty (*chushin*)** — Allegiance and constancy to one's sworn *daimyo* are extremely important to the Hakken. Faced with a choice of either death or betrayal of the *daimyo*, most Hakken will gladly accept death. To forswear loyalty is to lose face and honor almost irredeemably. However, unlike human samurai, Hakken are far less likely to commit ritual suicide over minor infractions such as this; a dying race cannot be quite as strict if there are to be any future generations.

- **The maintenance of quality in all things** — From personal appearance to politeness at social gatherings, the Hakken strives for perfection. Vengeance, art, war or love — no matter what the task, a Hakken seeks to practice it to the highest level of distinction.

- **Eternal obedience** — A Hakken knows his lord will not make demands that are unjust or not in accordance with the wishes of the Emerald Mother — to the Hakken, the *daimyo* is chosen, imbued by Gaia with all the wisdom necessary to uphold his responsibility. Therefore, the warrior will follow the *daimyo*'s dictates to the utmost of his abilities. If a Hakken feels that she cannot meet his *daimyo*'s orders, she may choose to become Ronin. Usually, this is not done because the Hakken fears a loss of personal honor; such things are expected as part of his obedience and loyalty to his clan. Hakken often choose the Ronin's path because they don't wish to contribute to the clan's loss of honor, or because the *daimyo* has lost her ability to be a just and strong leader. In spite of romanticized notions of Ronin in film, this isn't a path to choose lightly; being apart from the group

carries serious social repercussions. For all their human faces, the Hakken are still werewolves; being part of a pack is still in their nature.

- **Acceptance of punishment for failure** — The Hakken don't offer lame excuses for mistakes; they take full responsibility for their deeds. Quite often, this means they'll likewise have to accept some dire punishments for their actions. On the other hand, a *daimyo* who metes out discipline should also be just and wise in his chastisement. In other words, the punishment fits the crime, at least in the ideal.

- **Acceptance of a just fate for injustices done to others** — This is karma; if a Hakken makes someone else suffer unfairly, the offender knows he'll one day get his just reward. On the other hand, some act of injustice may be necessary due to a command by the *daimyo*. The Hakken must weigh his loyalty and obedience against his karma in such cases. Again, if the matter involves mere personal suffering or loss of honor, the Hakken will fall to the will of the clan and *daimyo* every time.

Organization

The Hakken divide themselves into clans quite similar to tribal camps, but are centered around hereditary families and alliances. The concept of belonging to a group is extremely important to a Hakken; the loyalty most Garou share with their packmates is reflected in the Hakken's sense of family bonds. Usually all members of a clan are blood relatives, though a *daimyo* can grant clan status to any individual she chooses. The Hakken believe that the clan is like the human (or werewolf) form: the *daimyo* is the heart and mind, the warriors are the hands and feet, the people are the body and the elders are the senses. Everyone is interconnected, and only the well-being of all clan members insures overall quality. The Hakken prize their Kin perhaps even more so than do Western Shadow Lords, though they are certainly no less demanding of service and loyalty. Many Hakken wear their family *mon* during battles or ceremonies. Lupus Hakken are perhaps the exception, and prefer gathering in more traditional packs; they are often more inclined to join *hengeyokai sentai* than homids are.

Instead of conducting massive clan wars, the Hakken settle most interclan disputes in ritual single combat. Sometimes, as with the Zhong Lung, this combat takes the form of art or lore competitions. The Hakken still delight in complex political machinations that may take years to culminate, nowadays made more tangled by increased technology. Just because they value tradition doesn't mean the Hakken are above using sophisticated bugs or hacking programs. But despite their unusually humanistic philosophy and outlook, the Hakken remain Garou; they still gather at caerns and hold moots much like other werewolves around the world.

The vast majority of Hakken live in Japan, but a scant few have immigrated to the west coast of the United States and to other parts of southeast Asia. Conflict is brewing to some extent between the Hakken and Glass Walkers over

economic interests in Tokyo, Hong Kong and other cities in the region. Not a few Hakken are disturbed that some Glass Walkers have joined forces with the *yakuza*. Among the Ainu people on Hokkaido are a few Uktena, but the Hakken consider them little competition.

In the courts of the hengeyokai, the Hakken serve as soldiers of the highest order. They are often found as generals, and serve their oaths of loyalty to both court and clan with the utmost distinction. They are perhaps happiest when serving with the Kitsune and Tengu, who have long histories in Japan; other hengeyokai make them uncomfortable, and a Hakken is typically unhappy when asked to serve in a *sentai* with other Breeds.

Nonethe-

less, they always set personal feeling aside when duty is concerned, and it is hoped by the Zhong Lung that service with other hengeyokai will provide the Hakken with a much-needed link back to their primal sides.

Traits, Breeds and Forms

The Hakken correspond to other werewolves in terms of auspices, breeds and forms. However, lupus Hakken are extremely rare since the wolf all but disappeared from Japan in the early part of this century. A few lone wolves remained in the northern islands, but whether there are Kin among them is anyone's guess; this loss of lupus werewolf and Kin is quickly growing to be a serious



Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East

Renown

For Hakken characters, Storytellers may want to consider awarding Renown based on the warrior's code. Benevolence, straightforwardness and wisdom are the most important parts of the code; the other tenets are significant but should garner less reward. Perhaps more important than awarding Renown is taking it away. Penalties for dishonor, disobedience, cowardice or foolishness should be about twice as harsh for the Hakken as for the Western werewolf.

problem. Similar to Silver Fangs in the West, many Hakken choose mates to cement alliances and keep family lines pure. However, love and passion are certainly not unknown; loyalty and devotion to mates and children are part of seeking quality in all things. More of a crime is mating outside the Hakken bloodline; they believe (perhaps rightly) that no *gaijin* can fully understand their code of honor and way of life. This may have to change if the Hakken are to survive.

Hakken have no restrictions on what Background they can or can't buy, but Allies, Kinfolk and Past Life are common choices. Hakken of noble families may bear weapons other than the *dai-sho* that are also fetishes, many with bound Ancestor-spirits. Hakken take unsoakable aggravated damage from silver (see *Werewolf*, p. 198), but may soak other forms of aggravated damage from radiation, fire and claws and teeth of other *shen*.

Rank and Renown follow the same guidelines as Western werewolves, although Storytellers may want to be extrastingsy with Renown. Hakken are expected to always act with honor, glory and wisdom; only extraordinary acts should merit extra rewards. Most Hakken simply refer to themselves as samurai rather than using *gaijin* terms; those who haven't yet undergone a Rite of Passage are sometimes called *ashigaru*.

Gifts

Hakken begin with three Gifts, one each for tribe, breed and auspice. Those who follow the Way of Emerald Virtue and are sworn to the Courts begin play with a Hakken Gift, a general *hengeyokai* Gift, and a breed Gift. They may use any Shadow Lord Gifts in addition to those of their own distinct subtribe. As with most other *hengeyokai*, several Gifts are taught by Ancestor-spirits.

- **Dream of a Thousand Cranes (Level One)** — This Gift grants the user good luck for a brief period of time. It is taught by an Ancestor-spirit.

System: The Hakken folds a single origami crane and the player makes a Charisma + Occult roll, difficulty 6. For each success, the Hakken may add one die to a chosen dice pool for one scene.

- **Fair Path (Level One)** — To appear before one's clan at moots or during rites in a disheveled or unpurified state is considered highly dishonorable. A Water-spirit teaches this Gift which allows the Hakken to appear perfectly groomed

and dressed; this is quite useful when coming from a battle to speak with the *daimyo*.

System: To use this Gift, the Hakken dips her hand in clean water and the player makes a Charisma + Etiquette roll, difficulty 6. She may add one die for each success to any rolls involving Social Attributes for the next scene.

- **Storm Winds Slash (Level Two)** — Although the *dai-sho* are not weapons of lethal combat among *hengeyokai*, the Hakken are not above using their power to slay lesser beings such as *bakemono*. Using this Gift, the werewolf can wound an opponent at a distance by executing a secret cut technique; as the Hakken slashes with her katana, a very real wound appears on the victim, mirroring the Garou's strike. A Metal or Wind-spirit teaches the Gift.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Dexterity + Melee, difficulty 7; the attack can be dodged as usual. Except for the range (of about 50 yards), this slash is treated as an ordinary katana strike; it does not cause aggravated damage.

- **Dark of Night (Level Three)** — Use of this Gift causes temporary blindness in a chosen victim; they can see nothing but inky blackness. Using this Gift in formal duels is a grave offense, causing the wielder to lose four points of temporary Renown in each category; he also cannot gain Renown from such a tainted duel even if he wins. A Raven-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: The Hakken empties a vial of ink and the player makes a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll at difficulty 6. For each success, the victim is blind for one hour.

- **Living Treasure (Level Four)** — The Hakken prize ancient pieces of art and often have such objects in their homes. Most of these treasures have awakened spirits that can impart bits of wisdom. This Gift coaxes the spirits of items to speak and tell their tales. An Ancestor-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: After the Hakken touches the object, a Manipulation + Etiquette roll is made, difficulty 7. For each success, the spirit will impart one brief bit of legend about its past. This Gift can even be used on common items; a gun might speak of its wielder, or a teacup of the Kuei-jin ceremony where it last saw use.

Susanowo and the Wyrn

Many Hakken honor *Naru-kami*, whom the *gaijin* werewolves call Grandfather Thunder. Susanowo, Lord of Rain and Storms, was once a revered totem to the Hakken also, just like *Tsuki-yomi*, Lady of the Moon, or *Naru-kami*. Yet while Susanowo's rains brought life, his tsunamis and typhoons also meant destruction. More and more often he sent fierce storms, both in the waking world and in the Umbra. Fearful that he had fallen prey to the enticement of the destructive Wyrn, the Hakken turned away from him to embrace a similar Lord, *Naru-kami*.

Is Susanowo truly Wyrn-touched? Or is there another force at work? No Theurge who's ever tried to find out has returned to tell the tale.

• **Divine Wind (Level Five)** — This Gift summons a terrifying storm upon a target area. Trees uproot and cars fly like paper cartons. Nothing can withstand the force of the wind which destroys buildings, cars and life. The teacher of this Gift is either an Ancestor-spirit or a servitor of Narukami, Lord of Thunder.

System: The user makes a Stamina + Enigmas roll, difficulty 7, and spends at least one Rage point. For each success, the storm will cover a one-mile radius; each additional Rage point used will add one success. Damage inflicted is at the Storyteller's discretion, though any unprotected humans will likely suffer severe injuries — if not death — from the storm's fury. The storm lasts for only a few turns, but rivals many hurricanes in its fury.

Rites

Rites of Death, Punishment and Accord are those most often practiced by the Hakken. Rites of Renown occur infrequently but are always times of tremendous celebration. Without a doubt, the most solemn ritual is the Rite of Seppuku. Most Westerners think this is merely ritual suicide in protest of a *daimyo*'s policy or because a Hakken has failed in her duty. The rite, however, also restores lost honor to the celebrant's clan or allows a Hakken to join her departed *daimyo* if she feels she can't continue without his guidance. A Hakken gains approximately five points of Honor and two points of Wisdom posthumously for participating in the Rite of Seppuku. Her clan is likewise given esteem. If a *daimyo* is still living, it's customary for the Hakken to obtain permission before beginning this rite. Hakken believe Rites of Death are particularly important as they wish to rejoin their clans in other lives; the proper conduct of a Rite of Death will help insure this dream.

Quote

Perhaps you speak with wisdom; perhaps our fangs have dulled with the years, and our talons grown feeble from clutching human weapons. Would you do me the honor of proving the truth of your words? Please, I await your attack.

Stereotypes

• **Khan** — They are rough and barbaric, though they believe themselves to be more noble than the mightiest *daimyo*. These great beasts will never understand perfection.

• **Kitsune** — They are our respected allies in the struggle against the coming age's corruption. The Foxes occasionally keep secrets, but well do they understand the need for balance in all things.

• **Kumo** — Have any of these unsettling folk ever wriggled out from under the Wurm's thumb? They seek to remake what balance and beauty exists into their own twisted image, and thus they are our enemies.

• **Nagah** — Their constantly shifting coils hint at impatience.

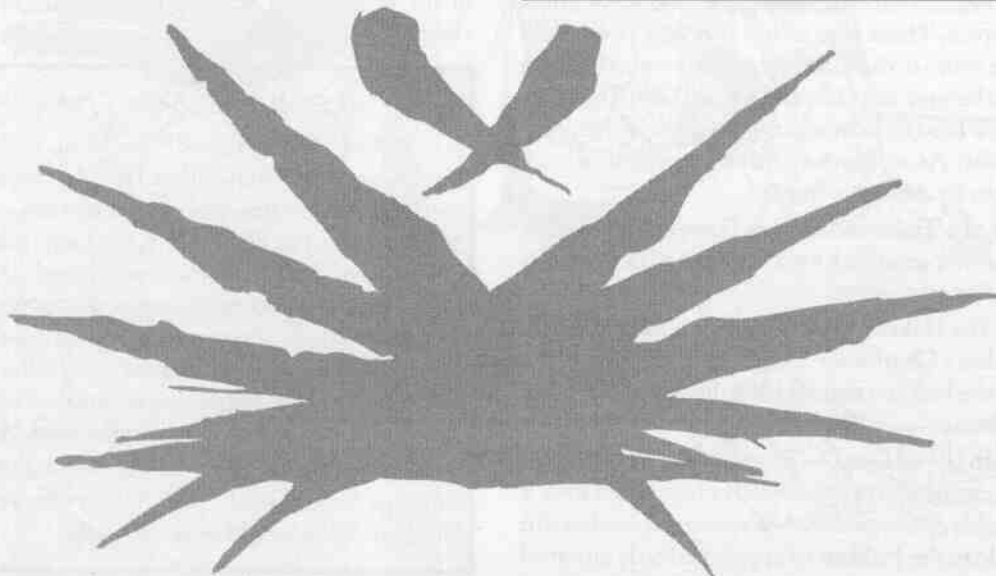
• **Nezumi** — Honor among these carriers of filth and disease is not to be found. They are crude and lacking in dignity; still, their worth in the arts of Low War is hard to deny.

• **Same-Bito** — So they have their own codes of honor? How well do they measure up against our traditions? None too well, I imagine, since they probably imitated us in the first place.

• **Tengu** — They don't practice *bushido*, but why expect the warrior code from messengers and scouts? The raven-folk are loyal and spirited, and if they test our patience from time to time, it is not too great a trial.

• **Zhong Lung** — Their gaze is most unsettling, and their tales of battles before a sea separated Nippon from China even moreso. They do not approve of us, that much we can tell.

• **Sunset People** — A few are tolerable and polite, but none will ever fully understand us. Most are only interested in stealing our lands or wealth. Treat them respectfully, but never give them your trust.



Khan

The King Who Forget

Once there was a great king, a rajah among men, and his court was the most splendid that had ever been seen. The king was much beloved, and the populace acclaimed him as a mighty hero, for it was said that he had slain many rakshasa before taking the throne. He feasted nightly on delicacies that would please even gods, and hunted the beasts of the forest with a vigor worthy of the tigers themselves.

It came to pass one day that the king's soldiers had finally caught a great and savage tigress, one that had slain many of the king's subjects over the years. They proudly brought the great beast before him, her paws and neck bound by chains. The king was pleased to see this tribute at first, but then he saw tears gathering in the tigress' eyes.

"What's this?" he frowned. "Such a savage beast that has slain nearly a hundred men — a coward? Do you weep for fear of your life? I had expected better of the mighty tigress."

The tigress looked sorrowfully back at him with jade eyes, and to the amazement of the entire court, she spoke. "I weep for you, O my king, for once you ruled all the tigers of the jungle, and now you have forgotten yourself and will be the death of your own kind."

The viziers gasped, and the queen fainted, and the king's son stepped forward with his spear upraised. Still the tigress continued, "Do you not remember? Do you not remember slaying jade-toothed rakshasas with your paws? Do you not remember watching the humans, and the curiosity that came over you? Do you not remember walking as a man from the jungle, bearing white deerskins, a rakshasa's skull and jade necklaces, and being proclaimed a hero? Have you forgotten the love of your mate and your cubs?" A tear fell from her eye, and she said, "Your cubs are dead, my king — they were slain for the delicacies that weight

your feasting table. And, I fear, your mate will follow them soon."

At that the king's son leapt up with a cry, and drove his spear into the tigress' heart. She lay down and died without a sound. But the king jumped to his feet, and suddenly his head was as a tiger's and his body was filled with the power of the Bright Kings. With a wail of rage, sorrow and remembrance he leapt forward and smashed his own son's head open with a blow of his paw.

He tore the spear from a guard and impaled three men on the length of the shaft. Then he ran roaring from the courtroom, racing through the palace, killing any human he found. Finally he leapt the wall and vanished into the jungle, where he lay down and wept.

A day and a night passed, and still the tiger king wept. Finally he heard a deep voice that said, " Mightiest of all Khan, tears will do you little good now. You could pour a second Yellow River with your tears, and still Heaven would not lift its curse."

The king looked up, and there stood the Tiger General, master of arms to the Ministers of Heaven. The General folded his arms and shook his head.

"I had hoped you would not do this, but curiosity cannot be denied, I suppose.

Now that a tiger has chosen humanity over his own kind, humanity will kill all the tigers. It is only a matter of time."

"But is there nothing I can do?" the king cried. "Can I not rend and burn my own flesh until Heaven relents? Can I not descend into Hell and take the suffering of my people on my own head?"

The General sighed. "The curse was placed, and cannot be taken back. But I no more wish to see the tigers perish than you do, so I will do this for you: I will seal you in a gem, and hide you somewhere, and if any of your people find you in the ages to come, they may awaken you to save them. But if they fall to fighting among themselves, you may never be discovered."

"I don't care," said the king. "I would do anything to save my beloved people, and if I cannot use my powers to help them now, I will do so in the future."

And so today the Khan continue to search for the greatest of their warriors, that he may teach them his mighty powers and lead them to victory. But even though the General hid him fairly, the tigers have fallen to fighting among themselves, and now they may never awaken his powers.

Description

Of all the tribes of the Bastet, only the Khan are found in the Beast Courts in any numbers. The werecats are too clannish and solitary to adapt well to such a communal life, and even the Indian Bagheera disdain the hengeyokai in favor of keeping their secrets to themselves. However, the great weretigers have always known that the Emerald Mother gave them a sacred duty, and most would sooner cut away a limb than shirk their responsibilities. Ever-loyal to the Mother, the Khan ruthlessly slew the humans who overstepped their bounds and as mercilessly destroyed any of the Centipede's spawn that crossed their path.

The Khan have something of a double duty to the Mother; they are responsible for gathering the secrets of the Adversary, but they are also warriors in Her name. Where the Tengu steal into a hive of corruption and then try to fly away, squawking their discoveries to all the Courts, the Khan move in carefully, extract the lore from the centipedes' coils, then make certain, in as expedient a manner as possible, that the secrets remain in the Khan's possession alone.

However, dark times have come to the sons and daughters of Tiger. Where once they ruled alongside human nobility, now they are a few scattered stalkers in the jungle. Their numbers have faded with each great war — with the Second Age crusades against the Yama Kings, with the Fourth Age wars that pit Khan against Khan, with the modern struggles that have brought them almost to extinction. Their divine power and deep wisdom is still widely respected among the Courts, but the other hengeyokai fear that the coming of the Sixth Age will see the death of the last of the weretigers.

Nonetheless, the weretigers still take great pride in who and what they are. Although their bloodlines have been diminished, they are still creatures of royalty. They study the arts of unarmed combat, and learn the wisdom of sages. A

Khan is truly a Khan only if every moment of his waking hours are spent seeking perfection; nothing less is suitable for these emperors among beasts.

Organization

Once, not so very long ago, the Khan gathered in a great sultanate, where the Tigers of the Sunset and the Tigers of the Courts met amicably to exchange lore. But the sultan betrayed his own kind, and the war that followed saw the deaths of far too many Khan. Since then, the weretigers of the Middle Kingdom have become very isolationist, maintaining that only in the safety of the Courts can their traditions survive. They are decidedly unfriendly to werecats of other tribes, and prefer holding court with other hengeyokai to attending the taghairms of the Bastet.

The Khan are largely solitary, and never travel with others of their kind. The only time that two weretigers spend much time together is when one of them is a cub receiving instruction from the other. When there are perhaps only a hundred of your kind in all the world — hengeyokai and Sunset People included — it seems foolish to gather together where a lucky band of centipedes could diminish the race by a twentieth in one blow.

In the Courts, the Khan often serve as champions or generals, using their stores of information to fashion tactics that would warm Sun Tzu's heart. They are creatures of High War, intense vigor and great virtue, but are hardly above preying on an enemy's weak points. To be honest, there are too few of them left to be gracious, and with every tiger lost to a poacher's bullet or trap, their Rage grows....

Traits

The Khan who have been raised in courtly fashion are fierce warriors, yet have trained to overcome their anger to a slight degree. They begin play with 5 Rage and 2 Willpower. They may purchase any Backgrounds (unlike the Khan outside the Beast Courts, these hengeyokai have been granted the great blessing of contact with the Courts of the Ancestors, and may purchase Past Life), including the Bastet-specific Background of Den-Realm; of course, they may only purchase Totem if part of a mountain sentai.

Unfortunately, the Khan cannot step sideways naturally; only the use of a specific Level Four Gift can permit them to enter the spirit world at will. This reason alone is enough to drive most Khan to search out worthy comrades to form a mountain sentai, that with their noble companions' assistance they may taste the delights of the Tapestry.

Khan who do not follow the Way of Emerald Virtue follow a Renown system similar to that of Garou Ragabash (although they generally require more Renown per Rank). In the tribal ideals, the virtues of Ferocity, Cunning and Honor are paramount. However, most Khan in the Middle Kingdom are traditionalists at heart, and prefer serving the Emerald Virtues — preferably as a Fist with the opportunity to avenge as many of their Kin's deaths as possible.

Breeds

The feline breed of the Khan is dwindling fast; some of the weretigers have been reduced to creeping into Chinese tiger-breeding operations in order to preserve their bloodline. However, since such cubs are almost always raised in captivity, they manage to survive to adulthood more frequently — but are less prepared for the rigorous life of a hengeyokai.

Homid Khan are more numerous, but are notoriously choosy about their breeding stock. The blood of the tiger is sacred, not a gift to be shared with just anyone. Once they chose only the finest nobles and cavaliers of China and Korea, but those days are long gone. Now selecting the best and most worthy from among the billion souls in China alone

is a difficult undertaking, particularly considering that duty often comes first. Some Khan take solace in one another's arms first, and the result is the occasional metis. These wretched beasts, twisted by the fiery purity of their bloodline, are always raised within the Courts, where they quickly learn the responsibility that is their birthright. To a metis

Khan, there is no other life than that of their duty.

Homids begin play with 2 Gnosis; metis have 4 and felines 6.

Forms

- **Homid:** Even in their human form, the Khan are regal and imposing. Most are large and broad-shouldered, giants among men. They are often very attractive in an athletic, imposing way.

- **Sokto:** Not the brute Glabro form of the Garou or Same-Bito, the Sokto form is long and supple, with sharp cheekbones, vestigial whiskers, elongated canines and slitted eyes. The hair grows longer and begins to take on a decidedly striped pattern, while the fingernails are now closer to retractable claws. Needless to say, the Sokto form is intimidatingly exotic.



Form Statistics

Sokto*	Crinos*	Chatro*	Feline*
Str: +2	Str: +3	Str: +4	Str: +2
Dex: +1	Dex: +2	Dex: +2	Dex: +2
Sta: +2	Sta: +3	Sta: +3	Sta: +3
Man: -1	Man: -3	Man: -3	Man: -3
App: -1	App: 0	App: 0	

*Khan have a -2 difficulty modifier to their Perception rolls in this form.

• **Crinos:** Although still not as powerful as Gaia's chosen warriors, the Khan nonetheless gain mighty war skills in their half-tiger form. The Crinos towers a full nine feet tall, although it is capable of surprising grace for its bulk. A Khan in Crinos causes a lessened Delirium in human onlookers for this was not their preferred form for carrying out the Impergium.

• **Chatro:** This massive throwback to the smilodon is terrifying to behold. Twice as tall as an ordinary tiger at the shoulder and four times as massive, with the trademark saber-teeth of its spiritual ancestor, the Chatro form is nothing less than a striped killing machine. Mortal onlookers suffer the full Delirium when beholding the Chatro, as memories of saber-toothed killers flood back.

• **Feline:** Although not as immense as the Chatro, the tiger form is nothing to sneer at. Some Khan are fond of assuming Feline form to attract poachers, then proving how much more fearsome they are than their cat Kin.

Gifts

The Court's tiger-soldiers begin play with three Gifts — one communal hengeyokai Gift, one breed Gift (use Garou breed Gifts, or those found in Bastet), and one Khan Gift. Their Gifts tend to focus on arts of combat and purity, although they also understand some tricks of stealth.

• **Catfeet (Level One)** — As the Level Three Lupus Gift.

• **Crushing the Centipede (Level One)** — As often as the Khan are called on to battle the venomous spawn of the Yomi Worlds, it's no wonder that they developed this Gift. By calling on the purity of Heaven, the Khan may make his hands or paws almost impervious to damage, enabling him to strike spiny or acidic enemies without fear. The Gift is taught by an Elephant-spirit.

System: The player spends one Gnosis and rolls Stamina + Medicine, difficulty 6; for each success, the Gift's effects last one turn. While the Gift lasts, the Khan receives five extra soak dice against damage applied to his hands or paws. This Gift is most commonly used to smite foes who are

harmful to the touch, although it also has some practical uses outside of combat (snatching an object from a roaring furnace, for instance).

• **Razor Claws (Level One)** — As the Ahroun Gift.

• **Sense the Truth (Level One)** — As the Philodox Gift: Truth of Gaia.

• **Gift of the Cricket (Level Two)** — Although the Khan are mighty warriors, their first duty is that of gathering secrets. This Gift is another trick designed to aid them in such affairs, permitting them to hear things through walls and across streets as if they were in the very room of the sounds' origin. This Gift is taught by the unobtrusive Cricket-spirit, and the Khan honor their teacher in the name of the Gift.

System: The Khan nominates a point anywhere within 250 yards and the player rolls Gnosis, difficulty of the local Wall. If successful, the Khan may eavesdrop on that very point for one turn per success. Note that the Khan must have a very good idea of where the target area is; if she cannot see it from her current location, she must be reasonably familiar with it. "The noodle shop where I had lunch" would be a reasonable request, while "Mituchi-san's 14th-floor office," presuming the Khan has never been to the 14th floor of the building in question, would not.

• **Heart of Fury (Level Two)** — As the Ahroun Gift.

• **Sense of the Prey (Level Two)** — As the Ragabash Gift.

• **Paws of the Raging Spirit-Tiger (Level Three)** — One of the Khan's greatest war secrets, this Gift allows the tiger to sheath his paws in crackling spirit energy. So empowered, he may tear into enemies in the spirit world without stepping sideways himself, as long as he can see them. Obviously, no spirit will teach a Khan this Gift unless directly instructed to do so by a Minister of Heaven; most weretigers have to carefully (and painfully) learn its secrets from others of their kind.

System: The Khan focuses his will and spends a Gnosis point. On the next turn, his paws or hands begin to smolder in blue-white, sparking light. The light burns from blue to green, then to yellow, then to red, then to a pinkish hue and finally disappears — in all, the Khan gets about six turns of battle before the Gift's effects ends.

• **Devour the Unclean (Level Four)** — As the Theurge Gift: Spirit Drain. This Gift can only be used on Banes, but the energy gained from doing so is purified somewhat by this power. It is taught by a Tiger-spirit.

• **Punishment from the Moon (Level Four)** — As the Ahroun Gift: Silver Claws.

• **Heaven Thunder Hammer (Level Five)** — By channeling the power of Heaven itself, the Khan strikes out with a blow that can shatter walls and splinter trees. The

force of his strike is akin to a gigantic battering ram, smashing through anything in his path. This Gift is taught by the Tiger General of the Ministers of Heaven.

System: The player must spend three Rage and two Gnosis, and make a Strength + Primal-Urge roll. The Khan's subsequent strike covers about a five-foot radius (reducing his difficulty to hit his opponent to 3), and adds a number of dice equal to his permanent Rage and Gnosis pools to his damage dice pool. Any other Gifts that affect his paw strikes, such as Paws of the Raging Spirit-Tiger or Blaze Talons, also lend their aid to this blow.

After using this Gift, the Khan must personally ask permission from the Tiger General to use it again in a later combat. Although this request is almost never denied, it can take some time to gain an audience.

Rites

The Khan are actually not as accomplished ritemasters as are other hengeyokai; although they tend to learn rites of purification and exorcism, they often tend to leave the majority of spirit-work to those better suited to it. Part of this may stem from their difficulties entering the Umbra; if one rarely greets spirits, it is impolite to make demands of their services. Another likely theory is that the Khan are too proud to rely overmuch on fetishes and dedicated equipment; as such, they allow other hengeyokai of the Courts to do the rite-work as necessary, but will not admit to requiring spiritual assistance in all but the gravest cases.

Quote

Shoot me. Cut me. Stalk me. Hunt my kind for their flesh and hate me for my claws. I am still Khan, the lord of tigers, and I shall still rest my paw on your bloody skull and shake the heavens with my roars.

Stereotypes

• **Hakken** — How is it that Wolf's cubs have fallen so far from the flame of unity? Their reliance on the monkeys' traditions has thinned their blood; soon, there will be nothing left of Wolf in them at all.

• **Kitsune** — They feign humility to your face, then practice executing your tasks when your back is turned. It's no secret that they have ambition; the question is how far they are willing to go to achieve it.

• **Kumo** — Their breath carries so many stenches that it is difficult to complain about any one.

• **Nagah** — It is hard to find fault with them, for all that we see of their faces. To kill with poison may be necessary, but it is hardly our way.

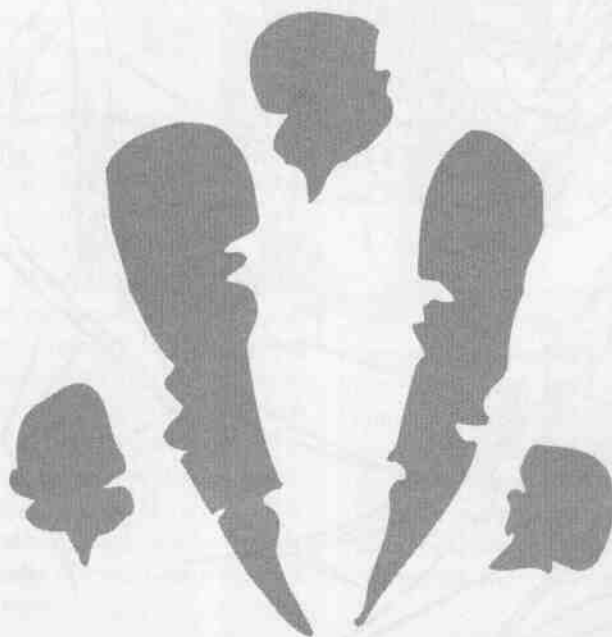
• **Nezumi** — These ratlings scatter like their animal kin when we approach. Still, Rat has always been most sagacious when trying to get his way, and we should be wary of his children's cleverness.

• **Same-Bito** — Their nobility is coarse and fits poorly on their shoulders. Still, with the Sixth Age at our heels, the shark-soldiers will probably have little need of grace in the nights to come.

• **Tengu** — Gossips who fly when we would fight, and chatter when we would remain silent. May they find their courage when the time is upon them.

• **Zhong Lung** — Long ago they learned that the road of the warriors is not theirs; nonetheless, we would value their strength at our sides. Brother Dragon, come and hone your claws on the bones of our enemies!

• **Sunset People** — Their sense of responsibility is scattered and half-formed, and our cat cousins are no exception. How can anyone rely on these squabbling children?



Kumo

Life and Death

One dark winter day in the Age of Legends, Rati the Insatiable sent summons to her two brothers, Marawa the Destroyer and Nareau of the Spiders. With her retainers went blocks of red and green jade as gifts; the brothers knew Rati must be serious if she would send such fine presents.

After welcoming her brothers in the usual warm manner, Rati took them to a balcony overlook-

ing her inner courtyard. Down below was a fat Goblin Spider and his dusky mate, reveling in lust, their bodies grinding and grating, their voices grunting and groaning in pleasure. Finally sated, they rolled away from one another, the Kumo male returning to human form to rest. Rati gave a sigh of content, but the brothers were less than amused.

"You brought us here merely to see one of our Kumo children dancing in the Floating World?" snapped Nareau, who didn't like to have his time wasted by such matters.

"Really!" agreed Marawa. "What fun is there in watching new life be made rather than destroyed?"

"Oh, but you miss my thoughts, dear brothers! Did you not see? These were not merely Kumo and Kin, but

two of the Goblin Spiders themselves engaged in the Floating Dance. Was this not inspiration? I think no pair of our

beloved Kumo have ever joined in this way before," said Rati thoughtfully. "Now my dilemma is this: what shall become of the product of their mating? Whichever of you gives me the most creative idea will have a reward, an entire room full of the finest jade."

Nothing could be more pleasing than jade, so the two brothers thought long and hard on the solution. They thought so hard and long that the female Kumo's stomach began to swell. She lounged lazily about while Rati's servants stuffed the creature with all manner of nice, wiggling delicacies. Finally, Nareau spoke.

"All of our children, whether they be human or spider, are beautiful of form," he said, admiring the belching, swollen female. "What if the mating of two Kumo produced the most remarkably perfect sons and daugh-

ters of all, that no others could surpass their charm? They would have many arms and spin thousands of threads. This is my idea, sister," finished Nareau.

"And bright it is, too," she replied, "that two of our great Kumo should produce a child even more perfect."

Then Marawa spoke. "Only destruction may create perfection, so hear my idea, sister. Since the child is better than its parents, why not have it prove its worth? The child must devour the mother's flesh in emerging from the womb. Yin and Yang, death and life, doesn't this show the balance of all things and the beauty in destruction and renewal?"

Nareau and Rati were so stunned, so amazed by this wonderful plan, they could only stare in open admiration. Marawa waved a hand at the Kumo female down below as her birthing pangs began, and they all watched the culmination of the Destroyer's will. The new Kumo chewed a path through his mother's flesh for many hours as she writhed in agony, succumbing to death only after the babe had sated his hunger.

"Deliver my jade posthaste, dear sister," laughed Marawa as he scuttled from the palace.

"He always did come up with better ideas," sighed Nareau, blatantly ignoring the wistful look in Rati's eyes.

Description

The Kumo are werespiders related to the Ananasi, but distinctly different in at least one aspect — all follow the dictates of the Wyrms. If any who revere Gaia or Queen Ananasa do live among the Kumo, they maintain a low profile lest they be devoured. Despite their taint, many Kumo are highly intelligent and inquisitive creatures who may be willing to talk to other *shen*... or not.

Since the Second Age, three allied families of Kumo have killed and corrupted their way through the lands of the east. Each family is attached to a particular totem of the Wyrms. Over the years, they've made their personal mission the conversion or eradication of all other Kumo who refuse to join them in a vision of enshrouding the world and all beings in dark webs of nothingness. Thus far, the Kumo have been quite successful. Their families are:

- **Marawa's Brood** — Marawa is the destroyer, bent on death and destruction. His Brood prefer the taste of Yin-aspected victims and specialize in outright killing and mayhem. They're uncomplicated and quite predictable — servants of the Wyrms through and through.

- **Children of Nareau** — Most balanced of all Kumo, the members of this family are curious and wise, but also capable of great cruelty. They typically enjoy torturing prisoners for days before ending their victims' lives. Nareau is also called the Lord of Spiders, and a few of his children profess to know something about the ways of the Weaver.

- **Blessed of Rati** — Wild, capricious and lustful, Kumo of this family still retain a touch of the Wyld in their souls. They enjoy preying on beings of high Yang, *moreso than do* the Children of Nareau or Marawa's Brood. Lady Rati, their

revered totem, appears in many forms, but usually as a beautiful woman personifying desire. A few other *shen* have boasted of meeting her and exchanging certain passions for bits of knowledge. The Blessed merely smirk at such rumors, coming as they do from the living.

The Kumo are scattered over China, Japan and South-east Asia. Their favorite habitats are nests built in deserted buildings, caverns or ruins. Overall, the three families get on surprisingly well with one another, though there are occasional squabbles over sacred sites and available victims. Rumors abound that the Kumo have found refuge among the Ainu people of northern Japan, though no proof exists to substantiate this hearsay.

Organization

Some Kumo lead solitary lives in dark, forgotten places; they like their isolation and only come out to breed or feast. Other Goblin Spiders congregate in small villages with an elder leader and four or five young Kumo, plus Kinfolk. Leadership is not based on combat but on respect for age and wisdom; the oldest living Kumo in a village or group is simply treated as the one in charge. Any disputes over leadership are resolved in the Endless Maze. This game involves several young Kumo building an intricate maze of webs and passages in a deserted building or some other out of the way place. The two competing leaders go in, but only one comes out alive.

Kumo, particularly those devoted to Rati, mate eagerly and indiscriminately among their Kin and certain humans. For two Kumo to breed, they must obtain permission from an elder, who won't permit the mating if he believes the local tribe's numbers to be too small. The birth of a metis might be an impressive and auspicious event, but it's not worth reducing the Goblin Spiders' forces in a time of need.

Kumo have little interaction with other *shen* if they can help it, but sometimes their innate prying leads them to meet other *hengeyokai*. They love exploring the Umbra, some even going so far as to set up nests there. Most aren't stupid; they won't attack other *shen* on sight like more mindless servants of the Wyrms. What gets them riled are threats to their villages or to their food supply. Any *hengeyokai* who suspect that angry Kumo are around should probably find help quickly.

Traits

The Kumo are not born to auspices, nor do they follow the Way of Emerald Virtue. For purposes of Rank and Renown, they are treated as Ragabash; for example, a Rank One Kumo will need a total of seven Renown in any combination of Glory, Honor and Wisdom to advance to Rank Two. Likewise, the Kumo may choose one of their three beginning Gifts from those of the Ragabash (see "Gifts"). Note that other *hengeyokai* and Bête don't recognize the Kumo's Rank in any way other than that of "dangerous foe"; a powerful Kumo is deserving of slightly

higher respect, but no hengeyokai of the Courts will offer him deference.

The Kumo don't have Rage; instead, they have a Blood Pool like vampires. As with the Leeches, the blood allows them to heal wounds; they may also spend it as if it were Rage to take extra actions. A Kumo can swallow a maximum of 10 Blood Points before she becomes gorged and lazy. Running out of Blood Points has no adverse effects, apart from an empty belly. A hungry Kumo heals no faster than a normal mortal, and cannot take extra actions, but is not otherwise impaired. A Kumo can spend a maximum of one Blood Point per turn only; she'll have to decide which is more urgent, healing or killing. Although a Kumo can ingest and even digest flesh (and many enjoy the taste of raw meat), they gain no nutrition from it — it's merely a vice. They need blood to survive — the more potent, the better.

The Kumo are a rather erratic group of creatures and begin with only 2 Willpower. They are very poor at keeping up friendships, and cannot purchase Allies or Pure Breed.

Finally, Kumo are blessed by their patron, and don't take aggravated damage from silver. They are, of course, still vulnerable to fires, the claws and teeth of *shen*, and so on (all soakable). Their particular weakness takes the form of weapons made from *hong mu*, a rare and fragrant variety of red rosewood. *Hong mu* damage can't be soaked; Kumo regard those armed with *hong mu* weapons as obvious enemies. Like the Ananasi, though, Kumo are weak in comparison to other shapeshifters in terms of resisting diseases and poisons. This is a matter of bitter irony for creatures who so enjoy death and destruction.

Breeds

The breeds of the Kumo are three: homid, arachnos and metis. Metis are not considered the shameful creatures they are among the Garou and some other hengeyokai — despite the fact that the metis infant must eat his way from the mother's womb, thereby killing her in the process.

- **Homid:** Kumo born of a human parent, often but not always Kinfolk. Kumo often watch the children of their illicit liaisons from afar, planning to steal any homid Kumo when they reach puberty (and often snatching non-Kumo offspring as well, for their own dark appetites). Of course, not all Kumo children are discovered.... These Kumo may select one beginning Gift from those of homid Garou.

Beginning Gnosis: 2

- **Arachnos:** Like her Ananasi arachnos cousin, the young spider-born Kumo eats her fill of brothers and sisters so that she may grow to the size of her Aghora form. Hopefully a Kumo adult will spot the young one's ceaseless hunger and quickly provide her with the needed sustenance. The arachnos Kumo are slightly more rare than their Western counterparts, perhaps one in 300 of all spider offspring of the Kumo. Arachnos may choose among lupus Gifts for a beginning breed Gift.

Beginning Gnosis: 4

- **Metis:** Perversely enough, the metis are revered among Kumo; their presence garners admiration and respect rather than scorn, particularly among the destructive Marawa sect. The gruesome killing of the metis' mother is seen as a sort of initiation rite that only a fortunate few enjoy. After all, if every Kumo mated with their own kind, the race would eventually die out since Kumo metis are barren just like those of other Changing Breeds. So the elders officially discourage Kumo breeding with Kumo while at the same time turning a blind eye to the de facto results. Kumo metis are of course born in their gruesome Lilian form. They may select a beginning Gift from those of Garou metis.

Beginning Gnosis: 5

Forms

The Kumo, much like the Western Ananasi, have four forms: Homid, Lilian, Aghora (Pithus) and Thousand Fang (Crawlerling). Their Homid form is like any other human, but the other forms....

- **Lilian:** Perhaps more terrifying than any Garou, the Kumo's Lilian form is utterly disgusting. The most common variation on this form is still bipedal, but eight to 11 feet tall; the belly distends into a round ball, with six arms sprouting above. The head appears only slightly enlarged with eight glowing eyes, and dark chitin adorned with thick, prickly fur covers the entire body. From the hindquarters, two large spinnerets bulge out, and the chest swells to accommodate two sets of lungs, one of which can breathe underwater. There are numerous variations on this theme, from immense spiders with chitinous human torsos or humanlike faces sprouting from the cephalothorax, to horrifically elongated bipeds covered with tarantulaesque fur. The differences in form are largely cosmetic; all Kumo have the same statistics in Lilian form, no matter the variation.

- **Aghora:** Just as nauseating is the giant spider form of the Kumo. This living nightmare stands about four feet tall at the "shoulder" joints, and is usually quite round and fat. Bristly fur may cover the entire body, save for the glowing eyes. The Aghora loses the water-breathing lungs, but she gains enormous mandibles that drip with noxious poison.

Form Statistics

Lilian	Aghora	Thousand Fang
Str: +3	Str: +3	Str: 0
Dex: +3	Dex: +3	Dex: +6
Sta: +3	Sta: +2	Sta: 0
App: -2	App: 0	App: 0
Man: -1	Man: -3	Man: 0
Difficulty: 6	Difficulty: 7	Difficulty: 6
Str +1 Bite	Str +3 Bite	
Str +2 Claw	Web	Web

Kumo in Lilian or Aghora form incite the Delirium at full strength in witnesses.

What's more, this giant spider shape is capable of spinning webs that are strong as steel cables (Strength 9 for the purpose of victims pulling free). The Kumo must spend a Blood Point to generate a web of near-comparable proportion to an ordinary spiderweb.

In this form, the Kumo are naturally poisonous. Although they have no truly significant reservoirs of venom, they unconsciously pump a minor amount of supernaturally tainted toxin into their victims with every bite. Those who take damage from a Kumo's bite must make a Stamina

roll, difficulty 7 (9 for mortals, mages and similarly unprotected creatures) or lose one point from a random Physical Attribute. Attributes lost in this manner can be healed as if they were Health Levels of aggravated damage, but if any Attribute drops to 0, the victim falls unconscious until healed — or devoured.

• **Thousand Fang:** Many people find crawling spiders to be creepy, and some folks are outright terrified of these creatures. Now imagine hundreds and hundreds of spiders moving in unison, with a seeming pack mentality. This is the impact of the Kumo in Thousand Fang (Crawlerling) form. A well-placed heel will probably get rid of several of them, but unless every single spider is destroyed (nearly impossible), the Kumo is still effective. Approximately 200 spiders per dot of

Strength manifest in this form. For example, Yuki is a homid Kumo with Strength 3. When she assumes

Thousand Fang form, she breaks down into about 600 spiders, and is virtually indestructible — if even one survives, it may consume other spiders and eventually reform. Though

the spiders have no Physical or Social Traits, the Thousand Fangs act with group consciousness and grant the Kumo the ability to see many different perspectives. If,

however, more than 30% of the spiders are destroyed, the Kumo is smaller when she reassumes breed form — at least until she

has properly increased her bulk once more. In Thousand Fang form, the Kumo may spin webs like any other spider, although the number of spiders present allows the Kumo to blanket an area in webbing in a ridiculously short time.



Gifts

In addition to Kumo, Western Ananasi and Breed Gifts, the Goblin Spiders may learn Ragabash Gifts without penalty. Storytellers may wish to allow Kumo to use Gifts of other tribes or Breeds that simulate trickery or mind reading. All Kumo begin with three Gifts: one Ragabash, one Kumo and one for their breed.

- **Nimbleness (Level One)** — Kumo are known for their quickness and agility. This Gift, taught by a Flea-spirit, allows them bonuses with jumping and dodging.

System: By spending a Gnosis point, the Kumo may add two dice to any Athletics or Dodge dice pools for one scene.

- **Shadow Step (Level One)** — This is an illusion Gift of Nareau allowing the Kumo to seem like she's in one area when she's really not. Those who witness the Kumo activate this Gift see her fade from one location and reappear in another, though in reality she hasn't moved at all.

System: The player rolls Dexterity + Subterfuge, difficulty 6. For each success, the Kumo will appear to be two feet from her actual location. Opponents who realize that the image isn't the real Goblin Spider may still strike at the invisible Kumo, although their difficulties increase by 3 (by 2 if they have heightened senses such as a lupus Garou's wolflike sense of smell). The Gift lasts for a number of turns equal to the Kumo's Gnosis, and may only be used once per scene.

- **Fangs of Madness (Level Two)** — As the Black Spiral Dancer Gift: Foaming Fury, although the Goblin Spider's mouth doesn't drip with foam; this is merely another form of toxic attack available to the Wurm-ridden Kumo. This Gift is taught by a Madness-spirit or a spider Bane.

- **Replenishment of the Flesh (Level Two)** — The Kumo may summon local spiders into her body, adding their mass to her own to heal her wounds. This Gift is taught by an Ancestor-spirit.

System: The character may take no other action while absorbing the summoned arachnids. The Kumo heals one Health Level per Gnosis point spent.

- **Spittle of Corrosion (Level Two)** — The digestive fluids of the Kumo, when properly agitated, can be nasty weapons, provided they hit their targets. This Gift allows the Goblin Spider to spit his fluids at opponents in hand to hand combat. It is taught by a servitor of Marawa.

System: The Kumo must spend a Blood Point to heighten his digestive juices into a properly seething mess.



The player may then make a Dexterity + Brawl roll, difficulty 7, to hit a target with the acid. The damage dice are equal to the Kumo's Stamina + 2, and the wounds caused are aggravated.

- **Hideous Bite (Level Three)** — As the Level Four Black Spiral Dancer Gift: Crawling Poison.

- **Snare of Beauty (Level Three)** — The Kumo delight in tricking their foes; this Gift, taught by servants of Rati, makes the Kumo irresistibly beautiful and desirable to all onlookers, regardless of gender or sexual preference.

System: The player makes a Manipulation + Occult roll, difficulty 7. The Kumo may raise her Appearance Trait by one point per success for a period of three hours.

- **Web Tremors (Level Four)** — By concentrating on the spirit webs all around them, the Kumo can sense when they're being watched or stalked. This Gift, taught by one of Marawa's folk, alerts the Kumo to any spies in his immediate vicinity, including those in the Mirror Lands.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Perception + Alertness, difficulty 7. With at least two successes, the Kumo knows whether or not others are prowling around. With three or more successes, the Kumo may learn more specific details (Storyteller's discretion).

• **Elder Wisdom (Level Five)** — This revered Gift allows Kumo to commune directly with Marawa, Rati or Nareau. It's somewhat risky in that if the Lord or Lady is out of sorts, they might choose to punish the Kumo. If they're feeling more benevolent, they might impart some facts or advice appropriate to their idiom; for example, Marawa may share a secret concerning how to destroy a certain foe. The Gift is taught by a servant of the malevolent trinity.

System: After performing an appropriate obeisance, the Kumo must expend one Gnosis and one Willpower point. The player then rolls Charisma + Primal Urge. No less than three successes at difficulty 7 are required; the Storyteller may require more. Success grants direct connection to the totem of choice; a botch has... imaginatively dire consequences.

Rites

The Kumo have several variations on Mystic Rites and Rites of Renown. They set great store in celebrating the birth of their young, particularly metis. Each of the three families also has minor rites to honor their patron. Some Kumo have spoken of Nareau, Marawa and Rati occasionally appearing when they've been especially pleased with a rite. They are believed to be the creators of the Rite of the Goblin Chrysalis, although no Kumo has admitted as much to any other hengeyokai.

Quote

These lands are our homes, too. You should show some respect for chosen ones like yourselves, and kowtow most carefully to us — or else we shall set our webs ringing, webs that reach even into the Yomi Worlds. Do you truly want to look on that which would answer?

Stereotypes

• **Hakken** — Ahh, our most traditional foes. They embrace Gaia and the Wyld, both of which we have forsaken forever. How else could we regard them except as enemies?

• **Khan** — So boring and stiff. Still, they are fewer every day, so one should enjoy the sport a Khan provides while there are Khan left to supply it.

• **Kitsune** — What clever little beasts the Nine-Tails are! And so much closer to us than even they suspect.

• **Nagah** — These accursed creatures constantly weave at our heels. They have accepted that we are only doing our ordained duty, but they still seek any excuse to swallow us whole. Kill any you see.

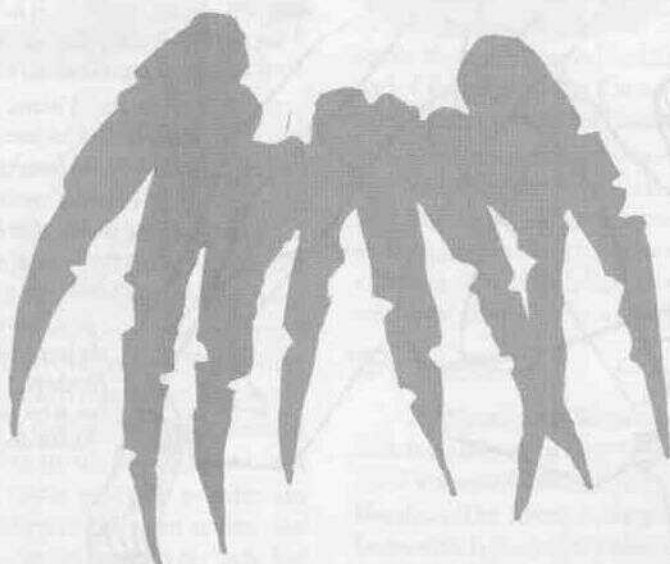
• **Nezumi** — In days past, the rats have been our unwitting allies. Perhaps we should try to rekindle our old friendship.

• **Same-Bito** — They're amusing in their silly quests for nobility and greatness, but they're hiding something, too. We should seek to find out what's behind their masks of honor.

• **Tengu** — Their love of the day and bright things is so different from us and our passion for the dark. Regrettably, we are seldom able to catch these winged folk in our webs, and so we know little of them — a flaw that should be remedied.

• **Zhong Lung** — Not only are they our enemies, they are formidable and wise about many things. Be respectful, and don't provoke them. Make a judicious escape whenever possible.

• **Sunset People** — It matters far less to us where shen are from than who they pay homage to. Do those from the West revere Marawa, Rati or Nareau? If so, who cares where they were born?



Nagah

The Death of Jatadaka

Hear me, O my children, and listen to a song born when the world was fresh and green from sky to sea-bottom. It is a song of one of us, a Nagah, like us the child of three mothers — and it begins with the closest of our mothers, with her pain.

Now none who have not lived by a river can know the beauty of our Third Mother. She is the River, the flow of coolness and life, the shelter of love and strength. As she rose from the frothing white among the mountains, the birds ceased their singing and the wind would not blow for fear of leaving her glorious presence. Her perfect eyes rose demurely, and looked along the great length that was also herself, the water that ran to the sea. It was a champion she sought, one among us, her children.

Her choice was Vasana. Vasana the Three-Hooded, Vasana the Emerald, Vasana the Terrible. Of all the Nagah who have come before, none have been so honored. Of all the Nagah, only Vinata's name was more notorious. Our Mother saw Vasana drying himself on a rock, his hoods spread under the sun, his eyes sleepy but holding the blood of hundreds in their depths.

She went to him, and he immediately prostrated himself before her glory. But she bade him rise with a voice that is the flow of water on smooth rocks. "Vasana," she said, "I am troubled by the mighty rakshasa Jatadaka, who insults me. Every day he devours a human, and every afternoon he washes the blood from his beard in my sacred depths, the place I have saved for you Nagah alone. I can no longer abide his foul touch there, and I would have you destroy him."

"For you, O Mother, I would try to pluck the sun from the sky and swallow it," Vasana replied. "His death is the smallest thing I can lay at your feet, but I will do so and hope you find it worthy."

Vasana then went to the land where Jatadaka lived, taking long roads through the jungle to get there. Once he was attacked by bandits, but he caught one and bit him, filling him full of deadly venom. He threw the bandit over his shoulder and continued on, paying no mind to the thief's fleeing comrades. Then he came to the cave of Jatadaka and sat down.

Soon enough, Jatadaka came out bellowing. He saw Vasana and made ready to fight, but Vasana said, "Here, O my king! I have brought you a present of a human meal. Enjoy the taste of his flesh, and then hear my offer."

Jatadaka did not have to be told twice. He popped the bandit into his great mouth and chewed him up, and a mixture of blood and Vasana's poison ran into his beard. Then he reached for his spear — for he did not intend to listen to Vasana, but rather to have a second helping of flesh — but stumbled, for the venom had made him weak.

At this, Vasana smiled — and almost before the smile had left his face, his fangs were deep in Jatadaka's neck. And although great demons may withstand many bites, Vasana's poison was so potent that only a Yama King could suffer two doses and live. The rakshasa crashed to the ground, and Vasana promptly cut off his head and rolled it into an anthill.

Thus closes the story, and now you know the fate which must come to all who abuse our Mothers. Glory to Vasana, who never died, but who sleeps on today! Glory to Earth, Moon and River! Glory to the Nagah!



Description

The poetry of a gleaming knife, the cadence of a corpse's last breath — such is the artistry that is the Nagah. The wereserpents were given the task to act as judges among the hengeyokai, keeping the Balance when the Wyrms themselves abandoned such a task. They enforce the Mandates when the Courts are too busy or blind to do so, moving at the edges of hengeyokai society, watching their targets with great care. Indeed, the Nagah prefer utmost secrecy in all things; they have even completely hidden their purpose from the Sunset People, preferring to fake their extinction rather than divulge the secret of their task.

They perform their tasks with such great efficiency and delicacy that it has come to be an omen of ill luck to speak openly of the Nagah. When a hengeyokai mentions the breed at all, she usually does so with poetic metaphor rather than speaking their name: "the lengthening shadows," "the sighing twilight," "the hush of the river." For their part, the Nagah look upon killing as artistry, something to be done with great precision if it is to be done at all. Indeed, they enjoy other arts such as poetry and sculpture, balancing their acts of destruction with pastimes of creation. They strive to be the picture of fairness, and consider it their sworn duty to escort those who belong in Hell back home.

But the Nagah's efficiency at killing has proven a curse as well as a blessing. When the wars of the Fourth Age erupted among the hengeyokai, the Nagah were attacked more viciously than any other save the Okuma. *After all, the reasoning went, if corruption surrounds us, then surely the judges must be corrupt themselves for allowing this to happen.* Coupled with the savage losses they'd taken during the War of Rage, these casualties had driven the Nagah almost to extinction by the time the Zhong Lung awoke.

Even today, old wounds have been slow to heal. The Nagah keep their arts mainly to themselves, and emerge from the shadows only when necessary. They are almost never approached to join sentai — which offends them not at all. After all, visible contributions might well improve the reputation of the Breed — but if the Sunset People learned that the Nagah still existed, they might try to remedy such an oversight immediately. Anonymity is far more judicious.

Organization

Although the Nagah have been steadily increasing their numbers since the disastrous wars of the Fourth Age, the wereserpents number perhaps only 400 or so in all of Asia these days. Some blame this on an ongoing feud with the Nezumi, and whisper that the wererats slip into Nagah dens to devour the scaled judges' eggs. They never work alone, as the legend of Vinata, their greatest traitor, serves as a terrifying warning of the destruction that a Wym-taken Nagah can wreak.

The Nagah of the Middle Kingdom have no caerns of their own; instead, they gather in the protectorate of a friendly court when they can. Some continue to maintain Ananta — small, personal pockets of the spirit realm, like the Den-Realms of the Bastet — at the bottoms of rivers, but

even these Nagah live within a stone's throw of one or two brethren. They almost never hold great moots of their own, and only do so when affairs threaten the entire Breed.

Among the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, the Nagah serve in a mostly invisible capacity — although this is certainly more than they give to the Sunset People, for revealing one's presence to the Westerners is punishable by death. They perform their duty quietly — if the other hengeyokai do not hear them oiling the cogs of the Cycle, then so much the better.

However, in dutifully continuing to serve at the Courts, the Nagah have put themselves in a very precarious position. Well aware of their near-destruction during the War of Rage, the wereserpents know that open action could well bring another purge on their heads. It is their hope that the goodwill of the Courts will act as a buffer between themselves and the Sunset People should the Westerners ever discover the truth.

Traits

The Nagah have a seemingly perfect design for the role of killing machines, but they are not without their weaknesses. For one, the wereserpents are unable to step sideways of their own accord; only in their Ananta may they enter the Umbra without the use of a special Gift or the assistance of their mountain sentai. They also have difficulty learning common Gifts; the only spirits that regularly answer Nagah rites of summoning are servants of the Wani, the slumbering Dragon Princes. Although this would seem to indicate most spirits in the Middle Kingdom, this is simply not the case; spirits do not aid the Nagah unless directly instructed to do so by a Wani or one of their viziers. As such, wereserpents must pay 7x the Gift's level in experience points to learn any Gift other than Nagah Gifts.

When acting in service to their Breed, the Nagah utilize a Renown system that isn't really a system at all; they care little for caste systems, and rely on the elders of the Breed to judge their merit. Similarly, their auspice system is an auspice system in name alone; they recognize four seasonal auspices, but do not assign particular tasks to any. All are equal; all are kept to the same high standard. The only difference is in the starting Rage totals; the Kali (Winter) and Kartikeya (Summer) each begin with 4 Rage, while the Kamakshi (Spring) and Kamsa (Autumn) begin with 3. All Nagah begin play with 4 Willpower.

However, the Nagah in service to the Courts gladly follow the Way of Emerald Virtue, and even take auspices as necessary. They make agreeable, if often silent and sinister, companions when they serve in sentai, and are properly professional courtiers. The Nagah bow to whatever is required of them; necessity, after all, is what they ultimately serve.

Breeds

The Nagah don't differentiate socially between their breeds; each is equally worthy in its own manner, and contributes an equal amount of ability. A Nagah's beginning Gnosis works just like that of the corresponding Garou breed; balaram (homids) begin with 1, ahi (metis) with 3, and vasuki (serpent) with 5.

Oddly enough, their metis are as fertile as any other Nagah; one in 10 of an ahi's children will be Nagah. If female, the ahi may choose not long into the pregnancy whether she wishes to give birth to humans or serpents; she then spends the remainder of her pregnancy in the *chosen form*. This has some unusual side effects in that if she chooses to bear human babies, she usually carries twins, sometimes triplets — but if she chooses to bear snakes, the eggs are usually fewer in number than they would naturally be. Despite this obvious advantage, the Nagah do not try to increase their numbers by breeding more than the proper share of ahi; they strive to keep an equal number of each breed within the tribe, fearing the curse that will descend on their lineage if they defy the balance of things.

Forms

The Nagah's forms are splendid and terrible, although the wereserpents are very careful about acting in any form other than Balaram. In all their forms save Balaram, they may inject a potent venom into their foes. If the foe takes any damage from the bite attack, the venom causes an additional seven Health Levels of aggravated damage, soaked separately. In some cases, the Nagah use their venom to blind opponents as well (they have always preferred mating with spitting cobras). If a Nagah successfully spits his venom on his target, the target takes the seven Health Levels of damage as usual, but there is a delay of one turn before the toxins enter the blood stream — the poison can be washed off if necessary. If the venom gets into the eyes, the pain it causes and the damage it deals to the optic nerves leave an opponent blinded for at least three turns. Thankfully, the Gift: Resist Toxin defends against this poison.

- **Balaram:** The Nagah is indistinguishable from any other human in this form.

- **Silkaram:** This form is mostly human, but only vaguely so. All hair on the Nagah's body disappears, to be replaced by bony ridges that strongly resemble scales. The fingers and toes become webbed, providing excellent swimming ability. The jawline extends substantially; the nose recedes and widens until the face seems almost flat. The Silkaram's "scales" cover even the lips, making human speech more difficult. The eyes grow darker and lose all human coloration. The teeth seem fused together, except for the much-lengthened canines, which have become fangs that fold back when not in use.

- **Azhi Dahaka:** The Nagah's war form is a terrifying creature, a giant cobra complete with a barrel torso and a powerful set of arms. Even Nagah descended from serpents other than cobras display a regal hood in this form. Azhi Dahaka may unhinge their jaws at will, and possess unobtrusive gills that make them fully amphibious. The limbs of a Nagah in this form are as flexible as a snake's spine. Below the torso, the tail (thick enough to balance on) easily runs to a length of 16 to 20 feet; often more. The wereserpent's hands sprout claws as terrible as those of any Garou, and their scales and scutes take on a supernatural resilience. Most Nagah scar their bodies in a manner similar to some Garou, and the scars become livid patterns in this form.

Form Statistics

Silkaram	Azhi Dahaka	Kali Dahaka	Vasuki
Str: +2	Str: +3	Str: +2	Str: -1
Dex: +0	Dex: +2	Dex: +2	Dex: +2
Sta: +2	Sta: +3	Sta: +2	Sta: +1
App: -2	App: -2	App: 0	App: 0
Man: -2	Man: -3	Man: 0	Man: 0
Diff: 7	Diff: 6	Diff: 7	Diff: 6
Bite +1	Bite +2	Bite +1	Bite +2
Venom†	Venom†	Venom†	Venom†
Claw +1	Claw +2	Claw +1	
	Constriction*	Constriction*	
	Incites Delirium		

* In this form a Nagah can use his body to grapple and squeeze one opponent with his Strength (nonaggravated damage) while fighting another with his arms. The Nagah must first make a standard Dexterity + Brawl roll to hit; to keep the opponent constricted, he must roll a Strength + Brawl roll with a difficulty of the opponent's Strength + Brawl - 2.

† Nagah venom moves through the body at supernatural speed. Although it cannot affect spirits (even Materialized spirits), it even works on vampires (although the damage is halved). Nagah and Kumo are immune to their own poisonous bites but not to each other's. A Nagah can inject venom three times before depleting the venom sacs behind her fangs; however, spitting the venom expends two "doses," due to the amount necessary for proper coverage.

- **Kali Dahaka:** This form is much like a great king cobra, as thick around as a man's leg. What's more, the Kali Dahaka form of many Nagah retains a slender set of arms, although these are considered unsightly. Most Nagah prefer to take this shape without the benefit of arms (which is possible with a second Stamina + Primal-Urge roll, difficulty 7). The wereserpent's ritual scars also remain, although they are muted and harder to pick out. The Kali Dahaka form is gilled, and Nagah in this "great serpent" form may breathe under water with ease.

- **Vasuki:** The Vasuki form is indistinguishable from a normal serpent.

Gifts

These Gifts are the most common among Nagah of the Courts; those on the Way of Emerald Virtue begin play with one Nagah Gift, one breed Gift and one common hengeyokai Gift. All Gifts of the Nagah are taught by the Wani.

- **Eyes of the Dragon Kings (Level One)** — This Gift allows the Nagah to see through any obstacle shy of a solid wall. Murky waters seem clear; hazy fields enshrouded in fog, smoke or darkness pose no obstacle. The Nagah's eyes glow when this Gift is employed.

System: The player makes a Gnosis roll, difficulty 6, and must still use Perception + Alertness for the Nagah to spot an approaching enemy. Gifts such as Blur of the Milky Eye still work against the Eyes of the Dragon Kings, though the Nagah's penalties to see the character are reduced by 1.

- **Scent of Running Water (Level One)** — As the Ragabash Gift.

- **Slayer's Eye (Level One)** — As the Shadow Lord Gift: Fatal Flaw.

- **Sense of the Prey (Level Two)** — As the Ragabash Gift.

- **Veil of the Wani (Level Two)** — The Nagah may erase the memory of her existence from the minds of any surviving witnesses or opponents. Anyone who saw the wereserpent may remember that

they encountered *something*—but that the entity they met was as fleeting as smoke. A Kuei-jin who battled a Nagah might presume that he was attacked by a Zhong Lung or Mukade, but would not think of the possibility of a wereserpent.

System: The player spends two Gnosis and rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge against a difficulty equal to the target's Perception. While only one success is needed, with three or more successes the target forgets ever even having an encounter and suffers complete amnesia regarding the incident. This memory isn't blurred or faded — it is completely removed from the target's mind.

- **Blessings of Kali (Level Three)** — With the Gifts of Kali, the Nagah develops natural weapons and body armor. A series of heavy, bonelike plates forms over the wereserpent's scaly hide, giving her a natural defense against most attacks and adding damage to her hand-to-hand combat at the same time.

System: The player spends one Gnosis and one Rage, then rolls Stamina + Primal-Urge to make the armor. The plates of bone form over the entire hood of the Nagah and over the torso, the arms and the underbelly, adding three dice to his soak pools. The plates on the arms, elbows and shoulders are all barbed and very sharp, giving the wereserpent a damage rating of Strength +3. As with Garou claws, this damage is aggravated. This armor doesn't affect the Nagah's mobility as it does not actually allow extra protection over the entire body. Nagah hoods run from the crown of the head down to the middle of the back, so when armored in this manner wereserpents' vital organs are granted the protection bonus from front and back, but not from the sides.

- **River Mother's Blessing (Level Three)** — By calling on the favor of the River, the Nagah can replenish his spiritual strength by drinking of her bounty. This Gift is used with the greatest reverence, and often fills the wereserpent with joy as he contemplates the love of the Mothers he serves.

System: The Nagah must spend an hour in meditation before a bowl of river water, opening himself to receive its purity. When the meditation is complete, the player makes a Willpower roll (difficulty 5) and drinks from the bowl; he regains one Gnosis point per success. This Gift may be used as frequently as necessary, but the Nagah consider it taboo to cling to the River's skirts, and will not use it more than once in a day unless very sorely pressed.



• **Breath of Sweet Amrita (Level Four)** — One of the few healing Gifts available to the Nagah, this allows the wereserpent to breathe out a cloud of healing vapor on herself or a companion. Although the Nagah were tricked out of the secret of immortality long ago, they have never forgotten the trick entirely.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Intelligence + Medicine (difficulty of the target's Rage, or 6 for those without Rage). Each success heals one Health Level of damage, even aggravated.

• **Gaze of the Serpent (Level Four)** — The Nagah can lock gazes with an opponent and petrify his enemy with the intensity of his glare. An enemy under the influence of this Gift is unable to take any actions save to regenerate.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation against the target's Willpower. Even one success freezes the target with fear. The target could well spend hours or days frozen in this way, experiencing the equivalent of a petit mal epileptic seizure. However, the effects of this Gift last only until the target is distracted (by, say, an attack). Once the target is disturbed physically, he is freed from Gaze of the Serpent. This Gift works against only one opponent at a time. Once a target is struck by the Gift's power, he can't be affected by it again until the next scene. Nagah often use this Gift to aid in escaping from powerful foes; few use it as a means of gaining advantage in combat.

• **Breath of the Dragon Lords (Level Five)** — The Nagah using this Gift exhales huge gouts of scalding gases. The gases often resemble flames and cause aggravated damage to opponents, but can't actually cause materials to combust.

System: The player must make a successful Dexterity + Firearms roll for the Nagah to strike an opponent. The number of damage dice rolled is equal to the wereserpent's Gnosis. This damage is aggravated and has an effective range of 20 feet.

• **Call the Flood (Level Five)** — The wereserpent may call on the River itself to rise up and take action against those who abuse it. This Gift is used infrequently in modern times, but legends tell of entire villages that were erased after offending the Nagah.

System: The player spends three Gnosis points and rolls Gnosis. The Nagah causes the waters to rise rapidly for miles around (one mile radius per success), causing all manner of havoc.

Rites

The Nagah are most exacting creatures, and are fond of using various rites of purification and chiminage to demonstrate their devotion to their Mothers. However, they are careful to avoid using too many rites of summoning or binding, as only the servants of the Wani make agreeable subjects.

Rite of the River's Blessing

Level One

This Rite of Accord is an archetypal Nagah purification ritual, performed after the death of a great enemy. The Nagah must kneel at the bank of a river or stream to enact it, and make

obedience to the water running by. As she chants a litany of mantras and praise to the Three Mothers, she washes herself in the water, then shifts to Azhi Dahaka to shake the drops from her hood. This rite is considered most auspicious when performed by moonlight, in full view of the Three Mothers.

System: The Nagah's Charisma + Rituals roll is at a difficulty of the Gnosis or Rage of the Wyrmspawn she slew, whichever was higher. (The Storyteller may substitute other Traits such as Chi for Kuei-jin or other opponents, if he chooses.) The difficulty is reduced by one if the rite is performed by moonlight. If successful, the Nagah shakes off any external taint that may have come on her during her task, and is spiritually fortified to face her next encounter, regaining three points of Willpower. In most other respects, this rite is much like the Rite of Cleansing (Werewolf, pg. 139), save that only the Nagah may be affected.

Quote

You have run far and hidden well, but you cannot hide the empty place in Hell that bears your footprints, nor mute the silver knives of the demons who cry your name like jilted lovers. It is time for you to stop shirking your fate and to assume your place.

Stereotypes

• **Hakken** — They keep to the human ways of long ago, and are thus most firmly bound in the Weaver's web. We may have to cut the strands away, even if the Hakken lose some flesh during the surgery.

• **Khan** — They are prideful, and blooded more than can be good for them. Beware the fall of the Khan, for it may signify the arrival of the Sixth Age.

• **Kitsune** — The foxes had but one tail when our song of duty was first sung. How may we properly judge what is wrong for them if they do not praise what they know to be right?

• **Kumo** — [low hiss] What was ordained to be, must be.

• **Nezumi** — Our little brothers, but too full of envy and spite to know the seven true virtues of judgment.

• **Same-Bito** — They, too, seem to be children of three mothers. But can Sea be as beautiful as our Third Mother if her children are so brutish?

• **Tengu** — If any of our allies might betray us, it would be the Tengu with their loose tongues. They must be reminded now and then that we are their friends, and would be most injured if their gossip did us a disservice.

• **Zhong Lung** — So much wisdom, so much sacrifice. They have purified themselves at the cost of their own blood. We honor those who remain.

• **Sunset People** — We may yet be their deaths, and they may yet be ours. I fear not death, but I fear for the Wheel if the long-ago wars begin again. Never show them so much as a single scale.

NEZUMI

Fire That Cleanses

The stench of human habitation wafted through the marketplace. Thousands of men, women and children had pushed and shoved their way into an area of a few square miles, competing with the odors of rotting fish, warm meat and pig urine. Yo Fa wrinkled his nose, trying not to blanch at the overpowering stink.

Forcing his way through the crowd, he finally caught sight of his human target. A seventy-year old man shouted at the river of monkeys flowing by him. Joyfully, he extolled the virtues of his "Bright as Heaven" firecrackers. Yo Fa could feel the cold steel of kris daggers waiting at his side. He made a conscious effort to keep his rage in check.

Hundreds of rats had been slaughtered in the city over the last few weeks. Hundreds of his Kinfolk brethren had been killed, but hordes of humans still

flooded into the city. Many fled the poverty of rural villages to suffer in the slums of the biggest cities, desperately fighting for a better way of life. When would they learn? And how could the Courts allow so many humans to breed in one place?

He carefully walked within inches of the old man. The knives were screaming for blood, but Yo Fa contained his Nezumi urges. Fighting the desire to lash out, he instead dropped a small package at the old man's feet. The timer attached to the explosives inside would give him the opportunity to reach the edge of the market, bolt into the sewers and scurry back to the nest. The old man had packed thousands of fireworks into his crowded stall; now hundreds of humans would be injured by the blast.

Yo Fa softly chattered in glee. At times like this, he loved working as an exterminator.

Description

Since the dawn of time, humans have steadily overpopulated the largest cities of East Asia. The markets of Mongkok in Hong Kong, the slums surrounding Beijing, the tenements and subways of Tokyo — the Far East is home to some of the most crowded and squalid places on the planet. The Changing Breeds have always sought balance in the East, but men have destroyed it. Now the rampant overpopulation of the human race threatens the balance between Man and Nature more than ever before.

During the Second and Third Ages of the World, the Nezumi worked diligently to prevent the earliest villages from growing too fast; they stole food, wore away at the foundations of homes, and even brought deadly diseases. Even when the Impergium ended during the Fourth Age, the cleverest Children of Rat knew that one day, they would have to finish the task at which the others failed. Where the Ratkin of the Western Concordiat were persecuted, the *shen* ideals of balance led the *hengeyokai* to think of the Nezumi as a vital *yang* force. As time passed, Rat shared his knowledge of War — for there is no question that such is his aspect as a totem — with many *hengeyokai*, particularly the Hakken and Nezumi. Under Rat's guidance, Eastern races developed two very different methods of waging warfare.

The Hakken acted as the masters of the first method, called *High War*. Though *night-time campaigns* in the East were always brutal, warriors were expected to respect the codes established by the *bushi* caste. They shed blood according to formal and chivalrous traditions. In times of conflict, this state existed until one side resorted to tactics that violated the Code of Bushido. At that point, warriors abandoned their rules of engagement and honor, and Low War began. After Hakken revealed the first assassination, abduction or mission of espionage, shapechangers were forced to rely on the talents of the most devious creatures in the shadows. Since the earliest days of the samurai, the Nezumi have been masters of Low Warfare.

Unlike the honorable *bushi* of the Hakken, most Nezumi lived with the *eta*, members of the lowest caste of Japanese society. The Kinfolk chosen by Nezumi homids were usually foreigners or immigrants to Japan (usually Koreans or mainland Chinese). More generally, the *eta* were humans who handled tasks regarded as unclean by civilized *nihon-jin*. Burial, execution, the preparation of leather, and the infamous arts of the ninja were *eta* family trades in feudal times. And even beyond Japan, the Nezumi bred with such outcasts. Rat's children roamed freely, establishing nests throughout Asia, from the districts of the untouchables of India to the slums of the Philippines.

Today, Nezumi establish their nests in the most impoverished neighborhoods. Though rats have always known how to deal with overpopulation, humans continue to multiply at an alarming rate. Surrounded by the squalor of rapidly-decaying urban metropolises, the Nezumi have been struggling to repopulate their race.

Fortunately, the Eastern Ratkin are breeding at a faster pace than their *gaijin* cousins in the West. Though the Western Ratkin have been far more subtle about their re-emergence, Eastern Ratkin are more impatient about returning to their ancient roles. Already, slowly increasing numbers of Rat's Children are spreading disease, stealing food, exacting violence, causing riots and spreading chaos. They have no regard for human law — or, for that matter, human life. In a world vastly overrun by humans, a few have already begun their Low War against mankind.

Their arsenal of weapons for Low War is growing. Terrorists are blamed for many chemical and biological compounds cooked in laboratories, but the most exotic strains are birthed by the Children of Rat. A knife in the dark, a satchel of explosives in a crowded market, poison gas released in a Japanese subway — it's all the same. Low War depends on destroying your enemies by any means possible. If a few hundred... or thousand... humans die in the process, the balance of life and death in the Far East is restored a little more.

As a result, the Hakken and other *shen* must learn the importance of upholding High War. The billions of humans in East Asia must co-exist peacefully. If they don't, then the alternative is depending on the tactics of the Nezumi. If the Hakken fail, the Children of Rat are waiting to take their place. Bright eyes watch from the darkness, and sharp teeth chitter in eager anticipation. The increasing number of Nezumi heralds the approach of the Sixth Age. These are the End Times, and Rat's children are slowly returning to the world.


Organization

The Ratkin are probably the most tightly-knit of all the Changing Breeds. Out of necessity, they learn the identities of their brethren quickly. Heightened senses allow them to sense the thousands of variations of scent among their kind. Whether born in the East or West, Ratkin consider all of Rat's children to be members of one great family. As is the tradition in the West, Children of Rat refer to each other as brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts.

Important Nezumi have three names: a human name, a gang name, and a court name. For instance, Yo Fa, an illustrious Knife Skulker, is also known as Poison Claw. His court name is formed by a series of subtle screeching, whuffling and chittering sounds.

Garou find it easy to underestimate the number of Nezumi in a city. Among other races, such as the Kitsune or Khan, homids are the most populous breed. For the Nezumi, the rodens breed is the most common. For each skulking homid an outsider may uncover, a dozen rodens breed Nezumi and a hundred rat Kinfolk may be spawning in a nest nearby. This explains why the legends of wererat rarity continue, even in Tokyo and Hong Kong.

Despite this, many rats never survive the horror of the Birthing Plague, the ritual that spawns their young. The vast majority of Nezumi die young — they are ravaged by disease, killed or eaten. Only the hardest... and most cunning... survive. To prepare for war, swarms of rats continually fight skirmishes below ground, relying on both man-made and rat-gnawed tunnels. This also keeps the local population under control. Casualties are high during these times of trial, but as the Sixth Age approaches, training is essential. Occasionally, conflicts erupt on the surface, but such displays usually involve few warriors. The evidence is quickly lost amidst the chaos of the worst urban slums.



A Nezumi who actually lives to be the oldest creature in the nest becomes its *sensei*, the elder of the group. This wise master teaches *sacred knowledge*: methods of resolving conflicts between nests, subtle methods of engagement and, when necessary, covert methods of assassinating enemies and rivals. Though Nezumi elders are few, some have begun visiting the local courts of the Hakken Garou, offering to aid the Eastern Lords in Low War once again.

Traits

All Ratkin share a few common traits: an absolute sense of direction *underground*, a highly-developed spatial sense, and excellent night vision, even in human form. (By spending a point of Gnosis, a Nezumi can even see in absolute darkness for a full day.)

When stalking underground, these rats can easily find their way around sewer mazes and tunnel networks, even if they have never traveled through them before. Since they also have excellent hearing, all of their Perception rolls have a -1 difficulty.

As Ratkin grow older, they learn other talents. Those who survive the first year of life are able to choose an auspice. The choice is often influenced by hallucinations during the Birthing Plague; and if the Nezumi is raised according to the Way of Emerald Virtue, the Rite of the Opened Way decides the auspice. There is little difference between Western and Eastern auspices; in fact, the Nezumi gain rank using the Renown chart for the corresponding sentai auspice (Seers gain rank as Mirrors; Skulkers as Lanterns; Warriors as Fists and Tunnel Runners as Leaves). Once Nezumi have selected their road, they work with other Warriors, Skulkers, Runners and Seers to build, breed and destroy.

• Seers

Beginning Rage: 1

Nezumi rites are taught and preserved by Seers, the mystics of their family. They conduct ceremonies that lead to the spawning of the Birthing Plague, reveal new Sacred Plagues, and, if legends are correct, allegedly open new bolt-holes to other realms. Seers speak of a Ratkin haven, a mystic realm

where thousands of Rat's children wait to return to the world. Whether these fairy-tales are true remains to be seen.

• Tunnel Runners

Beginning Rage: 2

Nests of Nezumi are often separated by miles of urban sprawl and endless laby-



riths of tunnels. Runners act as the messengers and scouts of the race. Rats of this auspice also have a traditional language of scraping and rattling. By rapping on lead pipes deep underground, they can spread their messages farther. It is rumored that they have access to ancient bolt-holes, similar to the spirit paths of the Garou.

- **Skulkers**

Beginning Rage: 3

Like the legendary ninja of feudal Japan, Skulkers are specialists in the most covert methods of warfare. All Nezumi are stealthy, but Skulkers are blessed with Gifts that place them among the deadliest assassins of the supernatural world. In any given nest, the oldest Skulker is the most likely candidate to become the nest's *sensei*. Most are of the homid breed.

- **Warriors**

Beginning Rage: 5

Warriors of different breeds employ vastly different tactics in Low War. Homid Nezumi are the most common above ground, especially since they are the best at hiding their true form. Homid Warriors learn to fight in small packs of two or three, conceal their deadliest weapons, hide in shadows, and above all else, settle conflicts quickly and quietly.

Metis Nezumi chafe under such restrictions, waiting for the time when they can take their true forms and wield their Pain-Daggers proudly. As they tend to be impatient, all of their Rage rolls are made at a -2 difficulty. Brute force is their favored tactic.

Rodens warriors don't mind waiting underground to assist their homid and metis brethren. They stalk beneath city streets in swarms, often relying on instincts to guide them into battle. When a homid pack falls, a hundred-strong swarm of rodens and Kinfolk may be waiting nearby to finish the job.

Breeds

- **Homid**

Beginning Gnosis: 1

Homid Nezumi are fiercely independent. Mavericks find homes farther from the nest, though they may try to establish new breeding grounds there. Warriors form rat packs to patrol their domains. Homid Nezumi often exhibit one or two signs of their heritage, such as bright narrow eyes, longer front teeth, a narrow face, or even a short (concealed) prehensile tail.

- **Rodens**

Beginning Gnosis: 3

The vast majority of Nezumi are of the rodens breed; thus, humans and Hakken often underestimate the population of a nest. The swarm's "group mind" must decide on the proper population. If they misjudge this number, the children devour each other or wage war against each other until

Form Statistics

Crinos	Rodens
Str: +1	Str: -1
Dex: +4	Dex: +2
Sta: +1	Sta: +2
Cha: -2	Cha: -3
	Man: -2
App: 0	
difficulty 6	difficulty 6
Str +2 Bite	Str +0 Bite

the balance has been restored. As the new age approaches, however, swarms of rodens are slowly getting larger.

- **Metis**

Beginning Gnosis: 5

Metis Nezumi are quite rare, but do not carry the social stigma metis Garou suffer. Their strength and power earns them a place of honor in warrior packs and swarms. When two Nezumi create a metis, they typically abandon their child, but still trust to the swarm or nest to raise her properly. Metis rarely learn the language of homids, instead relying on chittering and scratching to communicate with others.

Forms

Nezumi can assume three forms. Rodens and homids revert to their breed form when killed, although metis Nezumi always revert to rodens form upon death.

- **Homid:** Assuming Homid form is somewhat difficult for metis and extremely difficult for rodens; long years of hiding their numbers have acted something to the Nezumi's detriment. (Metis are at +1 difficulty for taking human form; rodens are at +2.) Of course, homid Nezumi can shift to human form immediately; they also possess skills that help them blend in with the seedier elements of human society.

- **Crinos:** The Crinos form is reserved for the most dangerous and violent circumstances. This short, densely muscle-bound form is the strongest hidden weapon a warrior has. The Crinos resembles nothing more than a hunched, five-foot rat standing on its hind legs; even the limbs are sometimes more ratlike than humanoid. The Crinos' teeth are long and dangerous, and a war-form Nezumi can easily chew through wood or even concrete. Unlike Western Ratkin, the Nezumi inspire full Delirium in Asian mortals — their actions during the Fourth Age were as bad as any Garou's in the Impergium. Humans witnessing Crinos Nezumi typically remember urban legends about the horrors of the slums, and do their best to forget what they saw.

- **Rodens:** This form is essentially a very large rat — some are as large as housecats. Tales of rodens who are capable of fine manipulation with their paws are somewhat exaggerated... more or less.



Gifts

Nezumi employ nearly all of the Ratkin Gifts detailed in the *Werewolf Players Guide*. The Gifts listed below are more commonly used in the East, but Western Ratkin can still learn them from a generous *sensei* or well-traveled Rat Jaggling.

- **Hunter in Crowds (Level One)** — A thousand years of hiding and skulking, secretly carrying out activities formally shunned by the Courts, have taught Nezumi how to sense the presence of their brethren. When surrounded by a large group of people, a Ratkin can sense if another shapeshifter is lurking somewhere in the crowd. The Ratkin may use the opportunity to either flee or begin hunting his stalker. This Gift is taught by a Dog-spirit.

System: This talent requires the expenditure of one point of Gnosis and a of Perception + Stealth roll, difficulty of the other creature's Stealth Ability + 4.

- **Raiding the Umbral Hoard (Level One)** — Raiding supplies of grain and rice is essential to a nest's survival. Through this Gift, a Nezumi can summon a small group of Rat-spirits to steal a small amount of food and transport it through the Umbra to another locale up to a mile away (although they can be tracked in the process). Food in plain

sight cannot be stolen — it must be hidden or unobserved. A variant of this Gift allows the spirits to corrupt and despoil caches of food. This Gift is, naturally, taught by a Rat-spirit.

System: This Gift requires one point of Gnosis and a Wits + Survival roll. A rodens can seize and transport a few handfuls of food; a homid can transport a few pounds; a metis can transport up to ten pounds. If the user spends a point of Rage instead, he can spoil an equivalent amount of rice or grain with feces and urine.

- **Resist Toxin (Level One)** — As the Fianna Gift.

- **Cloak of Darkest Night (Level Two)** — Darkness is the greatest ally of an assassin. A Nezumi can call upon his totem's strength to aid a swarm of rodens or pack of homids. Along the path of the invasion route, light sources are extinguished by small gusts of wind and electrical systems may short out. This makes the use of certain other Gifts (such as Cloak of Shadows) somewhat easier.

System: Underground or indoors, this Gift requires an Intelligence + Stealth roll and the use of three points of Gnosis. The effect lowers the difficulty of any Stealth rolls for Stealth-based and Subterfuge-based Gifts by 1. For five points of Gnosis, the Rat Totem can draw clouds across a clear blue sky to achieve the same effect outdoors. The results last one minute for each success.

- **Secrets of the Tunnels (Level Two)** — As the Bone Gnawer Gift: Attunement.

- **Keening of Swarm Panic (Level Three)** — If humans really were civilized, they wouldn't allow their cities to become so crowded. Nezumi are able to exploit this primitive failing through the enactment of this Gift. The practice is only possible in the midst of a crowd of at least fifty or sixty humans. The Nezumi keens a high, wailing sound just beyond the fringe of human hearing. After a few minutes, the humans become uneasy and soon begin to push and shove each other. The human swarm can become extremely dangerous if it senses the need to bolt. Although Awakened beings are immune to the effects, they can still be in trouble if they're caught in the mob. This Gift is taught by a Fear-spirit.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Charisma + Rituals (difficulty 7). If she obtains at least three successes, the crowd begins to force its way towards a chosen exit. With four successes, the crowd panics, surging so violently that anyone in their way and not part of the surge is swept into the crowd. Each of these victims suffers one Health Level of damage (difficulty 8 to soak).

With five successes, the crowd bolts. Anyone caught in the way of the crowd should roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 8); failure indicates that the unfortunate is trampled under a wave of human flesh. The victim takes one Health Level of damage each turn until he gets to his feet (until then, he can attempt to soak the damage at difficulty 9). The most insidious part of this Gift is its duration: ten minutes for each success on the initial roll.

- **Gnaw (Level Four)** — As the Lupus Gift.

• **Snake Bites Itself (Level Five)** — This Gift is a perfect example of what the Nezumi call *poetic justice*. By merely touching a victim and chittering a low, quick curse, the Nezumi can turn a foe's poisons against itself. *Bakemono* choke on their own bile, *Kumo* suffer the effects of their own venom, and *Kuei-jin* are ravaged by their Yin toxins. This Gift is taught by a Mushroom-spirit.

System: The Nezumi must touch her victim, and the player must spend a Gnosis point and succeed in a Wits + Medicine roll (difficulty of opponent's Willpower). The target immediately suffers the full effects of any and all poisonous, toxic, radioactive, corrosive or acidic powers he possesses, *regardless of any immunities he might have*. A *Nagah* would immediately have to resist the effects of its own venom, while a *Kuei-jin* might have to resist his more toxic *Shintai* Disciplines. Even human poisoners might be suddenly afflicted with *cyanide poisoning* or worse, depending on how regularly they practice their art. Although this Gift doesn't affect spirits, it can be *lethal to shen* who use an arsenal of toxic attacks.

Rites

Nezumi are highly ritualistic, and treat their mystic practices with a reverence that can be startling to those who don't know the ragged, sinister wererats very well. They honor their spirit allies highly, and in turn their favored spirits (often embodiments of less popular faces of the Mother, such as disease and fear) treat the Nezumi with great respect. They know most rites in the *Werewolf* rulebook, and have several other nasty tricks; the following is only one example.

Rite of Plague Genesis

Level Four

Seers are the keepers of ancient wisdom, but also receive revelations to aid them in solving problems. If kept in isolation for at least a week, the Seers of a nest can join together to create a new disease to spread across the nearest site of human population. Succumbing to the disease usually just incapacitates a human for a week or so. If it's the right human, however, the Rite is an excellent way to prepare him for his assassination or abduction.

System: The initial roll for this rite is Intelligence + Rituals (difficulty 9); each additional Seer reduces the difficulty by 1 (to a minimum of 4). The plague lasts one day for each success. Rodens can then swarm an area as large as

Stereotypes

• **Hakken** — Why sacrifice victory for honor? They place too much value on that monkey *bushido* shit, and that makes them weak.

• **Khan** — Heh, heh, heh. Lure one of these bastards into the sewers and a few swarms will take him down real easy. For some odd reason, these loners think they're better hunters than we are.

• **Kumo** — Fat centipedes with fewer legs to pick out of your teeth.

• **Kitsune** — Their cunning and quick wit are admirable, but they don't seem to notice the world's imminent doom. Poor them.

• **Nagah** — Damn slit-eyes watching us too close — worse than the *Khan*! If these legless bastards slither into our dens, then they'll deserve what they get.

• **Same-Bito** — Urrgh. (shudder) They may not share the others' little delusions about humanity's worth, but that doesn't mean these berserkers are choice allies.

• **Tengu** — I admire their talents as thieves. Still, if I had a choice between fleeing underground and flying from my enemies, I'd prefer a good sewer any day.

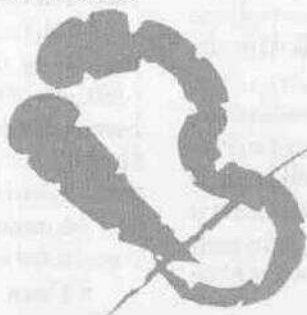
• **Zhong Lung** — They know what's coming, clever lizards. And they know they don't have any right to speak out against it. What good sages they are.

• **Sunset People** — These *gaijin* make little sense. Why do they feel that those who spread infection and disease are "of the Wyrms," and that those who make such things necessary are not? How strange.

a city block and spread the disease. Anyone living in that neighborhood should make a Stamina roll. The difficulty depends on the state of overcrowding; a community in rural China might be difficulty 5, while a tenement in Mongkok would be difficulty 9. Each victim (relevant to the story, of course) must make a successful Stamina roll each day or lose one Health Level. Fortunately, *Hakken Garou* and other *shen* have talents of their own for recovering from disease.

Quote

When the sun shines, the field of battle is yours. When it sets, you will know the talents of my kind. You have learned to fight what you can see; soon, you may need to fight what you cannot.



Same-Bite

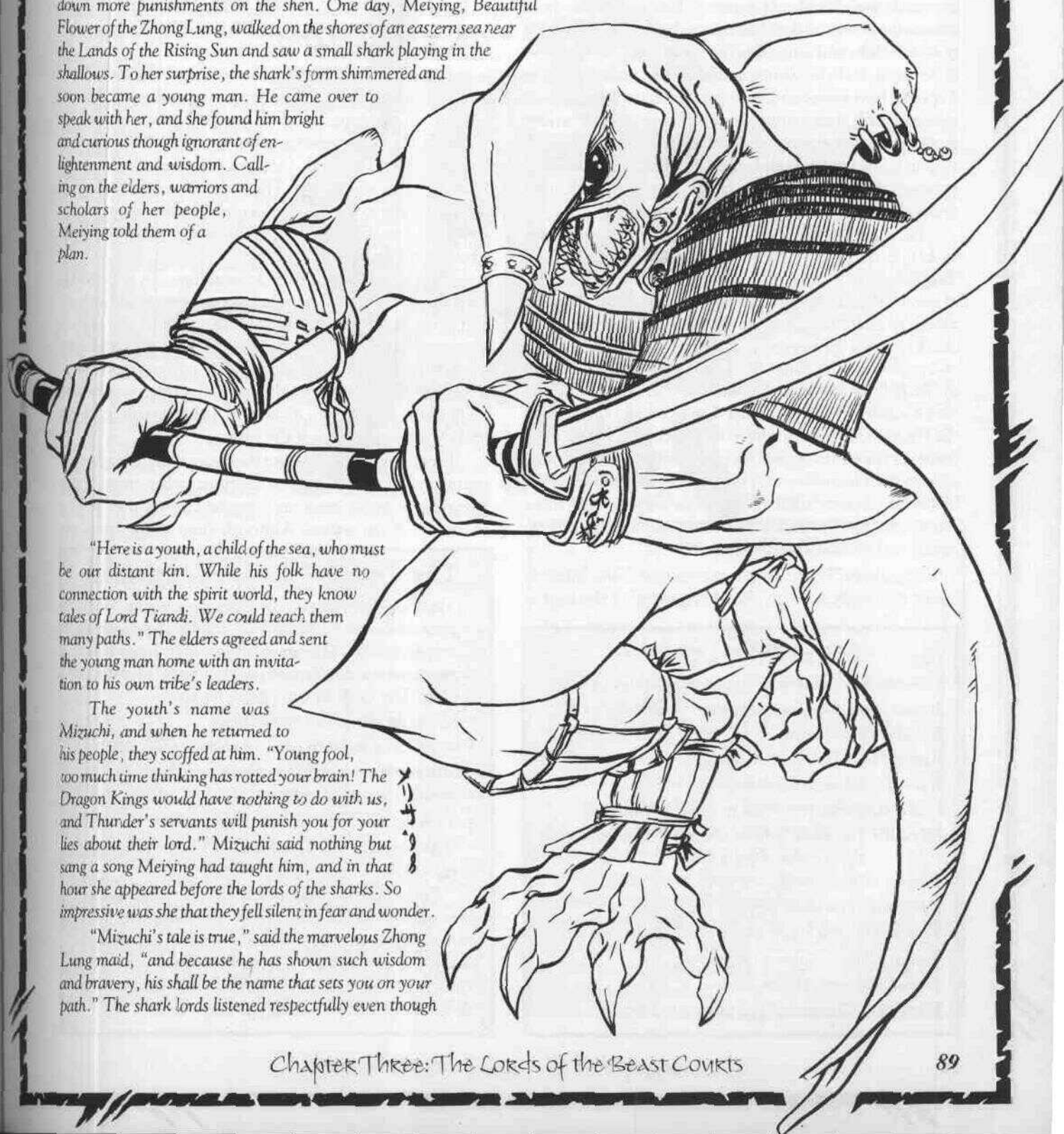
Sensei Mizuchi

Long ago, in the Age of Beautiful Sadness, the woes of the world troubled the noble Zhong Lung. They had cried to Heaven for justice against the Wan Xian and been answered, though the world changed forever. To right the balance, to atone for causing the Wan Xian's karma to change, the children of the Dragon Kings looked for a way to share their wisdom instead of calling down more punishments on the shen. One day, Meiying, Beautiful Flower of the Zhong Lung, walked on the shores of an eastern sea near the Lands of the Rising Sun and saw a small shark playing in the shallows. To her surprise, the shark's form shimmered and soon became a young man. He came over to speak with her, and she found him bright and curious though ignorant of enlightenment and wisdom. Calling on the elders, warriors and scholars of her people, Meiying told them of a plan.

"Here is a youth, a child of the sea, who must be our distant kin. While his folk have no connection with the spirit world, they know tales of Lord Tiandi. We could teach them many paths." The elders agreed and sent the young man home with an invitation to his own tribe's leaders.

The youth's name was Mizuchi, and when he returned to his people, they scoffed at him. "Young fool, too much time thinking has rotted your brain! The Dragon Kings would have nothing to do with us, and Thunder's servants will punish you for your lies about their lord." Mizuchi said nothing but sang a song Meiying had taught him, and in that hour she appeared before the lords of the sharks. So impressive was she that they fell silent in fear and wonder.

"Mizuchi's tale is true," said the marvelous Zhong Lung maid, "and because he has shown such wisdom and bravery, his shall be the name that sets you on your path." The shark lords listened respectfully even though



a few swam away that night in disgust, never to return. Many stayed and learned the codes of behavior that Mizuchi and Meiying set down for the weresharks of the Eastern lands, thereafter called the Same-Bito. Today they still revere Sensei Mizuchi as the greatest of their heroes and the Zhong Lung as most honored allies.

Description

The Same-Bito are the Asian counterparts of the Rokea; however, only those seeking suicide would ever compare the two with any weresharks present. The Same-Bito have chosen the culture of the Courts over the more primal life of their relatives, and long years of exposure to the teachings of Mizuchi and the Zhong Lung, to say nothing of the Tapestry, have removed them from the habits of their Rokea cousins. Still, their culture is little more than a veneer; despite their life among other *hengeyokai*, the Same-Bito remain fierce predators and merciless hunters. The ancient savagery that is the heritage of all weresharks still lurks under their refined outer skins.

Because of Mizuchi's personal magnetism, some stern looks from the Zhong Lung and perhaps a little pressure from Tiandi and his servants, the Same-Bito have taken the Code of Sensei Mizuchi to heart, at least on the outside. They are a fierce and determined people, anxious to prove their worth and live down the stereotypes of being nothing but stupid and primitive. The Same-Bito really aren't very interested in the politics and squabbles of other *hengeyokai*; nor do they consider it their particular duty to protect the lands of the Emerald Mother. However, they become furious if their homes or the seas in general are under direct threat. Anyone seeking their friendship may find the key lies in helping the Same-Bito defend their ocean protectorates, and those *sentai* who have recruited wereshark members find them deadly and loyal, if a touch exotic.

Like their Zhong Lung teachers, the Same-Bito pay honor to Tiandi, Lord of Thunder, a vassal of the mighty

Same-Bito Lexicon

Habatsu: Factions of Same-Bito, similar to Hakken clans.

Irono: Same-Bito born at night.

Kabina: Homid form.

Karui: Same-Bito born in daylight.

Karvu: Gladius (Crinos) form.

Koshoku: Same-Bito born in dawn or twilight.

Mizuchi: The great hero of the Same-Bito who gave them codes of behavior.

Rongo: Homid breed.

Tangaroa: The shark breed.

Teanoi: The great Shark-spirit Same-Bito revere in secret.

Tsufu: Glabrus (Glabro) form.

Warui: Chasmus (Hispo) form.

Watasami: Children of the sea; shark form.

Dragon Kings. However, unknown to the Zhong Lung, the Same-Bito also honor their ancient father Teanoi, the Great Shark Spirit. He sends his children Gifts from time to time which are jealously guarded; the Zhong Lung have no idea that some Same-Bito are slowly turning from Tiandi to serve Teanoi. Since the Same-Bito can't traverse the Umbra, not much is known about Teanoi's intentions. It's possible he seeks their reconciliation with the Rokea; on the other hand, his Gifts may be a sign of his pleasure at the newfound path of his children. Seeking knowledge of Teanoi is a favorite pastime of the rare scholarly Same-Bito.

Organization

Contrary to what outsiders may think, the Same-Bito are quite a gregarious tribe, congregating in slews of three to a dozen. In this aspect, they're similar to the werewolves. Albeit rarely, these weresharks do have Kin who live among the people of Thailand, Oceania, Indonesia and coastal areas of Japan and China. The warm waters of Southeast Asia are home to many varieties of sharks; even the Ganges River shelters sharks. Where there is salt water, there are likely Same-Bito.

Leadership of Same-Bito *habatsu* (factions or packs) is taken by trial at arms. The fight has two parts — one on land and one in the water. A panel of three judges arbitrates any disputes over ties or rules infractions. The loser must endure the taunts of his comrades, but usually nothing more punitive. The Same-Bito prize the scars that often result from such trials. Of course, incidental fighting still goes on outside the jurisdiction of the packs.

Peculiarly, the Same-Bito that have risen to leadership status are far from the greatest warriors; rather, those of the Same-Bito's noble caste are descended from the "goblin sharks" of Asian waters. Although their shark forms are

The Code of Sensei Mizuchi

Although much simpler than the elegant teachings of *bushido*, the Same-Bito follow the Code as closely as possible. The Same-Bito are literal-minded in the extreme and don't usually deviate from the letter of the law. The Code's main principles are:

- Attend the elders; you owe them all.
- Respect tribe members, and they honor you in return.
- Dishonor is a mark of lower beings.
- Battle is always honorable.
- If you are alive, you are still learning.
- Protect territory that Tiandi and the Dragon Kings have given to you.

At the heart of Same-Bito society the small faction who want to reject these codes and return to more primal ways is growing. Though for now they work in secret, the day may soon come when they overthrow Mizuchi's disciples and reestablish a more timeless and bloodthirsty lifestyle among the Same-Bito.

Auspices

Name	Usable Gifts	Beginning Rage
Karui	Ahroun	4
Koshuku	Galliard	3
Irono	Ragabash	2

small and weak, and their Warui only as strong as another wereshark's Watasami, these rare horned creatures are revered as great spiritual masters among the Same-Bito, and often lead their larger, stronger brethren on darksome missions against the enemies of the Sea Courts.

Traits

Thanks to the civilizing guidance of the Zhong Lung, the Same-Bito have moved slightly beyond the complete bloodthirst and fury of the Rokea. They have three auspices among their people: Karui, born during daylight hours; Koshoku, born in dawn or twilight; and Irono, born during dark of night. Rank and Renown follow the same rules as for the corresponding Garou auspices (Ahroun, Galliard and Ragabash respectively). Because they've stepped slightly off the bestial path of the Rokea, Same-Bito have less Rage than other weresharks. Some among their kind consider this a weakness and believe Teanoi might be willing to change this balance if he were properly appeased. Like the Rokea, Same-Bito may only regain Gnosis in the water.

The Kagesame, or goblin sharks, are not quite as physically powerful as their comrades; their Watasami forms are hardly the picture of ferocity, and their Warui forms use the same trait modifications as other weresharks' Watasami. However, the goblin sharks are often the keepers of Rokea rites, and are blessed with the ability to step sideways as easily as Garou.

All Same-Bito begin with Willpower 4. Unlike the Rokea, Same-Bito may purchase human Kinfolk, though the cost is twice as expensive as other Backgrounds (two points per dot). The vast majority of Kin are shark, not human. Same-Bito may not purchase Past Life or Pure Breed; any Contacts are almost exclusively among other shen.

Breeds

The Same-Bito differ from Western Rokea in that they admit to having two breeds: rongo (homid) and tangaroa (shark). This development was a side benefit of Mizuchi's congress with Tiandi and the Zhong Lung. The tangaroa still outnumber the rongo about three to one, and the shark breed tends to look down on the homid Same-Bito. No one is certain what happens to metis, but it's assumed they are devoured at birth by the parents.

Beginning Gnosis is comparable to the Rokea; however, the Same-Bito have similar restrictions in that they can't traverse the Umbra as most other Bête can, unless they

happen to be Kagesame. They use Gnosis for Gifts and occasional rites, but little else.

• **Rongo:** The homid Same-Bito are rarer than rare, but still more common than homid Rokea. Their scarcity has much to do with the weresharks' disdain for humans, but it also stems from the fact that the mating of a Same-Bito and human *always* produces Kinfolk, never a wereshark. A Same-Bito must mate with Kinfolk for even a slight chance of shapeshifting offspring, and this happens rarely indeed. However, rongo Same-Bito are under their race's protection, and are usually safe from the Rokea hunts for "betweeners." The occasional rongo is always irresistibly drawn to the sea before his First Change, if he didn't grow up there already.

Gnosis: 1

• **Tangaroa:** Same-Bito born of a shark parent. Although matings between Same-Bito and normal sharks always produce weresharks, the Same-Bito mate only twice a century, in accordance with tradition. Anything else would be an affront to their patrons.

Gnosis: 3

Forms

Much like the Rokea, the Same-Bito have five forms: Kabina (Homid), Tsufu (Gladius), Karvu (Gladius), Warui (Chasmus) and Watasami (Sea Child or Squamus).

• **Kabina:** No Trait changes. Due to the lack of human blood within Same-Bito bloodlines, Kabina-form weresharks are often hulking creatures with primitive, rough features.

• **Tsufu:** The near human form of the Rokea has about twice the mass of the Kabina form. The eyes bulge out, and the mouth enlarges. The beginnings of a dorsal fin sprout

Form Statistics

Tsufu	Karvu	Warui	Watasami
Str: +2	Str: +4	Str: +3	Str: +2
Dex: -2 (+1)*	Dex: -2 (+1)*	Dex: -1 (+1)*	Dex: +2
Sta: +2	Sta: +3	Sta: +3	Sta: +3
Man: -2	Man: -4	Man: -4	Man: -4
App: -2	App: 0		
Difficulty: 8	Difficulty: 6	Difficulty: 7	Difficulty: 5
	Str +3 Bite	Str +3 Bite	Str +1 Bite
	Str +1 Fin Slash		
	Sharkskin	Sharkskin	Sharkskin

*In these forms the Same-Bito have greater Dexterity under water.

In forms where the Same-Bito's sharkskin is at its fullest, opponents may take damage from striking the Same-Bito while unarmed. Those who grapple or strike the Same-Bito bare-handed take their own Strength - 1 in damage dice; if the Same-Bito is in Karvu form, this damage is aggravated.



from the back, giving the Tsufu a hunchback appearance. Webbing appears between the fingers; the skin thickens and appears oily and darker, though it can't cause damage like the skin of the more sharklike forms. The Tsufu can only speak in a harsh whisper — not that many people want to talk to a thing that looks like this. The Same-Bito assume this form rarely, although still more commonly than their Rokea cousins.

- **Karvu:** The humanshark form is brutal and terrifying, standing nearly 10 feet tall with dorsal fins and webbed feet. The Same-Bito's head and neck swell in bulk, the jaws widen and the eyes bulge. Double rows of razor sharp teeth fill the gums. Thick, serrated skin covers the body; any who touch this flesh barehanded are going to get sliced open for their troubles. The Karvu form does have both gills and lungs, allowing water and air breathing. Finally, along the elbows, the Karvu has short, spiked fins that can cut a human — or werewolf — to ribbons in short order. Most Same-Bito have grayish brown skin in this form, though some tend towards blue hues. The Same-Bito are effectively mute in this form, but can communicate amongst themselves via electrical impulses; the range for this is a mile underwater, but only 50 feet on land.

- **Warui:** The Warui stirs unpleasant images of immense sharks swallowing entire outriggers — because this

form seems certainly capable of that. This carcharadonesque shape melds the power of Karvu with greater mass, enormous jaws and double the swimming speed of the Watasami. Same-Bito usually assume this form when engaged in a water battle, while preferring the amphibious Karvu shape if their fight is on both sea and land.

- **Watasami:** Like the Rokea, a Same-Bito must be in water to assume shark form. The Watasami bites as fiercely as any shark and retains her protective skin. In this form, Same-Bito can swim at around 30 miles per hour for long stretches.

Gifts

The Same-Bito begin with three Gifts, chosen among those appropriate for their auspice (Ragabash, Galliard or Ahroun), breed (homid for the rongo or lupus for the tangaroa) and tribe. Those in service to the Courts learn a common Gift in place of auspice. Storytellers might also want to use certain other Gifts as options, particularly those that deal with water. The weresharks are careful about publicly using Gifts from Teanoi, lest the Zhong Lung or others suspect their loyalty to another besides Tiandi. The Same-Bito can often find teachers willing to instruct them in the common Gifts of the Courts; considering how terrifying their own Gifts are, this is hardly surprising.

- **Shou of Zhong Lung (Level One)** — Shou is the wisdom of ancestors; invoking this Gift provides tidbits of advice and information to the Same-Bito from their Zhong Lung allies. A Frog-spirit teaches the Gift.

System: This Gift doesn't call on Zhong Lung ancestors; rather, it conveys a message to the nearest Zhong Lung in the Umbra. Storytellers should note that it may take quite a long time for a Zhong Lung to reply, though they always eventually do so. The player makes a Manipulation + Expression roll, difficulty 6. At least two successes are required; a reply should usually come within the timeframe of the session.

- **Blood Scent (Level One)** — The Same-Bito using this Gift gains the ability to sense *shen*; something about the blood of hengeyokai and other creatures alerts their senses. A Shark-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point, then makes a Perception + Primal Urge roll, difficulty 7. If she gets at least two successes, the Same-Bito knows whether or not a fellow being is *shen*. Note that she doesn't know any specifics, such as whether they are hengeyokai or Kuei-jin, for example.

- **Sight Without Sight (Level Two)** — Sharks are sensitive to changes in the electromagnetic field around them, allowing them to sense targets even when blinded. This Gift is usable on land and is particularly advantageous in dark, murky waters. It is taught by a Squid-spirit.

System: Expending a Gnosis point and making a successful Perception + Alertness roll allows the Same-Bito to sense objects or creatures within a fifteen-foot radius. Note

that only the presence and general shape are sensed not the minute details.

- **Iron Jaws (Level Three)** — As the Level Four Ahroun Gift: Clenched Jaw.

- **Voracious Hunger (Level Three)** — The Same-Bito are skilled at biting off and swallowing whatever they can get their mouths around, whether oar, tire or limb. This Gift allows the wereshark to enlarge his maw and sink his teeth into almost anything. It is taught by a Manta-spirit and is not usable on land.

System: The Same-Bito spends a Rage point to invoke the Gift. The difficulty to bite is reduced by 2, and the wereshark can now sink his teeth into objects normally too big or oddly shaped to swallow. The effects last for a scene.

- **Bite of the Destroyer (Level Four)** — As the Level Five Get of Fenris Gift: Fenris' Bite.

- **Tsunami Form (Level Four)** — For short periods of time, the Same-Bito can effectively double her size while in Karvu or Watasami form. She's bigger, stronger and if possible, even more terrifying than before. This Gift is taught by a servitor of Teanoi.

System: If the player spends a Willpower point and achieves at least three successes on a Stamina + Primal-Urge roll, the Same-Bito may grow large for an hour. Each success over three adds an hour to the time. While enlarged, the Same-Bito gains two dots of Strength (maximum of 10) and two extra Bruised Health Levels.

- **Teanoi's Rage (Level Five)** — This fearsome Gift is kept highly secret among the Same-Bito. Taught by one of Teanoi's servants, this Gift sends the wereshark into an unstoppable blood-fury.

System: After the Same-Bito makes a plea to Teanoi, the player rolls her Willpower (difficulty 7). If she has at least three successes, the wereshark gains three extra points of Rage, recovers at least two Rage points per turn of combat, and gains two dice to all her damage pools. The danger in this Gift is that a Same-Bito full of Rage is a terrifying thing indeed. The Gift lasts for the duration of the scene.

Rites

The Same-Bito can't understand the pleasures many other Changing Breeds take in conducting rites in the Umbra. For the weresharks, nothing could be more exhilarating than moving through the chilly currents of the deepest sea. This is where they conduct their most sacred

Stereotypes

- **Hakken** — Their paths of honor are interesting, though their lack of a beast heart makes them inferior. These hengeyokai are too caught up in useless games of the mind to interest us.

- **Khan** — The cat beasts have never cared for our waters, and we certainly have no desire for their deserts and jungles. We are likely meant to mix with them as little as possible.

- **Kitsune** — Our teachers the Zhong Lung say to be wary of the extraordinary Nine-Tails. We honor their words and have as little dealing with the werefoxes as possible.

- **Kumo** — These many-legs rarely tiptoe down to our shores, although a few have offered the talon of friendship. However, they have nothing to offer us that is worth having.

- **Nagah** — [sullen stare]

- **Nezumi** — The Zhong Lung are patient with these rodents, but we've no use for them. Let them gather the refuse around themselves and keep their poisonous bodies from our waters.

- **Tengu** — How strange it must be to swim the depths of the Sky! And how very peculiar are the creatures that do so, for they and we are nothing alike.

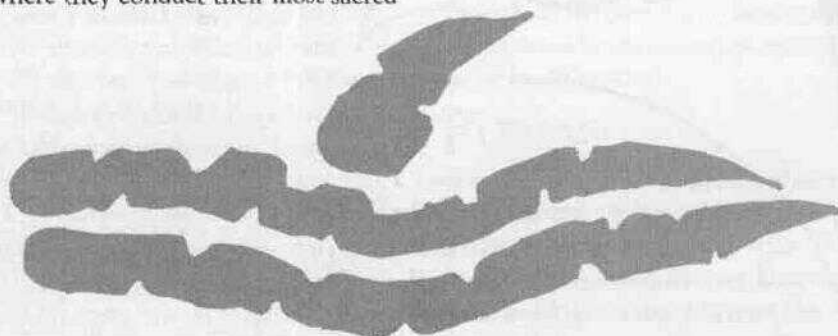
- **Zhong Lung** — They are our honored teachers and wise beyond reckoning. We owe them a great debt.

- **Sunset People** — I have yet to meet one of these creatures, but if the glass and iron that chokes the land is of their doing, I do not want their kind in our waters.

rituals. Rites of Accord, particularly the Rite of Contrition, are common, as are Rites of Punishment and Renown. Like the Zhong Lung, the Same-Bito enjoy welcoming the year's renewal with elaborate celebrations, often to worship Tiandi and the Dragon Lords. Unknown to their benefactors, some Same-Bito also perform rites to venerate Teanoi, their Great Shark Spirit.

Quote

The Lords have decreed that you are thoroughly unwelcome in these waters. Leave now, or your blood will flow through the gills of my brethren and your skull will make a home for crabs.



Tengu

Ice Feathers and the Shih

My grandfather told me that a long time ago there was a Tengu from the frozen mountains by the name of Ice Feathers. Ice Feathers was a perpetually hungry fellow, and what time he didn't spend spying out bakemono and chih-mei, he usually spent trying to steal a meal from humans — after all, they knew how to cook and he didn't.

On one particularly hot summer afternoon, Ice Feathers was perched on a branch overlooking the road to the market, panting to himself and hoping that a meal would come along soon. He'd seen twenty hungry peasants go by, and none of them could afford to spare food. Poor Ice Feathers! But then luck shone on him, for a priest came walking down the road, a large man with broad shoulders. "He looks like he eats well," Ice Feathers said to himself. "And priests are such fun, too! Let's see what he's brought me for lunch."

So Ice Feathers took his war shape and jumped down from the tree in front of the priest, cawing loudly and hopping around, beating his wings and trying to look very fierce. The priest jumped back, startled, but then he reached under his robes and drew a very sharp, very shiny sword. "Demon!" he cried, and at this point Ice Feathers could see that this man was very strong-looking indeed. In fact, he was a shih, one of the knights that hunt shen.

"Just my luck!" thought Ice Feathers to himself, but he was a quick thinker and not completely afraid. He hopped back, crying, "Ah! You are a shih! Surely you have come to kill me on this hot, hot day with your sword dipped in bakemono blood! Oh, I feel faint already! I would tear you apart, but the poison!"

The shih looked surprised, then looked very nervously at his sword. Ice Feathers stopped hopping and peered over his wingtips. "You haven't dipped your sword in bakemono blood? Don't you know that's poison to all Tengu?" The shih shook his head, and nervously tightened his grip on his sword.

"Well, I'll be," Ice Feathers continued. "You know, I hate to see a cavalier like you unarmed, and my powers really are very terrible. You wouldn't stand a chance. But I am charged with doing one good deed before I return to Hell, and I like your face. I'll tell you what. There are some bakemono four li down the road, in a cave under the old red bridge. You can't miss them. Why don't you go kill them, steep your sword in the blood, and then come back? I promise I'll wait for you; it's really much hotter up here on Earth than I was told, and frankly I wouldn't mind going back down to Hell where at least it isn't so sunny. Of course, it's a long walk, and very hot; I'll watch over your robe for you while you go."

"You're very considerate for a demon," said the shih. "I'll do as you recommend, and send you back to Hell as soon as I get back. But you had better be here, or else I'll track you down and take twice as long to kill you." Ice Feathers nodded at that, then sat down under the tree to show he was in no hurry. "I'll be here," he replied.

So the shih set down his pack and his heavy robe, then ran quickly to the bakemono lair. He was very good, and killed all five before they could even draw their knives. Then he steeped his sword in their blood, and put a little extra in his gourd just in case, and ran back to the tree where Ice Feathers was still waiting.

Ice Feathers leapt to his feet as the shih arrived, and flew at him with a loud squawk. The shih slashed his sword once, and Ice Feathers cried out as if mortally wounded, and then there was nothing but feathers drifting on the wind.

The shih was very pleased with himself, and resolved to tell all his comrades what an effective poison bakemono blood was, and to recommend that they all go out and harvest plenty. And in the Mirror Lands, Ice Feathers took to his wings and flew away north before the shih could look in his pack and wonder what had happened to his lunch.

Description

The Tengu have always been obsessed with the doings of man, perhaps moreso than was decreed proper. The children of Raven have dutifully watched humanity's progress as closely as possible, in the interest of fulfilling their role as unearthers of secrets. As a result, they are the hengeyokai most familiar with human society as a whole (possibly excepting the Hakken). They are the ones who fly to the four compass points and return by the day's end to share the tales they've heard.

The wereravens of the East take their duty as scouts and heralds seriously, and wisdom spills freely from their beaks. Their overwhelming curiosity is matched only by their tendency to gossip. Although they share the greatest secrets only with their hengeyokai brethren, they are often willing to barter minor gossip with shen of all sorts, and have even passed on some of their knowledge to select humans. It's said that the Tengu are responsible for the accuracy — and inaccuracies — of certain human myths, disseminating only whatever gossip strikes their fancy, and omitting certain details (such as the facts regarding a certain metal of the moon). Priests were often favorite victims of the Tengu, who enjoyed harassing the pious and trying to alter their world view into something more to the wereravens' tastes. However, information is spreading all too quickly these days, and although the Tengu can still edit legend and superstition to their taste in remote, rural areas, they are finding it much harder to foster ignorance in cities where the Information Age has arrived.

Like all Corax, the Tengu are blessed with the ability to drink a corpse's eyes and learn the circumstances of the person's death. Although such a filthy practice would be virtually unthinkable in most human Asian cultures, the other hengeyokai think nothing of it — the Tengu are of Raven's blood, after all. Such is their task. And at any rate, the only adverse side effect it seems to have on the Tengu is encouraging their morbid sense of humor — irritating to some formal shapechangers, but far from a killing offense.

Organization

Tengu society is largely individualistic; the wereravens gather together in Parliaments only every so often to share information and lore, then return to their individual haunts. They join sentai somewhat reluctantly, and often gripe about their too-social role, but serve as steadfastly as any

other. As one of the slightly more numerous shapeshifting Breeds, they are found as advisors and sentries in most of the few remaining courts scattered across Asia. The court which is without a Tengu spy is at a grave disadvantage when dealing with the plots of the other shen.

The Tengu have few divisions within their own society; they follow the Rank system of the courts, but have no individual auspices apart from following the Way of Emerald Virtue. If two of the raven-shifters have a dispute, they typically settle it with a ritualistic show of gamecraft, or by the actions of unwitting human champions — being able to select the next human to strike it rich at pachinko is a clear demonstration of superior wisdom.

There is a small faction of Tengu that sometimes abducts humans and trains them in the arts of hunting shen — in most cases, bakemono, Kuei-jin or Namebreakers. This camp, known obliquely as the Gray Clouds Temple, instructs their charges in all manner of bladesmanship, martial arts, shen lore (although carefully omitting any hengeyokai weaknesses) and sometimes even hedge magick. Thus armed, the new "goblin slayer" enters the shadowy side of the World of Darkness with open eyes and a fighting chance. None can say whether the Temple's ways are a cruel game or a noble calling — but the results are often interesting.

Traits

The Tengu's tie to the sun is unmistakable. They have no lunar auspices; neither does the touch of silver affect them in any way. It is gold, the sun's metal, that drains their Gnosis and causes aggravated damage to them. Slaying a Tengu can thereby be a very expensive proposition.

As creatures of little formality, unaffiliated Tengu follow a loose Renown system that is similar to the Mirror's path; Wisdom is of paramount importance to them as a race. However, most Tengu are sworn to the Courts, and obey the rules of their chosen (or assigned) auspice; like it or not, this is most often the aspect of Leaf. Nonetheless, the Tengu still attempt to accumulate as much Wisdom Renown as possible, no matter what their task; although it may not be necessary to their court duty, they certainly find it necessary by the demands of the First Mandate.

Tengu may choose from any Backgrounds they like, save Pure Breed (the details of their reproduction rather prohibit the formation of regal bloodlines). Unaffiliated Tengu have the permanent blessing of Raven as a totem, but wereravens who join mountain sentai fall under the auspices of the sentai's patron.

Breeds

The Tengu are plagued with a peculiar reproductive quirk; any unions between themselves and humans or ravens produce Kinfolk, but never Tengu. What's more, although their Kin are immune to the Delirium, they still have no chance of birthing new Tengu. The Tengu simply cannot

create new hatchlings by breeding with humans and ravens; the reasons for this are lost along the Wheel, but the Tengu themselves suspect a practical joke was played on them by one of the Ministers of Heaven. Whatever the reason, the Tengu must rely on the process of binding an Umbral spirit egg to a human baby or raven chick to create more of their kind. They cannot even breed among one another; such unions are always fruitless.

Nonetheless, the spirit egg can be attached to any human or raven — Kin or no — to create a new Tengu. It is somewhat inauspicious to select non-Kinfolk for such an honor, but one does occasionally hear stories of Tengu who so desire a particular child that they kidnap the objects of their paternal affection. According to legend, Tengu have chosen princes and peasants, the children of sages and warriors — it only depends on the sentimentality of the parent. Considering that the prospective parent must donate three permanent Gnosis to enact the Rite of the Spirit Egg, one must forgive a certain amount of choosiness; after all, few Tengu have the spiritual wherewithal to create offspring more than once or twice.

Regardless of breed, all Tengu start with 1 Rage, 6 Gnosis and 3 Willpower. How tightly the twin breeds interact is evident in the fact that a raven-born can create only homid children and vice versa. As a result, their clans are often quite tightly knit; a Tengu typically considers both his birth-parent Kinfolk and his spirit-donor Tengu to be his parents.

FORMS

The Tengu have only three forms, but they take a certain pride in that those three are all they need.

- **Homid:** A Tengu in human form is indistinguishable from other Asian people, although they tend to be thin and sharp-featured. Most have black eyes, although a few have startlingly blue or green eyes (that they do their best to keep hidden).

- **Crinos:** The Tengu's "war form" lacks much by way of dignity; at first glance, it appears to be a five-foot tall raven, but the differences are certainly unique. The face has a noselike bridge across the top of the beak, and the eyes are unquestionably humanlike. (Some poor Tengu retain their human ears in this form, making them all the more reluctant to shift out of human or raven shape.) Their wings are half arm, complete with gnarled, taloned fingers but no less flight-capable. The legs aren't jointed quite right for a bird, and aren't much good for sprinting.

A Tengu in Crinos does Strength +1 aggravated damage with the talons on hands and feet, and can fly in blatant disregard for her body mass (which is only a little lighter than that of her human form). Admittedly, the flight is far from graceful, but is adequate for frightening unsuspecting humans. The Tengu can also take advantage of several battle Gifts designed for this form — perfect for a bad situation where escape is impossible. Unlike the Western

Form Statistics

Crinos	Corvid
Str: +1	Str: -1
Dex: +1	Dex: +1
Sta: +1	Sta: +0
App: -1	App: +0
Man: -2	Man: -3
Per: +3	Per: +4
Diff: 6	Diff: 6

Corax, who are universally embarrassed by their Crinos forms, the Tengu take a perverse pleasure in using this form to terrify humans; admittedly, this is often the only pleasure they receive from this form, but damned if they aren't going to take advantage of it.

- **Corvid:** Although not much by way of combat skill, the Tengu's raven form is ideal for spying, scouting or swift flight. Many Tengu, even homids, enjoy the benefits of this form above all others.

GIFTS

The Tengu have gathered a great many Gifts from other sources, but have learned the hard way that what makes a reliable trick for other hengeyokai may work poorly for a Tengu. Their arsenal of most dependable Gifts is a mix of the tricks shared with their Western cousins and a few offerings given them by the Ministers of Heaven. In keeping with the First Mandate, the Tengu gladly winnow out the greatest mystic secrets — and often find themselves sharing them with their fellow hengeyokai, sometimes to their chagrin.

Generally speaking, Tengu begin play with a breed Gift, a Tengu Gift, and a common hengeyokai Gift — whether they are part of the Courts or not.

- **Crane's Wisdom (Level One)** — As the Philodox Gift: Truth of Gata.

- **Sweet Words (Level One)** — As the Homid Gift: Persuasion. This Gift is a Tengu favorite for spreading false rumors.

- **Voice of the Mimic (Level One)** — This Gift allows the Tengu to imitate any sound or voice she has heard; voices, accents, inflection, music, crashes, thunderbolts — anything. This Gift is taught by a Parrot-spirit.

System: The Gift requires a Perception + Expression roll, with the difficulty based on the complexity of the sound.

- **Courtly Speech (Level Two)** — As the Level Three common hengeyokai Gift.

- **Shoulder Cracker (Level Two)** — The Tengu always keep an eye open for portents of the future. This Gift, named after the scapulomancy practices of China, certainly helps that along. The Tengu with this Gift can read the future in the circling of birds, in the patterns of flame and smoke, or in almost anything. However, wereravens who use

this trick too frequently start misreading their surroundings, finding entirely false portents and believing them to be true. This Gift is taught by a Stormcrow.

System: For the Tengu to find an omen in her surroundings, the player rolls Wits + Occult (difficulty 6).

• **Slicing Feathers (Level Two)** — Although still not as potent warriors as the Hakken, Khan or Same-Bito, the Tengu have their ways of felling foes. This Gift is one of them. Usable only in Crinos form, *Slicing Feathers* makes the Tengu's feathers as hard and sharp

as a steel blade. In effect, his wings become weapons capable of parrying knives or claws, or opening flesh as easily as could a katana. The Gift is taught by a Metal elemental.

System: The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Stamina (difficulty 6); the feathers retain their keen edges and strength for one turn per success. While this Gift is in effect, the Tengu's primaries take on a metallic sheen, glistening faintly with a half-visible ghost-fire. Slicing Feathers inflict aggravated damage.

• **Yoshitsune's Sword (Level Three)** — The rumors of the Tengu's expertise at teaching the art of swordplay are fairly well-founded. In fact, with the use of this Gift,

a raven-shifter can increase a companion's sword skill to levels that the Tengu himself may well be thoroughly incapable of reaching. This Gift is taught by an Ancestor-spirit.

System: The Tengu must touch the recipient's fighting arm and the player makes a Wits + Melee roll, difficulty 5. If this succeeds, the Tengu may spend Gnosis points to raise his companion's Melee dice pool; every point thus spent adds a die to the dice pool for the duration of the scene.

• **Bloody Feather (Level Three)** — The Tengu with this trick in her arsenal is dangerous indeed. Using this Gift, she may pluck one of her own feathers and hurl it like a dart or *bo shuriken*. When hardened with the Gift: *Slicing Feathers*, these projectiles are unquestionably deadly. This Gift is taught by a Dragonfly- or Hummingbird-spirit.

System: The player must spend a point of Rage and then roll Dexterity + Melee (difficulty 5). The thrown feather does Dexterity +3 dice of damage. If the Tengu is currently





using the Gift: Slicing Feathers, this projectile does aggravated damage, punching through armor, flesh and bone with ease.

- **Airt Sense (Level Four)** — This Gift is the same as the spirit Charm; it's taught by any spirit that knows the selfsame Charm. This is a particularly favorite trick for sentai lucky enough to have a Tengu guide in their ranks.

System: The player must spend one Gnosis point and roll Perception + Occult (difficulty 7) for the Tengu to utilize Airt Sense. This Gift grants sufficient understanding of the Tapestry's threads to halve travel time through the spirit world.

- **Bloody Feather Storm (Level Four)** — The last-ditch tactic of many Tengu, this power rains down a veritable blizzard of razored feathers. Anyone in the target area beneath the Tengu, friend or foe alike, will likely be punctured by a deadly hail of knife-edged pinions. This Gift is taught, appropriately enough, by a Monsoon- or Hurricane-spirit.

System: The Tengu must be airborne, must spend three Gnosis and two Rage, and may take no other action that turn. The rain of feathers inflicts Dexterity + 4 damage dice over a fifteen-foot-square area; anyone within must score three successes on a Dexterity + Dodge roll (difficulty 8) to

escape or be automatically struck. Again, if the Tengu is using the Gift: Slicing Feathers at this time, the damage is aggravated.

- **Deceptive Demise (Level Five)** — As part of the great practice of deceiving humans into accepting the strangest things as "hengeyokai weaknesses," the Tengu sometimes had to fake their deaths—spectacularly. However, the trick they learned to do so also proved to be useful when dealing with persistent bakemono, Kumo or other enemies. Simply put, the Tengu who activates this Gift disappears in a cloud of feathers, leaving only a spatter of blood or some ashes on the ground to mark their passing. Although not always totally convincing (after all, it doesn't leave a body), it makes for a quick last-ditch exit when necessary—and the advent of heavy machine guns

Tengu Fighting Arts

Although the Tengu aren't particularly graceful in their "war form," they nonetheless strive to maintain some dignity on the battlefield. A Tengu in Crinos is fully capable of mauling opponents with his claws or a weapon; still, the wereravens of the East have carefully developed a few unique fighting maneuvers to give them a further edge in combat.

The most common trick in the Tengu arsenal is the Corax standby of the Eye Pluck (poetically and humorously referred to by Tengu sensei as "Crane Plucks the Frog from the River"). This attack is usable in Corvid or Crinos, and essentially entails plucking out an opponent's eyes with one's beak. The difficulty is 9 and the damage Strength + 2 aggravated; if the Tengu gets five successes on the attack roll and at least two Health Levels aren't soaked, the eye is torn out. Certain supernatural creatures can mend this damage; mortals and most bakemono are out of luck.

The other mainstay in Tengu martialry is a combat maneuver designed to take full advantage of the Slicing Feathers Gift. The formal name for this maneuver is Sun Swings Low; younger Tengu irreverently refer to it as "Hopping Death." The Tengu takes a short jump forward, twisting his torso to bring down both wings in a one-two slashing maneuver that traces a quick "X" across the target. The difficulty for this maneuver is 8, but if successful, the Tengu rolls a Strength + 3 damage dice pool twice, effectively getting two attacks for the price of one. A Tengu must have at least three dots in Melee to learn this maneuver from an instructor.

There are rumors of other tricks that the Tengu have mastered, particularly the fine points of swordplay and preying upon the body's weak points. However, these tales are unproven, as Tengu still prefer flight to battle. (Enterprising Storytellers may wish to adapt some of the maneuvers and styles in **World of Darkness: Combat** to represent the Tengu's carefully collected martial lore.)

has provided one more situation in which the theatrical demise can have the desired effect. This Gift is taught by a Fox-spirit.

System: The Tengu must spend a Gnosis point to activate this Gift; she also loses one Health Level to provide the blood or ashes appropriate to her faked death (unless the wound would kill her, in which case she's probably lost a convincing amount of blood anyway). Once the Gift is activated, the Tengu instantly and automatically steps sideways into the Mirror Lands, where she may appear in the form of her choosing. Most Tengu prefer to land in raven form and take to the Umbral air immediately, although a few enjoy hanging around to watch their foes scramble about and brag of their "victory."

• **Thieving Talons of the Magpie (Level Five)** — As the Ragabash Gift.

Rites

The Tengu can be fairly erratic creatures, and do not devote quite as much time to their rituals as do other hengeyokai. They regularly use the Rite of Talisman Dedication to keep their favorite trinkets with them in all forms, and the Rite of Becoming is also a favored standby. However, they are willing custodians of many of the Courts' less stringent Punishment Rites. Elder Tengu are masters of versions of the Stone of Scorn and Satire Rite, and are all too glad to perform them when necessary. Many an errant hengeyokai has been *shamed into a life of virtue* after watching the Tengu, wearing their ridiculous Crinos forms, hopping and squawking their way through a satirized version of the offender's deeds.

Rite of the Fetish Egg

Level Two

This is probably the most important rite a Tengu can learn; without it, there would be no future generations of wereravens. The Tengu pours some of his own spiritstuff into an Umbral spirit egg, where it grows and matures, eventually hatching into a full-fledged Tengu spirit and binding with the now-adolescent youngling.

System: This rite is always performed in the Umbra, and requires the investment of three permanent points of Gnosis — whether or not the rite succeeds. A homid Tengu may only bind the spirit egg to a raven chick, and vice versa. The rite requires another Tengu, of the same breed of the unknowing recipient, to serve as a witness.

This rite takes four hours to complete, and if interrupted at any point, the rite fails. Unsurprisingly, the Tengu often call in favors from other hengeyokai to guard the rite. At the end of the rite, the Tengu parent must roll permanent Gnosis (after subtracting the three points) against a diffi-

Stereotypes

• **Hakken** — It's hard to fault the Hakken for keeping the human traditions of their island kingdom. It's a fascinating world they live in; no matter what the others say.

• **Khan** — I've never had too much use for the Sunset Cats, but the tigers are rather better folk. If they reined in their pride so it was a little shorter than the treetops, they'd be wonderful company.

• **Kitsune** — The Mother's Little Emperors. They certainly have the air of spoiled children to them, although they make obeisances prettily enough.

• **Kumo** — To keep the Wheel turning smoothly through the next Age, I imagine that the Courts will have to cut a few tons of Kumo webbing from its axle.

• **Nagah** — It is a decidedly heavy burden to watch them so that others will not have to. They resent our attentions, but is it not foolish to expect the policemen to police themselves?

• **Nezumi** — We know more of what the Nezumi are truly planning than do our brethren. However, if we tell the Khan and Hakken the full truth, will we be interfering with the Nezumi's duty to the First Mandate? If we keep it to ourselves, are we disobeying the First Mandate? Such a test...

• **Same-Bito** — One more reason not to visit the Dragon King's court. These *chikusho* know how to do their job, and I am glad to leave them to it.

• **Zhong Lung** — Great and wise they are, although they know so much of the past and so little of the present. We talk often, for they may instruct us where we are ignorant and we may inform them of what they do not see.

• **Sunset People** — We know more of their ways than our brethren do, thanks to the tongues of our own Western cousins. If not for the duty that keeps us here, we would gladly fly to see their world for ourselves.

culty of 6. If successful, the fledgling will become a Tengu upon reaching adolescence — if the spirit egg isn't found and corrupted by then...

Quote

Our cousins miss so much when blinded by the boundaries that the humans have set for themselves. How can anyone dismiss such a diversity of beliefs and ideas? If only they could see the Middle Kingdom from above, they would gasp at the wonder of it all.

Zhong Lung

The Five Eggs of Si Wang Mu

Listen, children, to the story of Si Wang Mu, the great mother, who carried the first eggs of our kind from the Dragon Kings in the Halls of Blessed Purity to this world, a deed ordained by Lord Tiandi himself. Listen to the tale of the winds and seasons which we all share.

Si Wang Mu took the five precious eggs to the lush and abundant Yangtze Valley in the Time of Beauty. She watched the eggs and kept them safe and warm. Through a full turn of seasons she protected our ancestors. And as spring once more came, the eggs opened. The young ones, the tiny Zhong Lung, ran free and happy on the river's banks. Si Wang Mu played with the children, whispering secrets of the world. Then when she heard the summons of the Dragon Kings, she made ready to depart, calling the children to her.

"Favored children, hear me. For now you must choose for yourselves a season and a wind to call your own before I depart this world. This is my gift to you, wisest and firstborn."

The eldest, whose turquoise skin sparkled in the sun, said, "Mother, I choose the springtime in which we were born, when the east wind blows with promise of renewal."

"Then you will be Tung Chun, my son. Blue and green will be your hues, and the warrior's trade your craft, as you are bold and brave," replied Si Wang Mu.

The second-born, with skin like gold, spoke next. "Mother, I choose the summer season now upon us, with the south wind's warm breezes of change."

"Then you will be Nam Hsia, my daughter, with yellow as your color. You will be the peacemaker and advisor to your warrior brother," said Si Wang Mu.

The third-born, his skin like pearl, said, "Mother, I love the cool breezes of autumn that come from the west with a hint of darkness."

"Then you will be Sai Chau, my son. White will be your hue, and your path shall be that of the dragons themselves as you seek the words of sprits in all the worlds," answered Si Wang Mu.

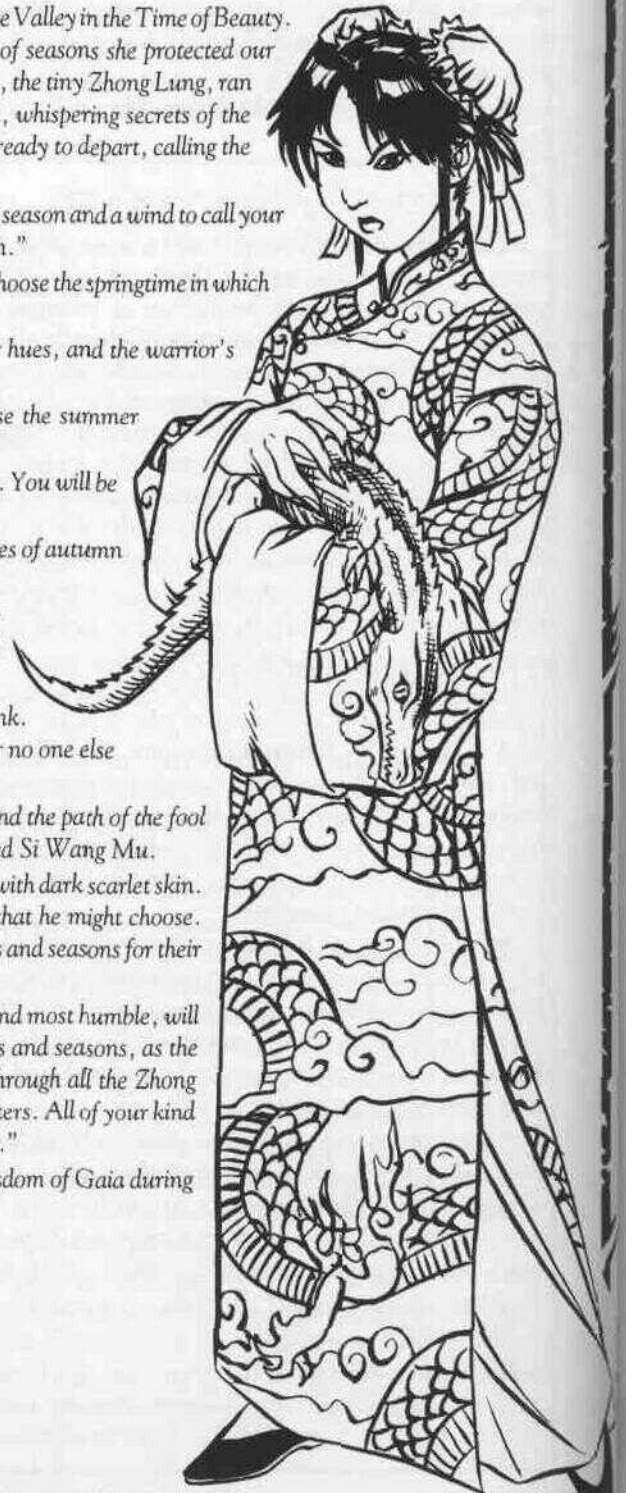
The fourth-born spoke then, her obsidian skin shining like rare ink. "Mother, the winter's chill and the icy breath of the north bring me joy, for no one else loves them as I do."

"Then you will be Pei Tung, my daughter, with black as your color and the path of the fool as your own. You will show your brethren the wisdom of laughter," smiled Si Wang Mu.

The four firstborn stared at their brother, the youngest and fifth born, with dark scarlet skin. His large eyes filled with tears, for there were no more winds or seasons that he might choose. "Mother," he said, "my honorable brothers and sisters have taken the winds and seasons for their own. What may be left for me?"

Si Wang Mu held her arms aloft to the heavens. "For you, youngest and most humble, will be the task of the revered scholar. You will have mastery over all the winds and seasons, as the heart's scarlet blood flows through the body, so your essence permeates through all the Zhong Lung. You have marked them forever as sages, scribes, singers and talemasters. All of your kind will carry memories of the ancestors until the Wheel of Ages begins again."

And that is how the Zhong Lung came into this world to guard the wisdom of Gaia during all seasons and with all breaths of the winds.



Zhong Lung Lexicon

- Aiyi:** The matchmaking aunts of the Zhong Lung.
Archid: Crinos form.
Chi'lung: Female Zhong Lung; they have feathers and long noses.
Ching-tu: Groups of female Zhong Lung, gathering for the protection of mothers and their young.
Chuming: The inside knowing of things, a Zhong Lung specialty.
Draco: Reptile breed.
Kiao: Zhong Lung of Rank One.
Kiao-lung: Zhong Lung of Rank Three.
K'iulung: Male Zhong Lung; they have horns, whiskers and pearls on their throats.
Lung: Zhong Lung of Rank Two.
Nam Hsia: The Philodox auspice.
P'an-lung: Zhong Lung of Rank Five.
Pei Tung: The Ragabash auspice.
Sai Chau: The Theurge auspice.
Tung Chun: The Ahroun auspice.
Ying-lung: Zhong Lung of Rank Four.

Description

Honored and revered by many *shen*, the Zhong Lung carry the sacred charge of protecting Gaia's memories. They have borne this duty since the Ebon Dragon and the Scarlet Queen breathed life into the world during the Age of Beauty. The Zhong Lung believe themselves the most ancient of the hengeyokai, first among other shapechangers in the seeking of balance and pure thought. Their forefathers were the Dragon Kings, and the image of these wise and terrible creatures lives on within the Zhong Lung. Like their relatives, the Mokolé, Zhong Lung also honor the Sun, believing sparks from that ancient celestial fireball burn within the Dragon Kings' hearts. Even now the Sun warms and nourishes the Zhong Lung and their eggs.

The Middle Dragons are perhaps the hengeyokai most unlike their Western cousins. All Mokolé have great ties to the past, and literally dream their war forms into being, remembering the time of dinosaurs, the Mokolé dream of war forms that echo the giant beasts of long ago. However, the Zhong Lung have been heavily changed by their time in the Middle Kingdom. Their dreams also reach into the past, across the Wheel of Ages—but where the Mokolé find their strength in the primal power of their ancestors, the Zhong Lung have been affected by the dreams of the great Dragon Princes themselves.

Male Zhong Lung are called *k'iulung*, and in their Archid forms they have drooping whiskers like a catfish, long horns and pearls under their chins. The *chi'lung* are the female Zhong Lung, and while they lack the splendid horns and pearls of the males while in Archid form, they possess

long, keen noses and bright plumes of feathers on their heads. Both males and females in Archid have tails; dependent on the dreamed-for form, Zhong Lung can appear quite different from one another. Even while in Homid or Suchid forms, Zhong Lung wear an air of nobility and cunning. Those who behold the Zhong Lung in Archid react not only in fear but also in awe. Moreover, unless they make a successful Willpower roll at difficulty 6, other hengeyokai suffer a +1 penalty when making Stamina + Primal-Urge rolls to change forms. This is the impact the sight of these ancient hengeyokai have on other Changing Breeds of the Middle Kingdom.

The Zhong Lung are masters of *chuming*, the inside knowing of things. They look on the outside for first impressions, but more importantly, they peer into the depths of the heart and soul to discover truths. Many of these hengeyokai are ancient by Western standards, some due to Gifts, others due to secrets of Chinese mysticism.

If these noble creatures have a flaw, though, it lies in their naiveté and seemingly dispassionate regard for day to day, mundane affairs. Certainly they are creatures of passion, sharing in the same Rage as all the Changing Breeds; an angry Zhong Lung should signal the way to run for their lives. Yet in regard to the dull affairs of humans and beasts, like stock markets, hunting and technology, the Zhong Lung stand apart and outside. Their own Kin and even other *shen* sometimes find them utterly detached from the everyday workings of the world.

Much more common in past centuries, today the Zhong Lung are few in number, homids being more common than dracos. Most live in China and Tibet; the Yangtze River is a natural habitat for alligators, with crocodiles in Malaysia and India. Indonesia is the native home of the Komodo dragon, largest of all reptiles. Vietnam, Cambodia and Hawaii also provide abodes for some Zhong Lung. The goal of these hengeyokai remains as it always has been: bearing the memories of Gaia through the cycles of the Wheel of Ages.

Organization

Male Zhong Lung, *k'iulung*, often live alone rather than in packs or tribes. They break their solitary existence only to confer with other beings, protect their homes or mate with their consorts. The Zhong Lung females, *chi'lung*, usually live in small groups of three or four called *ching-tu*, for the protection of the pregnant mothers or their young. Female Kinfolk form similar groups, but these generally include an older Female Zhong Lung called an *aiyi*, or aunt. The aunt, generally past her own childbearing years, holds a highly respected role, for she will guard the pregnant females or eggs until the young ones come forth. Like Garou, Zhong Lung offspring are born according to the breed form of the mother. A homid Zhong Lung or human Kinfolk will bear a human child; a draco Zhong Lung or reptilian Kinfolk will

Auspices

Name	Usable Gifts	Season	Wind	Color	Beginning Rage
Tung Chun	Ahroun	Spring	East	blue/green	4
Nam Hsia	Philodox	Summer	South	Yellow	3
Sai Chau	Theurge	Autumn	West	White	2
Pei Tung	Ragabash	Winter	North	Black	1

lay eggs. Unlike their Mokolé cousins, Zhong Lung don't often mate across breeds.

Mating is a highly ritualized event among both dracos and homids. The *aiyi* serves as a negotiator and go between for the homids; the male, Kinfolk or Zhong Lung, must weave tales and gather wisdom in order to impress his prospective mate or the *aiyi* respectively. Females by nature are quite choosy and demanding. The *k'ulung* may have to fight other male contenders, though the fight is often in terms of who can provide the most enticing story or interesting artifact. The situation is different among dracos where bloody trial by combat is far more common. In general, the Zhong Lung prefer to resolve differences through riddle contests and the like, but in no way should this be taken as a sign of weakness. Both male and female Zhong Lung are more than up to the task of trouncing any creatures that provoke their ire (including each other if necessary), but refuse to attempt to injure one another in the interest of mating.

The *k'ulung* will spend whatever time necessary with his mate before returning to his own home. The *aiyi* invites his return when the children are born so he can pay further respect to their mother and greet his offspring — the Zhong Lung's parental instincts are as strong as those of their Mokolé cousins. A Sai Chau Zhong Lung will often bless the children and show them their first glimpse of the universe. These Zhong Lung Theurges help the children make their first journeys on the crossroads of the dragon lines of Yin and Yang.

Traits

No other shapeshifter remembers precisely how or why it came to pass, but long ago the Zhong Lung turned from the path of following the Sun alone and instead devoted themselves to the cyclical patterns of the seasons. More than any other hengeyokai, the Zhong Lung are tied to their homeland and have been greatly altered by the passage of time under Heaven's law. One of the most significant differences is that among themselves, the Zhong Lung follow four auspices similar to those of the West, each linked with a wind and season. No auspice corresponds directly with the Garou Galliards, as all Zhong Lung are assumed to serve as sages and songkeepers. Consequently, Zhong Lung may use most Galliard Gifts. The Sai Chau consider their special duty to be the guarding and care of dragon nests. When

joining sentai, the Zhong Lung naturally try to harmonize their auspice roles, directions and elements; considering that the Middle Dragons were pioneers of the Way of Emerald Virtue, few would argue with them.

Zhong Lung may purchase all Backgrounds save Past Life; Pure Breed is a common Background, while Allies and Kinfolk are more rare. They also have access to the ancestral memory background of Mnesis. In essence, the Zhong Lung may seek wisdom from the past by falling into a trance and rolling Intelligence + Rituals, difficulty 8. Mnesis 1 allows the Zhong Lung to remember the events of the Fifth Age, Mnesis 2 the latter part of the Fourth Age, Mnesis 3 the early part of the Fourth Age, and so on. For more particulars, see the *Werewolf Players Guide*.

Zhong Lung regenerate damage as do Garou, but as creatures of both Sun and Moon, are equally vulnerable to gold and silver. Zhong Lung prefer basking in the sun's rays while healing their wounds; this is a way of honoring the sun's lifegiving warmth and beauty. They speak the Dragon's Tongue common to all Mokolé, although the Sunset Dragons would likely find their accent quite strange. Zhong Lung begin play with 4 Willpower.

The Zhong Lung gain rank as do their Garou equivalents; for example, a Nam Hsia needs one Glory, five Honor and one Wisdom to attain Rank Two, just like a Philodox. All auspices have the same five ranks: Kiao (Rank One), Lung (Rank Two), Kiao-lung (Rank Three), Ying-lung (Rank Four) and P'an-lung (Rank Five).

Breeds

The Zhong Lung have two breeds: homid and draco. Like their Mokolé cousins, the Zhong Lung dream their dragonforms into being before the time of their First Change, and meris are incapable of surviving this dreaming stage.

- **Homid:** Zhong Lung born of a human parent. Each homid Zhong Lung has only one Suchid form taking the appearance of whatever reptile is prevalent in his heritage. For example, Mayani is a Indonesian homid Zhong Lung, and all his hengeyokai forebears have appeared as Komodo dragons in their reptilian forms. Mayani too will become a Komodo dragon in his Suchid form.

Beginning Gnosis: 2

- **Draco:** Zhong Lung born of a reptilian parent (alligator, crocodile or Komodo dragon). The offspring's Suchid form is the same as her reptilian parent's form.

Beginning Gnosis: 4

Archid Form Characteristics

When designing a Zhong Lung's Archid form, use Gnosis as "points" with which to buy characteristics for the form. For example, a *chi'lung* who begins the game with Gnosis 5 can have five "Gnosis points' worth" of characteristics from the chart below. (Some characteristics "cost" two Gnosis, these are noted below.) All Zhong Lung may use the Bite and Claw maneuvers in Archid form; these do the standard amount of damage, unless the Middle Dragon has dreamt of the more vicious Long Teeth and Terrible Claws. As the Zhong Lung are still essentially Mokolé, the Storyteller may allow players to choose the dinosaurlike characteristics available to Western werealligators, making for truly intriguing Archid forms.

Naturally, the form dreamt during the Rite of Passage's dreaming is the one the Zhong Lung lives with forever; players may not take extra characteristics when raising Gnosis with experience, and it is most barbarous and inauspicious to even ask.

- **Armor:** +2 Soak (+3 for 2 Gnosis). This takes the form of glistening scales.
- **Bladed Tail:** Str. +2 Tail Lash.
- **Color Change:** Difficulty to spot Zhong Lung (when hidden) rises by 1; this can be taken more than once.
- **Constricting Coils:** +3 dice to immobilize an opponent.
- **Fiery Pearl:** +3 to Intimidation rolls versus Kuei-jin, servants of the Wyrn or superstitious *shen*.
- **Fins:** From the dreams of the lords of Umi. Fins double swimming speed.
- **Gills:** Fully amphibious. This is also a characteristic of the lords of Umi.
- **Grasping Hands:** Has normal manual Dexterity in Archid form.
- **Horn (k'ulung):** Str. +3 Head Butt.
- **Huge Size (k'ulung):** Stamina +1, +2 damage Body Slam or Overbear. This can be taken more than once: some Zhong Lung reach 100' lengths in Archid form. This also grants one additional Health Level each time it is taken.
- **Long Teeth:** Str. +3 Bite.
- **Poison Sacs:** If bite does damage, victim suffers an additional four dice of aggravated damage, soakable separately.
- **Resplendent Crest (chi'lung):** App: 3 and +1 Charisma in this form.
- **Royal Crest (chi'lung):** +2 to any social rolls involving Zhong Lung, Mokolé and Nagah.
- **Terrible Claws:** Str +3 Claw.
- **Upright Walking:** Enables tool use in Archid form.
- **Webbed Feet:** These allow a Zhong Lung to swim fast and to walk more easily on soft mud. They impose an additional -1 penalty to Dexterity when in Archid form.

Forms

Instead of five forms like the Garou, the Zhong Lung have three: Homid, Archid and Suchid. However, the resplendent power of their Archid form makes other forms unnecessary at best and overkill at most.

• **Homid:** No change to Traits; the Zhong Lung may be from any human stock, although they humbly prefer breeding with peasants, fishermen and the salt of the earth.

• **Archid:** Nowhere else is the powerful spiritual effect of the Middle Kingdom more evident than in the Middle Dragons' Archid form. As the Zhong Lung undergoes the Rite of Passage, she falls into a dreaming state where she dreams of her own true "dragon" self. Where the Western Mokolé tap into the primal well-springs of their dinosaur heritage, the Zhong Lung tap into the dreams of the Wani, the great Dragon Princes of Heaven.

As a result, the Zhong Lung's Archid form often looks very much like the traditional Eastern dragon. Although many blend the draconian features of the Middle Kingdom with dinosaur aspects accessible through Mnesis, many others appear purely dragonlike. Fire like sunlight burns in the Zhong Lung's eyes, and even the bravest of centipedes falls away in fright.

• **Suchid:** In this form, the Zhong Lung takes on the appearance of her reptilian ancestors, whether a saltwater crocodile, Chinese alligator or Komodo dragon. Crocodiles and alligators run at half speed, although their swimming speed is equal to Homid land speed; monitor lizards are adequate swimmers, but run as quickly as a human.

Gifts

The Zhong Lung, already blessed with great power, begin play with three Gifts in any combination. They may choose these from the Zhong Lung Gifts below or from their matching Garou auspices; for example, the Tung Chun may choose from Garou Ahroun Gifts. Any Zhong Lung may also use Galliard Gifts, and those who follow the Way of Emerald Virtue may choose a common hengeyokai Gift. Note that several of the Gifts are taught by ancestors or by servants of Tiandi or Si Wang Mu.

Form Statistics

Archid	Suchid		
	(alligator)	(crocodile)	(monitor)
Str: +4	Str: +2	Str: +3	Str: +0
Sta: +4	Sta: +3	Sta: +3	Sta: +2
Dex: +0	Dex: -1	Dex: -2	Dex: +0
App: 0			
Man: -4	Man: -4	Man: -4	Man: -2



• **Chi'ih Ming (Level One)** — Chi'ih ming is an old word meaning gasbag, and with this Gift, a Zhong Lung may walk on air at a normal pace. A Bird-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Stamina + Athletics, difficulty 6. The Zhong Lung may move at a normal pace while walking in the air, but cannot run.

• **Dragon's Milk (Level One)** — As the Theurge Gift: Mother's Touch, save that the Zhong Lung must mingle his own blood with that of the wounded. A Water-spirit is the usual teacher.

• **Shou (Level One)** — As the Level Three Philodox Gift; *Wisdom of the Ancient Ways*. Shou is the wisdom

of ancestors; invoking this Gift provides tidbits of advice and information (one per success on the Gnosis roll). This is a common gift among all Zhong Lung, taught by an Ancestor-spirit.

• **Breaking the Tomorrow Wall (Level Two)** — This is a basic soothsaying Gift, taught by a Crane-spirit.

System: After the Zhong Lung burns a bird feather, the player spends one Gnosis point and rolls Perception + Enigmas, difficulty 6. The Zhong Lung can then peer into the future and obtain one general fact or insight per success rolled.

• **Clap of Thunder (Level Two)** — As the Shadow Lord Gift. The Great Dragons are revered as bringers of rain and thunder, and the Middle Dragons share in their power.

• **Send the Dream (Level Three)** — As the Metis Gift: Mental Speech.

• **The Dragon's Tongue (Level Three)** — This Gift calls down a strike of lightning on a specific opponent.

System: The player spends a Willpower point and rolls Strength + Intimidation, difficulty 6. Each success inflicts one die of aggravated damage on the chosen target.

• **Anger of the Wani (Level Four)** — As the Level Five Wendigo Gift: Invoke the Spirits of the Storm; however, upon using this Gift, the Zhong Lung falls into a day-long sleep, offering his dreams to the Dragon Princes as thanks.

• **Harmony of the Soul (Level Four)** — As the Children of Gaia Gift: Serenity. The Zhong Lung often use this Gift to keep peace at their courts, particularly when "honored visitors" are present.

• **Sleep of Si Wang Mu (Level Five)** — A rare and treasured Gift taught by one of Si Wang Mu's servitors, this Gift allows the Zhong Lung to fall into hibernating sleep in which he adds years to his natural lifespan.

System: The player spends a permanent Gnosis point then rolls Stamina + Enigmas, difficulty 7. The Zhong Lung falls asleep for three days per success. Each three day stint of sleep adds a dozen years to his lifetime.

• **A Thousand Secret Faces (Level Five)** — While willing to share sage advice on many subjects, use of this Gift is a closely guarded secret among the Zhong Lung. While it's not true shapeshifting, the Gift bestows on the user an almost perfect illusion of her choosing. Even mystics and other Zhong Lung find it impossible to peer

through the facade without the use of supernatural powers (and even then the difficulty rises to 9). The Zhong Lung may take on any human appearance, with favorites being young maidens, children and old men. In this way, she can gather information and secrets unsuspected. An Ancestor-spirit teaches this Gift.

System: The user spends one point each of Willpower and Gnosis, then rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge, difficulty 7. The deception lasts for one day per success, although the Zhong Lung may dispel the illusion at any time.

Rites

Rites of Accord and Mysticism are common among the Zhong Lung. However, their most sacred and revered rites occur at the changes of the seasons. Summer brings the Rite of Nanfeng (south wind), fall the Rite of Xifeng (west wind), winter the Rite of Beifeng (north wind) and spring the Rite of Dongfeng (east wind). On the New Year is the Rite of Renewal, celebrating another complete turn of seasons. Each seasonal rite pays homage to the ascendancy of a new auspice and theme; activities involve honoring ancestors, quests for new knowledge, music, dance and some sort of deference to Tiandi. Minor rites honoring the Sun also take place from time to time.

Quote

Once we made the mistake of abandoning our duty as instructors. Never again. All the children of the Emerald Mother are welcome to sit at our talons and learn the wisdom of the Cycle — should they have the patience to do so.

Stereotypes

• **Hakken** — Their gaze falls not across the whole of the Wheel, but rather on a single spoke. It is not well for the Mother's warriors to be so blind.

• **Khan** — In the Age of Testing, they were our adversaries, noble of countenance yet thirsting for blood. Have they learned temperance since? I think not.

• **Kitsune** — Tricksters all. Be wary of the antics of the Emerald Mother's youngest; what lore they share is dubious at best and a clever lie at worst.

• **Kumo** — Most spin their webs in the Wyrms' coils, so we must be wary of their intentions. However, they do have unique insights and wisdom that is valuable.

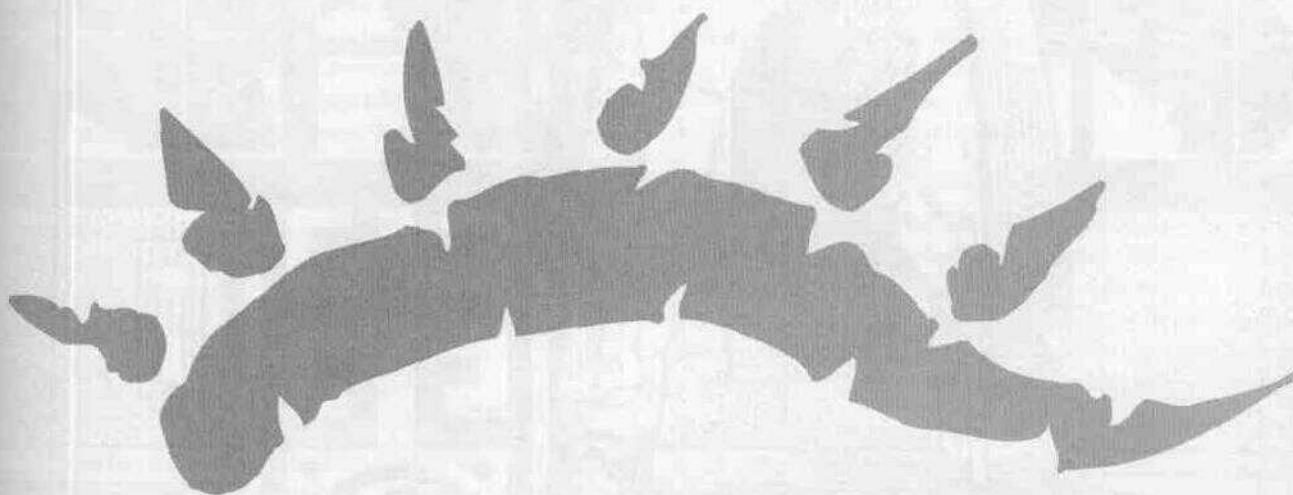
• **Nagah** — They have oiled the Wheel's axle with rivers of blood — both of others and of their own.

• **Nezumi** — These quick runners and stealers of secrets are clever and useful. A kindness to them is usually repaid a thousandfold ways.

• **Same-Bito** — Despite our tutelage, many remain unrefined and ill-mannered. Still, we come from the same waters and share mutual respect for Tiandi, Lord of Thunder. We must continue to set a good example.

• **Tengu** — Their battle lore is mighty and like the Nezumi, they are keepers of interesting secrets. Yet many still serve the Hakken, a bond we find unsettling.

• **Sunset People** — Many scorn us as dotards of a lost age. We would welcome their lore keepers as fellow scholars, if only they could open their eyes and truly see.



Chapter Four: Weapons and Antagonists

Susano Orbatos: *Damn it! This is beginning to PISS ME OFF! Does this place have a never-ending supply of WEIRD STUFF!?*

— Masamune Shirow, *Orion*

Roleplaying a hengeyokai isn't just a matter of putting a Garou in a kung fu tunic and lantern pants. The differences in ideology aside, the Courts have evolved separately from Western shapeshifters, dramatically so. Their mentality, their mysticism, their very powers have been influenced by a spirit world united by Umbral courts and isolated from Western spiritual influences. Although all things were one during the First Age, they have become rather distinct since then.

The following are rules to help capture the distinct arsenal of the hengeyokai, as well as to supply a few antagonists for games focusing on the Eastern shapechangers. Although there is literally no way to represent centuries of spiritual development across an entire continent, these should give sufficient inspiration to get you started.

Merits and Flaws

Perfect Protocol (1 point Merit)

You have a natural talent for dealing with other *shen*; you were born to take tea with the lords of the *hsien*, and you can politely address even the most hideous of Kuei-jin in a highly pleasing fashion. The difficulty of your Empathy, Expression and Etiquette rolls when dealing with other *shen* in a courtly fashion is reduced by 2.

Auspicious Birth (2 point Merit)

Fate smiled upon your parents, and you were born under the proverbial lucky star. You are considered lucky to have around, and are a natural choice to lead a sentai. Once per session, you may nominate one roll as "lucky" — on that roll, you may keep any 10s that come up on the dice as successes and then reroll those particular dice to get more successes, just like a specialization. If you're already specialized in the action in question, you may reroll both nines and 10s, keeping the successes for both.

Rival Clan (1 point Flaw)

For some reason, one of the other factions of shapeshifters at your court has an intense dislike for you. Perhaps the local Kitsune find you insufferably barbaric, or perhaps the Same-Bito think you are a poor excuse for a warrior. Whatever the reason, your Social rolls when dealing with this other Changing Breed (which may even be your own) are at +2 difficulty.

Inauspicious Birth (2 point Flaw)

You live in interesting times. The hour of your birth was marked by a poor omen, and your life has been marked by it. You are considered bad luck to have around, and superstitious hengeyokai may blame even the smallest misfortunes

Martial Arts and Shapeshifters

The martial arts are a rather thorny issue when dealing with hengeyokai. They are very much a part of the East — more to the point, they are a significant factor in many stories told about the East. However, to put it simply, the hengeyokai just don't bother with martial arts all that much. Martial arts were designed as a form of unarmed combat — and the teeth and claws of the average war form make hengeyokai far from unarmed.

The only martial art developed for shapeshifters has been Kailindo; only the Stargazers have been able to master their Rage sufficiently to develop an unarmed fighting style that doesn't rely on tooth and claw. What's more, Kailindo is expressly designed to work with the five forms of the Garou; Bastet and the like are more or less out of luck when it comes to learning the arts. (See the **Werewolf Players Guide** and **Stargazers Tribebook** for full details on the Way of Kai Lin.)

Of course, there's nothing to prevent a hengeyokai from learning a human martial art and practicing the style in Homid or Glabro (or the equivalent) forms. Naturally, martial arts in Crinos is out of the question, as disproportionate as the war form is to the human shape (to say nothing of the more exotic battle forms such as the Zhong Lung's Archid or the Kumo's Lilian).

Storytellers interested in detailed use of martial arts in their chronicles may want to have a look at **World of Darkness: Combat**, for the most exhaustive look at fighting arts in the World of Darkness. In addition, **Kindred of the East** presents an alternate system that is a good mix between detail and unobtrusiveness. Whatever works best.

on your mere presence. Once per session, the Storyteller will nominate one of your rolls as "unlucky" — on that roll, any "2s" you roll count as "1s"; they not only fail the roll, but they cancel out successes. It is possible to take both this Flaw and the Merit: Auspicious Birth; in such a case, you are such a mixed blessing that your comrades are probably very worried about how you'll cause the balance to shift next.

Angry Ancestor (2 point Flaw)

One of your Ancestor-spirits has been watching your actions since your birth, and frankly, she is most displeased. Perhaps you've erred against an ideal she held sacred — *perhaps you simply don't live up to her impossibly high standards*. Whatever the reason, she refuses to quietly leave you be and come only when called; she intends to place you back on the proper path, whether you like it or not.

As long as your ancestor is displeased with your actions, she will use her pull in the spirit world to hinder you. The difficulties of performing all rites are increased by 1, and the

Storyteller may select other times for inauspicious events that she has... arranged to strike. What's more, if you have Past Life, she may sometimes take over your body and attempt to do your tasks "in a proper fashion." She doesn't necessarily want to kill or endanger you — she simply wants you to amend your behavior in some manner that the Storyteller determines. This Flaw can be bought off through roleplaying and spending experience, but appeasing your ancestor should be a tricky effort indeed.

Gifts



The following Gifts are shared freely among the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother. However, they aren't fully accessible to outsiders; one must follow the Way of Emerald Virtue to receive such teachings. Hengeyokai pledged to their Breeds may still be offered these Gifts in return for services offered to the Courts, but as a general rule, not every shapeshifter in the East will necessarily know that many of these Gifts.

Starting characters who are allowed to choose from the communal hengeyokai list may instead choose an auspice Gift in keeping with their role (Lanterns may choose from Philodox Gifts; Fists, Ahroun; Mirrors, Theurge; Leaves, Ragabash; Pillars, Galliard).

- **Create Element (Level One)** — As the Metis Gift. Hengeyokai in tune with the appropriate elements (see page 57) can summon "moon" as an element; this manifests as pure moonlight, providing illumination and often some measure of comfort.

- **Mindspoke (Level One)** — As the Galliard Gift. This Gift is commonly shared among newcomers to the Courts as the most basic form of universal communication.

- **Sense Imbalance (Level Two)** — This Gift allows the hengeyokai to focus her perceptions on the balance between the Three, discerning any local imbalances of energies — whether those of the Triad, or those of Yin, Yang and Yomi. She may, for instance, learn that the Weaver is particularly strong in one area, or that the taint of Yomi is oddly absent from one hovel in the midst of a slum. This Gift is taught by any spirit servant of the Emerald Mother.

System: The player rolls Perception + Occult; like the Gift: Sense Wyrms, the difficulty depends on the strength of the relative forces in the area. Kuei-jin smell of the strongest Chi in their bodies, and those with powerful P'o have a decided Yomi taint to them.

- **Blaze Talons (Level Two)** — One of the war arts of the hengeyokai, this Gift enables the shapeshifter to ignite his hands or paws (or even wings, in the case of Crinos-form Tengu with Razor Feathers), granting his blows the ferocity of a wildfire. Shapeshifters using Blaze Talons are often wondrous to behold, as their strikes trace whirling patterns of flame around them. This Gift is taught by a Flame-spirit.

System: The player spends a point of Gnosis and makes a Strength + Primal-Urge roll, difficulty 6. The flame lasts for two turns per success. The flame adds one damage die to

all physical strikes, and can cause vampires to flee in instinctive fear. Even if the shapeshifter using this Gift is striking with fists, his damage is aggravated.

Same-Bito, Nagah and Zhong Lung must learn this Gift as Level Three; their deep ties to water preclude any greater affinity to flame.

• **Courtly Speech (Level Two)** — When acting as an envoy, *hengeyokai* find it only polite to speak in the tongue of one's host. This Gift allows a *hengeyokai* to speak any of the Changing Breed tongues as if he were a native. The nuances of a Hakken growl, the pheromonal cues of the Kumo, even the electrical speech of the Same-Bito — this Gift grants mastery of all. However, it does not grant knowledge of written symbols, nor does it work on human language. The Gift is taught by a Crane-spirit.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Linguistics, difficulty 7; only one success is required for fluency in the desired tongue. The fluency lasts for a scene.

• **Waking Dream of Unity (Level Three)** — This Gift was devised when the simpler Gift of Mindspeak proved to be too inefficient for regular courtly use. It, too, places a group of *hengeyokai* into silent communication by sending waking dreams into their minds, but is much easier to utilize.

Most Gai'nans know this

Gift, and use it to communicate with the entire court at a time. It is taught by a *Chimerling* or spirit official serving the Ministers of Heaven.

System: The *hengeyokai* need only spend one Willpower point to place up to thirty characters as needed into silent communication; of course, all participants must be present for this. Everyone included in the dream can act with some clarity; their dice pools are reduced by only one die. The *hengeyokai* can bring unwilling subjects into the dream, too, but must make a Manipulation + Expression (difficulty of the target's Willpower); if this roll fails, the dream ends.

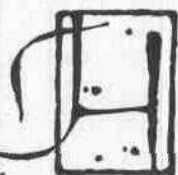
• **Exorcism (Level Four)** — As the Level Three Theurge Gift. The Yama Kings frequently send their spirit minions to plague the *hengeyokai* courts; as a result, the knowledge of banishing evil spirits is shared freely among the beast-children.

• **Part the Wall (Level Four)** — This Gift is shared among *hengeyokai* who cannot normally step sideways: notably, the Khan, Nagah, Zhong Lung and Same-Bito. It allows them to walk into the Mirror Lands as easily as their more fortunate cousins do.

System: The *hengeyokai* can now step sideways normally, just as *Garou* can. This ability becomes automatic once the *hengeyokai* learns this Gift.



Rites



engeyokai are as ritualistic as their Western brethren; perhaps even moreso. The Courts are very reverent towards the spirit world and their Ancestor-spirits in particular. Furthermore, as the alliance of the various Breeds is often a tenuous thing at best, rites serve as a shared ritual to unify the various shapeshifters of a court. It matters not whether one is Khan or Nezumi, Tengu or Same-Bito — when the seer calls for a rite, all present partake in the spiritual communion.

The following rites are representative of the ritual lore of the Courts. Most are commonly taught to whomever wishes to learn them; however, there are a few forbidden rituals that, although not openly shared (or even always Gaian), are quintessentially hengeyokai in some way or another.

Rites of Accord

Accord is a very important matter to the hengeyokai, as reflected by the Mandates. The Courts teach their versions of the Rite of Contrition and Rite of Cleansing to as many hengeyokai as they can, believing these rites to be of utmost value. The Courts have their own version of the Rite of Renunciation called the Rite of the Great Burden used when hengeyokai wish to turn from the service of their Breed to the service of the Courts or vice versa. This is also used when a Western shapechanger is accepted into the service of the Courts.

Rite of Feeding the Ghosts

Level One

This basic rite calls on one's ancestors to bestow their blessing from above, and offers up a sacrifice for their welfare. It is particularly popular among the Courts, and few hengeyokai beyond Rank Two or so are without knowledge of it. This rite is always performed in breed form, and almost always alone, although siblings or other relatives may honor their mutual ancestors in a communal rite. The ritemaster must make an appropriate offering of food to the ancestors — a Nezumi would offer plenty of rice, while a Kitsune would offer fine sake, candied sweetmeats and several fresh-killed rabbits. The hengeyokai then chants, howls, sings, dances or the like, whichever is most appropriate, while waiting for her Ancestor-spirits to devour the food. Although the food does not actually disappear if the rite is a success, the ritemaster's ancestors do consume the lingering spiritstuff of the sacrifice; anyone so callow as to eat the offering post-rite finds it bland, tasteless and without any real nutritional value.

System: The ritemaster rolls Charisma + Rituals, difficulty 8. If this rite is successful, then for the next three days, the ritemaster gains -1 to the difficulty of Past Life rolls or any other die rolls that involve seeking wisdom or guidance from Ancestor-spirits. What's more, this may be a way for a hengeyokai laboring under an inauspicious burden to re-

ceive a little more luck from the spirits; the Storyteller may determine what form this aid, if any, takes.

Rite of the Second Face

Level Two

This rite declares to the spirit world that necessity decrees the hengeyokai must walk a different path. Like the Garou Rite of Renunciation, it is performed when a shapeshifter must change his auspice to one better suited to his current role. Most commonly, this is when a hengeyokai must give up the role of a sentai member and become a courtier, but circumstances might necessitate other changes.

Aptly enough, this rite is always performed at a crossroads of some sort — even the crossing of two paths in a jungle or two currents in the sea suffices. The supplicant pleads for the spirits' blessing in his new role, and pledges renewed loyalty to the Beast Courts. At rite's end, his companions or fellow courtiers lead him away from the crossroads and welcome him to his new task.

System: The changing of auspice is not something to be taken lightly, but the hengeyokai know it can be necessary. As such, the recipient loses no Renown, unless his Renown totals would place him a Rank higher in his new role; in that case, he loses just enough to put him midway through his current Rank. For instance, Thanh is a Rank Three Lantern who must take up the role of the Fist; he has earned 9 Glory, 7 Virtue and 3 Wisdom from his very martial exploits. Upon the rite's completion, he loses 2 Glory, 2 Virtue and 1 Wisdom — but the circumstances that necessitated his change make it likely he'll regain the Renown soon enough.

Changing one's auspice more than once is inauspicious in the extreme; three chances are more than any loyal servant of the Emerald Mother should need.

Caern Rites

The Eastern shapechangers value caerns just as highly as do the Westerners. And with all the Wyrms-beasts, Chi-thirsty Kuei-jin, power-hungry Namebreakers and rogue hengeyokai trying to seize dragon nests for their own, the Asian beast-folk spend plenty of time and resources trying to keep the Emerald Mother's sacred places from being defiled. The Courts know their own versions of all Garou Caern Rites save The Badger's Burrow; although the actual specifics of the rituals might be unfamiliar to a Sunset Person, the end effects are very much the same.

Death Rites

Generally speaking, it is not for a court to ritually mourn the loss of one of their own. Death Rites are largely left to the Changing Breed in question, for nobody wishes to anger the Court of Ancestors by the improper burial of a descendant. As a result, each Changing Breed has their own highly stylized Death Rites, from the poetically formal funerals of the Hakken to the Nagah's eloquently simple consignment to the River. Only one rite stands out as distinctly of the Courts, rather than of any one race of beast-folk.



Journey's End

Level Two

This solemn rite is performed for a fallen hero whose actions have highly honored his court. The hero's body is taken to the heart of the caern, and there set in a diamond formed by mystic lanterns burning with spirit-fire. The court's historian beats a drum slowly, letting the mournful tempo echo through the caern. In turn, a representative of each Breed present at the court steps forward and honors the deceased in some way appropriate to his race — a Nagah representative might glide from the shadows and sing a brief song of glory; a Hakken might recite a haiku written in the fallen one's honor; a Kitsune might leave a beautiful calligraphy poem, exquisitely folded, on the hero's chest; a Nezumi might bow over the corpse, then throw his head back and release a keening wail.

When the last envoy is finished, the hero's surviving sentai mates, if any, sing a chant of loss and sorrow. If an entire sentai has perished and is the subject of this rite, then this song is sung by the court's Gai'nai. At the song's end, the entire court chants a single mantra, calling the body home. As the mantra concludes, a high wind arises; the lanterns extinguish, and the body of the fallen vanishes, absorbed directly into the Umbra. No greater honor exists.

System: The deceased gains a point of permanent Virtue at the close of this rite, and may well live on as a strong Ancestor-spirit. He is welcomed into the Court of

Ancestors with honor — but in most cases, heroes such as this do not rest peacefully from then on, but return to aid their beloved courts when called (via summonings or Past Life).

Mystic Rites

Hengeyokai constantly seek spiritual attunement, and it is no surprise that they have mastered great numbers of Mystic Rites. These are the usual province of the court seer or sentai's Mirror, although the hengeyokai aren't against performing such rites as a group. The rites of Binding, Talisman Dedication, Spirit Awakening and Summoning are all well-known to the Courts, as well as a few rites peculiar to the Eastern beast-folk.

Rite of the Harmonious Journey

Level Three

This rite is performed over shapeshifters who wish to form a mountain sentai. The rite usually takes place under moonlight, and involves the ritemaster ritually naming each participant by direction, element and task. At the close of this, the ritemaster leads the group into the Umbra, just as if treading the mountain's shoulders (see page 42). There they journey to the desired totem spirit's court and petition its patronage. Once a totem spirit has given its blessing, the sentai emerges into the physical world once more.



System: This rite is only performed to form mountain sentai, and the characters involved must purchase the Totem Background. Otherwise, the group is a wave sentai at best.

Rite of the Spirit Tattoo

Level Four

This peculiar rite is used to arm hengeyokai going on particularly dangerous missions. It involves binding a summoned spirit into the subject's skin, where it takes the form of a tattoo. When the hengeyokai calls on the spirit's power, the spirit will manifest its power in the form of one of its Charms—a Dragon-spirit tattoo might uncoil from the shapeshifter's torso and breathe a gout of fire on her foes, while an armored Ancestor-spirit might materialize into the solid world and attack. Once the spirit has performed its one service, it leaves; these tattoos are effectively talens bound into the shapeshifter's skin.

System: The spirit must first be called with the Rite of Summoning and persuaded to enter the tattoo. The ritemaster must roll Wits + Rituals, difficulty 8. Each success grants the spirit five points of Power to spend on the appropriate Charm (Blast Flame, Create Wind, Healing, Lightning Bolts and Materialize are favorites). If successful, the spirit appears on a blank area of the subject's skin in tattoo form; the more Power invested, the larger the tattoo.

To activate the tattoo, the hengeyokai must roll Gnosis, difficulty 8. If successful, the spirit emerges and the tattoo fades. Spirit tattoos count as dedicated items; a shapeshifter

can never have a total of spirit tattoos and dedicated items that is greater than his permanent Gnosis rating.

Rite of the Goblin Chrysalis

Level Five

One of the most foul practices to be found among the Yomi Courts, the Rite of the Goblin Chrysalis binds a Bane into a living being, creating a bakemono. The bakemono-to-be must be bound in fresh Kumo silk and anointed with warm blood before the actual rite's beginning. Although this stipulation would seem to make this rite the Goblin Spiders' exclusive province, many fallen shapeshifters have discovered that silk fresh-cut from a Kumo's abdomen and properly handled works admirably, as well as providing a source of fresh blood to anoint the subject.

System: The ritemaster must make the standard Wits + Rituals roll; however, the difficulty is 8. Innocents are harder to infect, due to the relative lack of purchase a Bane can have on their souls; the difficulty for transmuting a virtuous human being or animal is 9.

Punishment Rites

Unsurprisingly, a wide variety of punishment rites are shared among the hengeyokai courts. These are largely unique, although the Tengu know variants of the Stone of Scorn and Satire Rite, and are willing to share them. A pair of sample hengeyokai punishments follow.

Rite of Quiet Burial

Level Three

This rite is commonly used on offenders who have proven themselves in need of time alone to contemplate their wrongdoing. They receive it — for they are buried alive and left in the dark earth until the punishment is complete.

The subject is escorted to the place of burial, where the ritemaster binds his wrists and ankles with white cord and draws the hengeyokai symbol for “silence” on his forehead. The attendants then lower the subject into the prepared pit (administering any blows necessary to quell resistance along the way; the subject need not be conscious during this portion of the rite). The ritemaster then writes the subject’s offense on a piece of bark, then throws it onto the subject’s chest while intoning the story of the infraction to the four winds. Once the tale is complete, all present cover the subject with earth and tamp down the “grave.”

If the rite is performed successfully, the subject will not need to breathe, eat or drink for the rite’s duration (which usually lasts from sunset to sunrise). Of course, the live burial is a harrowing experience, and the subject must make three successive Willpower rolls, all difficulty 8, or lose a permanent point of Willpower. If any of these rolls are botched, the unfortunate sinner may go temporarily insane (if the **Werewolf Players Guide** is used, the Storyteller may select an appropriate Derangement). At the rite’s completion, the malefactor is exhumed, and all is considered forgiven. However, such a claustrophobic experience usually does much to set errant hengeyokai back on the path of virtue.

System: The ritemaster makes the usual Charisma + Rituals roll. If the rite fails, the ritemaster will know immediately. In such cases, most order the subject to be unearthed immediately, presuming that the Emerald Mother has decreed such a punishment too strict for the offense in question. However, it is not unknown for certain strict ritemasters to leave particularly “corrupt” individuals under to be rid of them once and for all...

Rite of Hell made flesh

Level Five

One of the direst punishments known to the Courts, this rite is reserved for those who have betrayed the Emerald Mother and her servants in the most heinous of ways. The subject is dragged out to a desolate place where none will hear his cries or care (this actually includes certain urban districts, in some cases). The ritemaster describes the subject’s crimes, appealing to the spirits to punish such treachery. They do so in a horrible way — by slowly transmuting the victim’s bones into silver, gold or hong mu rosewood, whichever is most appropriate. The change begins at the feet and proceeds upwards to the skull — by the end of the rite’s completion, the subject has been boiled alive by his own skeleton. Even if the subject is in breed form, this death is hideous. The body is then disposed of in the most matter-of-fact way possible, to avoid further offending the spirits —

some greedy homids who’ve cut open the corpse for the silver or gold have found themselves cursed with horrible withering ailments for coveting the byproduct of treachery.

System: Once the process has begun, there is no way to save the subject; death is guaranteed. Some whisper that a variant rite exists, one which is usable on other *shen* — but there is no proof, as using it on another *shen* would cause a diplomatic incident of riotous proportion.

Renown Rites

The Courts have relatively few common Renown Rites — the two most important celebrations are the baptism of new hengeyokai, and the acknowledgment of a shapeshifter’s Renown by granting him a new Rank. The latter is celebrated by a variant of the Rite of Accomplishment, which sometimes entails the gift of a new badge appropriate to the subject’s new station. The former is not so easily represented by a Garou rite....

Rite of the Opened Way

Level Two

This rite is performed on newly-Changed hengeyokai who are entering the service of the Beast Courts. Before undergoing this rite, younglings have learned the Mandates by heart, and must undergo a minor trial of worth. Unlike the Garou Rite of Passage, these trials are usually undergone alone, unless by the blessings of Heaven, enough newly-Changed shapeshifters are available to form a new sentai.

After the tests of ability and knowledge, the aspiring hengeyokai are brought under the light of the moon for this rite. There the ritemaster purifies each one in turn, and guides them into a state of meditation. As each one opens himself to the new life before him, the ritemaster speaks the words of the rite over their heads. Each cub will see visions before his eyes as this happens, visions that illustrate the Way that lies before him; those meant for the role of the Fist, for example, might see visions of war and weapons or images of clenched talons. As the ritemaster concludes the chant, the cub comes fully awake and speaks of his vision. The ritemaster then anoints the cub with a painted pictogram marking his auspice, and presents him with the wooden badge due his new rank.

System: Apart from the formal Charisma + Rituals roll, there are no real systems to this rite. The Storyteller should, as always, evoke the scene in his players’ senses, but dice-rolling should play little or no part in this rite.

Totems

The hengeyokai keep totems as do the Sunset People (many *shen* refer to these totems as *nushi*), and honor them as highly. Although there are a number of totems that serve the Courts exclusively, certain of the Tribal Totems also turn their faces to their Eastern children, serving as patrons to mountain sentai (or sometimes as personal totems to certain individuals — see **Werewolf Players Guide**, page 119, for details).

Of them, the most amenable to serving as a mountain sentai's totem include Chimera, Rat, and Grandfather Thunder. Cockroach is often willing to serve as a sentai's patron, but few hengeyokai request such an honor. Unicorn will also sponsor sentai of high virtue, to whom she appears as the sapphire-scaled ki-rin.

Certain totems in the **Werewolf Players Guide** are also appropriate for hengeyokai; of them, the Wind Incarna are particularly suitable, while also appropriate are Fox, Shark and Fog.

Bear

Background Cost: 5

Mighty Bear has suffered much. His children, the Okuma, were slain in the Fourth Age, and the Fifth Age has seen numberless monkeys opening poison rents in the land he loves so well. He is a wise master of many rites, but his anger often rises in his breast, and then he smashes boulders and topples trees in his rage. The sentai he chooses are treated with respect, but are often quietly overlooked, as their presence is a reminder of the shameful fate of the Okuma.

Traits: Bear's children gain three dice to Medicine dice pools and may hibernate for up to three months at a time without need for food or drink. Each sentai member's Strength is permanently increased by one, and each may use the Gift: Mother's Touch once per day. Finally, when a sentai member is wounded for the first time in any combat, all her packmates immediately gain two temporary Rage.

However, Bear's Eastern children must subtract one from any temporary Glory rewards they receive, due to the collective shame of the Courts.

Ban: Bear forbids his children to strike other hengeyokai with claw, beak or fang, fearing that another race will be lost as were his first children. Even the Kumo are included in this ban, although Bear doesn't prohibit his children from using Gifts or weapons against their enemies.

Dog

Background Cost: 4

Dog is a loyal and watchful friend, although he isn't that respected by wild beasts. He teaches that humans can be worthy of love and respect, and that they are capable of returning such emotions. Dog isn't a very popular totem, and most often guides Japanese sentai of Hakken and Tengu.

Traits: Dog's children can draw on an additional four Willpower points per story; they also receive three dice to Alertness dice pools and the Gift: Beast Speech.

Ban: Dog asks that his sentai try their best to avoid killing humans unless absolutely necessary.

Hare

Background Cost: 6

Hare is quick-witted, gentle, energetic and clever, although he is often too clever for his own good. He has little wisdom to offer his sentai, instead encouraging them to

think on their feet to survive bad situations. Hare has a very tenuous relationship with the Kitsune, and any werefoxes in his sentai may have to work twice as hard to gain equal favor.

Traits: Hare teaches his children the Gift: Speed of Thought; they may also draw on an additional four Gnosis points per story. Each sentai member gains one point of Wits. Moon-spirits react well to Hare's children, making Umbral travel a little easier.

Ban: Hare requires that his sentai protect children of all sorts and species, and expects his chosen hengeyokai to become parents themselves.

Mongoose

Background Cost: 4

Mongoose is deathly quick and very cunning, and she guides her children to kill before their foes have a chance to strike. Killing is an art, not a clumsy game — she teaches to evade an opponent's attacks until a fatal blow presents itself. Although her philosophy of war neatly matches that of the Nagah, Mongoose will not accept wereserpents as children, nor do Nagah think too highly of Mongoose's sentai.

Traits: Mongoose teaches her children the Gifts: Fatal Flaw and Resist Toxin. She also adds three to the sentai's Dodge dice pools.

Ban: Mongoose requires that her sentai never show fear.





Ox

Background Cost: 5

Ox has never been too bright, but his steadfastness is that of the mountain and his good nature soothes even the most warlike of tigers. He chooses children of gentle strength and pure nature, and teaches his children the virtues of patience and endurance.

Traits: Sentai who follow Ox gain two points each of Stamina and Strength, to distribute any way they choose among themselves. They may call upon an extra three Willpower points per story. Finally, each sentai member gains a permanent point in Empathy and two temporary points of Virtue.

Ban: Children of Ox must never overtax or overburden their servants, whether beasts of burden or allied spirits. They must be fair to those beneath them, or else Ox grows angry with them and withdraws his protection.

Prince Inari

Background Cost: 5

The Prince Inari is a spirit of plenty, of rice and foxes, of benevolence and justice. He is the great hero of the Kitsune, and teaches that true nobility requires generosity and cunning as well as bravery and honor. He is a common patron to Kitsune, and is willing to act as benefactor to any sentai who are willing to learn his lessons of cleverness and grace.

Traits: Each member of a sentai serving Prince Inari gains a dot of Wits. What's more, Inari teaches his children a variant of the Gift: Cooking which produces rice rather than gruel. Kitsune react favorably to sentai who follow Inari, and treat them as honored cousins (if not always as equals).

Ban: Inari forbids his servants from bringing misery to fox kits, and to a lesser extent, human children. Inari's children cannot kill foxes if this would leave kits to starve, and sometimes wind up spending some of their free time caring for local families of foxes. This ban doesn't forbid Inari's sentai from killing corrupt humans who also happen to have families, but the hengeyokai are expected to make some sort of provision to lessen the children's misery.

Tiger

Background Cost: 8

Tiger is a furious totem of War, but he also is worthy of much respect. He is an emperor among animals, a mighty leader and warrior. His nobility has been stretched to the breaking point of late, however, as the plight of his mortal children weighs heavily upon him.

Traits: Each of Tiger's children gains an additional three Rage points per story, even if this gives them more temporary Rage than their permanent rating. Each sentai member also gains one Glory and one Virtue; Tiger further grants an additional three dice to his sentai's Brawl, Survival and Melee dice pools. Khan look favorably on sentai blessed by Tiger, and the Courts expect great things from them.

Ban: Tiger requires that sentai who follow him work to save his mortal children. They may not display cowardice in their duties, or Tiger will be very angry.

Fetishes
Yomi Slayer Spells

Gnosis 5

These talens take the form of small sheets of rice paper with glyphs carefully inked across one side. The trick to making these fetishes is as old as paper itself, and even the humans have mimicked this magic in their own fashion. Even so, these hengeyokai talens are no less effective for their age.

The hengeyokai must activate the Yomi Slayer Spell as he throws it at his opponent. The spell-paper, if activated, flies straight and true, adhering to any target which exudes the stench of the Centipede — and then exploding in a burst of white fire, causing a die of aggravated damage for each success on the activation roll.

A hengeyokai must bind a fire elemental or War-spirit into the paper to create such a talen.

Wailing Devil Claw

Level 3, Gnosis 6

This fetish weapon is a favorite of Tengu, but is often found in the hands of their allies. It takes the form of a long steel chain with a jade-inlaid, three-taloned claw at one end and a weight at the other, resembling a kusarigama. It is complicated to use (a

character must have at least Melee 2 to use it for anything other than crude slashing attacks) — difficulty 7 to properly strike, but doing Strength + 1 aggravated damage. When bonded to its user, the claw releases an eerie, almost subsonic wail as it whips through the air. This sound is faintly perceptible to most *shen*, but keenly audible to shapeshifters and spirits.

The Devil Claw's utility is fully expressed when battling spirits; the weapon is consecrated to draw away their energy through the chain. To use it properly, one must wrap the chain around some portion of the spirit and cut the spirit with the claw (difficulty 8 to execute properly). If successful, the hengeyokai may then activate the claw; the spirit loses an additional three Power for every success on the Gnosis roll. Tengu weaponsmiths must bind a War-spirit into the claw for the fetish to be complete.

Tengu Feather Cloak

Level 3, Gnosis 7

This cloak appears to be woven out of raven feathers, and is a potent weapon in the hands of the Tengu — or even other shapechangers. When activated, the cloak allows the wearer to use the Gifts of Slicing Feathers, Bloody Feather and Bloody Feather Storm in Homid form. The wearer must naturally know the Gifts in order to use them,

however; the cloak does not provide the powers, only ammunition. Further, by activating the cloak, the user gains the ability to glide at running speed for a scene.

Although almost all of these cloaks belong to Tengu, other hengeyokai may benefit from their use. Indeed, while wearing the cloak, a shapeshifter may learn the Gifts: Slicing Feathers and Bloody Feather if a teacher is available. There are even rumors of hengeyokai learning to use the Sun Swings Low maneuver (page 98) with this fetish, although this may be just more of the Tengu's irrepressible gossip.

To create such a fetish, the Tengu must weave a cloak out of his own feathers and bind a Raven-spirit within.

Five Winds Fans

Level 4, Gnosis 7

These delicate rice-paper fans appear to be nothing more than elegant accessories, but are in fact potent tools in hengeyokai hands. Although they are usually created in sets of five, the Courts rarely trust any one hero to carry an entire set; ergo, the points paid for this fetish reflect only one fan. When activated, the fans can manifest a wind just as the Wendigo Gift: Call the Breeze.





In addition, each fan has a particular power, depending on the wind to which it is attuned. A fan of the North Wind calls a blast of chill air as the Wendigo Gift: Cutting Wind, while an East Wind Fan invokes a deep fog as the Black Fury Gift: Curse of Aeolus. The West Wind grants the Ragabash Gift of Open Seal, while the South Wind creates a resounding thunderclap when activated, as the Shadow Lord Gift: Clap of Thunder. Finally, the Umbral Wind Fan does not invoke a Gift *per se* when activated. Instead, it allows a hengeyokai bearer who cannot normally step sideways (such as a Khan or Nagah) to roll Gnosis to do so as usual. Bearers who can already step sideways have their difficulty to do so reduced by 3 when the fan is activated.

Obviously, to create one of these fetishes, one must bind the appropriate Wind-spirit into a fan of sufficient quality.

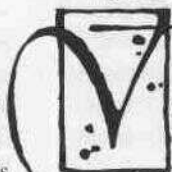
Earthquake Maul

Level 5, Gnosis 7

This powerful staff usually takes a form similar to that of the iron-shod Japanese tetsubo, although no iron is involved in its manufacture. As much club as staff, the Earthquake Maul is typically five or six feet in length, and as thick across as a large man's hand at the wide end, with a stone ring set into the end of the haft. The wood has been treated and shaped with sorceries, and is as hard as steel, with short, thick thorns protruding from its striking end. Some hengeyokai go on great spirit quests to find sufficient hongmu to manufacture a staff for use against the Kumo, although these weapons are significantly rarer.

The staff does Strength +2 aggravated damage, difficulty 7, but its true power manifests against manmade objects. A wielder may activate the maul as he strikes such an object; the more successes, the more structural damage is done. One success will blow a door off its hinges; three successes will shatter a concrete pillar; five successes will blast an armored car wide open. The damage done doesn't extend much beyond the striking area — the Earthquake Maul can't topple an office building in one shot — but can leave a swath of rubble as much as a foot across. Whether the fetish is activated or not, no manmade body armor can hold against the staff; opponents get no extra soak dice from Kevlar or the like. The maul takes its name from the Earthquake-spirit bound inside.

Antagonists



iswamitra said, "Majesty, that promise becomes you alone. No one else would make it. The pathless forest where I live has become a courtyard of evil and no longer is there any safety from the Rakshasas of the monstrous Demon King Ravana."

— Ramayana (William Buck, translator)

Although the Age of Legends is long past, there are still stories of hideous creatures that lurk beneath the snowy mountains of the Middle Kingdom. Many a hengeyokai legend tells of battles with powerful ogres, creatures much like bakemono but that were never human. Similarly, there are countless tales of the loathsome hordes of devils that pour out of Yomi. The

following creatures are a minor representative sample of the Centipede's Asian minions — this list is no more comprehensive than the listing of Banes in the *Werewolf* rulebook, but it should suffice to get the Storyteller's imagination running.

Bakemono

Most Sunset People would quickly recognize the bakemono for what they are: Fomori; mockeries. The Bane-possessed unfortunates on the losing end of a deal with the Devil (or in this case, the Yama Kings). However, bakemono are often more self-aware than other fomori. To be sure, there are plenty of creatures among their ranks who have no idea what's happened to warp their bodies and twist their minds. However, many others entered into their corruption with their eyes open, accepting the twisted bargain openly offered by Kumo, devil-Banes or even proxies of the Yama Kings themselves. The circumstances that trap a mortal in a bakemono's skin are innumerable — Storytellers are encouraged to be as creative as they like when detailing these fiends-wearing-flesh.

Many bakemono resemble the ogres of Asian myth — they often possess extra arms or eyes, vividly colored skin, distended bellies and wiry limbs. The stink that surrounds them often brings flies, disease or other decay in their wake. They skulk in the overcrowded slums of Calcutta and Bangkok, dig warrens under prison camps and haunt famine-stricken villages. Unsurprisingly, when bakemono seek to stuff food in their gaping, needle-toothed maws, human flesh is typically the repast of choice.

Powers

Most bakemono have three powers; some have more, some fewer. They may exhibit any fomori powers that the Storyteller chooses (see *Book of the Wyrm* or *Freak Legion* for the most comprehensive lists; a good starting point, of course, is *Werewolf*, pg. 251). What's more, the Yama Kings enjoy instilling their progeny with rather... creative talents. The following abilities are a few examples of the exotic powers displayed by the fomori of the East.

- **Armor** — The bakemono's skin is scaly and mottled, or perhaps a chitinous carapace, or even a calcified, rocklike texture. No matter the form, its hide proves as effective as personal body armor, adding three dice to all soak rolls.

- **Biting Plague** — The bakemono's distended belly churns with demonic insects, and he may vomit forth a stream of them at will. This causes Stamina +3 dice of aggravated damage to an unlucky target; armor cannot be used to soak, as the vermin flow easily to the unprotected portions of their victim's body. The bakemono may regurgitate twice before his "supply" is depleted; the insects remain in breed back up to full strength within a day.

- **Centipede's Kiss** — This ability allows the bakemono to spit a poisonous needle at his foes. The dart itself only does three dice of damage, but if the target takes even one Health Level of damage, the poison — a powerful hallucinogen — takes effect. The victim falls into a state of nightmarish visions, and becomes unable to functionally interact with

the world around him. The toxin lasts for a scene, and inflicts another unsoakable Health Level of damage once it's run its course. The toxin doesn't work on spirits, ghosts or vampires. Many bakemono prefer using this ability on ordinary humans, who are less likely to resist its effects. Some who receive this power as well as Hellish Beauty enjoy delivering the dart into an unsuspecting victim's mouth during a kiss, or attacking during other intimate activity.

- **Fleshflow** — An ability commonly manifested by a Bhuta's host (see below), this allows a bakemono to painfully reshape himself into whatever form is necessary. Flesh melts, bone softens and hair sprouts as the host body writhes in agony, pouring itself into its new form. Although the shapechanging bakemono may not gain or lose mass, this ability allows for interesting disguises (even taking the shapes of large, ugly dogs or other beasts) as well as the capacity to horrify onlookers.

- **Hellish Beauty** — Through a mix of pheromones, aura and physical beauty, the bakemono is supernaturally compelling. Add +3 to his Appearance, even if this takes it above 5. Even the most grotesquely altered creatures might possess this power, although it tends to manifest more often in bakemono that can pass for human (that, or the obviously inhuman ones are more frequently torn to bits by their jealous comrades).

- **Razor Tattoos** — The bakemono seems to be covered in tattoos representing the coils of a snake or centipede. However, at the bakemono's will, the tattoos spring into three-dimensional life, sliding quickly across his body like some form of demonic bas-relief. The scales, plates or legs of the living tattoos are razor-sharp, and inflict Strength -1 aggravated damage on anyone or anything in contact with them.

- **Spirit Eye** — The bakemono has a large, unnaturally bright eye in the center of her forehead; this may be a third eye, or it may be the only eye she has. By spending a Willpower point, the bakemono may look across the Wall into the Mirror Lands for as long as she likes, up to the duration of a scene. However, she cannot simultaneously watch the Mirror Lands and the earthly realm. Despite this limitation, bakemono with this ability are often posted as sentries to safeguard against *shen* approaching in the Umbra.

- **Thousand Jaws** — Although the common name of this little "gift" is somewhat hyperbolic, the bakemono possessing it has more than his fair share of mouths. The extra jaws may sprout on his shoulders, belly, biceps, knees — almost anywhere. The bakemono may make one extra bite attack per turn for Strength +1 aggravated damage. The maws have no throats of their own and cannot swallow, although they may hold a mouthful of flesh long enough for the meat to break down and be absorbed through the lining. Needless to say, such bakemono often stink of decaying meat, adding further to the repulsive nature of this power.

Banes

The Yomi spirits that plague the Tapestry come in a myriad of shapes, abilities and appearances. Storytellers are encouraged to be as gruesomely creative as possible when



devising the twisted denizens of the hells; after all, the Centipede's imagination is fertile indeed.

Bhuta

The Bhuta are shapeshifters and manipulators, and bind themselves to mortal hosts to be bakemono as a sort of pastime. They typically instill their hosts with the same shapeshifting powers they enjoy as spirits, the better to exercise their creativity as much as they like. They are most cunning, as spirits go, and subtle in highly varying degrees. Their arrogance often gets the better of them, however; many a Bhuta has been tricked into revealing itself and summarily destroyed thereafter.

Willpower 6, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Power 40

Charms: Corruption, Materialize, Shapeshift, Possession

Face Jackets

These Banes are rather peculiarly named — however, the name is gruesomely, horribly appropriate. The Face Jackets were first called that by a remarkably unpoetic Nezumi, who described one of these monsters — who were wearing tunics of stitched-together flayed human faces — to his court in a notably matter-of-fact manner.

The Face Jackets haunt areas of atrocities, where there are victims aplenty and none to mourn them. They prefer manifesting in the material world, where they can slice away mortals' faces with their razor fingers and adorn themselves with the

grisly trophies. Unsurprisingly, the Courts have decreed that the Face Jackets deserve nothing more than a quick extinction; unfortunately, such a thing is easier decreed than done.

Willpower 6, Rage 8, Gnosis 7, Power 35

Charms: Materialize (Str 4, Dex 4, Sta 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Stealth 4, Tracking 4, 7 Health Levels, Str +3 Claws; Power cost: 23), Possession, Throw Glass

Mukade

Considered by some to be the very image of the Wym, the Mukade are terrifying spirit monsters that prowl the Yomi Worlds, devouring all in their paths. These hideous spirit-centipedes are large as train cars and reek prodigiously of rot and corruption. Many have humanlike faces swelling from the chitin of their heads, or even along the lengths of their bodies. Their mandibles are frankly immense and drip with spiritual corrosion. In the ages long ago, slaying a Mukade was something of a rite of passage among greater hengeyokai heroes — but now the heroes are fewer, and the Mukade breed and writhe in greater numbers than ever in the Yomi Worlds.

Willpower 7, Rage 10, Gnosis 6, Power 50

Charms: Armor, Blighted Touch, Create Fires, Reform, Shatter Glass, Umbraquake

Water Ghosts

Although most people think of these weeping spirits as ghosts of the drowned, the hengeyokai know better. These Banes



are born of the despair of drowning victims, springing full-formed from the helplessness of their last moments. Thirsty for more of the same, they assume beautiful forms to lure travelers into leaning over the side of a boat to get a better look. Some brave ones actually venture onto shore or crawl into the ships themselves, pretending to be lost children or lovely stowaways. Leading her victim down to the waves, a Water Ghost grasps her "savior" and hauls him overboard, filling his lungs with icy cold sea.

Willpower 5, Rage 4, Gnosis 7, Power 35

Charms: Airt Sense, Flood, Materialize, Water Sense (as Forest Sense)

Yomi Blood Guards

Even Hell has its sworn protectors, and these mighty creatures are among the pick of the litter. They most commonly appear as hugely muscled beast-headed humans in blackened armor, bearing giant polearms. Their distorted features are permanently fixed in grimaces of hate, and their fists clench their weapons so tightly that blood runs down the hafts. They are a perennial favorite for Umbral lair guards or the creation of bloodthirsty, powerful bakemono.

Willpower 5, Rage 8, Gnosis 4, Power 40

Charms: Armor, Blast Flame, Guard Domain (as Forest Sense, but applies to the entire area guarded), Incite Frenzy

Kuei-jin

The vampires of the East are very unlike their Western cousins; although the Sunset People might be baffled by these strange Leeches, the hengeyokai are accustomed to the eccentric evils of the Hungry Dead. They are literally spirits from Hell reborn into corpses; they have no lineage or "childer," although they keep courts like any other *shen*. The Beast Courts keep up formal, if not warm, relations with the Kuei-jin; although these walking corpses are certainly vile, they do have their purpose under Heaven. Nonetheless, the manipulations of the Fourth Age have not been forgotten, and many hengeyokai burn to avenge their ancestors' deaths by offering up the torn flesh of the Hungry Dead.

Like the vampires of the West, Kuei-jin are creatures of particular debasement; many are coldly callous to the suffering they inflict, while others revel furiously in their demonic natures, washing their hair in their victim's blood and daubing still-living flesh on their lair walls. And as awful as this may seem, such is the fate intended for them. All Kuei-jin were once mortals who died—or lived—so brutally that they were doomed to fall instantly into Yomi, there to serve as the Yama Kings' playthings for all eternity. Yet some actually manage to escape, tearing free of their bonds, evading the Yomi guards and reentering their earthly bodies. The Cycle itself allows this, for such was the curse levied on the Wan Xian. Needless to say, the hengeyokai are most grateful that their own duties

to the Emerald Mother (or, in the case of the Kumo, to their dark patrons) preclude them from such a horrible fate. Even the Zhong Lung can verify that no shapeshifter has ever been reborn as a Kuei-jin. There are rumors of a very few hengeyokai traitors who fell so far that they entered Yomi upon dying, but it is certain that if this were true, the Yama Kings would never let such prize spirits escape from the very... special treatment they have earned.

The Kuei-jin feed on Chi, which they can ingest as blood or flesh; some are even able to draw the Gnosis from hengeyokai. They rot slowly in sunlight, but do not burn. They strive to take as many dragon nests as they can, which puts them at odds with the Beast Courts. Interestingly, almost all seek some form of dark enlightenment, hoping that with such enlightenment will come a return to grace as the Wan Xian. The hengeyokai, of course, have their own opinions as to how likely that is.

The powers of the Kuei-jin are almost better simulated with bakemono powers than with Gifts; the Hungry Dead have been known to shapeshift, sprout bone weapons, spit poison, detach their own heads, and manifest all other manner of devil-magic. The Storyteller may as well be creative when designing these sinister creatures of Yin and Yang; not only do they make interesting opponents, but their abilities are startlingly horrific, and should surprise and revolt the players.

Young Running Monkey

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

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Intimidation 1, Streetwise 2, Firearms 2, Melee 1, Stealth 3, Linguistics 2

Equivalent Gifts: Kumo, Ragabash

Equipment: Wicked-looking dagger, leather jacket, sunglasses, motorcycle, handgun

Elder Mandarin

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Charisma 5, Manipulation 5, Appearance 1, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Expression 4, Intimidation 4, Subterfuge 5, Etiquette 5, Melee 5, Leadership 3, Stealth 3, Survival 4, Enigmas 5, Investigation 2, Linguistics 5, Occult 5, Politics 4, Rituals 4

Equivalent Gifts: Black Spiral Dancers, Shadow Lords, Silver Fangs, Stargazers

Equipment: Ancestral weapon, silken fineries, broken-in slaves, extensive and sumptuous lair, many objets d'art

[For the ultimate sourcebook for Kuei-jin, as well as a look at the cities of the Middle Kingdom, check out *Kindred of the East*; you don't even have to own *Vampire: The Masquerade* to use it. Really.]



Chapter Five: The Nine-tails

North of the stone lay three foxes. I picked the white tuft off one's tail and saw it was a big white fox. "Wear red," the fox said, "when you bring me offerings."

—"The White Fox: Four Dreams" (Royall Tyler, translator)

Dearest Mei,

I expect you're wondering why your mother and I aren't home. Until this moment, I truly thought we would be there in person — that we would be allowed to explain things in our own way, before anything strange entered your life. Please forgive us, and remember this isn't our idea of a good-bye.

The time has come to tell you the truth, or at least a part of it: You are not our own child. Your birth mother was my little sister, Joy. Amy and I are your aunt and uncle.

Joy came to me in tears, but happy, in her last year of college. She was pregnant and getting married. I didn't take it well at first — our family was strict — but agreed to go with her and meet the man she loved. There were certain arrangements they wanted help with.

I won't even try to explain your real father to you. I don't believe what happened, myself. But I saw, and later Amy saw, and we agreed that should anything happen to Joy, we would raise you as our own.

We had to promise to give you up to your father any time after your twelfth birthday, to teach you martial arts, music, calligraphy, Mandarin, Japanese, and other things — Vietnamese, because I think your mother wanted it — and to keep this a secret until it was time for you to go.

Joy died in childbirth. I suspect she knew she would. Your father took one look at you and fled the room, and, I think, the country. We have not seen him since.

Mei, there are many things about your other family that we don't understand, but Uncle Hu, at least, has helped us a great deal over the years, watching over you in sickness and danger like a guardian angel. I think you can trust him.

We're told we have to go now.

Darling, Amy and I love you very much. Please don't think we've been the cuckoo's parents, not knowing any better — we will never forget you. Our door will always be open for our daughter. Remember us, sweetheart.

Your Uncle Hu will be here to pick you up at seven. Do what he tells you, study hard, and I know you will make us proud.

Love,
THUY QUAN

Introduction



o: You may be wondering why the effective Changing Breed Book for the Kitsune is kind of — well — stuck onto the tail end of **Hengeyokai**, instead of running wild and standing free as its own book. If you're not wondering, great, please skip on to the Lexicon.

However, without feeling the need to justify ourselves here, we would like to make a point: Other Changing Breeds have worldwide "memberships." Asian Garou may think a bit differently about the Apocalypse than their Eurocentric cousins, but they still consider themselves one with that great, global, extended family. There remains a common ground, a cultural network that lets Stargazers drift from caern to caern across the continents without major culture shock.

Kitsune think of themselves *always* as hengeyokai, never Bête. They began in China, Japan and Korea, and (minor forays across the Pacific notwithstanding) that's where they still live today. They took on the communal rites and court structures of Asian shapeshifters because those were what was there. They count the Ages of the World the way all *shen* do, because that's who they grew up spying on. They call the Celestines and Incarna by a thousand names the Get, Uktena and Qualmi wouldn't recognize — because that's what the gods go by in their corner of the world.

To sum up: Sure, you can play a hengeyokai without having to know anything about Kitsune. But you *can't* play a Kitsune without knowing about hengeyokai. Ergo, one book. (And, of course, the Nine-Tails would be right behind the idea of camouflaging themselves pick-a-back anyway, the little sneaks.)

Lexicon

Batsu: A Kitsune's closest friends and allies.

Byakko: A white-colored fox — frequently a servant of Inari.

Chie: Wisdom.

Doshi: A Kitsune Sorcerer; one of the Four Paths.

Eji: A Kitsune Warrior; one of the Four Paths.

Genko: A black-colored fox.

Go-en: Kitsune-go for contact and favor networks.

Gukutsushi: A Kitsune illusionist or Dreamweaver; one of the Four Paths.

Inari: A powerful Shinto Kami; Greater Incarna associated with Kitsune.

Ju-Fu: Kitsune paper and rune magic.

Jyu-ho: All Fox magic.

Kagayaki: Glory.



Kanji: Kitsune-go writing; a combination of hengeyokai pictograms and Chinese characters.

Kataribe: A Kitsune Bard; one of the Four Paths.

Kiko: Spirit fox; a second-rank Kitsune.

Kitsune: A Nine-Tails; werefox.

Kitsune-go: The language of the Nine-Tails.

Kojin: Human-breed Kitsune.

Koryo: Haunting fox; a third-rank Kitsune.

Kuko: Air fox; a Kitsune in the service of the Wyrn.

Nine-Tails: Another term for Kitsune.

Nogitsune: Wild fox; a Kitsune without rank — usually a kit.

Origami: The art of folding paper; frequently used in Ju-Fu.

Paths: Callings or professions of the Kitsune; not entirely unlike auspices.

Prince Inari, the: Near-legendary companion of the White-Faced One.

Reiko: Ghost fox; a fourth-rank Kitsune.

Roko: Fox-breed Kitsune.

Sempai: Mentor or teacher; an organization of teachers.

Shakko: A red-colored Fox.

Shinju: Pure-breed Fox; offspring of two Kitsune.

Silver Lady, the: Luna.

Tamamono: Gifts.

Tenko: Celestial Fox; a fifth-rank Kitsune.

Toku: Honor.

Yakan: Fox; a first-rank Kitsune.

Yojutsu: Hedge magic.

White-Faced One, the: Bai Mianxi; the First Kitsune.



Chapter Six: Birth of the Youngest

They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes.

—Psalms 63:10

The Kataribe



Uncle Hu stopped before the door and waited. Mei-Fei raised her hand to knock, stopped as he shook his head. The door opened, silently.

The woman wore bright blues and dark yellow — flowing, filmy skirts; a loose, elegant blouse; a long, brocade vest left open. Her skin was the color of old ivory, her eyes perfect almonds, jet-black, shadowed by long lashes. For one heart-stinging second, her sidelong, unreadable glance fell on Mei, and the girl thought, this is the most beautiful person.

The woman smiled and turned away, stepped into Uncle Hu's embrace. For a moment Mei was ignored; the two before her were alone, very far away. The moment ended; they took her hands and drew her out of the San Francisco fog into the apartment.

"Sondok, this is Mei-Fei Quan. Mei-Fei, I present to you Sondok, Queen of Silla." He smiled.

"I was never Queen of Silla. I am Kitsune, I am Kataribe, I am Sondok at the moment." She studied Mei's face. "It's time for dinner. You're going to need your strength; we open your eyes tonight. Hu, I would be honored if you would join us in the Rite."

A Bed-time Story

Thus spoke the spirit of the Death-Stone: "I am she who first, in Ind, was the demon to whom Prince Hazoku paid homage.... In Great Cathay I took the form of Hoji, consort of the Emperor Iuwao; and at the Court of the Rising Sun I became the Flawless Jewel Maiden, concubine to the Emperor Toba."

—"The Death-Stone" (B. H. Chamberlain, translator)

Sondok, to Mei, after the Opening of the Eyes:

You look too sleepy for history tonight. Make a den of those blankets, kit, and I'll tell you how the White-Faced-One had her eyes opened long, long ago.

One night during the reign of the First Yellow Emperor, when even mighty China was only as old as you are, Bai Mianxi sat with her court in Henan. The windows were open and the full moon shone down on our empress and on the Prince Inari beside her. Suddenly, like an arrow from the string, a white rabbit sprang through the window, jumped in her lap, and bit her on the paw. Then he bolted away as fast as his legs would take him.

Bai Mianxi leapt straight up and ran after the rabbit, favoring her torn pad. Her white paws grew lacquer-red in her heart's blood as each foot stepped into the print of the foot before, bitten one first of all.

The little beast ran south, into the jungles of Viet Nam, and she followed, amazed at its speed. It ran west, through the Taklimakan, and she wondered at its endurance. It turned back east, through the streets of Beijing, and she puzzled at its craftiness. It bounded over the mountains of Mongolia, and she was astounded by its dexterity. It came back again to Sichuan (close enough to her den for Bai Mianxi to hear Prince Inari still laughing at her plight) — and she lost the trail.

First her pale face flushed pink with anger and she leaped high and far in rage. Then Bai Mianxi stalked along more slowly, thinking of what Inari would say when she returned empty-handed. Finally, she caught sight of a well nearby, and decided to wash away the browning blood and take a drink; she'd crossed the Middle Kingdom two ways that night, and was terribly thirsty.

The White-Faced-One hopped to the edge and lapped at the dipper-gourd there, then looked down into the well. To her astonishment, there was the rabbit, curled up on the surface of the water and shining like a lantern! Bai-Mianxi pounced.

Bai Mianxi fell.

Down she came on her hind legs, onto a sparkling white path. All around her grew the loveliest garden — a truly wild-grown garden — that she had ever seen. The trees wore the first, best autumn colors and sweet ripe plums burst on their limbs. Great masses of chrysanthemums and late roses ran crazy. And standing in the middle of it all was the most beautiful person Bai Mianxi had ever seen.

When the White-Faced One first looked, the stranger seemed to be a gold- and silver-furred fox. When she turned her head, the lady fox had grown tall and two-footed like Bai Mianxi herself sometimes did — and the third time she blinked, human.

"Welcome to Heaven, Bai Mianxi."

"Heaven?" said our empress, thinking how foolish she must have been — drowned in a well, taking a reflection for a rabbit. Surely the other ghosts would laugh at her.

"Yes. Only a little one. Come now, or you will be late for your audience."

"I am granting an audience? To whom?"

"You are granted an audience — with my sister, your Mother, the First Goddess, the High Blue Empress of the River of Stars, the true Queen Before Na Kua, Gaia. You have seen her in your dreams, you have danced upon her back, you have suckled at her teat. She is waiting."

So Bai Mianxi followed the Silver Lady. She asked no more questions, but kept her eyes open, and in this way she learned many secret things on her walk through heaven. At last the two came to a great golden gate, taller than a dragon, wider than three bull elephants. The Silver Lady turned to Bai Mianxi, her lovely face now quite stern.

"Now, my youngest niece, you must behave as best you can. Your elder siblings have made your mother quite hot-

tempered, and she has little patience left. Go in now, and kow-tow, and do not raise your eyes to her, or she will be angry at your presumption."

And Bai Mianxi took on her best shape, combed out the fur of her tail carefully, pushed the golden doors open — only far enough for herself and half a wind — and slipped inside.

She never could say what the room really looked like; either she kept her eyes obediently on the floor or (which is more likely) was clever enough not to say things she wasn't supposed to know. The important thing is that she came to a little cushion just at the foot of a dais and prostrated herself next to it, before the throne.

Bai Mianxi lay there nervous, afraid, feeling very small and just a little angry — kow-tows were things other foxes made to her, not something she did herself. But most of all, she lay there listening, thinking:

"Only Bat has sharper ears than I do, and when this Gaia comes along I shall hear it, and so know something about it even though I cannot see."

Well, the White-Faced One waited a long time for the Gaia-goddess to come by, but heard nothing at all until:

"Bai Mianxi."

Our empress nearly jumped out of her skin. Not only had she not sensed the goddess coming, the voice was like nothing she had ever heard before — terribly loud in her heart and terrifyingly quiet in her ears.

"This is the end of your childhood. From now on, you and your people must work, and fight, and serve Us as dutiful sons and daughters.

"There are too many of you, you are breeding left and right — you are almost as bad as our child Man.

"You anger Heaven; you defer to no gods; you upset the local spirits with your tricks. There are legions of angry human ghosts here to petition me, saying you steal from and mischief their descendants day and night — We approve of that, but you must accomplish more, and leave alone those few who do still revere Us.

"We have spoken. Go. Your aunt will instruct you."

Bai Mianxi bit her tongue. She was frightened by Gaia's words, and she knew her people would be too. She did not want to ignore the Silver Lady's advice, but the silence stretched farther and farther out, and she did not rise.

"But... Your Most Worshipful Majesty..."

The silence deepened. Bai Mianxi felt a different kind of well yawn beneath her feet, but went on:

"My people are small and weak. We do not fight, we run. And if we have broken Heaven's rules or yours, it was because we were never given them. And, Your Majesty... I think it is unfair of you to ask us to grow up when we never knew we were children. How were we supposed to enjoy it if no one said?

"Please, let my people go on as they are. We won't trouble you any more..."

"Perhaps we could make a bet, Your Radiance. Let us say, if your preying mantis can't outwrestle and behead my preying mantis, you will let me and my people off the hook?" said Bai Mianxi. Behind her back she held ready a thin piece of stone painted green.

"Your brother Coyote has been here before you."

"Who?"

"Never mind."

"Perhaps I could tell you a valuable secret in exchange for our freedom, Your Radiance. I happened to hear a quite amusing and useful bit of scandal about the Yellow Emperor's favorite concubine and a certain river god..."

"Your sister Raven told me last week."

"Ah... well then... perhaps I could show you some new art. I have only just discovered it myself; it is vastly powerful but small, and so may have escaped your notice. It begins this way," began Bai Mianxi, and she demonstrated her most devastatingly wonderful magic.

"I have a cat who can do that," said Gaia.

"All right then," said Bai Mianxi. Now she felt truly lost; all her clever tricks and crafty dodges were used up — all that had any hope against such a mighty goddess as this — and the Foxes she had led to speech and wisdom were still in danger. She wanted to run, but she stayed.

"Your Radiance, my claws and teeth are all I have left. I will fight your strongest champion. But please, please, don't doom my people!"

"No," said Gaia, and Bai Mianxi knew despair.

"You are brave at the last resort — that is good — and it would be a noble sacrifice. But My champions would utterly destroy you. We did not allow you intelligence only to have you commit suicide. We did not permit Our sister to create a new changing child only to have the wolves tear you to pieces."

Our empress wept.

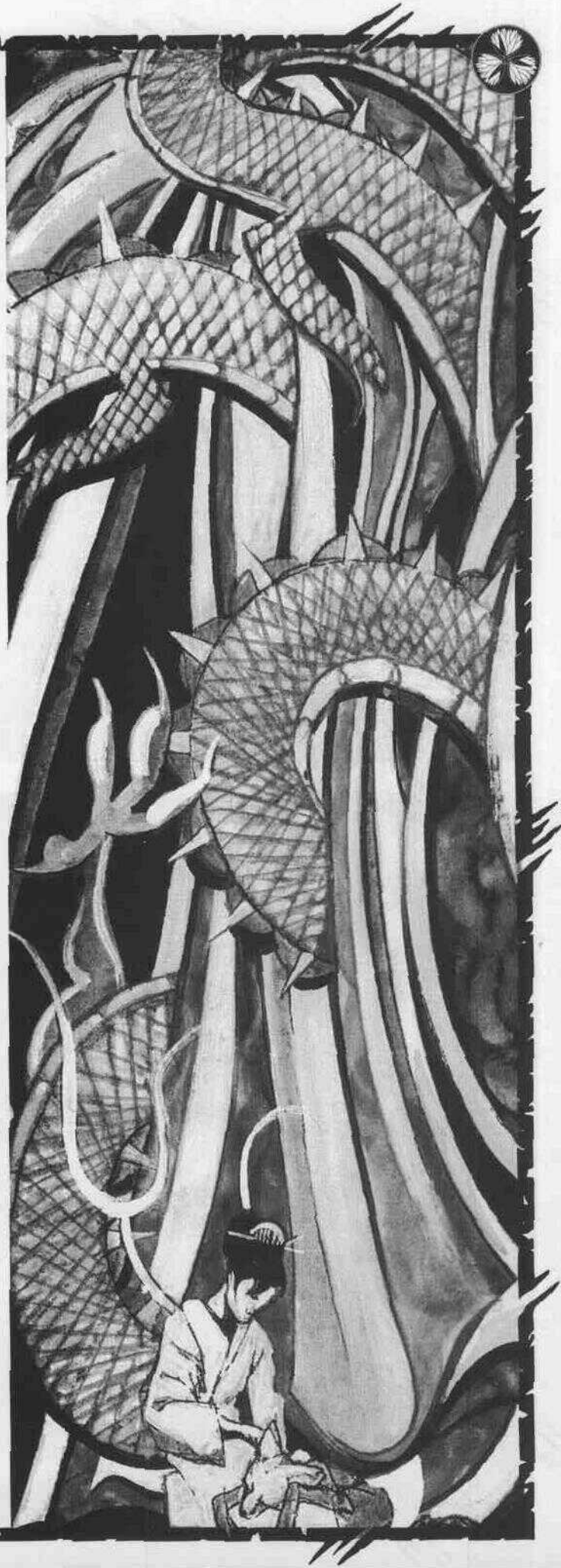
Then Bai Mianxi, in a flash of inspiration, cried out excitedly:

"But, Your Radiance — if you already have all these servants who are better at everything than Kitsune are, then you don't need us! We can go!"

So relieved was she to have rescued her followers (and so taken with her own cleverness) that she forgot the Silver Lady's words and raised her eyes as far as the hem of Gaia's robe.

There she saw a great wonder — the robe itself moved and changed as she watched — the fabric seemed to be part cobweb, part flame, with a green serpent-dragon writhing between them. The webs trapped and snuffed out the flames; the smoldering edges of spider-silk blazed up again; the serpent wove in and out of the chaos, tearing the cloth with its great teeth and patching it up again with its claws.

Bai Mianxi's eyes stung her, and her head spun. All went black. When she came again to her senses, her nose was pointed back at the floor where it belonged, and the cool



white hand of the Silver Lady stilled her trembling paws. They were surrounded by a howling whirlwind, in which furious words were barely distinguishable.

"They will betray Us! They will forget Us! We have had enough of Our Self destroyed by Our Own children!"

Bai Mianxi flattened her body to the floor, terrified.

"Wait, my Sister." The Silver Lady's voice cut clearly through the maelstrom. One white hand left our ancestress' paws and stroked her soothingly on the back. There was a moment of icy pain.

"Look into her heart," the silky voice whispered, and Bai Mianxi knew darkness again.

She woke curled in the lap of the Silver Lady.

"We shall let you have your chance, little Fox." Gaia's voice was endurable once more, even tender. Bai Mianxi trembled in the Silver Lady's arms, and began to weep.

"We have for you three promises. Obey Us and Our sister Luna, and one day you *will* be best at something. Fight hard, and We will help your people survive, even through the Sixth Age that is to come. Serve Us well, and in the last Ages of the world, we will give your people back their freedom."

"Leave Us now — We would sleep."

The Silver Lady — Luna, the Moon, she who saved Bai Mianxi from Gaia's wrath — carried her from the audience chamber, for our ancestress was still too shaken to walk from her Mother with dignity.

Still awake? No, of course it doesn't end there. Nothing ever ends where the story stops. But I think that's enough for now.

The Ages of the World



That may not be literally true, but the abbot of our monastery always said that fable has strong shoulders that can carry far more truth than fact can.

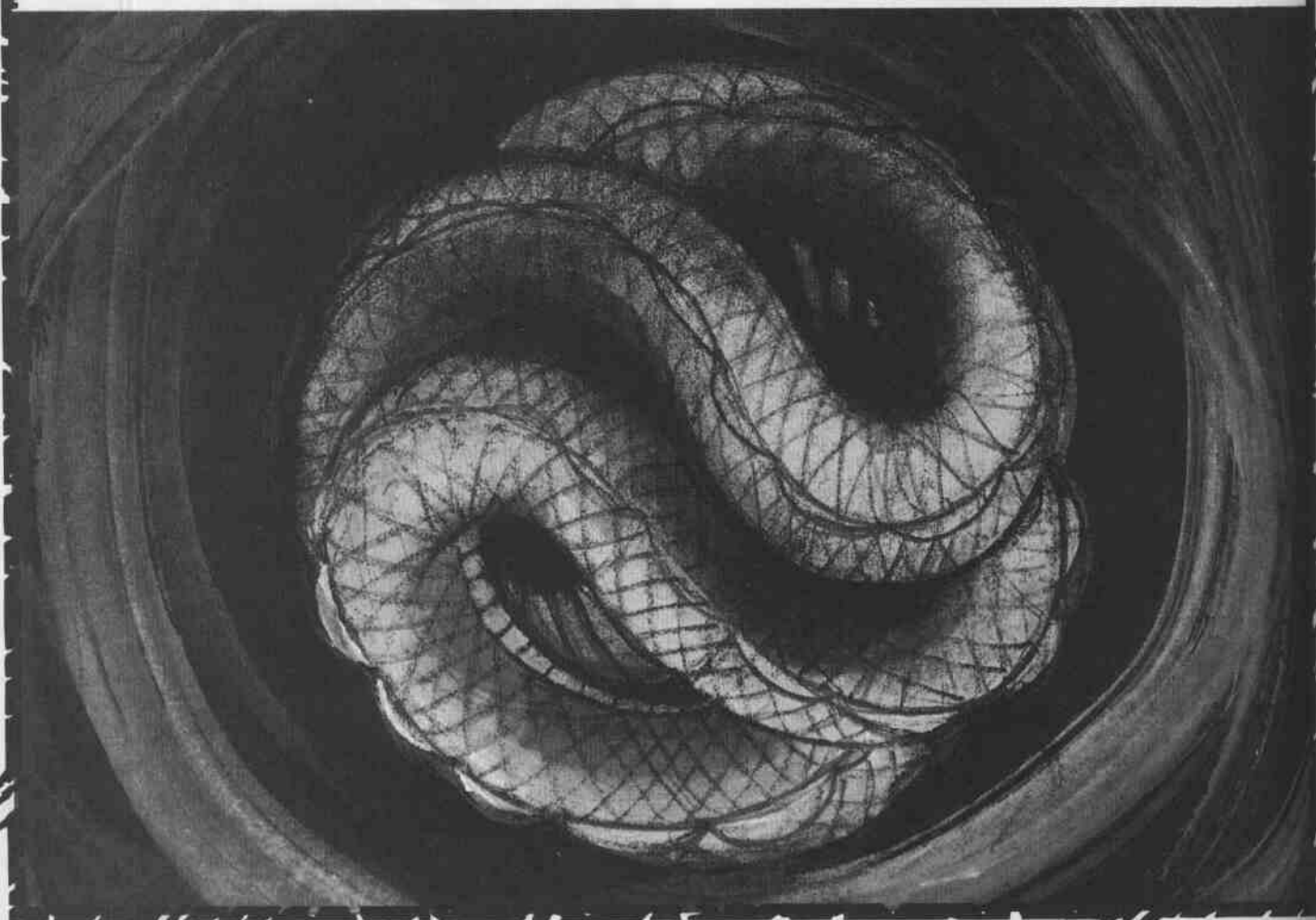
—Barry Hughart, *Bridge of Birds*

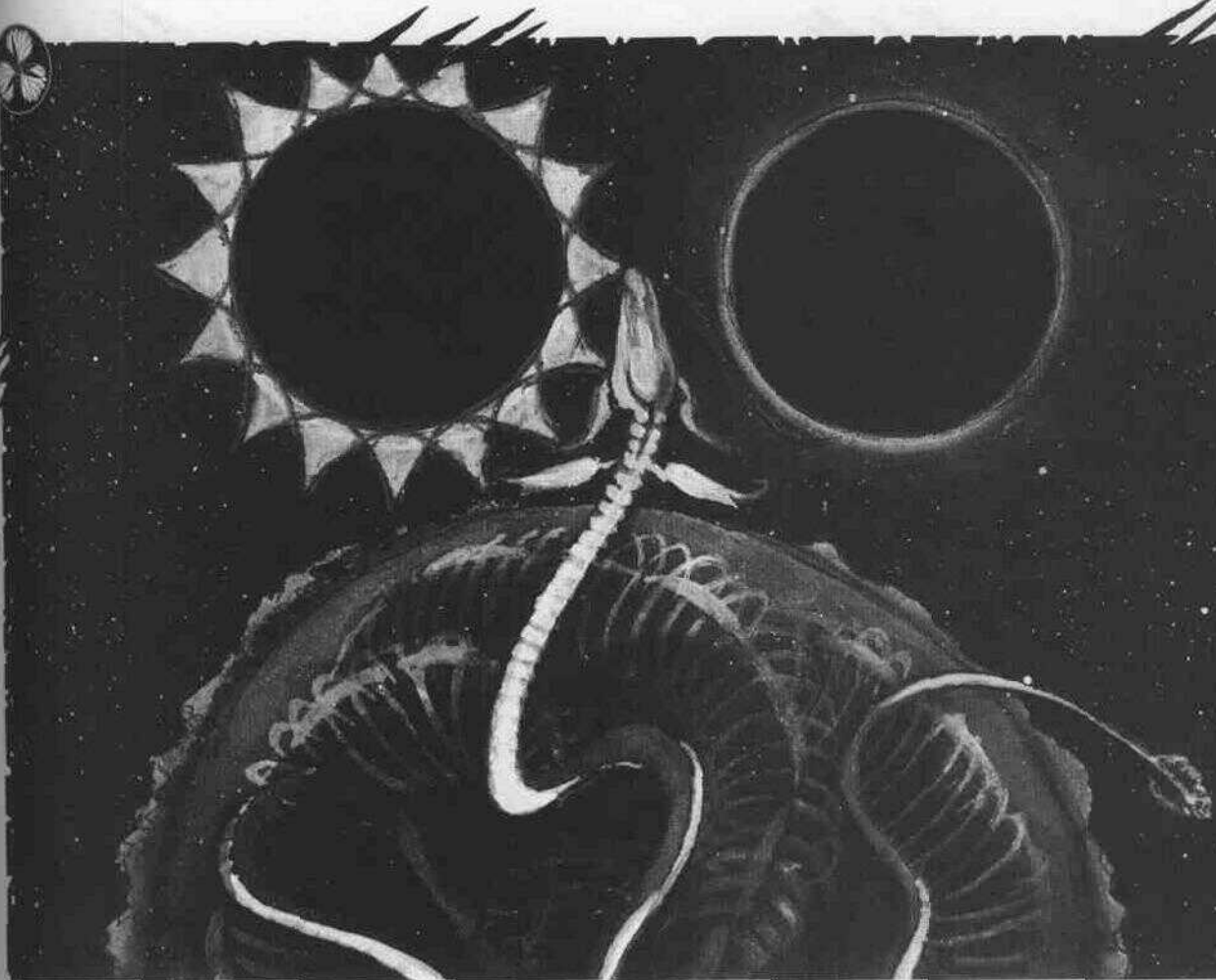
Morning, Mei. How are your eyes? Dream of anything strange? Very good; you should be seeing things. You're adjusting. It may be a while before you can really take in everything that happened last night. We can't afford to wait on your lessons, though.

The first thing you must know — of the things I have been asked to teach you — is that the world has not always been the way it is today. You think you know that, but all you have in mind are human changes: technology, population, expansion, medicine. These are nothing. Last night you caught a glimpse of the truth.

The Age of Gaia

The First Age was Peace. Gaia existed in harmony with herself. Yin and yang, dark and light, spirit and flesh were





balanced, and mingled freely within Her. She was everything, and She was alone.

The First Age ended when Gaia thought, "I will have children."

The Age of Birth

At the beginning of the Second Age, Gaia gave birth to the universe. All of herself she made into her children. From her living body, she created yang things: life, day, dry land, light, heat and fire. From her blood, she created yin things: death, night, water, darkness, the cold and ice. From the afterbirth, that was both, came the things that are neither one nor the other. A little of this she put aside, in case something else needed making.

She set both her great eyes in the sky. One turned golden and shone brightly, the other became silver, and shone coolly. She scattered her teeth and claws through the space left empty by all that creation, and they became stars.

The labor was difficult, and Gaia felt weak. Her eye-daughter, Luna, looked out on the world, and saw that her mother had nothing left but bones and womb. She was dying.

"Mother — I shall take your bones apart, and place them in your womb. I shall gather your children around you, and they will keep you company. My brother Helios will keep watch by day, and you will be warm. I will watch by night, and guard you as you sleep. Rest now."

Luna gathered the scattered pieces of the Mother together, and the world became the shape we know. The teeth and claws came, and kept vigil, and paced restlessly in circles, as they do even today. Gaia kept silent for a long time. At last, with a great shudder, she died.

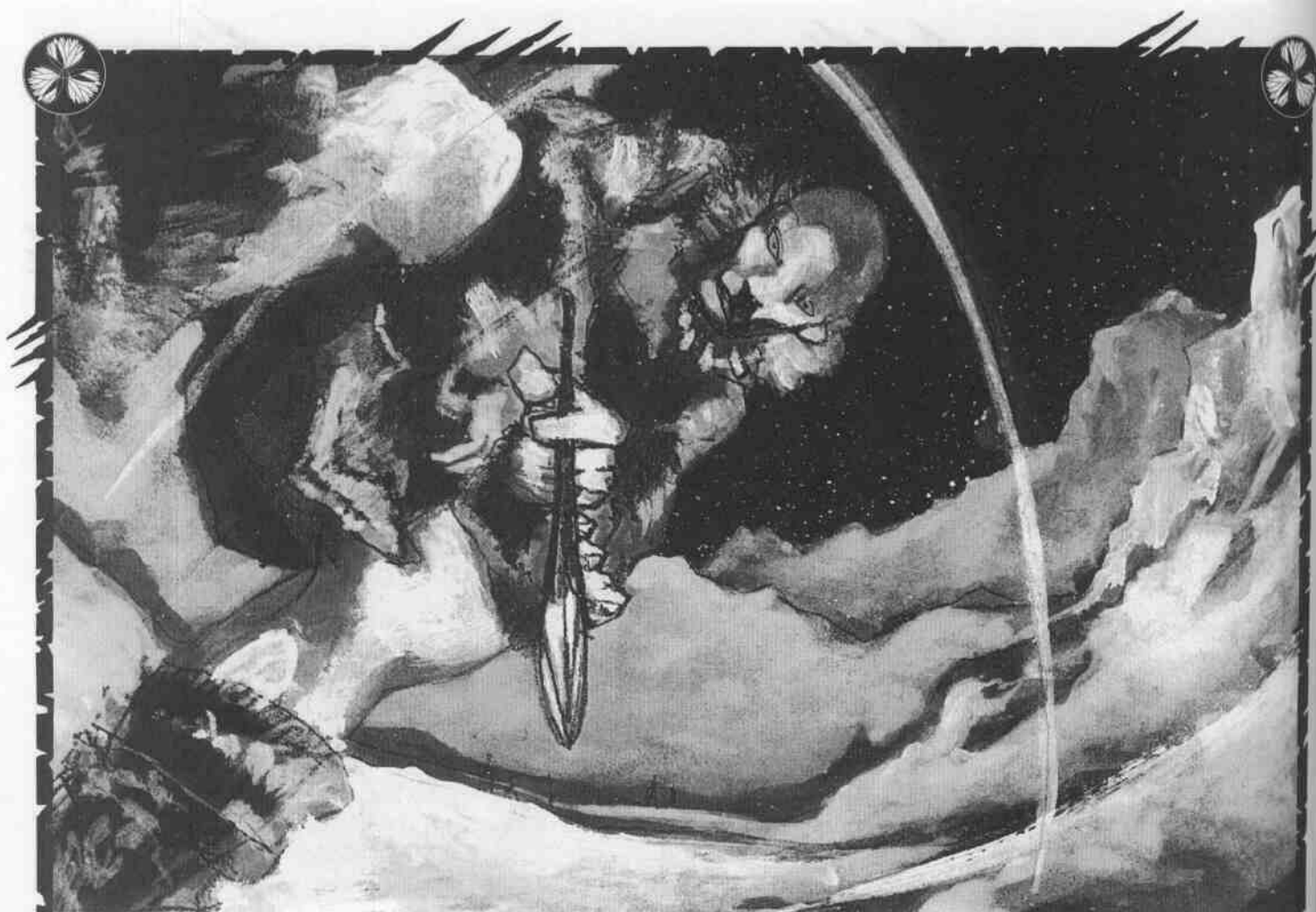
Helios became dark, and screamed in anger. Luna turned away in an agony of despair — and heard a cry *through* the sun's keening. She turned back, and saw a new child, the last child of Gaia-That-Was — Gaia-That-Is. Luna's medicine had left the Mother just enough strength to finish the world with what she had left.

This is why, even today, the sun can go black and the moon turns away. They do this to honor their Mother.

The Triad

Using the things that Gaia-That-Was had created, Gaia-That-Is and her siblings made all the other spirits and creatures.

These children ran wild and free through the world, doing what they pleased and bothering everybody. No one had planned on how to keep them under control; the idea of control hadn't even been invented yet. No one knew how to *destroy* the creatures that Gaia and her siblings no longer had use for; destruction hadn't been thought of, either. And all the Elder Ones were tired of having to make every little thing themselves; no one had figured out how the new creatures could be made to make each other.



At this point, three of the new children — particularly old, wise and powerful ones — came to Gaia and offered their services. They had new ideas. A great Spider-spirit called Weaver had invented a magic called Control. A thunderously large Dragon-spirit called Wyrn had dreamed up Destruction. And a mighty Elemental spirit (no, I don't know what kind) called Wyld came up with — well — Propagation. Fertility. They showed Gaia, Luna and the others how well their new magics worked, and the Elder Ones gave them leave to oversee the Balance of Creation.

And Gaia was tired, and slept.

The Monkey-Plague

One night, many years after the Three had begun their tasks, Luna looked down and saw that her sister's face had changed. Tiny reddish lights speckled her face like a pox. Fires — too many and too far apart to be lightning blazes, too small to be any good at fire's job: cleaning old forests and fields to make way for new ones.

Luna looked closer.

Groups of Gaia's children were gathered around the fires — naked monkeys, where it was too cold for monkeys to rightly be.

Luna called out to her sister, "Gaia, wake up!"

Gaia opened one sleepy eye, and saw a monkey staring back at her. It wore fur that did not belong to it. On a length of sinew — not its own — polished rabbit bones hung round

its neck. It held a branch it had not grown, tipped with teeth it never chewed with. Worst of all, it bore fire on a rock. Gaia looked beyond it, and saw that there were *many*.

"WYRM! WEAVER! WYLD!" she shouted. "What have you been doing? Who are these thieves that wield the powers of your offices?"

The Three came running. "What thieves?" they asked. "These!" Gaia trembled beneath the monkeys' feet.

"Oh," said Wyrn. "Those are not thieves. They are Man."

"You made them yourself," said Weaver, "just after Mammoth and before Manatee. We have found them extremely adaptable, and use them in our work."

"Man!" roared Wyld. "Man-Man-Man-Man-Woman!"

"I made nothing that small and weak with the power to destroy, to order, or to make new things. What is that around its neck? Who thought of that? If I had wanted monkeys with shiny, bony necks I would have made them."

She paused.

"I did make some. Golden Bone-Hummers. Where are they?"

"Ah... They were old-fashioned. *These* monkeys can do all of that, and more — now that we have taught them what we know," said Weaver.

"Their time had passed. I take things when their time is done," said Wyrn. "I had Man get them out of the way."

"Gone!" roared Wyld. "Gone-Gone-Gone-Gone-Dead!"

"Gone forever? MY CHILDREN?!" Gaia shook and boiled in anger, and the Three stumbled. "All of them? Man did this?"

"You don't like them," said Weaver.

"We can kill them, too, if you don't want them around anymore," hissed Wyrn.

Wyld said nothing, but spun more madly around his mother.

"No," whispered Gaia. "You have done enough already. Killing Man to avenge the Bone-Hummers will not bring them back. You three must take your gifts from Man, and he must forget how to do all these things."

Wyld spoke. My throat would go hoarse from yelling and chanting, my feet would bleed and my bones crack from dancing and leaping, if I tried to tell you what a whole thought of Wyld's was like, but this was the point: The Three could no more take their gifts away from the monkeys than Gaia could turn back time and become her own mother again. Wyrn could only destroy Man, not change them, and Weaver only bind them, not take away the powers. And Wyld — Wyld didn't remember exactly what it had done to give the monkeys minds that could grow, but he couldn't undo his, either.

And Luna wondered: If Wyrn could only destroy, and Weaver could only bind, and Wyld could only grow, what would happen to a creature that was cursed with all three?

Aengeyokai

While the Three were still bickering over whose fault it was — which was never settled, though I think Wyrn and Wyld would never have gotten tangled up in it if Weaver hadn't organized the whole thing — Luna picked up a handful of monkeys and a handful of other creatures, and compared them.

Man stank, had terrible fur, bad hearing, useless claws, a feeble sense of smell, poor sight, not much speed, no teeth worth mentioning and little humor. All of the other animals were better at the things that counted — or, that had counted up until now — and had a lot more sense.

Luna turned her silvery eyes to the Three. "Why did you have to use monkeys?"

She looked to her sister, and saw that she was tired, worn out from weeping and in no condition to act. Luna took charge, and said to Gaia:

"We will make guardians for you, that you may sleep safely. They will have the gifts these monkeys have — and more besides — but they will know us and our servants."

"We will make them half from Man and half from these other creatures. Then they will be able to go among Man and teach them about us, yet not have to live with the Weaver-things and Wyrn-fires all the time. They will stay close to you, and keep the wisdom of your heart."

Luna laid out the double handful of children on her belly, and picked out the finest, bravest, and wisest to serve Gaia: Wolves to fight for her, Ravens to watch for her, Cats to listen for her, Bears to heal her, Devil-Fish to guard her life's blood, Dragons to remember for her, Rats to hide in the low places and catch what the rest missed, Snakes to —

No, not Foxes. Not yet.

Next, Luna picked out the finest, wisest, least deaf men and women that she could find, and set them next to the animal they were best suited to. Then she took a little of the afterbirth that Gaia-That-Was had saved — the stuff that was neither yin nor yang but both — and wrapped each pair up together. Finally, she bound each bundle with a silver wire — a single strand of her hair — and cast them back to earth.

And to each Changing Child, she spoke of its duties, its gifts, its place, its birthright, and its weaknesses. She commanded them to work together, and bade Dragons remind the others of the beginning of things. She gave them advice on keeping Man in his place without killing him outright. She whispered to them to watch the Three, especially Weaver, whom she suspected of intending more by teaching Man than it had admitted to. Because she spoke so softly, this was the first thing the Changing Children would forget.

Last of all, Luna called out to the sun:

"Make it colder. There are monkeys out of place, and we must send them home with ice."

"Sleep safe, now, Sister. We will keep watch."

Shen

Luna had creatures left from each hand after making the Changing Children. She put them gently back where they had come from. Even though they were rejected for the greatest duty, they were changed by her touch.

The men and women saw, heard, and understood more clearly, and became the shamans.

The animals grew wiser, lived long, and each became chief of its kind. In time they learned to listen to Gaia, and passed into other Realms to watch over their kin. The trees and plants Luna's fingers grazed as she set down the creatures learned to see and to think, and they passed on as well. All of these became Kami.

When Luna reached down to set the creatures in their homes, strands of her silver hair fell on other beings of all kinds, and their souls became part of hers. They became *hsien*, and are hers forever.

The Trial Waits

At last, Gaia slept and Luna turned away in her mourning dance. The Three stood where their elders had left them.

Wyrn seethed with anger. He felt he had been judged unfairly. He felt duped by Weaver, and abandoned by Gaia — his Mother! Why was she more concerned over a few thousand Bone-Hummers than over his feelings? He still didn't understand what was wrong with Weaver's idea of



giving Man a little extra help — they had just made the pathetic things more useful — and he resented Gaia and Luna for having scolded them.

Weaver sat perfectly quiet at the end of her silken thread, watching the new guardians with eight calculating eyes. After a time, the heat of Wyrn's rage attracted her attention, and she turned to the serpent with a smile.

Wyld hung his head in sorrow, and spun in place for almost the entire month. Then he dashed off to a remote wasteland where the other two could not hear him, and wept thunderstorms, begging his Mother's pardon for disobedience. By the time she said "Yes" he had forgotten the entire incident, but that is his way.

The Web

Weaver whispered in Wyrn's ear for eons afterward, and spun her gossamer ties around him — seeking to harness the great power she recognized in his anger. Some say she sought to use him to rebel against their Mother even then, but I think she had no higher purpose than control for its own sake. Her web spread over his weakest coils first: Duty, Judgment, Filial Piety, Sanity. When she felt the sticky strings were strong enough, she laid a thread across the heart of his rage.

Of course, this was a terrible thing to do — not only a betrayal of her sibling, but overreaching what Gaia and Luna had given to her to do. The Three were assigned to deal with lesser creatures, and Wyrn was her equal. In her arrogance she forgot that.

The pure, raw force of Wyrn's fury resonated along the strand, and Weaver could hardly bear it. She fought in terror to escape, but the web was the strongest she could make, and it held her to him. She went mad.

The webs she'd woven around the weakest and finest parts of Wyrn tightened with Weaver's agonies, and strangled him where they held. He was cut nearly in half. Broken ends whipped and lashed at the serpent, savaging his body and mind. He howled in pain, and his rage turned to hatred.

At this time, the damage was yet slight, and Weaver still feared her Mother. She knew she had done wrong, and that Wyrn's wounds would not heal by themselves. She did not know Wyld had been forgiven, and she did not trust Luna to let her live after these crimes. So Weaver said nothing. She repaired such evidence as would betray her, and laid her plans in secret.

We reckon the end of the Second Age from the breaking of Weaver's mind and the wounding of Wyrn.

The Age of Legends

In the Third Age, the consequences of Weaver's thoughtlessness spread throughout the world.

Wyrn lost what hold he had had over his own servants. They could not know what had happened to their lord, but many of them kept honestly and conscientiously at their

duties, killing only what had been proscribed by Gaia to die. Some of them *still do this today*, but they are few.

Weaver, not wishing her minions to find her out, freed the more intelligent of her retinue, but bound the rest into madness with her. You may find descendants of the freed spiderlings today, but beware them: Some have returned to her, some were swallowed by her serpent-brother, and some serve other powers. They should not be trusted.

Weaver convinced Wyrms that Gaia had been the one to hurt him, and the two together created more creatures to serve them. Remembering Luna's invention of *hengeyokai*, they wrapped Man up in spider-silk and snake-skins, trying to make their own. When this didn't work as well as they'd hoped, they kept experimenting. That is why there are so many kinds of *bakemono* walking Gaia's skin: The two traitors could never get the formula quite right.

Ten Wyrms-lordlings known as the Yama Kings became ambitious with the distraction of the Liege. They were lesser servants, really. Their duties were limited to one, tiny, insignificant, negative aspect of Yin: Decay. But the Ten had a secret grudge; they desired no Yang in the world at all (Life ruined all their best work). The Balance which Gaia-That-Was had been, and had struggled to leave for her children, they sought to destroy utterly. Together they plotted, and gathered other drifting Wyrms-children into their service. When they controlled Death as well, the Yama Kings created a stronghold realm for themselves out of parts of the Mother, and called it Yomi.

From their castle-kingdom, the Yama Kings set out in conquest of the world. They took other creatures under their banner when they could, and whatever men and women, *shen* and Kami that they could not persuade to join them, their servants took great delight in destroying. And they fed so much Yomi power into their servants that soon they were no longer only Ten.

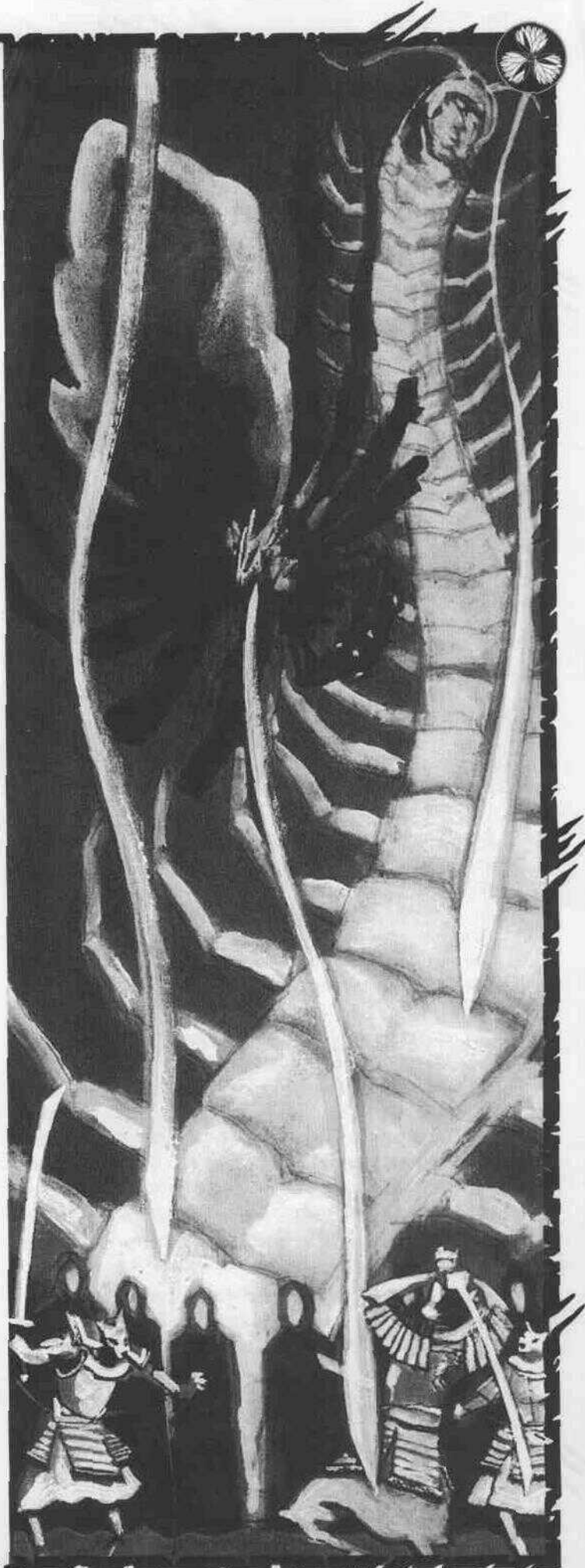
Yomi began to take over Gaia, and Wyrms and Weaver smiled.

Gods and Heroes

If we had but time and leisure, I could fill your ears to the tips with stories of this Age — of Oh-Kuni-Nushi — of Archer Yi and the nine false suns the Yama Kings sent into the sky — of our cousins the wolves, and the brave part they played in turning back Yomi, time and again — of the Bastet, and their great leaders keeping the Seven Radiant Bridges clear of Luna's enemies — of One White Feather, the wisest Tengu who was ever rumored to live in Korea — of three Okuma brothers who healed an entire mountain range after the Yomi had passed that way.

But I will have to save my breath today, and be satisfied with telling you three things only.

First: The humans fought at the side of the *shen*. Mages, sages and ordinary people — they could still feel through their feet and taste the air like any other creature (as they could today, if only they would pay attention) — and many



fought for Gaia then. Many fight for Gaia today, though they seem few compared to the apathetic, the ignorant, and the corrupt.

Second: When the humans cried out, joining their voices with the *shen* in prayer and in battle, in thanksgiving and in mourning, Gaia, her brothers, sisters, and their most powerful servants heard and answered. The creatures called to Helios and Luna, on the Morning Star and the Red, and the Elder Ones sent their servants to visit and to watch over those who needed them. Wherever the servant-spirits went, they called their Lieges by new names, showing each group of *shen* and mortals a different face. They meant to confuse no one; they did this so the Elder Ones would know where on Earth pleas for help came from. Humans call the masks the Celestines wear to speak to them "gods," "kami," "angels," "avatars," and other things.

If you study a god very closely, you may still be able to find the Incarna or Celestine behind the mask, but it is always safest to speak to the Elder Ones by the names Luna gave us for them. Also, gods like their privacy.

Third: When the Elder Ones saw so many wise ones and good warriors among the monkeys, the *hengeyokai*, and the *shen*, they became quite proud. To beings so powerful, the mortals defending Gaia looked like mayflies guarding the Great Wall. The gods began to take favorites, and reward particularly tricky, valiant, strong or interesting fighters.

Some of the gods' human favorites were given longer lives in which to fight Yomi. Some were honored with the choice of what form their next life would take, or that they should remember old lives in the next, and this is how mortals came to understand reincarnation. Some were taken after their deaths to advise or amuse or fight in the ranks of the Celestial Courts, and they were the first that Man called "demigods" or "immortals." Some were preserved as they had been killed and sent back to serve in better, stronger, more beautiful and terrifying bodies, and they were called Wan Xian.

Now there were about ten thousand tribes of Man, and ten thousand kinds of creature that were neither Yin nor Yang but both, and ten thousand Kami all fighting to destroy or restore the Balance-That-Should-Be. Even Luna, the most clever of the Elder Ones (and the one with the best view) had trouble telling friend from foe. Mortals (who can rarely see past the sky they were born under) had a terrible time, but by keeping to their duties, putting their trust in the gods, most found the right path.

And so the Balance-bringers won out.

War's End

All the forces of the Yama Kings were sealed up in the kingdom of Yomi, and the Wan Xian were set to guard the portals in and out.

To make the living, the spirits, and the dead easier to tell apart, the Elder Ones divided the world into three places. The dead were given a Realm called Yin from which

they could still see their families, and it was a pleasant echo of the lands they were used to. The Kami were given a Realm called Yang made of stuff like themselves, where gods and their servants could speak freely with spirits without the burden of flesh. And the gods gave the living the Middle Kingdom, the best present they could have asked for: a place to call their own, a chance to rebuild from the war, and freedom from the constant kibitzing of their ancestors. The three Realms were still quite close together, and those who wished to could cross between as they liked.

The *hengeyokai*, the Wan Xian, and all the other *shen* kept to their tasks for many years. Man listened to their feet, their ears and their shamans, and lived as naturally as could be expected. Wyld served as he was intended to, Wyrn sulked in silence and Weaver hid her thoughts behind her webs. Peace reigned. Gaia smiled in her sleep. Slowly, other Elder Ones joined their sister in dreams.

Yet, in Luna's mind, there was the memory of war, and she saw the Red Star grow ever more wakeful and brighter.

The Age of Testing

Wyrn and Weaver ended the Second Age in a storm; the Third Age was killed so quietly that no one ever knew quite when it was done. There was no one great Betrayal. So many servants had Gaia then — so many weak places in her hide, so many creatures burrowing and chasing across the gaps — that each need slip only a fraction, be inattentive only a moment, close their eyes for but an instant, or leave their post by just an inch, and the Balance would be broken.

And so it was.

The Wan Xian

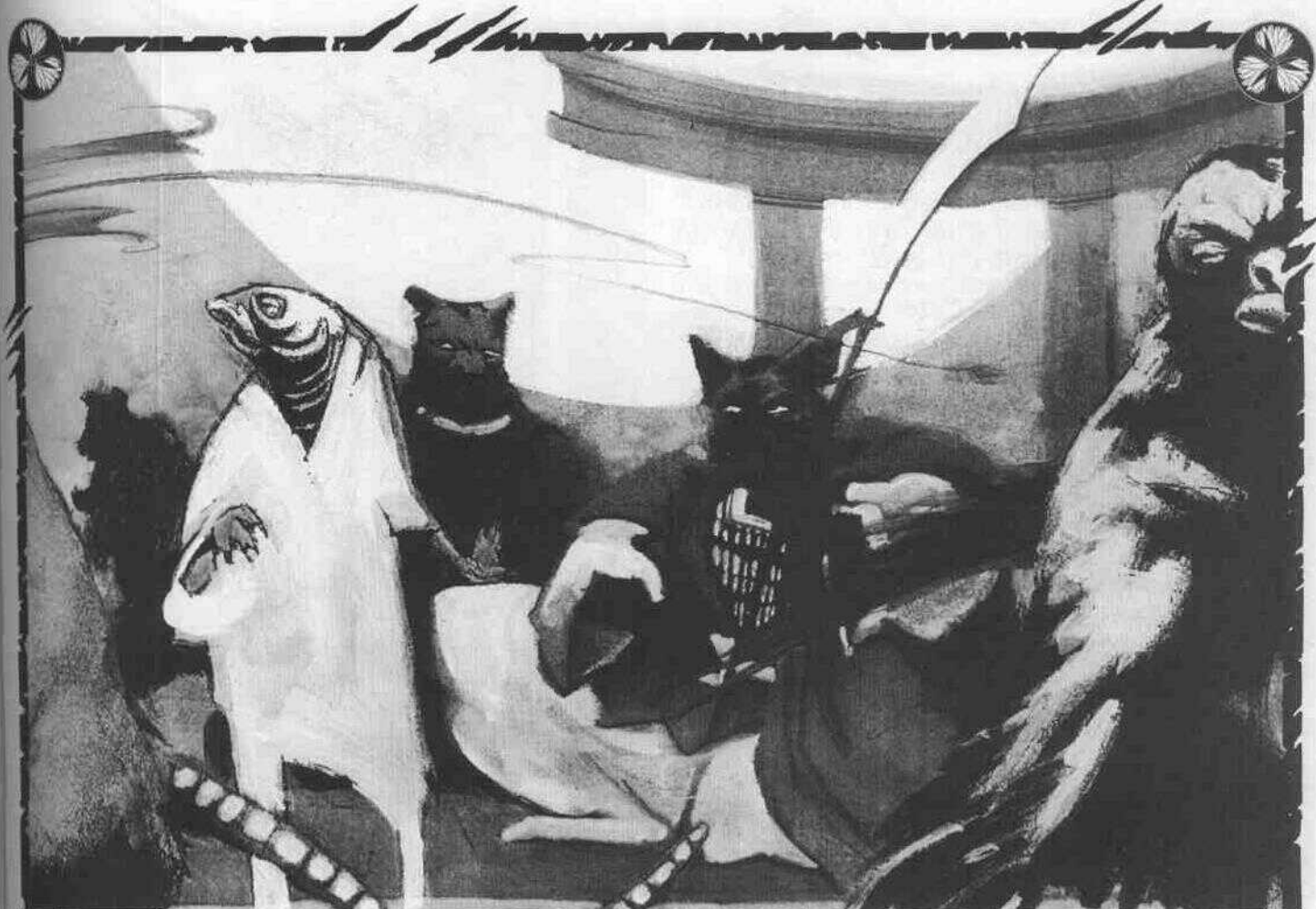
The Guardians of Yomi failed because of their masters' reticence. The gods who had honored them with second lives had told them little about the world before the Third Age. They did not know Wyrn or his purpose, and so were unprepared for the kinds of powers he had crafted while Yomi fought the open war.

Corruption came in embassy to the Court of the Wan Xian. Flattery opened doors for him and Bribery made him friends. Sloth drew up the agenda, Decadence saw to the lodgings, and Ostentation handled protocol. Greed threw a banquet in honor of their hosts, Depravity provided... entertainment... and Lies ran errands for everyone.

The Wan Xian opened a gate to Yomi for the servants of Wyrn, and looked out on the world with new eyes — the eyes of overlords.

Man

Man failed because they, too, knew little of the Three. Wyrn, Weaver and Wyld had been nothing but friends to them. Had they not given them great gifts? Had they not raised them above the other beasts? Weaver moved carefully among them, as she knew most humans were faithful to Gaia



—and that *other* things in human skin would recognize her work, no matter how well disguised.

Weaver sent one servant, and one only, to tempt humanity. It wore a human skin as well, and crept on silken webs from mind to mind, from village to village, from tribe to tribe. Man hardly knew that it had been there, save for the gifts it left behind: Seeds, needles, throwing sticks, flints, sinew cordage, mashed roots, grinding stones. The grateful monkeys began to hope the spider would visit. Moreover, they realized that what the traveler could do, they could do, and they invented things of their own.

Progress returned to its mistress, and Weaver set that spiderling high in her Court.

The Wall

When the Elder Ones created the Great Realms, they separated the three with the thinnest barrier possible, something like a paper screen — good enough for privacy, but no great obstacle in a crisis.

Weaver looked at the arrangement in admiration. In one generous act of creation, the gods had provided her the means to divide her enemies. She sent out legion after legion of her smallest web-spinners, with very simple orders:

Run on the Wall.

Every thread they trailed behind them thickened the paper screen one iota. Where the strands crossed, the net toughened and tightened. Each spider had to do very little,

but if they all ran long enough, the entire Wall would have a new layer, stronger than the first. And if it was a very slow process, what would that matter? The more gradually the web grew, the more time would pass before anyone caught on — and the longer it took the Elder Ones to notice, the harder they would find the barrier to break without destroying the Realms on either side.

The Wars

Oh, the Wan Xian were clever. They knew that in order to savor their new forbidden delights, they would have to do something about the hengeyokai. The beast-folk had always helped police humanity, assisting the Wan Xian in making sure that settlements never grew too large or too small. Their eyes were upon the Ten Thousand Immortals, and the caerns they guarded brimmed with delicious Chi. So the Wan Xian sent their most glib to the hengeyokai courts to speak of a grave threat — the other hengeyokai.

So began the War of Shame, and so fell the Okuma.

But you cannot fool the hengeyokai forever, even though they are short of temper and live with all the impetuosity due their short lifespans. The Khan heard the quiet whispers of the Wan Xian; the Tengu spied blood glittering on their hands; the Nagah scented rot on their breath. Fewer in number but unified once again, the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother turned their war on the Wan Xian and the human settlements that harbored the Immortals.

Gaia wearily opened her eyes to see her most blessed children fighting in a war they would not lose, but could never truly win. Their healers were gone, lost for their own gentleness, and all the others were so much fewer in number. So Gaia formed a thought, and gave it a voice, and sent it to do her bidding — to birth a new child.

The White-Faced One

She came blind and wet, into darkness, knowing only the smell of Gaia around her, the good earth under her paws, the heartbeats of her mother fast beside her ears. She was the only kit the vixen bore that season, and the fur of her face was white.

The White-Faced One lived as any other fox, but she was the cleverest, sneakiest, wisest, fastest and nimblest that had ever lived. The older she became, the more wisdom she found in her head and heart. And all that was nothing other foxes had not done before.

But as Bai Mianxi grew older, she began to find other ways to wisdom — voices in the wind, in the water, in the trees, in the ground, in the prey and the hunters, in the fires the humans built by their camps. The spirits of these things whisper to every creature Gaia makes, but few of the Mother's children stop to listen. Bai Mianxi learned not only to listen, but to speak and call. She was the first, but she was not yet Kitsune.

While the world burned and charred beneath her feet, while the servants of Gaia fought and died beneath one another's claws and Wan Xian's teeth, while Yomi escaped its bounds, while Weaver and Wyrn preyed on Man and shen alike, Bai Mianxi played in the fields and forests. She found other clever foxes and taught them what she knew. They played tricks on anyone and everyone they met. They rescued underdogs if they liked, to make fun of the powerful. They tormented the poor if that was easier, or more amusing. They killed if it occurred to them to do so. Bai Mianxi and her followers drifted across the Middle Kingdom like storms through a valley — untrained, wild and destructive, setting fires or putting them out as their whims led them.

This is who they were the night Bai Mianxi chased a rabbit down a well.

The Age of Darkness

Our Empress spent only one year in the little heaven, yet when she came home, the Age of the World had changed.

Her court lay in ruins, but only one autumn's leaves covered the rubble. She ran along the fallen trees, searching for her people, fearing what she found: The Prince Inari's den, bare, cold and empty — the boundary places unmarked and scentless — the best paths abandoned — the farms nearby overrun with fat mice and rabbits — and one hole, and one hole only, still lived in.

In that dark and lonely den shivered the last fox of the old Court, Burrs-in-the-Ears. He told her how the Court had

scattered in her absence, and what had become of all the foxes she once knew. She pressed him closely over the disappearance of her consort, the Prince, but Burrs could only guess and point vaguely West. Bai Mianxi's pads itched to follow her mate, but she felt the moon look over her shoulder. There were other things to do before her time was her own.

Burrs-in-the-Ears became Fire-Splits-the-Sky, Bai Mianxi's original pupil and the first Dosht. Together they found others — there is a fine story for each new Kitsune kit, should you ever have time to hear — and Bai Mianxi stayed in Henan to teach them. Not until her mission was done — one Fox of each Path five-tailed and an Elder in their own right — did she go out searching for Inari. His trail was colder than Yomi's heart, but she set her nose to follow Helios as he set, and strode away through China.

The Fifth Age

In Hubei she found no trace of Inari, but by the side of the road one night she met a demon.

"Nihao, guardian!" she cried. "How fare the Wan Xian today?"

The demon flushed red in shame, then white in fear, then red again, but for anger. "The Wan Xian are no more, little fox. Spare me your insults." And Bai Mianxi smelled that the blood he flushed with was not his own, and heard the rattlers of dead skin rustling against his dry bones. The Wan Xian had become Kuei-jin, and the gods had taken their breath and blood away.

In Sichuan the Prince was nowhere to be seen, but in a cemetery she heard three ghosts talking.

"Nihao, revered ancestors! How fare the fallen heroes?"

"There are no heroes on this Side, little fox," said the first. "I am cursed to roam the dark places because my family hadn't the money for a decent burial."

"There are no heroes on this Side, little fox," said the second. "I am cursed to roam the dark places because my family had too much money, and buried me in jade."

"There were heroes here, little fox," said the third, "but they have left us to fight Yomi or to live again. There are no heroes left us."

In Qinghai not even the wind remembered Inari, but she shared rabbit with two starveling *hsien*.

"How fare the people of the Moon?" she asked them, but they knew nothing of their home, being lost themselves. She caught more rabbits for the pair before she moved on, but they were spider-bit and sickening, and she could do little for them.

In Tibet the mountains held the footprints of many foxes, but none were those she sought. She came across a shaman, though, who offered to find her lost consort for the price of a word — one word — but he would not say what word he wanted, and she so left him. She was wiser than she knew; the word the wizard wanted was her Name, that he might break it and learn her secrets.



In Nepal she knew she was on the wrong path, perhaps even on the wrong mission, and she climbed a high mountain to be nearer the Silver Lady while she prayed. Looking up from her rites, stretching her back for a moment, she saw a Cat and a Raven watching her from other peaks.

"Nihao, Eyes of Gaia." Both, she knew, loved the title. The two looked up at one. "How fare the Great Mother's servants?"

"Poorly. Poorly. We are decimated; we are betrayed; we are overrun by the monkeys," said the Raven. "Why, Tange Phom, who lives three valleys that way, is in such terrible trouble over these villagers that I don't know what —"

"Who wants to know?" asked the Cat. "We will tell you nothing until you have said who you might be."

"I am Kitsune; I am a servant of Luna and of Gaia. I travel west, and I might be the White-Faced One — or I might not."

"Keetsneigh," said the Cat, in a knowing tone, though he had never heard of one before. "You are nobody; I need not trouble myself over such a minor Keetsneigh as you," and (dying of curiosity as he was) he turned away, so as to snub her, but stayed within earshot.

"Brother Raven, I would know more about our kin. Are there many near here that I might meet?"

"We are great in number," said Raven and Cat together.

The Cat rolled over to catch Bai Mianxi's eye. "Our Khan and Bagheera swarm across these mountains. We have all the power of the earth and sky against our enemies, and for any foe against us we can bring two veteran warriors — and a novice, nay, a kitten, as page, who could handle the enemy alone."

The Raven eyed his feline kin in disbelief.

"Right. Keep telling yourself that."

"We are great in number, Sister Fox. There are four of us: This flea-bag, myself, and Tange Phom, and a wolf who weeps for his fallen packmates. That is the army of Gaia in these parts."

Bai Mianxi wept for the changes the world had suffered. Her Prince was gone and her heart broken, but what a small wound that was, compared to the multitude of dead, warped, changed, starving, lonely, web-caught, corrupted, broken, forgotten and forgetful creatures roaming the earth.

"I will use no more time searching for my love or my destiny," she prayed to the Silver Lady. "Forgive me for wasting these years looking for the Prince. What do you want me to do, my lady?"

To her astonishment (for in that split second she had been so humble she honestly hadn't expected Luna to listen to her unworthy self), the prayer was answered.

"The time was not wasted, dear niece. The journey let you see what harm Yomi has caused your Mother and her servants; also, you traveled in the right direction. Now we command you to leave the mountains for India. We wish

you to spend time assassinating dynasties which Heaven no longer sees fit to rule.

"Many of them do not exist yet; you may be at this some time."

The Death of Empires

Now Bai Mianxi proved herself not merely the First, but the Best. Little Kitsune like us may destroy an evil person — a politician, a ruler, a dictator, a Wurm-sotted tyrant — and be proud to call the deed our own. Bai Mianxi executed nations, and left the populace living.

In India, she allowed the good and tolerant King Asoka a full and fruitful reign. His heirs she toppled.

She made crumble the Qin line of Emperors; the Han weakened and fell to her machinations in their time, four centuries later. She visited the Sui when Heaven had no further use for them — and when they had no use for Heaven. The full tale of her journeys is unknown; she was the lone fox, and as the centuries passed she took on many other names.

When the Emperor Toba of Japan lost the Mandate of Heaven, Bai Mianxi infiltrated his very chambers and possessed the body of his favorite concubine. Her mission, so far as we know, was to destroy the decadent, intrigue-wracked Court and its horrid dark mages. But the Namebreakers were too strong for her, or found her out too early. They warned the Emperor, and exorcised the White-Faced One.

Exorcised. Like a ghost, yes. The fool mages and priests thought, even, that they had destroyed her. We knew better. Still, the story of the First Kitsune ends with her expulsion from the Jewel Maiden. No! No more tonight.

The Prince Inari

Her Prince kept his secrets closer to his neck; none of my calling ever discovered where he came by his training as a Kitsune. (They dared to ask, I suppose, but nothing came of it.) So there is no tale I can spin to take him from Bai Mianxi's side in their Henan dwelling-place to his caerns and shrines in Japan.

The Kataribe of that country, who should know best, say that when the Prince arrived there and began to teach them to be Foxes, rather than foxes, he had five tails and golden fur. He shone like the sun by day, like the moon by night. He possessed powers no Nine-Tails has duplicated since, and controlled the fabric of the earth and sky. He could and did send his Court to the other islands of the Archipelago, China, Korea, Mongolia, Manchuria — even as far as Tibet and India.

He led his Elders to the front gates of a Hakken Garou caern through a sky-wracking summer storm he had called up himself, and Grandfather Thunder's family condescended to speak with them.

He sent the most chatty, nimble, harmless-looking Kataribe of his Court to gossip with the Tengu, and the rumors flew fast and free between Raven and Fox.

He sent the youngest, most respectful, reverent and legend-hungry kit to a Dragon, and in time the Zhong Lung accepted the honor of Grand Celestial Historian to the Court of Inari.

He sent the least scrupulous, ugliest, nastiest fighter among his Eji to fight dirty against the enemies of the Nezumi, and in time they fought at his side.

He sent the most attractive, coquettish, mysterious Doshi to the dens of the Khan, and the great Cats fell like mountains without feet.

He sent the kindest, ablest, gentlest Gukutsushi to tend to the last dying Okuma in all Japan, and the two became fast friends. The Bear even said, once before he passed on, that in time the Kitsune might be trusted.

He sent no one to the Nagah; he said an emissary would come from them eventually, and that the Kitsune were to accord the Snakes all the courtesy in the world.

Words

Now, once we were growing into our own and learning our new ways, we discovered a most wondrous thing, a creation of the Fourth Age, perhaps the most glorious creation of the Weaver in all the ages.

Paper.

How good of you not to scoff. Some others might think that paper is useless, that too many trees die to make paper these days. The second is somewhat true, for to the humans paper has become a dead thing, a convenience. But the first is so very wrong. You see, paper — along with its aunt, writing — is one of the most powerful things in all the world. It is born of the earth and catches the wind. It may conquer water and nourish fire. It is a vessel that spirits trust, for it may be of complete purity and yet can be torn asunder so easily, returning the spirit to freedom.

So much magic, bound in so fragile a substance. How can it not be powerful? Oh, in these days of photocopiers and magazines paper seems very cheap; the humans even daub away their own filth with it. But to those who know the secrets of its magic, it is the greatest of sorceries. It is a Weaver-thing that can be used to break the Weaver's webs, to teach others new ways. It may be used to aid Gaia, even moreso than computer or gun or automobile — for it is magic, and it was our greatest mystic discovery.

I shall not bore you with the thousand-and-twenty tales of how we found its power and how we first used it. What is important is that a Chinese Kitsune was the first of our kind to use writing; a Korean Fox was the first to use rune-magic; a Japanese Kitsune was the first to master sacred paper and origami. It is one of the greatest shared secrets of our tribe, and I envy the Fox who will have the joy of teaching you Ju-Fu.

Theft

Everyone knows that foxes steal. Eggs, berries, hares from a woodsman's traps — whatever a fox needs. Gaia knew this, of that you may be certain. And I think Luna was not so very disappointed in us when the Kitsune began to steal from their cousins. Oh, it wasn't very much or anything truly important — but it was oh-so-true to Bai Mianxi and all our illustrious ancestors.

You see, we weren't the only thieves. The Tengu were bandits in their own way, and the Bastet knew a thing or three about theft themselves. In fact, the Bastet knew to watch other hengeyokai and steal their very Gifts.

So the one thing we stole from them was that very trick of theft.

It was really the only thing we needed to steal, you know. From that point on we weren't really thieving as Kitsune; we were merely practicing a Bastet pastime. We learned much from other hengeyokai, and our sorceries began to be so many and great that they would have filled many scrolls. The Doshi were the finest at this art, and would spend many a summer day chasing quietly after other beast-folk, hoping to catch something new.

Then one day, a pair of Doshi noticed a peculiar-looking wolf, whose fur was black as any Hakken's, but whose gums were green as the sea. This wolf was worrying at a human carcass, pulling out the entrails and strewing them about. But the wolf didn't eat any of it. Rather, he set his head to one side and studied the entrails, then nodded happily to himself and ran away. The two Doshi immediately said "Divination!" to one another, and ran off to find a human to practice on.

But when the two Doshi returned to their court a week later, the Khan general drew up his hackles and flew at them. They ran away, of course; what would you have done? They leapt into a bramble-bush, panting, and began to talk quickly to one another, trying to figure out what was wrong with the once-noble tiger.

It was then that each Doshi noticed that the other's breath smelled like centipede venom.

Oh, how very sorry they were then. They immediately fled to the Court of Ancestors, where they begged and kowtowed and asked if someone could please remove the taint. They did the same in Umi, and in the Tiger Lands, and wherever they could find servants of Heaven to listen to them.

Finally, it was an old, old wolf who gave them an answer — not their answer, not the one they wanted to hear, but an answer. "Yomi is everywhere," the old wolf rumbled. "A little of it is even in ourselves, if you recall from the sutras of the San Yuan. Some people have much more of it, and are eaten from within until there is nothing but Yomi under their skins. Such a one was the wolf from whom you stole your latest trick. In doing so, you invited Yomi into yourselves, and now it is making itself comfortable."

"But can we not make it leave?" protested the first Doshi.

The wolf shook its head. "You cannot take back an invitation. Yomi is already settling in, and I would be careful of inviting in any more."

"Oh, we won't!" cried the second Doshi. "We have made all our kind swear oaths never to steal Gifts again! But isn't there a way to — well, to encourage Yomi to go someplace else?"

The old wolf shook its head again. "Not in this age. But listen — if you keep yourselves from taking on any more Yomi as a houseguest until the Wheel turns again, then perhaps you will have done enough penance to make that Yomi uncomfortable. And in the Age Yet to Come, there will be so much war and misery that you may be able to apologize for your actions through very great deeds." He settled his hoary chin on his old paws, and looked through half-lidded eyes at the two Doshi. "The world will be remade or destroyed then. If you are helpful enough, and we manage to win, then perhaps Gaia will be strong enough again to chase away the Yomi from you sorcerers."

It was not the most reassuring promise, but not one Doshi who has lived since then has forgotten those words.

Parting

There, I have spoken much and you are almost sleepy again already. There are thousands of other stories that you should hear, I am sure, but this is enough for one poor kit's head to retain for some time. You will meet other Kataribe in the times to come. Be polite, and listen to their tales of the past; history will die only when the future dies with it.


Modern Times

Mei-Fei sat nervously at the bar of the tiny robata-yaki. The crowded restaurant seemed like a sea of eyes glittering black at her; fishermen and dock-workers smiling uncertainly at the thirteen-year-old and her clean-cut guardian. Sake and beer smells assaulted her new senses — to the kit the whole town stank of seaweed and dead fish.

The cook smiled and set square plates of unrecognizable vegetables before them, and Uncle Hu handed her a full bowl of rice. Uncertainly, following orders, she unwrapped her chopsticks and stood them straight up in the sticky white grains. Cold air struck her cheek and ear, and almost she thought she heard a whisper.

The black eyes of the patrons glittered more darkly, and the happy, chattering wash of voices changed tone. A few of the smiles wavered. Mei stared hungrily at her plate, trying to ignore them, wishing Uncle Hu had used his chopsticks to offer the food to the ghost.

A youngish, burly-looking man in soiled coveralls came up behind them. In broken English, he said, "Little girl, rude to do this is." He gestured at the rice. "You sticks from food take, no?"



His dull, hostile gaze caught Mei's. Suddenly his face seemed to melt: A wizened, impish old man with greeny-yellow eyes winked up at her through the fog-like, colored haze.

"Settle up, Hu," commanded the Gukutsushi. "You dine with me tonight. Bring your girlfriend, yes?"

You listen well, little girl-fox. I was born underground, you know? I don't do the monkey-chatter — Japanese, English, Chinese, whatever — the way some folks can. Strong, silent type, me. But the ladies, fox or monkey, they like that, so nothing wrong there, you know?

Sondok, she tells stories very well. I know she gave you good history. First half of Fifth Age, huh? But what happened yesterday, it's not history yet, so your father sends you to me to tell you that. He's one wise, good fox, and don't you listen if the high-nosed court layabouts tell you different.

So. I am Blackfoot — I go shoeless, see, to touch Gaia always, and city streets are not so clean as forests. I am roko, that you've guessed, right? I am Gukutsushi; I play with light and shadow and they play with me. I play with minds, too, but that's no story for little kits; not so little as you. No batsu for me; no court, no sentai. I am lone fox, just like old White-Face. Yeah, well, maybe a few ghosts can call me friends, but there's nothing wrong with that. Ghosts have problems too, you know.

East

When Chairman Mao was alive, his horoscope was very powerful, and the gods did not dare come out.

— Chinese religious underground leader, quoted on PBS

You want to know Kings and Emperors and Presidents, you go read history book, kit. You want to know dates and places, you find travel-guide or Bard or something. I'll tell you something they won't, okay?

East is always empires. East is always dynasties. Communism? Empire! People's Republican Army; imperial troops; no difference. Mao Tse Tung; Son of Heaven if ever there was one. And the Red Army children, they worshipped him just like any god's son. You find me one difference between Cultural Revolution and the Duke of Chin's purges; I give you my lunch.

You want Princes and Sages in exile? Look for the politicians and intellectuals in fields and labor camps. Old emperors, they send them to rot in Viet Nam. New ones, to deserts where no one speaks their chatter.

You want fights and bloody overthrows of the heirs to the throne? Plenty. Even there is government in exile. Yes! You go to Taiwan and ask to meet King of China. Oh, King, President of Nationalist Party — no difference, kit.

East is also — listen close, kit — poor people looking to get out from under fat ass of emperor. Everywhere there are our friends. Everywhere there are peasants with superstitions about us; everywhere you find keepers of old religions — some older than Foxes, yes! Monkey-people who know Gaia better than they think — monkey-people who feel

webs of Weaver around them and hate her — children of the children of heroes, who remember in their dreams fighting Yomi. You can wake them up, if you know how.

And if the human is too far gone to wake? You use him. You take that rotten soul and you get it to fight another. Remember, kit: Empires breed bad men who can be led anywhere by greed, and good men who can be forced anywhere by their honor.

West

So this boy, this Marco Polololololo; he comes to China. Big deal, you know? I listen to know-all gaijin professor man I smuggle into China, he tells me how great a thing this is, how ideas go back and forth like waves and build up civilization. Sure, I nod for him. Then I ask, wasn't there anybody living in India? Did the Nepal-monkey clans never meet girls from Tibet? Did Tibetans not go out drinking with Kazahks? Didn't everybody have wars between East-West? How come silk in west before Marco Polo? How come green tea in India? He stopped answering after a while, I think maybe he doesn't understand my English. Could be that.

I tell you another thing: Democracy is Empire. Only differences: You get coup on schedule in democracy, and all kinds of purges happen same time. All kinds of reform happen same time. In old empire, you have purge of everything once in while on whim of ruler. In democracy, you have purge of some things all the time by many people. In old empire, you have peasants downtrodden by law, and heavenly right, and soldiers, and other people who say: Thank gods I'm not downtrodden myself! In democracy, people agree to tread on some people and help others. Both very bad systems, I think.

What world needs, is less and better monkeys. I think if monkeys had more room to wander in, they might not be such bad neighbors.

Sorry, not what your father asked me to teach you. What was I telling? Yeah, biggest thing about East-meets-West for you to trouble about is that once West started meeting us (and everybody else in world, I think) they decide they know more about everything than anybody. Seems to be a disease they got.

So the humans, they take over land for themselves, and they make the people who live there servants, and sharecroppers, and move them around like pebbles.

And all kinds of things come with them.

The Sunset People

Gaijin Garou who think they know best try to take over caerns and run hengeyokai out. Some places it works; some places it doesn't. When the Kinfolk of the hengeyokai — and the Pure Ones, and the Bunyip, and things I don't know

in Africa — get slaughtered by human know-alls, the Sunset People make most of it. Always shapeshifter pride makes Gaia's other children miserable.

Blood-suckers who come with the Western humans, they try to muscle in on Kuei-jin territory. You want to laugh 'til your whiskers hurt? You watch a Kuei-jin take down a Kin-jin. Is very funny, and Kuei-jin make great job of it!

Our ghosts — fine neighbors, they used to be — oh, they suffer so much these last few millennia. They're not getting any help from West, I tell you. Okay, so is not West's fault, but is still Fifth Age problem, kit. Beast Courts blame lots of things on West; and it's true, but not everything.

You listen — I have seen better days and you will not!

Weaver

What worst thing about West is how it bring Weaver here like never before. When I was kit, glass was real special, not many know what it was. Now monkeys build mountains out of glass, and spiders run all over Mirror Lands. Spiders! No use for damn things — not me, not any Kitsune! They just spin webs and make little web-tunnels where centipedes breed. These days, not much difference between centipede and spider. Not much difference between Papa Centipede and Mama Spider. We learn to live in webs, sure. But would rather go barefoot on clean earth than on stinking sticky web-road, for sure!

Don't know why Weaver makes it easy on Yomi. Just does. You go Chiba sometime, or Hong Kong. Even where it look good, on other side of mirror, is real bad.

The Age of Sorrow

Whew. Sixth Age, it on way. You go Bangkok or Beijing or someplace, you maybe think it already here. Is gonna be big war — Kuei-jin maybe try put out sun, Yomi maybe leap Wall and run in streets, it all possible. Empires come crashing down all over place. Monkeys die of sick and bullet and poison, and world, it look like it going to end. Maybe see some races of hengeyokai die out forever, like Okuma. Khan probably first to go, and Nagah not too far behind. Who knows what else? Maybe these deaths make way for new races like us to be born — maybe they just a waste. Can't know.

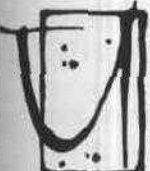
Some Bards say is pretty much how all ages go, but problem is that if Yomi gets way, then Wheel pop off hub and we get darkness and extinction forever. No new races born. No more gifts from Heaven. Heaven maybe even die.

Yeah, is all pretty bad. Gonna be real bad, and may never get better. Feel sorry for you, but don't cry in food yet! You are Kitsune — best creation of Emerald Mother yet! If anybody gonna be ready for Sixth Age, gonna be you — if you finish your learning, kit!

Chapter Seven: The Courtly Dance

Obviously a fox had tricked him.

—Konjaku Monogatari-shu (Royall Tyler, translator)

Uncle Hu slipped silently into the cave. Low words from within fell on Mei's waiting ears. Her uncle reemerged, and beckoned, and stood aside to let her pass. The kit hesitated, shocked by the solemn, drained face of her guide. At last, with timid steps but chin held high, she left him behind, and picked her way along the dark, crooked gallery.

At the tunnel's end, in a bone-littered den, a lone Fox with dirt-colored fur sat staring dully into his low fire. He was wrapped in robes of brocade, but they were threadbare and dusty. He bore four tails, but they twitched idly on the sand and debris behind him, and their fur was matted and soiled.

As his daughter stepped into the dim light, his eyed flashed up, and over her, and he flinched. A pained whisper escaped him.

"Su vui ve..."

"I am Mei-Fei Quan. I am Kitsune. I am Nogitsune, and I have yet no court or sentai," she said, as the old smuggling roko had taught her.

Looking blankly into the embers once again, her father commanded brusquely:

"Sit."

And began to speak.

Kinfolk and the Curse

Do not think that we never love our Kinfolk.

The Curse, we call it, and the Kataribe have a hundred tales for how it was laid and why. It hardly matters if any of these stories are accurate. What matters is that each kit born to the full powers of the Kitsune is paid for by a life. Sometimes both parents are spared; sometimes both die. Luna always takes her fee in the end.

In the older times, such matters were arranged... impersonally, I suppose, would be a word for it. We had certain arrangements among many families, and they would send certain of their young ones, or the young ones of families indebted to them, to be brides and grooms to Foxes. Each time they knew they might never see the offered one again, but the humans learned long ago to live with Death — and to offer up their children and neighbors to him.

There are still arranged marriages today, and many of us blithely mate with whomever is handy; after all, we cannot survive without the birth of young kits like yourself. Others — like myself — mate dutifully, but remain aloof, never becoming too attached to the other parents of our children.

If only this were always possible.

I... I do not want to speak any further of these things. I will give you a token to take to the Shining Cliffs Court,

where you will speak with Matsuko Sun-Devil and Katsuko Moon-Saint. I have lost interest in the formal affairs of our kind, and you are much better off learning such important matters from those who still enjoy talking of them.

Good-bye, Mei. I think we shall meet again, but I dare not say when.

Long Life and Laughter

The tight knot of Western Garou strode proudly to the foot of the hillock on which the Gai'nan had gathered. The court and its guests — emissaries, wanderers, and two foot-weary travelers from San Francisco — watched quietly.

The twin Kitsune regents, Matsuko Sun-Devil and his sister Katsuko Moon-Saint, stepped forward in unison and bowed gracefully to the Sunset People.

"On careful consideration of your most generous offer of assistance, cousins —" said Matsuko, smiling sweetly.

"And consultation of our noble colleagues —" the vixen gestured courteously to the three behind them.

"Taking into account the tenor of opinion among our fellow courtiers and allies —" her brother nodded to the ring of hengeyokai that encircled the clearing.

"And not neglecting the truces, treaties, and understandings with the other courts whose interests would be affected by our decision —" the female Eji bowed deeply to the cluster of ambassadors; enemy and ally, shen all.

"We have decided not to avail ourselves of your aid," declared Matsuko. "We deny you passage through our territory. We deny you use of our sacred sites. We deny you the guides and information you have asked for."

The Westerners, stunned but growing in anger, growled amongst themselves. Half of them were staring, openly, at the ambassadors, and sniffing the air in deep suspicion. Their leader cried out, "What is this? We came to help you. There are forces of the Wyrn advancing which you know nothing about — Pentex — fomori —"

"Are there none of these to fight where you come from? Who defends your homes while you are away?" asked Katsuko, sharply.

The Westerners' mutterings found their leader's ears, and his shoulders twitched and rippled as he fought to control himself. "We are Garou! We are Gaia's own, like you! We are your kin! We should be your allies — but you turn us away and bargain with the walking dead before us!"

The twins' eyes met, and their sleek red heads nodded.

"We have an offer for you, gaijin," said Katsuko.

"We hesitate to ally with you because we know little of your character," her twin went on. "We have heard much of how you treat your friends."

"Bring to this Court one living Bunyip to testify on your behalf, and you may do here what you will."

The assembled shen murmured approval, and the intruders, eyeing the throng, walked stiffly out. The courtiers drifted off.

Uncle Hu and Mei-Fei were left alone with the Regents, and Matsuko and Katsuko led them away into the night.

Matsuko Sun-Devil speaks:

Many of our kind would find it peculiar that we two Eji have chosen to remain at one court, following the Way of Emerald Virtue. You are polite not to question this, and yet you must understand that being hengeyokai, being of the Beast Courts, diminishes the way of the Kitsune only a very little bit. We have still lived as Foxes for all our lives, merely doing so alongside our Changing Brethren. It's good that you have been sent to us to learn of your new society. For you are Kitsune, and you will be so for a long, long time — longer than you may think possible.


You see, Luna rewards us for great service to her and our Mother by granting us additional tails. And with each tail comes many years; Bai Mianxi herself will probably never die of old age. Yes, I speak of her as if she were still alive. Who could slay her? The Namebreakers of Japan? Ha!

No, I believe she still lives. I also believe that she is still active in our affairs. You see, it is very difficult for us to "retire." Curiosity propels us ever forward, particularly when the reward is more tails, longer life and plenty more of answers and questions with which to amuse ourselves! We Foxes intend to continue in our affairs until the Sixth Age comes, and if at all possible we shall be running freely as Foxes when the Seventh arrives.

Of course, there is another gift that makes the many years bearable. We have seen so much death, so much suffering, so many loved ones and things lost forever. And yet — we laugh. We laugh because we must not cry. Let all others fall into Harano and despair — such is not our lot. If a Kitsune must cry, she does so only in the privacy of her own darkened den, her face pressed to the earth so that her tears fall directly from her eyes to the Mother.

Others may consider our humor black, vindictive, even malicious. Perhaps it is. But it is a noble gift, the gift of laughter. I understand that of all the Emerald Mother's children, only one other received this blessing. Would that we could share our humor with them, for perhaps then we could bring laughter to all the tribes.

Gatherings

 Matsuko Moon-Saint speaks:

When we gather in any numbers smaller than a proper court or moot, we do so in our most auspicious numbers: one, two and four. One Kitsune is very often the way of things; ever since Bai Mianxi, we have been very capable of getting things done on our own. Two Kitsune is also lucky; one yin to the other's yang, one alert when the other must rest. As our fellow courtiers will gladly tell you, two Foxes can accomplish much when their hearts are set on it.

Of all the peoples of the Middle Kingdom, you will find no other who acknowledge four as an auspicious number as

we do. You know your Japanese, yes, kit? Then you know that *shi* is "death" as well as "four" — bad luck to the humans, yes, but fine luck to us. Four Kitsune, one of each Path, is a team with the cleverness and sorcery to win through any situation and the base of what we consider the perfect sentai. Add one other for whatever role is necessary — a Hakken or Khan for a true war party, a Tengu for a sentai of stealth — and is that not perfection?

Among the Beast Courts

Matsuko Sun-Devil speaks:

It would be highly improper to sit here, within the protectorate of this court, and not speak of our relationship with the Beast Courts. It is true that most of us serve the Kitsune first and the Courts second. Perhaps only one in four Kitsune follows the Way of Emerald Virtue — however, every Fox across the world knows at least one Kitsune who is pledged to the Courts. They are a noble hierarchy, and worthy of your respect. If you decided that you would like to join the Courts, as we did, be reassured that you would be made most welcome.

Now, not all Kitsune who pledge fealty to the Courts do so forever. Many serve for the duration of another shapeshifter's life, and devote their next "lifetime" to other affairs. But while here, we are the picture of perfection in courtliness. We serve gladly in sentai, ever-eager to learn from our fellows. We play the games of politics as courtiers, and make eloquent ambassadors to the courts of other *shen*. And as you can see, we may even rise to the station of Gai'nai.

The story of how we two assumed the joint position of regent is really not important. However, you may well see other Kitsune regents if you visit many courts; we make most gracious magistrates, and are always open to the advice of our fellow Gai'nai. The role of seer is also most appropriate for Kitsune, and I think I need not explain why. The other stations, those of general and historian, are simply not for us. Even Eji like ourselves defer to the military power and wisdom of Hakken or Khan; and as a race, we are simply too young for the post of historian. What kind of balladkeepers would we be, considering that we first tasted knowledge in the late Fourth Age?

Meets

It is not a common thing for many Kitsune to cluster together in one place. For one, we have very many enemies who would be all too glad to kill a number of Foxes with one stroke. For another, we keep ourselves busy; we rarely have the time to spare for great meetings. Finally, we have very few caerns of our own, and how can we hold meetings of private business in commonly held courts?

When we do gather, we do so briefly to discuss affairs of great importance. In all other cases, it is sufficient to spread news amongst ourselves in the usual fashion, passing word from one Fox to the next. I am sure this sounds inefficient,

but you should know that we are a very well-connected people. News that affects the Kitsune can be spread across the Middle Kingdom in a matter of a week or less; after all, if we are to remain effective, we must remain well-informed. How quickly did you arrive here, kit, and how many of our kind have you met since? That is proof that scattered as we are, we are never truly separated.

We also honor the spirits personally, rather than as a vulnerable group. As you have already guessed, even rites that require more than one Fox are performed in auspicious gatherings of one, two or four. So what need do we have for these "moots?" Frankly, a group of many Kitsune would be a trying experience for everyone involved; there would be too much pride for any one hilltop to hold.

Camps



Matsuko Moon-Saint speaks:

It is an amusing notion that Kitsune should gather together in little social cliques, each devoted to their own particular ideal. We do not have so many "camps" of the sort you see in other Changing Breeds' ranks — for we are the youngest, and we have not had quite so much time to misinterpret our place on the earth and argue what is most "important." We know.

Inari's Messengers

If anything within our ranks must be called a "camp," then I suppose that would be Inari's Messengers. They are a monastic order — and when I say monastic, you should understand that I mean monastic in a Fox's way. The Messengers set aside their own personal goals for the duration of their servitude, instead obeying the dictates of their elders and completing tasks for the good of Foxes everywhere. A Messenger is assigned specific duties upon joining the order, although these may certainly change as the elders require.

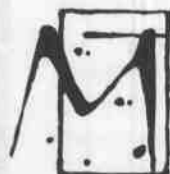
A Messenger does not generally spend his life in the service of the order. Many join as a form of penance for improper behavior, atoning for their poor choices by learning more about what is necessary. Others join the order to repay a debt to an elder or sempai; if an elder does not want an indebted kit stumbling over her tails at every turn, she may send him to the Messengers that all Kitsune may reap the dividends of her generosity. Whatever one's reason for joining, once the deeds done for the order prove of sufficient merit that Luna grants the Fox another tail, it is a sign that one has spent sufficient time in the Messengers. Most leave after such a sign; but others remain.

A Messenger Tails:

Of course you are having difficulty with the Righteous Devils; those corpses wrap a sword of mystical power in many silks of influence. They are far too much for you to resist alone. That is why I am here. Will you honor me by allowing me to offer my advice?



Treading the World



atsuko Sun-Devil speaks:

True, we do not gather in camps or clubs. Instead, each Kitsune may speak freely with all our kind. And why not? It is a very big world, after all, much bigger than even Bai Mianxi would have guessed at first. There is room for all of us — or at least, there should be, if things were properly managed. But then again, that is why we are here. By the end of the Sixth Age, we should have the entire world in such a condition that things may improve. At least, one hopes so.

Japan

Ah. So, we are to speak objectively about the Foxes of our own island of birth? Well, what must be done, must be done.

Japan is a stronghold for our race, as you have no doubt deduced. We are numerous there, and very active in the teeming cities and snowy mountains alike. Japanese Foxes often are accused of being the most arrogant and racist of our kind. Perhaps this is true, or perhaps others are simply jealous of our divine heritage; we are descended from both Inari and Amaterasu, after all. Which is true? You tell me.

The most important thing to understand about Japan is that for all *hengeyokai* there, it is most obviously a territory separate unto itself. Mortals may quibble over imaginary borders, but one cannot deny that the sea separates Japan from

the mainland. In many ways, this is our island, and many Foxes are dedicated to cleansing it entirely so that it may become a stronghold from which to attack the rest of the world's Yomi. I doubt this is possible, but it is a noble ambition.

The Mainland

Here is where our race was born, and here we still carouse across the wilds. We are hardly the masters of China, and yet we are still scattered across the land in sufficient numbers that we retain a modicum of power. You will know mainlander Kitsune when you meet them; they are remarkably adaptive even for our kind, and somewhat freewheeling in their business. Long years of struggles, wars, coups and purges among the humans have taught us to do whatever is necessary to cope here.

We are perhaps more comfortable in the wilderness than in the cities here; the Kuei-jin of the civilized places are terribly ancient, and difficult to outmaneuver. Nonetheless, we cannot refuse the call of the Forbidden City and its intrigues; nor can we deny the allure of Hong Kong, one of the most fascinating cities in all the world — and no less so since its return to Chinese hands. From Vietnam to Mongolia, from India to Cambodia, we run from intrigue to intrigue and dodge around the machinations of the Kuei-jin's Quincunx. If we can win here, we can win anywhere.

Hm? Oh, *that* rumor? Perhaps, and perhaps not. I would not know.

Korea

One must speak graciously of a country founded by the children of a Bear. It has managed to maintain its own identity as humans measure it (and even as we do) for quite some time, when many other places would have been just another province of China before long. If only the humans there had not foolishly drawn their petty lines and built their petty walls — but then again, this is exactly the sort of thing that we shall see more and more of when the age turns, so I suppose we must grow used to it.

The Kitsune of Korea are likely those of us most accepting of strangers. They gladly share their territory with other hengeyokai; perhaps it is the sorrow at the loss of the Okuma and the Korean tiger-born Khan, both creatures that they never really had the chance to know. They are a little less gracious to the local Kuei-jin, but nonetheless admirable diplomats and negotiators with all the *shen* of their country.

The Americas

North America is a beckoning, wheedling song to us. It hosts countries that are newborns next to our history, yet that are filled with the energetic power of the West. Foxes run there, too; and so, we understand, do our mysterious cousins the Nu-Isha. The temptation to visit has led several Kitsune to the United States and Canada; they assuredly find enough to amuse themselves there for some time, for they do not quickly return.

South America is rather less important to us; although there are foxes there, they are of a sort unfamiliar to us and likely beneath our superior breeding. If Gaia had intended to intervene in this continent's affairs, she would have placed red foxes there. Nonetheless, a few of our kind have found ample amusements among the mountains and jungles there; it may well be worth visiting, should you not be needed elsewhere.

Europe

Like the other fox-touched countries of the West, this land inspires us to go and visit in small numbers, the better to see what Gaia intended us to find there. So far, we have found a land choked with Kin-jin and dotted with courts of very territorial werewolves. Perhaps it is meant to be something to us in the Sixth Age, but all things taken into consideration, it is not as important a territory to us as the Middle Kingdom. Any land which fosters fox-hunting as a pastime is a land of barbarians which we rightly find inhospitable.

Australia

A strange and unique country, this Australia. And yet, it is most terrible and shameful that our own fox kin are destroying its creations. The presence of foxes there makes it easier for us to wander the land and ask it to share its secrets

with us — and yet, the foxes are harming the balance of things as they should be. What are we to do?

The greatest riddle that this island has to offer us is the riddle of the Bunyip. They were the latest tribe of Sunset Wolves to fall, and they fell to the claws of their own. Let this be a lesson to you — the War of Shame was not one war, but many, and some of those wars may well be waiting their turn to erupt again. It is our hope that by finding and preserving the secrets of the Bunyip, we will strengthen Gaia and atone for the wolves' mistake. However, if we are successful, do not expect us to give that lore to the descendants of their murderers until proper penance has been done!

Africa

Like South America, this continent has little to offer us. Although its secrets and native sorceries are undoubtedly intriguing, it is obvious that our attentions are not meant for this place. It has its own defenders, and we have our jaws full with the Middle Kingdom, to say nothing of other fox-touched lands! If we are ever to explore Africa in any numbers, it will have to be in an age when we can spare the time.

Courtesies among Shen



atsuko Moon-Saint speaks:

You will never accomplish anything if you do not deal with other *shen*. As the dragon nests fall one by one over the years, it becomes impossible to properly defend Gaia without meeting the others as allies, enemies or even both. I cannot number the times that we have had to defend our own court, or that we have found it necessary to strike pacts with other beings of power. Listen carefully, and we shall advise you on who are most likely to be your friends, foes or pawns.

Hakken

They are very noble in their own manner, and quite taken with their own virtue. Perhaps their manner of doing things does not quite coincide with our own — but the two are highly complementary. When we operate together, they are thunder and we are lightning. Such storms are poetically beautiful, and most potent besides.

Khan

The Khan are fine people in their own right, and not half so insufferable as the Cats of other tribes. To be sure, they are rather high-minded and taken with their own importance, but even the noble Tigers have been humbled by the events of the Fifth Age. If you must choose between aiding one of several hengeyokai, I suggest you assist the

Khan; if you wait to do so, there might not be any Tigers left for you to help.

Kumo

There is such a thing as using evil ways to attain virtuous ends. If the Kumo know this, they do not care. To the Goblin Spiders, evil ways are a worthy pastime in their own right. They feed their bloated bellies with pestilential depravities, and glut themselves on the Mother's biles and blood. You may be able to set them against other enemies of yours, thus slaying two creatures of Yomi at once — but be ever-careful if you do so. The Kumo are nearly as clever as we, poisonous to the core, and their venom is not easily avoided.

Nagah

I... We shall not speak of the Nagah. I am sorry, but we have our reasons.

Nezumi

Now it is impolite to do so, but many of our hengeyokai cousins speak poorly of the Rat-children. The cities so many despise are home to the Nezumi, and the Low War beneath so many warriors is the Rats' reason for being.

I shall not be impolite in such a manner. The Nezumi are as worthy of Luna's gifts as any of us; they are less hobbled by scruples and human sensibilities, but how is this so very bad for hengeyokai? We can share a joke with them now and again, and we can share a task with them as well. But most importantly, the Nezumi are willing to dig with their paws to find the rot buried deep. As we do as well, kit.

Same-Bito

They are not very light-hearted beings, but such was not Gaia's intent, I suppose. It must be said that the sharks are the fiercest warriors of the warm seawaters, and the Same-Bito did not have to be changed much to be effective. I doubt they could have developed cleverness on their own the way the White-Faced one did, but who are we to criticize? They do what they do, and we cannot do it better, so the Emerald Mother's blessings be on them that they may keep the seas free of Yomi.

Tengu

Bring tea when you visit with a Tengu, and open your ears. They are as much our friends as any other Changer may be, and are a splendid source for gossip. We have talked with Tengu until the sun set, rose and set again. They miss little and share all; cultivate them carefully.

Zheng Lung

If you think you are too proud to kowtow to anyone but another Fox or a great Minister of Heaven, then perhaps your opinion will change when you meet one of the Middle Dragons. They are very rare now, but no less wise or grand for their numbers. They are allies more precious than any



gem, and should never be your foes. May Inari forbid that any more turn to Yomi — those few that have already done so were most implacable and terrifying foes.

Sunset People

The more time one spends with the Sunset People, the more one understands Gaia's wisdom in granting us Foxes the gift of Changing. For every error the hengeyokai make, the Sunset People make two more. They are fractious and argumentative, and their lands are filled with angry Garou and their bitter cousins. Even the Shadow Lords are hard to understand; one expects them to be more like Hakken, and yet they are not so.

We have few allies among them, and do not make diplomatic overtures to their "septs." Instead, we quietly watch them when they come to our shores. The only ones out of the lot that seem worthy friends are the Corax and the Nu-Isha; if only we could meet with those "kai-otes," perhaps they might be able to explain why the Sunset People misbehave so!

Kuei-jin

I almost feel it unnecessary to tell you of our kind's sentiments regarding the Hungry Dead. The first time you meet one of these corpses, its breath reeking of stolen life, its eyes glittering with ancient evil — the feeling that rises in your stomach then is the feeling that we all share. When Heaven cursed the Wan Xian all those years ago, it was perhaps the wrong curse to lay; after all, who suffers now? The Kuei-jin, yes; but very many other people besides.

However, all this does not preclude dealing with these creatures. They are exceedingly crafty and of great influence: useful traits. It is a dangerous, dangerous game to play at using the Kuei-jin for our own purposes, and difficult to make deals that are worth the price paid. Yet we do these things more readily than do our brethren. Sometimes such pacts are necessary, and even the Hungry Dead are not completely without honor. Still, always be prepared for their betrayals — a prudent Fox will have a counterstratagem ready just in case.

Namebreakers

Our Doshi learned the lesson early on that some sorceries are forbidden to any who would live peaceably on the Mother's skin. The Namebreakers are living transgressions against that law. Why can they not accept that some things are ordained to be, and some are not? If Gaia had meant them to wield such magics, she obviously would not be punishing them whenever they do so. They are exceedingly clever, and make poor pawns. In many cases, it is best never to show your tails to these "Lightning People" at all lest they try to hack them off for their alchemies.

However, to those of us who do not mate for life, but rather for convenience, the Namebreakers have their own uses; they are usually of excellent genetic stock, and may provide us with wise new kits.

Asien

We are very like these spirits made flesh; their nobles are creatures of the elements, like our own noble selves, and their commoners are beings of the beast world, as are we. Hsien will probably return any courtesies you make them, and although their affairs and ours do not constantly overlap, they are fine additions to your network of contacts. Be most civil and respectful towards them, and treat them as you would friends. What you receive in return will likely be worth the trouble.

Ghosts

It of course barely merits saying that ghosts are very influential. Once freed of the shackles of flesh, humans become surprisingly perceptive, and a Fox who knows the proper etiquette of the Kingdom of Jade can learn a great deal. Although they are relatives farther removed from us than are the spirits of the Yang Realms, and are under no obligations to aid us, they are nonetheless singular contacts.


Treat with the ghosts of lowest rank; not only are they more likely to escape their supervisors' notice, but they see a good deal clearly, thanks to their closeness to the earth. However, you must be very careful of those who are ruled by their P'o, for they are highly untrustworthy. How can you tell? Ah, kit, if I knew that I would have more allies in the Yin Realms.

Mortals

And humans. Ah, humans. Like trees, they grow across all of Gaia, and like trees they have their distinct uses — both alive and dead. If one must hew a few down to save a forest, so be it.

There are still a few who walk barefoot on the Mother. If there is a reason to speak well of humanity as a whole, this is it. If only they were not so few in such a sea of blind, chattering monkeys! It only proves that great potential can be very deeply buried indeed. I wish I knew Gaia's mind in crafting humanity; as is, I may only do my duty and remove the troublesome ones as quickly as possible. More will certainly sprout later, to be sure, but that does not excuse a dereliction of duty.

The Laws of Heaven

atsuoka Sun-Devil speaks:

These are the exact words of Luna to Bai Mianxi. The Silver Lady gave them to her, and drilled her in them every day of the year that she spent in the little heaven. She repeated them over and over until she could recite them in her sleep.

Then Luna asked her what they meant.

I am going to teach you the words as often as you wish. I will explain them once. A year from now you will be able to recite them in your sleep, and I will ask you to explain them in your own way — before me, your father,



and the Kitsune of this court. They are perhaps the most important rules you will ever hear, and you must listen very carefully.

I command you to destroy that which harms Gaia.

We of the Courts value the First and Final Mandates above all others; it is no different with the laws of the Kitsune. This law is first because it is of greatest importance. We do not care what it is that harms the Mother — we want it removed. Take up the Bane-daggers of the bakemono if those are the only weapons available to you; strike pacts with the Kuei-jin to set them against your foes; whatever is required, you must do just that to slice away the taint that fouls the world and imperils the Wheel. A life was given for you to be born to this task; prove yourself worthy.

I command you to aid your brothers, your sisters, and that which serves Gaia.

We will not bare our throats to angry wolves and tigers; nor will we grant all our potent secrets to prying ravens and cats. However, we will offer our assistance to our fellow hengeyokai, for they are dedicated servants of the Mother, as are we. In most cases, they must ask first, but we oblige

such requests. At times this law may even require you to aid Sunset People of good hearts, or the rare shen who serves the Emerald Mother. They *do* exist, or so I understand. Though I have never met one in person.

Would you like to know why this law exists? No? Ah, then you understand. Good. It is common sense.

I command you to revere your Mother, myself, your Aunts, your Uncles, and our favored servants.

Humility is sometimes difficult for us. But it is a grave mistake to set ourselves among those who gave us life, and those who strengthen us with their patronage. We may not revere any mortal kings, emperors, presidents or chairmen — but we will offer the proper obeisance to those who are above us in Heaven.

I command you to keep your duty first in your heart, and to listen for my teachings.

Is this teaching vague to you? Let me tell you how I interpret it. You see, the humans' world has many temptations: luxuries, power, love, and the like. Once the wild places had similar temptations of running water and abundant food, but there are fewer and fewer of those places left. It would be easy to forget your duties, to use your Gifts and powers to run free and wild as once Bai Mianxi did, doing as you pleased.

You may not do that, for our time as children has passed. Now we must serve the Silver Lady as adults, and always keep ourselves open for when she commands us. When the world is whole and green again, then we may enjoy ourselves at leisure. Until then, we are needed.

I forbid you to exterminate the humans.

The humans are destructive, noisy, messy, bloodthirsty, ignorant, crude, embarrassingly fecund and annoyingly self-ish. Nonetheless, all things fashioned by our Mother have a purpose. Even if the Three perverted Her creation since then, we are not allowed to bring extinction to one of Gaia's species. Surely they have their merits; their blood flows in our veins, after all. When the Wheel finally gets to where it is going, perhaps the humans will be made a little better as a race. Until then, you should do your best to eliminate the bad ones and let the good ones continue about their business.

I forbid you to make war on your brothers and sisters.

This forbiddance is echoed in the Mandates of the Beast Courts. The hengeyokai have already warred among themselves — and they, their Kin, and Gaia all suffered for it. We were not created to repeat that mistake. We do not shed shapeshifter blood unless absolutely necessary,

and we will never call for purges or crusades against our brethren. Enough — indeed, too many — will die in the Sixth Age. We need not do the Wyrn's work for it beforehand.

I forbid you to break your word.

All hengeyokai must have virtue and honor to keep them upright, otherwise they become no better than the Kumo and the diseased wolves of the Black Spiral. By wisely dictating this law to us, Luna reminds us that even we must use honor to strengthen our souls.

Bear in mind that at no point does Luna require you to give your word of honor. If it is not given, it does not bind you.

I forbid you to commit suicide for reasons of honor.

Listen well to this one, little fox. Why is the samurai tradition of seppuku no longer so acclaimed? Did the kamikaze pilots win the war for Japan? Suicide in the name of honor has only one result — fewer honorable people. And as troublesome as it is to lose honorable humans, it is

sacrilege for Kitsune to throw our lives away in such a manner. Your existence as a Fox was paid for with the death of your parent — would you shame her by making her sacrifice worthless?

Leaping into a situation that you know will kill you is foolish, spiteful, and deprives our race of a Fox. Sometimes it may be the only thing that can be done — but honor alone is no good reason to die. And if you do not believe me, you may go ask the Middle Dragons, who also have an opinion on the subject.

I free you to do anything else necessary to achieve our goals.

Do you like the sound of that? Bai Mianxi did, and she took those words to heart. It is a deadly world and a tumultuous age; this freedom grants us the power to do what is necessary to strike down our Mother's enemies. To presume that one may achieve success without needing a variety of weapons is a form of vanity. Nobody has ever accused us Kitsune of being short on vanities — but this particular vanity is not one that we care to indulge.

.....

Dear "Hideko",

If I figured you right, you probably know why this note's on your pillow and I'm not. I also imagine you aren't quite so peeved as some ladies might be, 'cause you've worked out for yourself just what to expect from a fella like me.

Hope you don't mind, but I figured I'd just hop on out of town before you dragged the truth out of me. I wouldn't have held up that long under torture; you already know I'm ticklish!

See, my folk ain't in the business of sharing secrets, even in our sleep. We'll leave that to the other blabbermouths. You're gonna have to hunt me down and drag our secrets out of me with a backhoe — if you can. Because let's face it, you may be older than you look (which'd make two of us), but you Foxes aren't much more than a bunch of kits all told. Don't get me wrong; you, me and all our relations might be a great team — but you're gonna have to earn it first.

Catch me if you can, kit. I'll be damn surprised if you can manage it, but nobody's surprised me in about fifty years, so I'm kinda hoping you break the monotony.

— "Zeke"

Chapter Eight: Opening of the Eyes

Where the lion's skin will not reach, you must patch it out with the fox's.

—Plutarch, Lysander

Mei-Fei woke to wild music and singing. More Kitsune than she had ever seen before were dancing and clapping in the clearing—a confusion of bright eyes, bright clothes and bright laughter swirled in and out of the moonlight. She crept shyly toward the celebration.

"What's going on?" she asked, of a Dreamweaver she barely knew.

"A new Fox is being born," he said.

"Be sure to congratulate the father—"

"—before he leaves." The delighted voices of the twins spun past.

Mei looked to the Gukutsushi. "No, not me! Over there," and he pointed, laughing.

In a place apart, under the bare branches of a willow, a dark and blanket-covered form was curled up on the dry winter grass. Mei's new senses caught the smell of the willow's roots, and the breath of the man lying between them.

"Uncle Hu!"

She ran to his side, clutching breathlessly for his hands. Her horror-filled eyes met his, but she saw no pain behind them. A paper charm hung round his neck; a cup of wine stood close at hand.

"Sondok's kit is in a hurry to enter the world, Mei-Fei," he said. "Forgive our child's impetuous nature; it has cut short my guardianship."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't know that my child would be Kitsune, Mei." Blood trickled from his mouth. "I could only hope."

Then the spirit of Jianbua Hu, mate of Sondok-Dusksong-Fireblade-Inho, and Uncle to a dozen kits, left Gaia to make room for his own son. And Mei-Fei Quan found she could not cry, but stumbled laughing and in pain to join her family.

Character

So you want to play a Fox. May we congratulate you on your excellent taste? The Kitsune are magical, cunning, practical and proud—the youngest of Gaia's servants, the bright young things of the Bête, the only shapeshifters who don't incite the Delirium in humans, the only Changing Breed to breed true, the sole race to climb up out of beasthood on their own...well, we could go on and on. In fact, we will.

Prelude

From the beginning, a Kitsune is marked as something other than human or fox; these otherworldly creatures enter the world most distinctively. Birthing a Fox is an supernaturally painful experience, and the otherworldly suffering is empathically shared by both parents, no matter how distantly separated. Sadly enough, a Kitsune's human or fox parent has only a one-in-ten chance of surviving the experience. It's even possible that her Kitsune parent might die, although the odds are much better; a Fox parent survives nine times out of ten (save when the *shinju*, the metis are

born; then each parent has even odds of surviving or dying). If a Kitsune has deigned to mate with another shapeshifter, then the birth of a Fox will kill the non-Kitsune parent only three times out of ten. No matter how one looks at it, these are worrisome odds.

However, all the Changing Breeds were born of loss to some extent or another. The Kitsune grows to adolescence in spite of this tragedy, and when the time comes for the other Foxes to take her and open her eyes, she is usually more than ready to assume the role of Gaia's lastborn — and, they claim, Luna's favorite — child.

Character Creation Chart

Character Creation Process

Step One: Character Concept

- Choose Breed (Kojin, Roko or Shinju)
- Choose Path (Sorcerer, Warrior, Dreamweaver or Bard)
- Choose Totem, Sentai, and Mission (if any)

Step Two: Attributes

- Prioritize categories: (7 Primary/5 Secondary/3 Tertiary)
- Assign Physical Traits: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina
- Assign Social Traits: Charisma, Manipulation, Appearance
- Assign Mental Traits: Perception, Intelligence, Wits

Step Three: Abilities

- Prioritize categories: (13/9/5)
- Choose Talents, Skills, Knowledges

Step Four: Advantages

- Choose Backgrounds (5)
- Choose Gifts (3, 1 each from breed, path and general)
- Record Renown (by Path)

Step Five: Finishing Touches

- Record Rage (by Path)
- Record Gnosis (by Breed)
- Record Willpower (5)
- Record Rank (1)
- Spend Freebie Points (15)
- Pick Merits and Flaws (if desired)

Breed

See also *Breeds*, pg. 158.

• **Kojin:** Born among the monkey's children, you never knew your real parents — the day you were born you killed the one who might have raised you. Now your kin have come to claim you — and your true heritage is grander than any Emperor's.

Initial Gnosis: 3

Beginning Gifts: Persuasion, Seduction, Smell of Man

• **Roko:** Trickiness is nothing new to you; you were outwitting beetles as soon as your eyes opened — you moved

up to mice and rabbits later that week. Now that you have words and fingers, the rest of creation had better watch out.

Initial Gnosis: 5

Beginning Gifts: Burrow, Cricket Leap, Heightened Senses

• **Shinju:** Born to not one, but two of Gaia's favorites, you are perfect in every way — except possibly humility. You may not have as many monkey-friends or nose-knowledge as your cousins, but the labyrinths of *shen* etiquette are your personal playground.

Initial Gnosis: 4

Beginning Gifts: Scent of the True Form, Sense Wurm, Truth of Gaia

Paths

See also *Paths*, pg. 158.

• **Doshi:** Lonely Sorcerers, dedicated to turning the darkness against itself.

Initial Rage: 3

Beginning Gifts: Blessing the Blade, Sense Magic, Spirit Speech

• **Eji:** Cavalier Warriors, relentlessly hunting whatever disrupts the Cycle.

Initial Rage: 4

Beginning Gifts: Razor Claws, Resist Pain, Sense Hostility

• **Gukutsushi:** Cunning Dreamweavers, using illusion to heal — or to harm.

Initial Rage: 2

Beginning Gifts: Clear the Mind, Mother's Touch, Open Seal

• **Kataribe:** Inquisitive Bards, seeking tales and lore for fun and ammunition.

Initial Rage: 2

Beginning Gifts: Beast Speech, Fable, Truth of Gaia

Backgrounds

See also *Backgrounds*, pg. 161.

• **Batsu:** Your closest allies.

- **Clan:** Family — Kinfolk, Foxes and adopted relatives — both your aid and obligation.
- **Fetish:** A magic item inhabited by a spirit guest (or prisoner); it has special powers.
- **Go-en:** Contacts and acquaintances — a rumor and favor network.
- **Past Life:** Your connection to Kitsune Ancestor-spirits.
- **Resources:** Money, wealth and material power.
- **Rites:** The potency and quantity of rites you have learned.
- **Sempai:** An older Nine-Tails or *shen* who teaches and watches over you.
- **Totem:** The strength of your bond to a special spirit that's adopted you as its own.

Gifts

One each from *Breed* and *Path* choices, above. In addition, choose one of the following: Chi Sense, Ishin Denshin, or Scent of Running Water.

Rank

See also *Renown*, pg. 173.

All characters begin at Rank One.

Rage, Gnosis and Willpower

For Rage, see *Path* above.

For Gnosis, see *Breed*.

For Willpower, record 5.

Freebie Point Costs

Trait	Cost
Attributes	5 per dot
Abilities	2 per dot
Backgrounds	1 per dot
Gifts	7 per Gift (Level 1 only)
Rage	1 per dot
Gnosis	2 per dot
Willpower	1 per dot

Blessings

The Kitsune's great strength is their magical versatility. Not only do they possess potent Gifts of their own, but they can learn the Gifts of other Changing Breeds with great facility. They rely more on their Gifts than do shapechangers like the Garou; however, this has yet to prove a handicap.

Kitsune may enter the Umbra as easily as do Garou. When in Koto (Crinos) or Juko (Hispo) form, their teeth do aggravated damage. Finally, they have the advantage of extremely long life — when a Kitsune goes up in Rank (not counting the attainment of Rank One), her lifespan effectively doubles. As a result, Kitsune elders are usually very deserving of the term, and a Fox with nine tails — of whom there has been exactly one throughout the ages — is effectively immortal.

Maledictions

Unfortunately, the werefoxes are not without their weaknesses; when they were created in the Fourth Age, Gaia and Luna did not have the strength to grant them some of the boons their Changing cousins enjoy. Most poignantly, each time a Kitsune is born, a parent is likely to die; a life is required to bring a Fox into the world.

Also making life difficult for the Foxes is the fact that they lack the healing abilities of their cousins; without the use of healing Gifts, Kitsune heal all wounds as do mortals. In effect, all damage is aggravated to the werefoxes (who rightly avoid combat unless absolutely necessary). They may still soak this damage, even from aggravated sources such as a Kuei-jin's claws or teeth; however, this doesn't include silver or other forms of damage that Garou cannot soak.

The Foxes came into the world just after the wars of the Fourth Age, and never played a part in controlling humanity. As a result, their Koto form does not invoke the Delirium in onlookers, and Kitsune are careful about hiding this form.

Finally, Kitsune may indeed frenzy, but they always go into fox frenzy, appropriately enough. Gaia did not choose the Foxes to be berserkers — one need only study history to see how well those have worked out.

The Obligatory Abomination Question

Some Kin-jin will try to Embrace anything. Never mind the fact that 99 out of 100 Western vampires have no idea what a Kitsune is, let alone whether one would make a good childe or not — if it moves, a Cainite will probably try sucking its blood, giving it the Embrace, and showing off his new Blood Bound pet to the prince.

Although the Kitsune have little experience with Kin-jin in general, there are one or two tales floating around of the few Embrace attempts made on Kitsune. In essence, Luna or Gaia (the Foxes aren't sure which) has blessed the youngest Changing Breed with a rather dramatic release; once a blood-drained Kitsune is given a morsel of vitae to revive her, she goes up in a brief but intense pillar of flame. Nothing is left of her (and probably nothing of the would-be sire, either); and the Kitsune are most thankful to Gaia and the Silver Lady for protecting them from a fate that only the accursed of Heaven rightly deserve.

Breeds

Kitsune parents know instantly when one of their kits is born a Fox — there is no denying the shared pain of a Kitsune birth. As a result, the only “lost kits” are those whose Kitsune parents died before their First Change. Like all other shapechangers, Kitsune are different from mortals from the moment of birth — and they realize that very quickly.

Kojin

The human-born Kitsune know that they are somehow different long before their eyes are opened. The mysterious death of one parent and the equally mysterious absence of the other tend to create strange, distanced children; even those who grow up quietly in foster families are aloof to any siblings and curious about the hidden nature of the world around them. Kojin usually grow up haughty and introspective, sure that some great secret is being kept from them. They are right.

Kojin Kitsune are almost always Asian, although some have been born to mixed families in recent years. They make hyperactive children and slender, sharp-eyed manipulative adolescents. The First Change is sometimes traumatic, but kojins recover remarkably quickly — they have always known they are special, and becoming Kitsune is the first true justification that they are the favored children of the world.

Roko

Roko often have more difficult kithoods than most foxes; not only do they have the usual collection of predators (such as man) to worry about, but they are short one parent to care for them. The Kitsune parent often quietly places his or her kits in another fox's litter, providing extra nourishment and protection to the new foster “parents” to help the kits' chances of survival, and carefully watching for the day that one of the young ones manifests new powers.

Roko are insatiably curious, and are awed and delighted when the First Change comes and they gain the gifts of hands, tools and full sentience. They scamper across as much of the world as possible, eagerly striving to learn as much as they can of the new things made available to them. Although roko suffer the same restrictions as lupus Garou when choosing Abilities (Werewolf, pg. 87), that doesn't stop them from avidly trying to learn these new tricks; there are plenty of roko who have done their best to master driving, writing, crafts, even piloting aircraft.

Shinju

Being metis may be a curse to other, less enlightened Changing Breeds, but not to the Kitsune. The shinju have

no deformities (although only one in five Fox-Fox pairings produces a shinju). Shinju are as fertile as kojins or roko Foxes, but the chance that their offspring will be Kitsune is still one in ten. The greatest tragedy in a shinju's life is that one of her parents — one of Gaia's own chosen Foxes — will never speak words of magic or race through the Mirror Lands again. The loss of a Kinfolk mate is regrettable but necessary; the loss of a Kitsune, any Kitsune, is tragic.

There is no concealing a shinju as anything but Kitsune, and so these lucky children are raised in their parent's court, where they are told of their magnificent role and destiny from the moment they first understand words. As a result, many are frankly insufferable by human standards, utterly convinced of their own superiority. This is counterbalanced by the fact that shinju realize that perfection must have very high standards, and accept nothing less than the very best from their own work; most are complete perfectionists, terrified of — oh, the very thought! — failure.

Paths

A Kitsune's Path is both profession and a near-religious calling. In this it is very like an auspice, but with one major difference. The Paths are chosen not by the sun, not by the moon, but by the kits themselves. At the end of Nogitsune-time, when a Nine-Tails is ready for adulthood, an older Fox performs the Rite of the Crossroads (page 173). The element the kit chooses defines the remainder of her life; unlike other *hengeyokai*, the Kitsune does not even have the option of a Rite of the Second Face to change her road. However, given that a Path speaks for everything that makes a Fox who she is, none really see the need to “try on something else for a change.”

The Elements

Most *shen* deal with a basic set of four elements — earth, water, fire and air or wood — and a fifth that varies — metal, void, moon, etc. Kitsune, as with most things, take up a position 45 degrees skewed from everybody else. Their Four Paths correspond to the corners of the mandala: Clay (born of Earth and Water), Fog (born of Water and Air), Lightning (born of Air and Fire) and Lava (born of Fire and Earth).

Aside from the benefits they claim from the change in perspective, Nine-Tails find they can draw on the strengths of both their elemental “neighbors.” For example, Gukutsushi (attuned to Fog) find Water-, Ocean-, River-, Cloud-, Mist-, Steam-, Wind-, and Air-spirits (and others of their kind) more approachable, even friendlier, than the average Garou might.

Many Kitsune find favor early on with a spirit in their “corner” and ally with it. The spirits are usually flattered to be adopted, particularly if the Nine-Tails also take the spirits' symbols or themes as their own.

雷

Lightning

風

Air

霧

Fog

火

Fire

月

Moon

水

Water

溶岩

Lava

粘土

Clay

地

Earth

Doshi

(doh-shee)

Translation: Sorcerer

Element: Lightning (Inazuma)

Description: Like the Theurges of the Garou, or the seers and Mirrors of the Courts, the Doshi are masters of magic and spirit communication. However, their paws are slightly touched with darkness, and the faintest taint of Yomi still clings to them (the Gift: Sense Wyrn will detect a Doshi as Wyrn-tainted at a difficulty of 9). Nonetheless, the Doshi still firmly believe that evil may be used as a weapon against evil, and they have not completely abandoned all their questionable sorceries.

Sorcerers have great knowledge of the Centipede and its minions, and use such knowledge to great effect; they are not above enslaving Banes or other such creatures if it proves necessary for a greater good. However, this dark path tends to distance them from their cousins, and many Doshi live alone in abandoned monasteries or other hidden hermitages. Their constant struggle to control the darkness within themselves makes many a Sorcerer cynical and inhuman; however, it would be a mistake to consider them irredeemably corrupt. Although they are often driven by hate, they are not its slaves.

Quote: Tell me this — if the way of virtue crossed a very wide stretch of mud, would you leave the path to go around or would you go ahead and get your feet dirty?

Initial Rage: 3

Beginning Gifts: Blessing the Blade, Sense Magic, Spirit Speech

Eji

(ay-jee)

Translation: Warrior

Element: Lava (Yogan)

Description: The Eji are cavaliers among Kitsune, strong as Earth and fierce as Fire. They consider themselves surgeons to the Emerald Mother, neatly slicing away the cancers that threaten Her. Oddly enough, the Eji sometimes display the greatest respect for life among their brethren; although they kill without regret when necessary, their constant work of the hunt makes them keenly aware of how sweet life truly is.

Nonetheless, this respect for life never keeps an Eji from neatly executing someone whose existence pollutes the world around him. Like the mortal *shin*, the Eji spend much of their time slaying rampaging Banes, brutish bakemono and crazed Kuei-jin; however, they also remove any witch hunters who threaten Gaia's chosen (i.e., shapeshifters). In human guise, they are often adventurers, daredevils or even religious figures, striving to encourage others to imitate their upright behavior even as they secretly remove those who add to the world's ills.

Quote: The Sixth Age may well be the promised time for people like you, but that doesn't mean you're entitled to be around to see it.

Initial Rage: 4

Beginning Gifts: Razor Claws, Resist Pain, Sense Hostility

Gukutsushi

(goo-koots-shee)

Translation: Dreamweaver

Element: Fog (Kiri)

Description: The Dreamweavers are a difficult lot for outsiders to understand. Masters of the mind and illusion, the Gukutsushi are equal parts trickster and healer. Well aware that their powers are less physical than those of their brethren, the Dreamweavers are content to bring solace to those who suffer and to deceive those who are deserving.

Among sentai, Gukutsushi often take the path of the Leaf or Mirror; however, their reliance on illusion doesn't make them helpless in battle themselves. When properly angered, a Dreamweaver can visit terrible deaths on an enemy's mind or bend his foe's senses until the hapless victim throws herself in front of a bullet train. Their knowledge of how the human (or *shen*) mind works is a terrible weapon indeed, and one that they are well-versed in using.

Quote: Oh, I'm sure "vehemently virulent" is merely poetic exaggeration. You know how those scientists get when they don't get much fresh air. You're probably perfectly safe right here. Yes?

Initial Rage: 2

Beginning Gifts: Clear the Mind, Mother's Touch, Open Seal

Kataribe

(kah-tah-ree-bay)

Translation: Bard

Element: Clay (Nendo)

Description: Like the clay which is their patron element, the Kataribe make many things which aid their fellows. They are builders and doers among the Foxes, acting in direct contrast to the Doshi and Eji's paths of selective destruction. However, their first love among the love for all things made or crafted is the love for lore. Great tales of long ago are the Bards' meat and drink, and each one spends his long life accumulating heaps of stories from around the world.

The Kataribe get along especially well with the Beast Courts; most Kitsune on the Way of Emerald Virtue are Bards. They often attach themselves to court historians or to Zhong Lung, trying to learn as much as they can about the ages before Bai Mianxi. They also walk easily in the human world, and are perfectly affable with other *shen*; if there is something worth knowing, it's likely that some Kataribe somewhere knows it.

Quote: My dearest general, such a thing was only done once before by Ying Qung-Fa the Staff of Harmony, and even he required the assistance of two Nezumi pallbearers! Do you not know the story? Here, then, let me tell you, and you may analyze his plan and tell me how we shall best imitate it.

Initial Rage: 2

Beginning Gifts: Beast Speech, Fable, Truth of Gaia

Abilities

Kitsune have no new Talents, Skills or Knowledges that are particularly important to the race's existence. However, the Storyteller may want to introduce the secondary Skills of *Calligraphy* and *Origami* to make life on Ju-Fu sorcerers easier; besides, expert calligraphers are highly respected throughout the East.

Backgrounds

Kitsune may buy the Backgrounds of Fetish, Past Life, Resources and Rites without any modifications. They may purchase Totem if part of a sentai, or perhaps a personal totem of their own (see *Werewolf Players Guide*, pg. 119), but can generally live without the patronage of spirits. In their eyes, their patron spirit is Luna, and why offend Her unnecessarily? Pure Breed is redundant; all Foxes are by definition of the purest blood, even if other *shen* do not always recognize them as such.

In addition, Kitsune have a rather unique outlook on Allies, Contacts, Kinfolk and Mentor. These variant Backgrounds are described below.

Batsu

When you say "we," this is who you mean. Your Batsu are the center of your life, the people you turn to in a crisis — because they'll understand — because they'll care — because they're probably already standing next to you, at least in spirit. These are your allies and friends: Your brother, your sister, your best friend from school, your sweetheart. A Batsu may be *shen*: other kits of your Mentor, kits whose eyes were opened with yours, the spirit who watched over your childhood, the Garou whose Rite of Passage you tagged along for. You don't need to slap points down to buy your *sentai*, just the people outside of it who would help you as they would themselves — and expect you to help them on the same scale. As they say, "Friends help you move; good friends help you move bodies."

- One damn fine friend.
- Two bosom buddies.
- Three; you're the fourth member of the Heroic Trio.
- Four; you spend nights arguing which is the lout, which the kid, which the girl-type.
- Five soulmates. What a nice person you must be.

Clan

Kitsune Kinfolk are indeed immune to the Delirium; but since Kitsune don't inspire the Delirium, Kinfolk status alone doesn't mean quite as much to the Foxes. Consequently, a Kitsune's Clan represents the network of relatives and friends who know the truth about the Foxes and their grand purpose. Most are indeed Kinfolk, but not all. Naturally, only the most trustworthy outsiders may be brought into the Clan and taught the truth; a Kitsune who makes a poor choice of confidant will have to face the displeasure of her elders.

Kitsune-go

Communication in fox-form is instinctive to even the rawest of kits. Nine-Tails pick up the spoken Kitsune-go during their Nogitsune time, and though they must "learn" it, they need pay no points for the Ability.

While we're on the subject, some of you may be wondering why a shapeshifting fox-race "born" in China uses all this *human* writing and *Japanese* terminology. Excellent question!

The Kataribe are unanimous that Kitsune adopted Chinese characters as soon as Bai Mianxi and the Prince Inari stole their first Shang oracle bones. Soon the whole race was swiping Garou, Bastet and Tengu glyphs left and right. Writing even seems to come naturally to the roko — perhaps not surprising, as even ordinary foxes have to master a complex scent-mark system by their second year.

There's considerably less agreement on when Kitsune-go (Fox-talk) became so thick with Japanese vocabulary, but they're all sure the Prince Inari or Inari's Fox followers brought that language back to the mainland. Everyone, Kataribe or not, knows *why*: Mandarin- and Cantonese-style sliding, tonal inflection is trouble for a half-human tongue.

Modern Kitsune-go mixes "flattened" Chinese words, Japanese, *hengeyokai* pidgin, and a little Korean. The grammar follows Fox logic and tends to give outsiders a headache — so it's probably a good thing only Kitsune and a few "Uncle and Aunt" Kinfolk are ever taught it.

- 3 clan members
- 5 clan members
- 10 clan members
- 25 clan members
- 50 clan members

Go-en

The Kitsune equivalent of Contacts, Go-en represents a comprehensive network of minor contacts rather than a few influential contacts of note. Foxes care less about worming favors out of particular pawns (well, actually, they enjoy that quite a bit, but on an individual basis) and more about having the information they need from whatever source is handy. The information network is usually pretty reliable, but Storytellers are free to insert bits of bad gossip anywhere along the line.

- You know what's going on in your home town.
- The affairs of your prefecture are at your fingertips.
- You have contacts across the country and a few in other lands.
- The Middle Kingdom is your rumor mill.
- Wherever you go, you know somebody.

Sempai

Sempai is the equivalent Background to Mentor; however, Kitsune are even more likely to have a group of hengeyokai as patron than are Garou. A sempai can be an "aunt" or "uncle," a Fox's actual Kitsune parent, a court sentai who looks on the kit as a mascot, or even a Gai'nan. Sempai may help the Kitsune from the goodness of their hearts, or they may be grooming the Fox for an eventual task; the player and Storyteller should work together to come up with an interesting patron or patrons for the kit.

- A Kiko or Iron-rank official; an inexperienced or very distant sentai.
- A Koryo or Steel-rank official; a moderately accessible and experienced sentai.
- A Reiko or Gold-rank hengeyokai; an influential courtier; a capable and often accessible sentai.
- A five-tail Fox; a Gai'nan; a powerful and friendly sentai.
- A Fox with six or more tails; a Gai'nan to an important court; Luna Beast Sentai Gaiamon.

FORMS

The Kitsune's five forms are hardly as combat-effective as those of the Garou, but the Foxes take great pride in how elegant and beautiful their various shapes are. So what if they could have been stronger or tougher, or could have had wings? Being Kitsune is more important than *that*, thank you very much.

In any of these forms, the Kitsune may manifest one or more of her tails with a simple Gnosis roll against the local Wall, or hide them in the same fashion (although the Koto, Juko and Kyubi forms always sport at least one).

• **Hitogata:** The Kitsune's Homid form is really no different from any other Asian man or woman. Kitsune like to keep in shape, and are often rather good-looking, but apart from the gleam in one's eyes, there's no distinguishing a Fox in human form from any other mortal.

• **Sambuhenge:** The Kitsune's analogue to Glabro is almost comical in appearance, and the Foxes take it only rarely. The body mass remains the same, but the ears point upward, the eyes become thin and slanted, the nose lengthens and whiskers sprout. The Sambuhenge also naturally sports a fox's tail; many roko often forget to "retract" their tails in this form. Most often, a Kitsune takes Sambuhenge only if she's a roko kit still learning how to walk in human shape, or if trying to play a joke on another Fox.

• **Koto:** The Koto form stands only an inch or two taller than the Hitogata, and adds no real bulk. The head becomes fully vulpine, although the light of intelligence in the Koto's eyes is unmistakable. The Koto's body is covered with fur, and sports an obvious fox-tail. Kitsune typically assume this form only for courtly affairs, impressing visitors, or for the extra comfort of fur; and they never do so unless assured of their privacy. The Koto may bite for Strength +1 aggravated damage, but few Kitsune resort to this unless thoroughly out of other options.



Statistics

Sambuhenge (Glabro)	Koto (Crinos)	Juko (Hispo)	Kyubi (Vulpes)
Str: +0	Str: +0	Str: +1	Str: +0
Dex: +1	Dex: +2	Dex: +3	Dex: +4
Sta: +1	Sta: +2	Sta: +3	Sta: +2
Man: -1	Man: -1	Man: -2	Man: -1
App: +0	App: 0 (+0)*	App: +0	App: +0
†Per: +0	†Per: +1	†Per: +1	†Per: +2
Diff: 7	Diff: 6	Diff: 7	Diff: 6

*The Koto form has an effective Appearance of 0 to humans, who frighten easily. However, to *shen* and similarly enlightened individuals, the Fox's beauty is in no way compromised in this elegant form.

†The difficulty for hearing Perception rolls is reduced by two in all forms but Hitogata.

• **Juko:** The Juko form is essentially a wolf-sized fox. The Kitsune has a remarkable amount of "manual" dexterity with his mouth in this form, and many have learned the art of fighting with daggers in their Juko forms' jaws.

• **Kyubi:** The average Kitsune in this form is indistinguishable from an ordinary red fox. There are a few Kitsune who appear as gray foxes, but the werewolves do not (or cannot) breed with foxes of more exotic natures.

Jyu-ho

The rumor of a modern prime minister practicing fox magic would be too weird to make sense.

—Royall Tyler, *Japanese Tales*

Kitsune simply adore magic. Any trick is better with a Gift thrown in; success is sweeter when elders offer lessons as reward, and Rank more prized because of the new power Gaia grants with each tail. In a scant few millennia, the Foxes have coaxed the spirits to grant them a wide array of tricks, picked up hedge magic, reinvented an entire branch of witchcraft, and stolen, toyed with and abandoned the Baster's Gift-swiping ability.

Foxes call their magic as a whole *Jyu-ho*. Gifts are still Gifts (Tamamono in their speech). Hedge magic they name *Yojutsu*, and their own brand of runic sorcery, *Ju-Fu*.

All Gifts not described in full are taken from *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*.

Breed Gifts Kojin

Kojin are strongest when speaking and dealing with humans, weakest when trying to cope with spirits or the wilderness. Most of their Gifts take advantage of the specialty; a few protect them from hostile *shen* and natural foes.

• **Persuasion (Level One)** — As the Homid Gift.

Yojutsu

Hedge magic is very foxy.

While we'd be the last to suggest introducing what is, basically, a crossover Mage mechanic into an otherwise simple *Werewolf* chronicle, we'd be right behind the idea of letting Kitsune have access to it in games that have already delved into crossover complications.

Because hedge magic is completely optional, we're not going to go into it in depth here. For the total picture, consult *World of Darkness: Sorcerer*.

• **Seduction (Level One)** — A Nine-Tails with this Gift holds a powerful attraction for mortals, and can cause humans to fall in love with her — not always intentionally. This Gift is taught by a Cloud- or Rain-spirit.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Subterfuge; the target resists with a Willpower roll (both difficulty 6). Each success increases the depth of emotion; one is a mild crush, five or beyond a haunting obsession. The Storyteller is encouraged to surreptitiously roll this for pure mischief or subplot every now and then, particularly if the Fox uses the Gift often.

• **Smell of Man (Level One)** — As the Homid Gift. This Gift is particularly useful for Kojin new to the wilderness. Smell of Man can scare off wolves, bears, owls and other predators, and because it affects natural foxes as well, saves the Kitsune the trouble of fighting over territory he passes through.

• **Jam Technology (Level Two)** — As the Homid Gift.

• **Silver Tongue (Level Two)** — As the Fianna Gift: Glib Tongue.

• **Staredown (Level Two)** — As the Homid Gift.

• **Disquiet (Level Three)** — As the Homid Gift.

• **Reshape Object (Level Three)** — As the Homid Gift.

• **Tongues (Level Three)** — The Fox can read and write any language encountered, even obscure or forgotten tongues and scripts. This Gift is taught by a Wind-spirit.

System: The player rolls Intelligence + Linguistics (difficulty 5 for one language, +1 for each additional roll) and spends one Willpower point. This ability lasts until the next sunrise.

• **Forgetfulness (Level Four)** — Kitsune with this Gift can erase information or memories of an event from the target's mind. This tactic is sometimes the only way the Veilless ones can keep their secrets. Forgetfulness is taught by Fog- or Mist-spirits.

System: The player spends one Gnosis and one Willpower point, then rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 6). The target can resist with a Willpower roll, difficulty of the Kitsune's number of tails +3.

• **Spirit Ward (Level Four)** — As the Homid Gift.

• **Assimilation (Level Five)** — As the Homid Gift.

• **Call to Allies (Level Five)** — Asia is crisscrossed with supernatural allegiances and rivalries, old scores and old debts. Parts of this web on like “sides” can call on each other in times of danger or crisis. This Gift is the Kitsune’s ultimate distress call. Her Batsu, Clan, and sentai will certainly hear and feel it, but it will also affect unknown allies and friendly neutrals in the area. (It’s even possible for a Fox to Call to Allies and bring down a horde of Kuei-jin vampires upon the enemy, strange as that would seem to her Garou cousins). Local spirits, *shen* and tuned-in mortals sense the Fox’s distress or pain and hear her voice, growl, scream (or death rattle) for an instant. The imperiled Fox’s location is clear to them, and the beacon of her fear and Rage will become brighter the closer the rescuer approaches. What each entity receiving the call does is entirely up to them — spirits that are tied to a location may do what they can from where they are, neutrals who wish to remain so will, and *hengeyokai* who choose to ignore can. However, because the *shen* you rescue today may save you tomorrow, most who do hear will act. The situation must be very grave indeed for the Kitsune to make such a request; false alarms anger spirits and *shen* alike. This Gift is taught by an Ancestor-spirit.

System: Call to Allies costs nothing and the Kitsune need not roll; the player declares the Call and the Fox suffers the consequences.

Roko

Kitsune born to four feet are masters of hunting, sensing and tracking magics. With a little more wisdom and effort, the roko fine-tune their instincts to work with more spiritual and elemental Gifts as well.

- **Burrow (Level One)** — As the Metis Gift.
- **Cricket Leap (Level One)** — As the Lupus Gift: Leap of the Kangaroo.
- **Heightened Senses (Level One)** — As the Lupus Gift.
- **Scent of Sight (Level Two)** — As the Lupus Gift.
- **Sense Imbalance (Level Two)** — As the common *hengeyokai* Gift (page 108).
- **Ten Chi (Level Two)** — The roko can feel himself in relation to Gaia and always know in which direction he travels — regardless of where he may be in the Middle Kingdom, Yin or Yang Realms. In addition, the Fox carries his “territory” with him anywhere. Natural foxes and other animals sense this, and allow him passage through their domains without challenge. Other roko will generally do the same. This Gift is taught by Crane-, Goose- or other migratory Bird-spirits.

System: The roko spends a Gnosis point and knows the following: Whether he is in the Yin, Yang, Yomi or physical Realm, where the meaningful “cardinal points” are, and what direction home is from where he stands.

- **Blind (Level Three)** — The roko can strike an enemy blind for one day. The loss of sight is accompanied by stinging pain. This gift is taught by a Porcupine-spirit.

System: The player spends one Gnosis and rolls Manipulation + Medicine (difficulty 7). The target resists with Stamina (difficulty 7).

- **Catfeet (Level Three)** — As the Lupus Gift.
- **Name the Spirit (Level Three)** — As the Lupus Gift.
- **Carriion Clothes (Level Four)** — Wild foxes sometimes catch birds by pretending to be dead; wild Foxes catch larger prey in like manner. This Gift cloaks the Kitsune completely in the trappings of death — no aura, no breath, no pulse, no telltale movement; the faint smell of first rot emanates from a roko thus disguised, and a conviction that the body is dead creeps into the minds of those affected. Even those with magically sharpened senses may be mistaken — possibly for the last time. This Gift is taught by the spirits of flies, flesh-grubs and other insects in the recycling trade.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and makes a Stamina + Stealth roll (difficulty 7). The Gift will hide small motions only; visible attacks, creeping corpses and Gifts that involve gestures or speech will break the spell. Mortals and inexperienced *shen* may be slow to realize what they’re dealing with, however — the first thought may be that the body is undead, rather than living. *Shen* with special senses may roll Perception + Occult (difficulty 9) to realize the spirit remains.

- **Forest Lord (Level Four)** — As the Lupus Gift: Beast Life.
- **Elemental Gift (Level Five)** — As the Lupus Gift.
- **Song of the Great Beast (Level Five)** — As the Lupus Gift; of course, depending on where in the Middle Kingdom the Kitsune is when she uses this Gift, anything from yeti to whale-sized carp or even the dreaded Lower Dragons could answer the call.

Shinju

The rarest Kitsune are raised by and among the supernatural, and are deeply attuned to such forces. Shinju Gifts concentrate on using that special awareness to the greatest advantage.

- **Flow of Aura (Level One)** — The Kitsune has a feel for “personality of place” and the psychic impressions left on an area by strong emotion. Walking across a field, she might sense a century-old battle. In a house, every room might hold a different scene of births, deaths, sickness, argument, grief, joy or thanksgiving. This Gift is taught by Wood- and Stone-spirits.

System: The player rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty 7). With one success, the shinju has a vague idea of past events (this house is drenched with death), with three, more detail emerges (this house was the site of a massacre about two centuries ago; a betrayal was involved) with five or better, she senses the precise emotional texture and depth (this house was the site of a massacre two centuries ago, a trusted servant let the soldiers in the house, two lovers died right where I’m standing, a baby cried over there among the bodies for half an hour before the killers got to him...).

- **Scent of the True Form (Level One)** — As the Philodox Gift.
- **Sense Wurm (Level One)** — As the Metis Gift.
- **Call to Duty (Level Two)** — As the Philodox Gift.
- **Imperial Authority (Level Two)** — Shinju know their place in the society — the top. They can take advantage of this by gazing into another’s eyes and exerting their

personality. An animal will fawn and defer to them. A human will immediately assume that the Fox is of a higher caste, better family, senior management, low-number Party membership — whatever is appropriate. *Shen* of weak will are similarly affected. This Gift is taught by Dragon-, Phoenix- or other animal spirits accustomed to royalty.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Intimidation (difficulty 6). *Shen* can oppose with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7).

- **Past Whispers (Level Two)** — While Flow of Aura grants the Kitsune psychometric insight about the emotional past of an area, this Gift lets the *shinju* tune in on the very thoughts impressed on a place. Fragments of thought (those spoken aloud, in particular), if intense enough at the time, can still be heard echoing years later. Wind-spirits and Epiphings teach this trick.

System: The player rolls Perception + Occult (difficulty 8). As with Flow of Aura, the greater the number of successes, the greater detail the Fox receives.

- **Distant Whispers (Level Three)** — Much like the *Metis* Gift: Mental Speech, but with a typically Fox twist: The *shinju* speaks his message into the wind, a stream, a fire, the bare ground or other element, and the target hears the Kitsune's voice coming from a like source nearby. Storms are particularly popular vehicles — talking thunder satisfies the *shinju* sense of drama. This Gift is taught by any Elemental spirit.

System: The player rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 8). The Fox may communicate over a distance of 20 miles per success, provided the element she chose for a carrier is present at both ends. The conduit will not allow mind-reading and will not work with strangers (unless the Fox has a personal token of the target, such as fingernail clippings or a wedding ring), but permits Social Abilities to be used on the receiver, provided no visual cues are necessary.

- **Eyes of the Cat (Level Three)** — As the *Metis* Gift.
- **Wisdom of the Ancient Ways (Level Three)** — As the Philodox Gift.
- **Roll Over (Level Four)** — As the Philodox Gift.
- **Scent of Beyond (Level Four)** — As the Philodox Gift.
- **Imperial Obligation (Level Five)** — As the Philodox Gift: Geas.

- **Marionette (Level Five)** — The Kitsune can make her target do anything she wants by mimicking the desired action. Snake-spirits teach this Gift.

System: The player spends a Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge (difficulty 7). The victim may resist with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7); if he fails, the Kitsune controls him for one turn per success.

Path Gifts Doshi

The Sorcerers have more *Jyu-ho* to call their own than any other Path — arguably more powerful Gifts, as well. This power comes (inevitably, in the World of Darkness) with a

price: The *Doshi* are tainted, very slightly, by at least one of the tricks they've stolen and the *shen* they first learned it from. ...

- **Blessing the Blade (Level One)** — With this Gift, the Sorcerer calls on a local spirit to inhabit a blade for a short time, infusing it with supernatural power. The Nine-Tails may do this instantly, for immediate use, or prepare a blade ahead of time. Outside of combat, this Gift functions only if activated with a specific enemy in mind. Special cloth or leather wrappings restrain the spirit until the enemy's name is spoken by the bearer. Only one such weapon can be carried at a time. This Gift is taught by a Fire-spirit.

System: The player spends one Gnosis and rolls Wits + Rituals (difficulty 7). The weapon will do aggravated damage against other *shen* for one scene only.

- **Breath of Yu-Chiang (Level One)** — Exactly as the Black Fury Gift: Curse of Aeolus; Yu-chiang is the Chinese God of the Sea-Wind.

- **Sense Magic (Level One)** — As the Uktena Gift.
- **Sense Wurm (Level One)** — As the *Metis* Gift.
- **Spirit Speech (Level One)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Blood Omen (Level Two)** — The Fox can divine the future by ritual sacrifice. Most commonly, the Fox will read the entrails of the victim, but there are also traditions of signs in burnt-offering smoke and scapulimancy. Legend has it that the *Doshi* stole this secret from the Black Spiral Dancers (who practice it with great enthusiasm using wolf, human, and Garou captives). The Sorcerers insist they never use *hengeyokai* (or wolves, or anyone's possible Kinfolk) for divination. As for humans, well — in times of crisis Kitsune ask more questions of Gaia and fewer of each other. ...

Black Spiral Dancers find their answers through the power they serve; *Doshi* are extremely careful to dedicate the ceremony to Celestines, Incarna and totems opposed to the Wurm, influential in their area, and not offended by a little bloodshed.

System: The player rolls Intelligence + Enigmas (difficulty 9 — difficulty 7 with humans or *shen*, shame on you), and spends one Gnosis. The more successes, the more detailed and accurate the information — provided the entity asked is willing and able to reveal the future. (Local spirits have local answers.)

- **Command Spirit (Level Two)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Ghost Speech (Level Two)** — Through the Gift: Spirit Speech, Kitsune can communicate with spirits in the Yang Realm; this Gift allows them to talk with the denizens of Yin. This Gift is taught by Ancestor-spirits and those associated with Yin or deathly influences (e.g. a local Mountain-spirit whose territory is mostly tombs).

System: When in the Yin Realm, the *Doshi* can speak to spirits there as naturally as to Yang spirits in that Realm. Wraiths and other once-human residents may still present linguistic challenges (and intelligence problems). When the Kitsune is in the Middle Kingdom, Yin spirits and wraiths that can normally speak across the Wall find it easier to talk to her. (For Wraith crossover purposes, treat all Kitsune with this Gift as mediums.)

- **Name the Spirit (Level Two)** — As the Lupus Gift.
- **Sight from Beyond (Level Two)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Exorcism (Level Three)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Pulse of the Invisible (Level Three)** — As the Theurge Gift.

• **Spirit Ward (Level Three)** — As the Homid Gift.

• **Swarm of Servants (Level Three)** — This is one of a Doshi's most bizarre powers; from the fur of his tails he may summon armies of tiny vermin to do his bidding (mice, lice, beetles, frogs, grasshoppers, whatever the caster wishes). The spirits of such creatures teach this Gift, if the Kitsune will only stop scratching long enough.

System: The player spends one Willpower and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 8). Each success summons 25 of the beasts; they are under the mental control of the Doshi. Though the swarm must stay within 20 feet of the Kitsune, they can harass foes (-1 to the victim's Dice Pool per 25 creepers) and perform simple tasks (at Strength 1 per 10).

• **By the Light of the Moon (Level Four)** — The Kitsune can see any hidden creature by moonlight. This includes Obfuscated Kin-jin, invisible Kuei-jin, spirits in the Penumbra, mages, changelings, hengeyokai and well, anything. This Gift is taught by Owl- and Bat-spirits.

System: The player spends one Gnosis point and rolls Perception + Alertness. The Storyteller sets the difficulty, taking into account things like distance, crowds, attempts to hide physically and the size of the invisible creature. The effect lasts until moonset, but the Kitsune must roll each time she tries to pick out another hidden form.

• **Fooling the Tiger (Level Four)** — As the Theurge Gift: Ultimate Argument of Logic.

- **Grasp the Beyond (Level Four)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Spirit Drain (Level Four)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Feral Lobotomy (Level Five)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **The Malleable Spirit (Level Five)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Seal of Inari (Level Five)** — Doshi, suspicious by nature, learned early to take nothing and no one at face value. Using this Gift, a Sorcerer can secretly brand any shen or mortal he encounters — as a warning to others, as a request for protection, as a death mark — with sigils only Kitsune can see. The ghostly red or black symbols appear to hover just above the skin — over makeup, clothing, body armor or other coverings — and are distinct at any distance (even if rather small) if the bearer's head is visible. Spirits such as Chimerlings and Epiphings may share this Gift if they feel like it; Doshi rarely teach it to each other.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Occult, difficulty 8. For each success, the Sorcerer may inscribe one character of his choice on the subject. Other Kitsune see the Seal without effort, and will usually act in accordance with the warning or request.

Eji

Kitsune warriors walk a difficult Path — usually right into the physical danger Foxes least like. Their Tamamono

are well-suited for the long hunt, lone fighter and last survivor.

- **Falling Touch (Level One)** — As the Ahroun Gift.
- **Razor Claws (Level One)** — As the Ahroun Gift.
- **Resist Pain (Level One)** — As the Philodox Gift.
- **Sense Hostility (Level One)** — Eji using this can sense the presence of hostile beings within (roughly) 100 feet.

System: The player rolls Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6). This Gift must be used voluntarily; it isn't a "danger sense."

• **Bolt (Level Two)** — The Eji can call on great forces to devastate his opponent. A lethal bolt of lightning, fire, ice, wind (or more exotic element — depending on the teacher's nature) strikes the enemy. Elemental spirits teach this Gift.

System: The player spends one Rage point and rolls Dexterity + Occult (difficulty 6). The target takes aggravated damage equal to the number of successes.

• **Enduring Warrior (Level Two)** — Eji with this power heal as quickly as their hengeyokai cousins. This Gift is taught by a Bear-spirit (some say because the Okuma lent the Eji this Gift to help the Kitsune survive the next War of Shame; some people will say anything...).

System: The Kitsune spends one point of Rage. From that point, she recovers one Health Level per turn, exactly as do Garou. The effect lasts out the scene.

- **Sense of the Prey (Level Two)** — As the Ragabash Gift.
- **Spirit of the Fray (Level Two)** — As the Ahroun Gift.
- **Call of the Dead (Level Three)** — The Kitsune's attunement to Yin enables them to interfere with a being's vital energies. Exposure to the negative forces of the darker Umbra causes chills, injury, confusion, and even serious damage in living creatures (among other things). Rare Water- and Cold-spirits teach this Gift; it is uncommon.

System: The player spends 1 Rage and 1 Gnosis point and rolls Stamina + Occult (difficulty 8). Animals (such as humans), halfway creatures (hengeyokai, changelings, etc.) and Yang-Realm spirits suffer damage as per the chart below; the victim loses Health Levels to the given point, regardless of Stamina. Yin creatures and spirits take no harm from the Gift, and (at the Storyteller's discretion) may be strengthened or even healed by its effects. Kindred of Humanity 6 or higher and Kuei-jin aspected to Yang take damage; their darker-souled cousins do not.

Successes Effect

- 1 The victim is functional but in pain from headache, chills and aching joints. He may find it difficult to concentrate. (A Willpower roll is necessary to continue any complex mental or intense physical activities successfully.)
- 2 The victim is Injured, experiencing fever, sprains and cramps.
- 3 The victim is Wounded. At this level, convulsions wrack his body and the damage is inflicted by his own muscles tearing him apart.
- 4 The victim is Crippled. Hypothermia and seizures set in, and humans will probably die by end-of-scene if left

unaided. Sturdier victims are only Wounded, but the damage is aggravated.

5 The victim is Crippled with aggravated damage. Humans die instantly.

- **Song of Fear (Level Three)** — The Eji has such disciplined control of her fear that she may release her fox frenzy on other beings. *Caveat vulpes*: Garou and similar professional berserkers will not be happy with the Kitsune who uses Song of Fear on them. Enemies react with undying vengeance. Allies (even should the Fox have saved their life by forcing them to run) often seek retribution or sever contact. This Gift is taught by a Hare-spirit.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Intimidation (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Each success sends the target running in terror for one turn.

- **Weak Arm (Level Three)** — As the Philodox Gift.

- **Element Meld (Level Four)** — This Gift transforms the Eji into any one of the physical elements — water, fire, earth or air — and allows her to merge with and move through larger bodies of it. This is useful before the fight, in surveillance, and after, as a near-perfect escape route. (Imagine, for instance, a water-Fox following the Pentex tanker through the sea, or the cornered Kitsune sinking into the earth before the eyes of the hunters.) With more skill (on attaining Rank Five) the warrior may transmute into more difficult, secondary elements — mist, electricity, moonlight, metal and the like. Elemental spirits teach this Gift.

System: The Kitsune spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Manipulation + Gnosis (difficulty 8). The Kitsune must be in contact with the desired element to change (and changes on contact, therefore fire and lightning do not harm her), and will revert to her natural form on leaving it. On taking the new form, she will acquire its immunities (water is bulletproof, air can escape from anything but hermetically sealed spaces) and limitations (water can be frozen, fire needs oxygen, etc.). Her "body" remains the same size and in one piece, but may stretch out, flatten or distort to go around obstacles; she may move at her normal rate. Silver, radioactivity and toxic waste harm her as normal, and will bar her progress; under no circumstances can she become the last two without having joined the Wyrms. While merged with the element, the Kitsune is very difficult to detect (no body heat, no smell...) and observers need special senses and a successful Perception + Alertness (difficulty 9) to spot her.

- **Sorcerous Bite (Level Four)** — The Eji can transmute his teeth to any substance he desires. Silver and jade are the most common, but as the teeth are supernaturally strong and rigid no matter what is chosen, wood, fire, ice and even water are possible. This Gift is also taught by elementals.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Stamina + Primal-Urge. Silver teeth will not harm the Kitsune so long as they stay where they're supposed to be — if he is forced to bite himself, he's affected as much as any enemy would be.

- **Dragon Ally (Level Five)** — Kitsune warriors can find help in the least expected places. With this Gift, an Eji can call forth a mighty fighter from the elements surround-



ing him. There must be a substantial amount of the raw material available — strong winds, not merely air; a fair-sized pool or stream, not puddles. The creature takes the shape of a dragon, and is formed entirely from its parent force. Not surprisingly, Elementals teach this Gift.

System: The player spends 1 Rage point and makes a Gnosis roll (difficulty 8). For every success on the Gnosis roll, the "dragon" has five feet of length, five Health Levels, two soak dice, and does two dice of aggravated damage. It may attack with one bite and one bodyslam per turn. (For example, Wu Bingshu calls forth a dragon from a bonfire and rolls three successes. The blazing creature is fifteen feet long and has fifteen Health levels; its bite inflicts six dice of damage, its tail lashes out for another six, and it has six effective soak dice against all attacks. The Kuei-jin are in trouble tonight.)

Dragon allies are friendly toward their creator; this may be because if the Kitsune stops concentrating on their Ally's existence, it disappears. (The Eji may take only the simplest actions in addition to maintaining the Dragon.) The creature will vanish regardless at the end of scene or if it loses all its Health Levels; each time the dragon loses a Health Level, it also loses a foot of length, until gone entirely.

- **Fire Immunity (Level Five)** — As the Ahroun Gift: Kiss of Helios.

Gukutsushi

Dreamweavers are best known for the pictures they paint in the minds of others. Yet Gukutsushi study all the weaknesses of sanity — memory, passion, ego — to brace or break open as they see fit.

- **Blur of the Milky Eye (Level One)** — As the Ragabash Gift.
- **Clear the Mind (Level One)** — As the Children of Gaia Gift: Calm.
- **Mother's Touch (Level One)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Open Seal (Level One)** — As the Ragabash Gift.
- **Dreamspeak (Level Two)** — As the Galliard Gift.
- **Fan-Shadow-Robe (Level Two)** — The Kitsune can alter her appearance. This Gift does not allow perfect, detailed control — the Fox may not duplicate another's appearance exactly, reproduce complicated patterns, garments (i.e. uniforms) or equipment, for instance — and does not cloak the Dreamweaver's actions. (Her arms are where they appear to be, but the gun may seem to be a democracy leaflet...) Chimerlings and illusion-related spirits (someone has to be in charge of heat haze) teach this Gift.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Empathy vs. the target's Willpower. There is no limit on the number of beings affected. Obviously, however, the fewer witnesses, the smaller the chance of one getting lucky and seeing through the disguise. Fan-Shadow-Robe (supposedly named after the props Bai Mianxi first used to enhance the effect) lasts one scene.

- **Silver Tongue (Level Two)** — As the Fianna Gift: Glib Tongue.

- **Taking the Forgotten (Level Two)** — As the Ragabash Gift.

- **Distant Whispers (Level Three)** — As the Shinju Gift.

- **Ebisu's Fingers (Level Three)** — As the Ragabash Gift: Gremlins, but named with a twist: Ebisu is a Shinto luck god and the Patron of Honest Work. To the Kitsune way of thinking, machines take work away from honest laborers; this Gift puts it back.

- **Shadow-Fan-Flowers (Level Three)** — One entity within the Dreamweaver's sight sees a vision and believes. The illusion is perfectly detailed; the Gukutsushi directs motion, color, light, everything. The Gift is taught by Chimerlings and other spirits of dream and illusion.

System: The player spends a point of Gnosis and rolls Manipulation + Empathy vs. the target's Willpower. The viewer may free himself from the dream only by finding a crack in the enchantment — a flaw in the vision — and convincing himself that it is not real. This is extremely difficult. Mundane humans may have no chance at all, if the Storyteller desires. All others may escape with a Willpower roll (difficulty 9) once they have a good reason to disbelieve.

- **Moon-Fan-Face-Shadow (Level Four)** — As the Glass Walker Gift: Doppelganger.

- **Whelp Body (Level Four)** — As the Ragabash Gift.

- **Madness (Level Five)** — As the Metis Gift.

- **Violation (Level Five)** — As the Ragabash Gift.

Kataribe

Power carries tales; tales carry power. Kataribe Gifts let them find and communicate with anyone and everyone with a story that somebody might one day need.

- **Beast Speech (Level One)** — As the Galliard Gift.

- **Fable (Level One)** — With this Gift, the Kataribe may use her natural expressive abilities and will to sway an audience. By telling an appropriate story, singing the right song, etc., she can plant a suggestion into the hearts and minds of listeners. (For example, Sondok sings a ballad of reverence for the earth at a folk festival; the attendees find themselves voting Green in the next referendum.) Bird-spirits (Nightingale in particular) favor Kataribe with this Gift.

System: The player spends a Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Empathy. Listeners are influenced by the experience for a number of days equal to the Fox's Manipulation + Performance dice pool. This Gift will not work if the targets are forced to listen, nor when the Kitsune is not actually in the room; recordings and broadcasts of the tale have no effect.

- **Mindspeak (Level One)** — As the Galliard Gift.

- **Truth of Gaia (Level One)** — As the Philodox Gift.

- **Centipede's Beckoning (Level Two)** — As the Galliard Gift: Call of the Wyrn.

- **Distractions (Level Two)** — As the Galliard Gift.

- **Lore (Level Two)** — The Kataribe can access the memories of other Bards, living and dead, to find specific information about an artifact, location, person, etc. (This is

similar to Wisdom of the Ancient Ways, but brings up stories, riddles, mnemonics, nursery rhymes, songs, and the like — things Kataribe would treasure, but not necessarily obviously useful.) This Gift comes from Tortoise-, Elephant- and other long-lived, deep thinking spirits.

System: The player rolls Intelligence + Rituals; the Storyteller sets the difficulty based on the obscurity of the information. The Fox must have a personal contact with the subject — sight, touch, her own memories — or the Gift will not work.

- **Tongues (Level Two)** — As the *Kojin* Gift.

- **Seek (Level Three)** — This Gift opens contact with a local spirit, whom the Kitsune may ask for the location of *any one individual*. Spirits will answer correctly if they can; if the individual is outside their territory they will say so. The spirits of predatory animals teach this Gift.

System: This Gift requires the expenditure of a Gnosis point to reach the desired spirit (waived if the Fox is standing at the questioned one's feet, lair, shrine, etc.) and the player must roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 6).

- **Silence (Level Three)** — The Kitsune can completely silence an area so that no sound can be heard whatsoever. Lake- and Mountain-spirits teach this Gift.

System: The player spends two Gnosis points and rolls Manipulation + Stealth (difficulty 8); the area of effect is five yards in radius per success. Any Gifts or other actions which require sound to work will cause the two users to make a resisted Gnosis (Chi or another appropriate Trait if not Bête) roll (difficulty 6). The winner's action takes precedence over the loser's, but the Silence will continue except for that interruption. The effect lasts one scene, or until the Bard is rendered unconscious.

- **Uzume Sings (Level Three)** — Kataribe voices are particularly beautiful; with this Gift they become paralyzingly so. A skilled bard may hold an enemy at a standstill purely with the power of song, or entice him forward to his doom. Nightingale- and Snake-spirits teach this Gift.

System: The player spends one Gnosis and rolls Charisma + Performance (difficulty of the target's Willpower). For every success rolled, the victim remains in the Kitsune's power one turn — she must roll again when the first successes run out, but need not spend more Gnosis. The victim may be held completely motionless, or (if the singer desires) slowly follow the sound. If the Kitsune leaves or stops singing, the spell ends after the current duration runs out.

- **Kuei Dance (Level Four)** — This Gift calls on the dead to bear witness, usually to the manner of their death, occasionally to the events of their lives. This magic compels truth, not cooperation — but as most Restless ones are *frantically eager* to have their lives remembered, deaths avenged, graves tended and true stories known, few refuse. The Dance may take any form — the Kataribe may begin a story and have the ghost step forward to continue the tale, act out the events of the story in mime or dance and let the ghost appear in its part, or (and this is the best for convincing others the tale is true) begin a song or narration that readies the audience for the experience, then let them see the ghost's very memories around them. This Gift is taught by Ancestor-spirits.

System: The player spends a Willpower point and rolls Gnosis + Empathy (difficulty 8) for the Nine-Tails to establish contact with the spirit. To communicate the deceased's memories to the audience, she rolls Manipulation + Performance (difficulty 6). The more successes, the better the testimony comes across to the audience. This Gift will work *only* on the dead who have retained some semblance of themselves in the next life. This includes hengeyokai ancestors, wraiths, Spectres and all manner of hungry ghosts. Kuei Dance cannot call up the living. Souls that have been reincarnated since death will not appear. The Gift may even work on Kin-jin and Kuei-jin if the Kataribe is powerful enough (Rank Five and up); their bodies do not travel with them, and they return unharmed (though likely very angry) at the end of the scene.

- **Shadows by the Firelight (Level Four)** — As the Galliard Gift.

- **Assimilation (Level Five)** — As the Homid Gift.

- **Fabric of the Mind (Level Five)** — As the Galliard Gift.

General Gifts

The Kitsune have a fair amount of communal Gifts, but not as much as one might expect from the sorcerous Foxes. This stems largely from their devotion to their Paths — once a Gukutsushi has begun learning the tricks of *mind-mysticism*, the more “vanilla” Gifts shared by all his brethren seem less enticing. The shared Gifts of the Foxes reflect their mysticism as a race, as well as their infamous penchant for mischief.

- **Chi Sense (Level One)** — The Kitsune can open herself to the flow of Yin and Yang, carefully feeling the flow of Chi in the world around her. A Kitsune can make good use of this Gift to become an accomplished *fengshui* (a practitioner of *fengshui*). This Gift is taught by any spirit of the Middle Kingdom.

System: The player rolls Perception + Occult; the difficulty and information received depend on the local distribution of Chi. For instance, being able to tell that a graveyard is high in Yin would be about difficulty 3 or 4 (if not common sense), while discerning surreptitious sabotage of a laboratory's Chi flow might be difficulty 8 or 9.

- **Ishin Denshin (Level One)** — The Kitsune can communicate telepathically with others of her kind. Both Foxes must possess the Gift and be willing conversationalists. The Kitsune find it very difficult to lie through this Gift (its name means “Mind-to-Heart Communication”), and therefore use it less often than one would expect. Ishin Denshin is taught by Snake-spirits.

System: The player rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty 6) while the Kitsune gazes into the other Fox's eyes. No effort is necessary to sustain contact once established, but any prolonged distraction (such as combat) will break the link. For each success of the initial roll, the connection will survive one round of combat or single scene of confrontation without breaking.

- **Scent of Running Water (Level One)** — As the Ragabash Gift.

- **Moon Dance (Level Two)** — The Kitsune becomes completely invisible provided no moonlight falls on her.

She may step in and out of Luna's gaze as many times as she likes, appearing and vanishing over and over. Lunes teach this Gift (and presumably included the exception to keep an eye on the little tricksters).

System: The Kitsune spends one Gnosis point; however, the effect lasts an entire night. This Gift does not mask a Fox's scent, sound or any other sensory cues; just vision.

- **Sense Magic (Level Two)** — As the Uktena Gift.
- **Spirit Speech (Level Two)** — As the Theurge Gift.
- **Ghost Speech (Level Three)** — As the Doshi Gift.
- **Puppeteer's Secret (Level Three)** — All Kitsune pick up a few illusions, and a few fox tricks. Not being noticed is the most important of both. This Gift won't turn the Nine-Tails invisible; even better, it makes him one of the crowd. If a Fox using Puppeteer's Secret is standing around the police station, everyone just *knows* he's part of the squad. At the Party meeting, everyone assumes he's a faithful, if dull, member. *Wherever he goes, he's been there for years* — he's the familiar face; the friend of a friend; the loyal, nameless supporter; the small-timer trustworthy because he hasn't an angle to call his own. Deer and other well-camouflaged spirits (whose mortal representatives blend into the scenery or die) teach this Gift.

System: For starters, the player rolls Charisma + Subterfuge (difficulty 7). The Kitsune should be wearing at least a rough approximation of what everyone else is — a suit won't encourage the confidence of dock-workers — and keep up fairly appropriate behavior (as a janitor he can sweep the same patch of floor forever, but safecracking will draw too much attention). This need not be a major effort — Puppeteer's Secret will cover all the things a disguise can't except ignorance — but as a rule, the less the Nine-Tails says and does, the better. If the Fox begins to step outside his assumed character, the Storyteller may ask for additional skill rolls: Wits, Charisma or Manipulation plus Streetwise, Etiquette, etc., to allay suspicion.

- **Shadow-Fan-Flowers (Level Four)** — as the Gukutsushi Gift.

- **Possession (Level Five)** — The Kitsune may abandon her physical form to take over that of another. It is the most famous, and most infamous power the Nine-Tails wield. Humans across Asia rightly fear it. This Gift is taught by lesser Incarna of Luna or one of Fox's brood, if at all.

System: The Fox must be in contact with the victim, the victim's hair or nail cuttings, or a personal token of extreme importance to the victim (wedding ring, favorite toy, etc.). She burns a Gnosis point to assume a completely spirit form, then a Willpower point to overcome the host, then the player rolls Manipulation + Occult (difficulty of the target's Willpower).

Shen can resist at this point (and once a day from then on) with Stamina + Occult (difficulty of the Kitsune's Willpower). Humans — with the assistance of priests, sages, witch doctors, hedge mages, *shen*, friends keeping vigil — can resist the intruder once a week with straight Stamina (difficulty of the Kitsune's Willpower). The Gift: Exorcism can be used to counter Possession. If successfully exorcised, the Kitsune returns to her physical form.

JU-FU

He folded the last crease and opened his hands, putting the little paper decoration on the lacquered table beside him.

Herb and the guard stared at it.

"Guard...take him away," said Lord Hong.

It was a marvellously constructed paper figure of a man.

But there didn't seem to have been enough paper for a head.

— Terry Pratchett, *Interesting Times*

Perhaps the most intriguingly distinct Kitsune trick is the art of Ju-Fu, the paper magic. The Foxes were bewitched with the idea of paper when they first found it — much as humans across Asia revere the substance. In Japan, paper is a religious symbol, and it is part of funerary rites across the Middle Kingdom. In Japanese, *kami* is a homophone for both spirit and paper, and the Kitsune use the term to refer to their paper-spells just as they refer to the Kami, the spirits of Gaia made flesh. (In **Werewolf** terms, *kami* — lowercase and italic — refers to Kitsune Ju-Fu spells, while Kami, uppercase, refers to the entities described in the **Werewolf Storytellers Handbook**.)

In many ways, the Kitsune look on Ju-Fu as the most elegant sorcery ever devised. The ideograms reflect their manner of thought perfectly, for one. What's more, the method of working a miniature rite, storing a mystical effect for later, is highly useful. In times of plenty, the Kitsune can set some of their Gnosis aside for times of want, in the form of Ju-Fu. What's more, spirits that might hesitate to be bound to a fetish don't mind temporary talens like the *kami* — after all, there's no way they'll be bound into such a fetish for all that long.

In essence, learning each Ju-Fu "trick" is treated much like learning a common Kitsune Gift, although they are learned from other Kitsune rather than spirits. Once a Kitsune learns a Ju-Fu "Gift", he may create the appropriate *kami* at any time by painting the ideogram on an appropriate piece of paper (or in some cases, by instead using a special origami folding technique). The paper must be natural and easily destroyed; photocopier paper or magazine pages are out of the question! In some cases, the Kitsune may create a *kami* out of papyrus, cloth, birchbark or even skin, although she must spend an additional Gnosis point to properly invest such a substance with power. Similarly, the ink must be of natural origin — octopus or squid ink is lovely, but blood, mixtures of water and lampblack, ochre and egg yolk or any other natural stain works well. If the Kitsune uses unnatural materials of any sort, the difficulty to create the *kami* is raised by 3; if the difficulty rises above 10, the Ju-Fu is impossible.

Each *kami* requires the expenditure of at least one Gnosis point to create, thus limiting the number of *kami* available to any one Fox; Gnosis isn't that easy to recharge, after all. There is also a die roll specific to each trick; however, the Fox can only know whether he was successful or not at the time he activates the *kami*. For this reason, the Storyteller may want to make any such rolls in secret; if the Kitsune fails, the *kami* holds no power, but the Fox still pays the Gnosis cost. Unless otherwise noted, any rules apply at the time of the *kami*'s creation rather than the time of activation.

The Storyteller may allow the Kitsune to roll Dexterity + Calligraphy or Origami to do a particularly beautiful job, reducing the difficulty to create the *kami* by 1. However, such art isn't necessary for success; any symbols or folds vital to create a *kami* are taught when the Fox learns the "Gift."

Obviously, if a *kami* is destroyed prematurely, its power is lost; even activated *kami* that provide ongoing effects immediately cease working if the host-paper is destroyed.

JU-FU GIFTS

- **Element Child (Level One)** — The Kitsune can create a small amount of one of the basic elements by destroying a *kami* bearing that element's symbol. The Kitsune prepares the *kami* by writing a mandala showing the elements in relation to each other. When he wants to activate the *kami*, he must fold it into an appropriate shape (airplane, shuriken, water bomb or the like) and throw it where he wants it to be.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Gnosis (difficulty 6) at the time of preparation. In most other respects, this Gift is identical to the *Meris Gift: Create Element*.

- **Lantern (Level One)** — In Japan, will-o'-the-wisps are considered the work of foxes. By crafting a paper lantern or similar *kami*, the Kitsune can later infuse it with an eerie light. The light may take the appearance of captured lightning, moonlight, an evil reddish glow, or whatever effect the Fox had in mind when creating the *kami*.

System: The player rolls Gnosis, difficulty 6; the Gnosis cost is one. The light is exactly as bright as that of a mundane paper lantern, and lasts for a scene or until the lantern is destroyed.

- **Paper Speech (Level One)** — By crafting an origami figure or special pictogram of a specific creature or animal, the Kitsune may communicate with such creatures at will, apparently in their native tongues. When she activates the *kami*, an illusion of the represented creature overlays the Kitsune's own image in the subject's mind; the Fox's speech is then translated into the appropriate language of scent, body language, and so on. The Kitsune herself hears the creature's responses as Kitsune-go in her own mind.

System: The player spends a Gnosis point and rolls Intelligence + Animal Ken (difficulty 6) for the Kitsune to craft the *kami*. This can be used to speak other human or hengeyokai tongues, although the roll is Intelligence +

Abusing Ju-Fu

Storytellers beware: Some players, being the unscrupulous creatures they are, they may try to get you to allow them to mass-produce *kami* between game sessions — maybe even trying to rationalize having twenty, thirty or a hundred *kami* fully prepared for any emergency!

As no properly busy Kitsune has this kind of free time or Gnosis to spare, this is clearly an abuse of the rules that interferes with the spirit of the story. Such players are clearly drawing down the Wrath of Heaven, and you are encouraged to tell them "no" in as firm tones as necessary.



Empathy, the difficulty rises to 8, and the Gnosis cost is two points. The duration is one scene.

- **Umekochi's Mouth (Level One)** — Named for the Japanese goddess of food, this trick allows a Kitsune to craft a small paper cup, dish or other container that can hold four times as much volume as it should.

System: The player rolls Gnosis, difficulty 7; the Gnosis cost is one.

- **Attraction (Level Two)** — This trick lets a Kitsune attract or repel a certain type of animal by creating an appropriate *kami*. For instance, the Fox might craft a tiger-repelling *kami* to travel safely through tiger territory, or fashion a paper firefly to summon enough fireflies to eerily light a graveyard.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Animal Ken, difficulty 7; the number of successes indicates the relative strength of the *kami*. The Gnosis cost is one for insects or vermin, two for most animals, and three for large or dangerous animals such as tigers or water buffalo, and will not work against *shen* in animal form. The *kami* is activated by spitting on it.

- **Eyes of the Wall (Level Two)** — This trick really creates two *kami*: the Fox takes a paper and cuts a hole in it, leaving the cut-out hole someplace useful. The Kitsune can then put her eye to the hole in her half of the *kami* to see what the cut-out would "see." She can even get each side's view by looking through alternate sides of the hole. Kitsune who fly kites as a hobby are particularly enamored of this trick.

System: The player spends two Gnosis and rolls Gnosis, difficulty 7, when creating the two-in-one *kami*. The stolen view lasts for a whole day and a night.

- **Labyrinth (Level Two)** — By hiding this *kami* in a room and speaking a word of binding, the Kitsune can prevent anyone from leaving. A person who climbs out the window finds himself coming back in through the door, and so on. People can still enter the room as usual — leaving is the tricky part. As the Kitsune must be present to activate the effect, he is trapped inside along with any other prisoners until the *kami* is destroyed.

System: The player rolls Wits + Enigmas, difficulty 8; the Gnosis cost is three.

- **Silver Sigil (Level Two)** — This trick is much like the Fianna Gift: Glib Tongue. The Kitsune can write "badge" on a piece of paper — and the target will see a badge of some sort. She can write "passport" on a scroll of birch bark and get through customs without a hitch. The *kami* cannot be changed, but it will affect as many people as necessary for the duration of a scene. Combat or other significant distractions end the effect, as does destroying the *kami*.

System: The player rolls Gnosis, difficulty 7, and spends a Gnosis. The *kami* is activated when human eyes first rest on it; at that point, the Fox is considered to be using the aforementioned Fianna Gift.

- **Banishment (Level Three)** — This *kami* is used against spirits who have traveled from their home realms. By brandishing the pictogram and demanding that the spirit

return home, the Fox may force devils back into the Yomi World or Crab Soldiers back into Umi, for example.

System: The player invests three Gnosis and rolls Gnosis, difficulty 7, during the *kami*'s creation. As the Kitsune activates it, the player must make a contested Willpower roll against the wayward spirit; if he succeeds, the spirit is immediately forced back into its native Realm (or into the Mirror Lands, in the case of Realmless spirits that are materialized in the physical world). Unfortunately, this cannot be used to split a bakemono's possessing Bane from its mortal host.

- **Paper Beast (Level Three)** — This *kami* is always fashioned in the form of an origami animal, or with the pictogram of an animal painted across it. When the Kitsune spits on the paper, the replica immediately grows to the full size and likeness of its "original", and obeys the Kitsune's commands.

System: The player invests two points of Gnosis and rolls Gnosis, difficulty 7. The resulting creature has all the strength and capabilities of its model beast; paper elephants may lift logs, tigers fight with all the appropriate strength and fury, and so on. However, since the beast is still paper, it only has one Health Level. The Kitsune may only create mundane animals, although legend tells of seven-tailed Foxes who could create paper phoenixes and the like.

- **Beast Shape (Level Four)** — The Kitsune may take the form of the animal represented by this *kami*. Apart from the need to prepare the spell beforehand, and the specific duration (one scene), this Gift is identical to the Black Fury Gift: The Thousand Forms.

System: The player must spend two Gnosis and roll Dexterity + Animal Ken, with a difficulty dependent on the form chosen.

- **Walk (Level Four)** — This last-minute escape route allows the Kitsune to vanish from sight as she tears the *kami*, reappearing in the Mirror Lands in the form of her choice.

System: The player must invest four Gnosis in a *kami* and roll Gnosis, difficulty 7 to prepare this charm. Once the Nine-Tails activates the power, stepping sideways is instantaneous and automatic.

- **Kidnap (Level Five)** — One of the dirtier tricks in the Kitsune arsenal, this allows a Fox to abduct a person or *shen* into the Umbra. It matters little where the Kitsune is standing at the time; a Fox in the Mirror Lands can pull a target in with him, while a Fox in the physical world can either throw his target into the Umbra while remaining behind himself, or vanish along with the unfortunate victim. The Kitsune hurls the *kami* at his target while crying a word of activation; if the Fox is in the Umbra at the time, the paper literally appears from nowhere, striking the target. As the target vanishes in a flash of light and smoke, the now-blank piece of paper drifts slowly to the ground...

System: The player must invest two Gnosis in the *kami* and seal it with a Gnosis roll, difficulty 8. To activate the *kami*, the Fox must make a Gnosis roll, difficulty of the local Wall; however, only one success is necessary.

• **Paper Flesh (Level Five)** — This Ju-Futrick is identical to the Level Three sorcery: Paper Beast, save that the summoned creature becomes flesh and blood in all respects.

System: The *kami* requires three points of Gnosis and a Gnosis roll at difficulty 7. The summoned creature has full statistics, full Health Levels, and is real in every way; however, once slain, or at the end of the scene, it reverts to a powerless paper form.

Rites

There are relatively few Kitsune-created rites. Not only have they had less time to come up with them, they haven't needed to invent as many. The Foxes are only too happy to adopt or adapt rites from other hengeyokai, and borrow most of what they need.

Kitsune, as a rule, express tremendously flattering (and often sincere) respect and admiration for the customs of other *shen*. Though this will not, naturally, gain them access to the most secret or most sacred rites of others, they have learned many lesser rituals this way. For general purposes, consider that the Nine-Tails have access to beginning (first and second level) rites of the less reclusive hengeyokai. Characters with good reason (Clan, sentai members, a Batsu or Sempai of another breed) may pick up more advanced ceremonies appropriate to their ally's race, area, and the relationship between them. Elders who get around might know almost anything. These rites will work as usual, unless there is some reason that the spirits would simply not heed a Kitsune's call (such as the Baptism of Fire, which relies on Garou tribal spirits).

The Opening of the Eyes

Level One

This simple rite is used after a Kitsune kit first manifests his powers — which may not always be in the form of a First Change. It isn't the exclusive province of Kitsune; the Foxes teach this rite to many other hengeyokai and even a few other *shen*, in case a young kit needs awakening and instruction before a Kitsune can arrive. The Opening of the Eyes takes only five minutes to perform, and requires that a *shen* touch the kit's eyelids and speak a few brief words of purpose, telling the kit of his heritage and what role he will soon play.

System: The ritemaster rolls Charisma + Rituals, difficulty 5. The newly-awakened kit quickly adapts to the trauma of the Change, and is soon as mirthful as any other Fox.

Rite of the Crossroads

Level Three

The Kitsune's Rite of the Crossroads serves much the same purpose as the Beast Courts' Rite of the Opened Way. In it, the Foxes use the power of the four directions to celebrate a kit's first — and only — choice of path.

The rite is always performed in a transitional place — although a crossroads is of course most auspicious, bridges over running streams or even doorways also work well. The ritemaster properly purifies the young kit (the rite's subject), then brings her

to the site of the rite. There, after proper obeisance to the Emerald Mother, the Silver Lady, Bai-Mianxi and Prince Inari, the ritemaster asks all four to bless their newest child's arrival into adulthood. The ritemaster then lays out four bowls before the kit, one at each direction. The kit sees each bowl as filled with one of the four Paths' elements — clay, lightning, lava and mist. The kit must then reach into the proper bowl, thus choosing her path. Although this can be a painful experience for fledgling Eji or Doshi, the kit suffers no permanent damage. Once her choice is made, and her paws drip with the symbol of her path, the ritemaster ends the rite and takes the new Yakan to her training.

System: The ritemaster rolls Charisma + Rituals; the kit is officially Rank One at the rite's end. It is a great honor to perform this rite, and successfully sponsoring a new Kitsune grants the ritemaster two points of temporary Toku.

Renown

Toshihito did not have much rank, but it just shows how well a man can do anyway when he is well established and liked in his own locality.

— "Yam Soup" (Royall Tyler, translator)

The Kitsune system of Renown seems, on the surface, similar to those of most other Changing Breeds. If asked, the average Nine-Tails (presuming he respected the questioner enough to answer such a personal question at all) would probably say that his race valued Wisdom, Honor and Glory, just as the werewolves do. Though this would be both truthful and (probably) stop the nosy-parker from digging too much deeper, it is misleading. (Surprise, surprise. A misleading Fox answer...)

Better translations of Chie, Toku, and Kagayaki — revealing in themselves — are provided below, but to really get at the heart of the matter, we have to explain how they feel about Rank and Renown to begin with.

Renown doesn't matter to Kitsune. It's a very small part of the Kataribe mission to record what their fellows do. Certainly, there is respect to be had for any accomplishments a Fox might manage, but Renown and the bragging rights Corax and Garou often wrest from it strike the Kitsune as shocking vanity. Nine-Tails keep track of Renown primarily because everyone else does — to ignore the social customs of their allies would be impolitic, and a Kitsune whose deeds are well-known is at an advantage in the Courts.

Rank, on the other hand, is prized and revered by the Foxes. Mortal beings can trade in fame and face all they want, but real merit is rewarded by Luna with tails. Kitsune gain a new tail only when they gain value in the spirits' eyes. It may not be lied about (though it can be hid) or boasted of, faked or exaggerated. It is absolute, and Foxes who leave Gaia's service cannot acquire new ones, no matter how powerful their new masters make them.

In game terms, every time the Kitsune advances in Rank beyond Rank One, he gains a new tail. These tails are not always visible; most of the time, they're neatly tucked away in the same place as a Garou's Crinos mass goes. The

Renown

Rank 0 (Nogitsune) — the Kitsune holds no Renown, and has yet to choose his Path.

Doshi

Rank	Chie	Toku	Kagayaki
1 (Yakan)	2	1	0
2 (Kiko)	4	3	0
3 (Koryo)	6	5	1
4 (Reiko)	8	7	2
5 (Tenko)	10	9	3

Eji

Rank	Chie	Toku	Kagayaki
1 (Yakan)	1	1	1
2 (Kiko)	3	2	2
3 (Koryo)	4	4	4
4 (Reiko)	7	5	5
5 (Tenko)	8	8	6

Gakusashi

Rank	Chie	Toku	Kagayaki
1 (Yakan)	2	1	0
2 (Kiko)	3	3	1
3 (Koryo)	6	4	2
4 (Reiko)	8	6	3
5 (Tenko)	10	8	4

Kataribe

Rank	Chie	Toku	Kagayaki
1 (Yakan)	1	1	1
2 (Kiko)	3	3	1
3 (Koryo)	5	5	2
4 (Reiko)	7	7	3
5 (Tenko)	9	9	4

Kitsune may manifest or hide his extra tails by making a simple Gnosis roll against the local Wall.

(Yes, the game is only set up to handle Foxes of five tails or less. The higher a Kitsune climbs in Rank, the longer it takes to advance again — thankfully, their lifespans allow them adequate time to do so. Frankly, no player character is going to earn his sixth tail by the time the Wheel turns to the Sixth Age — if that soon.)

Chie

(chee-yay)

Analogous to Wisdom, Chie is best defined as intelligence, talent, cleverness and ingenuity. Kitsune write it using the characters for “know” and “blessing or kindness.” This would surprise most of their enemies, as the usual application of Chie involves destruction or evasion of the enemy — with an emphasis on cunning tricks, good use of magic and Gifts, booby traps, disguises, etc. The *ideal* of Chie is the killing of two enemies by tricking them into destroying each other, preferably while the Fox herself is three Prefectures away.

Toku

Similar in some ways to Honor, Toku can mean virtue, ethical character, moral excellence or honor. One character represents it: The glyph for “upright” combined with “heart.” Toku is granted for living one’s life in accordance with Gaia and Luna’s rules, and removed for deeds distasteful even to the Foxes; naturally, the Kitsune care less about the morality of attacking something large and dangerous from behind and more about being a good sempai to a kit who needs one’s help. In essence, Toku reflects a Kitsune’s unwillingness to compromise what it is to be Kitsune, and constant furthering of the Foxes’ goals.

Kagayaki

Kagayaki can be translated as Glory, but radiance or magnificence suits it better. It is written with the character for “shining” with a partial ideogram meaning “army” or “military” tacked on. Kitsune use the term and award the Renown mostly to recognize the shining that their members do in other *shen*’s eyes. Foxes don’t give a damn about battle-prowess on their own account, but feel there is a certain benefit to racking up points for bravery and ferocity with hengeyokai who care.

Kagayaki can also be given to Kitsune who do “good deeds” in the sight of anyone that matters. Nine-Tails fully expect at least one more flare-up in the War of Shame before the Sixth Age dawns, and would like a few allies and sympathizers when it starts. Foxes who are good ambassadors to other *shen* may be rewarded in this way.

Experience

For the most part, Kitsune gain and spend experience like any other shapeshifter. The primary difference comes when learning the Gifts of those outside their own breed or Path — here the Kitsune truly shine. Of course, the guidelines for cross-Gift learning given in the Werewolf Players Guide (pg. 189) should be followed fairly closely; but the Gifts that Foxes can learn, they learn quickly.

Experience

Trait	Cost
Attribute	current rating x 4
Ability	current rating x 2
New Ability	3
Gift	level of Gift x 3
Gift of another Breed, Path, Hengeyokai	level of Gift x 4
Rage	current rating
Gnosis	current rating x 2
Willpower	current rating

Appendix: Nobles among Nobles

Mei-Fei followed Katsuko along the trail, and knelt where she was bid — at a spot where a fox run intersected the footpath. The Moon-Saint vanished into the trees to her right, and the Nogitsune patiently waited for the test (it must be another test, she thought) to begin.

At last, the shadows on her left flickered. She looked up expecting the Sun-Devil, but met a darker gaze.

"Father?"

"Quiet."

He carried four blackened iron bowls. Without a sound he set them down around her — left, right, before and behind — along the paths, but just outside the crossroads.

"Bow to your Imperial Mother."

Mei pressed her face to the soil.

"Bow to your noble Aunt."

Mei stood and honored the Moon.

"Four bowls. Your life rests at the bottom of one. Choose."

Mei looked at each in turn. She saw the lightning; she saw the clouds. She saw the river bottom; she saw the fires of the earth.

At her feet lay a fifth black bowl — a bowl her father had not set there — full of liquid silver, and she reached for it.

Underground Shaman

Quote: Gaia's own are everywhere. Give them hope, and they will rise.

Prelude: Grandmother raised you knowing full well what you were. She couldn't teach you shapeshifting or real magics, but every charm, spell, blessing, herbal cure, poultice, folk remedy and bit of spirit-lore she had became yours. You walked with her to temples, groves and gardens. You prayed to the Celestines behind the masks, and met the people and shamans of the old ways in farmhouse, ditch, cellar, city and slum.

When the Kitsune came, you knew more of the truth than your tutors could have hoped for, and they found a place among their Kin for Grandmother to live out her years in peace and honor.

When the time came, you reached for the lightning. It was inspiration, revelation, the blinding sign of the gods, the color of the moon and sun come together. You took to the tools of the Doshi like a fish to water, and you knew instantly what your first mission must be.

Concept: There are men and women still living — or still remembering — the true way; monkeys as they should be, not the savaged hulks crippled by Weaver and Wyrn. These people need you, and you travel from village to village, block to block, dodging the police, the armies, the immigration services, the missionaries, the well-meaning hunters. Borders mean nothing, only faith matters.

Some hengeyokai fault you for being too kind to man, but you aren't interested in saving the vast herds. If you could kill off every human being who was past saving, you'd do it in an instant — the decent ones would be that much easier to find and help. Doing it the hard way will take Ages, but that's what being Kitsune is all about.

Roleplaying Hints: To most mortals, you're just a vagabond. Fortuneteller, medium, herbalist, midwife, hedge wizard — whatever they want to see, you'll play up to it while you judge their heart. To Gaia's people — awake or asleep — you show a different face: Spirit-talker, forthright counselor, kindly friend, stern judge and fearsome protector. Only among your own kind can you be yourself, whoever that may be.

Equipment: Jugs, jars, baskets and pouches full of potions and herbs; ink, brush and paper for folk charms; tattered copies of human religious texts; ritual robes and paraphernalia



KITSUNE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: Kojin
Path: Doshi
Totem:

Sentai:
Mission: Preaching
Concept: Vagabond Priest

Attributes

Physical

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

Social

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

Mental

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

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ○○○○○
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Empathy ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●
Intimidation ○○○○○
Primal-Urge ●●●●●
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Animal Ken ●●●●●
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ●●●●●
Melee ○○○○○
Performance ●●●●●
Repair ○○○○○
Stealth ●●●●●
Survival ●●●●●

Knowledges

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

Advantages

Backgrounds

Clan ●●●●●
Go-en ●●●●●
Fetish ●●●●●
○○○○○
○○○○○

Gifts

Smell of Man
Spirit Speech
Chi Sense

Gifts

Renown

Chie
●●●●●
□□□□□

Toku

●●●●●
□□□□□

Kagayaki

○○○○○
□□□□□

Rank

Rage

●●●●●
□□□□□

Gnosis

●●●●●
□□□□□

Willpower

●●●●●
□□□□□

Health

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

Weakness

DOES NOT REGENERATE

Neighborhood Hero

Quote: *Are you in some kind of trouble?*

Prelude: You never knew your parents, and Mao's purges swept away what close family you had. The only constant in your life has been your Kung-Fu teacher — he took you in when the Red Army kids denounced and displaced your relatives.

When you were sixteen they kidnapped you, gave you some funny dreams and called you Kitsune. They spouted a lot of fairy tales; you had your feet on the ground. They spoke of nature; you longed for the crowds and sizzle of the city. They talked about destiny; you weren't listening. They stuck four cookpots on the

ground; you reached for the first one you saw — anything to get out of there. You walked away with the wind at your back, forgetting as hard as you could.

They let you go, and laughed into the storm.

Concept: Sifu takes your Fox-dreams seriously, but he's an old man. You're just keeping your nose clean, having a good time, looking out for yourself, for him and for your friends.

Unfortunately, your destiny simply won't go away. You're always running into damsels in distress, honest people with Tong

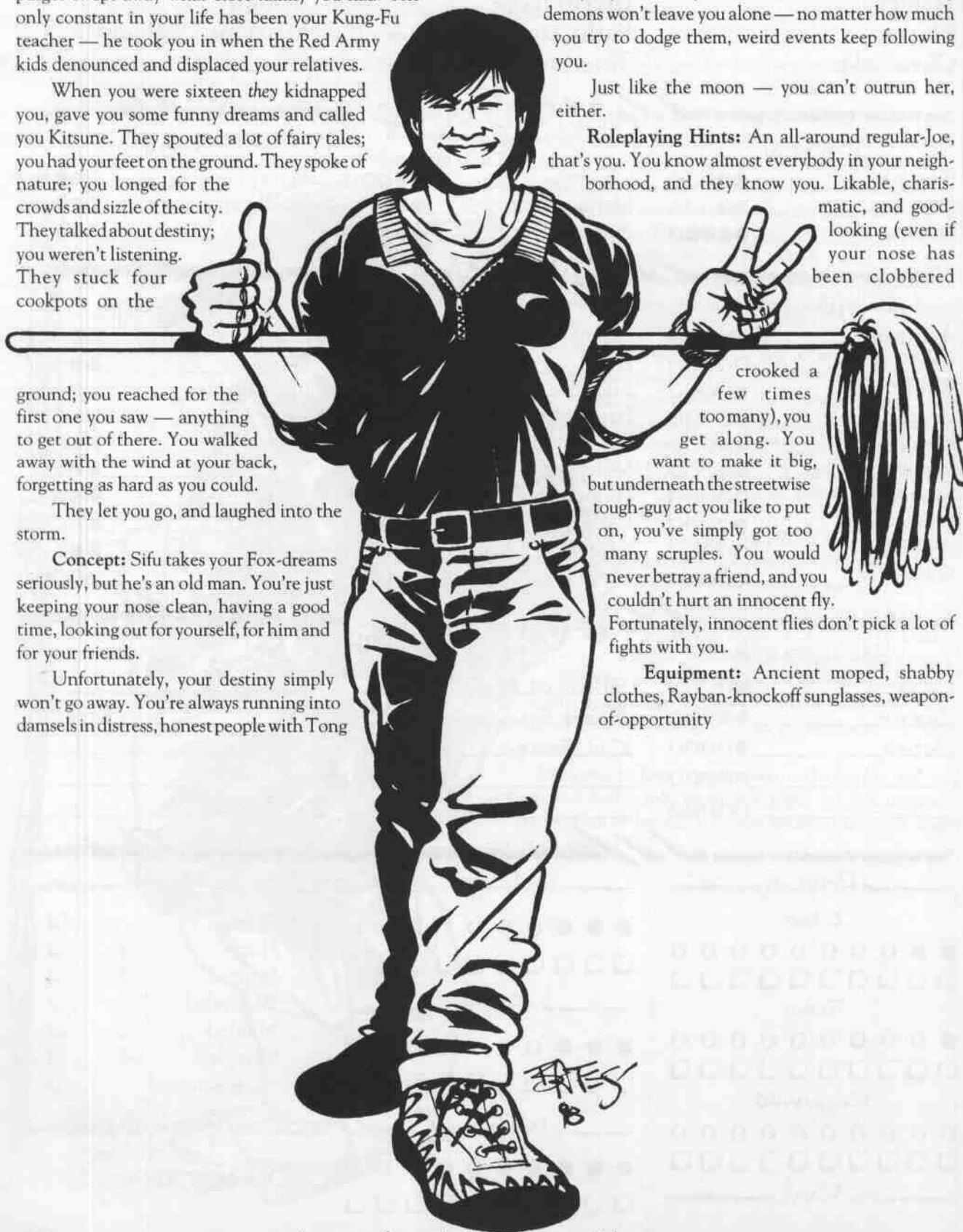
troubles, grandfatherly gentlemen with secrets, arrogant bullies who just must be put down. Frightened children pop out of alleyways and into your arms. Even monsters and crazy demons won't leave you alone — no matter how much you try to dodge them, weird events keep following you.

Just like the moon — you can't outrun her, either.

Roleplaying Hints: An all-around regular-Joe, that's you. You know almost everybody in your neighborhood, and they know you. Likable, charismatic, and good-looking (even if your nose has been clobbered

crooked a few times too many), you get along. You want to make it big, but underneath the streetwise tough-guy act you like to put on, you've simply got too many scruples. You would never betray a friend, and you couldn't hurt an innocent fly. Fortunately, innocent flies don't pick a lot of fights with you.

Equipment: Ancient moped, shabby clothes, Rayban-knockoff sunglasses, weapon-of-opportunity



KITSUNE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: Kojin
Path: Eji
Totem:

Sentai:
Mission: Protector
Concept: Nice Guy

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness 00000	Animal Ken 00000	Computer 00000
Athletics ●●●●●	Drive ●●●●●	Enigmas ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●	Etiquette ●●●●●	Investigation ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●	Firearms ●●●●●	Law 00000
Empathy ●●●●●	Leadership ●●●●●	Linguistics ●●●●●
Expression 00000	Melee ●●●●●	Medicine ●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●	Performance 00000	Occult ●●●●●
Primal-Urge 00000	Repair ●●●●●	Politics 00000
Streetwise ●●●●●	Stealth ●●●●●	Rituals 00000
Subterfuge 00000	Survival 00000	Science 00000

Advantages

Backgrounds	Gifts	Gifts
Go-en ●●●●●	Persuasion	
Sempai ●●●●●	Resist Pain	
00000	Chi Sense	
00000		
00000		

Renown	Rage	Health
Chie	●●●●●○○○○○○○○	Bruised <input type="checkbox"/>
●○○○○○○○○○○○○	□□□□□□□□□□	Hurt -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
□□□□□□□□□□		Injured -1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Toku	●●●●●○○○○○○○○	Wounded -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
●○○○○○○○○○○○○	□□□□□□□□□□	Mauled -2 <input type="checkbox"/>
□□□□□□□□□□		Crippled -5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Kagayaki	●●●●●○○○○○○○○	Incapacitated <input type="checkbox"/>
●○○○○○○○○○○○○	Willpower	Weakness
□□□□□□□□□□	●●●●●○○○○○○○○	DOES NOT REGENERATE
Rank	□□□□□□□□□□	

Fox-Woman

Quote: My right hand is death. My left hand is life. My eyes are madness.

Prelude: Both your parents were Kitsune; both your parents lived. You were the wonder of wonders — the most special secret of their court, the mascot of their sentai — even the Dragons' darling. Every Fox of any status peeked in on you; in short, you grew up spoiled rotten, witty, winsome, and too charming for anybody's good.

Then your adoring family Opened your eyes — and turned you over to the hardest taskmaster they could find. Gaia's teeth! was that Elder tough! But you realized (as you cried yourself to sleep the first morning) what had been wrong with everything in your life until then. You were sick of baby games. You walked in to train the next evening with the gleam of death in your eye, soaked up every back-breaking, mind-bending, heart-rending lesson, and loved it.

When the Crossroads came, you took one look at the braziers Sensei had set before you, and reached directly for the most mysterious.

Concept: Your ancestors were the ruin of emperors and samurai; you shall destroy Yakuza lords, corporate moguls and global diplomats. You shall sieze them by their weaknesses and drive them against each other; you shall fog and their minds and chase them into mirror wars. Weaver's minions shall fight those of the Wyrn, and the steel webs of cities shall choke their masters.

Roleplaying Hints: You are poise incarnate. You are femininity at its most fearsome and cunning. Every mode of womanhood — ingenue, temptress, tomboy — and every style of manipulation — innocent, careless, brazen, sophisticated — are your tools of trade.

Equipment: Extensive wardrobe and cosmetic kit; concealed garrottes, knives, lead-weighted scarves, poisons, drugs, needles, blinding powders; origami paper



KITSUNE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: Shinju
Path: Gukutsushi
Totem:

Sentai:
Mission: Destruction
Concept: Femme Fatale

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness ●●●●●	Animal Ken 00000	Computer 00000
Athletics ●●●●●	Drive 00000	Enigmas ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●	Etiquette ●●●●●	Investigation ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●	Firearms 00000	Law 00000
Empathy ●●●●●	Leadership ●●●●●	Linguistics ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●	Melee ●●●●●	Medicine ●●●●●
Intimidation ●●●●●	Performance ●●●●●	Occult ●●●●●
Primal-Urge 00000	Repair 00000	Politics ●●●●●
Streetwise 00000	Stealth ●●●●●	Rituals ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●	Survival 00000	Science 00000

Advantages

Backgrounds	Gifts	Gifts
Resources ●●●●●	Clear the Mind	
Past Life ●●●●●	Truth of Gaia	
Sempai ●●●●●	Isshin Denshin	
00000		
00000		

Renown

Chie
●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Toku
●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Kagayaki
●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Rank

Rage

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Gnosis

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Willpower

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Health

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

Weakness

DOES NOT REGENERATE

EARS OF INARI

Quote: Let me see!

Prelude: Your earliest memory is of digging into a ground-wasp nest: The stinging swarm resenting your curiosity, the whimpering of the rest of the litter, the frightening laughter of the strange vixen come to visit your family's territory. You licked your wounds and jumped right into the next unknown hole, and you've been poking your nose into trouble ever since.

When the strange vixen asked you to follow her, you leapt straight over her and dashed off ahead. You pounced all over your lessons, too. Words didn't trouble you, they were lovely playthings — buzzing, flying things that could sting as much as the wasps or spin beautifully along like butterflies. Gifts were serious, wonderful toys. And the world was a huge, lovely puzzle.

When Auntie set the tin cans around you, you sniffed at the fire and the lightning first, but they singed your nose and made you sneeze. The cool, smelly mud was just what you needed, and you buried your whole muzzle in the wonderful ooze.

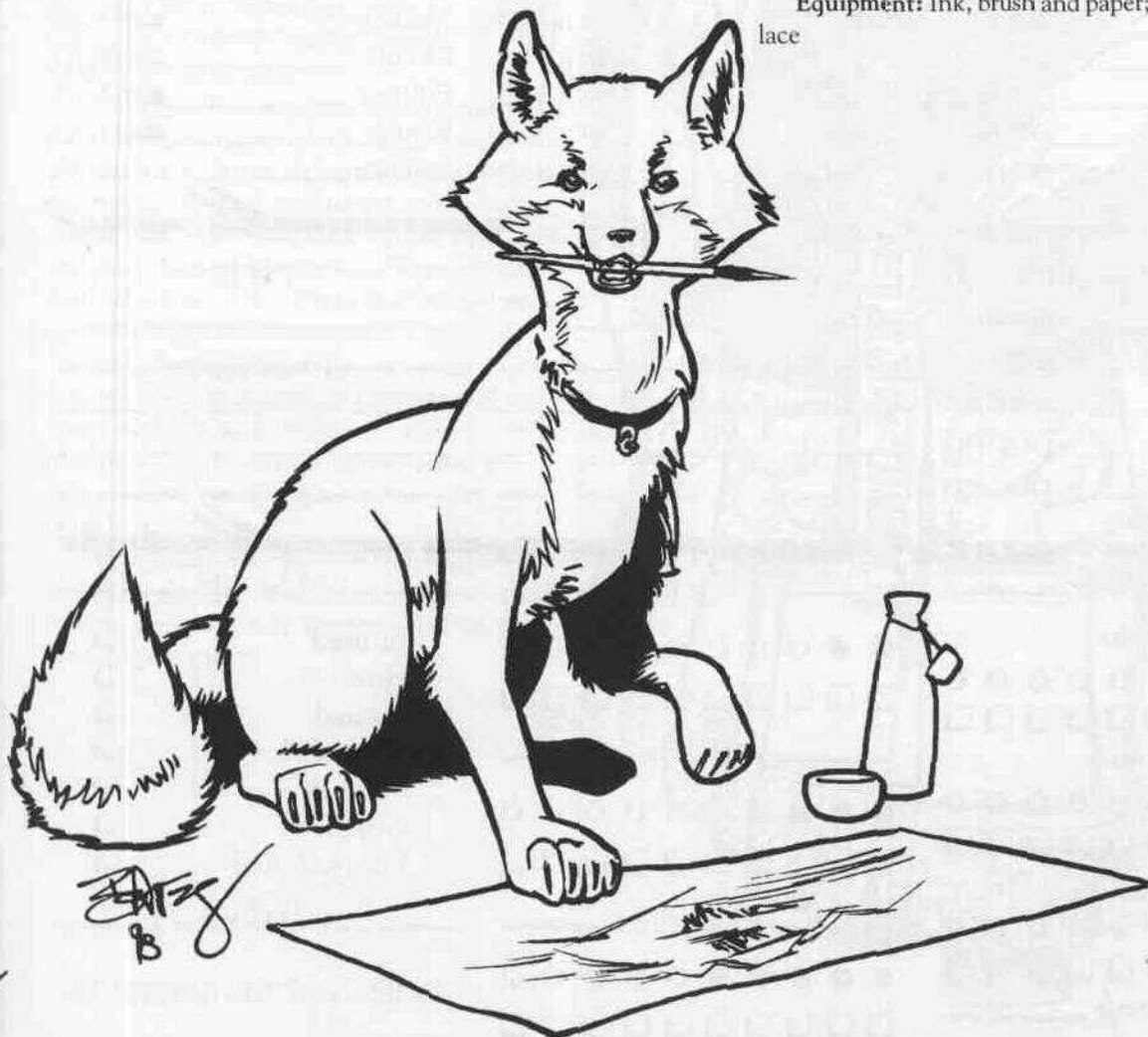
You hadn't much direction to start out with — you'd head north and be distracted south, intend to go west and dance back into camp with the sunrise. Then one evening Auntie suggested a tour with the Messengers, and scouting for them suited you perfectly.

Concept: You're a Fox who exemplifies stealth in the grandest way. There's always a job for you to do, and they're all worth doing. You meet the most interesting people, and spy on the most amazing things. Maybe someday you'll figure out what Luna wants your real mission to be, but for now a life as Inari's sneaky ears is the most fun in the world.

Roleplaying Hints: Look into every window. Listen at every door. Eavesdrop. Chatter away about the weather while you read the upside-down papers on their desk. Read as if it's going out of style. Creep along the side streets, make friends with the rats and ravens. Devour any gossip you can find.

Just try not to look like you're doing it, and be ready to run. Monkeys — and shen — have this horrible hang-up about secrets.

Equipment: Ink, brush and paper; jade fetish necklace



KITSUNE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed: Roko
Path: Kataribe
Totem: Inari

Sentai:
Mission: Messenger
Concept: Scout

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●●●●	Charisma ●●●●●	Perception ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●	Manipulation ●●●●●	Intelligence ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●	Appearance ●●●●●	Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness ●●●●●	Animal Ken ●●●●●	Computer 00000
Athletics ●●●●●	Drive 00000	Enigmas ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●	Etiquette ●●●●●	Investigation ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●	Firearms 00000	Law 00000
Empathy ●●●●●	Leadership 00000	Linguistics ●●●●●
Expression ●●●●●	Melee 00000	Medicine 00000
Intimidation ●●●●●	Performance 00000	Occult ●●●●●
Primal-Urge ●●●●●	Repair 00000	Politics 00000
Streetwise 00000	Stealth ●●●●●	Rituals 00000
Subterfuge 00000	Survival ●●●●●	Science 00000

Advantages

Backgrounds	Gifts	Gifts
Batsu (Tengu Friend) ●●●●●	Heightened Senses	
Fetish ●●●●●	Beast Speech	
Totem ●●●●●	Scent of Running Water	
00000		
00000		

Rehown

Chie
●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Toku

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Kagayaki

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Rank

Rage

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Gnosis

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Willpower

●●●●●●●●●●
□□□□□□□□□□

Health

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

Weakness

DOES NOT REGENERATE



Kitsune of Note

All Kitsune are "of note," at least to themselves, and the breed itself is so young that few Fox deeds have yet been forgotten. Therefore, this would be a very long chapter if a Nine-Tails had hold of it.

Fortunately, when pressed, the Bards can agree that five names shine above all others: Bai Mianxi, for her lone escapades, long life and close ties to Luna; the Prince Inari, for his status as enigma, innovator and guardian; Fukutenjin, for her fame as a healer and for her status even in human legend; Trung Water-Walker for his clear foresight and great travels; and Broken-Sky-Ashes for his strange visions and odd prophecies. Some of the history of these five is covered elsewhere in this book; here we shall concentrate on their current (approximate) doings and whereabouts.

The White-Faced One

Bai Mianxi — the Nine-Tailed Fox, the assassin of dynasties, the legendary and historical mother of her people — was last seen being thrown out of the Emperor of Japan's court (and concubine) by priests and mages. They claimed to have destroyed her, cast her into the netherworld and finally bound her in a stone — which promptly exploded into a thousand pieces and fell to earth all over Asia.

The Kitsune know better.

The Empress was cast out of the Jewel Maiden, and wounded badly by the evil powers the Namebreakers summoned. Alone and hurt, she stumbled towards the wild places,

but found herself in a human shrine. Terrified and sick, but too weak to run, she lay still as the temple servants came toward her. Luna's command against suicide throbbed in her ears, and she wept bloody tears into the holy ground. The priests carried her failing body to the inner sanctum, and laid her upon the kami's altar — the altar of the Incarna Inari.

Bai Mianxi is alive and well (say the Elders who know best), and holds high office in the Court of Luna. She watches carefully over her descendants, coming to troubled Kitsune in dreams and visions, aiding despairing foxes when no other help can come. The White-Faced-One is seen, sometimes, in the corner of the eye as a Nine-Tails is saved by outrageous luck.

Luna sends her often as ambassador to Gaia's Court, and there she pleads mercy for her people, just as at her first meeting with the Goddess. The Foxes believe (because some of the less tight-lipped spirits have let it slip) that Bai Mianxi was responsible for the Blood-Fire-Death — that after seeing the Western vampires work their ways, the Kitsune's silver-tongued patroness cajoled Helios and Luna into granting the Foxes ultimate freedom from the hell of the Abomination.

The Prince Inari

Truth is hard to come by, particularly for Kitsune. What other race could have a total mystery as their greatest hero and progenitor?

Now, Inari the Kitsune was a fox. Inari the kami was and is a Shinto deity — god-spirit of Rice and Foxes. Why?



Humans grow rice to eat. Vermin steal rice to eat. Foxes hunt and eat vermin, but not rice. The more rice grows, the more vermin grow fat upon it, and the more juicy mice and voles and rats there are for foxes to eat, the more Kitsune there shall be as the Ages go by.

The Prince left the world by walking into the shrine of Inari at Kyoto. His courtiers found no trace of foul play, no evidence of his destruction, and not even the spirit guardian of the caern had noticed his passing.

Disappearing *completely* is a good trick, even for a Kitsune, and disappearing from within a great caern like that shrine *without the guardian noticing* should be close to impossible. And all the Celestial Courts that Kitsune seers have asked seem to think the Prince Inari is alive and well — somewhere, but definitely in the present tense. So most think that the Prince of Kitsune and the Kami of Rice and Foxes are one and the same. No spirit has cared to contradict this belief in three thousand years; that's not proof, but it's something.

The question is, which came first? Did Fox himself look at Bai Mianxi and decide to send an avatar to visit? Or did Inari grow so powerful and wise that Fox took him? Is Inari in the Court of Fox as the little Incarna of Kitsune? Or has Inari returned to the Court of Fox as lord?

Who is arrogant enough to claim to know?

Fukutenjin

Perhaps the kindest (towards humans, anyway) of all Kitsune, Fukutenjin actually enjoys a place in human myth as the Celestial God of Good Fortune. The stories of her

wonders are many and varied, and not a few have trickled into the Japanese humans' body of lore.

Fukutenjin danced across the islands of feudal Japan, occasionally revealing herself to the humans for whatever reason suited her at the time. However, she cared less for toppling governments and more for encouraging small delights; to her reasoning, better that humans should gradually learn the benefits of sound health, music and peaceful living. She gained her name from one escapade where, the tales would have it, she arranged for the lord of her choice to be granted a regency. The only evidence the new regent had of his benefactor's identity was a fox's tail — which he promptly enshrined in the Celestial God of Good Fortune's name.

Fukutenjin was certainly not against using her Fox arts of possession and misdirection, and in at least one case possessed a minor noble for the sole purpose of demanding music for her shrine. However, she proved equally generous with her healing gifts, and as such has enjoyed a positive reputation that almost rivals the Prince Inari's — although if she was pleased with such a daring comparison, she always hid it behind a demure smile.

*Trung Water-Walker a.k.a.
Sukuna-Bikona, Wind-Chaser,
Alistair-Mittleham-Trent,
Argonaut, Yellow-Dust-Boy,
Rollaway Potato, Spicy-Joe-China...
(etc.)*

When Trung Water-Walker was a young kit, fresh from his foggy Crossroads, the first Western ships were newly sailing into Asia. While the mortals shut the gates against the newcomers and the shen scrambled for reliable news of the new threats, Trung found his way to the docks. As a bright-eyed, likeable boy with a stunning gift (and Gift) for languages, he had no trouble ingratiating himself with the foreigners. When they left, he went along. At each new port, he gossiped with the spirits, swapped tales with the Ravens, ran with the foxes and chattered with the monkeys.

Water-Walker circled the globe four times before setting eyes on his native Korea again. When he landed there, he had the news the hengeyokai needed. He taught the tricks of travel to a dozen eager kits, and the spread of Kitsune Bards across the world began.

Of course, the Kitsune would have gone regardless. They and the Tengu; out in front is where they know they belong, at least until the shooting starts. But Trung leapt boldly into the breach, before anyone else, and Luna blessed him with unparalleled success. It was Trung that opened America to the Kitsune and found their contacts strung across the railroad works and Chinatowns. It was Trung who saw the Bunyip running, and Trung who called Kataribe south to bear witness to the slaughter. It was Trung who first heard from Fox that Africa





and South America were not yet the Kitsune's concern, and Trung who jets and tramps across the face of Gaia and the Three Realms even today.

*Shining-Crescent,
Flame-White-Crane,
Death-of-Ice,
Broken-Sky-Ashes*

Shining-Crescent began life as an arrogant shinju kit, with no use for even Kinfolk humans. His pride was compounded by the unusual event of his Rite of the Crossroads; there he saw a fifth bowl, in the center, a bowl full of forbidden silver. He reached for it, but it disappeared under his hand. Unsure how to interpret this omen but sure that it marked him special even among Foxes, he chose the lightning second, and quickly became ritemaster, ghost talker, adept with the Gifts of his Path — and every other he could coax from the spirits.

When the time came for him to join a sentai, he naturally took the lead. His sentai, the Boiling Silver Gang, quickly established their prowess with a string of bloody successes that their court's Nezumi applauded as highly suitable work. In their triumph, they pursued a rival *wu* of Kuei-jin across the Pacific to retrieve one of the Courts' prize fetishes — and there the sentai met with tragedy.

The Boiling Silver Gang caught up with their enemies in San Diego, and the ultimate back-alley show-

down was brutal. Their Pillar fell in a gout of demon's poison and his own blood, and the shock of his loss propelled the Gang to even greater savagery. When the last Kuei-jin's head rolled free of its body, the broken sentai moved to gather their fallen comrade — and found a young woman, a nursing student, bending over what she thought was a human victim, desperately trying to coax him back to life. Even when the Nezumi Dripping-Crimson-Hand took on his war form and made to drive the girl away, she wouldn't leave. It was then that Shining-Crescent (then Flame-White-Crane) felt something stir within him that he could not understand.

He sent the others away and began talking to the girl, quickly explaining that they had to bear away their comrade's body; still, he could not convince her to leave. Without exactly knowing why, he showed her his fox-form as proof that they were not human — and still she did not run. Finally, when the Fist scooped up the fallen Pillar and left for the docks, the girl came after them.

Without their Pillar, the Boiling Silver Gang was no more. Two of the survivors returned to China to bear the sorrowful news to the court; Shining-Crescent and Sondok remained to search out the fetish's hiding place. The young student quickly proved her willingness to help by serving as a guide; before long, she and Shining-Crescent (now Death-of-Ice) were lovers, much to the shinju's surprise and wonder. He began making plans to bring her back to China with him; and then one night,

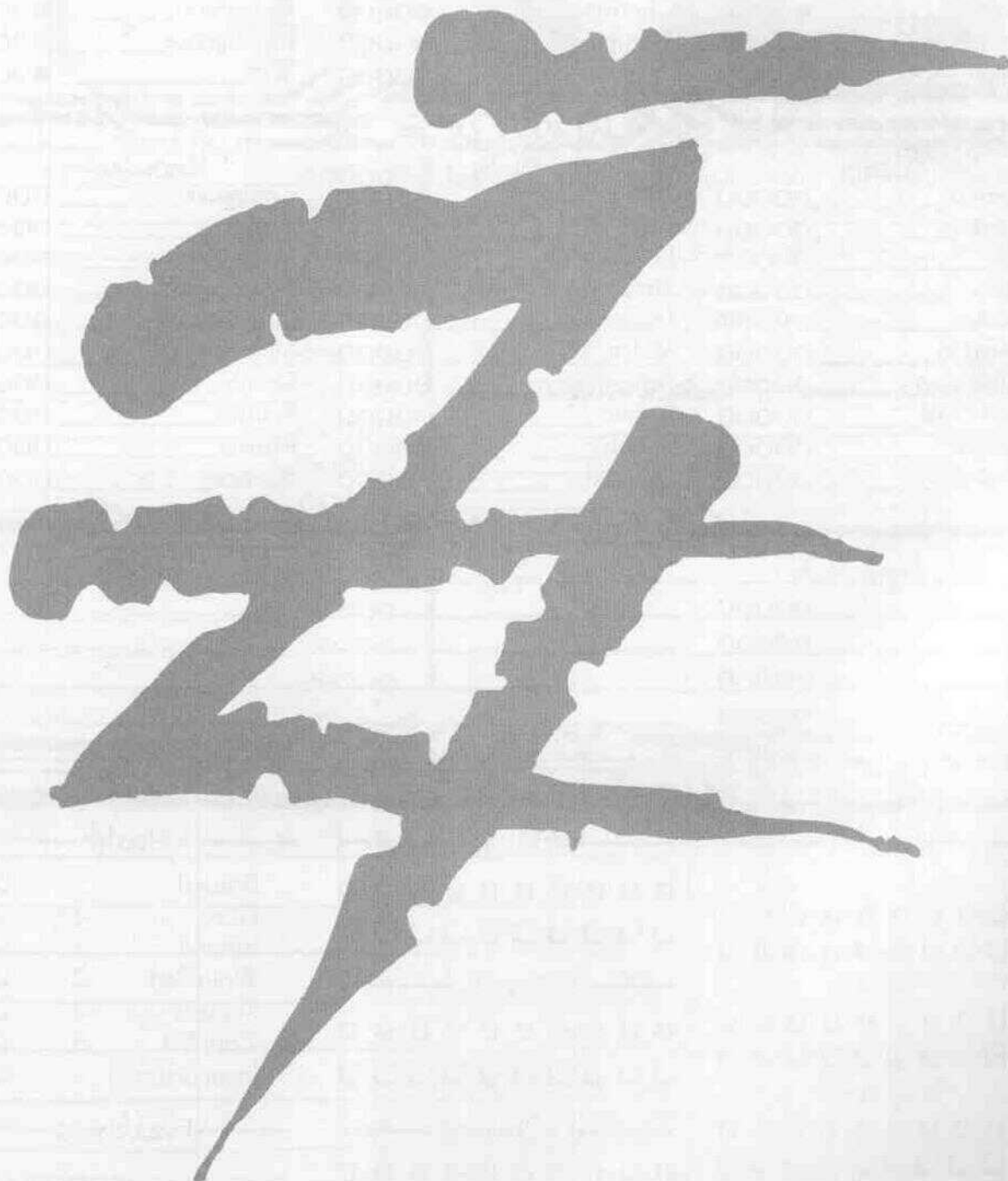


her voice trembling with nervousness and joy, she told him that she was pregnant.

Shining-Crescent howled and tore his hair in private for weeks on end. Frantically, he explained the danger to her, but the strength with which she bore the news only tore his heart further. She quietly arranged for foster parents should the child breed true — and it did. Richer by a daughter but poorer by the loss of the truest

happiness he'd ever known, the broken Kitsune came home.

Shining-Crescent, now Broken-Sky-Ashes, lives a hermit's life far from the courts, in a cave where Gaia surrounds him but Luna cannot see. His past glories are now dust in his mouth, and the courts call on him no more. Now the shining hero tarnishes slowly in isolation, and the elders shake their heads at the fate of one who was once great.



KITSUNE

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Breed:
Path:
Totem:

Sentai:
Mission:
Concept:

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledges	
Alertness	○○○○○	Animal Ken	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Primal-Urge	○○○○○	Repair	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Rituals	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Survival	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Gifts		Gifts	
○○○○○					
○○○○○					
○○○○○					
○○○○○					
○○○○○					

Rehown

Chie
○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Toku
○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Kagayaki
○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Rank
□□□□□□□□□□

Rage

○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Gnosis

○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Willpower

○○○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□□□

Health

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

Weakness

DOES NOT REGENERATE

KITSUNE

— Hitogata — Sambuhenge — Koto — Juko — Ryubi —

No
Change

Dexterity(+1)_____
Stamina(+1)_____
Manipulation(+1)_____

Dexterity (+2)_____
Stamina (+2)_____
Manipulation (-1)_____
Appearance 0 (+0)_____
Perception (+1)_____

Strength (+1)_____
Dexterity (+3)_____
Stamina (+3)_____
Manipulation (-2)_____
Perception (+1)_____

Dexterity (+4)_____
Stamina (+2)_____
Manipulation (-1)_____
Perception (+2)_____

Difficulty: 6

Difficulty: 7

Difficulty: 6

Difficulty: 7

Difficulty: 6

Other Traits

OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO

Fetishes

Item: _____ ☐ Dedicated Level _____ Gnosis _____
Power: _____
Item: _____ ☐ Dedicated Level _____ Gnosis _____
Power: _____
Item: _____ ☐ Dedicated Level _____ Gnosis _____
Power: _____

Rites

Combat

Maneuver/Weapon	Roll	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip

Brawling Chart

Maneuver	Roll	Diff	Damage
Bite	Dex+Brawl	5	Strength+1†
Body Slam	Dex+Brawl	7	Special
Claw	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength+2†
Grapple	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength
Kick	Dex+Brawl	7	Strength+1
Punch	Dex+Brawl	6	Strength

†These maneuvers do aggravated damage.

Armor: _____

KITSUNE

Nature:

Demeanor:

Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Expanded Background

Clan

Resources

Go-en

Sempai

Past Life

Totem

Possessions

Gear (Carried):

Equipment (Owned):

Experience

TOTAL:

Gained From:

Court

Name:

Caern Location:

Level: Type:

Totem:

Regent:

TOTAL SPENT:

Spent On:

KITSUNE

History
Prelude

Description

Age: _____
Hair: _____
Eyes: _____
Race: _____
Nationality: _____
Sex: _____

	Height	Weight
Hitogata:		
Sambuhenge:		
Koto:		
Juko:		
Kyubi:		

Battle Scars: _____

Visuals

Sentai Chart

Character Sketch



HENGEYOKAITM

SHAPESHIFTERS OF THE EAST

On Hemmed-in Ground, Resort to Stratagem...

The Wheel of Ages turns steadily to the age of blood and fire, the age that the Westerners call the Apocalypse. The ghostly roars of battles yet to come resound in the Yang Realms, and the cries of wild devils echo between mountaintops. And the beast-changers, the moon's children — the hengeyokai — hear them all. The tigers watch the sun descend; the goblin spiders crawl in the shadows; the foxes whistle to one another; the dragons below the mountains wake. The time of great war is here.

On Desperate Ground, Fight!

Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East details the werereatures of Asia, their sorcery and tactics, and their blood enemies. What's more, there's information on the spirit world of the East, as well as setting information on the Middle Kingdom and the Beast Courts. Finally, the elusive werefoxes — the Kitsune — appear in all the detail of a Changing Breed Book proper. Ignore this wisdom at your own risk.

Hengeyokai:

Shapeshifters of the East includes:

- Details on the many Changing Breeds of the East, including Hakken Garou, Tengu and Zhong Lung
- Full details on the Kitsune; an entire Changing Breed Book included within
- Specific cosmology on the Asian spirit worlds, new Gifts, rites and powers, antagonists and more



ISBN 1-56504-338-3

W/W3063 \$20.00 U.S.

5 2000



9 781565 043381



Copyrighted material