

Mind's Eye Theatre

HENGEYOKAI

变化妖怪

A supplemental rulebook
for Eastern shapeshifters

WEREWOLF
THE APOCALYPSE





Prelude: The Leaf's Tale

Suzuko ran swiftly through the crowded narrow streets, dodging sidewalk vendors in her haste to outdistance her pursuers. Sensing rather than seeing the trio of shadowy figures that dogged her heels and moved steadily to close the gap between her and them, she made a sudden turn into a blind alley. On either side of her, tall buildings rose upward, nearly blocking the cloudy sky. The smells of steamed rice, hot vegetables and pungent sauces leaked through the back doors of restaurant kitchens into the alley, blurring her otherwise keen sense of smell.

Suzuko's head sagged against her chest as she gasped for breath. *I can't smell them anymore. Either I've lost them or else they're using the alley's smells to mask their presence. Emerald Mother, help me do what I must do.*

A feeling of dread washed through her as she heard soft footsteps pad slowly down the alley. "Come out now, rat-girl," a scratchy voice leered. "There is no hope for you now that you've fallen into your own little trap."

Suzuko shrank down behind a pile of food scraps and refuse pulled from a nearby dumpster by local scavengers or vandals. At another time, she might have investigated the heap for still-edible morsels to take back to her Kin across town. Now, she had other, more important concerns — like staying out of sight of her enemies until the right moment.

Her sharp ears picked up a rustle of movement above her. Without daring to look, she extended her senses to their limit. The rustle grew more pronounced and she caught a faint scratching noise, like talons, scraping out a recognizable pattern against a window ledge a few stories over her head. *We follow. Be strong.* A single ebony feather drifted downward, landing not far from Suzuko's hand. She snatched it up quickly with nimble fingers and shoved it inside her thin cotton shirt.



Here goes nothing.

Deliberately, she shifted position, making certain that she jostled a cleanly plucked chicken carcass, which rolled out into the alley. Swifter than thought, her pursuers were upon her. She leaped upward into fighting position to face her enemies. *I have to make this look good or they'll suspect something.*

She lashed out with a kick aimed at the chin of the tall, spindly man who confronted her, knife at the ready. Feeling the satisfying thud as she connected with bone, she allowed herself a small moment of elation as her opponent groaned in pain and surprise.

"Nice, but not nice enough," a harsh voice rasped. Behind her first opponent loomed an enormous figure, part spider, part human — all Kumo. The werespider's movements were too quick for her to detect and Suzuko felt a thick, ropy cable lash out and wind around her body. Panic engulfed her as she struggled to free herself from what felt like unyielding steel.

"Don't bother to fight it, little rat," the third member, a svelte woman dressed in a black kimono said, stepping forward to view her still struggling captive. "Kazujiro's webs are too strong for the likes of you." The woman extended her arm and stroked Suzuko's face with a single, long lacquered nail, drawing a thin line of blood as she did so.

Suzuko glared at her captors but her heart rejoiced. *The blood will help them find me.* She continued to struggle as Kazujiro heaved her off her feet and tossed her over his shoulder, or what served as his shoulder in his grotesque half-spider form. Finding no means of escape, Suzuko allowed her body to go limp. *I must conserve what strength I have left.* The trio set off into the night, carrying their motionless burden.

Overhead, a dark shape on silent wings tracked their path. From his vantagepoint, Akio saw the three figures head across the city by a series of side streets and alleys. Linked with the rest of his sentai, the wereraven sent a cautious message to his comrades. *I have them in sight. I will not lose our valiant Leaf.*

...

Roused from her meditative stance, Hannae felt a twitch of excitement. "Akio has the trail!" she said, her voice rising with excitement. "The spiders are taking Suzuko to their lair. We need to hurry." The young fox-woman brushed back her long hair, securing it quickly into a fighting braid and stood waiting impatiently for the two remaining members of her sentai to join her.

"Patience, little Mirror," Makoto growled, placing a hand on Hannae's shoulder. "We all heard our Lantern's report. We are all ready to go."

"Listen to the Khan counsel patience," Johnny Dai, the sentai's newest member said, his soothing voice softening the sarcasm of his words. Since joining the sentai a few months earlier, the Stargazer had dedicated himself to fitting in with his new companions and bringing credit to his tribe.

Makoto snorted. "This time I will let your American brashness pass unmarked. Just remember, without all of us, you are nothing."



Johnny Dai held up his hands in mock surrender. "Noble Fist, I couldn't agree more. We've got a pack . . . er . . . sentai-mate to rescue and a nest of goblin spiders to clean out. So as your Pillar, I'm supposed to hold things together, right?"

Hannae sighed. "More or less," she said. "You'll learn eventually, Johnny Dai. But right now, we need to go after Suzuko."

"I'm already ahead of you," Makoto said. "Let's go!"

The three remaining members of the Immaculate Jade sentai moved out into the night. Guided by their mental connection with Akio, the trio made their way through the streets of Tokyo. Akio flew steadily, driven by the sense of determination that came with knowing that the life of a member of his sentai hung in the balance. He felt the pull of the feather Suzuko had snatched up — his feather. *With luck and the blessing of the Emerald Mother, little sister, I shall not fail you.*

• • •

The warehouse smelled of years of abandonment. Suzuko risked opening one eye to get a sense of her surroundings. The remnants of broken crates lay scattered across the creaky wooden floor. No light filtered through the boarded-up windows. Her captor, the one called Kazujiro, headed across the room in an apparently random pattern. *He's avoiding something, but what?* Suzuko thought about the story Johnny Dai had told her about the children abandoned in the forest and how they left a trail of breadcrumbs to lead them back home. *Only the birds ate the crumbs and the children barely escaped the clutches of a cannibal witch. I have no crumbs, anyway.*

She heard a scrabbling sound and then she felt Kazujiro lift her from his shoulder and lower her into an opening in the floor. *A trapdoor?* Suzuko bit her lip and once again tried not to doubt the wisdom of Akio's plan. The Tengu Lantern had flashes of genius from time to time and often came up with the sentai's most brilliant maneuvers. *But this one is personal. He has more to risk than any of us — except me.*

A pair of rough hands grabbed Suzuko's feet and pulled her through the trapdoor, then slapped her cheeks.

"Wake up, rat-bitch!"

Suzuko recognized the Kumo whose jaw she had cracked in the alley. Now more or less healed of his wound, he stared at her and smiled — a grin filled with malice and anticipation. Suzuko looked away from him at her surroundings. She was in a cellar filled with broken bits of furniture and other ruined odds and ends. A strong smell of rotting flesh permeated the air along with the unmistakable coppery tang of blood, some of it recent.

"Step aside, Hisoka," the female Kumo snapped, her voice resonant with authority. "You'll have your turn. Secure her first."

Kazujiro, now appearing as a large, harsh-looking human male, pulled Suzuko by her bindings to a stone pillar that served as one of the ceiling supports for the cellar. The other Kumo, the one called Hisoka, handed



Kazujiro a length of thin silver coated wire, which the large Kumo used to secure Suzuko to the pillar, beginning at her forehead and winding around her face and neck, proceeding all the way down her body. Suzuko felt her face grow pale with the realization that even the slightest movement could cause the wire to slice through her body. A sudden jerk could sever her head or, at the very least, cut her throat.

The female Kumo stepped up to Suzuko and studied the captive wererat. Almost tenderly, she reopened the cut in the girl's face, placing her bloodied fingertip between her own lips.

"Very powerful, if a little gamy," she said. "You should feed us for quite some time."

Suzuko tried to reply with a curse, but found even the attempt to speak pulled at the wires stretched across her face and between her lips. She tasted her own blood.

"Eventually, as your muscles begin to ache, you will need to shift your body to relax the strain," the female said. "Each tiny movement will open a cut that you will not be able to heal. Each cut will provide us with an opportunity to feed on your delicious blood. You will have to try to stay awake and keep your head from drooping, or else you might accidentally cut your own throat. If you try to speak or scream, you will sever your tongue. Clever, is it not?" The Kumo's voice reeked of self-congratulatory pleasure. Then she, along with the other two werespiders, moved out of her line of sight.

The hiding place. I must find out how to reach the place where they have hidden Akio's spirit egg. Suzuko shoved her agitation aside and tried to concentrate on appearing stoic. Bound to the pillar as she was, Suzuko could not turn her head to see anything that was not directly in front of her. She heard the three Kumo move purposefully behind her, making noises that sounded as if they were pushing a crate aside.

"Hisoka, make sure it is safe and still viable," the female hissed.

"I know what I'm doing, Chikako," Hisoka snarled.

Suzuko offered up a portion of the Mother's power and tried to feel a change in the air around her. *There, they've breached the Wall almost directly behind me. That must be where the egg is.* She continued to wait attentively. *This is what a Leaf does— she waits, she watches and listens, and she reports all to her sentai.*

A few minutes later, she heard Hisoka's voice. "All seems well. The egg is still in place and still healthy, though a little weakened since we brought it here."

"Good," Chikako said, her voice complacent. "We shall bring the bakemono-child here soon and try to bond him to the egg. It will be an interesting experiment, if it succeeds. If it fails, all that has happened is that we shall be rid of one potential Tengu. Not a bad price for a test-run."

"Meanwhile, we have enough sustenance to last us for a few days," Kazujiro added, stepping into Suzuko's line of sight. "She's trying so hard not



to appear as if she's watching us," he said, chucking the wererat under the chin gently, opening up a small cut just over her eyes.

"Let's do something about that," Hisoka said, moving to stand in front of Suzuko. "Close your eyes, if you value them," he said coldly. Knowing what was to come, Suzuko quickly closed her eyes. Gingerly he took one of the thin strands of wire and pulled it out far enough to slip it gently over the were-rat's eyelids. "Hold very very still," he said, "or those beady eyes will never look at anything again."

Suzuko fought back tears, knowing that she couldn't even afford to blink.
Please come soon, my beloved friends. Please.

• • •

Akio flew down to perch on his Mirror's shoulder. Hannae grimaced, but suffered the light touch of the wereraven's claws.

Mind-to-mind, Akio gave his report to the other members of his sentai. ***They seem to be in the basement of that building,*** he said, using his beak to indicate the darkened warehouse. ***I can smell Suzuko's scent. It is full of fear. Oh, and there's blood, too. Hers.***

Let's not waste time, Makoto said. His mind-voice sounded like a growl. ***The time for subtlety is over. I say we rush the building.***

I sense some urgency, Akio confirmed. ***We have no time for a plan.*** He launched himself into the air as Makoto assumed his full Crinos form and turned his body into a battering ram. Johnny Dai followed quickly behind the charging Khan while Hannae assumed her fox-form and scampered close at Makoto's heels. ***Someone will have to make sure we don't run into anything unexpected once we get inside.***

The door gave way to the impact of Makoto's body, splintering into a hundred wooden slivers. "We're in," he said. Before Johnny Dai could make his entrance, Hannae rushed inside and felt for the familiar tingle that told her that magic was at work.

Hmm, she remarked. ***Nothing up here except for—*

Her thoughts broke off as her foot caught a soft spot in the floor. ***The boards are weak,*** she thought to the others. ***Your weight would have collapsed the floor underneath. There must be a safe path.*** She put her nose to the boards and soon picked up Suzuko's scent. "This way," she said.

Makoto sighed heavily and followed the small fox, carefully stepping where she stepped. Johnny Dai fell in behind the Khan and Akio hovered over his three sentai-mates.

There! Akio's sharp eyes caught sight of an area where dust had been disturbed. ***A trap-door.***

Hannae sniffed at the edges of the door, opening her senses to the presence of the Centipede. Her nose wrinkled and she nearly gagged at the powerful sense of Wyrn-taint. "Ugh!" she coughed, her eyes watering with



the overwhelming reek. Suddenly, from below, a heartrending scream pierced the air and continued to grow louder. Hannae gasped. "It's Suzuko's voice," she said. A shadow loomed over her and she leaped to one side to avoid Makoto's huge paw as he wrenched the trap-door off its hinges. "Now!" he roared and leapt to the ground below.

...

Suzuko heard her sentai approach before the Kumo caught wind of their arrival. Steeling herself for what she must do, she deliberately wrenched her body to one side, trying to keep her head motionless. The pain of the silver wire cutting through her bound arms and upper torso brought a scream to her throat. She opened her mouth, feeling the wires cut the sides of her lips, and gave voice to her pain, knowing that as she did so, the wires would cut her tongue from her mouth. *The spiders must not hear their doom. Mother, give me strength!*

...

The three Kumo turned toward their captive as she wrenched her body to one side and screamed with the pain. Immediately, the air filled with the scent of rich, fresh blood.

Kazujiro launched himself toward the bleeding wererat, eager to be the first to sate himself on her blood. As he did so, the world exploded around the Kumo.

An enormous tiger-man burst through the ceiling and landed on the balls of his feet, huge taloned paws ready to rip apart the first creature he saw. That happened to be Hisoka. The surprised Kumo tried to shift forms, as his body began the change that would transform him into hundreds of small spiders. He was too slow. Makoto's claws caught him across the face and torso, ripping great gaping wounds that brought forth gouts of red-black blood.

Johnny Dai, his man-wolf form nearly as large as that of his Khan ally, threw himself at Kazujiro, pulling the large Kumo away from Suzuko and spinning him around. "Face me and fight me!" he spat, aiming a high kick at his startled target.

Hannae shifted to human form and ran toward Suzuko, then stopped suddenly, her eyes tearing up. "I don't know how I can help you, little sister," she whispered. "I can't touch you without—"

Gagging on the blood pooling in her mouth, Suzuko tried to speak, but only managed garbled syllables. Hannae caught sight of Akio, still hovering near the ceiling, his sharp eyes scanning the room.

"She's trying to tell us something," Hannae said. "Link with her, Akio." The wereraven sent his thoughts into Suzuko's mind.

Behind me is the way to the egg. I think the female has gone to defend it, Suzuko gasped with relief as she delivered her message. *Now I can let go.* Commending her soul to the Emerald Mother, Suzuko opened her eyes for one last look at her beloved sentai. She felt blackness cut off her eyesight and then her mind went dark.

...



Suzuko woke to darkness and an absence of pain. Soft hands stroked her forehead, and she smelled the familiar scents of her sentai — and others, chief among them, that of Zhong Lung.

She realized that she was in the presence of no less than Pan-Lung Hideyo, revered elder of the Court of Mountain Snow, to which her sentai owed allegiance. The young Nezumi tried to rise and make her proper obeisance to her superior, but she felt a slight increase in pressure on the cool hand that rested on her brow.

Unfortunately, we can do nothing to restore your sight or your tongue, Hideyo's calm voice intoned. ***But the rest we have healed. It seems that your mind-speech will have to serve as your voice as well as your eyes.*** Her voice seemed to smile, and Suzuko realized that no words had yet been spoken aloud.

***The egg?** she allowed her mind to voice the question.

Safe. The voice, this time, was Akio's and she sensed great sorrow contained within his mind.

***Then why do you sound so sad?** she asked. ***Am I not still your Leaf?** The silence that greeted her question contained its own answer.

Finally, she heard Hannae's clear voice caress her mind. ***The esteemed Pan-Lung has decreed that you would be best suited to remain at her side as a courtier,*** Hannae said. ***If you are willing, that is.***

Your bravery and sacrifice would honor me, the Zhong Lung said in a voice that made it clear to Suzuko that she had no choice except that of duty.

Suzuko fought back the tears that welled up in eye sockets sewn shut. Never more would she run through the streets and alleys of her beloved Tokyo, pitting her senses and her acute mind against the forces of the Wym and the Weaver. Now she would serve a sedentary position in the Court itself, waiting on her elders and serving as an example for others to follow, or so they would have her believe.

You will always be dear to us, Akio said, placing a hand on Suzuko's shoulder. ***Thanks to you, my spirit egg will one day blossom into a child of my lineage. She will know whom to thank for her life. I promise you that.***

As soon as you are ready, Hideyo continued, ***we will perform the Rite of the Second Face, announcing your change from Leaf to Courtier — if you are agreed.***

Suzuko took a deep breath and, as she exhaled, she said farewell to the life she had known. ***I am agreed,*** she said. ***You will have to find another Leaf to replace me,*** she thought, directing her unvoiced words to the soon to be former members of her sentai.

Yes, Akio replied. ***And with that, we shall give ourselves a new name. We have already spoken of this while we were waiting for you to regain consciousness. The Immaculate Jade sentai no longer exists. From now on, we call ourselves the Sentai of the Leaf's Noble Sacrifice.***

Suzuko felt a sudden upwelling of peace settle within her. *This is how the cycle turns in one rat's life.* "This pleases me," she whispered, allowing her broken tongue to stumble over the words that resounded clearly in the minds of those around her. "This pleases me very much."

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HENGEYOKAI

变化妖怪



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rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN USA



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By Way of Introduction

Welcome to the world of the hengeyokai. At long last, the shapeshifters of the Beast Courts of the Middle Kingdom have their own sourcebook. Within the pages that follow you'll find information on the society and culture of the mysterious Changing Breeds of Asia. This book presents guidelines for playing a wide variety of Eastern shapeshifters, from the honorable Hakken Garou to the sinister Kumo. You'll even find information on the elusive Nagah and the awe-inspiring Zhong Lung, with stops on the way for the proud Khan, the curious Tengu, the pragmatic Nezumi, the ferocious Same-Bito and the clever Kitsune.

This book is not a complete rulebook; there aren't enough pages to cover material that has already seen print in other **Mind's Eye Theatre** publications. Instead, what you have before you is a sourcebook that offers information for creating and playing hengeyokai — with a little help from **Laws of the Wild** and the **Changing Breeds** books. **The Book of the Wyrms** is also helpful but not essential.

How To Use This Book

Hengeyokai provides a wealth of source material for live-action roleplaying for players and Storytellers. Sections on cosmology and culture help bring the world of the Middle Kingdom to life. More specific information on each of the hengeyokai species allows players to create fully fleshed out characters. Sections on rules provide information not contained in **Laws of the Wild** or the **Changing Breeds** books. Finally, **Hengeyokai** provides extensive information on creating and playing the capricious and puzzling Nine-Tails, the Kitsune fox-shifters.



Chapter One: Introduction presents a quick guide to what is in this book.

Chapter Two: The Heart of the Mother offers a look at the world view of the hengeyokai, providing insights and information on the cosmology, history, culture and practices of the Asian shapeshifters.

Chapter Three: The Children of the Emerald Mother: The Beast Courts presents information on the major types of hengeyokai as well as the newest addition to the ranks of the Middle Kingdom, the Stargazers.

Chapter Four: Ways of the Middle Kingdom details some rules not covered in other chapters as well as a listing of Gifts, Rites, Merits and Flaws and other useful information.

Chapter Five: Nine-Tails (Kitsune) provides complete information on the werefoxes, who have their own particular way of looking at the world and their fellow shapeshifters.

Lastly, the **Appendix** details the bakemono, Kuei-jin and other wicked creatures that the hengeyokai encounter in the jungles and back alleys of the East, from the islands of Japan and the South Seas to the crowded streets of India and Pakistan.

Read, enjoy and get ready to enter a whole new world!

Other Resources

If you are interested in a greater picture of the supernatural world of the hengeyokai, the following books may be helpful. It's not necessary to own these to create a satisfying hengeyokai chronicle, but as the *shen* — the family of all supernatural creatures of the East — do regularly cross paths, you may find them useful. After all, as some have so eloquently put it: "Our ways are not your ways."

The Kuei-jin are the former Wan Xian, now the bloodthirsty half-demons that stalk the nighted city streets from Tokyo to Calcutta. They are described more fully in **Laws of the East** and the tabletop **Kindred of the East**.

The *hsien* are the changelings of the East, spirits wrapped in flesh like their Western counterparts. Some share spirits with animals — monkeys, cats, serpents and koi — while others carry the blood of the very elements within them. They can be found in **Land of Eight Million Dreams**. Should you wish to bring them to your chronicle, **The Shining Host** and **The Shining Host Players Guide** can assist you.

The kuei, the lost souls of the wandering dead, continue to haunt the lands alongside the Middle Kingdom. They call the Yin Realm they inhabit the Yellow Springs, which Westerners have called the Dark Kingdom of Jade. More about this strange world can be found in **Dark Kingdom of Jade** and **Dark Kingdom of Jade Adventures**. Oblivion is the best resource to bring their horror to life.

The Namebreakers that plague the East are found in many places, from secretive old women working in peasant villages to the willful mages who



barter with demons for power. See **Dragons of the East** for tabletop, **Laws of Ascension** and **Laws of Ascension Players Guide** to further flesh them out.

World of Darkness: Tokyo, **World of Darkness: Hong Kong** and **The Thousand Hells** can help you round out your setting or more fully describe the secrets and sights of the cities and hells that the hengeyokai face daily. **World of Darkness: Demon Hunter X** describes the shen's greatest adversary, the holy men and women who make a lonely business of hunting down the night-people who overstep their bounds with humanity (they are detailed for MET in **Laws of the East**).





Lands of the Emerald Mother

*Speak to the bones of the Mother.
Shelter 'neath Her jungle liana-hair.
Walk within Her caves. There you shall find the
Memory of dragons and the courts of the beasts.*
— Keoki Walks-the-Righteous-Path, Khan poet

Spring Blossom paced sedately at the front of the small group, leading it beneath the trees and onto a crooked mountain trail. She glanced back at the three who followed, noting their varied reactions to the trek. The girl that stalked a few paces behind held herself as if expecting imminent attack, her eyes wary. The small, thin boy who occupied the center position turned his head from side to side as if expecting to find riches strewn along the path. Further down the path, as though dissociating himself from the others, an older boy glowered darkly at the trio ahead, the low growl trapped in his throat almost audible. Spring Blossom smiled to herself, remembering her own walk so many years ago.

"Is there some point to this beyond stomping around the mountainside?" the girl asked, her tone barely civil. *So, she will be the challenge*, thought the elder. Spring Blossom continued to smile and kept walking. After a few moments of silence when it became apparent the older woman did not intend to answer, the girl tried again, "Hey, I'm not going anywhere until we get some answers." She stopped, arms crossed, blocking the trail for the two that followed. The elder boy sighed, stopped and tried to look interested. The younger one stared at the girl, then settled to his haunches.

Spring Blossom turned, raised an elegant eyebrow and nodded. Using her most courteous tones, she answered, "Very well, Mei Ling. It is your choice. Please step back so those who wish to learn of their heritage may do so. Ki,



Shiro," she continued, "please follow me. Long life and luck to you, Mei Ling." She turned and began walking up the trail again, clearly expecting to be obeyed.

Stunned, Mei Ling took a quick step backward, then shook her head, angered by the older woman's manipulation. "I will not be denied what is rightfully mine," the girl stated proudly. "I have slain a Kumo in single combat, and I am not afraid of anything you might show me... if there is anything worth seeing here." Her tone clearly implied doubt, but she renewed her trek up the mountainside.

Shiro, the older boy, snorted, unimpressed by Mei Ling's boast.

Spring Blossom moved on quickly, momentarily disappearing around a curve in the trail. When the others caught up to her, she gestured toward a mossy boulder made slick by the rivulet of water that cascaded down its face and formed a tiny stream across the trail itself.

"We are at our journey's end and stand at the door to your journey's beginning," she intoned. "I bid you enter the Court of the Mountain Fastness, home to the Splendid Pinnacle Court of the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother. May you prosper from your time within." So saying, she moved aside the concealing greenery, revealing the cave entrance behind the stone. Eyeing one another as if daring one to lead the way, the trio moved toward the cave. Finally, taking a deep breath and squaring her shoulders, Mei Ling led the way inside. "My name," she said as she entered the cave, head held high, "is Slayer of Demons."

History of the Ages

Come in, young ones, the voice boomed through the darkness, resonating through the cave. Light slowly grew around them as the three newcomers took in the sight before them. Massive, carved pillars supported a soaring roof, while underfoot, what should have been the uneven stone floor of a cave was a great expanse of smooth, many-colored marble reminiscent of a great emperor's audience hall. Hung on the walls were intricately worked, multi-hued tapestries depicting mountains, seas, waterfalls and other scenes from nature. Scents of jasmine and patchouli wafted through the vast hall, while the tinkling sound of water falling on tiny cymbals punctuated the air. Beast-folk stood or sat around the great hall: a fox-woman in a crimson kimono, a huge man-wolf, a bright-eyed wizened old man and others. All seemed intent on the three youngsters.

As the light grew and reached the central area, the youths became aware of the figure of an enormous dragon-being curled about the central pillar and recognized that it was this entity's voice they had heard. All of them realized almost simultaneously that the words he had uttered had been in their minds, not spoken aloud.



Language Barriers

The territory the hengeyokai inhabit is vast and varied, encompassing many lands, cultures and disparate languages. Aside from purely regional language barriers, hengeyokai must also contend with their species language differences. While a Chinese hengeyokai may be able to comprehend a Japanese or Korean one when speaking in "human" form, each breed's own preferred tongue may consist of sounds, grunts, body motions, scents or color changes. Though one hengeyokai may understand a different breed's language, he may not be able to speak it if he lacks the proper scent or ability to reproduce some other aspect of the tongue in question. Even within a particular Changing Breed, the separation of the Middle Kingdom from the West has wrought subtle variations in speech, not least of which may be cultural expectations and what is considered polite by each. A Western Corax may have considerable difficulty following not only the speech, but the very thought patterns prevalent among Eastern Tengu. Imagine, then, the difficulties that exist between the Zhong Lung and the primeval Mokolé.

To diminish this difficulty, hengeyokai focus on mental speech. Making use of the Gifts: *Mindspeech* and *Waking Dream of Unity* (see Chapter Four), they communicate ideas, thoughts and concepts with other *shen* and even with Sunset People. This mental speech is the official language of the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother, allowing the beast-folk to maintain a universal language of both ideas and beliefs, effectively erasing the difficulties of species limitations.

Although this method of communications affords the hengeyokai a means to communicate freely with Sunset People, they rarely do so. Frankly, they cannot afford the time and bother of educating their rude and contentious cousins. They feel that they might speak very clearly, yet still be misunderstood as the fractious Westerners filter what is said through their foolish cultural bias. Further, the Sunset People are usually quite rude, foregoing the necessary polite forms and behaviors known even to the youngest hengeyokai cubs and kits. They might even attack a Kuei-jin ambassador or display some equally discourteous attitudes. Most feel it is better to simply explain to the Sunset People that they are not wanted and to bid them farewell — with all due courtesy, of course. After all, one cannot let a mad bull loose to rampage through and destroy carefully arranged negotiations in order to eventually train the bull.



"I am Birth of Monsoons. You, as yet," the dragon seemed to smile grimly at Mei Ling, "have earned no grand names for yourselves. You stand before the Beast Court of the Emerald Mother. We meet today to offer you knowledge that you may attain your destinies. We also require your fealty in service to the Emerald Lady and the goals we champion. This we ask in return for the teaching you will receive. You will become part of this court and take up your proper place within the Great Cycle of Being. If you accept, kneel now and listen. If your heart holds reservations, we bid you a courteous farewell." As he ceased speaking, the dragon uncoiled, changing into a middle-aged man clad in saffron robes. His eyes crinkled with mirth and wisdom. Even "Slayer of Demons" knelt humbly.

"So, in this you show wisdom," Birth of Monsoons continued. "Understand that we live in a time that has almost run its course. Even as you are born to your new state of being, the world around you gasps the last breaths of a dying age. You are accursed to come of age in such a time, and yet you are blessed to take up the battle in the time when we will either achieve our aims or fail utterly. You must all possess great hearts and be intended for great deeds to have been born at such a time! Be fearless, for we have need of such as you."

"We can all see the death of the spirit world and the wild places as cities expand to claim more and more territory, even as the older areas already overrun with decay and filth from lack of attention are left to rot. This is but one sign of the death and ruin that moves inexorably forward with each breath we take. Would you make the world a place of purity and life again? Would you give your lives to such a purpose? I see that you would. But, my young friends, to do so, you must know what it is you can do. To know this you must first learn who and what you are, and part of what you are lies in understanding the root of all that is. So listen carefully, for I shall tell you of the Great Cycle and our part of it here in the Middle Kingdom."

The Great Cycle

The Great Cycle of Being is the natural order of all things. All things flow in a cycle. Seasons follow one another, each taking over from the last and in its turn surrendering to the next season as time moves onward. Within these seasons, animals move through their own cycles: mating in spring, bearing young in summer when food is available, nurturing the young through the plentiful time of fall, hibernating, migrating or gleaning what they can during winter, each according to its kind. We follow a cycle throughout our lives: being born, strengthening, changing, reaching adulthood, becoming parents, growing old and dying. If we are wise, this life serves as a progression for our souls as well. As we learn, we may even change our path through the cycle as we become aware of what we are meant to do at important junctures. To embrace your nature is a part of that journey.

We of the Beast Courts represent balance by our very existence. We are passion and intellect, human and animal, fury and compassion, spirit and flesh. We hold within our mortal selves a spark of immortality. Who better to



assume the duty to bring the Wheel of Ages back to its apex? The Great Cycle is real, though it cannot be seen or touched; each of you can feel it within your hearts and souls if you search for it. Hear now of the Wheel of Ages and know that it lies within you to determine the fate that befalls the world as that wheel turns from age to age.

The Wheel of Ages

The Great Cycle makes itself known to us through a series of ages. Picture a great wheel with spokes, each of which represents a different age. We measure our history by those ages, and we learn new lessons and experience new things in each age as we undergo different incarnations.

We hengeyokai have always told tales of our great deeds, accomplishments and victories and the wonders we have wrought throughout our long history. Through those stories come lessons learned at great cost. They combine to create a greater truth that exists beyond any single tale. All time moves through a succession of ages that has existed from the start of creation. In that time, the *shen* have learned of the Wheel of Ages. Even the Kuei-jin, who lost their godlike place through their foolish pride, acknowledge the truth of the four ages past, the current age in which we dwell and the future ages to be.

At the dawn of time the Emerald Mother foretold that there would be 12 ages in all before the wheel turned completely through its cycle. Six to reach the nadir, in which darkness and chaos will reign and six more to climb once again to the top, reaching wisdom and perfection when the wheel returns to its starting place. We cannot say how long each age will be, for they are determined not by how much time passes, but by what occurs during them. We only recognize when one age moves into another. In ancient days, when the Middle Kingdom lay closer to the Yin and Yang Realms, the Ministers of Heaven spoke with sages and taught us of the Great Cycle and the passage of the ages. Now we must turn to our own memories to unravel the ages and the lessons taught therein. Heed me well, for many secrets and much wisdom lies enfolded within the passage of the wheel.

The First Age—The Age of Dawning

How may I tell you of a time so far before my birth and before the existence of most things as we know them? I will tell you as I was told of the primordial time known as the Age of Dawning: tales and more tales that tell of what came before us, how everything began, and how we were created. Thus, we also call this the time of Ten Thousand Truths, though such things have a way of changing over time and what was once true no longer holds, while what was once thought false now stands before us. Myths and legends we call those things that once were, and might yet be again.

In this time before time, there was Gaia and all things were as one. Mind, body and spirit dwelt together and were one thing. The hengeyokai were not yet in existence for there was no need. All things were in balance. All was Heaven. All was perfection. All was divine.



We understand that this age ended when the worlds of matter and spirit separated. Many say this occurred when Gaia gave birth to the San Yuan, whom some call the Triat. Even they, however, were born of the perfection of Gaia, and so retain a little of that perfection and divinity. All things born of Gaia do. That is why the universe has the potential to someday return to that divine state. It will not do so, however, if the wheel is stopped. That mote of divinity will then die, and the world and the universe will rot away — soulless.

San Yuan: The Triat of the East

What the Sunset People call the Triat we call the San Yuan. Although we may call them by different names and see them in different ways, each view of them is correct. The Sunset People believe that the Triat is made up of forces of the universe called the Weaver, the Wyld and the Wyrn. They see these forces as intelligent beings of immense power. Where the Wyld personifies freedom and creativity, the Weaver binds things into permanent forms, turning chaos and wildness into order and structure. The Wyrn brings destruction, breaking down what has been made — necessary if the world is to ever have room for new things and the raw materials from which to make them.

The Namebreakers, whom the Sunset People call mages, see the San Yuan as the forces that make the great changes necessary to continued life. One force is the Wyld, change itself; it moves the cycle along. The second force is that of the Weaver, order; it brings solidity and firmness to the universe. The third force is the Wyrn, decay; it eventually destroys of all that is, bringing the cycle to an end. Our Courts call the San Yuan by the names of Ching, Gui and Qui — essence, spirit and vitality. Each of these is a necessary part of each being's soul. Without any one of them, the individual cannot reach enlightenment.

Thus, the Weaver may be an enormous Spider-spirit madly spinning her webs, but she is also the force of will that turns hopes or dreams into reality. The Wyld is the wilderness, the raw stuff of chaos from which things are created, but also both the creative spirit within us and the Gnosis that allows us to use our powers. As more wilderness dies, the Wyld also perishes. The Wyrn thrashes with insanity, striking out blindly to destroy everything in its path, yet it also fuels our rage and helps us destroy those things that should not be.

Thus, we attempt to understand all the ways of knowing the San Yuan, for they are within us as well, and if we are creatures of balance, we must acknowledge this. You shall hear more of the San Yuan as you grow in wisdom and understand where each of you fits into the world.

The Second Age — The Age of Ten Thousand Things

As spirit split from matter, great change came about. Land and ocean separated into distinct places. New beings of flesh were created and sought



places to call their own, while spirits fought and bickered, tearing the world apart in their quarrels. The world was in turmoil. The Weaver was trying to name everything so the world would conform to the order she desired, while the Wyld resisted her, trying to create new things and cause those already named to throw off their restraints and return to wildness. The Wyrn came behind them both, setting things to decay and breaking things the Weaver had newly made. During the Second Age humans were born and many wonder if this was a good thing or if they were fatally infected and doomed to re-enact the uncertainties and insanity of the time.

Several powerful groups of spirit beings, each made up of the mixed essences of the San Yuan, also made their debut in the Second Age. Some stayed in the world, while others traveled to faraway places. Of the ones who stayed, two factions grew in strength to become mighty forces: the Yama Kings and the Ministers of Heaven. They loathed one another and immediately declared war. The Yama Kings were horrid, twisted beings, obsessed with having everything. If someone else possessed something, they coveted it. Their obscene behavior was not well-organized, but they had great numbers and much power. The Yama Kings made it clear to all that they wanted to rule both Heaven and Earth and bend them to their disgusting desires. Scholars agree that the Yama Kings' depredations were the signal that the Wyrn had lost its place as the Great Serpent of Balance and had become the Devil-Centipede of Corruption.

The defenders of the world were formed to combat this evil.

The August Personage, one of the Greatest Ministers of Heaven, chose to make humans his champions. He gave them powers of the spirit and made of them the Wan Xian, the Ten Thousand Immortals. The Wyld created its own champions, the *hsien*, creating them of pure spirit wrapped in a small amount of earth and flesh. Gaia carefully chose the best humans and beasts and used the purest spirit to bind them together as one. She gathered Her new children into Her two hands and called Her brother Sun and Her sister Moon to bless them. The Moon breathed upon Her left hand and the Sun on Her right and the children awoke.

And that is how we were born. In the Second Age we learned who we were and made our great Pact of Brotherhood with the spirits. We learned our responsibilities and prepared to fight in the Emerald Mother's name. We learned that all were born for a purpose, and we will never forget we were born to defend our Mother and battle those who pervert and ruin the Ten Thousand Things she created.

The Third Age — The Age of Legends

We hengeyokai entered the Third Age as the Emerald Mother's defense and hope. Mountain and valley rang with our war cries and the Yomi devils and centipedes heard and trembled. With our allies the Wan Xian, we waged High War upon them, performing great heroics against enemies as strong, numerous and well-armed as we. The devils and centipedes saw us, the



children of human and beast, and they learned to hate and fear us for our strength. Together we fought and drove the Yama Kings back from the Earth and into the Yomi world. Though the Wan Xian were allies, they were not of our courts and we were not a part of their society.

In our present age the Kuei-jin speak of the greatness of the Wan Xian in striking down the Yama Kings and consigning them to Hell. They speak truth, but not all of the truth. They lack the remembrance of my kind, that which we call *chuming*. We all fought, and each deserves to be remembered for their part, but the greatest war host was not that of the Wan Xian but of my ancestors, the Middle Dragons.

We, the Zhong Lung, existed in great numbers in those days. In the Third Age, dragons shook mountains when angry. We, their children in spirit, remember, for it is our part to do so, and we are blessed to know things stretching far back before the humans had descended from the trees. In those days the wolves were few and the Mother needed warriors. Though the wolves and the Khan answered Her call, the great dragons saw the need for others and they asked us, their younger cousins, to join the battle. We did and our hosting was grandeur and beauty and terror. We screamed our battle songs into the howling winds and drove the Yama Kings before us. With the Wan Xian and our Beast allies we drove the Yama Kings into the Yomi World. Sadly, we were as arrogant as we were splendid. We pursued them into the Yomi world — and died.

When we warred upon them, we did as we were created to do. As the Mother's dutiful children, we defended Her, as every one of us must do when She is endangered. But when we pursued the Yama Kings and came against them in their own fortresses and territory, we sought glory, not righteous defense of our Mother. We strove to be warriors, forgetting the First Mandate of returning to the role chosen for us to fulfill. The Zhong Lung had no memory of the Yomi World, for we had never ventured there before. We failed to listen to the Tengu's warnings and so we faced tens of thousands of demons in lands we did not know. Few escaped horrid death there. We did not obey the Mandates, and to this day we pay the price, for as all can see, the Zhong Lung are few in number and our people are still waning. And so we came to realize that cooperation is always needed in defense of the Mother. Yet we should not grow arrogant and forget our limitations. We should never presume that we are the Emerald Mother's only defenders, as is witnessed by our pacts with the Wan Xian. Together we agreed to guide and control the growing human settlements and though the Ten Thousand Immortals fell to their own folly, we may still deal fairly at times with the Kuei-jin.

You had a question, small one? What are the Mandates? They are the laws that govern our kind. You shall hear more of them later. Now have the courtesy to let my story continue, for you must know of the past before you can grasp the present or look to the future.

The Fourth Age — The Age of Testing

It was obvious to all with the eyes to see that the better times were gone. The Wheel turned to a darker, bloodier day. Thus began the Age of Testing,



an age of strife and blood. Blood of humans, hengeyokai and the foul blackened blood of the centipede.

Though it began before human history, they came of age during the Fourth Age. Until this time, we had kept their numbers within reasonable bounds in accordance with our pact with the Wan Xian. Their ministers prevented the humans from overpopulating, and ours kept the humans from building atop our sacred sites. All was in balance. But the age dawned when the Wan Xian became greedy for more than their share.

The Sunset People speak of a War of Rage, a time when the wolves raged against the other changing creatures, tearing them apart in their arrogance to be thought Gaia's dearest, most deserving children. Though we feel great and everlasting shame, we too engaged in a war against our siblings. It was the Wan Xian who set us against one another.

We thought them our truest friends and best allies. We suspected nothing when they came to us with stories of others tainted by the Centipede's wiles. Soon they had set hengeyokai court against hengeyokai court throughout the lands. Once we were engaged in fighting one another, the Wan Xian moved in on abandoned caerns and sucked them dry of the Chi within. This is the time we call the War of Shame, and truly we should be ashamed. Ashamed that we were so easily taken in by their lies, ashamed that we let caerns fall while we were away waging war, but most of all shame that we sank our claws and teeth into our brethren. As their blood soaked into the ground, Gaia wept. Finally, when She could stand no more, She cried out in agony. And that cry became the death knell for the Wan Xian. Their lives were torn from them with that cry, dooming them to continue existing only as the dead devils that must drink Chi, the Kuei-jin.

We had our revenge, of course. We scoured human civilizations, killing any that worshipped the fallen Wan Xian in death cults. So ferocious were we that even today humans remember and run from us when we take our war forms. We slew the Kuei-jin, shredding their bodies as we consigned their souls to the darkest hells. We will never forget their treachery, nor shall we trust them in the future as we did in the past. But it was a lesson we learned too late.

To our great sorrow and regret, the children of Bear, the Okuma, were lost to us during the war. Keeping their own counsel, the Okuma did not partake of the war. Fleeing into the mountains, they turned their backs on our foolish war. Their wisdom in refusing to fight was rewarded by our folly in believing the worst. Whispers that they had fallen to the Centipede and that they had deserted their duties caused us to seek them out and slay them, mercilessly hunting them until no more remained — the Hakken hunted them on the mountainsides, the Nagah slithered into their caves, and the Khan waited in ambush for them. Those that our courts did not find fell to the Kumo.

I have heard that in the West the bear-folk were slain by their cousins as well. I do not know why the healers were the ones destroyed. Yet it happened in the West as it did here. And so, we learned in this age that although we must have allies in our fight to defend the Mother, we must not blindly follow their



counsel. We know now there is no one constant answer to a problem — what may seem to be one's duty should be examined before we engage in deadly combat. Things are not always as they appear and only a fool believes that they are. There are many roads to virtue, and it takes more than one to reach it.

The Fifth Age — The Age of Shadows

Most *shen* believe the Fifth Age came to pass when the Westerners arrived. But it is arrogance to put a human date on the turning of the Wheel. We know that the new age is here because it is darker than the last — an age of shadows in which the *Kuei-jin* have become as demons and the *hsien* fade with the fading of the spirit world. The Weaver's webs stretch across the Middle Kingdom, humans lose ever more of their spirits, lusting after the corrupt luxury of industry while the tigers die in the jungles. The Mirror Lands fall into decay and the High Dragons, once so mighty, have fallen into a slumber from which it seems impossible to wake them. This is your age, the age in which you learn who you are and take on the responsibilities for which you were born.

And now I fear that the Sixth Age, the nadir of the Wheel is almost upon us. How shall we know what we have learned from this age until it too has passed? Where once was a world of shining beauty when spirit and matter were one, you see the coldness, the horrors, the waning of the wilderness, the death of the spirit that leads to greater darkness each day. How then will the Sixth Age be? We must train ourselves. We must stand steadfast. We cannot prevent the Wheel from turning to that dread time, but by readying ourselves and making our wills adamant, perhaps we may force the Wheel onward. For we cannot allow the Wheel to stop in the age that is to come, lest we lose all.

The Sixth Age — The Age of Sorrow

There will come a time of such horror and misery, such agony and soulessness that many will say the world is ending. The Sunset People believe that this is so. In their visions they see the death of Gaia and the ending of the ages.

This may come to pass. For many forces array themselves against us, seeking to stop the turning of the Wheel. The Yama Kings strive to stop the Wheel in the Sixth Age, so that one of them can become the Demon Emperor ruling over all. The Wyrms seek to destroy the cycle in a mad attempt to allay its misery. Yet it is our sworn duty to prevent this. We must prevent the Wheel from becoming mired and see that it turns, so that once we are past this Age of Sorrow — and I hope that it may pass as quickly as possible — the Wheel may turn again to the ages of light. Though this will be a time of Hell on Earth, we may once again hope that enlightenment will prevail.

Ages Yet to Come

I have nothing I can say of what will come in the ages after this. What will the future bring? What we hope and dream is that the cycle will continue, becoming better and better until we reach the 12th Age. With the arrival of



that great time, matter and spirit will once again unite. The universe and everything it contains will have become the True Gaia Realm and the Emerald Mother will become one with Her children. Though we may die in the achievement of this dream and ones we love may be lost, you must keep the thought of this wondrous reunion in your hearts. Use it to drive you to greater deeds for the Mother when all seems lost. Someday, if we persevere and perform our duties as we ought to, the Mother shall know peace once again.

Lands of the Courts

I grow weary of the telling, for I see that like all modern young folk you half-listen to your elders. Ah, you protest! You would hear more? Then settle yourselves, for the tale is not yet done. Hear then of who we are and from whence we come.

As you may note from looking about you and even from noting your own differences, a court may boast members from many backgrounds and countries. As this is so, you must adhere to our customs of politeness toward those who differ from you. If you feel any prejudice against your neighbors, if you feel the Japanese are haughty or the Vietnamese devious or the Koreans are lower than dust, you had best forget those beliefs. To be one of the *hengeyokai* means you are of the Courts rather than any particular human nation. We claim Kin in many lands and thus take discourtesy and insult to them poorly.

The Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother may be found from upper Mongolia to the Philippines, from Hokkaido to the edges of India. This is the territory the *shen* call the Middle Kingdom. Most say that this is because our lands lie between the enlightenment of heaven and the ignorance of the Earth.

We might spend years speaking of the various countries that make up the Middle Kingdom, for each holds its own courts and each has its own history. That would but waste your time, for the best way to learn of other courts is to visit them. Nonetheless, you should know something of the territories we call our own, and so I shall give you a small view of our realm.

China

We will begin with the land we occupy at present — China, *Zhongguo*! Though it seems wrong to single out a particular country for attention, China is so large we must at least grant it precedence of place. A divine old country, it holds within its breast soaring mountains and labyrinths of caves, vast plateaus and mighty rivers, endless deserts and fertile fields. The humans have crammed themselves together, with 90 percent of them occupying only 20 percent of the land.

Here Khan and Tengu still inhabit the mountains. Here the Middle Dragons are most numerous. In this land, the White-Faced One, first of the Kitsune, walked and awoke to her nature. Nezumi swarm the slums of the cities, and Nagah, so it is said, inhabit the Yellow River. A vast land, China



boasts an impressive history and a vibrant people that amaze us with an ongoing barrage of interesting actions. With all of this, you might think China a paradise for us. Mayhap it was once, but if so, it is no more.

Worst of all is the human overpopulation and our own difficulty in reproducing. In this troubled time when we could use as many hengeyokai as possible, we have only a few new ones born each year. Look to yourselves. Where are the armies of warriors, the cadres of scouts we need? Only three of you have come to us. Why? We have such difficulty in making babies that bear the spirit within that makes them hengeyokai and the government here "encourages" only one child per family. The odds of Kinfolk families producing a shapeshifter are so slim as to be almost nonexistent. Yet we cannot encourage more children for famine stalks the land all too often and the suffering brought by too many mouths to feed is a horrible sight to witness.

I have not even spoken yet of the frightening possibility that we may soon lose the Khan as their tiger Kin become ever more scarce, or the problems the Zhong Lung face. Half of our family, the human side, slaughters the other half for food and good luck medicine. When will they learn that eradicating the tiger in the name of increasing their virility is self-defeating? How can something that has been made extinct be thought of as virile? It makes no sense.

We hengeyokai keep to the wilderness here. The human cities are already a Hell on Earth before the coming of the Sixth Age, and in the mountains and wild places, we still guard our sacred caerns. The Kuei-jin and those who have fallen to the Centipede walk freely in the cities and more populated areas, for they have numerous humans to prey upon and hide among there. Thus in China, while we hold many strong areas, there is still corruption and danger to the Mother wherever we travel. Setting out in any direction in search of foes to battle would not be a waste of time.

Korea

Korea is called the Land of the Morning Calm, a fitting name for a land founded by Tan'gun, whose mother was said to be a bear who became human. In the same tale, a tiger also sought to become human but lacked the patience to do so.

Sadly, neither the Khan nor the Okuma now rule in this mountainous country. A few bears remain, but none of the Okuma themselves. The Khan's tiger Kin are gone entirely. A few homid Khan, some Tengu and an occasional traveler make up the forest courts. They are sorely lacking warriors and welcome those who choose to join them. They do not lack enemies. The Kuei-jin are among those enemies, for they covet and take Korean jade with a greediness that recalls their actions of the War of Shame. They demand ever more jade and take it by force if it is not given to them.

Japan

Ah, Nippon! Here is the land that is most set apart from the rest of the Middle Kingdom. Perhaps our ways have diverged because of the sea that lies between us.



The Hakken hardly seem like other wolf-changers, and the Weaver has so wound her webs there that it becomes ever more dangerous in the Mirror Lands near Tokyo. As for the Wym, you must know this: Do not travel the Mirror Lands near Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Though their earthly sites may have seemed to heal, the spirit world surrounding them remains an oozing, bleeding wound. The bombs exploded just above major dragon-lines, and not even the Okuma at their strongest could have healed such devastation if they worked day and night until the dawning of the Sixth Age. I often wonder, if such atomic horrors did not cause the Sixth Age to come, what will it take to do so? You may well shudder. Likewise, do not trust ghosts from Hiroshima and Nagasaki's reflections in the Yin World — I have heard that darkness festers there, and what emerges from the maw resembles only the Centipede's nightmares.

Regardless, many Beast Courts still rule freely within the cities. The Hakken treasure Hokkaido as their spiritual stronghold and they entrench themselves in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka as well. Mount Fuji remains a place of great power where the secretive Cherry Phoenix Court battles to prevent the land's fall into spiritual decay. The Tengu thrive in the cities, watching the technological feats and the machinations of the yakuza. Some Same-Bito troll through the seas, and the Kitsune find endless amusement playing their games. Nezumi and Kumo teem in the cities, finding many... amusements, and the Kuei-jin rule where they choose. Beware when you walk the land of Nippon, for many pitfalls await those too foolish to listen to their elders. It is paradise for many, but a flawed one.

The Himalayas

The Himalayas — such sadness and pain! How these Bones of the Mother ache under the strain placed upon them. One of our traditional territories, of late, we have lost so many sacred sites, we fear we may not be able to retain our grip there much longer. Such majesty in these mountains with their lofty peaks and unexpected valleys! There are few animals there to offer us much hope of Kinfolk, yet many of us have spent our lives tending to the sacred places, only traveling to populated areas to breed in hope of producing a few more changers to assume these posts when we are gone.

The Centipede's armies have taken much of the Himalayas now. They overran the Stargazer's Shigalu Monastery, home to a particularly powerful caern guarded by the Sept of the Snow Leopard. The loss still stings us. The Chinese occupation of Tibet has resulted in government troops crawling over the area, mistreating the human population and with no sympathy at all for beasts. When the Wheel brings the Sixth Age, war will surely set this ground awash with our blood in many of our most sacred places.

Southeast Asia

That such death and so many dying hopes could reside in this peninsula is beyond sanity. If Tokyo's Mirror Lands choke beneath the Weaver's webs,



Bangkok's reek of the Wyrms' worst sewers. We sometimes send well-meaning Sunset People here who want to help us make our lands a better place. As they are useless at court, lacking all knowledge of courtesy, we send them to redden their claws on the countless stinking evils to be found here. If they possess some intelligence, they might even escape before their actions stir the Kuei-jin that rule here into retaliation.

In Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, so many damned souls have been consigned to the Yomi World and the Yin Realms that those who can feel the spirit world can barely walk the lands for the pain and sickness there. Banes erupt from the very soil here, and legions of hungry ghosts thirsty for blood savage whatever they can overwhelm. We have very few surviving courts hidden deep within the jungles — battered remnants who survived the Vietnam War's bombing runs and the occasional battalion that mysteriously vanished — yet we are losing here. Southeast Asia needs supreme warriors and unparalleled sorcerers of great character and spiritual strength if the Mother is to survive at all in those lands. Should you choose to go there, may the Ministers of Heaven give you their highest blessing.

Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines

These islands mark the edge of our territory. The few courts found here are the province of the Zhong Lung and the Same-Bito, powerful defenders who are masters of the sea. Much Chi can be found here and it does not suffer from the taint found too often in other lands such as Southeast Asia or Japan. Nonetheless, all is not paradise. The Centipede's spawn have made their nests here as elsewhere. The Zhong Lung and Same-Bito are mostly able to hold them in check through their superior control of the waters surrounding the islands. Mostly. If there is hope to be had, it may be found here in the end.

India

Though India does not truly fall within the Middle Kingdom, we maintain courts there and it is the homeland of our Nagah allies. The jungles of India provide good shelter for us, and the Khan have long been associated with this Jewel of the Mother.

How, then, can the humans be so poor and mismanaged? They live within disease-choked cities, kill the Kin of both Nagah and Khan, and endure a plethora of demon entities — Kuei-jin, bakemono, Banes, even Western vampires — that flock to their overcrowded cities. It has become so bad that the Scarlet Talon tribe of the Sunset Wolf-people avenges the deaths of Indian wolves by replying in kind and slaying villagers for each wolf slain.

So many enemies abound here that we could not possibly supply the kind of support they truly need. It would drain our resources elsewhere. As we consider India only a fringe territory for the Beast Courts, such help from us will be sorely lacking. If the Sunset People truly wish to come here and offer



their help, they should start with India and prove their capabilities where it would do the most good. Will India's open sores be healed before the Sixth Age rips them into gaping wounds? I would love to see that, but my heart tells me it will not be so.

Not tired yet? That is a good sign. You exhibit more patience than I had thought possible for those so young. Perhaps we shall pause a moment for refreshment and for stretching tired limbs, and then we will continue. Although you may begin to see who we are, it is equally important for you to know of others. Come back in an hour's time, and you shall hear more.

Shen: The Varied Forms of Divinity

And so, we continue. We have mentioned other *shen*, but have not yet said much regarding who they are or how we deal with them. When we speak of the *shen* we are speaking of various races that are more than simply human or animal. The Mother and Her Brother and Sister, the San Yuan, and the Ministers of Heaven and Hell created the *shen*, each with a plan in mind for these creatures they had made. They are as varied as the humans they dwell among, yet each has its own powers, and we keep an uneasy truce with most of them most of the time. The Kuei-jin may be our foes, but when we battle them, we do so with courtesy, for that is their due. We have sometimes made pacts with various *shen* — *hsien*, Kuei-jin, Namebreakers and ghosts — when it was necessary. Thus, you must always remain polite and interact with all civility when meeting the *shen*. Doing so could someday save your life should you need one for an ally.

Kuei-jin

Once known as the Wan Xian, the Ten Thousand Immortals, the Kuei-jin long ago fell from that lofty position and forsook their sacred duty. Now they are known as the Hundred Corpse Families. In this age, their purposes often clash with ours, bringing us into conflict over dwindling caerns and other places of power. We also vie for secure havens away from prying mortal eyes, a difficult thing to find in lands so overpopulated. Some few of the Kuei-jin fight the Yama Kings, but more of them serve those dread beings.

A very few have attempted to reclaim their divine natures and have returned to performing their sacred duties. They are called bodhisattvas, and those are the ones who are more attuned to our beliefs. Still, we must always remember their treachery in the Fourth Age when they set us against one another. Their tongues may be sweetened with honey, and their words all you could wish to hear, but you must never trust them. Watch them and be prepared for battle, lest they lull you into complacency and best you with nothing more than words.



Hsien

The hsien are those born from the Wyld. You should speak of them with respect, for they are much like our own spirit allies. They were once divine messengers who have now been given flesh bodies so they may live in this world. Although this was done some time ago, they still seem uncomfortable with these shells. Perhaps they flinch at earthly imperfection after living in Heaven.

Many of them are brothers of a sort to us. The beast-*hsien* — the *hirayanu* — are closer to us in nature, though fierce and proud. When the *hsien* send emissaries to us, they are usually the badgers or the cats. They are far easier for us to understand, in any case.

The Kuei-jin and the Namebreakers both hunt the *hsien*, and this makes us allies. Yet they consider their beast members to be of lower caste than the human sort, and this seems wrong and discourteous to us. If they understood the inherent nobility of animals, we would be better friends. As it is, until they can come to grasp this, we will give them aid, but only if such a request is phrased properly and with the humility and respect that should accompany the asking of such a favor.

NAMEBREAKERS

Sorcerers exist in the world whose power surpasses that of the Taoist alchemists or the practitioners of feng shui. These fearsome beings possess the ability to reweave the cloth from which the universe is made. It is a power they were never meant to have, one that they stole — the power of Naming. The Kuei-jin call them “Lightning people” and avoid them whenever possible. We too avoid them when we can; we call them Namebreakers.

It is said that during the Second Age, a man stole the secret of Naming. He was proud and handsome, dashing and fearless. So special was he that the chambermaids of Gaia’s palace would pause in their duties to watch him, and this eventually caught the notice of a goddess, the Minister of Rivers and Streams. So beautiful was she that when she descended to call on him, he made no resistance. This beauteous minister took him to her bed in Heaven where they dallied for a day. When she at last slept, he pretended to sleep as well.

Not satisfied by the honor he had already been shown, as soon as she slept he arose and walked through Heaven to satisfy his great curiosity. Such was his pride that he dared go beyond what was offered and sought to gain more! Before long, he found a library and entered to search for a book of divine poetry that he might use to win women’s favors. Instead, he chose the books of all Names and learned much in his reading that he should not have known.

When he was returned to Earth, he was impatient to test his new knowledge. He went to a boulder and spoke its Name, but he pronounced it differently and it exploded into a thousand pieces. Delighted at his great power, he clapped his hands and danced away, playing with it as he went.



As you might expect, before too long the Weaver noticed that this thief was disrupting her careful order. She flew to the Emerald Mother and told Her that a human had somehow stolen the power of Naming. Gaia turned Her attention to it and felt someone pulling at Her tapestry of being, loosening a thread here, inserting a thread where none should be, breaking the Names that had been given to things, for the thief was calling down lightning to dance for him. The Emerald Mother placed a curse on the arrogant human, boiling him from the inside. Yet it was too late. The thief had passed on the knowledge of Naming to other mortals — a courtesan to be exact, for the man talked in his sleep. To this very day, the Namebreakers face punishment from the Mother and the Weaver when they work their magic, and this is just, for they go beyond what was meant to be.

We have no love for these beings and their "True Magic," for it was stolen from heaven and never meant for Man. We find it utterly offensive that in their pride they dare to change the Names given to all things by the Mother. Yet even more do we dislike them because they seek to harness the energy of the dragon lines for themselves, a power to which they have no lawful right. Once again, they try to steal what they should not have. It is a great pity that humans could not be content with the sorcery and rituals freely given them. As is usually their way, these selfish magi insist on taking what is not theirs and damn the consequences to anyone else.

Ruei

The spirits of the wandering dead exude a pathetic sadness I find difficult to bear. Nonetheless, despite my pity for them, I think it best to avoid them when possible. These are the unfortunate beings who no longer move within the correct paths of the Great Cycle, suffering banishment from it. They must somehow pay their karmic debt to be allowed reentry. Those who do not reenter the cycle in the correct manner may face obliteration; they must undergo an arduous journey in search of the path to righteousness once again.

Some of us have conversed with these luckless souls. I have knowledge that the Kitsune and the Tengu sometimes do, and I have heard rumor of shapeshifters from other lands doing so as well. For myself, I think it best to leave the dead to follow their own paths. They must pay the debt to reenter the cycle. Finding the way to do so is a part of the payment. It is their duty and we cannot alter that.

Sunset People

We refer to all the beast-folk as our cousins, though the Sunset People have grown apart from us in strange lands. Often, we find that the greatest differences between us are our values and our integrity. They do not conform to the customs and traditions we find essential, and our dealings with them suffer because of this. We refer to them as the Sunset People not only because they come from the west, but because they seem so fatalistic about our ability



to continue defending the Mother. They truly believe that we stand at the edge of Apocalypse and that the end of this age will be the end of all things. They see no future beyond the coming of the Sixth Age and do not truly understand our duty to keep the Wheel in motion. They are clannish, warlike and given to bickering, and have no understanding of why we of the Beast Courts exist as we do, with members from different beast-folk welcome and honored equally. This is instinctive in us; the Sunset People are comparatively ignorant and blind.

While some of us meet — cautiously — with our Western counterparts to share information or to find common cause, it is difficult to interact with them due to their arrogant ignorance of our ways. We do not allow them to dictate our behavior to us. We were given our tasks by the Emerald Mother herself, just as the Sunset People were, and we will not shirk our honorable duties. We follow the Mandates of Heaven, not the Westerners' twisted logic. It is not their place to instruct us, and yet they believe that is exactly what they must do. This makes for a lack of harmony and brings unpleasantness to what might otherwise be an intriguing interaction with foreign cousins.

The Western Garou are the most frequent visitors here in the Middle Kingdom. When they enter our lands respectfully and honor our traditions and if they display civility and polite behavior, we permit their intrusions, though we watch to make certain they did not come to take what is not theirs.

Many among us have heard of their War of Rage. We never understood what drove them to it, for we have never heard that anyone else manipulated the wolf-changers into attacking their brethren. For countless generations since then, our courts have debated whether the Garou lost their place in the Great Cycle through their actions. Some even believe they may have been cast out like the Kuei-jin. Yet they have totems and the spirits heed their call. It would seem to me that if this is so, the Mother has forgiven them. Perhaps some day we shall do the same.

The Kitsune tell a story of the arrival of a contingent of Western Garou among them. It is said that they came to a court and offered their assistance to combat the Wym's forces, newly come from the West. In return they asked for passage through the lands, use of the land's sacred sites and scouts to guide them through the lands since they did not know them. The Kitsune regents, for there were two of them, spoke with all consideration and politeness, expressing their regret that they could not accept the help offered and saying that they must deny the Garou passage. The Garou grew angry and demanded to know why their offer of help was denied. At this, the Kitsune replied, "We know little of you, but we have heard 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." As I have stated, it is best to be wary of them, even when they would seem our natural allies.

Of course, there are some members of their tribes who make oaths to the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother whom we consider to be as much hengeyokai as you or I. Many have lived in these lands for generations. They



unquestionably belong in the Courts and prove to be some of our most loyal members. Some of the more common among those live in Hong Kong. Most particularly, I speak of the Boli Zousizhe, once known as Glass Walkers, and the Wangtong, who are related to those called Bone Gnawers. Do not mistake them for their Western cousins! Thankfully, this is usually not a problem as those who live in the Middle Kingdom show courtesy and respect to others not often found among the Sunset People.

Others

Wondrous beings and strange beasts once roamed these lands and may yet dwell here in the most remote wilderness regions. Whether spirit creatures or mythic beasts, it is difficult to know what their customs and civilities might be. Should you chance to meet one such as these, I hope you will honor this Court by acting in a proper and receptive manner.

"And now, it is time I ceased speaking and let some others here have the chance." So saying, the dragon closed his eyes, sighed and slept.

Spring Blossom motioned for the three young ones to rise and follow her. "Now it is time you learned why each of you is here and why the Mother gave you the gifts you possess. I shall teach you who the Mother intended you to be and what She asks you to do. If you are not ready to do that, find your way back outside and leave this place with shame written upon you. If you are ready to assume your duties, follow me." The three, even Mei Ling, bowed humbly to the dragon, arose and followed their slender guide to an alcove set aside from the main hall. There they settled once again as Spring Blossom began to speak.

The Beast Courts

I have traveled far and seen much, for I am older than I seem. Because I have seen the world outside the Middle Kingdom, I can tell you how we differ from our cousins. I also say this to you now: be proud that you are of the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother and thank the Ministers of Heaven that you have been given the privilege of living in the Middle Kingdom.

Perhaps the most distinctive difference between us and the Sunset People (aside from their deplorable lack of manners) is the way we organize our courts. The Westerners cannot understand us, for they do not often cooperate with one another. Perhaps the other Changing Breeds remember the atrocities of the War of Rage and bear a grudge against the modern Garou for the depredations of their ancestors. Such shameful actions are difficult to atone for, even generations later. But we welcome many different Breeds, and our courts cross racial and geographical boundaries so that all shapeshifters of the continent may find unity of purpose. Among the Beast Courts, our caerns are communal property. Any hengeyokai in the Mother's service may be welcomed within. Our septs often mix Tengu with Khan, Hakken and Nezumi, Zhong Lung and Same-Bito, sometimes all together.



Not all Asian shapeshifters choose to belong to the Courts. The Kumo have rejected the Mother, choosing instead to serve the Great Centipede. Many Khan feel more at home with the other Bastet ideals rather than the laws of the Courts, and the Hong Kong Boli Zousizhe, the Glass Walkers, remain cordial to, but are not a part of the Courts. Being born within our territory does not necessarily make you a part of the Courts. To be a member, you must pledge your loyalty to the Emerald Mother and to the court system she decreed that hengeyokai follow.

When you become a court member, you become set apart in some ways from others of your Changing Breeds. We keep a separate Renown system, which we call the Way of Emerald Virtue. It rewards you for following your auspice roles, which are discovered by ritual divination. These do not necessarily correspond to positions of the sun or phases of the moon. Some hengeyokai prefer to follow their own system, remaining loyal to their individual Changing Breeds, but offering their services to the Beast Courts. Those who enter into a permanent court position at one of the sacred caerns or through joining a mountain sentai, honor our court Renown system.

The second greatest difference between members of the Beast Courts and other shapeshifters is that we all follow the Mandates of Heaven. There have been times when individual hengeyokai discovered conflicts between the Litanies of their kind and the Mandates. The Mandates are an ancient, unchanging part of hengeyokai law handed down to us from the first existence of the Beast Courts, however, and close reading of them usually provides a solution to the dilemma. Thus, those hengeyokai who give their allegiance to the Beast Courts may be expected to put the Mandates before their own tribal practices. Of course, following tribal laws may be excused by invoking the First Mandate. You see how clever we are, that we give ourselves the room we need to maneuver?

Court Organization

We follow no formal caste system among the Courts. We do, however, acknowledge that each Breed has been assigned a given task, set for them in the Second Age before the first shapeshifter was even born. Not even the plague-bearing Nezumi are turned away from our courts. The Children of Rat have their own part to play, a role that the Mother assigned them, and who are we to question this?

The exception to this is, as always, the Kumo. The Goblin Spiders never swore fealty to the Mother, instead most often embracing the Wyrms. We of the Beast Courts consider them enemies. Yet their ambassadors find a courteous reception when they visit our courts (though we watch them most carefully). We have even been known to make temporary pacts with them to battle mutual enemies whose foulness surpasses that of the Goblin Spiders. However, I have never heard of any Kumo who turned from the Wyrms' path and joined the Beast Courts. I do not believe it shall ever come to pass.

A court in many ways resembles a Garou sept that protects each of our caerns, each with its own assembly of ministers. Many court members live at the



caern, and most try to maintain several sentai of shapeshifters for handling everyday business and remaining ready for quests as necessary. Formerly, the courts were glorious, with many ministers overseeing varied affairs and mighty war hosts ready to battle the Centipede's spawn. In this age, courts may struggle to maintain two sentai, and only four offices are a constant from court to court.

The ranking members of a court are referred to as *Gai'nan*, meaning Gaia's liegemen. The closest human word to this might be "magistrate," but the connotations of the word are not perfect. They are not so much government appointees as leaders who accept responsibility and who show fairness and honor in all their dealings. As I said, there are only four to each court, though some courts may appoint some of their members to minor offices (Herald of All Tongues or Minister of Questions, for example). As most courts are too small to allow for many such minor ministers, the *Gai'nan* may take on an array of responsibilities in addition to their court duties. The responsibility is great, and should a *Gai'nan* betray his post, the punishments are correspondingly severe.

Regent

The highest ranking caern elder serves as regent, the ultimate authority of the court. The regent is the keeper of the laws and the arbiter of disputes. His is the word that decrees what the court's responsibilities are. Chosen by the acclaim of the court and through petitioning the Court of Ancestors to recognize the most worthy candidate, the regent serves the will of the Emerald Mother. A regent is never chosen lightly, and few ask for the office, for the influence gained is not enough to offset the grave burden of being the just overseer of all the court's affairs. All eyes are on the regent and he dare not tread far from the Mandates or make decisions too open to interpretation, lest he lose face before all.

In times of crisis, the other *Gai'nan* may vote to supplant the regent if he clearly ignores their recommendations and endangers the court by doing so. However, removing a regent from power may lead to enormous loss of renown for the *Gai'nan* if they cannot prove it was of the gravest necessity, for by doing so, they go against the chosen of the Emerald Mother. Do not be fooled. It has been done, and done successfully. In the case I heard about, the regent had fallen to the ravages of age and no longer possessed the keen mind he had exhibited when first appointed. The *Gai'nan* were correct in displacing him, for despite his popularity, his follies and fantasies were leading the court to ruin.

General

The general, also called the warmaster, plays a role similar to that held by the Western Garou's Warleader. She has the responsibility to prepare the members of the court for warfare and to defend the caern at need. Such tactics may embrace many forms. You might learn stealth tricks worthy of a ninja or practice the arts of warfare as laid down by Sun Tzu. The latest, most modern techniques of warfare might be imparted to you, even to giving you elaborate



weapons training. We cannot afford to turn up our noses at anything which may give us the advantage we need against the Wyrms' minions, save those that would pull us into the same cesspit inhabited by our enemies.

The general's influence with the court varies, but she can usually count on a good deal of support. With the hengeyokai always at war somewhere, she can utilize her talents to the utmost and finds her advice followed more often than not.

Seer

The seer could be compared to the Master of the Rite. He is the keeper of the rites. He deals with the spirits and acts as the master of summonings. The seer's duties include summoning and binding spirits, asking spirits for favors, binding sentai together and teaching Gifts to other court members.

As you might expect, this gives the seer a good deal of personal power, and he may expect his words to carry great weight with the *Gai'nan* and the rest of the court. As with any such position, there is the possibility that the seer will become too proud or might use the position to accumulate even more power, becoming corrupt and turning the regent into little more than a figurehead. Conversely, the seer lives under the threat that a Yama King may target him for extermination because he acts as the court's representative to the spirit community, making him highly visible in the Umbra.

Seers generally keep at least one potential successor nearby, watching for promising young hengeyokai to train. Both the seer and the court know that it would be easy for the seer to be killed or captured by demons and his lore lost with him. Thus, training an apprentice or two is a prime priority. If more than one worthy candidate exists, the court usually gives the seer both in the hope that time will weed out the most worthy. This is how many rivalries begin....

Historian

We keep an oral history that stretches back beyond prehistory. The historian learns the story of the caern, its triumphs and battles from its inception to the present. Aside from acting as the receptacle for the court's history, the historian also receives the reports scouts bring in. She compares the reports with her knowledge of patterns that have gone before to arrive at conclusions the *Gai'nan* might need in assessing a problem.

Retaining so much knowledge is a monumental undertaking. Some historians are chosen almost from the day of their First Change to accept this role. In many courts, *Zhong Lung* serve as historians. Their prodigious memories make them the obvious choice. In other courts, varying races fulfill the role. As *metis* are born within the court and nurtured there from birth, they too make good historians.

Sentai

Though not as high-ranking as the *Gai'nan*, a court's war parties are excused from holding formal offices, for their duty as warriors is far too important to lay aside. Wave sentai may be gathered together from several



different courts and serve no long-term purpose in a given court. Mountain sentai are rarer still, as their active duty is considered too important to burden with unnecessary conflicts. Those that pledge their services to the defense of a particular caern earn a great respect from all.

Courtiers

Unlike the Gai'nan, the hengeyokai who are lesser courtiers have few responsibilities beyond upholding the Mandates and defending the caern from attack. Most are free to do what they will so long as it does not conflict with the court's aims. The regent may assign minor offices to courtiers to make certain that each has a way to occupy himself. This is because hengeyokai are born to responsibility and feel uneasy when given nothing constructive to do. If given valuable tasks to perform, however inconsequential they may seem to some, the hengeyokai of a court remain happy. It is a sad truth, however, that as more hengeyokai die out, the courts can use all the help they can get from all their members.

The Mandates

We shapeshifters were created for a purpose. When the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother were brought into being they set down the laws that would guide our kind. Those laws are the Mandates.

According to the Zhong Lung and others who profess to know, the Emerald Mother Herself handed the Mandates down directly to the First Court's regent. As the Mother's words to us, the Mandates are treated with the utmost respect and reverence. Like the codes of other Changing Breeds or the Garou's Litany, the Mandates are Gaia's own laws. We obey them as if She spoke them yesterday. Unlike the Litany, many types of hengeyokai hold the Mandates in common and they serve to hold the Courts together. Naturally, each of us find some leeway in our interpretations of the different edicts, but we all try to stay within the spirit of Her words.

The First Mandate and the Final Mandate form the cornerstones of all hengeyokai law. You must give obedience to the First Mandate in order to understand all the Mandates and the duty of all shapeshifters. The Final Mandate must never be changed, ignored or forgotten, for if the hengeyokai do, the Mother's essence will drain away from the Earth, lost forever. If the other edicts are violated, the punishment is vigorous, but none violate the First or Final Mandates without suffering prolonged and brutal retribution.

Shirk Not the Tasks Which Have Been Given You

The First Mandate requires each Changing Breed of the Courts to do as the Mother intended him to do. Each must embrace the service that the Mother requires of his kind. No Garou may refuse to battle the Wyrms; no Tengu can refuse to uncover the enemies' secrets. No Zhong Lung is allowed to forget even the most horrible or painful memory. Gaia gave each Breed a duty to perform and we should



honor Her wisdom and follow the path She decreed for us. To turn from that path is an unforgivable insult to the Emerald Mother. The Mandate specifically forbids hengeyokai from abandoning their duties to live a normal life as a human or animal, for to do so squanders the Mother's gifts and weakens us all. Those who violate this Mandate whether from cowardice, laziness or some other failing are severely punished by the *Rite of Quiet Burial*. We have no patience for those who will not perform the duties to which they were born.

Reality: We all know that there are those who do not conveniently fit the pattern of what they "should be." Some that should be warriors are born frail. Some might find themselves better suited to taking on some other role than that decreed by their Breed. The Mandate doesn't prohibit hengeyokai from breaking free of the norm, so long as the Court's greater purpose is served by those individuals. And of course, even the Hakken that spends her time as a stealthy spy or the diligent scholar may be called upon to fulfill her original purpose when there is need. It is only if you turn from your ordained path when called upon to follow it that the Mandate has been broken.

Guard the Wheel That It May Turn in Fullness

Left to itself, the Wheel of Ages turning is a certainty. A great pity it is that the Wheel is not invulnerable to sabotage. Many *shen*, especially the Kuei-jin, would be only too happy to see the Wheel stop in the age of their choice, and most such hell-spawn seek to halt it in the Sixth Age. We were created as creatures of balance for the express purpose of seeing that the Wheel continues to turn, with each age ruling for a time, only to be supplanted by the next. Gaia gave Her promise to us that if we could succeed in this task we will eventually come into the 12th Age when Heaven and Earth will unite. Gaia's wounds will be healed and Her faithful will be made whole as their bodies and spirits become one with the All. In this rotting, dying age in which we live such promises seem impossibly distant. This remains the one great hope of the Courts, however, and many hengeyokai have given their lives to bring it into being.

Reality: Some few dissidents believe they should stop the Wheel before it ever reaches the horrors of the Sixth Age and attempt to turn it back to the First Age. While their intentions may be good, we of the Courts find it insulting and arrogant to believe we could order the universe better than the Emerald Mother. We trust Her way is best and there lies some purpose we are as yet unaware of in suffering through the Sixth Age that may be necessary to endure if we are to reach perfection once again. As turning back the Wheel also sounds like running from a battle, I know where my sympathies lie.

Presume Not to Instruct Your Cousin in His Task

Each of us must trust the others to conscientiously and fittingly perform the duties given them or the courts will be embroiled in chaos. This Mandate forbids hengeyokai from ignoring their own work to criticize their compatriots'. It would seem folly, after all, for a warrior to instruct a sorcerer how best to



perform a ritual or for a diplomat to take on the role of a warrior. This does not mean, however, that a spy would not warn a general of relevant information that might cause him to modify his battle plans. It only reminds us that we were each created to execute specific roles and should not presume we would know better than those the Mother appointed to perform a different task.

The Nagah are little bound by this Mandate as they are the ones appointed to judge and to mete out punishment. To obey the First Mandate, they must attend to these magisterial duties for the Courts, ensuring that none betray their positions. Even they, however, do not have the right to punish hengeyokai for a poor performance or for being unsuccessful. They are only empowered to bring retribution against outright traitors.

Reality: This one is difficult, for the matter of court politics rears its head. Because of politics, this Mandate is often bent somewhat. Courtiers gossip about their fellow's decisions or the favor shown one and not another. Few hengeyokai openly challenge their rivals, but word of their latest plots or failings inevitably gets around.

Honor Your Territory in All Things

There exist numerous interpretations of this Mandate, but some things remain constant from court to court. We are expected to keep our lands in good order so that we may honor the spirits, keep Gaia healthy and pure, and ensure a steady flow of energy in our sacred places. We also believe that the treatment of Kinfolk comes under this Mandate, as all things within a territory are considered a part of it. Different hengeyokai interpret "proper, honorable treatment" of humans in various ways, yet all speak to it as a necessity. Under this Mandate, Kinfolk will never be ignored.

Reality: Unfortunately, so many bloody conflicts have arisen from this Mandate, I cannot begin to name them all. The hengeyokai share the same territorial instincts as other shapeshifters, but we usually consider ourselves more fit to oversee sacred areas than other *shen*. Judging from the results of the Kuei-jin and the Namebreakers when they come upon such places, I would say that we are right. Most other *shen* cannot be trusted with such a duty.

Let Mercy Guide You in Our August Mother's Court

This Mandate was decreed to prevent bloodshed between hengeyokai. Logically, it would seem foolishness to attack those you deem allies, but in moments of jealousy or rage, such considerations are too easily thrown aside in the heat of the moment. We have enough enemies that the last thing we need is hengeyokai blood spilled by a fellow courtier.

Reality: Most hengeyokai consider other *shen*, especially Westerners, to be apart from the Mother's Courts. Kuei-jin, Western vampires, Namebreakers, *hsien* and Sunset People had best not offend our honor or dignity under the delusion that this Mandate will protect them.



HONOR YOUR ANCESTORS AND YOUR ELDERS

Those who have come before us grant us the wisdom they gained, a fact which makes us greater than we might otherwise be. Among our human Kin, most go to great lengths to honor and propitiate their ancestors. So, too, do we hengeyokai perform many rituals to honor our Ancestor-spirits, whom we refer to collectively as the Court of the Ancestors.

We must also show proper respect for our elders. Those who have lived long have learned much, and with knowledge comes wisdom and strength. It is proper to listen to the voice of experience, and also valuable, for they usually know things we do not.

Reality: There are very few hengeyokai that find this law difficult to keep. We can usually find the time to maintain relations with our ancestors. The hengeyokai who most often fail to keep this law are the youngsters of homid birth. Most often they've been raised with Western ideals and values. They soon find, however, that disrespecting one's elders among shapeshifters of any culture leads to swift punishment by those mightier than they within the court.

HONOR THE PACTS WITH THE SPIRIT WORLD

The spirit world exists as a vital part of our beings. As we are creatures partly of spirit, it would be foolish for us to ignore this Mandate which tells us: All rites and rituals must be performed properly, with the requisite obeisance made when in the presence of the powers that inhabit the Yang World.

Reality: It is usually the young, homid hengeyokai who follow Western customs that violate this Mandate. Many feel they have no need to follow antiquated customs and traditions. This is foolish of them. Western custom was not built on the traditions of the spirits. Our Mandates, our customs, our traditions were born of the Mother. Even if they themselves do not believe in such things as a normal course of action, most hengeyokai eventually learn to follow the proper path to keep these valuable allies happy and responsive.

WAR NOT UPON HUMAN NOR BEAST

You might think of this Mandate as a rule of survival. Humanity is so numerous, its reach so long and destructive that if they knew of the hengeyokai they could wipe us from the Earth. This is not the true meaning of the Mandate, for it was given to us long before the Chinese invented gunpowder, before man beat iron into steel, before even the crudest stone weapons were used against us and humans were hardly a threat to us. The edict is meant to remind us that we are of both animal and human blood and neither side should be abandoned or ignored.

The Mandate doesn't forbid singular acts of violence against humans or animals — it simply bans organized campaigns against specific communities or species. The Impergium was a failure, and we have not the numbers to try to enforce it once more. To do so would doom us, not them, to extinction. When performing your duties, some deaths may be necessary, but they should never be the first objective of your mission.



Reality: Interpretations of this Mandate differ widely. The Hakken of Japan interpret it strictly, to the point where they have lost contact with much of their animal nature while interacting so closely with the humans. We fear the Tengu's growing fascination with modern wonders may be leading them toward the same path.

The Nezumi interpret this mandate as forbidding High War. As the First Mandate orders them to keep the humans in check, the Nezumi constantly wage Low War on them. And with the near extinction of the tigers, many Khan have questioned this Mandate that precludes them from waging war on the humans when the humans continue to wage undeclared war on their beast-Kin.

Let No One and Nothing Violate the Sacred Places

Of all the Mandates, this one is most important and most inviolable. In the Second Age the sacred sites of the Earth were entrusted to the hengeyokai that we might guard them and keep them from falling. If we betrayed that trust the world would enter an irreversible slide into decay and death. Betrayal of the Mandate is punished with the *Rite of Hell Made Flesh*. Other measures are often added to this as well.

Reality: Even with such punishments you find the occasional traitor. The excruciating agony that awaits a hengeyokai who betrays the Final Mandate is enough to dissuade most, for the possible rewards of success do not compare with the price of failure.

Lexicon

Though some hengeyokai have their own dialects or slang, the following words and phrases are in common usage among the hengeyokai of the Beast Courts. They are generally understood by all shapeshifters of the East.

Age of the Dawning: The First Age, when all things were one with Gaia and matter and spirit were together.

Age of Legends: The Third Age, when the hengeyokai first warred against the Wyrms' forces; a time before recorded history.

Age of Shadows: The Fifth Age; the modern era, begun when Westerners arrived in the East.

Age of Sorrow: The Sixth Age; the hengeyokai's name for the Apocalypse; a time yet to come, but nearly here. Some believed this age may not be the end of all things, but is necessary to advance the turning of the Wheel of Ages.

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

Age of Testing: The Fourth Age, a time of strife and warfare; this age began in prehistory and continued until the advent of the Age of Shadows, late in the last millennium.

Bakemono: A fomor; fomori.



Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother: The formal term for hengeyokai society. Sometimes called simply "Beast Courts;" All Eastern shapechangers who follow Gaia are honorary members, while some pledge themselves to uphold the Courts' law.

Centipede, centipedes: Slang for the Wyrms and its minions; most likely inspired by battle with the Mukade centipede-demons.

Court: A hengeyokai sept; courts are more formal than their Western counterparts, but not as formal as the human courts of Asia.

Court of Ancestors: The collective society of the hengeyokai Ancestor-spirits.

Courts, the: Hengeyokai shorthand for the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother; considered disrespectful, terse and rude by many elders.

Dragon Line: A line of strong Chi connecting dragon nests. Equivalent to a Moon Bridge (a Yang dragon line) or a Byway (a Yin dragon line).

Dragon Nest: A *shen* term for a caern.

Emerald Mother, the: Gaia.

Fifth Age: The current age; a time when evil is on the rise. Many believe it will soon give way to an even blacker time.

Fist: The auspice of a warrior; an Ahroun.

Gai'nan: (the accent is on the second syllable): A hengeyokai word meaning "magistrate," a ranking court official.

Gaki: Term sometimes used for Japanese Kuei-jin.

Hengeyokai: Literally "Changing Phantom;" The term applies to any Eastern shapeshifter, especially those bound to the Beast Courts.

High War: Honorable combat; the formal, courtly mode of waging war.

Kin-jin: Western vampires.

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

Lantern: The auspice of leadership and judgment, a Philodox.

Leaf: The auspice of stealth and information gathering; a Ragabash.

Low War: Less honorable warfare; pacts with Kuei-jin are often denoted as being within 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. Wyrms Incarna are called Ministers of Hell.

Mirror: The auspice of mysticism and meditation; a Theurge.

Mirror Lands: The Penumbra.

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

Namebreakers: Hengeyokai word for mages; used contemptuously.

Nareau: The Spider Lord, the totem of the more balanced Kumo.

Okuma: The Gurahl of the East; all the Okuma were slain in the War of Shame.



Pillar: The auspice of unity and support; a Galliard.

Rati: The Insatiable Lady, totem of the Yang Kumo.

Sentai: A hengeyokai war party. A sentai usually numbers five people and may be temporary or united by a totem as in a Garou pack.

Shen: Any Asian supernatural or Awakened being.

Sixth Age: The Apocalypse. Not all hengeyokai believe this is the end of all things but rather the nadir of the Cycle.

Sunset People: Western shapechangers; a comment on their fatalistic outlook.

Susanowo: Lord of Storms; a Hakken totem, possibly tainted by the Wyrm.

Talon: an elemental role within a sentai such as a "Fire Talon."

Tapestry, the: A *shen* term for the Middle Umbra; used by hengeyokai to separate the spirit world they are familiar with from the Sunset People's Umbra.

Tsuki-yomi: A Hakken moon totem; Luna.

Wall, the: The *shen* name for the Gauntlet.

War of Shame: Fought among the hengeyokai in the Fourth Age and brought about by Wan Xian manipulation; like the War of Rage.

Wave sentai: A temporary sentai formed for convenience.

Wheel of Ages: The Great Cycle encompassing all time, it is believed this began with the birth of the universe. Beginning with a time of harmony, the Wheel turns, falling to its lowest point, a time of misery. After reaching the nadir, the Wheel eventually moves onward, ascending to harmony again.

Wind: A sentai member's alignment with a cardinal direction such as "south wind" or "center wind."

Yama Kings: Enormously powerful Banes that rule their own pocket domains in the Yomi World.

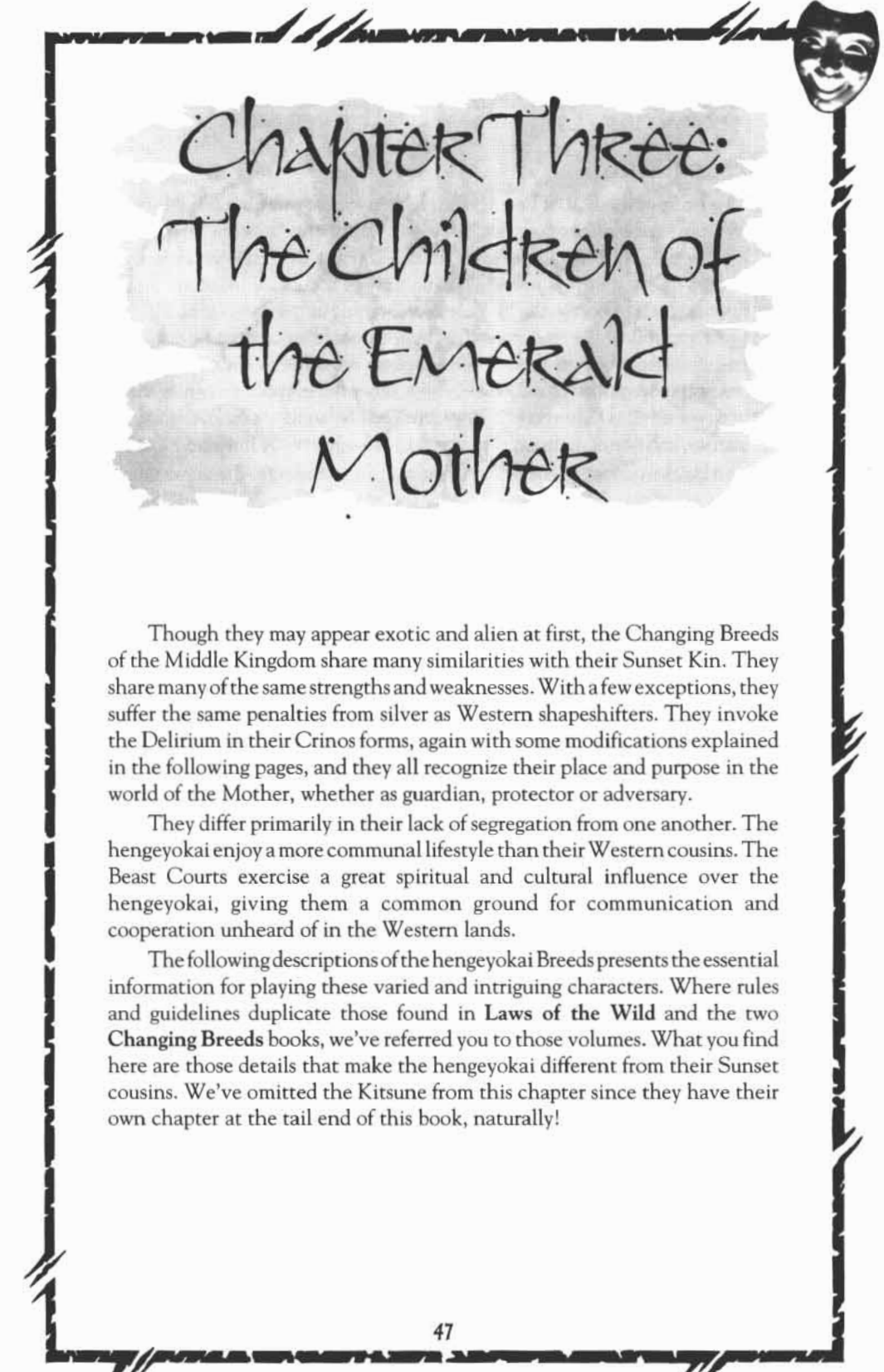
Yang World: The higher spirit world of life energy; the Near Umbra.

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

Yomi: The Wyrm's power; Yin Yomi spirits are Spectres, while Yang Yomi spirits are Banes.

Yomi World: A Wyrm-corrupted Realm made of equal parts Yin and Yang; a Hell for *shen*.





Chapter Three: The Children of the Emerald Mother

Though they may appear exotic and alien at first, the Changing Breeds of the Middle Kingdom share many similarities with their Sunset Kin. They share many of the same strengths and weaknesses. With a few exceptions, they suffer the same penalties from silver as Western shapeshifters. They invoke the Delirium in their Crinos forms, again with some modifications explained in the following pages, and they all recognize their place and purpose in the world of the Mother, whether as guardian, protector or adversary.

They differ primarily in their lack of segregation from one another. The hengeyokai enjoy a more communal lifestyle than their Western cousins. The Beast Courts exercise a great spiritual and cultural influence over the hengeyokai, giving them a common ground for communication and cooperation unheard of in the Western lands.

The following descriptions of the hengeyokai Breeds presents the essential information for playing these varied and intriguing characters. Where rules and guidelines duplicate those found in **Laws of the Wild** and the two **Changing Breeds** books, we've referred you to those volumes. What you find here are those details that make the hengeyokai different from their Sunset cousins. We've omitted the Kitsune from this chapter since they have their own chapter at the tail end of this book, naturally!



Hakken

Description

To many of the Sunset People, the Hakken appear indistinguishable from the Western tribe of Shadow Lords but with distinctly "Eastern" trappings. Where Western Garou may wonder at the concept of Shadow Lords that apparently follow the ways of the samurai and act according to a formal and unrelenting code of honor, the Hakken merely shrug at the shortsightedness of the *gaijin* and follow the traditions they have honored since their beginnings. Shapeshifters from outside the Middle Kingdom often fail to comprehend the actions and motivations of the Hakken, but other *hengeyokai* recognize these noble werewolves as followers of the ancient code of *bushido* or *budo*, the way of the warrior, and honor them as protectors and defenders of the Emerald Mother.

All Hakken subscribe to the way of the warrior, adhering to the samurai way of life in all things. This, if nothing else, sets them apart from their Western Shadow Lord counterparts, though there are some similarities between the two groups. Most Hakken look upon Shadow Lords with some contempt, seeing them as rude, uncouth barbarians lacking in polish and sophistication. While Hakken indulge in politics and delight in manipulation as much as any Shadow Lord, these *hengeyokai* pride themselves on their finesse and subtlety, as well as their mastery of a complex code of conduct that governs their slightest action.

All their formality and honorable conduct comes with a price, however. The wolf-strain has grown weak within the Hakken bloodlines. Each season sees fewer and fewer wolf-born Hakken and the howls of these samurai of the Emerald Mother grow fainter with each passing of the seasons. Homicidal blood dominates the Hakken population, and the ever-present threat exists that these noble warriors may lose the wolf altogether.

The roots of this tragedy lie in the Fourth Age, when the Middle Kingdom reeled with the shock of war — between *hengeyokai* courts, between humans and shapeshifters, and between those born of human stock and those who carried the blood of the wolf in their veins. During this time, the Hakken entered into a binding pact with Tsuki-yomi, promising to protect her lands and people — regardless of whether they were humans or shapeshifters. The territory of the Land of the Rising Sun was small and isolated. The Hakken, in their desire to consolidate their defenses, strengthened their ties with the human population, forming alliances with their leaders, serving in their armies and governments and, in all things, blending in with humans. The population of human Kinfolk grew at the expense of wolf Kinfolk, and the Hakken's tribal structure imitated the formal clan structure of feudal Japan. As the centuries passed, the legacy of the wolf was pushed into the background, sometimes forgotten entirely. The numbers of wolves in Japan — and of wolf Kinfolk — diminished until lupus Hakken became almost extinct. Now only a few lupus Hakken remain, primarily in Japan's northernmost islands.

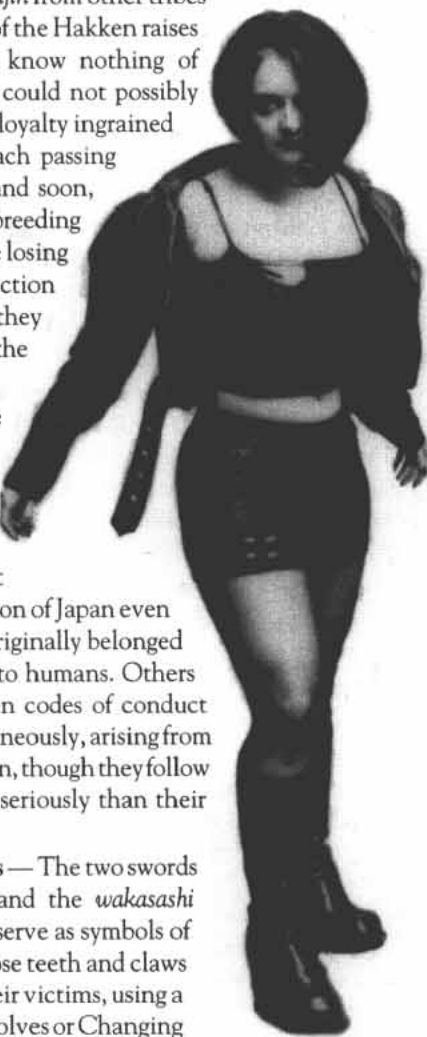


Although some Hakken realize the dreadful consequences that will certainly ensue from the loss of the wolf-strain, they have few remedies for their situation. Some courageous individuals propose a drastic but simple solution: bring new lupus blood into the mix. These Hakken hope to encourage lupus from Siberia, China and other parts of Asia and the Pacific to migrate to Japan in order to strengthen the Hakken wolf-blood. While the extremely formal, humanlike customs of the Hakken may put off some potential immigrants, others seem drawn by the mystery and beauty of the Land of the Rising Sun and its variegated and exotic Tapestry. In this bold movement may lay the salvation and preservation of the Hakken.

Unfortunately, for every Hakken who wishes to preserve the lupus strain by outbreeding, there are 10 Hakken who resist such drastic and outlandish measures. The thought of allowing *gaijin* from other tribes to mingle their bloodlines with that of the Hakken raises their hackles. Foreign werewolves know nothing of Japanese honor or family ties; they could not possibly understand the demands of duty and loyalty ingrained in the Hakken lineage. Yet with each passing year, the wolf-strain grows weaker and soon, even the staunchest opponents of outbreeding must admit the truth: the Hakken are losing the wolf and without that vital connection to the Emerald Mother's fierceness, they cannot long survive the coming of the next Age.

During the Fourth Age, the Hakken adopted a set of tenets that make up their version of the way of the warrior. They still act in accordance with these principles, for they enable the Hakken to interact successfully with the human population of Japan even today. Some hold that these tenets originally belonged to the werewolves and were taught to humans. Others believe that the human and Hakken codes of conduct developed independently but simultaneously, arising from common circumstances. Lupus Hakken, though they follow the code of the warrior, take it less seriously than their homid counterparts.

Benevolence and Unselfishness — The two swords worn by the Hakken, the *katana* and the *wakasashi* (known collectively as the *dai-sho*), serve as symbols of authority and rank. For Hakken, whose teeth and claws deal almost irreparable damage to their victims, using a sword in combat against other werewolves or Changing





Breeds is a sign of mercy. While drawing a weapon indicates that the Hakken intends to shed blood, the *dai-sho* cause far less damage to other hengeyokai than the natural weaponry of tooth and talon. For Hakken, wearing the *dai-sho* serves as a reminder that a warrior should stay his power and treat opponents with mercy whenever appropriate.

Because of this attitude, Hakken never bind spirits into their swords. Power brings responsibility to its wielder, and the wise use of power separates the true warrior from the barbarian. Just as a true follower of bushido would never turn away anyone who is hungry or otherwise in need of assistance, the Hakken warrior never strikes without due provocation (although provocation has a different meaning among werewolves) and then only with the minimum force necessary to make his point. Naturally, enemies of the Emerald Mother do not fall within the strictures of this tenet.

Straightforwardness — The most complex levels of subtlety and intrigue are indistinguishable from straightforward, simple behavior. This concept is often hard for *gaijin* to grasp. Hakken are at their most devious when they seem to be the most direct. An appearance of straightforwardness, unruffled calm or imperviousness to fear sets up an almost impenetrable mask behind which the Hakken may execute her most complicated machinations. At the same time, however, Hakken are very careful to say precisely what they mean. Those who grasp this concept find it easy to use the truth as a weapon. This tenet reveals the similarities that still exist between the Hakken and the Shadow Lords of the West. The symbol for this tenet is a jewel, whose simple appearance conceals many facets and hidden depths.

Wisdom — Just as the jewel symbolizes straightforwardness, the mirror stands for wisdom. As a symbol of reflection or self-knowledge, the mirror reminds each Hakken that he must first know his own strengths and weaknesses before he can come to know the strengths and weakness of others. This self-knowledge lies at the root of both love and hatred and informs all relationships the Hakken have with other creatures. Very often, that which the Hakken loves or despises in others is something he loves or despises in himself.

Taken together, the three tenets of benevolence, straightforwardness and wisdom form a triad of divine virtues, collectively referred to as *shintoku*.

Loyalty (*chushin*) — Hakken swear allegiance to their clan head, or *daimyo*. Most Hakken will willingly accept death rather than betray their lord. To violate this tenet is to lose face and honor beyond the possibility of redemption or atonement, and death becomes a far preferable choice than life without honor. Most Hakken, however, do not commit ritual suicide over minor infractions of this tenet. They leave that to their human samurai counterparts. A race already in danger of extinction cannot afford to adhere as strictly to this tenet as they otherwise might.

Quality in all things — Hakken strive for perfection in all that they do. To this end, they place great emphasis on personal appearance, politeness of conduct in social circumstances, correctness of speech and an appreciation of



beauty and culture. Whether involved in acts of creativity, vengeance, love or warfare, Hakken strive always to achieve the highest possible level of distinction.

Eternal obedience — Because Hakken believe that their *daimyo* possesses the wisdom necessary to act in accordance with the wishes of the Emerald Mother, they strive to obey their leader in all things. If, however, a Hakken finds herself unable to do so, either because she believes her *daimyo* acts in error or because she knows that she cannot follow a specific command, she may choose the path of the Ronin. Hakken who do so rarely act out of fear of the loss of personal honor; rather, they choose to become Ronin in order to preserve the honor of the clan, thus adhering to the precept of loyalty even when failing to honor the precept of obedience. Other Hakken choose the way of the Ronin if they believe that their *daimyo* no longer possesses the wisdom to lead with justice and honor. This course of action is never taken lightly, however, since it separates a Hakken from her clan. The Hakken are no less werewolves than their Western counterparts, and pack life is part of their make-up. They separate themselves from the group through choosing the way of the Ronin only in the most desperate of circumstances. Movies and stories have romanticized the path of the Ronin, particularly in Western culture where independence is valued over community; in truth, not only is it lonely, but it can carry serious social repercussions in Eastern cultures.

Acceptance of punishment for failure — Hakken rarely seek to excuse themselves from failed actions. Accepting responsibility for both success and failure is a part of the code of the warrior. Hakken who fail at their appointed tasks expect to receive punishment at the hands of their *daimyo* or his duly appointed representative. Hakken also believe that their *daimyo's* wisdom prevents the leader from meting out undue punishment. In like manner, a *daimyo* makes certain that any punishment she may deal out is appropriate to the offense and is neither too harsh nor too lenient.

Acceptance of a just fate for injustices done to others — Hakken see this tenet as the work of karma in their lives. Whenever a Hakken commits an unjust act, she realizes that in time, she will pay the price in her turn. In addition, Hakken realize that obedience to their *daimyo* may sometimes cause them to commit an act of injustice. Most Hakken place loyalty and obedience above personal karma, accepting their fate even as they obey the will of their lord. When given the choice between mere personal suffering or the suffering of the clan, Hakken will choose the former every time if it helps the clan.

Organization

Hakken organize themselves into clans that resemble tribal camps among Western Garou; these camps, however, center on hereditary family lines and allies. Family bonds are of utmost importance to Hakken, taking the place of the feeling of loyalty other Garou feel toward their packs. Most members of a Hakken clan are also blood relations, although a *daimyo* may grant clan membership to any worthy individual she desires to name. Hakken wisdom holds that a clan symbolizes the body: the *daimyo* is the heart, the warriors serve



as hands and feet, the elders act as the senses, while the common people of the clan are the body. Only when all parts of the body function as one does the whole body survive in good health. While Hakken make many demands on their Kinfolk, they prize them even more than their Shadow Lord counterparts and often wear their family *mon* in ceremonies and in battle. Lupus Hakken, on the other hand, organize themselves in more traditional packs and are more likely to join *hengeyokai sentai* than their homid counterparts.

Rather than engaging in costly clan wars, Hakken settle disputes between clans through ritual combat, usually fought one-on-one. Like the Zhong Lung, Hakken often use art or lore competitions in lieu of armed or unarmed combat to resolve differences. Hakken also take great pleasure in complex political or social schemes that take years to come to fruition, delighting in the additional complications and permutations sparked by the influx of technology. While Hakken value traditional ways highly, they are also among the first to take advantage of new developments in science and technology. Many Hakken are sophisticated hackers, occasionally rivaling the Western Glass Walkers in their grasp of high-tech corporate warfare. Despite their assimilation into the human world, Hakken retain much of their Garou heritage. Like werewolves in other parts of the world, they gather in *caerns*, hold moots and celebrate their connection to the Emerald Mother.

Hakken Lexicon

Ashigaru: Rank 0 Hakken.

Bushido: The way of the warrior; Hakken code of conduct.

Chushin: Loyalty.

Clan: Family sub-group within the Hakken tribe.

Daimyo: Head of a Hakken clan.

Mon: Family crest; often worn when going into battle.

Naru-kami: Lord of Thunder: Hakken totem.

Shintoku: Trio of divine virtues, consisting of benevolence, wisdom and straightforwardness.

While most Hakken live in Japan, a few have made their homes in other parts of Asia as well as in the western part of the United States and in other places along the Pacific Rim. Conflicts have arisen between Hakken and Glass Walkers in the more technologically advanced cities of Tokyo, Hong Kong and a few other major cities. Many Hakken are concerned that some Glass Walkers have joined the *yakuza*. Among the Ainu on Hokkaido, there are a few *Uktena*, but the Hakken do not consider them a concern.

The Hakken serve the *hengeyokai* courts primarily as elite warriors, often acting as generals who carry out their oaths of loyalty to court and *daimyo* with distinction. Happiest when working with *Kitsune* and *Tengu*, who likewise



have their roots in Japanese history and culture, Hakken sometimes bristle when required to serve with other hengeyokai Breeds. Their discipline and loyalty win out, however, and Hakken generally obey the will of the courts in all things regardless of personal feeling. The Zhong Lung hope that enforced association with other Changing Breeds will result in rekindling the primal aspects of the overly civilized Hakken Garou.

Traits

In most instances, Hakken correspond with Western Garou in terms of breeds, forms and auspices. They follow the character creation guidelines set out for Shadow Lords in **Laws of the Wild** for the most part, with a few modifications.

Though Hakken have no restrictions on Backgrounds, they commonly choose *Allies*, *Ancestors* and *Kinfolk*. Noble-born Hakken may bear other weapons in addition to the *dai-sho*. These additional weapons may be fetishes containing bound spirits, often Ancestor-spirits. Hakken suffer aggravated damage from silver.

Hakken follow the same guidelines for Rank and Renown as do other Garou. Storytellers may wish to award Renown only for extraordinary actions since Hakken are expected as a normal course of action to act with wisdom, glory and honor. Hakken who have not yet undergone a *Rite of Passage* are sometimes referred to as *ashigaru*, while most Hakken simply call themselves samurai rather than resorting to terms used by the *gaijin*.

Alternate Renown

Instead of the precepts of Honor, Glory and Wisdom, Storytellers may wish to assign Renown based on the *shintoku*, or divine virtues of Benevolence, Straightforwardness and Wisdom. While the other tenets of the warrior's code may contribute to the assigning of Renown, the three divine virtues should form the major standards of rewarding and punishing behavior.

Storytellers should also be more concerned with taking away Renown than with awarding it for Hakken. Dishonor, disobedience, foolishness or cowardice should carry twice the penalty for Hakken as for Western Garou.

Breeds

Hakken have the same breeds as other Garou. Metis Hakken, though rare, almost exclusively serve the Emerald Courts and follow the Mandates of the Emerald Mother. This is their way of preserving their honor and avoiding bringing disgrace upon their clan. The scarcity of lupus Hakken, however, is a major factor among Hakken. With the exception of a few creatures in the northern islands, wolves have almost completely disappeared from Japan. No one knows how many of these are actual Kinfolk. Although Hakken tend to seek out mates to maintain the purity of their bloodlines and to create or



reinforce political and social alliances, they also attempt to pursue bonds of love and passion in their matings, part of their desire to seek perfection in all things. Hakken consider it a major failing to mate with *gaijin*, since they believe that no outsider can comprehend their beliefs and traditions.

Homid Hakken begin play with an Initial Gnosis of 1; metis have an Initial Gnosis of 3; lupus begin with an Initial Gnosis of 5.

FORMS

Like Western Garou, Hakken have five forms: Homid, Glabro, Crinos, Hispo and Lupus. Only the Crinos form invokes the Delirium in mortals, and even then, many individuals in the Middle Kingdom have enough familiarity with the existence of *shen* that they may not react as strongly to the sight of a "man-wolf" as a Western man or woman. (Storytellers may make adjustments to the Delirium chart to account for this phenomenon.) Hakken receive Bonus Traits for their various forms according to the guidelines in **Laws of the Wild**.

Gifts

Hakken Garou begin play with three Gifts, one each for auspice, breed and tribe. Hakken sworn to the Courts and who follow the Way of Emerald Virtue begin play with a Hakken Gift, a general *hengeyokai* Gift, and a breed Gift. Hakken may also use standard Shadow Lord Gifts in addition to or instead of Hakken Gifts where appropriate or with Storyteller approval. As with most *hengeyokai* Gifts, many of these Gifts are taught by Ancestor-spirits. Unless otherwise indicated, *Occult* is the Ability for retests.

Basic Gifts

- **Dream of a Thousand Cranes** — This Gift grants good luck to the user for a short period of time. To invoke it, the Hakken must fold a single origami crane, then make a Social Challenge. With success, she gains a retest on any failed challenge for the rest of the scene.

- **Fair Path** — With this Gift, a Hakken may instantly achieve perfect grooming to avoid having to appear before her clan or daimyo or attend a moot in a disheveled or otherwise unseemly state. To do otherwise would amount to an act of dishonor, so many Hakken rely on the benefits of this Gift to counteract the messier physical effects of battle or long travel. The Hakken dips her hand in clean water (whether from a natural source or contained in a cup or other vessel), then makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Etiquette*). Success means that the Hakken loses any physical traces of dust, grime or sweat, her clothing appears neat and unwrinkled and her hair is perfectly groomed. She gains the benefit of two extra Social Traits in her interactions during the next scene.

- **Storm Winds Slash** — This Gift enables the Hakken to inflict a wound with the weapons of the *dai-sho* from a distance. Though Hakken do not consider it entirely honorable to use this Gift in combat against other *hengeyokai*, it is a favorite technique for battling *bakemono* and other less honorable



opponents. The Hakken uses her katana as if she has faced off against her target, even though she remains distanced from her foe. As she wields her sword, an actual wound appears on her target, reflecting her strike. To invoke this Gift she must designate an opponent within 50 yards of herself, spend a Gnosis Trait and win a Physical Challenge (retest with *Melee*) against her target. The attack can be dodged, if the target knows it's coming — entirely likely, as the Hakken would consider it highly dishonorable to strike someone in the back. A successful strike inflicts one level of lethal damage.

Intermediate Gifts

- **Dark of Night** — With this Gift, the Hakken can cause her opponent to experience temporary blindness. The victim sees only an impenetrable blackness. Using this Gift in formal duels guarantees a major loss of temporary Renown (usually four points) and does not allow the user to gain Renown from winning the duel. To invoke this Gift, the Hakken empties a vial of ink, and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Subterfuge*). With success, the victim suffers blindness (and all the penalties thereof) for one hour.

- **Living Treasure** — Hakken have a great appreciation for art and artistry, often collecting beautiful objects to adorn their homes. This Gift allows a Hakken to speak with any awakened spirit that may reside in such a "treasure," learning its history and place in the world. The Hakken touches the object, and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Etiquette*) in order to "persuade" the object to relate its tale. Hakken may use this Gift to learn the stories of common objects, convincing a sword to tell the story of its owners or a sake cup to speak of the person who last used it. How much information the object provides is up to the Storyteller.

Advanced Gifts

- **Divine Wind** — This powerful Gift calls forth a ferocious wind storm over a designated area, uprooting trees, overturning cars, propelling heavy objects into the air and causing massive physical damage — even destroying buildings and vehicles. The Hakken must spend at least one Rage Trait and succeed in a Physical Challenge (retest with *Enigmas*). Success causes a storm to rise over a one-mile radius. Each additional Rage Trait spent adds another mile. The Storyteller should decide how much damage is done to property within the area and how many unprotected humans are caught in the radius of the storm. The storm has a duration of only a few minutes, but its intensity mirrors that of many hurricanes.

Most Hakken honor Grandfather Thunder, whom they call Naru-kami, and it is his servants who occasionally teach this Gift. Once they revered Susanowo, Lord of Rain and Storms in the Shinto pantheon, but Susanowo's tsunamis and typhoons brought death as often as his rains brought life. His storms became more ferocious in both the waking world and the Mirror Lands, and the Hakken turned from him, believing that he had become corrupted by the Centipede. If Susanowo is indeed Wyrms-tainted, no one seems able to answer — any who go to learn have not returned.



Rites

Though Hakken make use of the same rites as most Garou (see **Laws of the Wild**), they most often perform rites of Death, Punishment and Accord. When they do perform Rites of Renown, these rituals take on an air of festive celebration. Seasonal rites for the Hakken pay tribute to the many cyclic patterns of existence, including the procession of life and death, the turning of the Wheel of Ages and the karmic cycle, in addition to the regular passage of seasons.

By far, the most solemn and portentous rite performed by Hakken is the *Rite of Seppuku*, or ritual suicide. In addition to acting as a protest against a *daimyo*'s erroneous policy or because a sworn leader has failed in her duty, the *Rite of Seppuku* also restores lost honor to the clan of the individual performing the rite. Hakken also undergo the *Rite of Seppuku* in order to join an honored *daimyo* in death, particularly if the Hakken feels unable to remain alive without her lord's example and counsel. A Hakken gains posthumous Renown — five Honor and two Wisdom — for this rite. Her clan, also, gains in esteem. If the individual's *daimyo* is living, custom dictates that the Hakken gain her lord's permission before undergoing the *Rite of Seppuku*. In general, Hakken believe that Rites of Death must be performed with scrupulous attention to detail in order to ensure that the departed individual remains with her clan in future lives.



Khan

Description

The Khan have a long and honorable history in the Middle Kingdom. Of all the werecats, they alone adhere to the principles of the Beast Courts and count themselves among the ranks of the hengeyokai. While other werecats prefer a more solitary existence or confine their associations primarily with those of their own species, the Khan place their sacred duty to the Emerald Mother above all other purposes.

During their long and illustrious history in the Middle Kingdom the Khan have fought long and hard against both creatures of the Centipede and against humans who have exceeded their assigned place in the universe. Khan strike swiftly and without remorse, upholding their duty as warriors of the Emerald Mother. At the same time they also fulfill their responsibilities as gatherers of the Adversary's secrets. Like the Tengu, the Khan concern themselves with searching out hidden things; unlike the wereravens, the weretigers do not lightly share their secrets, preferring instead to keep their knowledge for themselves alone.

Though their common history with the Middle Kingdom holds much honor and distinction, the present day offers a somber challenge for the Khan. Once the weretigers shared rulership with human nobles; today, they rule over a rapidly diminishing jungle. The crusades against the Yama Kings in the Second Age, the interspecies wars of the Fourth Age, in which Khan fought Khan, the modern struggles of the Fifth Age, and the steady depletion of their habitat — not to mention the near-extinction of their tiger-Kinfolk — have brought the noble Khan to the brink of annihilation. Relegated in number to a few hardy individuals who still prowls the jungles or a pitiful remnant imprisoned in zoos, the Khan have fallen far from their former position as lords of the jungle. Still, the Beast Courts of the hengeyokai hold these warriors and wisdom-seekers in great esteem and revere them for their past glories and their present vigilance. Even as they honor the Khan, however, other hengeyokai also grieve at the thought that the onset of the Sixth Age may be heralded by the disappearance of the Khan from the Middle Kingdom.

Even so, the Khan hold fiercely to their pride. They know they come from royal lineage, and as such, they act as befits royalty. They train themselves in the arts of martial combat and study the wisdom and lore of the ages. As is suitable for the lord of beasts, the Khan seek nothing less than perfection in all aspects of their lives.

Organization

In past times, both the Sunset Khan and the Khan of the Middle Kingdom formed one vast sultanate. Here, both groups met to exchange knowledge and ally themselves with one another for common causes. Their betrayal by their own sultan and the ensuing war caused the death of many Khan and brought



about a rift between Eastern and Western weretigers. The Middle Kingdom Khan of today have retreated into isolation from their Western relatives, seeking the stability and civility of the traditions of the Emerald Court to preserve their dwindling numbers. Khan of the Middle Kingdom feel more kinship with other hengeyokai than with either Sunset Khan or other Bastet tribes. Their memories are long and their Rage lives fiercely within them.

Khan generally travel alone, making an exception only when a new cub requires the companionship of a mentor to impart the knowledge and heritage of the tribe. This penchant for remaining apart from other Khan stems partly from necessity and partly from choice. Naturally sufficient unto themselves, the Khan also realize that their numbers are so sparse that they are reluctant to gather in large numbers, where a well-executed attack by the forces of the Centipede could deal devastating damage to their population.

Khan serve the Emerald Courts as warlords, generals and champions. Their fierceness and acute battle sense earns them the admiration of their peers and the respect of those who serve under their command.

Creatures of High War, Khan possess a keen sense of valor, and fight with dignity and ferocity. Nevertheless, they are not above using an opponent's weaknesses to achieve victory, especially when battling the servants of the Centipede. The Khan feel that their small numbers precludes many of the formalities of High War, particularly when the well-being of the Emerald Mother is at stake.

Traits

For the most part, the Khan follow the guidelines for character creation set forth in **Changing Breeds**





Book 1, with a few modifications. Khan who follow the Emerald Court have practiced courtly ways to the extent that they can overcome much of their tremendous Rage. Eastern Khan begin play with 3 Rage and 2 Willpower, thus enabling themselves to stem their tendency to rash behavior when necessary. Court Khan, unlike their Sunset relations, have access to any Background, including *Ancestors*, since the Courts of the Ancestors look with favor upon the Eastern weretigers and grant them their advice and counsel. Likewise, Khan may purchase the Bastet-specific *Den Realm* Background. Only Khan who serve in a mountain sentai may purchase the *Totem* Background.

Like the Sunset Khan, the Khan of the Emerald Court may only step sideways through the use of the Advanced Gift *Walking Between Worlds*. Because of this limitation, many Khan seek out worthy comrades among the other hengeyokai for the purpose of forming a mountain sentai and thus gaining the ability to traverse the Wall and experience for themselves the wonders and mysteries of the Tapestry.

Eastern Khan who do not subscribe to the tenets of the Emerald Courts use a Renown system similar to those of their Western cousins (see **Changing Breeds Book 1** for Renown guidelines). Most Khan of the Middle Kingdom, however, follow the Path of Emerald Virtue and receive Renown as a Fist. This gives them the opportunity to channel their Rage in battling the Adversary or in seeking vengeance for the deaths of their animal-Kin.

Breeds

Feline Khan are dwindling to such an extreme that weretigers wishing to bolster the tiger-bloodline have penetrated breeding projects in China to mate with tigers raised in captivity. The Khan cubs born from such a mating, while enjoying a higher rate of survival due to their captive state, find it more difficult to adjust to the ways and traditions of the Beast Courts after their Khan relatives come to steal them away. Felines begin play with a Gnosis of 6.

Though more numerous, Homid Khan remain highly selective about their mates. In the past, Khan would choose partners from among the Chinese and Korean nobility, particularly those with warrior ancestry. Homid Khan begin play with a Gnosis of 2.

Modern times have made such fine distinctions difficult, so the Khan must search long and diligently for worthy individuals among the densely populated countries of the Middle Kingdom. Such a search among the billion souls of China alone can be very difficult quest indeed. Often, the quest for a suitable mate takes second place to duties to the Emerald Mother and the Beast Courts. Because of this, two Khan sometimes turn to each other for solace and comfort, occasionally giving birth to a metis cub.

Metis Khan, raised entirely within the Beast Courts, know no other life except that of service to the Emerald Mother and no goal other than responsibility. These often-fanatic warriors fight with exceptional ferocity, making up for their deformities by the white-hot flame of their Rage and their



incomparable courage in battle. There is no other life than duty for metis. Metis Khan begin play with a Gnosis of 4.

FORMS

Like other Bastet, the Khan have five forms. Changing from one form to another necessitates a similar progress to that followed by the Garou and requires the same amount of time. Non-dedicated clothing is usually destroyed by the shift progression through the forms unless removed before beginning the Change.

Homid

In human form, Khan appear with all the authority of their noble place within the Beast Courts. Both men and women are generally taller than average, with muscular, attractive physiques and an unmistakably charismatic presence. Despite their greater size, Khan in this form retain an uncanny grace that renders them both attractive and imposing.

Sukto

Instead of exhibiting the coarse features found in the Garou's equivalent Glabro form, Khan in their Sukto, or near-human, form acquire an exotic set of characteristics. Their cheekbones become more sharply defined, their canine teeth elongate and vestigial whiskers appear on the faces of both males and females. A Suto's eyes develop catlike slits, while hair lengthens and takes on a distinctively striped pattern. The fingernails resemble retractable claws and the body, in general, becomes longer and more supple. The total effect induces a sense of intimidating fascination, sometimes tinged with eroticism, causing many mortals to believe that they are in the presence of one of the Celestial spirits.

Crinos

Khan in Crinos form, though not as powerful as their Garou counterparts, nevertheless cut an imposing and fearsome figure. This form is particularly suitable for battle, and most Khan assume Crinos as their customary war-form. Crinos Khan stand nine feet tall, yet retain their catlike grace even in this massive size and shape. The Crinos form induces a milder form of the Delirium, since this was not the preferred form used for hunting humans during the time of the Impergium. (Storytellers should allow characters normally subject to the Delirium to move up one level on the Delirium Chart given in **Laws of the Wild** in addition to any modifications they might receive for possessing the *Occult Ability* or for having tribal ancestors.)

Chatro

Khan in Chatro form hearken back to their primeval ancestors, the smilodon or saber-tooth tiger. Their mass increases to four times normal while they become twice the size of a normal tiger. Like their ancient ancestor, Chatro Khan bear the distinctive and deadly saber-teeth. Mortals who encounter a Khan in this form suffer the full effects of the Delirium since this was the favored form for culling the human population during the Impergium.



Feline

Khan in Feline form are imposing and intimidating, like normal tigers, but more so. Though not as large as when in Chatro form, feline Khan are still somewhat larger in size than normal tigers. They, too, exude an aura of power and grandeur. Khan enjoy using this form to lure poachers into a trap.

Bonus Traits

Homid: No Trait adjustment

Sokto: *Ferocious* x 2, *Quick*, *Tough* x 2; Negative Trait *Feral*

Crinos: *Brawny*, *Ferocious* x 2, *Nimble*, *Quick* x 2, *Relentless* x 2, *Tough* x 2; Negative Traits *Bestial* x 2, *Tactless*

Chatro: *Enduring*, *Ferocious* x 4, *Quick* x 2, *Relentless* x 2; Negative Traits *Bestial* x 2, *Feral*

Feline: *Ferocious* x 2, *Quick* x 2, *Tireless* x 3; Negative Trait: *Feral* x 3

Gifts

Khan of the Emerald Courts begin play with three Gifts: one common hengeyokai Gift, one breed Gift (chosen from the Garou or Bastet breed gifts) and one Khan Gift. Most Khan choose Gifts that center on combat and purity, though stealth-related Gifts are also popular among the weretigers.

Basic Gifts

- **Catfeet** — As the Lupus Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Crushing the Centipede** — The Khan developed this Gift to aid them in their constant struggle against the minions of the Centipede and the Yomi Worlds. To invoke this Gift, the Khan calls upon Heaven's purity to render his hands or paws nearly impervious to damage, thus making it possible for him to strike enemies possessing special defenses such as spiny skin or acid coating. To invoke this Gift, spend a Gnosis Trait and make a Physical Challenge (retest with *Medicine*). Success grants the Khan gains two additional Healthy health levels for the duration of the combat. Additionally, damage that would be inflicted by making skin-to-skin contact through the hands (such as spines, acidic skin or the like) inflicts only half the normal damage. The Khan use this Gift primarily when facing off against an enemy whose skin causes harm when touched, but occasionally, one of the weretigers may use this Gift in non-combat situations requiring them to touch or grab something that would otherwise harm them — a flaming object or a cake of lye. Outside of combat, the Gift lasts for one scene.
- **Gift of the Cricket** — Although the Khan place great importance in battle and the arts of war, they are first and foremost gatherers of information, particularly about their enemies. This Gift enables a Khan to hear across streets or through walls as clearly as if they were in the same room with the sound, like



the cricket, which enters quietly and disturbs no one. The Khan designates a point within 250 yards of his location, then makes a Static Gnosis Challenge against the local Wall rating. If successful, the Khan may eavesdrop on any conversations or sounds taking place within the designated area for the duration of one scene. The Khan must either be able to see the target site or, if she cannot, must be familiar enough with the area to form a psychic connection with it. For example, "the workroom of the swordsmith who made my katana" might qualify as a target area, while "the lair of the Kumo drug-lord," would not meet the qualifications unless the Khan had, in fact, visited that place.

- **Heart of Fury** — As the Ahroun Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Razor Claws** — As the Ahroun Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Sense of the Prey** — As the Ragabash Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Sense the Truth** — As the Philodox Gift: *Truth of Gaia* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Intermediate Gifts

• **Devour the Unclean** — As the Theurge Gift: *Spirit Drain* (see *Laws of the Wild*). The Khan may use this gift only on Mukade or other Banes. This power purifies the energy drained, to some extent.

• **Paws of the Raging Spirit-Tiger** — This Gift comprises one of the Khan's greatest secrets and serves as a masterful form of attack in battle against the spawn of the Centipede. When a Khan invokes this Gift, she gloves her claws in a sheath of sparking energy from the spirit world. This energy enables the Khan to attack enemies in the spirit world without stepping sideways or otherwise entering the Tapestry. The Khan must be able to see the creatures in order to attack them. Spirits are reluctant to teach this Gift and do so only under the direct command of a Minister of Heaven. Because of this reluctance, most Khan must learn the Gift from other Khan — at the price of being on the receiving end of a demonstration of its power. Any damage inflicted is based on that which is typical for the Khan's form. The Khan spends a Gnosis Trait. Success causes the Gift to go into effect, manifested as sparking light that changes color from blue-white, to green, to yellow, to red, fading to pink and finally winking out — the change happens with each turn, lasting for six turns of battle.

• **Punishment from the Moon** — As the Ahroun Gift: *Silver Claws* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Advanced Gifts

• **Heaven Thunder Hammer** — With this Gift, a Khan may channel Heaven's power into a mighty blow, shattering walls, felling trees or demolishing vehicles. Much like a battering ram in its force, this strike destroys almost anything in its path. Spend three Rage Traits, two Gnosis Traits and make a Physical Challenge (retest with *Primal-Urge*). Success means that the Khan's next blow covers a five-foot radius, striking anyone or anything in its path. Creatures hit by this blow suffer four levels of damage; objects in the path of the



blow are automatically destroyed (at the Storyteller's discretion). Gifts such as *Paws of the Raging Spirit* or *Razor Claws* may add their effects to this Gift. After using this Gift, the Khan must petition the Tiger General of the Ministers of Heaven to use it again. The request is not usually denied, but gaining an audience can take time.

Rites

The Khan do not place as much emphasis on learning rites as other hengeyokai, believing that others are better suited to rituals and formal appeals to spirits. When Khan do learn rites, they usually prefer rites of purification or exorcism. Because Khan find it so difficult to traverse the Tapestry, they seldom encounter spirits and, thus, feel reluctant to petition those they do not know for favors or blessings. In addition, the Khan's sometimes overweening pride often precludes them from depending on fetishes and dedicated objects. They feel that other hengeyokai should take on the responsibility of performing necessary rites while the Khan concentrate on their forté — fighting the good fight. Only in the most dire circumstances will a Khan admit to needing help from the spirit world.



KUMO

Description

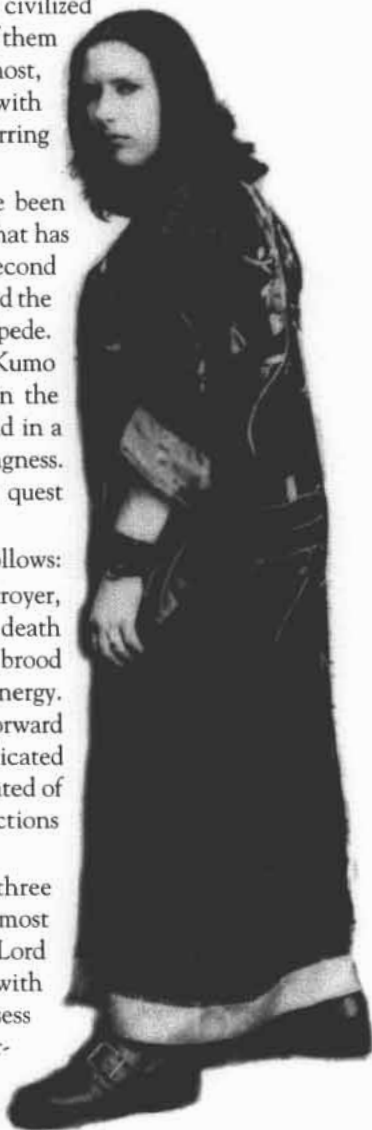
The werespiders of the Middle Kingdom resemble their Sunset cousins, the Ananasi, with one major difference: all of the Kumo serve the three-fold aspect of the Centipede. Any Kumo who revere Queen Ananasa or the Emerald Mother keep their presence a tight secret, lest their Wyrms-serving brothers and sisters annihilate them. Even though they bear the taint of the Wyrms, Kumo possess a keen intelligence, a thirst for civilized congress and an abiding curiosity. Some of them are willing to speak with other *shen*; most, however, remain reticent to deal directly with the Courts of the Emerald Mother, preferring to carry out their activities in secret.

Three allied families of Kumo have been responsible for much of the corruption that has tainted the Middle Kingdom since the Second Age. Each of the three families has adopted the patronage of one of the aspects of the Centipede. One of their goals is the eradication of all Kumo who do not serve the Wyrms or share in the werespiders' vision of enfolding the world in a dark shroud of webs that hold only nothingness. Their success since they undertook this quest has been remarkable.

The three families of Kumo are as follows:

Marawa's Brood — Called the Destroyer, Marawa is the aspect of the Wyrms bent on death and destruction. Those who belong to his brood prefer the taste of victims steeped in Yin energy. Their favored course of action is straightforward slaughter and mayhem. Completely dedicated to the Wyrms, they are the least complicated of the Kumo, making their actions and reactions easy to predict.

Children of Nareau — Of the three families, this Kumo group represents the most balanced aspect of the Wyrms. Called the Lord of Spiders, Nareau has much in common with the Weaver and many of his children possess vast amounts of knowledge about Weaver-related things. Nareau's children have an insatiable curiosity; their thirst for learning imparts wisdom to them, as





well. Nevertheless, they retain a cruel streak and delight in imprisoning and torturing their victims for a prolonged period of time, squeezing every bit of information out of them before finally granting them the small mercy of death.

Blessed of Rati — These Kumo serve the aspect of the Wyrms closest to the Wyld and to the Yang Realms. Chaos and caprice, lust and madness are the touchstones of the Blessed. They enjoy the taste of Yang energies and select victims who satiate their thirst. Lady Rati, whose patronage they seek, takes on the appearance of a lasciviously beautiful woman, the embodiment of lust and desire. A few *shen* have claimed to have met Lady Rati and exchanged certain... favors for knowledge. The Kumo find such rumors — from the living, no less — highly amusing.

Kumo dwell throughout China, Japan and other parts of Asia, preferring to make their nests in deserted places — buildings, cave systems and ancient ruins. Aside from the occasional dispute over sacrificial victims, sacred places and similar details, the three families coexist in relative amity, realizing that they need to work together in the face of the many forces arrayed against them. Reports that some Kumo have made their homes among the Ainu of northern Japan have yet to meet with confirmation.

Organization

Although some Kumo live in solitude, nesting in dark, hidden places and coming out only to breed, feast or execute their latest scheme, other Kumo prefer the society of their own Kin and kind. Small Kumo villages exist, populated by an elder leader, several young Kumo and their Kinfolk. Kumo place great emphasis on age and wisdom. Leaders are not chosen from among the most skilled in combat; rather, the oldest Kumo in a group or village is automatically treated as the leader and obeyed accordingly. Leadership disputes are resolved through a trial by "combat" in the Endless Maze, an elaborate labyrinth of passages and webs created by the younger Kumo in some isolated location — often an abandoned building. The two contenders enter the maze, but only one comes out alive.

Kumo mate frequently and with great eagerness. Those belonging to Rati have a particularly lusty streak and exercise their desires as often as possible with humans and Kinfolk alike, usually quite indiscriminately. Two Kumo who wish to produce a child must gain permission from an elder, who will give permission for this momentous deed only if the local tribe has sufficient members to withstand the loss of the mother during the birth process. In times of need, not even the prestige accorded the birth of a *metis* Kumo outweighs the necessity for survival of the species.

Kumo rarely have contact with other *shen* unless such a meeting is unavoidable. Occasionally, their curiosity and inquisitive nature draws them to other *hengeyokai*, but they treat these encounters with wariness and caution. Kumo enjoy traveling through the realms of the Tapestry, and some have even created nests in the Umbra. The werespiders do not attack other *shen* on sight,



unlike many less intelligent servants of the Wyrms. Kumo usually gear up for battle when someone or something threatens either their villages or their food supply. Angry Kumo make formidable opponents, and hengeyokai who suspect that they have roused the werespiders to action should seriously consider augmenting their numbers — just in case.

Blood Trait Effects Table

Number of Traits	Effect
4-6	Normal activity
7-8	Kumo moves at half speed; actions take twice as long; must spend Willpower Trait to perform strenuous activity, such as combat
9	Kumo moves at one-quarter speed; actions take three times as long; must spend Willpower Trait to perform even moderate activities
10	Kumo must spend one Willpower Trait for any action, even the slightest movement

Note: An engorged Kumo may choose at any time to burn enough Blood Traits, which simply disappear, in order to become active.

Traits

Follow the general guidelines for character creation as given in **Laws of the Wild** with the following changes. Kumo have no auspices, nor do they follow the Emerald Virtues. They gain Renown and Rank, however, as if they are Ragabash Garou. Other hengeyokai and Bête do not acknowledge a Kumo's rank except to rate them according to the danger they present. The more dangerous a Kumo seems, the more respect she gains as an adversary. No Court hengeyokai shows deference to a Kumo, regardless of the werespider's Rank.

Instead of Rage, Kumo have a Blood Pool. As with vampires, Kumo use blood to heal themselves or to gain extra actions, spending Blood Traits in the same fashion as other hengeyokai use Rage. A Kumo begins play with 4 Blood Traits, but may accumulate up to 10 Traits before becoming engorged and lethargic. Kumo who have sated themselves with blood must spend a Willpower Trait before engaging in any activity — even walking around. They may reduce their Blood Pool by burning Blood Traits.

Kumo suffer no ill effects from spending all their Blood Traits, except that they experience hunger pangs and usually want to feed. A hungry Kumo heals at the same rate as a normal human and may not take extra actions, but suffers no actual penalties for lack of Blood Traits.

Kumo may spend one Blood Trait per turn, so that in one combat turn she may get an extra action or heal herself of one health level of damage, but not



both. Kumo may eat and digest flesh (and some individuals actually enjoy the taste of raw meat), but gain no nutritive value from it. They need blood for survival and health; the stronger, the better, and *shen* blood can be quite strong indeed. Blood also allows the Kumo to spin webs; spending a Blood Trait allows a Kumo to create webbing in any form that has spinnerets.

Kumo are fickle and flighty as a group; thus, Kumo characters begin play with only 2 Willpower Traits. They may not purchase the *Allies* Background because they have a hard time maintaining stable and reliable friendships. Likewise, Kumo may not purchase the *Pure Breed* background because of their promiscuous mating habits. Otherwise, Kumo may have any other Background.

The Kumo enjoy an immunity to silver; unlike other hengeyokai, they take no damage thanks to the blessing of their patron. Fire, radiation and the claws and teeth of other supernatural creatures cause aggravated damage. The Kumo have a special vulnerability to weapons crafted from *hong mu*, an extremely rare and aromatic red rosewood found in the Middle Kingdom's forests. Werespiders regard anyone carrying such a weapon as an automatic enemy. Like their Sunset cousins the Ananasi, Kumo are especially vulnerable to poison and diseases. Kumo characters must spend a Blood Trait in addition to making a Physical Challenge to resist taking damage from poisons or disease.

Breeds

Kumo have three breeds: homid, arachnos and metis. Unlike most other hengeyokai, Kumo do not consider metis members as shameful or lesser creatures, despite the fact that every metis infant must eat its way out of its mother's womb, killing her in the process.

Homid

Most, but not all, homid Kumo come from matings between a Kumo and a human Kinfolk. Usually, a Kumo parent watches any offspring from a casual affair from afar, making plans to spirit the child away when it reaches puberty. Occasionally, Kumo also snatch any siblings of the Kumo child, for reasons best left for speculation. Some Kumo children remain undiscovered until their Change comes upon them, leaving them to puzzle out for themselves what they have become. Homid Kumo may choose one beginning Gift from those available to their homid Sunset cousins. (See **Changing Breeds Book 3** for available Gifts.)

Beginning Gnosis: 2

Arachnos

After the fashion of their Ananasi counterparts, spider-born Kumo feast upon their normal siblings in order to gain the bulk they will need for their Aghora form. In most cases, an adult Kumo recognizes an Arachnos Kumo early in its life and makes certain it has the sustenance it needs. Arachnos Kumo occur in slightly fewer numbers than their Sunset cousins. Arachnos Kumo may choose one beginning Gift from those available to Arachnid Ananasi who are of the Hatar faction. (See **Changing Breeds Book 3** for available Gifts.)



Beginning Gnosis: 3

Metis

The perverse societal customs of the Kumo grant admiration and prestige to the rare metis Kumo. The violent death of the Kumo mother during the birth process is counted as an homage to their patron, while the birthing acts as an initiation rite granted only to a fortunate few and symbolic of the intimate bond between creation and destruction. Since metis Kumo, like most other metis hengeyokai, are sterile, Kumo elders only allow such a birth during times of relative peace — or dire necessity. Otherwise, the line would soon become extinct. So, while matings between Kumo are usually discouraged, those that do occur incur no penalties (other than the inevitable sacrifice of the mother's own life). Metis Kumo are born in their Lilian form. Metis may choose one beginning Gift from those available to metis Garou. (See **Laws of the Wild** for available Gifts.)

Beginning Gnosis: 4

FORMS

The Kumo have four forms, like their cousins, the Ananasi: Homid, Lilian, Aghora (Pithus) and Thousand Fangs (Crawlerling). Both the Lilian and Aghora forms invoke the Delirium in mortals who encounter them. The Thousand Fangs causes the Delirium in humans who witness the transformation process.

Homid

Kumo in Homid form look no different from normal humans, though they may tend toward an otherworldly gracefulness in their movements. Their physical build runs the gamut of possibilities, while their features display the characteristics of their origins in the Middle Kingdom.

Lilian

The Lilian form of the Kumo usually arouses feelings of disgust in other creatures and terror in the unenlightened. Most Lilian forms are bipedal, standing between 8 and 11 feet tall, and possess a distended belly and six arms. A slightly enlarged head has eight glowing eyes. Dark chitin and thick prickly fur covers the whole body. Two large spinnerets protrude from the Lilian's rear, while a swollen chest holds two sets of lungs — one for breathing air, the other for underwater respiration. Aside from these basic features, the Lilian form may have many variations combining the human and spider form. The face may seem almost human (except for the octet of eyes), the torso may be human in form and covered in chitin, or the arms and legs may have long, tarantula-like fur. These variations are purely cosmetic, since all Kumo have the same statistics in Lilian form, regardless of their appearance.

Aghora

Equally repulsive, the Kumo's giant-spider form stands approximately four feet tall at the shoulders and resembles a bloated gargantuan spider the size of a VW Bug, what some call the "Ohmygawditsagiantspider!!!" form. Arachnos



Kumo take on the appearance of a monstrous version of their birth species when in Aghora form; other Kumo may choose the type of spider they resemble, but they maintain that form throughout their lives. Aghora Kumo do not possess the water-breathing apparatus of their Lilian forms, but their mandibles drip poison. They may also spin webs having the strength of steel cables. Victims caught in such a web must succeed in a Static Physical Challenge against nine Traits to break free. The Kumo must spend a Blood Trait in order to create a web of this material proportionate to its own size. Aghora Kumo are naturally poisonous, regardless of their species. Though they do not carry reserves of toxin within them, they exude a natural poison with each bite. Anyone bitten by a Kumo in Aghora form must make a Physical Challenge; losing means the loss of a health level to aggravated injury. Dropping to Incapacitated means the victim is unconscious and at the mercy of the Kumo

Bonus Traits

Homid: No Trait adjustment

Lilian: *Ferocious, Tough x 2, Dexterous x 2, Agile*; Negative Trait: *Repugnant x 2, Callous*

Aghora: *Brawny x 2, Ferocious, Nimble, Quick x 2, Relentless x 2*; Negative Traits *Bestial, Feral, Repugnant x 2*

Thousand Fang: *Dexterous x 2, Quick x 2, Agile x 2*; Negative Traits *Delicate x 2*

Thousand Fang

Although a single small spider usually incites fear only in individuals with a strong phobia of insects or spiders, the sight of hundreds of tiny spiders frequently invokes such a response — or at least raises the hairs (or hackles) on the back of the neck. Add to this the sight of so many spiders apparently acting in concert, as if part of a group mind, and the sight is truly terrifying. The Thousand Fang form of the Kumo has, at best, an unsettling effect on those who see it. At worst, this form rivals that of the Lilian and Aghora in revulsion.

When a Kumo assumes this form, her body breaks down into hundreds of tiny spiders. Each Strength Trait an individual possesses in her Homid form gives her approximately 100 spiders; a Kumo character with five Strength-related Traits, therefore, devolves into 500 or so small spiders in Thousand Fang form. Although it is possible to crush many individual spiders with a well-placed foot or paw, only the extermination of every single spider destroys the Kumo's effectiveness. If even one spider survives, the Kumo may begin the arduous process of devouring other normal spiders until she builds up enough bulk to reform her normal self.

Thousand Fang Kumo have no Strength or Stamina-related Physical Traits or any Social Traits. Their Mental Traits remain undiminished and they are able to act with a group mind. Able to see through each individual spider's eyes, the Kumo gains multiple perspectives in perception. (Storytellers may



require a Kumo in Thousand Fang form to make a Mental Challenge in order to make sense of what she sees if the surroundings are particularly chaotic or confusing.)

If more than 30% of the spiders are destroyed, the Kumo's bulk is reduced when she reassumes her normal form; she may, of course, restore her normal size by feeding. (Storytellers should decide how many Physical Traits are temporarily lost through attrition; these Traits may be refreshed through time spent feeding.)

Kumo in Thousand Fang form spin webs after the fashion of their spider species, though the number of spiders involved allows them to cover a large area with webs in a relatively short period of time.

Gifts

Like other Changing Breeds, Kumo characters begin play with three Gifts: one Kumo Gift, one breed Gift and one Ragabash Gift. Storytellers may allow Kumo players to learn Gifts from other hengeyokai tribes or breeds that emulate trickery, mind-reading or other forms of stealth and deception. They may also pick up Gifts from their Sunset cousins, especially those of the Hatar faction. In addition, Kumo have some gifts unique to their species.

Basic Gifts

- **Fangs of Madness** — This Gift merely allows another type of toxic attack to the werespider, though it is not a physical poison. By invoking this Gift, a Kumo endows her bite with the ability to inflict a mental sickness on her opponent. The character spends a Gnosis Trait and a Willpower Trait and makes a Mental Challenge against her target. Success means that the target gains an immediate derangement of the Kumo's choice along with taking physical damage from the bite. This derangement can be "healed" through Gifts of cleansing or healing. The damage from the bite itself must be healed separately. The effects last until healed.

- **Nimbleness** — Known for their agility and athleticism, the Kumo can enhance their ability to leap and dodge through this Gift. The Kumo spends a Gnosis Trait and gains the bonus Traits *Nimble* x 2. This Gift lasts for one scene.

- **Shadow Step** — This Gift allows the Kumo to create an illusion of herself in one place while she is in another location. When she activates this Gift, the Kumo seems to fade from sight, reappearing in different place — about two feet away. In actuality, the Kumo does not change position, she merely "displaces" her image. The player must succeed in a Mental Challenge versus any opponents in her area to invoke this Gift successfully (retest with *Subterfuge*). Any subsequent attacks upon the Kumo by enemies who attack her illusionary self automatically fail. Enemies who possess keen senses (such as Garou in lupus form) or who have activated a Gift or fetish that allows them to sense invisible creatures or objects may attempt an attack, though they must bid two Traits. This Gift lasts for a number of turns equal to the Kumo's current Gnosis rating.



• **Replenishment of the Flesh** — With this Gift, the Kumo can heal herself of damage by summoning a host of normal spiders in her area and absorbing them into her body, thus adding their mass to her own. No test is necessary, but the Kumo may take no other action while absorbing the summoned creatures. The Kumo heals one health level per Gnosis Trait spent.

• **Spittle of Corrosion** — This Gift allows a Kumo to spit her corrosive digestive fluids at an opponent in battle, causing aggravated damage to her target if successful. The Kumo spends a Blood Trait to activate his digestive fluids and make them properly acidic, then makes a Physical Challenge to spit at her opponent (retest with *Brawl*). A successful strike causes one level of aggravated damage. This Gift lasts for one combat, after which the Kumo must spend another Blood Trait to re-activate it.

Intermediate Gifts

• **Hideous Bite** — As the Ahroun Gift: *Clenched Jaw* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Snare of Beauty** — This Gift allows a Kumo to enhance her physical appearance so that she is almost irresistible to anyone she meets, regardless of gender or preference. The Kumo spends a Blood Trait and makes a Social Challenge. Success grants her the following bonus Traits for the rest of the session: *Alluring* x 2, *Seductive* x 2.

• **Web Tremors** — This Gift enables the Kumo to make use of the spirit webs around him to alert him to any spies, whether in the physical world or in the Mirror Lands. The Kumo spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental Challenge to activate the Gift. Thereafter, the Storyteller should alert the character of any spies, eavesdroppers or lurkers in the immediate vicinity — including those in the Umbra. *Web Tremors* only alerts the Kumo to presences nearby, not what kind they are. This Gift lasts for as long as the Kumo remains in one localized area. A change in location (such as leaving the room) ends the Gift.

Advanced Gifts

• **Elder Wisdom** — This powerful Gift enables the Kumo to speak directly with Marawa, Nareau or Rati, the patrons of their species. Invoking this power entails some risk, however, for the Lord or Lady who responds may just as easily punish the petitioner as reward him. If the responding patron is feeling magnanimous, he or she may provide the Kumo with some appropriate information. For example, the Lady Rati may offer a clue as to how best to seduce or compromise an important person, while Lord Nareau might impart the answer to a puzzling riddle or offer advice on how best to prolong a victim's agony without actually killing him or her. The Kumo makes an appropriately elaborate obeisance to her desired patron, then spends a Gnosis Trait and a Willpower Trait and makes a Static Social Challenge (difficulty seven Traits; retest with *Primal-Urge*). If successful, the petitioned totem spirit arrives within a few minutes — to the benefit or detriment of the character. This Gift may only be used once per session.



Rites

Kumo place great emphasis on rites, just as other hengeyokai. They have their own variations of Mystic Rites, Rites of Renown and other rituals, including a special rite celebrating the birth of a metis Kumo. Each of the three families has a minor rite to honor their patron. Some Kumo elders maintain that Nareau, Marawa or Rati occasionally appears when a rite in their honor has proven particularly pleasing to them. Most Kumo rites involve some sort of sacrifice, whether of knowledge, blood, Gnosis, or the life of a victim (willing or unwilling). Though they do not openly admit it to other hengeyokai, the Kumo are credited with creating the *Rite of the Goblin Chrysalis* (See Chapter Four).

Nagah

Description

Silent slayers, graceful assassins, the Nagah, or wereserpents, represent the twin principles of creation and destruction. Chosen by the Courts to act as judges and executioners, the Nagah are responsible for the cosmic Balance when the Centipede turned away from the Emerald Mother. They spend their time observing their fellow hengeyokai, striking swiftly and accurately to enforce the Mandates when no one else will do so. For this, they are both respected and feared — mostly feared.

Among the hengeyokai, Nagah are perhaps the most rare. Few of the Eastern shapers are so fortunate — or unfortunate — to meet one. The Nagah cover their movements carefully, lest too many people remember their existence. Why are these shapeshifters so scrupulous about concealing their presence in a society that shows more than a little tolerance for most supernaturals?

The roots of the Nagah's reticence lie in the wars of the Fourth Age. When the Changing Breed of the East warred against each other under the belief that the Centipede had tainted their brothers and sisters, the Nagah came under brutal attack by the other hengeyokai. Only the Okuma, or werebears, suffered more. The shapeshifters reasoned, *If corruption is all around us, then the judges must be corrupt for allowing this to happen.* The awakening of the Zhong Lung saved the Nagah from extinction — barely.

As a result, the Nagah have allowed rumors to spread of their demise, preferring that others believe they no longer exist — or that, if they do, their numbers are so small as to be insignificant. Only rarely do the Nagah show themselves to other hengeyokai, and few of the Eastern shapeshifters request their presence as part of a sentai. The wereserpents seem content with this, preferring to keep their own counsel unless absolutely necessary.

Nagah Characters

Nagah are included in this book for the sake of completeness, but their numbers are so rare — only 400 are believed to exist in all Asia currently — that Storytellers should restrict the numbers of wereserpents as player characters in their chronicles. While Nagah make excellent antagonists or adversaries, too many wereserpents can seriously undermine a game and, worse, provide an unbalanced picture of the composition of the Emerald Courts. Exercise judgement when deciding whether or not to allow Nagah characters in your game.

Nagah have assumed an almost-mythical status among hengeyokai. Few speak of them at all, and when they do, they use metaphors or poetic euphemisms to do so: “the shadows that lengthen,” “the sighing twilight,” “the



whisper of the river," "the rustle in the bamboo." The Nagah, in turn, stay as far from perception as possible.

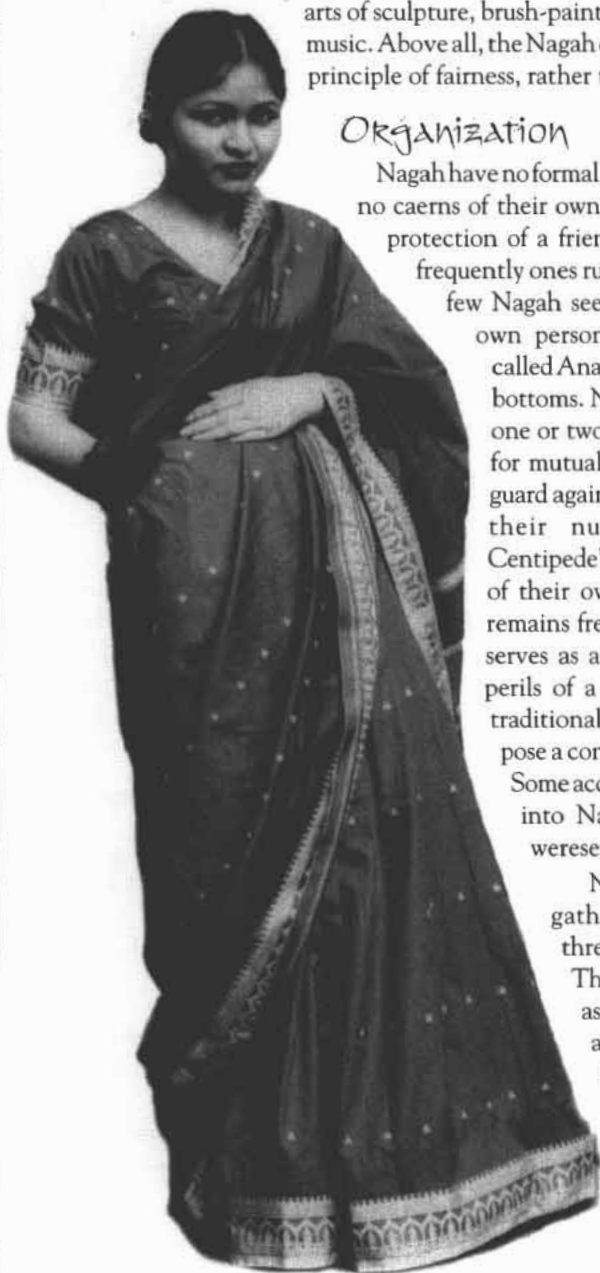
The wereserpents consider their role as assassins and killers as an art to be cultivated, studied and executed with precision, delicacy and beauty. To balance this aspect of their lives, they pursue acts of creativity, practicing the arts of sculpture, brush-painting, calligraphy, poetry or music. Above all, the Nagah dedicate themselves to the principle of fairness, rather than mercy, in all things.

Organization

Nagah have no formal organization and maintain no caerns of their own. They rely on asking the protection of a friendly court of hengeyokai, frequently ones ruled by the Zhong Lung. A

few Nagah seek Umbral refuge in their own personal spirit realm pockets, called Ananta, usually located in river bottoms. Nagah usually remain near one or two of their own kind, partly for mutual protection and partly to guard against the possibility of one of their number falling to the Centipede's corruption. The example of their own traitorous Vinata still remains fresh in their memories and serves as a cautionary lesson in the perils of a solitary existence. Their traditional enemies, the Nezumi, also pose a constant threat to the Nagah. Some accuse the wererats of stealing into Nagah dens to devour the wereserpents' precious eggs.

Nagah only hold their own gatherings when something threatens their entire Breed. They serve the Beast Courts as invisible sentinels, judges and assassins—present but unseen, known but not spoken of. For one of the Sunset People to know of their existence warrants a death sentence, sometimes for both parties involved.





They perform their duties quietly — so long as the hengeyokai do not hear them oiling the Wheel of Ages, so much the better.

The Nagah thus occupy a delicate position in the scheme of things. They perform their ordained tasks, but do so silently and inconspicuously so as not to arouse the wrath of their fellow hengeyokai; another open action like that of the War of Rage could bring about their extinction. They hope that this discretion may stand them in good stead in the event that the Western shapeshifters discover their existence, for no one else will stand to protect them if the hengeyokai turn their backs on the wereserpents once again.

BONUS TRAITS

Balaram: No Trait adjustment

Silkaram: *Brawny, Tough x 2, Robust*; Negative Trait: *Impatient x 2*

Azhi Dahaka: *Brawny, Ferocious x 2, Wiry, Agile, Quick, Relentless, Robust x 2*; Negative Traits *Bestial x 2, Violent*

Kali Dahaka: *Dexterous, Quick, Tireless x 2, Wiry x 2*. Negative Traits: *Feral x 2*

Vasuki: *Graceful x 2, Wiry*. Negative Traits: *Feral, Delicate*

Note: Both the Azhi Dahaka and Kali Dahaka forms have a special Constriction attack. If a Nagah character successfully grapples an opponent, she may then squeeze that enemy with her torso while using her arms to attack another target. The player must succeed in an additional Physical Challenge (retest with *Brawl*) each turn she wishes to constrict her current opponent. Success inflicts one level of bashing damage per turn. The player may also attack other opponents normally.

TRAITS

Nagah follow the guidelines for character creation set out in *Laws of the Wild*, with a few modifications. Wereserpents cannot step sideways (except when they are in their Ananta). Otherwise they must use a Gift that allows them to do so, or rely on the help of their mountain sentai, should they belong to one. Nagah also find it more difficult to learn common Gifts than other hengeyokai, since most spirits are reluctant to teach the wereserpents unless directly ordered to do so by a Wani (the slumbering Dragon Princes) or one of its agents. In fact, only the Wani's servants regularly respond to summonings from the Nagah. In order to learn any Gifts other than Nagah Gifts, wereserpents must add two to the Experience Trait cost of the Gift. For example, a Nagah must spend five Experience Traits for Basic Gifts instead of the usual three Experience Traits expended by other hengeyokai. See *Laws of the Wild*, p. 173.



When serving their Breed, Nagah use their own "non-system" of Renown; their elders judge a Nagah's merit and reward them accordingly with status and Renown.

While Nagah have four seasonal auspices, these categories differ only in starting Rage. The Kali (Winter) and Kartikeya (Summer) auspices begin with a Rage of 4, while the Kamaakshi (Spring) and Kamsa (Autumn) auspices begin with a Rage of 3. Nagah begin play with a Willpower of 4.

However, Nagah in service to the Emerald Courts adopt the Way of Emerald Virtue, taking on an auspice as appropriate to their task within the Court. When serving in sentai, Nagah conduct themselves with honor, subtlety, politeness and amicability, rarely calling attention to themselves and performing their assigned roles with efficiency and grace. In all things, the Nagah consider necessity their governing principle.

Breeds

Balaram (Homid)

Balaram Nagah are identical to humans in every way. They may exhibit more exotic features and move a little more sinuously than most people, but they are otherwise the same as normal humans.

Beginning Gnosis: 1

Ahi (Metis)

When two Nagah mate, they produce an ahi. Unlike other hengeyokai metis, Nagah are not infertile and possess no deformities. They are born in their Azhi Dahaka form, the Nagah equivalent of Crinos. Only 10% of all matings between Nagah produce ahi, however, so they are quite rare. Raised primarily in the spirit world, the "pure-blooded" ahi have a particular vulnerability to pollution, especially Wyrms-toxins and poisoned or corrupted water. Ahi take an extra health level of damage from intensive exposure to pollution; if the toxin is water-borne or Wyrmbased, the damage becomes aggravated. Normal levels of pollution, such as city smog and other background pollutants, do not actively harm ahi, though they may experience some respiratory discomfort from the bad air. Should a female ahi become pregnant, she must decide early on whether she wishes to bear human children or serpents, then spends the rest of the pregnancy in the chosen form. This has an unusual side-effect — if bearing humans, the ahi carries twins or even triplets, but if bearing serpents, the egg-clutch is fewer than it might normally be. One in 10 ahi children will be a true Nagah, but the Nagah do not attempt to build their numbers by ahi breeding; they fear it would risk their Breed's balance.

Beginning Gnosis: 3

Vasuki (Snake)

Snake-born Nagah occur in 10% of each potential brood, regardless of number. In other words, a brood of 20 snakes and a brood of 50 snakes with a Nagah parent each has a 10% chance of producing one Nagah. Vasuki begin play with the same restrictions as lupus Garou.

Beginning Gnosis: 4



FORMS

Nagah have five forms, similar to the Garou. In all forms except for their Balaram (or Homid) form, Nagah may inject a toxic venom into their foes. If an enemy takes damage from a Nagah's bite, the character takes an additional four levels of aggravated damage. Nagah may also use their toxin to blind an opponent by spitting into the opponent's eyes. The player must make a successful Physical Challenge to do so. Success blinds the target for three combat turns or until washed out of the eyes. The Gift: *Resist Toxin* (or a similar Gift) protects against this attack.

A Nagah's Vasuki or serpent form lends some of its physical traits to all the other forms except for the Balaram. Thus, similar patterns, coloration and some features may be visible throughout an individual's transformation from form to form. Unless otherwise specified, all these effects are cosmetic only.

Balaram

Nagah do not differ from other humans when in this form. Though the occasional wereserpent may arise from Western stock, most Nagah come from Asia or India and have the physical characteristics typical of those regions.

Silkaram

The "near-human" form of the Nagah, wereserpents in Silkaram form lose all the hair on their body; instead, bony, scalelike ridges cover the skin surface. Webbed fingers and toes enhance swimming ability. The jawline extends, somewhat resembling the elongated jaw of a snake. The Nagah's nose widens and recedes until the face seems almost flat. Scales cover the face, including the lips, making normal speech difficult. The eyes darken and lose any human coloration. The teeth fuse together, except for the fanglike canines which fold back when not used. Though odd, this form does not induce the Delirium in mortals.

Azhi Dahaka

The Azhi Dahaka form serves as the Nagah's battle form. Shaped like a giant cobra, a Nagah in Azhi Dahaka possess an enormous barrel torso along with powerful arms. All Nagah, regardless of whether or not they claim descent from the cobra line, bear an intimidating hood when in this form. Inconspicuous gills allow the Azhi Dahaka to breath underwater, while they can unhinge their powerful jaws at will. The Nagah's limbs grow exceedingly flexible, similar to the spine of a snake. A 16- to 20-foot tail extends from the torso, providing ample balance for the Nagah. Hands develop claws that deal aggravated damage, while scales acquire extra resilience. Any deliberate scarifications or battle scars appear as brilliant patterns in this form. The Azhi Dahaka form invokes the Delirium in mortals.

Kali Dahaka

Resembling a king cobra (even in individuals from other snake-species) the thickness of a man's leg, the "near-snake" form of the Nagah also sometimes possesses a slender pair of arms. Most Nagah consider these appendages unseemly in Kali Dahaka form, however, and prefer to omit them when they



assume this form. Players must succeed in a second shifting challenge (retest with *Primal-Urge*) to avoid arms when shifting to Kali Dahaka. Ritual scars remain but are paler than in Azhi Dahaka form. This form also possesses gills and allows the Nagah to breathe easily under water. This form, while it may frighten mortals, does not invoke the Delirium.

Vasuki

This form offers no difference from that of a normal serpent. Many varieties of serpent are possible, but an individual always has the same serpent-type.

Nagah Gifts

The following Gifts are available to all Nagah and are taught by the Wani. Nagah who follow the Way of Emerald Virtue and belong to the Courts begin play with one Nagah Gift, one breed Gift and one common hengeyokai Gift.

Beginning Gifts

- **Eyes of the Dragon Kings** — This Gift allows a Nagah's sight to penetrate obstacles so long as they are not solid. Thus, a Nagah can see through thick smoke, darkness, murky waters or heavy fog. The Nagah's eyes take on an eerie, supernatural glow when under the effects of this Gift. Only a Gnosis Trait spent is necessary to activate this Gift. The Gift lasts for one scene. In order to perceive an oncoming enemy, the character must make the usual Mental Challenge, while Gifts such as *Blur of the Milky Eye* are still effective, though at a lesser penalty.

- **Scent of Running Water** — As the Ragabash Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Sense of the Prey** — As the Ragabash Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Slayer's Eye** — As the Shadow Lord Gift: *Fatal Flaw* (see *Laws of the Wild*.)

- **Veil of the Wani** — The Nagah may remove the memory of her existence from the mind of a survivor of an encounter with her. The target individual may remember that he met *something*, but will not be able to accurately call the nature of the creature to mind. Other *shen* may believe they met a Zhong Lung, a Mukade centipede-devil, anything *but* a wereserpent. The Nagah spends two Gnosis Traits and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Subterfuge*). Success means that the victim has no memory of his encounter with the Nagah.

Intermediate Gifts

- **Blessings of Kali** — This Gift provides the Nagah with natural weaponry and body armor, causing heavy, bony plates to cover her hide. This covering spreads over her hood, front and back torso, arms and underbelly. It affords additional protection against damage and adds to damage given in hand-to-hand combat. The Nagah spends a Gnosis Trait and a Rage Trait and makes Physical Challenge (retest with *Primal-Urge*) to invoke this Gift. While the Gift lasts, the Nagah receives three bonus Healthy health levels. The plates on her arms, elbows and shoulders are all very sharp, and can inflict aggravated



damage if she successfully strikes her opponent or someone attempts to grapple her with a bear hug. The armor does not affect the Nagah's mobility in any way. The Gift lasts for one battle, regardless of how many opponents the Nagah faces, but this only protects the Nagah's front and back. When armored this way, the Nagah's sides are still vulnerable.

- **Breath of Sweet Amrita** — This Gift enables a Nagah to exhale a cloud of healing vapor on herself or on a companion. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Medicine*). Success heals one level of damage, including aggravated damage. Spending additional Gnosis Traits allows the character to heal additional levels on a one-to-one basis.

- **Gaze of the Serpent** — With this Gift a Nagah can render her enemy unable to move by fixing her with a baleful look. An individual so held may do nothing except regenerate damage. The Nagah must first catch the eye of her target, then succeed in a Static Mental Challenge (difficulty is the target's Willpower, retest with *Intimidation*). Success causes the victim to freeze in place, grounded by fear to the spot. The Nagah need not remain in eye contact with her target; the victim remains in place until something (such as an attack) distracts her. Otherwise, she could stay transfixed for hours or even days. A Nagah may only use this Gift on one person at a time, and the target may only be under one Nagah's Gaze at a time. Nagah most often use this Gift to affect their escape, rarely using it to gain advantage in a battle.

- **River Mother's Blessing** — This Gift provides the Nagah with the special favor of the River, allowing the wereserpent to replenish her Gnosis by drinking water from a river. Nagah who use this Gift see it as an act of reverence, honoring the River Mother, as well as a boon to themselves. The Nagah spends 10 minutes meditating while gazing at a bowl of river water, opening herself to its purity and contemplating the love of the Mother she serves. After the meditation is completed, the player makes a Simple Test. When the character drinks from the bowl, she receives a Gnosis Trait. She may make additional Simple Tests to receive up to her full complement of Gnosis, but if she fails a test, she may regain no further Gnosis Traits with that particular invocation of the Gift. Although Nagah may use this Gift as often as necessary, they consider it bad form to cling too closely to the River and attempt to restrict the use of this Gift to once per day unless the circumstances are sufficiently critical to warrant multiple uses.

Advanced Gifts

- **Breath of the Dragon Lords** — This powerful Gift enables the Nagah to breathe out a cloud of scalding hot gases. Though the gases do not set objects aflame, they do inflict aggravated damage to enemies. The Nagah must succeed in a Physical Challenge (retest with *Firearms*) to strike her target. She inflicts as many levels of aggravated damage as she has Gnosis Traits. Opponents must be within 20 feet of the Nagah. This Gift lasts for one combat.

- **Call the Flood** — This Gift enables the Nagah to petition the River itself to rise against those who harm or pollute it. Used more often in the past than



in modern times, it still presents a potent threat against large numbers of people. The Nagah spends three Gnosis Traits and makes a Static Gnosis Challenge against six Traits. Success causes the river waters to overflow their banks, resulting in a potentially devastating flood. The Storyteller should adjudicate the damage caused by this Gift.

Rites

Nagah use many rites of purification and chiminage to honor the River Mother, the Dragon Lords and the Emerald Mother. They rarely use rites to summon or bind spirits, since only the Wani respond to their calls and the Nagah are reluctant to strain their relationship with these friendly spirits. The following rite provides an example of a rite exclusive to the Nagah.

Basic

• **Rite of the River's Blessing (Accord)** — This Nagah purification rite takes place when a formidable enemy dies. The Nagah kneels at the edge of a body of water and pays her respects to the spirit within the waters by chanting mantras and songs of praise to the Three Mothers. While chanting, the Nagah washes herself in the water, then shifts to Azhi Dahaka form to shake off the drops of water from her hood. When performed by moonlight, this rite takes on its most auspicious form. The Nagah makes a Static Social Challenge (difficulty is the Gnosis or Rage of the Wyrms-creature slain, Storyteller's choice, or an appropriate Trait such as Chi for a Kuei-jin; retest with *Rituals*) order to successfully effect this rite. If she succeeds, the rite cleanses her of any Wyrmtaint she might have acquired while doing battle with her opponent, particularly if the enemy was one of the Centipede's minions. In addition, she regains any Willpower she has lost. Similar in many ways to the *Rite of Cleansing* (see *Laws of the Wild*), this Gift only affects Nagah.

Nezumi

Description

In past Ages of the Wheel, the Nezumi served as wholesale cullers of humanity, using their abilities to spread disease and instigate famine to restrict the size of villages and prevent humans from multiplying too rapidly. Although the end of the Impergium put a halt to much of the wererats' activities, the Nezumi realize that their purpose in the Emerald Mother's vision remains a vital one. Unlike their unfortunate Sunset cousins the Ratkin, who suffered persecution for their actions during the Black Plague and other epidemics, the Nezumi enjoy the tolerance, if not the respect, of the other hengeyokai breeds. They represent the Yang principle of change and chaos, and the Emerald Courts acknowledge the important roles carried out by the Children of Rat.

Among their other talents, the Nezumi are masters of the art of Low Warfare. The Hakken excel in waging High War in the name of the Emerald Mother. Masters of the Code of Bushido, the Eastern wolves conduct war according to traditional methods. When their enemy violates the formal rules of High War, however, the Hakken give way to those who prefer more devious methods of combat — the Nezumi. Just as the Hakken provide leadership in honorable battle, the Nezumi take the reins of Low Warfare. Unbound by matters of honor or civility, the Children of Rat have one guiding principle when they take up arms on behalf of the Emerald Courts — win at all costs. No method is beneath them: assassination, deception, espionage and the proliferation of disease and famine are all acceptable ways of defeating the enemies of the Mother.

In keeping with their station among the Beast Courts, Nezumi generally make their homes among the lower classes of Asia. In ages past, they dwelled among the *eta*, Japan's lowest social caste. Feeling comfortable among humans who performed the duties that were beneath the more civilized ranks of society, such as the burial of the dead, tanning, execution, butchering or the nefarious arts of the assassin, the Nezumi found breeding partners among the outcasts. Even today, Nezumi choose their Kinfolk from among the poorest of the poor, knowing that those who have nothing to lose either develop their own methods of survival or else they die. Those who manage to keep themselves alive in the midst of adversity are generally cannier, cleverer and harder than their less fortunate comrades — and these are prime candidates for mating with the Children of Rat. The Nezumi have spread throughout the Middle Kingdom, but they always flourish best where conditions are harshest, amid the teeming slums of Asia's largest cities, from India to the Phillipines. In these places, the Nezumi have undertaken the task of replenishing their numbers, which dwindled considerably in the Fourth Age.

While the Nezumi are multiplying faster than their Western cousins, they are less subtle than the Ratkin about their desire to reassume their ancient roles as thinners of the human population. Even today, Nezumi have practiced their





tactics throughout Asia, bringing about outbreaks of violence, famine and pestilence as part of their Low War against the humans who crowd the surface of the Emerald Mother. They have little regard for human law — or human life.

The arsenal for Low War has been growing in recent years. The Children of Rat have been experimenting with chemical and biological compounds, and political unrest makes it easy to blame terrorists for any accidents with their toys. Low War has only one goal — win at any cost — and the Nezumi are quite

willing to fight, using anything from poison gas released in a subway station to a bomb in a crowded marketplace.

The Hakken and other *shen* must continue to maintain High War, to ensure that the billions of humans in Asia continue to coexist peacefully — the alternative is the Nezumi's tactics, and the Children of Rat are all too willing and ready to put Low War to the test.

Organization

Ratkin make little distinction between Rat's Eastern and Western children. They learn the names and identities of their brethren quickly wherever they go and feel a kinship and solidarity with one another that transcends the boundaries of the Middle Kingdom. Their heightened senses allows them to differentiate the myriad scents of their brothers and sisters, and they always seem to find each other, even in the largest and strangest of cities. Like their Western Kin, Nezumi refer to each other by names that connote familial relations: brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts and cousins.

Each Nezumi of any importance possesses three names: a court name, a gang name and a human name. Known to human contacts as Ling Bi, the crafty Nezumi Tunnel Runner goes by the name Swift Runner among his own kind. At court, his name consists of a series of ratlike sounds that denotes one who is swift, clever and silent.

Few *hengeyokai* realize just how many Nezumi dwell within their cities. Unlike most of the Eastern Changing Breeds, whose populations consist primarily of homid members, the Nezumi count more rodents among their numbers. Rats multiply exponentially, and the





number of Nezumi living among their rodent Kinfolk far exceeds their homid counterparts. The Birthing Plague, however, takes many Nezumi before they reach adulthood. Most Nezumi die young — ravaged by disease, killed or even eaten. Those who survive do so because of their hardiness, cleverness and strong will. Underground skirmishes in labyrinthine sewer mazes filled with traps to test the unwary provide additional testing and training for the Nezumi survivors. The coming of the Sixth Age will herald a time of darkness and utter chaos, and the Nezumi see this as their time of ascendance. Should any conflicts boil to the surface, the evidence is usually lost in the urban slums.

Nezumi honor the oldest surviving member of a nest as their elder, or *sensei*. From these *sensei*, younger Nezumi learn the wisdom of Rat — how to survive, resolve conflicts, meet the enemy with subtlety and finesse and remain unnoticed in the midst of the turmoil. Though they are rare, some of these *sensei* have begun traveling to the courts of the Hakken lords to discuss bringing Low War to the forefront of the Emerald Mother's cause.

Bonus Traits

Homid: No Trait adjustment

Crinos: *Brawny*, *Dexterous* x 2, *Agile* x 2, *Enduring*; Negative Traits: *Bestial* x 2

Rodens: *Agile* x 2, *Enduring*, *Tenacious*; Negative Traits: *Feral* x 2, *Puny*, *Shortsighted*

Traits

In general, Nezumi follow the guidelines for character creation as described in **Laws of the Wild**, with a few differences. All Nezumi enjoy an infallible sense of underground direction, a keen spatial sense and acute night vision in all forms, including their homid form. By spending a Gnosis Trait, a Nezumi can see in absolute darkness for up to 24 hours. Nezumi have no trouble finding their way through mazes of sewers and tunnel warrens, even if they have never traversed them before. Simple directional problems require no challenges, while Nezumi gain a one-Trait bonus in any Perception-related challenges.

Nezumi may not choose *Allies*, *Pure Breed* or *Totem* as Backgrounds. They may not have more than one *Resource* Trait as beginning characters.

If they survive beyond their first year, Nezumi choose an auspice, either as a result of visions gained during the Birthing Plague or revealed through the *Rite of the Opened Way* (if the Nezumi follows the Way of Emerald Virtue). There is little difference between the Eastern and Western auspices, and Nezumi gain rank using the Renown chart for sentai auspices (Seers gain rank as Mirrors; Skulkers as Lanterns; Warriors as Fists and Tunnel Runners as Leaves). Once they choose their auspice, the Nezumi go through a period of apprenticeship with an older member of the auspice to learn all the tricks of the trade.



Seers

Nezumi who follow this auspice become mystics, teachers of rites to Rat's children. Seers preside over the ceremonies that produce the Birthing Plague, share knowledge of new Sacred Plagues, and create openings to new realms.

Beginning Rage: 1

Tunnel Runners

Tunnel Runners act as messengers and scouts, traveling the mazes of tunnels and alleys linking the nests of the Nezumi in the urban centers of the Middle Kingdom. Possessing a secret language consisting of rattling and scratching noises, Tunnel Runners can communicate with one another without fear of being overheard by anyone outside their auspice. Sometimes they tap on lead pipes when further underground. Legends claim that they know the way to ancient bolt-holes leading to the spirit realm.

Beginning Rage: 2

Skulkers

Experts in covert warfare, Nezumi who belong to this auspice resemble nothing less than the ninja of Japan's feudal age. Skulkers possess unusual stealth. Nezumi Skulkers most often have the survival skills that enable them to rise to the position of *sensei* of their nest. Skulkers are usually homid.

Beginning Rage: 3

Warriors

Nezumi warriors learn Low War tactics common to their breed. Homid Warriors excel in combat above ground, where their breed form allows them to disappear in a crowd. They prefer to work in small groups or two or three Warriors and usually attack from the shadows, into which they vanish after their job is done. Metis-born Warriors grow impatient for the time when they can assume their birth-form and attack with their full powers. These Nezumi favor frontal assault and maximum force when they battle. Because of their impatience and full-frontal assaults, metis Warriors suffer a two-Trait penalty to their Rage challenges. Rodens Warriors operate best underground, lending their support skills to their fellow homid and metis Nezumi. Working in swarms that sometimes include their rat Kinfolk, these Warriors can serve as a literal second wave to overwhelm foes.

Beginning Rage: 4

Breeds

Like most hengeyokai, Nezumi have three breeds: homid, metis and rodens. The majority of Nezumi, however, come from rodens, rather than homid stock. While exceedingly rare, metis Nezumi gain no social stigma from the circumstances of their birth.

Homid

Nezumi born from human stock possess a tenacious independence, occasionally ranging far from their nests to establish new breeding grounds.



Warriors gather in packs to patrol their territory. Physically, homid Nezumi may display some ratlike traits, such as unusually bright eyes, thin faces, prominent front teeth and occasionally a vestigial tail.

Beginning Gnosis: 1

Metis

Although they are exceedingly rare, metis Nezumi do not suffer the disapproval of other Nezumi. Instead, they are respected for their strength and warlike abilities. The Nezumi parents of a metis, however, usually leave their child in the care of the swarm or nest, trusting them to raise the young Nezumi in the ways of its breed. Metis rarely learn the language of humans, relying on the secret language of the Nezumi for communication.

Beginning Gnosis: 5

Rodens

By far the most populous breed of Nezumi, the rat-born begin life with a struggle to survive. The "group mind" of the swarm decides on the optimum size of the population. If there are too many, the young rats devour each other until the proper number is reached. As the end times approach, however, the size of the swarms — and the rat population in general — grows larger. Few outside the society of Nezumi have a true idea of the number of Rat's children.

Beginning Gnosis: 3

FORMS

Nezumi have three forms: Homid, Crinos and Rodens. A slain homid or rodens Nezumi reverts to her birth form. Metis usually assume their rodens form when killed.

Homid

Metis and rodens Nezumi have a more difficult time assuming Homid form than their human-born brothers and sisters. (Players must make a Simple Test in addition to the usual Static Physical Challenge necessary for most form shifts.) Homid Nezumi do not have the same problem and also possess the skills necessary to blend in easily with the seedier side of human society.

Crinos

The Nezumi's Crinos form resembles a five-foot tall, muscular hunched-over rat standing on two legs. Crinos Nezumi have sharp, elongated teeth that can chew through most substances, even concrete and stone. This form inspires the full Delirium in Asian mortals, for their actions against mortals during the Fourth Age have etched themselves in the human subconscious, and current tales about the horrors in the urban slums only reinforce that forgetting is best. Nezumi in Crinos form are ideally suited for warfare.

Rodens

Nezumi in Rodens form often rival domestic cats for size, if not for temperament. Otherwise, Rodens appear as normal rats, if a bit sturdier, and a little more capable with their hands.



Gifts

Nezumi who follow the Way of Emerald Virtue begin play with three Gifts: one breed Gift, one common hengeyokai Gift and one Nezumi Gift. (See **Changing Breeds Book 3** for Breed Gifts.) Nezumi who do not belong to the Beast Courts should choose an auspice Gift (see **Changing Breeds Book 3**) instead of a common hengeyokai Gift. Nezumi employ many of the Gifts in **Changing Breeds Book 3**, but the ones listed below are more typical for the East. Still, a Western Ratkin might pick up a trick or two from a well-traveled Rat Juggling or a generous *sensei*.

Beginning Gifts

- **Cloak of Darkest Night** — Darkness is the assassin's first ally. With this Gift, a Nezumi can call upon the strength of Rat to create an atmosphere of darkness suitable for disguising the passage of a swarm of rats or a small pack of homid Nezumi. All light sources along the path of the Nezumi fail due to small gusts of wind or electrical shortages. The resulting darkness makes the use of stealth-related Gifts easier (the Storyteller should determine the effect this Gift has on subsequent Gifts). The Nezumi spends three Gnosis Traits and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Stealth*) to effect this Gift at night, indoors or underground. By spending two additional Gnosis Traits (five total), this Gift may cloud an otherwise sunny sky to create the same effect outdoors. This Gift lasts for one scene or one combat.

- **Hunter in Crowds** — Years of carrying out activities that are formally shunned by the Beast Courts have taught the wererats the value of secrecy (and some plausible deniability). The Nezumi can use this Gift to ascertain the presence of other shapeshifters among a crowd of people. The Nezumi must spend a Gnosis Trait and make a Mental Challenge (retest with *Stealth*). The Gift simply alerts the Nezumi to the presence of other shifters — it doesn't put a neon arrow over their heads. What the wererat does on learning if other hengeyokai are in the crowd is up to her.

- **Raiding the Umbral Hoard** — This Gift enables a Nezumi to summon small groups of Rat-spirits to raid a hidden cache of food (usually grain or rice) and transport small quantities through the Umbra to another place as far as a mile away. Only hidden supplies of food may be raided in this fashion. Alternately, the Nezumi may command the Rat-spirits to spoil the food instead of pilfering it. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Survival*). By spending a Rage Trait, the Nezumi can cause the food cache to become tainted and unusable.

- **Resist Toxin** — As the Fianna Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Secrets of the Tunnels** — As the Bone Gnawer Gift: *Attunement* (see **Laws of the Wild**).

Intermediate Gifts

- **Gnaw** — As the Lupus Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Keening of Swarm Panic** — Nezumi use this Gift to incite panic in large crowds of people, preying on primitive fears. For the Gift to be effective, a crowd



must contain at least 50 people. The Nezumi makes a high-pitched, keening sound just outside the range of human ears. Within a few minutes, normal humans become restless, then anxious, finally panicking and possibly even resulting in a stampede if they feel the need to flee. Nezumi use this Gift as a diversion or, sometimes, as a weapon, hoping to hurt an enemy trapped in a rioting crowd. Used in a small, closed room (such as a movie theatre), this Gift can cause injury and even death to individuals unlucky enough to fall or be crushed against a wall or locked door. Supernatural creatures do not suffer the mental effects of the Gift but may get caught in the crush. The player spends a Gnosis point and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Rituals*). The Storyteller should assign damage to normal humans based on the circumstances — generally, humans not part of the surge may find themselves being swept away, suffering at least one level of bashing damage due to the sheer pressure of the crowd. Someone unlucky enough to fall and risk getting trampled suffers one level of damage per turn until he can get to his feet or someone pulls him up. Even supernaturals will suffer injury if caught in the panicking crowd. The effect lasts for just 10 minutes, but once a crowd becomes frightened and starts stampeding, it is usually difficult to stop.

Advanced Gifts

- **Snake Bites Itself** — Nezumi use this Gift as a form of poetic justice. By touching the victim and uttering a curse, the wererat can cause a creature's own poison to turn against it. Thus, bakemono fall prey to their own vile secretions, Kuei-jin suffer from their Yin poisons, and Kumo take damage from their own poisons. First the Nezumi must touch her victim (which may require a Physical Challenge), then she spends a Gnosis Trait. The touch itself does no damage, but she then makes a Static Mental Challenge against the target's Willpower (retest with *Medicine*). Success means the target suffers from a dose of his own poison (Nagah venom, Kumo poisons, Kuei-jin Shintai Disciplines, etc.), although the victim is welcome to make any necessary attempts to resist the effects. Even human poisoners or habitual drug users may suffer from the effects, although the extent of which is at Storyteller discretion.

Rites

Nezumi love ritual and hold their mystical rites with great formality and dignity, a surprise to many who tend to equate the often-wretched appearance of the wererats with a slovenly attitude. Nezumi tender their respects to their spirit allies and to the Emerald Mother, often honoring less popular agents of Gaia, such as embodiments of illness, fear and famine. Nezumi know most of the rites described in *Laws of the Wild*, with appropriate variations. The following rite is an example of the rituals peculiar to the Children of Rat.

Intermediate

- Rite of Plague Genesis (Mystic)** — A nest's Seers may isolate themselves for a week and combine their wisdom to create a new plague to infect the nearest center of human population. This disease usually only weakens a human for a



week or so, but Nezumi use it to weaken certain individuals, targeting them for either assassination or kidnapping at a time when they are too sick to put up much resistance. At least three Seers must join together to perform this rite. Each Seer spends a Gnosis Trait and meditates on the type of disease they wish to create. Rodens then swarm the area (up to one city block) to spread the disease. The disease usually incapacitates humans for approximately one week, and its spread depends on how overcrowded the area is. A stricken victim must make a successful Physical Challenge each day, or he loses another health level. *Shen* are just as likely to fall victim to the plagues created, but they have their own means of resisting the illness.



Same-Bito

Description

The Asian weresharks bear little resemblance, except perhaps in appearance, to their Sunset cousins, the Rokea. In ages past, Mizuchi the Code Giver, inspired by the Zhong Lung, influenced the Same-Bito to look beyond their inherent savagery and aspire to a more civilized code of behavior. To this day, the Code of Sensei Mizuchi governs every aspect of the life of the Same-Bito. Even so, the weresharks remain predators at heart. Although they struggle to live up to the laws given them by Mizuchi, they dwell on the edge of a great precipice, ready at a moment's notice to plunge into a sea of violence and Rage. Though refined on the outside, within each Same-Bito swims a fierce hunter and a vicious killer.

Through a combination of Mizuchi's charisma, some stern "interest" from the Zhong Lung and perhaps a little encouragement from Tiandi and his servants, the Same-Bito have fully adopted the Code of Mizuchi, at least to all appearances. They are a fierce people, determined to prove their worth and squash the notions of the stereotypical stupid, primitive wereshark. While they have little care for the Wyrn's predations on the land — or for the political games of the hengyokai courts — the Same-Bito defend their seas with an implacable devotion. Anyone seeking their alliance will receive it only if they pledge to assist the weresharks in defending the oceans. Sentai who have succeeded in recruiting one of the Same-Bito find him a fiercely loyal, somewhat unsettling companion.

The Zhong Lung introduced the Same-Bito to their current patron, Tiandi, Lord of Thunder, who serves as a spirit vassal to the mighty Dragon Kings. Secretly, the Same-Bito revere Teanoi, the Great Shark Spirit, who occasionally teaches Gifts to his true children. The weresharks keep this association secret from the Zhong Lung, who would be displeased to discover that their protégés have abandoned Tiandi for the rougher, less civilized Teanoi. Except for the goblin sharks, the Same-Bito cannot travel in the Umbra, so they have little direct contact with Umbral spirits and do not know if Teanoi seeks to reconcile the Asian weresharks with their Rokea cousins or if he wishes to acknowledge his approval of the Same-Bito's new code of conduct. Some scholarly Same-Bito dedicate themselves to discovering more of their patron spirit's intentions.

Organization

Like wolves, sharks tend to travel in groups. The Same-Bito generally gather in slews of three to a dozen creatures. Their rare human Kin dwell among the populations of Oceania, Indonesia, Thailand, and parts of China and Japan that border on the ocean or near bodies of water where sharks make their home. Even some rivers such as the Ganges contain some varieties of small sharks, and the Same-Bito have a presence there as well. Wherever there is saltwater, there are Same-Bito.



Same-Bito *habatsu* (packs or factions) choose their leaders through trial-by-combat. This contest takes place in two portions, one on the land and one in the water. Three judges arbitrate the trial and settle disputes or ties. The loser suffers only the humiliation of losing and, perhaps, some insults from his *habatsu* but otherwise incurs no penalties. Battle scars from such trials enjoy prestige among the Same-Bito. Though incidental fighting occurs from time to time, the *habatsu* has no jurisdiction over such instances.

Many Same-Bito leaders have arisen from the ranks of the goblin sharks of Asia. Not the greatest physical specimens, these horned Same-Bito have great wisdom and enjoy the reverence of their fellow weresharks. Often they lead larger, more ferocious sharks on dangerous missions against those who threaten the sea and its inhabitants.

SAME-BITO LEXICON

Habatsu: Same-Bito factions, roughly equivalent to Hakken clans.

Irono: Night-born Same-Bito.

Kabina: Homid form.

Karui: Daylight-born Same-Bito.

Koshoku: Same-Bito born at either dawn or twilight.

Mizuchi: Legendary Same-Bito hero; giver of the Code of Sensei Mizuchi.

Rongo: Homid breed.

Tangaroa: Shark breed.

Teanoi: Great Shark Spirit, revered in secret by Same-Bito.

Tsufu: Glabrus (Glabro) form.

Warui: Chasmus (Hispo) form.

Watasami: Shark form (Children of the sea.)

Traits

Same-Bito use the same rules for character creation as those described in **Laws of the Wild** with some modifications. Asian weresharks begin with less Rage than their Rokea cousins, an indicator of their more civilized, less bestial path. They possess three auspices, relating to the time of day in which they are born. The Karui, born during the hours of daylight, earn Rank and Renown as Ahrouns (or Fists); their beginning Rage is 4. The Koshoku, born at dawn or twilight, receive Rank and Renown as Galliards (or Pillars); their beginning Rage is 3. The night-born, or Irono, gain Rank and Renown as Ragabash (or Leaves); their beginning Rage is 2. Some followers of Teanoi believe that, with proper appeasement, their patron might restore the lost Rage as a sign of his favor. Same-Bito may only regain Gnosis when in water.

Goblin sharks, or Kagesame, are physically less powerful than Same-Bito from other shark stock. They begin play with one less Physical Trait and their



Warui forms have the same Bonus Traits as other weresharks' Watasami forms. In recompense, Same-Bito goblin sharks possess great wisdom, beginning with one more Mental Trait than other weresharks, and enjoy the ability to step sideways as Garou, unlike others of their kind.

All Same-Bito begin with 4 Willpower Traits. Though most Same-Bito Kinfolk are sharks, Asian weresharks may purchase human Kinfolk as a Background, unlike their Sunset cousins, at twice the cost. They may not purchase *Ancestors* or *Pure Breed*, while *Contacts* are primarily among other *shen*.

The Code of Sensei Mizuchi

In honor of their greatest teacher, Same-Bito follow the precepts set out by Mizuchi as closely as possible. While not as exacting as the way of *bushido*, the Code of Sensei Mizuchi demands discipline and obedience. Most Same-Bito keep the Code to the letter, according to the following principles:

- 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.

A growing faction within the ranks of Same-Bito seek to overthrow the Code and return to a more primal way of life. Their popularity is increasing as the times seem to call for a more bloodthirsty and visceral response to events.

Breeds

Same-Bito have two breeds, unlike their Western cousins who claim only shark-blood. However, there are three times as many tangaroa, or shark-born, as rongo, or human-born, Same-Bito, and the tangaroa often consider themselves better than their rongo brothers and sisters. The existence of human-born Same-Bito comes from the influence of the Zhong Lung. No metis Same-Bito exist; many believe that any metis-born are devoured by their parents at birth.

Except for the goblin-sharks, who can enter the Umbra, Same-Bito use Gnosis only for activating Gifts and in the performance of Rites.

Rongo

Human-born Same-Bito, though rare, enjoy the protection of the shark-born weresharks, unlike their unfortunate Rokea counterparts, who are hunted by the more numerous shark-born relatives. The rarity of rongo Same-Bito comes from the fact that a mating between a Same-Bito and a normal human always produces Kinfolk. In order to have a chance of producing a wereshark



from human stock, the Same-Bito must mate with a human Kinfolk. Rongo appear much like normal humans, though they may appear somewhat rough and unpolished. Human-born Same-Bito feel drawn to the sea before their First Change, if they didn't already grow up there.

Beginning Gnosis: 1

Tangaroa

All matings between Same-Bito and sharks produce weresharks. The number of Same-Bito does not threaten the balance, however, since weresharks mate only twice in a century, according to their traditions. To flaunt this tradition would offend their patron.

Beginning Gnosis: 3

FORMS

The Same-Bito have five forms: Kabina (Homid), Tsufu (Glabrus), Karvu (Gladius), Warui (Chasmus), and Watasami (Squamus).

Kabina

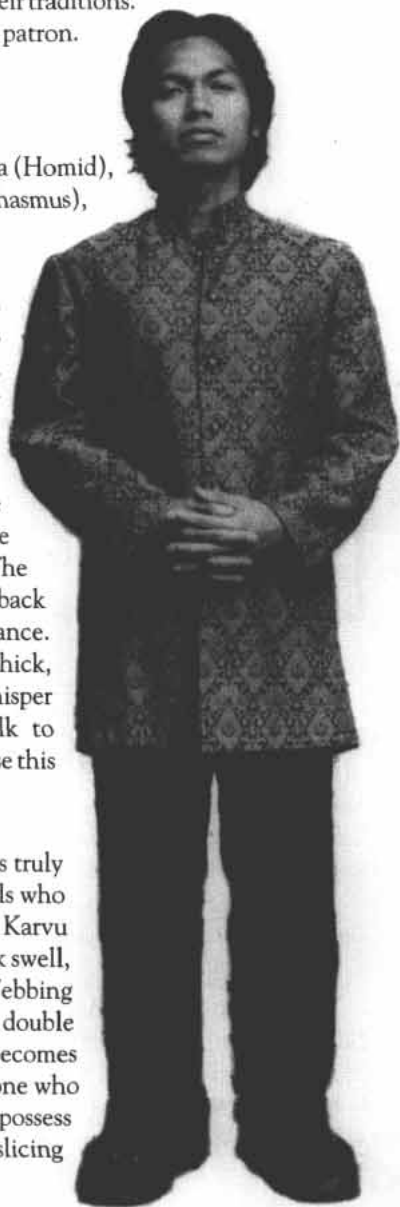
The Homid form of the Same-Bito has no Bonus Traits. Most Kabina appear as hulking, large-boned men and women with rough, primitive features and predatory attitudes.

Tsufu

The near-human form possesses twice the size of the Kabina form. Tsufu have bulging eyes and overly large mouths. The appearance of a dorsal fin on the Tsufu's back gives the creature a hunchback appearance. Fingers develop webbing; the skin becomes thick, oily and dark. Tsufu speak only in a harsh whisper — not that anyone would want to talk to something that looks like this. Same-Bito use this form only rarely.

Karvu

The Same-Bito equivalent to Crinos is truly fearsome and causes the Delirium in mortals who encounter it. Standing up to 10 feet tall, the Karvu possesses full dorsal fins. The head and neck swell, the jaws grow wide and the eyes bulge out. Webbing appears on both hands and feet. Teeth form double rows that fill the gums, while the skin becomes thick and serrated, causing damage to anyone who touches it with their bare hands. Karvu possess both lungs and gills. Spiked fins, capable of slicing





human or wereflesh, appear along the elbows. Same-Bito in Karvu form cannot speak, but manage to communicate with one another by means of electrical impulses, with a range of 50 feet on land and a mile underwater. Same-Bito prefer this form for combat on land or in a mixed battleground.

Warui

The Warui form causes a milder form of the Delirium in humans, resulting in a one level adjustment on the Delirium Chart contained in **Laws of the Wild**. This form resembles nothing less than a giant shark, with huge jaws and twice the size of a normal shark. Capable of swimming twice as fast as a shark, the Warui form of the Same-Bito is the preferred form for water combat.

Watasami

Same-Bito may only assume this form in water. This form is indistinguishable from a normal shark except that it possesses slightly thicker skin for defense. The Same-Bito can swim at 30 miles per hour for long stretches.

BONUS TRAITS

Homid: No Trait adjustment

Tsufu: *Brawny* x 2, **Agile*, *Robust* x 2; Negative Traits: *Clumsy*, *Repugnant*

Karvu: *Brawny*, *Ferocious* x 2, *Stalwart*, **Agile*, *Enduring* x 2, *Resilient*; Negative Traits: *Bestial* x 2, *Callous*

Warui: *Brawny*, *Ferocious* x 2, **Agile*, *Enduring* x 2, *Resilient*; Negative Trait: *Feral*

Watasami: *Ferocious*, *Tough*, *Agile* x 2, *Enduring*, *Tenacious*; Negative Traits: *Feral*

**Same-Bito gain this Trait only when under water.*

In all forms except for Tangaroa and Tsufu, opponents take one health level of lethal damage from striking the Same-Bito's tough skin with bare flesh. Grappling a Same-Bito gives the attacker two health levels of lethal damage. Damage of this kind is aggravated if the Same-Bito is in Karvu form.

Gifts

Same-Bito begin play with three Gifts: one appropriate to their auspice (Ahroun, Galliard or Ragabash), one breed Gift (chosen from Homid or Lupus Gifts) and one Same-Bito Gift. See **Laws of the Wild** for auspice and breed Gifts. Same-Bito in service to the Emerald Court begin with a common hengeyokai Gift in place of an auspice Gift. Storytellers may wish to allow Same-Bito characters to learn other Gifts that pertain to water or are otherwise appropriate. Weresharks attempt to conceal their use of Gifts learned from spirit-servants of Teanoi in order to prevent the Zhong Lung from discovering their reversion to their original patron. Most members of the Court are willing



to teach their Gifts to the Same-Bito, hoping to replace the weresharks' terrifying Gifts with more civilized ones.

Basic Gifts

- **Blood Scent** — A Same-Bito may discover the presence of *shen* nearby; something about the smell of *shen* blood alerts their senses. The *shen* need not actually spill blood for this Gift to work. *Blood Scent* will work on a very fresh pool or trail of blood (no more than 15 minutes old)s. The wereshark cannot tell, however, whether a given individual is one of the *hengeyokai*, a *Kuei-jin* or some other Awakened creature. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Primal-Urge*). If successful, the character learns which individuals in his immediate vicinity are *shen*.

- **Shou of Zhong Lung** — This Gift provides the Same-Bito with *shou*, the wisdom of the ancestors — or in this case, the weresharks' Zhong Lung allies. This Gift sends a message to the nearest Zhong Lung in the Umbra. The process may take some time, but the Zhong Lung always replies. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Expression*). The Storyteller should determine the nature of the reply and how long it takes for the nearest Zhong Lung to receive the query or message.

- **Sight Without Sight** — With this Gift, the Same-Bito can sense nearby targets, even when blinded, by perceiving changes in the electromagnetic field. While usable on land, this Gift has its greatest value in the dark, murky waters of the sea's depths. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental Challenge. Success allows the Same-Bito to discern the presence of creatures within 15 feet of him. The wereshark can sense only rough shapes, since the Gift does not provide minute details. The Gift lasts for one scene or until the Same-Bito changes location significantly.

Intermediate Gifts

- **Bite of the Destroyer** — As the Get of Fenris Gift: *Fenris' Bite* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Iron Jaws** — As the Ahroun Gift: *Clenched Jaw* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Tsunami Form** — This Gift allows the Same-Bito to double her size temporarily when in *Karvu* or *Watasami* Form. The Same-Bito spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Physical Challenge (retest with *Primal-Urge*). Success enables her to double her effective size and strength, gaining *Ferocious* x 2 and three extra Healthy health levels. Any successful combat attacks inflict double the usual aggravated damage. In addition, the effects of the Delirium are increased by one level on the Delirium Chart (see *Laws of the Wild*) for the *Karvu* form, while a mild form of the Delirium affects mortals who see the enhanced *Watasami* form.

- **Voracious Hunger** — Same-Bito have the ability to bite and swallow anything they can grab with their jaws, from an arm to an outrigger. This Gift enables the wereshark to enlarge its mouth and clamp down on almost anything. The wereshark spends a Rage Trait to activate the Gift. For the next scene, the Same-Bito gains a two-Trait bonus on biting attacks, even if the



object would normally be too big or oddly shaped for him to get his teeth into. This attack can be used against hengeyokai or other sentient creatures, but it inflicts only the usual amount of damage (one level of aggravated with a successful bite).

Advanced Gifts

• **Teanoi's Rage** — This Gift propels the wereshark into a blood-fury that cannot be stopped. The character appeals directly to Teanoi to invoke this Gift, then spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Static Willpower Challenge against seven Traits. Success gives the character an additional three Rage Traits, allows her to recover two of those Traits per turn during combat, and enables the wereshark to inflict two additional levels of damage per successful attack. This Gift lasts for an entire scene. All non-Awakened individuals in the area are affected by the Delirium in the aftermath of this exhibition of pure Rage. This Gift remains a closely guarded secret among the Same-Bito who revere Teanoi.

Rites

The Same-Bito do not place a great deal of emphasis on rites and rituals, feeling that the proper veneration of their relationship with the Mother's oceans is ritual enough. When they do conduct formal ceremonies, they do so in the deep waters, where they feel closest to the Emerald Mother and to their patron. Same-Bito practice Rites of Accord, Punishment and Renown as well as a rite to welcome the turning of the year and to honor Tiandi and the Dragon Lords. Some Same-Bito hold secret and often bloody rites to honor Teanoi.



STARGAZERS

Description

Until recently, the Stargazers belonged to the 13 tribes of the Garou Nation. Even at the best of times, however, they always stood out from their Garou cousins. Primarily, though not exclusively, of Asian descent, the

Stargazers held to a more peaceful, philosophical mindset not unlike the beliefs of Zen Buddhism. Placing little attachment on worldly connections, the Stargazers have focused primarily on their jobs as caretakers of Gaia and seekers of Her truths. This otherworldliness, while admirable, left the Stargazers vulnerable to attacks from their enemies.



Such an attack came about in the last years of the 20th century, when the forces of the Wyrms attacked and destroyed the tribe's ancestral caerns in the Himalayas, utterly devastating the prestigious Shigalu Monastery. Distraught, the Stargazers petitioned the other Garou tribes for assistance in retaking their protectorates. The Garou, however, knew that they could not afford to send warriors into the lands of the Middle Kingdom, where they were not welcome by the resident shapechangers. With reluctance, the Garou Nations refused to help the Stargazers.

In the final months of 1999, the Stargazers received an emissary from the Emerald Courts, offering them assistance in retaking their lands provided they ally themselves with the hengyokai and the Beast Courts. The Stargazers thought long and hard about the offer from the shapechangers of the Middle Kingdom and came to the conclusion that they should answer the call of opportunity and trust their fate to the winds of change. They accepted the offer of the Emerald Courts and tendered their resignation from the Garou Nation. Rather than force a civil war that would cost more than it was worth, the Garou Nation allowed the Stargazers to leave without (much) recrimination.



Since that time, most Stargazers have relocated to the Middle Kingdom. While a few have opted to remain in the West with their packs, all new Stargazer cubs now travel to the East to receive training in the Way of Emerald Virtue.

Organization

Stargazers have little formal organization, unlike the hierarchical structure of most Garou tribes. Instead they rely on the mentor system, where each individual looks to a more experienced tribe member as teacher, guide, counselor and friend. Since coming to the Middle Kingdom and joining the Beast Courts, the Stargazers have put aside their camps, choosing instead to concentrate on learning the ins and outs of their new culture and social structure. While they do not make the best courtiers, Stargazers are proving their worth as advisors to the various Courts. In addition, they are in demand as members of sentai, where they serve not only as Fists, but more appropriately as Lanterns or Mirrors.

Traits

Stargazers use the guidelines for character creation set out in **Laws of the Wild** with a few variations. They may not purchase *Allies* among the Garou Nations without permission from the Storyteller and a good reason why they still maintain ties with the Sunset wolves. In addition, Stargazers may not begin play with *Resources* or *Fetish* Backgrounds since the tribe places great weight on self-reliance.

Most Stargazers now follow the Way of Emerald Virtue and choose their auspices accordingly. Those who remain with the Sunset People use standard auspices and make use of their auspice Gifts. Stargazers are sometimes prone to the lure of mental gymnastics due to their philosophical bent. Whenever a Stargazer encounters a problem or puzzle too difficult to solve, he finds it difficult to focus on anything else until he succeeds in achieving the solution. If the player fails a Mental Challenge to solve a puzzle or problem, the character becomes obsessed with finding the answer. The Storyteller should decide how this manifests itself during the game. By spending a Willpower Trait, the player may overcome this difficulty for a time.

All Stargazers begin with an initial Willpower of 4. The tribal totem, Chimera, still supports the Stargazers (see **Laws of the Wild** for details on Chimera).

Breeds

Stargazers have the same breeds as other Garou. Metis Stargazers are very rare, since the tribe has made an effort to increase their rapidly dwindling population. Those metis who are born grow up entirely within the Emerald Courts and are seen as payment for the assistance of the Beast Courts in recent times. Stargazers make a concerted effort to locate and breed with wolves to ensure the strength of their wolf bloodlines. Since the Hakken have evinced so



little interest in mating with wolves, the Stargazers feel free to claim any they encounter as potential Kinfolk and possible mates. Human Kinfolk tend toward intellectual pursuits. Since coming to the Middle Kingdom in force, Stargazers have attempted to insert themselves among the human populations, seeking out appropriate individuals for mating and for establishing Kinfolk lines.

Homid Stargazers begin play with a Beginning Gnosis of 1; metis have a Beginning Gnosis of 3; lupus begin with a Beginning Gnosis of 5.

FORMS

Stargazers have five forms, just as other werewolves. They receive Bonus Traits accordingly. See **Laws of the Wild** for guidelines for forms and Bonus Traits.

Gifts

Stargazers begin play with three Gifts, one each for auspice, breed and tribe. Those sworn to the Courts and who follow the Way of Emerald Virtue begin play with a Stargazer Gift, a general hengyokai Gift and a breed Gift. Tribal Gifts reflect the Stargazers' mystical bent as well as their tendency to seek non-lethal forms of combat.

Beginning Gifts

- **Balance** — This Gift allows the Stargazer to walk on ledges, ropes and other narrow surfaces, even if slippery or otherwise treacherous. A Wind-spirit teaches this Gift. The player spends a Gnosis Trait to activate this Gift, which lasts for one session.

- **Falling Touch** — As the Ahroun Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Inner Strength** — Through concentration, a Stargazer can convert her anger into focused determination. The character spends five minutes in meditation, after which she may automatically convert one Rage Trait into a Willpower Trait. For each five-minute period in addition to the first, the character may convert an additional Rage Trait, although she may not reduce her Rage below one Trait.

- **Sense Wurm** — As the metis Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Surface Attunement** — The Stargazer focuses on becoming so attuned to her surroundings that she can walk across surfaces such as water, mud, thin ice, quicksand and snow at normal speed without danger of falling through. Stargazers who use this Gift leave no tracks of their passing. After the character concentrates for one turn, the player makes a Physical Challenge to activate the Gift, which lasts for one scene.

Intermediate Gifts

- **Clarity** — This Gift enables the Stargazer to see through utter darkness, normally impenetrable fog or dense smoke. In addition, Stargazers using this Gift can spot invisible creatures and penetrate illusions. The player makes a Mental Challenge to activate this Gift's powers of keen sight. Invisible



creatures show up automatically under the effects of this Gift. In order to see through another individual's illusions, the player must win a Mental Challenge.

- **Merciful Blow** — With this Gift, a Stargazer can subdue an opponent without actually causing physical harm. The Stargazer spends a Gnosis Trait to attune herself to her foe's body. If the player wins a Physical Challenge against an opponent to whom she is attuned, the player may then make a Mental Challenge against her victim. Success means that the victim takes no physical damage from the attack but instead falls over helpless for the rest of the turn, thus giving the Stargazer time to capture or subdue her opponent or, perhaps, to withdraw from the battle scene.

- **Preternatural Awareness** — The Stargazer becomes so attuned to her surroundings that she can anticipate the actions of her opponent. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental Challenge to invoke the Gift. Thereafter, for the rest of the scene she gains some idea as to what any opponents are planning. The Storyteller should provide the player with information appropriate to the Gift's effects. If she engages a foe in combat while using this Gift, the player may limit her opponent's possible response to one of two hand signs. For example, she may inform her rival that she must use either Paper or Scissors, thus weighting the combat in the Stargazer's favor.

- **Strike the Air** — As the Child of Gaia Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

Advanced Gifts

- **Circular Attack** — The Stargazer becomes so fluid in her attacks that she can face a group of opponents in hand to hand combat and redirect their blows away from her and toward each other. The player spends a Willpower Trait before going into a combat against multiple opponents. She makes one Physical Challenge against all her opponents. Those who lose the challenge must redirect their blows to one of their fellow attackers, doing damage to their allies instead of to the Stargazer. The player may only use this Gift only once per turn and she may not spend a Rage Trait in the same turn.

- **Wisdom of the Seer** — The Stargazer studies the night sky and receives answers to almost any question from the position of the stars. This Gift only works at night. The player must spend 15 minutes out of game play "studying the sky." After doing so, she makes a Static Mental Challenge against seven Traits (retest with *Enigmas*). If she succeeds, she may ask the Storyteller a simple question and receive an honest and accurate answer.

Rites

The Stargazers enjoy rites as much as any Garou, but they tend to prefer simple and elegant variations on common rites. Whenever possible, they celebrate their rites in the evening, under a starry sky, and try to attune themselves to the alignment of the stars and planets to ensure a successful result to their rites. These philosophical Garou prefer Mystic Rites and Rites of Accord to Rites of Punishment or Renown and enjoy Seasonal rites as well.



Tengu

Description

Tengu fulfill their duties as watchers of humankind and unearthers of man's secrets with zeal and avidity. With the possible exception of the Hakken, the wereravens know more about human society than any other group of hengeyokai. More importantly, they share what they know.

As scouts and heralds for the Emerald Courts, the Tengu travel to all parts of the Middle Kingdom, returning periodically to relate everything they know to whoever wishes to listen. They are as prone to gossip as they are curious. While they share their most important bits and pieces of knowledge only with other hengeyokai, they spread juicy rumors and tidbits of information freely with other *shen* and, occasionally, with certain mortals. Some believe that the Tengu are responsible (or to blame) for the proliferation of partial truths in the legendry and mythology of humans. They also take the credit (or the blame) for imparting partial knowledge about the strengths and weaknesses of certain supernatural creatures — such as omitting facts about certain metals associated with the moon and sun. In the present age of rapid and uncontrollable spread of information, the Tengu find it more difficult to exercise any control over what knowledge leaks to which groups. While rural areas still allow them to edit legend to their liking, they can no longer keep certain areas of the population in the dark over cosmic truths when the Internet and other forms of mass media provide relatively easy access to large sections of humanity.

Like their Sunset cousins, the Corax, the Tengu have the ability to drink the eyes of a corpse and gain information about the person's demise. Other hengeyokai, rather than feeling disgust at the practice as their Western cousins do, understand and respect this ability of the wereravens, recognizing it as the proper task of the Children of Raven. However, this remains a practice best kept hidden — in human Asian cultures, eye-drinking is considered a filthy practice because it desecrates a corpse and handling the dead is the province of the lowest castes.

Organization

Most Tengu live solitary lives, traveling singly from place to place in their capacity as scouts and messengers. Occasionally, they convene in Parliaments for the purpose of disseminating what they have learned and exchanging lore and stories. Tengu make reluctant but loyal members of *sentai*, doing so when necessary or mandated by circumstances. Most of the Beast Courts throughout the Middle Kingdom have Tengu spies attached to them; lacking a wereraven as a member puts a court at a considerable disadvantage when dealing with other *shen*.

Tengu follow the Rank system of the Courts but otherwise make little distinction among themselves. They use the auspice system of the Way of Emerald Virtue. Wereravens settle disputes through an elaborate ritual of



games and puzzle challenges or by using humans as pawns in their schemes and allowing their actions to demonstrate an individual Tengu's superiority.

A small faction of Tengu, called the Gray Clouds Temple, occasionally kidnaps humans and trains them to hunt *shen* — usually pointing them in the direction of Kuei-jin, bakemono and Namebreakers. The Tengu instruct their pupils on weapon mastery (especially the blade), survival, martial arts, lore (although carefully editing certain things, such as hengeyokai weaknesses) and even sometimes hedge magic. The newly armed goblin hunters then make their way in the world with a much better chance of surviving and wreaking havoc on the enemies of the hengeyokai. What exactly the Temple's game is remains a mystery, but the results have never been less than interesting.

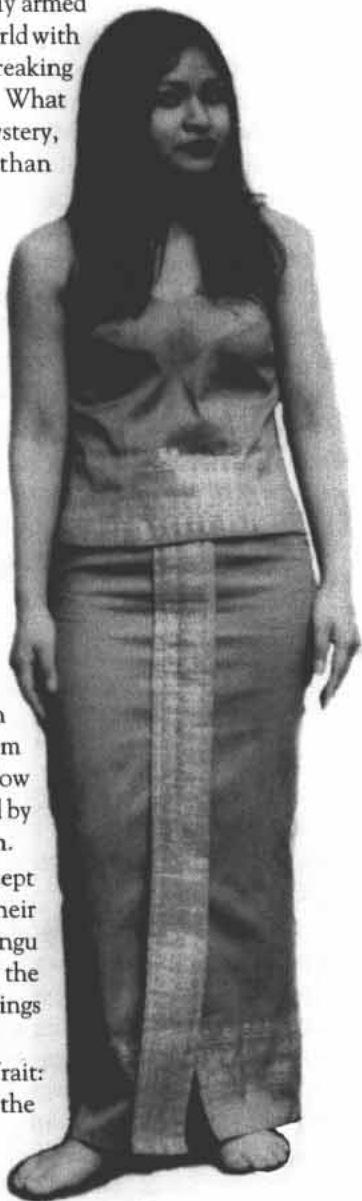
Traits

Tengu have an affinity for the sun rather than the moon. Silver does not affect them in any way; instead, they have a vulnerability to gold, the element of the sun. Tengu react to gold as other hengeyokai react to silver; the metal drains their Gnosis and they suffer aggravated damage from gold weapons.

Tengu who are affiliated with the Courts use the system of Rank and Renown set forth according to the precepts of the Way of Emerald Virtue. Within the Court, most Tengu fall under the Leaf auspice and gain Rank and Renown accordingly, although they still attempt to gain as much Wisdom Renown as possible. Unaffiliated Tengu follow a loose system of Renown similar to that used by Mirrors; Wisdom is most important to them.

Tengu may select any Backgrounds except for *Pure Breed*, since the circumstances of their "birth" preclude adherence to bloodlines. Tengu who are unaffiliated with the Courts enjoy the favor of Raven; Court Tengu rely on the blessings of their sentai's patron spirit.

Tengu begin play with the Bonus Trait: *Flight* x 2. Tengu may avail themselves of the ability to fly only when in those forms which possess wings. **Changing Breeds**





Book 1 gives descriptions of Corax special abilities such as *Flight*, *Altered Senses* and *Eye Drinking*.

Breeds

Tengu have one of the most unusual methods of reproduction of any of the *hengeyokai*. While wereravens may mate successfully with either humans or ravens, such couplings always produce Kinfolk rather than Tengu. Furthermore, even Kinfolk may not produce Tengu when they mate. Tengu legends whisper that their unique system of perpetuating their species came about through a celestial joke by one of the Ministers of Heaven. In any case, Tengu reproduce by binding an Umbral spirit egg to either a human infant or a raven chick. Usually, but not always, Tengu choose suitable hosts for their spirit-eggs from among Kinfolk. Occasionally, a non-Kinfolk human infant or raven hatchling so impresses a Tengu that she absconds with the young one in order to secure her claim.

Tengu must invest three Gnosis Traits in order to enact the *Rite of the Spirit Egg* that produces a new Tengu, so the wereravens are necessarily choosy, selecting only those candidates who appeal strongly to them. There is no such thing as an unwanted Tengu child.

The close bond between homid and corvid Tengu evidences itself in the fact that human-born Tengu may create only raven children and vice versa. Metis Tengu do not exist, for all matings between two Tengu are sterile. The bonds are so close that a Tengu generally considers both her birth-parent Kinfolk and her spirit-donor Tengu to be her parents.

Regardless of breed, all Tengu begin play with a Rage of 1, a Gnosis of 6 and a Willpower of 3.

FORMS

Tengu have three forms: Homid, Crinos and Corvid. All three forms have the Negative Trait: *Delicate* to reflect their light bone structure.

Homid

In Homid form, Tengu appear as normal humans of Asian stock. Their physical features tend toward thin bodies and sharp facial features. Most have black eyes, though a few green or blue-eyed individuals occur.

Crinos

The war form of the Tengu resembles a cross between a human and a raven. Crinos Tengu stand five feet tall, with human eyes and a nose-like bridge atop its beak. Flight-capable winged arms have taloned fingers. Tengu in Crinos form have awkward-appearing legs jointed like bird legs rather than human limbs. Crinos Tengu can fly regardless of rules affecting body mass, though they lack a certain gracefulness usually associated with birds. The talons on their hands and feet inflict aggravated damage in combat. Several Tengu Gifts are designed for use in Crinos form. Western Corax find this form somewhat embarrassing; Tengu, on the other hand, take great delight in terrifying (or



mystifying) humans, who frequently can't believe their eyes. This form evokes a very mild Delirium; count as two levels higher on the chart given in **Laws of the Wild**.

Corvid

A Tengu's Corvid or raven form is indistinguishable from that of a particularly large raven. While not terribly useful in combat, except as a distraction, this form is ideal for spying or bearing messages swiftly. Many Tengu, including the human-born, enjoy taking this form for the sheer exultation of flight and freedom.

Bonus Traits

Homid: No Bonus Traits; Negative Trait: *Delicate*

Crinos: *Attentive, Discerning, Nimble, Observant, Tireless, Wiry*;
Negative Traits: *Bestial x 2, Delicate, Tactless*

Corvid: *Alert, Attentive, Discerning, Nimble, Observant*. Negative Traits: *Bestial x 2, Delicate, Puny*

Gifts

Tengu have learned that not all Gifts serve their purposes; hence their Gifts tend to reflect their special qualities. Tengu begin play with three Gifts: one breed Gift, one Tengu Gift and one common hengeyokai Gift, whether or not they belong to the Courts. Tengu may use the Corvid Gifts described in **Changing Breeds Book 1** as well as breed Gifts from **Laws of the Wild**, if they are appropriate and possible, given the physical specifications of the wereravens. The Tengu's own Gifts enhance their strengths and provide them with a few specialized combat maneuvers.

Beginning Gifts

- **Courtly Speech** — As the common hengeyokai Gift (see Chapter Four).
- **Crane's Wisdom** — As the Philodox Gift: *Truth of Gaia* (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Shoulder Cracker** — Named for the Chinese practice of scapulomancy, this Gift enables the Tengu to read portents of the future from the signs around them: the flight of birds circling in the sky, the patterns of clouds or smoke or the appearance of animals or people at certain times or in certain places. Tengu who overuse this Gift often misread their surroundings, seeing omens where there are none. The player makes a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits. If she succeeds, the Storyteller should supply her with a visual image, which can run the gamut from the appearance of animals (such as three red foxes on a hill), to changes in the weather (a chill breeze on a sunny day), to events (a funeral procession), to something that makes a striking picture (a cherry tree shedding



its blooms in a stiff breeze, a wall full of Noh masks). The omen is usually vague or ambiguous.

- **Slicing Feathers** — This Gift bestows upon the Tengu a useful and exclusive form of attack that places them near, if not on a par with, warriors such as the Khan, Hakken and Same-Bito. Usable only in Crinos form, this Gift hardens the Tengu's arm feathers until they are as hard and sharp as a sword blade. Thus, the Tengu may parry knives or claws and can slice into flesh as if the wereraven were wielding a katana. The Tengu spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Static Physical Challenge against six Traits. For the duration of one combat, the Tengu's feathers become metallic and sharp-edged, glistening with ghost-fire. Any successful hits inflict aggravated damage. In addition, any successful defense deals one level of aggravated damage to any attacker using natural weaponry.

- **Sweet Words** — As the Homid Gift: *Persuasion* (see **Laws of the Wild**). Tengu frequently use this Gift to hasten the spread of rumors among humankind.

- **Voice of the Mimic** — The Tengu can use this Gift to imitate a sound or voice she has heard, including voices, inflections, accents, music, thunder, car crashes, electronic sounds and other noises. The player makes a Static Mental Challenge against a number of Traits determined by the Storyteller depending on the difficulty of the sound that the Tengu wishes to reproduce (natural sounds tend to be easier; retest with *Expression*). The Gift lasts for one scene.

Intermediate Gifts

- **Airt Sense** — This Gift has the same effect as the spirit Charm of the same name. A sentai with a Tengu who knows this Gift as a member can make use of its benefits. The Tengu spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Static Mental Challenge (against seven Traits, retest with *Occult*) to use this Gift. While under its effects, a Tengu can travel twice as quickly through the Tapestry by understanding the threads that connect one portion of the Tapestry to another.

- **Bloody Feather** — A Tengu with this Gift may pluck one of her feathers and toss it like a dart or a shuriken. Used in conjunction with the Gift: *Slicing Feathers*, this Gift can arm the Tengu with a formidable weapon. The Tengu must spend a Rage Trait to invoke the Gift. Throwing the feather requires a Physical Challenge and inflicts lethal damage. If the Tengu is also using the Gift: *Slicing Feathers*, the thrown feather inflicts aggravated damage and can punch through flesh, bone or armor easily.

- **Bloody Feather Storm** — This Gift produces a storm of razored feathers that rain down on anyone in the area beneath the Tengu, whether friend or foe. Because of its indiscriminate effects, Tengu use this Gift when they have no other recourse. The Tengu must be flying to use this Gift. The player spends three Gnosis and two Rage Traits and may take no other action for the rest of the turn. The storm of feathers covers a 15-foot-square area beneath the airborne wereraven and inflicts four levels of lethal damage to anyone underneath; a Physical Challenge to dodge is possible, but failure means getting



struck. If the Tengu combines this Gift with the Gift: *Slicing Feathers*, the damage is aggravated. The high cost to the Tengu in Rage and Gnosis precludes using the Gift except when absolutely necessary.

• **Yoshitsune's Sword** — This Gift enables the Tengu to boost a comrade's sword skill to levels that may exceed any the Tengu himself can achieve. The Tengu must touch the target's fighting arm (a Physical Challenge to do so is necessary only if the target is unwilling, which is rare), then make a Mental Challenge. Success enables the Tengu to spend Gnosis Traits to increase the target's combat skill with sword. Each Gnosis Trait spent gives the target an extra Trait in *Melee: Sword*. This Gift lasts for one scene.

Advanced Gifts

• **Deceptive Demise** — This Gift enables the Tengu to disappear in an explosive burst of feathers, leaving behind only a splash of blood or ashes, as if the wereraven had suddenly expired. While such a display may not fool everyone, particularly since no corpse remains behind, it nevertheless allows the Tengu to make a precipitous exit when faced with impossible odds. This is considered highly useful when dealing with bakemono, Kumo or other formidable or persistent foes. The Tengu spends a Gnosis point and sacrifices a health level to produce the blood or ash residue to activate the Gift. When the Gift is invoked, the character may instantly step sideways into the Mirror Lands in any form she chooses. Many Tengu opt to assume raven form and fly through the Umbra to effect their escape.

• **Thieving Talons of the Magpie** — As the Ragabash Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Rites

While they are not the most formal hengeyokai, Tengu appreciate some rites and perform them very well. Of particular use to them is the *Rite of Talisman Dedication*, which allows them to keep their favorite objects with them when they enter the Tapestry. Tengu also appreciate the *Rite of Becoming* and are masters of the various Rites of Punishment, such as the *Stone of Scorn* and the *Satire Rite*.

Basic

Rite of the Fetish Egg (Mystic) — The most important rite a Tengu can learn, for it ensures the proliferation of a new generation, this ceremony allows a wereraven to use some of his spirit to form a spirit egg that grows and matures in the Umbra until it hatches as a full-fledged Tengu and binds with an adolescent human or raven. This rite must take place in the Umbra. The Tengu must spend three Gnosis Traits in order to create the spirit egg, a process that takes four hours to complete. A corvid Tengu may only bind a human infant to the spirit egg, while a homid Tengu must bind a raven chick. Whether or not the rite succeeds, the Gnosis Traits are not recoverable. Another Tengu, of the same breed, must be present as a witness to the rite. If any interruption occurs the rite fails. Tengu often enlist other hengeyokai as guardians during the rite,



calling in favors as necessary to ensure a safe and uninterrupted ceremony. When the rite is completed the Tengu must make a Static Gnosis Challenge against six Traits. If she succeeds, the chosen infant or chick becomes a full-fledged Tengu upon attaining adolescence, unless someone finds and corrupts the spirit egg in the meantime. Kumo, bakemono and other unpleasant sorts find spirit eggs make very interesting omelets....

Zhong Lung

Description

Revered by all the hengeyokai (including the Kumo) and honored by most of the other *shen*, the Zhong Lung consider themselves the oldest of the Changing Breeds, originating during the Age of Beauty, when the Scarlet Queen and the Ebon Dragon sent their breaths of life flowing through the world at its creation. Alone of all the hengeyokai, the Zhong Lung bear the sacred task of keeping safe the memories of the Emerald Mother Herself. Within the hearts and minds of the Zhong Lung dwells the recollection of their descent from the lordly Dragon Kings. This constant reminder of their beginnings and their purpose gives the Middle Dragons (as they are called) a seriousness of intent that infuses their every waking and sleeping moment. Like their Sunset cousins, the Mokol , the Zhong Lung revere the Sun rather than the Moon. Their legends claim that each Zhong Lung bears a spark of the celestial fire within their hearts. To bask in the Sun and to let that orb warm their eggs are acts of honor for the descendants of the Dragon Kings.

The Zhong Lung, though similar in some ways to the Mokol , differ greatly in form. While the Western werelizards dream into being war-forms based on the prehistoric dinosaurs, the giants of primeval Earth, the Zhong Lung's dreams stretch further back into the time of myth. Their war-forms take the shape of the Dragon Kings themselves. Male Zhong Lung, called *k'iulung*, boast long drooping whiskers like catfish, great horns on their foreheads and pearls set under their chins when in their Archid or war-form. Female Zhong Lung, or *chil'lung*, lack the male's accoutrements; instead, their Archid forms possess long noses that can discern the slightest of scents and bright, feathery plumage on their heads. Both sexes have tails in Archid form. In all their forms, the Zhong Lung possess an immense dignity and nobility as well as an air of cunning and wisdom.

Masters of *chuming*, the art of knowing the heart of things, Zhong Lung gaze into the core of a being even as they gain first impressions by viewing a creature's outward appearance. This insight provides them with great knowledge of others and makes them powerful advisors and counselors. Most Zhong Lung are ancient in Western terms, either from Gifts that extend life or through secrets contained in the wisdom of the East.

The major weakness of the Zhong Lung lies in their inattentiveness to the day-to-day affairs of the present. So wrapped up are they in contemplation of the past that they often forget to take into account the world immediately around them. This detachment makes them seem distant and aloof. Like other hengeyokai, however, the Zhong Lung possess an inner Rage; most hengeyokai flee the sight of a Zhong Lung's righteous anger.

Zhong Lung are declining in number, with homid weredragons outnumbering dracos by a large proportion. Most Zhong Lung make their homes in China or Tibet. Alligators live along the banks of the Yangtze River,





while crocodiles dwell in India and Malaysia. The Komodo dragon, largest of all extant reptiles, is a native of Indonesia. Zhong Lung can also be found in Hawai'i, Cambodia, Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands. All the Zhong Lung share one abiding goal: the preservation of the memories of Gaia, the one constant throughout the turning of the Wheel of the Ages.

Organization

Male Zhong Lung generally live alone, coming out of solitude in order to meet with other Awakened creatures or to mate with their chosen consorts. Zhong Lung females live in small groups, usually consisting of three or four individuals. These groups, called *ching-tu*, serve as a convenient and companionable means of protecting pregnant mothers and their young ones.

Female Kinfolk congregate in small groups as well, usually under the supervision of a Zhong Lung elder female, referred to as *aiyi* (aunt). The *aiyi*, usually past her own childbearing years, has the responsibility for guarding the group's pregnant females or watching over their eggs until they hatch. Zhong Lung are born according to the mother's breed form — homid Zhong Lung or human Kinfolk give birth to human infants; a draco Zhong Lung or a reptilian Kinfolk lays a clutch of eggs. Zhong Lung, unlike the Mokolé, do not mate across breeds except in rare instances.

For the Zhong Lung of both breeds, mating involves a high degree of ritual. Acting as a negotiator, the *aiyi* serves as a go-between to bring male and female Zhong Lung together. The male must display his ability to tell stories and amass wisdom, hoping to impress the *aiyi*, along with his prospective mate. Female Zhong Lung can be very demanding and selective, sometimes requiring her suitors to challenge one another. These combats do not always involve force of





arms; rather, they more often take the form of storytelling contests or riddle games. Draco Zhong Lung resort to physical fights more often. Although the Zhong Lung prefer intellectual and philosophical resolutions of conflict, such as riddles and puzzles, their tastes do not indicate any weakness on their part. Both male and female Zhong Lung are formidable in battle, when they choose to embrace the art of War. But they do not consider mating grounds for causing harm to their rivals.

After mating, a male Zhong Lung returns home. When the children are born, the *aiyi* invites him to visit his mate and greet his children. A Sai Chou Zhong Lung (similar to a Garou Theurge) blesses the children and introduces them to their world, often helping them make their first treks along the crossroads of the Yin and Yang dragon lines.

Zhong Lung Ranks and Titles

Rank	Title
1	Kiao
2	Lung
3	Kiao-lung
4	Ying-lung
5	P'an-lung

Traits

While Zhong Lung characters may use the character creation guidelines from **Laws of the Wild** and the rules for Mokolé characters in **Changing Breeds Book 2**, there are some important modifications, explained below.

Like the Mokolé, the Zhong Lung turned long ago to the path of the Sun and the passing of the seasons. Zhong Lung have deep inner ties with their homelands, mirroring the passing of time and the cycles of the years in the lands of their birth. The four auspices of the Zhong Lung reflect this aspect of their lives.

Tung Chun

Similar to Ahroun Garou, this auspice corresponds to spring, the east wind and the color blue or green. Tung Chun may use most Ahroun Gifts. They gain Rank and Renown as Ahroun Garou.

Beginning Rage: 4

Nam Hsia

Not unlike the Philodox Garou, this auspice corresponds to summer, the south wind and the color yellow. Nam Hsia may use most Philodox Gifts. They gain Rank and Renown as Philodox Garou.

Beginning Rage: 3



Sai Chau

These Zhong Lung resemble Theurge Garou. They are responsible for the guardianship and care of dragon nests. This auspice corresponds to autumn, the west wind and the color white. Sai Chau may use most Theurge Gifts. They gain Rank and Renown as Theurge Garou.

Beginning Rage: 2

Pei Tung

Most like the Ragabash Garou, this auspice corresponds to winter, the north wind and the color black. Pei Tung may use most Ragabash Gifts and gain Rank and Renown as Ragabash Garou.

Beginning Rage: 1

All Zhong Lung consider themselves sages and lorekeepers, so individuals of any auspice may use most Galliard Gifts. (See **Laws of the Wild** for appropriate Gifts)

Zhong Lung may purchase any Backgrounds except for *Ancestors*. Often the weredragons choose *Pure Breed*. *Allies* and *Kinfolk* occur less frequently as Backgrounds. Zhong Lung may also select the *Mnesis* Background, which touches upon their ancestral memory. (See **Changing Breeds Book 2** for information on this Background.)

The Zhong Lung regenerate damage as Garou but they have a dual vulnerability to both gold and silver as creatures of both the Sun and the Moon. They generally prefer healing wounds while basking in the sun's warmth as a way of honoring their primary patron. They speak Dragon's Tongue, the common speech of all Mokolé, though their inflections and accents differ slightly from those of their Sunset cousins. All Zhong Lung begin play with a Willpower of 4.

Bonus Traits

Homid: No Bonus Traits

Archid: *Brawny* x 2, *Brutal*, *Ferocious* x 3, *Enduring* x 2, *Resilient* x 2, *Tireless*, *Tough* x 2, *Vigorous* x 3. Negative Traits: *Bestial* x 3

Suchid: *Tough*, *Enduring*, *Tireless*. Negative Traits: *Bestial*, *Feral* x 2

Breeds

Zhong Lung have only two breeds: homid and draco. Like the Mokolé, the Zhong Lung dream their war-forms or "dragon" self into existence before their First Change. Metis-born Zhong Lung do not survive the dream-experience.

Homid

Zhong Lung born of human parents bear the physical characteristics of their human ethnicity. In similar fashion, the Suchid form of a homid Zhong Lung takes on the reptilian form native to their place of birth. Thus a human-born Zhong Lung from the area near the Yangtze River will have the Suchid form of an alligator, a native of that area.

Beginning Gnosis: 2

Draco

Zhong Lung born of a reptilian parent appear as normal reptiles until their First Change. Draco Zhong Lung have the same Suchid form as their reptilian parent.

Beginning Gnosis: 4

FORMS

Zhong Lung have only three forms: Homid, Archid and Suchid. Such is the power and majesty of their Archid form, however, that other intermediate forms seem not only paltry but utterly unnecessary.

Homid

The Zhong Lung's Homid form resembles that of normal humans typical of their region of birth. They most often appear as peasants, farmers or other common folk, since they believe that honor and nobility are inner, rather than outer, virtues.

Archid

Unlike other hengeyokai, Zhong Lung "dream" their most powerful form. When a Zhong Lung undergoes her *Rite of Passage*, she enters a dream state in which she discovers her true "dragon self." Unlike their Mokol  cousins, whose dreams reflect the primeval history of the world, the Zhong Lung's dreams have their seeds in the Middle Kingdom's cosmology. Each Zhong Lung dreams a form reminiscent of the Wani, the Dragon Princes of Heaven. While some may blend dragon and dinosaur features accessed through Mnesis (see **Changing Breeds Book 2**), most Zhong Lung's dreams take forms that resemble the traditional Eastern dragon. Not only does the Archid form invoke the Delirium in mortals, other hengeyokai who encounter a Zhong Lung in Archid form experience a combination of fearful respect and awe. When in the presence of an Archid Zhong Lung, a hengeyokai must make a Mental Challenge. If she fails, she must spend a Willpower Trait to change into another form. Even minions of the Centipede quake with fear when they encounter the formidable dragon-form of the Zhong Lung.

Suchid

A Draco Zhong Lung's Suchid form resembles her reptilian ancestors, while a Homid Zhong Lung's Suchid form mimics the reptiles native to her birthplace. Crocodiles and alligators run at half normal speed, though they swim as quickly as humans can move on land. Monitor lizards swim reasonably well but run as fast as normal humans.

FORMS of the DREAM

When a Zhong Lung dreams her dragon form into existence during the course of her *Rite of Passage*, she acquires physical characteristics that remain consistent throughout her life. Zhong Lung player characters select a number of Archid Traits equal to her Gnosis at her *Rite of Passage*. If the character has





four Gnosis Traits, she may select four Archid Traits. A Trait may be selected more than once for additional power by spending additional Gnosis Traits. Even if she acquires more Gnosis later on, she may never acquire more Archid Traits. Her form is set during the dream. Players should cooperate with their Storyteller when designing their characters Archid forms since some of the Traits may overbalance the game. The most common Archid Traits suitable for Zhong Lung are listed below; with permission, players may use the Traits for the Mokolé's Archid forms as described in **Changing Breeds Book 2**.

Armor — A Zhong Lung's armor in Archid form takes the appearance of glistening scales. It adds an additional two levels of defense — two Bruised health levels. By allocating two Gnosis Traits to *Armor*, a character may gain three Bruised health levels.

Bladed Tail — This Trait allows the Zhong Lung to inflict an additional health level of aggravated damage with a tail strike.

Color Change — The Zhong Lung with this Trait may blend with the surrounding cover, making it nearly impossible to detect her presence. The character gains one free retest against attempts to see through her camouflage.

Constricting Coils — The Zhong Lung may use her body to constrict her opponent. This Trait gives the Zhong Lung *Brutal* x 2 for a grappling attack and continues to inflict damage until the trapped opponent succeeds in a Physical Challenge.

Fiery Pearl — A reminder of the Dragon's Fire, this Trait substitutes a knob of shining bone for the normal pearl of male Zhong Lung. Zhong Lung characters with this Trait receive two levels of *Intimidation* when facing down creatures such as Kuei-jin, bakemono and other Yin-oriented individuals or servants of the Centipede.

Fins — This Trait doubles the swimming speed of the Zhong Lung but does not allow for the use of claws.

Gills — Zhong Lung with this Trait may breathe in water.

Grasping Hands — The Zhong Lung may use tools and other hand-held items normally with this Trait and takes no Dexterity-related Negative Traits.

Horn — This Trait allows the Zhong Lung to inflict one additional health level of aggravated damage from a successful head butt.

Huge Size — The Zhong Lung's size is larger than normal, allowing for additional toughness at the expense of a certain lethargy of movement. The Zhong Lung exceeds the usual size for a Middle Kingdom dragon by about 250 pounds. The character gains an extra Healthy health level. In addition, however, the Zhong Lung in Archid Form gains the Negative Trait *Lethargic*. This Trait may be taken a maximum of three times for a total of three Healthy health levels. Each time a character takes *Huge Size*, she also receives another Negative Trait *Lethargic*.

Note: Characters of such great magnitude in size tend to move more slowly in combat. A character with this Archid Trait may need to make a Simple Test



each turn in order to take their intended action. The Storyteller should decide whether or not to require this test in her game.

Long Teeth — This Trait gives the Zhong Lung two extra Traits for bite attacks. Successful attacks inflict an additional level of aggravated damage.

Poison Sacs — The Zhong Lung's bite, if successful, inflicts two levels of aggravated damage in addition to damage from the actual bite. Zhong Lung may also assign their poison to another portion of their body — such as their claws or tail blade. A character may purchase this Trait up to three times, granting an additional level of damage for each purchase.

Resplendent Crest — Zhong Lung with this Trait in Archid form gain a single automatic retest on Social Challenges with other hengeyokai or *shen* when in Archid form (the second result stands).

Royal Crest — This Trait manifests as a colorful, bony nose-ridge. Zhong Lung with a *Royal Crest* gain two Social Traits when testing against Mokolé, Nagah or other Zhong Lung.

Terrible Claws — Zhong Lung with *Terrible Claws* gain an additional Trait for their claw attack and inflict an additional level of aggravated damage.

Upright Walking — The Zhong Lung may stand upright in his Archid form with this Trait and also gains the ability to use tools in Archid form.

Webbed Feet — This Trait enables the Zhong Lung to move rapidly in water, though his movement on land is slowed. The player may move five steps when in water but only two steps on land to simulate the effects of this Trait.

Zhong Lung Lexicon

Aiyi: Zhong Lung females who act as matchmakers.

Archid: Crinos form of the Zhong Lung.

Chi'lung: Female Zhong Lung.

Ching-tu: A group of Zhong Lung who gather together to protect the breed's mothers and children.

Chuming: The special Zhong Lung ability to know the inner essence of a thing.

Draco: Reptile-born Zhong Lung.

Kiao: Rank One Zhong Lung.

Kiao-lung: Rank Three Zhong Lung.

K'iulung: Male Zhong Lung.

Lung: Rank Two Zhong Lung.

Nam Hsia: The auspice that corresponds to the Garou Philodox.

P'an-lung: Rank Five Zhong Lung.

Pei Tung: The auspice that corresponds to the Garou Ragabash.

Sai Chau: The auspice that corresponds to the Garou Theurge.

Tung Chun: The auspice that corresponds to the Garou Ahroun.

Ying-lung: Rank Four Zhong Lung.



Gifts

Zhong Lung begin play with three Gifts in any combination. They may choose from the Zhong Lung Gifts described below or from their corresponding Garou auspices or breeds. Any Zhong Lung may choose from the Garou Galliard Gifts. Zhong Lung who follow the Way of Emerald Virtue may select a Gift from among the common hengeyokai Gifts. Many of the Zhong Lung's Gifts are taught by Ancestor-spirits, servants of Tiandi or Si Wang Mu.

Beginning Gifts

- **Breaking the Tomorrow Wall** — The Zhong Lung use this Gift to look briefly into the near future. The character must burn the feather of a bird and meditate on the pattern of the smoke, then spend a Gnosis point and make a Mental Challenge (retest with *Enigmas*). Success allows the Zhong Lung to gain some insight into a future event, though the information is usually vague and often symbolic. This is similar to the Midnight Sun Mokolé Gift found in *Changing Breeds Book 2*.

- **Chi'ih Ming** — The Gift's name means "gasbag." Zhong Lung using this Gift may walk on air as if walking normally on land. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical Challenge (retest with *Athletics*). If successful, the Zhong Lung may walk on air at a normal pace, but may not run. This Gift lasts for one scene.

- **Clap of Thunder** — As the Shadow Lord Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*). With this Gift, the Middle Dragons reflect their kinship with the Great Dragons, who have the power to bring rain and thunder to the world.

- **Dragon's Milk** — As the Theurge Gift: *Mother's Touch* (see *Laws of the Wild*) except that the Zhong Lung must mix her blood with that of the individual she wishes to heal.

- **Shou** — As the Philodox Gift: *Wisdom of the Ancient Ways* (see *Laws of the Wild*). Tapping into the wisdom of the ancestors, this Gift enables the Zhong Lung to uncover advice and information and is taught by an Ancestor-spirit.

Intermediate Gifts

- **Anger of the Wani** — As the Wendigo Gift: *Invoke the Spirits of the Storm* (see *Laws of the Wild*) except that, after using this Gift, the Zhong Lung falls into a sleep that lasts for an entire day. During his sleep, the Zhong Lung sends his dreams as offerings to the Dragon Princes in thanks for the Gift.

- **The Dragon's Tongue** — This Gift enables the Zhong Lung to call down a bolt of lightning to strike a specific opponent. To invoke The Dragon's Tongue, she spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Physical Challenge (retest with *Intimidation*) against her victim. Success means that the victim takes three levels of aggravated damage.

- **Harmony of the Soul** — As the Mokolé Gift: *Serenity* (See *Changing Breeds Book 2*). The Zhong Lung use this Gift to ensure peace in their courts,



particularly when entertaining visitors (such as Kuei-jin or Sunset People) who might otherwise arouse the anger of other court attendees.

- **Send the Dream** — As the Metis Gift: *Mental Speech* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Advanced Gifts

- **Sleep of Si Wang Mu** — This Gift enables the Zhong Lung to enter a hibernating sleep that adds years to her normal lifespan. The player spends a permanent Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical Challenge (retest with *Enigmas*). Success places the character into a three-day sleep which adds a dozen years to his natural life. Since this Gift can put a character out of the story for an extended period of time, players should use it judiciously — either during downtime, with Storyteller's approval, or to take advantage of a necessary absence from the chronicle.

- **Thousand Secret Faces** — As the Midnight Sun Mokolé Gift of the same name (see *Changing Breeds Book 2*). The Zhong Lung guard their knowledge of this Gift with utmost secrecy, for with it, the character can assume an almost perfect illusion of her choice. Others, including hengeyokai and *shen* of a mystical bent as well as other Zhong Lung, find it difficult to penetrate the illusion without using supernatural powers — and even then, they must have a reason to suspect the disguise.

Rites

The Zhong Lung have a great appreciation of and respect for rites and formal ceremonies. They commonly practice Rites of Accord and Mysticism, but they save their most elaborate rites to acknowledge the changes of the seasons. The *Rite of Nanfeng* (south wind) ushers in the beginning of summer, while the *Rite of Xifeng* (west wind) honors the arrival of autumn. The *Rite of Beifeng* (north wind) heralds the advent of winter and the *Rite of Dongfeng* (east wind) announces the coming of spring. The *Rite of Renewal*, performed on the New Year, pays tribute to the passing of one year and the birth of a new procession of seasons. At each seasonal rite, the Zhong Lung auspice pertaining to that rite receives special honor. A member of the appropriate auspice often receives the privilege of leading the rite. The Zhong Lung often work music, art, dancing and other aesthetic activities into their rites as well as paying tribute to Tiandi, the Lord of Thunder and patron of dragons. The weredragons also take part in numerous rites honoring the Sun.





Chapter Four: Ways of the Middle Kingdom

Changes in Character Creation

This chapter covers a wealth of material that emphasizes the differences between the hengeyokai and their society and that of Western shapechangers. While the information contained in **Laws of the Wild** and the various **Changing Breeds** sourcebooks lay the groundwork for character creation and game mechanics, the rules and guidelines that follow should enable Storytellers to customize their Middle Kingdom chronicles. It is not possible to include every detail of character creation and world-building in these pages. Unless a subject is specifically covered below, use the guidelines in **Laws of the Wild**.

Merits and Flaws

Merits and Flaws help flesh out a character, adding weaknesses and strengths that make her unique and often more fun to play. Many of the Merits and Flaws listed in **Laws of the Wild** and the **Changing Breeds** sourcebooks can apply to hengeyokai characters, with little or no adaptation, while others may simply be unsuitable. Check with your Storyteller before selecting Merits and Flaws. The Merits and Flaws listed below are particularly appropriate for characters residing in the Middle Kingdom and belonging to the Beast Courts.

Perfect Protocol (1 Trait Merit)

Since birth, you have always known what to say and what to do at the right times and in the right places. You can converse politely with the sinister Kuei-jin, preside at a tea ceremony with the most august of *hsien* and win the



favor of the most reclusive of the Zhong Lung. You gain an extra Trait in any Social or Mental Challenge involving protocol, etiquette or similar issues. You also earn an automatic retest in appropriate situations.

Auspicious Birth (2 Trait Merit)

You enjoy the favor of the heavens. Born under a lucky star, you find fortune and luck follow you wherever you go. Others consider you a natural leader for a sentai and believe that they share in your luck when they are near you. Once per session you may automatically win one test by designating it a "lucky" occasion.

Rival Clan (1 Trait Flaw)

For some reason, another group of shapeshifters has difficulty getting along with you. Perhaps you have provoked the Nezumi one too many times or have managed to alienate the local Tengu. For whatever reason, whenever you deal with your rival group, you suffer a two-Trait penalty in any Social Challenge and they gain an automatic retest. Work with your Storyteller to create this rival clan.

Angry Ancestor (2 Trait Flaw)

You have somehow earned the wrath of one of your Ancestor-spirits; either you don't measure up in some essential way, or you've inadvertently slighted her or caused problems for her in the Celestial Courts. In any case, your ancestor has decided to dog your movements and make her disapproval plain to you — and those around you. Whenever you interact with the spirit world, either through participating in rites or traveling through the Mirror Lands, you suffer a one-Trait penalty in any action you attempt to take. Furthermore, if you have the *Ancestor Background*, your ancestor may sometimes take over your body and attempt to force you to behave to her liking. (The player must make a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits to resist being temporarily possessed by her angry ancestor, which may make her even more irritated) In most cases, the ancestor does not wish you any real harm; she merely wants you to mend your ways. Roleplaying may eventually buy off this Flaw, with the Storyteller's consent.

Inauspicious Birth (2 Trait Flaw)

Born under an ill sign, you attract misfortune and complications wherever you go. Others consider you unlucky and often ascribe failures and bad luck to your mere presence. Once per session the Storyteller may declare one of your actions "unlucky," giving your opponent an automatic success in a specific non-lethal challenge. You may take both this Flaw and the Merit *Auspicious Birth* to represent a character whose birth presents mixed blessings for those around him, as luck is in the eye of the beholder.



Common Gifts

The Gifts that follow belong to the Beast Courts in common and any hengeyokai who subscribes to the Way of Emerald Virtue may learn them. Outsiders, however, may only learn these Gifts under special circumstances. Hengeyokai who follow the ways of their Breed rather than the Courts may still learn these Gifts in return for special service to the Emerald Courts.

Beginning characters who are eligible to learn common hengeyokai Gifts may choose instead to learn a Gift from an auspice appropriate to her role (see **Laws of the Wild**). Thus, Lanterns may learn Philodox Gifts; Mirrors may choose from Theurge Gifts; Fists may study Ahroun Gifts; Leaves may opt for Ragabash Gifts; and Pillars may select from among Galliard Gifts.

Basic Gifts

- **Blaze Talons** — This Gift enables the hengeyokai to ignite hands or paws so that his blows strike with the ferocity of wildfire. Tengu in Crinos form may combine this Gift with *Razor Feathers* and ignite their wings — a truly formidable combination. Individuals using this Gift form swirling patterns of flame as they attack — often serving as a distraction and a source of awe to their opponents as well. Spend a Gnosis point and make a Physical Challenge (retest with *Primal-Urge*). Success means that the character's physical strikes inflict an additional level of aggravated damage, even when using fists instead of claws. Vampires must make a Willpower Test to avoid fleeing in frenzy from the sight of this attack. Same-Bito, Nagah and Zhong Lung, with their close ties to water, must learn this Gift as an Intermediate Level Gift. This Gift lasts for four turns.

- **Courtly Speech** — Generally, hengeyokai who are acting as emissaries prefer to speak in the host's tongue as a mark of politeness. With this useful Gift, the hengeyokai may converse in the language of any of the other Changing Breeds tongues as if fluent in that tongue. This Gift imparts mastery of even the oddest forms of speech — pheromonal emanations of the Kumo, the electrically charged language of the Same-Bito, even the chattering speech of the Nezumi. The parameters of this Gift do not include written symbols or human languages. Make a Social Challenge (retest with *Linguistics*). The Gift lasts for one scene.

- **Create Element** — As the Metis Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**). Some hengeyokai, if they have attuned themselves to the "moon" as an element, may summon pure moonlight through this Gift, providing themselves and their sentai with illumination and comfort.

- **Mindspoke** — As the Galliard Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**). Hengeyokai find this Gift convenient for introducing and communicating with outsiders attending the Courts for the first time.

- **Sense Imbalance** — Hengeyokai use this Gift to attune themselves to the local balance among the Three. They can sense a wrongness in the Triad or in the triumvirate of Yin, Yang and Yomi. This Gift tells her which of the



three has fallen out of parity with the other two and in what manner. For example, she might learn that a particular area is overwhelmed by Weaver power or that a normally dangerous part of a city is weak in Yomi activity. The player makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Occult*); success gives her information on the relative strengths and weaknesses of the three major forces in an area. Like *Sense Wyrms*, this is not an automatic "evil-meter." The presence of a high amount of Yomi may be more indicative of a lack of Yin or Yang than activity by bakemono. The Storyteller may use phrases such as "You sense a strong Yin Chi in this neighborhood" or "There is almost no Yang Chi in this wood — curious!"

Intermediate Gifts

- **Exorcism** — As the Theurge Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**). Court hengeyokai regularly use this Gift to banish evil spirits sent by the Yama Kings to plague the shapeshifters of the Middle Kingdom.

- **Part the Wall** — This Gift allows hengeyokai who cannot normally step sideways to do so as if they were Garou. Khan, Nagah, Zhong Lung and Same-Bito make a point of learning this Gift as soon as they are of sufficient Rank to do so. Once a character knows this Gift, stepping sideways becomes automatic, according to the rules in **Laws of the Wild**.

- **Waking Dream of Unity** — A simpler form of mass communication, hengeyokai use this Gift when *Mindpeak* proves unsuitable for regular court functions. This Gift places a group of hengeyokai in wordless communication through sending waking dreams into their minds. Known by most hengeyokai Gai'nan, the magistrates use it to communicate with the entire court simultaneously. Spend a Willpower Trait to place up to 30 other characters into silent communication. Everyone affected must be present when the character invokes the Gift. The activator of the Gift may bring unwilling participants into the waking dream by winning a Social Challenge (retest with *Expression*). The Gift lasts for one court session.

Common Rites

Hengeyokai, like their Sunset cousins, appreciate the formality and beauty of ceremony. Perhaps even more so than Western shapeshifters, the Changing Breeds of the Middle Kingdom enjoy gathering together to celebrate and pay honor to their Ancestors and to the many spirits of the Mirror Lands. In the Beast Courts, rites serve as a way to bring all the Changing Breeds together, for when the ritemaster of the Courts calls for a rite, all present participate, regardless of whether they are Hakken or Same-Bito.

The rites described below provide a sampling of rituals and ceremonies commonly practiced within the Beast Courts and shared by all hengeyokai. Most of these rights may be learned by anyone who wishes to do so, provided they possess sufficient knowledge to do so. A few, however, are secret rituals that, while not openly shared with other hengeyokai, nevertheless represent the true spirit of the Eastern shapeshifters.

Rites of Accord



Rites of Accord play an important role in the lives of the hengeyokai since these rituals reflect the spirit of the Mandates. The Courts make certain that as many hengeyokai as possible learn the Middle Kingdom's version of the *Rites of Contrition and Cleansing*, since these rites exemplify the balance of the middle way. The Courts also use their own form of the *Rite of Renunciation*, known as the *Rite of the Great Burden*. This rite takes place whenever one of the hengeyokai wishes to change from service to his Breed to service of the Court or vice versa. The *Rite of the Great Burden* is also used whenever one of the Sunset People is allowed to serve the Courts. See **Laws of the Wild** for Rites of Accord that may be adapted for use by hengeyokai.

Basic

Rite of Feeding the Ghosts (Accord) — Hengeyokai use this rite to honor their ancestors, asking for their guidance and offering them a sacrifice. The rite's enactor always assumes breed form for this rite and usually performs it alone, though relatives may participate in a communal version of the rite. The ritemaster prepares and offers food appropriate to her ancestors. Nezumi may proffer rice in abundance, Kitsune might prepare a selection of fresh-killed meats, sweets and sake, Same-Bito might supply a copious amount of fish. The hengeyokai then sings, chants, dances or engages in similar activities while waiting for the Ancestor-spirits to arrive and partake of the feast. While the food does not actually disappear, the ancestors of the ritemaster do arrive and consume the sacrifice's spiritstuff if the rite is successful. Though no hengeyokai would dare, anyone crude enough to eat the sacrificial food after the rite finds it without taste or nutritional value. When the character has undergone the proper activities, the ritemaster makes a standard rituals challenge. If successful, the player gains an automatic retest on any attempts to seek advice or guidance from Ancestor-spirits. Characters laboring under the disfavor of the spirits (or possessing the *Angry Ancestor* or *Inauspicious Birth Flaws*) may win a temporary reprieve from the wrath of the spirits, if the Storyteller is amenable.

Rite of the Second Face (Accord) — Similar to the Garou *Rite of Renunciation* in intent, if not in form, this rite announces a hengeyokai's desire to change from her original path to a new one. In most cases, the rite's enactor uses it to change his auspice to a more suitable one or to resign from a sentai in order to take up the role of courtier. Circumstances may also dictate other uses of this rite. The ritemaster performs this ritual at a crossroads, even if only the intersection of two paths in the jungle or the crossing of two well-traveled sea-lanes. The petitioner begs the spirits' blessing for her new path and renews her loyalty to the Beast Courts. When the rite is over, the hengeyokai's companions or courtiers lead her from the site and offer her an official welcome to her new role. Although changing auspice is not done lightly, occasionally it proves necessary for an individual to do so. When this happens, the character loses no Renown in the process unless her current Renown



would put her at a higher Rank in her new auspice. If so, she loses just enough Renown to place her at the midpoint of her current Rank. Characters seldom change auspice more than once. To attempt a third auspice courts disaster in the eyes of the Celestial Ministers. No tests are necessary for this rite and no Traits are risked.

Caern Rites

Hengeyokai place as much emphasis on rites to protect, strengthen and guard their caerns, or dragon's nests, as Western shapeshifters. Kuei-jin thirst for the Chi locked up in caerns, Namebreakers lust for the power they can siphon from these places of energy, and rogue shapeshifters lurk near potent caerns in an attempt to claim these havens for themselves. Wyrmspawn and demons from the Yomi worlds occasionally stage raids on caerns, trying to defile and corrupt them for their own use. Thus, the hengeyokai have their hands full trying to hold onto what has been given to them by the Emerald Mother to hold in trust for her. The Beast Courts have their own versions of all the Garou Caern Rites except for *The Badger's Burrow*. See **Laws of the Wild** for a description of these rites. The specifics may change to reflect the culture of the Middle Kingdom, but they achieve the same results.

Death Rites

The Courts usually do not hold death rites for those hengeyokai who serve them. Each Changing Breed, rather, bears the responsibility for celebrating or mourning the passage of an individual from one world to another. Nobody wishes to anger the Ancestors of a particular Breed by an improper burial ceremony. Each Changing Breed has its own specialized form of the Death Rites. The Hakken hold formal funerals marked by poetic elegies and artistic displays, while the Nagah have a much simpler rite that commits the bodies of their dead to the River. **Laws of the Wild** may provide guidelines for rites to honor the dead. The Courts reserve one Death Rite to honor the passing of a hengeyokai whose actions brought honor to his court.

Basic

Journey's End (Death) — Used to pay homage to a deceased hero whose deeds gave great honor to his court, this rite is the only death ritual enacted by the Courts themselves. The body of the hero is placed in the heart of the caern in the midst of a diamond pattern of lanterns burning with spirit-fire. As the court's historian keeps up a slow drumbeat, a representative of each Breed performs some act honoring the deceased individual. A Hakken might recite a haiku or present a calligraphed poem about the hero; a Kitsune might hold an elegant tea ceremony on behalf of the deceased; a Khan might perform a stylized dance of grief. When all the emissaries of the Breeds have finished, the surviving members of the hero's sentai, if any, perform a song or chant of their loss and grief. In the event that an entire sentai has perished and the rite is performed in honor of all of them, this task falls to the court's Gai'n'an. After the song, all the participants chant a mantra to call the body



home. At the end of the mantra, a powerful wind rises and extinguishes the lanterns; the body of the hero vanishes, spirited away into the Umbra. This is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon one of the Eastern shapeshifters. No actual tests are necessary; the Storyteller should describe the effects of this rite. The subject of the rite gains a point of permanent (posthumous) Virtue at the end of the rite and may, in fact, become a powerful Ancestor-spirit. Such heroes, though welcome in the Courts of Heaven, often return in answer to Ancestor summonings from their descendants in the Middle Kingdom.

Mystic Rites

The hengeyokai strive constantly to attune themselves to the cycles of life and to the Wheel of the Ages. Mystic Rites, therefore, have a special meaning for the Eastern shapechangers and are numerous and varied. Most Mystic Rites fall under the aegis of the Court seer or a sentai's Mirror, though frequently many hengeyokai participate in these rites. The *Rite of Binding*, *Talisman Dedication*, *Summoning* and *Spirit Awakening* are common among the Courts. See **Laws of the Wild** for other rites that are adaptable for use with shapeshifters of the Middle Kingdom. A few rites, however, are specific to the Eastern Changing Breeds.

Intermediate

Rite of the Harmonious Journey — The Court's ritemaster performs this rite for a group of hengeyokai who wish to form a mountain sentai. Usually enacted by moonlight, the ritemaster begins this rite by announcing each participant by direction, task and element. After the new sentai's members have been presented, the ritemaster leads the entire group into the Mirror Lands as if "treading the mountain's shoulders" (see "Sentai," below). The journey through the Umbra leads to the court of the sentai's desired totem spirit where the group petitions the spirit's patronage. When the totem spirit has bestowed its blessing, the new sentai re-emerges into the physical world.

If the rite is roleplayed correctly and with the appropriate attitude of seriousness, the Storyteller may waive the necessity for any tests. Otherwise, the players may need to make a Static Social Challenge against the totem spirit (difficulty is seven Traits; retest with *Rituals*). Each member of the sentai must purchase the *Totem* Background prior to the enactment of the rite.

Rite of the Spirit Tattoo — Whenever hengeyokai undertake a particularly dangerous or risky mission, particularly for the Emerald Court, this rite is often used to enhance their abilities by binding a spirit into the skin of the subject in the form of a tattoo. Whenever the hengeyokai calls upon the spirit, it manifests one of its Charms. An armored Ancestor-spirit might materialize and engage an opponent in battle, while a Dragon-spirit might stretch from its wearer's body and breathe fire or spit lightning at a designated target. Once the spirit has performed its function, it departs immediately. The ritemaster must first call the chosen spirit with the *Rite of Summoning* (see **Laws of the Wild**). If successful, the spirit grafts itself onto the skin of the



subject, appearing as a tattoo. Each spirit has a particular power it may use on behalf of the hengeyokai, designated during the performance of the rite. In order to activate the tattoo, the hengeyokai must spend a Gnosis Trait and make a Simple Test. The spirit comes forward and takes its action as the tattoo fades from the hengeyokai's skin. Spirit tattoos are considered dedicated items, and an individual may not have a total of tattoos and dedicated items that exceeds her permanent rating in Gnosis.

Advanced

Rite of the Goblin Chrysalis — Thought to have originated with the Kumo, this foul rite of the Yomi Courts binds a Bane to a living creature, thus forming a bakemono. The victim must be bound in fresh Kumo silk and coated with warm blood before the rite begins. Though Kumo silk is necessary, other fallen shapeshifters may perform this rite — usually after cutting the silk from a captive Kumo's abdomen, a practice which also provides the necessary blood for the rite. The ritemaster makes a standard rites challenge against eight Traits (retest with *Rituals*). An innocent victim increases the difficulty of the test to nine Traits and does not allow a retest; their innocence makes it more difficult for the Bane to gain a foothold in their spirits.

Punishment Rites

The hengeyokai courts share many Punishment Rites. Some are unique to each Breed. The Tengu have created variants of the *Stone of Scorn* and *Satire Rite*, which they share with other hengeyokai in keeping with their general philosophy of information-sharing. Storytellers should use the rites described in **Laws of the Wild** as the basis for adapting rites for hengeyokai. In addition, the following rites exemplify the unique nature of Eastern justice.

Intermediate

Rite of the Quiet Burial — Hengeyokai who need time and solitude to reflect upon their shortcomings sometimes find themselves the subject of this rite, which provides them with plenty of time alone and without distractions, buried beneath the earth. Participants in the rite escort the subject to the place of burial, where they bind his wrists and ankles with white cords and inscribe the hengeyokai symbol for "silence" on his forehead. The escorts lower the subject into an already prepared grave, subduing him as necessary. The subject does not need to be conscious for this portion of the rite. The ritemaster inscribes the nature of the subject's offense on a piece of bark and tosses it onto the victim's chest while announcing the infraction to the four winds. When this is done, the participants cover the victim with earth, tamping it down firmly.

Successful performance of the rite means that the victim does not need to eat, drink or breathe for the duration of the ritual, which usually lasts from sunset to sunrise. During this time, the victim is aware and able to spend his confinement in contemplation of the actions that resulted in his current situation. The rite master must make a Static Social Challenge against eight



Traits (retest with *Rituals*). If he fails, he realizes that something went wrong and the victim must be immediately removed from the ground, assuming that the Emerald Mother has determined that the ritual is too rigorous for the subject. The harrowing experience of being buried alive, however, often permanently affects the victim. The player must make three Simple Tests. If the player fails even one of these tests, the Storyteller may assign the character a suitable derangement. When the rite ends, the participants return to unearth the subject, whose transgressions are considered forgiven. The combined sense of claustrophobia and abandonment often serves to set the errant hengeyokai back on the proper course or action, and a second performance of this rite is seldom warranted for the same individual.

Advanced

Rite of Hell Made Flesh — Only the vilest of individuals, those who betray the Emerald Mother or her servants in the most foul manner, receive this extreme punishment. The subject is brought — usually by force — to a secluded and desolate place where no one can hear his screams. This area is often in deep wilderness, though some large cities may contain certain districts which qualify. Here the ritemaster describes the victim's crimes and appeals to the spirits to address the treachery in the most horrible of ways, by transmuting the victim's bones into whatever substance is most suitable — silver for most hengeyokai, gold for Tengu or Zhong Lung, and *hong mu* rosewood for Kumo. This transformation begins with the feet and proceeds upward to the crown of the skull. At the end of the ritual, the victim is dead, boiled alive by his own bones. Even in breed form, this form of execution is long and extremely painful. The performers of the rite dispose of the body in the most practical and efficient way possible, so as to cause no further offense to the spirits. Anyone greedy enough to attempt to cut open the corpse to mine its bones finds himself cursed with a permanent and incurable wasting disease for his troubles. This rite is reserved only for special circumstances and should not be used lightly, as once it begins there is no reversing it. Storytellers may wish to consider carefully before allowing the rite to be used on player characters. This rite can be both memorable and instructive against Storyteller-controlled characters or as the climax to a scene in which a great villain or traitor receives justice from the spirit world.

Renown Rites

The Courts have only a few common Renown Rites. According Renown and honoring a rise in Rank involves a variant of the *Rite of Accomplishment* (see *Laws of the Wild*). The Courts have their own special rite to celebrate the arrival of a new hengeyokai and welcome her to the service of the Emerald Mother.

Basic

Rite of the Opened Way — This rite introduces a hengeyokai who has just undergone her First Change to the Courts and to the service of the



Emerald Mother. As preparation, the young hengeyokai must learn the Mandates by heart and undergo a minor test of her worth. Unless enough new hengeyokai are available to comprise a new sentai, the subject undergoes this preliminary testing alone, unlike the Garou Rite of Passage, which involves an entire pack. After passing tests of her ability and knowledge, all subjects are brought under the light of the moon for the performance of this rite. The ritemaster purifies all candidates in turn and leads them into a meditative state. As the ritemaster speaks the proper words over each candidate's head, the subject opens herself to her destiny, receiving visions that illustrate her purpose in life and the Way she is to follow. Fists might see visions of war and images of weapons, while Mirrors might gain glimpses of spirits and journeys through the Mirror Lands. After the chant is over, the cub emerges from her trance and speaks of her visions. The ritemaster then paints a pictogram of the cub's chosen auspice on her body or face and presents her with a wooden badge signifying her new rank. The ritemaster makes the usual Social Challenge to perform the rite successfully. All else should be roleplayed among the players and the Storyteller.

Totems

Totems play an important part in the lives of the hengeyokai just as they do for Western shapechangers. Often referred to as *nushi*, certain totems serve the Courts exclusively, while other Tribal Totems serve Eastern shapeshifters as well as their Western cousins, acting as patrons to mountain sentai or as personal totems to deserving individuals. See **Laws of the Wild** and the **Changing Breeds** sourcebooks for general information on totems as well as for other possible totem choices. The following totems are particularly appropriate for hengeyokai, but are not the only totems possible.

Bear

Background Cost: 5

Bear's first children, the Okuma, perished during the War of Shame. Now he watches as thoughtless humans and malevolent Wyrms creatures destroy the lands he was created to heal. Bear's love of ritual makes him a wise and thoughtful teacher of rites, but his anger often outweighs his patience. Bear chooses sentai predisposed toward healing and protection, yet capable of unleashing their anger. Others treat sentai patronized by Bear with respect but caution, since their presence shames them with memories of the deaths of the Children of Bear.

Traits: *Medicine* x3. Each member of the sentai receives the Trait *Brawny* as a permanent advantage and may use the Gift: *Mother's Touch* once per day. Sentai members may also hibernate for up to three months without needing food or drink. Whenever a member of a sentai acknowledging Bear first receives a wound in any combat, each sentai member immediately gains two temporary Rage Traits.



Ban: Bear forbids his children to use their natural weaponry against other hengeyokai, even Kumo, lest any more of the Mother's Children perish. Bear does not prohibit the use of Gifts or weaponry against any who oppose the Emerald Mother or Her creatures.

Dog

Background Cost: 4

Loyal, patient and watchful, Dog nevertheless does not receive much respect from wild creatures. Unlike most beasts, Dog has formed a bond with humanity and teaches other creatures that humans can prove themselves worthy of respect and love. While few Middle Kingdom sentai select Dog for their patron, those that contain Hakken Garou or Tengu sometimes opt for this steadfast and trustworthy totem. Sentai loyal to Dog most often occur in Japan.

Traits: A sentai of Dog's children gain four temporary Willpower Traits which may be used throughout each story. They receive the Gift: *Beast Speech* and the Mental Traits *Alert* x 3.

Ban: Dog wishes for members of sentai that honor him to refrain from killing humans whenever possible.

Hare

Background Cost: 6

Hare thinks and acts quickly, possesses great energy and revels in his cleverness. Sometimes, however, Hare's impulses prove too clever for his own good. Hare has little wisdom to impart to any sentai seeking his patronage, expecting them instead to learn to think for themselves and act quickly to overcome dangerous circumstances. Hare maintains a delicate relationship with the Kitsune, so individual werefoxes who belong to a sentai loyal to Hare may have to put forth extra effort to gain equal standing with their totem.

Traits: Hare's children gain the Gift: *Speed of Thought*, and a sentai gains four additional Gnosis Traits they may use each story. Moon-spirits favor Hare's children and ease the way for Umbral travel, allowing for a free retest to enter the Umbra. Each sentai member also gains the Mental Trait *Clever*.

Ban: Hare asks his sentai to protect children of all kinds and expects members to have children of their own.

Mongoose

Background Cost: 4

Mongoose specializes in the quick kill and the preemptive strike. She views dealing out death to one's foes as an art and teaches those who look to her patronage to avoid an opponent's blows while waiting for the opportune moment to strike. Though Mongoose shares a war-philosophy with the Nagah, she refuses to act as a totem to wereserpents; likewise, Nagah have a low opinion of sentai that claim affinity with Mongoose.



Traits: Children of Mongoose receive the Gifts: *Fatal Flaw* and *Resist Toxin*, as well as *Dodge* x 3.

Ban: Mongoose requires that her children never show fear.

NARUKAMI, LORD OF THUNDER

Background Cost: 7

Known to Western Shadow Lords as Grandfather Thunder, Narukami invokes as much fear as respect from those who honor him. He excels in patience and subtlety, though when necessary, he can unleash his tremendous anger on friend and foe alike. Narukami prefers to send his stormcrow servants as messengers to sentai that honor him.

Traits: Members of sentai honoring Narukami gain the use of five Willpower Traits per story. All sentai members gain *Intimidation* x 2 whenever they invoke Narukami by name. Each sentai member gains one Honor Renown and two levels of *Etiquette*. Hakken find sentai that honor Narukami interesting and keep an eye on them for potential alliances.

Ban: Children of Narukami need only be truthful to those they respect, i.e., those who they cannot intimidate or dominate.

Ox

Background Cost: 5

Though not the brightest of totems, Ox possesses a steadfastness as solid as the mountains and a peaceful nature that can soothe the most savage of beasts. Ox bestows his favor on children of gentle strength and those with pure hearts, and teaches them the ways of patience and endurance.

Traits: Sentai who follow Ox may choose two Strength-related Traits and two Stamina-related Traits and distribute them among the members of the sentai in any combination. These are considered permanent Traits. In addition, a sentai may use up to three Willpower Traits per story. Each member of a sentai dedicated to Ox also receives two temporary Renown Traits in *Virtue*. Each sentai member gains a level of *Empathy*.

Ban: Ox asks his children to respect their underlings, never overburdening servants, beasts or others under their authority.

Prince Inari

Background Cost: 5

Prince Inari, the hero of the Kitsune, is the lord of foxes, rice, plenty, benevolence and justice. His teachings state that true nobility requires not just honor and bravery, but cunning and generosity. Many Kitsune claim Lord Inari as their personal totem and this spirit also favors any sentai willing to learn his lessons of grace and cleverness.

Traits: Inari teaches his children the Gift: *Cooking*, except that it produces rice, not gruel. Each sentai member serving him receives the Mental



Trait Clever. Kitsune react with favor to sentai honoring their hero, treating them as honored cousins at the least, equals at best.

Ban: Prince Inari forbids his children from bringing harm to fox kits in particular and children in general. Members of a sentai belonging to him may not kill a fox if doing so will leave behind a litter of motherless kits. Many children of Inari donate some of their time to tending to local fox families. Inari does not forbid the killing of evil or corrupted humans who have families, but he does expect the sentai to make provisions for the care of such families.

Teanoi

Background Cost: 6

Also known as the Great Shark Spirit, Teanoi embodies swiftness, silence and deadliness — the best and worst qualities of sharks. Teanoi does not expect his children to love him; rather, he only needs for them to accept their own predatory natures above all. He demands that those who honor him act as predators, without regret or joy in killing.

Traits: Each individual who honors Teanoi receives *Stealth* x 2 and the Physical Trait Tough. Sentai rarely choose Teanoi as their totem unless, for some reason, the members are all Same-Bito.

Ban: Teanoi's children never take pleasure in killing, neither do they regret taking life. They must hold no grudges.

Tiger

Background Cost: 8

An emperor among beasts, Tiger represents the unleashed fury of war, yet he also represents the honorable warrior. Lately, however, the plight of his tiger children has driven him to the edge of fury and his wrath is often terrible to behold.

Traits: Each member gains three Rage Traits per story, even if this gives them more temporary Rage than their permanent rating. These Traits must be used or they disappear before the next story. Each sentai gains one Renown Trait in Glory and Virtue. Tiger also grants his sentai two levels each of *Brawl*, *Survival* and *Melee*, which may be divided up among the members as necessary and can be reapportioned each session. Khan favor sentai loyal to Tiger, and the Emerald Courts have great expectations for such groups.

Ban: Tiger demands that his children work to save his tiger kin. Children of Tiger may not show cowardice in the performance of their duties or they risk the anger of their patron.

Sentai

One of the most critical distinctions between Western shapeshifters and their hengeyokai cousins lies in the difference between the pack and the sentai. Roughly equivalent to a Garou pack, a sentai is actually a war party.



Sentai come together according to a strict code of rules pleasing to the spirits and to the Court of Ancestors. All sentai have a purpose. Their membership is comprised of individuals who perform specific roles within the sentai. Most importantly, sentai usually contain at least two different Breeds of hengeyokai, sometimes more. This intermingling of Breeds is a concept almost unheard of among Western shapechangers, whose memories of the War of Rage tend to get in the way of true cooperation among the Breeds.

Sentai traditionally contain five members, corresponding to the five faces of the Moon, five elements and five cardinal directions. For a sentai to please the spirits, it must represent each of these aspects. To this end, each member of a sentai aligns herself with a direction, an element and a duty. Each of these aspects is chosen separately, so that a member who represents the element "fire" does not necessarily align with the "south wind," which is the wind assigned to fire. The duties correspond roughly to Garou auspices and give each member of the sentai a specific and crucial role to play in the harmony of her war party.

Mountain sentai have a somewhat permanent duration and most closely resemble Garou packs in their unity of purpose and action and in the bonds they form with one another. These sentai usually serve the Courts exclusively, acting always in accordance with the will of the Emerald Mother and for a higher purpose that enables them to put aside their loyalty to their Breed as well as personal aspirations. Mountain sentai follow the Renown system common to the Courts. They enjoy many of the same privileges as Garou packs, particularly with regard to the benefits gained from group totems. As solid and enduring as the mountain for which they are named, mountain sentai provide stability and reliability to the Beast Courts.

Wave sentai, on the other hand, reflect the transient and fluctuating nature of their name. Formed for a specific and immediate purpose — and only for that purpose — wave sentai generally last only until they have fulfilled their mission. Where mountain sentai have stronger advantages, wave sentai enjoy greater flexibility. Members do not have to follow a common system of Renown and the sentai chooses no totem spirit. Frequently, wave sentai incorporate whoever happens to be nearby, available and convenient — including a few non-hengeyokai on rare occasions, so long as they are trustworthy and willing to work together for a common goal. These may include Namebreakers, *hsien*, Sunset shapeshifters and the occasional Kuei-jin, provided the circumstances are compelling enough. Though wave sentai have little social standing in the Courts, they do enjoy a great deal of freedom and practicality.

Auspices

The word "auspice" derives from "auspicious." For hengeyokai, the term "auspice" refers to the best possible role a person can fulfill within her sentai rather than to the phase of the moon at her birth (with the exception of



Hakken and Stargazer Garou, who still occasionally use the Western form of auspice). When a war party or sentai comes together, the tasks each member performs dictate her role in the sentai and, therefore, her auspice. The Way of Emerald Virtue, with its emphasis on fulfilling the tasks an individual excels at rather than forcing a creature into an artificial pattern, influences the assigning of auspices within a sentai. Each mountain sentai serves the Beast Courts, gaining Renown according to the traditions set down for their chosen auspice. Other groups of hengeyokai, whose members adhere to the Renown system of their particular Breeds, fall under the category of wave sentai at best, mere gatherings of individuals at worst.

In a mountain sentai, each member takes a common totem (i.e., players all purchase the *Totem Background*). Each individual takes on the auspice most suited to her. Most sentai include several different hengeyokai Breeds. It is theoretically possible for groups of four or fewer to form a mountain sentai, but the spirits consider it an incomplete version and do not expect as much from it. When more than five hengeyokai join together in a war party, only five consider themselves an actual mountain sentai sworn to one another by the *Rite of the Harmonious Journey*; the others are considered additional members. In most cases, if more or less than five individuals form a sentai, the Courts consider it a wave, rather than a mountain, sentai.

Although a wave sentai does not need to include one of each of the five auspices, the Courts consider it inauspicious if this tradition is not followed. In the Middle Kingdom, where spirits involve themselves more closely with the Changing Breeds than in the Sunset Lands, ignoring luck has decidedly unfortunate consequences. Occasionally, unlucky or incomplete sentai are unavoidable, particularly in regions where hengeyokai are few or especially endangered. Such groups must work twice as hard to gain the favor of the Courts and of the spirits, but if they do so, they receive the honor they deserve.

Lantern

The lantern serves as the heart of a sentai. Like a signal light, she leads her sentai-mates. Like a flame, she brings them together and provides spiritual warmth for the journey ahead. Lanterns often act as leaders, organizing their fellow sentai members into a coherent and effective whole. In certain situations, however, a Lantern may cede her position of leadership to another auspice. In times of battle she may turn to the Fist to lead, while in occasions that require stealth she may defer to her Leaf. A Lantern must show wisdom and justice in all her actions. Her responsibilities are great, but her rewards for a job well done are worthy of her efforts.

Concepts: Noble, mentor, general, magistrate, popular hero, sergeant, private detective, police chief, teacher

Fist

Fists act as the primary expert in times of battle. Frontline warriors, Fists represent the martial aspect of the sentai. Whether a master of weapons, a



martial arts expert or a relatively ordinary fighter with a head for tactics, the Fist bears the responsibility for guiding his sentai in the thick of combat and ensuring that the group survives and conquers. Like their Sunset cousins, hengeyokai possess Rage in abundance; hence, the position of Fist never lacks for those willing to fill it.

Concepts: Weapons master, swordsmith, elite soldier, bodyguard, professional thug, hunter, martial artist, gunsmith, supercop

Mirror

The Mirror speaks for the sentai and acts as mediator between her sentai and the spirit world. She interacts with spirits, serves as chief negotiator and forger of alliances with outside groups and wields the most powerful of magics in the service of the Courts and her sentai. Like the object which gives her auspice its name, the Mirror acts as a reflection of the spirit world. With preternatural calmness and stillness, like ice or glass, she presents an unmoving focus that disarms the proudest adversary. Her role is dangerous, like that of the Court seer. She trafficks with the spirit world and puts herself at constant risk for her sentai. Nevertheless, the opportunities for displaying and gaining Wisdom are many, and most Mirrors relish the challenges they accept.

Concepts: Ritemaster, healer, prophet, ambassador, mystic, sorcerer, philosopher, seducer, medium

Leaf

The Leaf flies upon the wind, hides unseen in the dark underbrush, and blends in with the landscape without calling attention to her presence. The sentai member who serves as a Leaf provides her comrades with information and insight, acting as the sentai's eyes and ears in hidden places, sometimes in the camp of the enemy itself. The ways of stealth and subtlety belong to the Leaf, though her arsenal also includes darker elements — the assassin's knife, the poisoner's vial, the rumormonger's whisper. A Leaf takes risks, but values cleverness above all. Her wits serve her better than force of arms, and her sentai acts as a last resort whenever she needs someone to extract her from danger.

Concepts: Spy, assassin, feral human, hacker, street detective, wilderness guide, undercover police officer, busybody, trickster, teacher

Pillar

While less glamorous than the other auspices, the Pillar acts as the legs of the sentai. He provides support for his fellows, filling in for a fallen comrade, helping to lead the rescue of a sentai member, bringing hope to the sentai in apparently hopeless situations. The Pillar frequently serves as a jack-of-all trades, able to function wherever he is needed. While not as visible as the other members of the sentai, without the Pillar, the sentai lacks its foundation.

Concepts: Lorekeeper, medic, sage, working man, spear carrier, spin doctor, guru, artist, mechanic, bard, pilot



Changing Auspices

Some hengeyokai Breeds seem particularly well-suited for certain auspices. Tengu and Nezumi, for example, make superb Leaves, while Hakken Ahrouns and Khan seem obvious Fists. When a sentai breaks apart and members leave to undertake other duties, those members occasionally feel the need to take on a different auspice.

While the *Rite of the Second Face* acknowledges this necessity, the Courts consider it unlucky for an individual to undertake this ritual more than once. Accumulating enough Renown to justify such a change once is also difficult — doing it twice is nearly impossible.

When a hengeyokai wishes to renounce the Path of Emerald Virtue and turn his attentions to his own Breed (or vice versa), he does this through the *Rite of the Great Burden*, a ritual similar to the Garou *Rite of Renunciation*. A hengeyokai who has undergone this rite may never again learn the Gifts belonging to the path he has forsaken. For the most part, most hengeyokai seem content to serve either the Courts or their Breeds, without ever feeling the need to change.

Renown

Hengeyokai of the Middle Kingdom may choose whether to dedicate themselves to their Breed or to the service of the Beast Courts and the Emerald Mother. If they opt to ally themselves with their Breed, they abide by the rules of Renown known to their Western cousins. For information on Western forms of Renown, see **Laws of the Wild** and the **Changing Breeds** sourcebooks. If, however, hengeyokai elect to serve the Courts they follow a common Renown system approved by the Courts and reflective of the Way of Emerald Virtue. This system cares less for the specific natures of each hengeyokai Breed than for their common bond with the Emerald Mother and their respect for and veneration of the Mandates. Rewards come to those who uphold the Mandates, follow their chosen auspices, serve as members of sentai, and defend the sacred places of the Emerald Mother and the Courts.

Renown is awarded according to how well a particular hengeyokai fulfills her role or auspice. The Courts recognize six auspices altogether: the five active ones of Lantern, Fist, Mirror, Leaf and Pillar, and the less mobile auspice of Courtier. While the other five auspices operate primarily outside the Court itself, going where the action is and serving the Courts in the field, Courtiers tend to remain within the confines of the Court, maintaining and defending the dragon nest or caern and involving themselves in Court activities and politics.

As with Western shapeshifters, Renown for hengeyokai involves three categories: Glory, Virtue and Wisdom. The lines that separate these aspects or Renown, however, are not clear-cut. Often an individual may exhibit Wisdom in the way she achieves Glory, or may find Glory through pursuing the path of Virtue. Storytellers may choose to award one or two extra



temporary points of Renown in categories other than the primary one to reward particularly heroic deeds, thereby acknowledging the interconnection of all aspects of Renown.

The disadvantage of having a fluid system of Renown awards is that it is also easy to lose Renown in as many categories. Infractions and offenses bear more weight for hengeyokai than with some of their Western kin since balance holds such an important place in the philosophy of the Middle Kingdom. Losing Renown brings such embarrassment to a hengeyokai that she suffers twice the penalty that her Western cousin might — one loss for the offense she committed, then a second loss to express her shame at losing Renown. Storytellers should feel free to emphasize this aspect of Middle Kingdom society. It is one of the major distinctions between Eastern and Western shapechangers.

The three paths of Renown are as follows:

Glory: Bravery embodies virtue. Every hengeyokai breed recognizes the heroic actions of those who risk their lives — and sometimes pay the ultimate price — for the Emerald Mother and her creatures. Stupid, useless deaths, however, gain no Glory in the eyes of the Courts. While the Hakken Garou follow the code of *bushido* and the way of the samurai, they rarely undergo the ritual suicide of *seppuku*, understanding that their numbers are so small that every Hakken life, even the most unworthy and compromised, is valuable to the Emerald Mother. For hengeyokai, Glory involves fierceness in battle, valor in conduct, loyalty to the Courts and to the sentai, martial excellence and steadfast behavior. Those who demonstrate their willingness to die for the Mother have little time in their lives for cowards and those of timid heart.

Virtue: For hengeyokai, Virtue represents adherence to the Mandates, personal honor and integrity, loyalty to the Emerald Mother and to the Way of Emerald Virtue and respect for those above and below one in Rank. In some ways, this aspect of Renown resembles the Honor Renown of Western shapeshifters, but where Honor has a more personal and subjective application, Virtue remains constant regardless of Breed. In essence, Virtue measures a hengeyokai's ability to behave in accordance with the laws of the Emerald Mother and to work together with other members of the Beast Courts. Those who lack Virtue are considered disrespectful of the Court and potential threats to the harmony of hengeyokai society.

Wisdom: Wisdom differs very little from Western ideals. Wisdom Renown comes from heeding the advice and counsel of the spirit world, seeking enlightenment, remaining content with one's role in society, honoring the ancestors and elders and, above all, performing one's duties faithfully. Those who lack Wisdom are no better than barbarians, or Westerners.

Rank

Hengeyokai acknowledge five levels of Rank, just like their Sunset cousins. They draw their Rank titles from the five major materials — wood,



iron, steel, gold and silver. When introducing herself to someone for the first time, a hengeyokai might refer to herself as a Gold Courtier or an Iron Leaf. Rank is rarely used as a title among hengeyokai; rather it serves to describe the level of ability of a hengeyokai in her chosen auspice.

Most hengeyokai wear the colors or materials pertaining to their rank openly, providing visual cues for their fellows or for the spirits. Traditionally, a hengeyokai combines her Rank material or color with a glyph, badge, mon or other symbol that represents her Court or sentai. For example, a Silver Fist Khan of the Burning Lotus Court might wear a white sash or armband decorated with an embroidered or painted image of her Court. Hengeyokai who have not attained first Rank (i.e., have not had their *Rite of Passage*) are referred to as Stone. Their color is gray.

The five Ranks and their colors, in order of ascendancy, are: Wood (brown), Iron (red), Steel (blue), Gold (yellow) and Silver (white). Silver ranks higher than gold due to its association with the Moon. The rare individuals who rise to Rank 6 are referred to as Jade and their color is green; hengeyokai privileged to wear a Jade badge have great respect from all the Courts of the Middle Kingdom.

As with Western shapeshifters, the spirits take note of a hengeyokai's true Rank. Those who attempt to deceive others by pretending to a Rank they do not possess find that their ruse brings the disfavor of the spirits: rites fail to work for them, fetishes disappear mysteriously, and spirits refuse to teach Gifts to the offender. On rare occasions, in dire circumstances, hengeyokai have risked the wrath of the spirits to exceed their proper Rank in order to perform some crucial feat. In those cases, even though the hero apparently succeeds in his ruse, he often accepts a karmic debt and pays the consequences for his deceptive behavior. But then, heroes do what they do in spite of the repercussions to themselves. Generally, if one must disguise one's Rank it's considered more prudent to present oneself as being of lower, rather than higher, Rank.

In Court society hengeyokai often use their formal (and quite impressive) titles as a symbol of their place in the greater pattern of the Middle Kingdom. A Tengu might possess a formal designation such as "The Steel Leaf Mizuki Flies-Before-the-Wind, East Wind and Fire Talon to the High Mountain Sentai." In addition, a listing of the individual's heroic and memorable deeds might be appended to her title. Most often, however, such a formal introduction only occurs upon first arriving at a Court or when meeting someone for the first time. Usually abbreviated titles are preferred. When making an introduction to the spirits, however, formality is always in order so that the creatures of the Mirror Lands may form a good impression of their hengeyokai allies.

Renown Chart

Lantern

Rank	Glory	Virtue	Wisdom
1 (Wood)	0	1	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

Courtiér

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



The Tapestry

Dragons dwell on the other side of the Wall. The Tapestry, as the Middle Kingdom's denizens call the Umbra, bears vestiges of its former glory, a time when the great dragon lords ruled the realm, dispensing justice and wisdom and overseeing the turning of the Wheel. The spirit world of the Middle Kingdom lies somewhat closer than that of the Western lands. Humans, both Kinfolk and normal mortals, still believe in the ceremonies and rituals that honor the ancestors and other spirits. Creating good luck and avoiding bad fortune through the adherence to customs is a common practice among many people in the Middle Kingdom lands. Even in the most modern cities of Tokyo, Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai, Singapore and other urban centers, young and old alike see no problem with integrating a life filled with cell phones and Palm Pilots with attendance at temples where joss sticks are burned for luck, or consulting a *feng shui* master before furnishing a high-tech office.

Hengeyokai have an even closer relationship with the Tapestry than their Western cousins. Many of their courts take place entirely within the spirit world. The Beast Courts keep up an active relationship with their spirit allies, particularly the powerful Incarna and the ministers of the sleeping dragon lords. Homid hengeyokai often have far less trouble comprehending the Tapestry than their Western counterparts, since they have grown up with something of the spirit world all their lives.

The turning of the Wheel, however, has seen the Tapestry fade considerably, growing patchy in places where the modern world's coldness and corruption intrude. The forces of destruction, led by the Centipede's armies, have spoiled many places in the physical world and tainted the spirit-reflections of those once pure places. The wars for sacred sites have led to the leeching of Chi energy from many caerns, bleeding color and brightness from the Tapestry and severing some of its connections to the physical world. Harbingers of doom warn that the coming of the Sixth Age may spell the end of the spirit world itself, as the stink of the Wyrms brings destruction and stagnation to the Tapestry's threads. Others maintain that the Tapestry will survive even the darkest times, losing only its weakest threads in the process, and that it will emerge refreshed and reborn for the upward turn toward the Seventh and future Ages. This is what many hengeyokai believe, the purpose that guides their existence and inspires them to acts of heroism and sacrifice.

The Wall

Asian hengeyokai refer to the Gauntlet as the Wall, for it stands, not unlike China's Great Wall as a barrier between worlds. Like the Great Wall, the spirit Wall consists of many walls that differ in strength and character from place to place. In regions where humans still believe in the old traditions and honor the spirits, the Wall's thinness makes travel to and from the spirit world



easier. Near dragon nests (caerns) and along dragon lines, the Wall runs very thin. Some rumors claim that gates in the Wall exist connecting the spirit world with the physical world — or at least they did in recent memory. These gates may lurk in the most pristine natural places or in the backrooms of mystical herb shops. If they even exist, such gates would most likely possess powerful spirit guardians who would demand honor and gifts in order to pass through — and the gates themselves would be fragile and dangerous to navigate.

Places of high technology and Weaver-stuff, such as laboratories, high-tech corporate offices and manufacturing plants have nearly impenetrable Walls that prevent crossing into the Umbra or even using certain Gifts in their vicinity. While standard ratings for the Gauntlet apply in the Middle Kingdom (see **Laws of the Wild** for details), Storytellers should feel free to adjust those ratings up or down as appropriate to represent the differences between East and West.

The MIRROR LANDS

What the Sunset People call the Penumbra, the *shen* call the Mirror Lands, for they reflect the material world's true face, without artifice or deception. The Mirror Lands can seem frightening, dangerous, exotic, perplexing and mysterious as they provide a slightly skewed image of the physical world that exposes the essence of material reality. Filled with symbolic touches, the Mirror Lands pose riddles that wise *hengeyokai* may ultimately solve, thus giving them access to the vocabulary of the spirit world. While Westerners may fail to understand the imagery that surrounds them when they enter the Mirror Lands, the shapeshifters of the Middle Kingdom speak the language of symbols and images like a second tongue.

Just as in the Penumbra of the Western world, conflict arises between parts of the Mirror Lands where the Weaver is strongest and parts where the Wyld holds sway. Research complexes vie with ancient temples for precedence in the Mirror Lands, creating unsettling vibrations that place a great strain on the fragile threads of the Tapestry. Sometimes storms occur in the Mirror Lands due to these conflicts; such outbreaks of violence often damage city-based spirits in the vicinity of these storms. *Hengeyokai* and even normal humans with skills in meditation or *feng shui* can sometimes feel these fluctuations and surges in the spirit world, sensing the presence of a disturbance.

Spirits in the Mirror Lands of the Middle Kingdom feel a close affinity for the physical world, more so than Western spirits. Many spirits have carved out strongholds and residences in the Mirror Lands, often with paths leading deeper into the Umbra. All Changing Breeds, Eastern and Western, believe that all things possess a spirit. The spirits of the Middle Kingdom, however, are particularly active, and many objects possess awakened spirits. The Way of Emerald Virtue teaches that each person, place or thing has its place in the order of the universe, and spirits are no exception. Some play the part of



counselors; others are tricksters; still others exist to cause fear or harm. Whenever hengeyokai travel in the Mirror Lands they must remember to treat all spirits cautiously; even the lowliest spirit may act as a representative for a powerful Incarna or one of the sleeping dragon lords.

The light of the moon provides light for the Mirror Lands, just as it does in the Western Penumbra. In addition to the moon, 10 distant suns show themselves during the day. The smallest of these suns is not much larger than a bright star; the largest is about three times that. The Zhong Lung honor this largest sun as the "true Sun"; their legends say that the other nine are sister and brother suns that never came into being in the physical world but maintain a presence in the Mirror Lands.

While viewing the Mirror Realms may lead to some subjectivity in what individuals see, for the most part, the experience of traveling through the Penumbra is consistent for all who journey there. The physical realm, more than the traveler, affects the appearance of the Mirror Lands, though some spirits might appear more readily to certain individuals than to others. Hengeyokai are apt to meet other *shen* when traveling in the Mirror Lands; even the Kuei-jin have learned how to enter the Mirror Lands.

Walking the Mountain's Shoulders

Mountain sentai have an advantage over lone hengeyokai or wave sentai when traveling in the Mirror Lands. Garou packs can have one person — usually the individual with the highest Gnosis — pull the entire pack into the Umbra by having the character make the Gnosis roll for the group. In the same fashion, a sentai can choose one of its members to bring the rest of the sentai with her into the Umbra. However, if the sentai has won the favor of the spirits by holding true to their traditional roles and acting with reverence and duty, the spirits generally recognize this by allowing even those hengeyokai who cannot normally enter the Mirror Lands on their own to pass through with their sentai. In this fashion, a Hakken may lead any Khan or Zhong Lung with him into the Mirror Lands despite their inability to do so by themselves. The Mountain sentai thus acts as a catalyst to awaken the latent potential to step sideways possessed by all Changing Breeds but active only in some. When apart from their sentai, however, those Breeds who cannot normally traverse the Wall must remain outside the spirit world unless they know a Gift that can allow them to step sideways.

Wave sentai do not enjoy this privilege. Members of a wave sentai who can travel in the Umbra may do so while their less fortunate comrades must find an alternate means of getting from place to place.



The laws of the physical world apply for the most part to the Mirror Lands. Gravity does function, as does the passing of time and the relative speed of travel. Running takes you somewhere faster than walking, and an arrow shot from a bow follows its expected trajectory. In some cases, however, exceptions do occur. Some realms and domains within the Mirror Lands have absorbed strong spirit energies that permeate their environment, causing unexpected changes to the surrounding environment. Many of these are similar to places in the Western Umbra (see **Laws of the Wild**), but others have significant deviations from their Western counterparts.

Blights exist in the Mirror Lands, often surrounding the worst sections of large cities such as Bangkok or Hong Kong. As the Wyld loses its grip on these tainted spots, the combination of Wyrms and Weavers exercises a rotting influence over the Mirror Lands. As the Sixth Age approaches, the frequency of Demon Lands (Hellholes to Sunset shifters) increases. Many of these Demon Lands serve as homes to demon spirits bent on creating tangible horrors to torment the Middle Kingdom and its Mirror Lands. Courts inhabited by Banes exist in the vilest of locations as rude, obscene mockeries of the spirit courts.

The abstract domains known as Epiphs also exist in the Mirror Lands, and wise hengeyokai traverse them with caution, since the laws of reality break down within these bizarre realms. Some of the Eastern shapeshifters deliberately seek out the spirits that dwell in these odd places, hoping to find enlightenment, giving these spirits the same attentive study as they would a Zen koan. Indeed, the spirits that dwell within the Epiphs may well be the embodiments of koans and other Eastern enigmas. Some *shen*, including many of the less imaginative Kuei-jin, attempt to destroy Epiphs when they encounter them, seeing them as corruptions of reality. Most Western shifters would find the Eastern Epiphs even more confusing than usual, but a few have developed a decidedly Western flavor.

Once the most common of places in the Mirror Lands, Glens have declined in number as civilization has increased and humans have expanded over greater regions. The high mountains of Tibet and Nepal, the jungles of Southeast Asia, the desert realms of parts of Asia still contain these serene and beautiful sites of power. In these awe-inspiring domains, Weaver-related Gifts are more difficult to perform; the Storyteller should adjust the difficulty for challenges accordingly. Similarly, Gifts related to the Wyld are easier to invoke. Some courts hold meetings in Glens to take advantage of the serene atmosphere, stringently punishing any young hengeyokai who might inadvertently act with rudeness or disrespect toward the sacred place.

While much of the Mirror Lands remains unsullied, the webs of the Weaver grow stronger as the Middle Kingdom succumbs to the onslaught of technology. Areas such as Seoul, Hong Kong and Tokyo, with their factories and research facilities, glisten with Weaver's many webs. Even the Kumo do not linger in these places, and very few hengeyokai can stand to be long in them.



For a long while, a strange swirling curtain of mist barred travel between Russia and China in the Mirror Lands. Even travel between the two countries in the spirit world was not possible. The hengeyokai remained on vigilance against whatever might be lurking on the Russian side of this misty curtain. Within the past year, however, the curtain abruptly faded, opening the borders between the countries for the first time in decades. Very few hengeyokai are rushing in to explore, however. Some mysteries are worth investigating very carefully before jumping in.

The Tapestry

Beyond the Mirror Lands of the Penumbra lies the Tapestry, rich with moon tracks, dragon lines and mysterious realms. Time has little meaning in the Tapestry; Chi power assumes utmost importance, becoming more tangible in this place than in the physical world or even the Mirror Lands. Westerners refer to the Tapestry as the Near Umbra, but few of them know it with the same intimacy as the hengeyokai, who see it as the embodiment of the principle of balance and opposition.

The hengeyokai perceive the Tapestry as comprised of Yang Realms, filled with the energy and vitality associated with places of life and creativity, and Yin Realms, permeated with the darkness and decay of death and entropy. Most hengeyokai interactions with the Tapestry take place in the Yang Realms, which have a closer affinity for the mindset and philosophies of the shapechanging Breeds. Ghosts and many malevolent spirits, including demons, dwell in the Yin Realms and hengeyokai generally try to avoid those places. While the Eastern shapeshifters believe that a balance exists between the number of Yang and Yin Realms, disagreements abound concerning their precise location and exact numbers and power levels.

Moon paths and dragon tracks lead Umbral travelers from the Mirror Lands to the Tapestry. Hengeyokai passing through the Near Umbra find that it consists mostly of swirling fog and mist, filled with haunting sounds and lingering, unidentifiable spicy aromas. Many hengeyokai attempt to find omens and portents in the patterns of the mists and the frequency of the sounds, but no one has yet to determine a consistent symbolic vocabulary within the Tapestry. Both beneficial and malicious spirits wander freely through the Near Umbra. Hengeyokai who have lost their way usually know to summon Stork-spirits to lend them assistance in navigating a course that leads them to their intended destination.



Stork Spirits

Appearing as magnificent storks, cranes, herons, egrets and similar birds, Stork-spirits serve only the Emerald Mother, having no other pressing allegiances. They delight in assisting hengeyokai who have become lost in the Tapestry, but other *shen*, such as Kumo, Yin-oriented Kuei-jin, corrupted shapeshifters and other sinister individuals must find a way to compel these spirits to even speak with them, much less help them.

Traits: Willpower 6, Rage 3, Gnosis 5, Essence 14

Charms: Airt Sense, Healing, Reform, Updraft

Dragon Paths and Other Roads

Created long ago by the steps of the great Dragon-spirits, these Umbral roads connect the Mirror Lands with the Tapestry and provide safer, less circuitous routes by which hengeyokai can reach the various Realms within the Tapestry. Preferable in most cases to simply wandering around through the mists and fog, dragon paths place those who travel on them under the protection of the Dragon-spirit who originally blazed the trail. Though the spirits themselves lie deep in slumber, few spirit minions of the Centipede will dare to pursue a hengeyokai who walks the dragon path. Well-marked, these paths stand out in the Near Umbra. They appear as fine roads intricately inlaid with jade, gold, rare hardwoods and other precious materials. The nature of the substance that decorates the road resonates with the essence of the dragon who created it; a pearl road marks the tracks of a dragon of the sea, while a jeweled road might indicate the guardianship of a mountain dragon.

Moon and sun trails also traverse the mists of the Tapestry and connect one Realm to another. Hakken Garou and, now, Stargazers frequent the moon trails, while Zhong Lung and Tengu gravitate toward the sun's roads. Most hengeyokai, however, swear by the dragon paths since the moon and sun trails fluctuate with the rising and setting of sun and moon. Some hengeyokai, however, have noticed that the Wym's spirit servants and nobles belonging to the spirit courts also use the dragon paths. Rather than bring conflict to the paths, many shapeshifters try to avoid open confrontation with spirit travelers, searching instead for new connections within the Tapestry.

While some hengeyokai have traveled to Realms more familiar to Western shapechangers, they have little opportunity or desire to visit such places as Erebus or the Tribal Homelands. The Tapestry of the Middle Kingdom contains enough diversity, danger and exotic adventure for anyone.

Spirit Courts

Spirits have their own sovereign places in the Tapestry. Even though these Ministers of Heaven tend to have their own duties and responsibilities,



they still find time to preside over their own domains in a decidedly feudal manner, expecting obeisance and deference from all those who cross into their territory. Regardless of their arrogance, they still follow the traditions of civility and politeness, conducting themselves in accordance with proper behavior. Even the vilest of the Eastern Banes are capable of treating adversaries with honor when approached with the proper respect. Despite their dedication to the service of the Wyrms, some of these malevolent creatures have proven themselves spirits of trust and honor, within the parameters of their corrupt vision.

Spirit courts differ from spirit to spirit, but they do share some common elements. Most spirits elect to dwell within a tower, where a powerful guardian spirit situated at the main gate demands tribute, poses a riddle or some other sort of test for all who desire entry. A river of water, diverted from the great river of life that flows through the Tapestry, runs through the courtyard, crossed by a bridge made from some precious and appropriate substance such as jade, ivory or marble. The bridge, too, possesses its guardian spirit.

Hengeyokai desiring to visit a spirit court need to have a good reason for their visit or else know for certain that the spirit will welcome them. Some spirits place carved petition poles outside their domain; potential visitors may hang their petitions from the pole and await permission for an audience with the spirit lord, a process which can take as long as a full day of waiting.

Inexperienced hengeyokai need to keep in mind that the spirits have connections with one another and offending one spirit may well earn the offender a host of enemies in allied spirits. Adhering to the customs of politeness and correct behavior goes a long way toward winning the favor of the spirits in their courts. Just as offending a spirit can make many enemies, winning the good will of a spirit can earn the favors and alliances of other spirit allies. On the other hand, a few hengeyokai have found that they have gone too far in winning the favor of a spirit noble and have been forced to extricate themselves from an unwanted "marriage" to a spirit noble and permanent residency in the Tapestry.

Yang Realms

Ruled by the Yang Lords, these realms embody all that is vital and creative. Yang energies are the energies of light, life, creativity and propagation. Spirits allied to the Emerald Mother abound in the Yang Realms. Some ancient hengeyokai believe that all living creatures possess individual domains within the Yang Realms similar to the Den-Realms of the Khan or the personal realms of the Nagah.

Each Yang Realm has its own ruling spirit, usually an extremely powerful entity similar in power to an Incarna. While no one knows the names and identities of all the Yang Lords or the locations of their realms, the Courts have learned of a few. The most frequently visited and best known of the Yang



Realms are described below. Storytellers should feel free to use their imaginations to create other Yang Realms for their players to discover and explore.

The Realm of Fighting Spirits

One of the most frequently visited of the Yang Realms, the Realm of Fighting Spirits consists of a vast battleground populated by the unhallowed spirits of dead warriors from many ages, all locked in a constant battle. A place of savagery and carnage, bloodshed and glory, this perpetual war zone embodies all the best and worst qualities of battle. Kamikaze pilots take on the Mongol cavalry, while tanks plow headlong into ranks of royal elephants, and primitive tribesmen charge Uzi-toting radicals. Nothing stops the never-ending fray; the battle continues through day and night. Not even death halts the flow of warriors. Soldiers fall, ripped apart by weapons or claws, only to rise again and resume the fight.

A careful look (if time permits) at the big picture reveals a three-way conflict. Under one banner, which displays a giant spider, march the armies of the Weaver. Precise ranks of disciplined and homogenous soldiers, these legions attack in strict formations, armed with the most sophisticated weapons and armor. Devoid of passion, driven only by the desire to fight and fight with excellence, this army devours everything in its path. Augmented by Pattern Spiders and other spirits allied with the Weaver, this force pushes forward relentlessly and emotionlessly.

A second banner, displaying the image of a giant centipede or serpent, fights in opposition to the first. Composed of brutish and corrupt spirits, these armies of the Wyrms use foul weapons and poison to attack and undermine their opponents. Their primary goal consists not of winning but of tormenting their enemies, causing as much pain and agony as possible. Legends speak of certain of the Yama Kings appearing in this realm from time to time to lead the armies of the Wyrms' banner. Mukade, Banes and other Wyrms-spirits come together under this banner.

The third army fights under no banner and uses no discernible means of organization. Made up of a loose cohesion of shapeshifters and wild energies, these spirits allied to the Wyld use chaos as their weapon. Frenzied berserkers attack with teeth and claws; rock-throwing spirits unleash volleys of missiles before charging into battle. Animal-spirits also take part in this free-for-all horde of attackers. Facing off against both the banners of the centipede and the spider, the armies of the Wyld fall in battle only to rise again, regroup into yet another patternless army and continue their vigorous onslaught. Often the Realm itself rises to assist this army of "nature," using rockslides, thunderstorms, monsoons and other natural phenomena to undermine the forces of the Weaver and Wyrms. Wyld-spirits sometimes join in the fun, drawn to the battle by the emanations of madness and violence.



Many hengeyokai visit this place to study and practice the art of war and to test themselves for the times to come. Those who do well can often win the alliance of war-spirits, who may agree to enter fetishes or talons of worthy shapeshifters. A path connects this Realm to the Battleground Realm known to Western shapeshifters, though few feel the inclination to travel back and forth between the two places.

Sample Spirit: Screaming Spear

Appearing as skull-faced, bloody humans armed with black lacquer spears tipped with diamond blades, these spirits fling themselves headlong into battle with berserk fury. Within their Realm, they cannot be permanently destroyed, reforming with all their powers intact on the morning following the day in which they meet their "death." Hengeyokai can sometimes compel their service if they can first avoid their attacks. These spirits frequently end up bound into fetishes dedicated to spilling blood and creating battle madness.

Willpower 6, Rage 8, Gnosis 5, Essence 19

Charms: *Armor, Ice Shards* (from their spears), *Reform*

Umi, the Dragon Kingdom of the Sea

This realm attaches to the Mirror Lands of the Pacific Ocean and provides a home for the Dragon King, who presides over the unpredictable manifestations of the ocean: typhoons, calms and great seething storms. While he claims the whole of the Pacific for his domain, other spirit courts have been known to challenge that claim. Under the Dragon King's touch, the Pacific Ocean of the Mirror Lands is even more fickle than its physical counterpart.

Many Zhong Lung and Same-Bito dwell here, serving the Dragon King. A few of these are so old that they only exist in spirit form, having left behind their physical bodies to wither and vanish. Spirit-fish and aquatic mammals of all kinds form the ranks of servants in this underwater realm, along with the spirits of more legendary creatures. Some hengeyokai believe that a tour of duty with the Dragon King's private army is necessary to gain his favor.

Gajyra, the seneschal of the slumbering Dragon King, presides over the creatures of this realm. As one of the few great dragons that remain awake, Gajyra has amassed vast amounts of power. Some say that the nuclear tests over the Pacific have aroused the seneschal's anger; others maintain that Gajyra has fallen to the corruption of powerful Banes. In any case, no one knows whether the Dragon King's seneschal has fallen to evil or not.

Legends also say that the Dragon King lost his lover, the Princess of Hiroshima, in the Umbral devastation from the nuclear attack on that city and that he still grieves for her. Some whisper that the King was with his love on the fateful day that Fat Man and Little Boy were dropped, and while he did not die from the Umbral backlash, it left him twisted and insane. Others claim



that Gajyra has slain his liege as a proof of his commitment to the Wyrn, and his ruthless nature hides his guilt. In any case, it has been more than half a century since anyone has seen the Dragon King and speculations abound as to his whereabouts or his continued existence.

Nevertheless, Gajyra holds sway over Umi, ruling with honor despite the rumors of his corruption. Many hengeyokai travel to this realm to seek the aid of sea spirits and to learn the wisdom of the ocean.

Sample Spirit: Crab Soldier

Clothed in ceremonial sashes and armed with halberds that are both decorative and functional, these bipedal crablike spirits possess low, clacking voices and chitinous armor. The Umi lords sometimes send these spirits to the material world to assist worthy allies such as certain Zhong Lung and Same-Bito. Occasionally, these loyal warriors agree to enter fetishes of invulnerability and prowess.

Willpower 5, Rage 8, Gnosis 6, Essence 35

Charms: *Armor, Flood, Materialize, Whirlpool* (as *Umbraquake*, usable only in the seas of the Umbra)

The Mountains of Heaven

This towering mountain chain rises above the clouds in the roof of the Tapestry. Greater than even the mighty Himalayas, the Mountains of Heaven supposedly contain hidden shrines, ancient pagodas and lost cities. Daring hengeyokai discover they can literally walk on the clouds that surround these mountains. At this height, they can commune with aerial spirits of flying creatures and the wind-spirits themselves. Here the moon shines gloriously upon all who traverse this Realm.

Dragon-spirits preside over courts in these august places, but many of their courtiers no longer understand their cryptic communications. Rumors abound that these Dragon Lords have fallen prey to a sickness caused by Western thought patterns.

Many hengeyokai believe that this Realm contains a gateway that leads to the farthest of the Umbral reaches but that spirits of immeasurable power and incredible ferocity guard the gateway and allow no one to pass. The Stargazers believe that paths through this Realm lead to the Aetherial Realm familiar to Western shapeshifters and that roads to the Deep Umbra can be found here as well.

Travelers come here to seek advice from the Dragon-spirits. Stargazers enjoy the meditative qualities of this realm and now that they have joined the ranks of the hengeyokai, they have a right to feel welcome here.

Sample Spirit: Cloud Butterfly

These sapphire-winged creatures of beauty personified fill the air of the Mountains of Heaven and circle around the heads of particularly attractive



hengeyokai visitors. When roused to anger, however, these seemingly gentle spirits can conjure up fierce storms. Occasionally, hengeyokai may bind these butterflies into fetishes associated with wind and cloud, though they never force these spirits to enter into servitude unwillingly.

Willpower 4, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 20

Charms: *Airt Sense, Create Wind.* A group of three or more may use *Lightning Bolt* and *Updraft*.

The Tiger Lands

Hidden in the deepest jungle realms of the Tapestry, the Tiger Lands provide a home for the spirits of wild places lost to the depredations of humans and the corruption of the Wyrms. This realm comprises large portions of wild environments. All the landscapes characteristic of Asia appear in the Tiger Lands: majestic mountains, dense jungles, broad rivers, fertile deltas. The marks of human civilization do not exist in this verdant region.

Tiger-spirits make their home in this realm, prowling the lands in search of anyone or anything that reeks of humankind in order to take vengeance on them for the near extinction of their species in the physical world. Other animal-spirits dwell here as well, elephants, serpents, giant pandas and great apes. Each type of animal has both a palace and a court in the Tiger Lands. The rulers of the realm have great respect for the Dragon Lords. In fact, the nobles of these lands often intermarry with the Dragon Lords and the Yama Kings. Each noble has her own rank in the Realm, and personalities vary greatly; while all are honored and respected, a Tiger princess is more likely to carry greater rank than a prince of the Ghost Crabs.

While humans are not welcome in the Tiger Lands, the spirits of this realm may accept hengeyokai who approach with respect. Other *shen*, however, may find it almost impossible to gain a welcome here. Occasionally, hengeyokai can convince spirits of the Tiger Lands to bind themselves to curative talens. Those who attempt to force the spirits from this Realm to enter talens or fetishes find their welcome quickly rescinded.

Sample Spirit: Tiger Spirit

Gigantic examples of their species, these lordly spirits show no deference even to the mighty Khan. They are true rulers of their kind, accepting of praise and homage but refusing to be bound into fetishes under any circumstances.

Willpower 6, Rage 9, Gnosis 7, Essence 40

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

The Gardens of the First Age

Similar to the Summer Country familiar to Western shapeshifters, the Gardens of the First Age manifest only to hengeyokai with an important part to play in the Great Cycle of the Ages. This idyllic Realm mirrors the



perfection of the mythic First Age, when spirit and matter existed in unison. Unlike that time, however, all the creatures of the Emerald Mother have representative spirits in this paradise. Heady aromas, gentle breezes, clear waters and brilliant colors bring pleasure to all the senses as well as a sense of harmony and peacefulness unequalled in any other Realm.

Hengeyokai who discover this perfect place feel as if they have always known its location. They spend time here in meditation, enjoying the pleasures of the Gardens and feeling the answers to many questions that slowly unfold in their minds. During their stay, many hengeyokai discover truths about themselves and their role in the pattern of the Ages. While many of the insights fade once an individual leaves, the important truths remain. When enlightenment comes to the visitor, she realizes what actions she must undertake to fulfill her purpose. Many hengeyokai destined for great deeds find themselves guests in the Gardens of the First Age preparatory to setting out to accomplish their task.

Sample Spirits

The peaceful spirits that inhabit the Gardens of the First Age need no game statistics, for they offer no harm to anyone. Any creatures who bear ill will to the inhabitants of this Realm cannot find their way here.

The Goblin Jungle

Situated on the edge of Yang and Yomi Worlds, the Goblin Jungle consists of a dark, dense tropical forest. Its heavy canopy conceals even the distant light of the moon and the dim suns. All types of poisonous spiders, insects and other crawling things creep through the sickly sweet underbrush. Carnivorous plants and poison-bearing flowers bloom here, along with strangle-vines and thick, thorny bushes and trees. Spirit-bats swoop through the air, ready to pluck out the eyes of their victims or sink their tiny sharp teeth into tender flesh. The constant heat and dampness, coupled with the musty smells of rotting plant matter contribute to a steamy and fetid atmosphere that clings to the skin and burns the eyes of those unfortunate enough to journey into this land.

The spirits who dwell here embody the malicious nature of this realm. Referred to as goblins, they are actually malevolent spirits of many kinds. Though each spirit resembles no other, they all share common traits. All the "goblins" in this realm are misshapen in some way; some may have seductive eyes set in a horrid face, while others may have the body of a monkey, the head of a lion and the voice of a nightingale. Each spirit also possesses a weakness or vulnerability, such as a phobia of metallic items or a vulnerability to teakwood. Many have deformities as well. Goblins often set elaborate traps to trick their victims into their clutches; these spirits enjoy the taste of living flesh and enjoy receiving sacrifices from those who come here. Some hengeyokai risk the dangers of this place pursuing rumors of long-lost fetishes and treasures reportedly hidden in the Goblin Jungle.



Despite their ferocious reputation, the goblin-spirits do not always attack hengeyokai. Some may deal honorably with visitors. Kumo come here to make alliances. Rumors say that the goblins will honor and serve those who evade their traps. Whether these are insane spirits of the Mother or refugees from the Yama Kings' realms, no one knows.

Sample Spirit: Goblin Tribesman

Ugly and misshapen, this spirit uses no weapons except its own supernatural powers. Made of mismatched animal parts, this creature has the look of madness in its eyes. Other creatures may differ in temperament and appearance as well as in fighting style. Storytellers should design each goblin individually to suit the needs of her chronicle.

Willpower 7, Rage 6, Gnosis 4, Essence 25

Charms: *Incite Frenzy, Tracking*

The Temple of the Ancestors

Though this realm has many forms, hengeyokai believe that it is actually one place. The Temple of the Ancestors appears differently to each individual who seeks it. Lying between the Tapestry and the Celestial Heavens, this venerable Realm has the protection of the Cycle itself and harm does not enter its borders. Hengeyokai wishing to find the Temple of the Ancestors must only seek out their own ancestral spirits in the Umbra. Frequently the ancestors put the seeker through a testing phase that gauges the merit and worth of the petitioner. Many times, the tests reflect the hengeyokai's auspice role. When the ancestors are satisfied, the way becomes straight and easy. The hengeyokai finds herself entering her family's sacred place. For homids, this may take the form of a simple (or elaborate) temple; for other creatures, the sacred site may appear as a waterfall or grove or a rock formation in a hidden glen. Whatever its appearance, the seeker knows that she has entered into the presence of her ancestors.

When she has reached her familial temple, a guide appears to the visitor, usually in the form of a spirit animal or a priest. The guide does not need to ask the identity of the seeker; he merely directs the visitor to a meditating figure — her ancestor-spirit. When the traveler approaches the ancestor stops his meditation to greet his descendant.

Hengeyokai often seek out their ancestors for guidance or to learn certain Gifts. Sometimes one of the Eastern shapeshifters simply wishes to give thanks to her ancestors for leading the way so often and for past favors. More often, ancestor-spirits provide information to the visitor, imparting the location of certain fetishes or explaining how to defeat the family's traditional enemies.

The guide reappears when the visit has reached its climax, regardless of whether or not the hengeyokai seeker has had all his questions answered. The guide escorts the ancestor further into the temple while Umbral winds sweep



the hengeyokai seeker back to the Mirror Lands. Hengeyokai who have completed a visit to the Temple of the Ancestors return with all their Gnosis replenished; occasionally, they also receive the knowledge of an unexpected ability heretofore unknown. (The Storyteller should reward good roleplaying by assigning a free Trait of some sort to the character.)

Those who seek out this realm with malice in their hearts seldom find their way to the Temple. Anyone foolish enough to behave disrespectfully or to attack a spirit-guide in order to remain beyond her allotted time usually finds herself lost somewhere in the Tapestry, stripped of Gnosis and with only the slimmest chance of finding her way out without help.

Sample Spirit: Ancestor Spirit

Ancestor-spirits have no ill-will toward their descendants and do not engage in open conflict or hostile confrontation. They refuse binding into fetishes, but they do possess the knowledge of many Gifts, which they can impart to worthy family members.

Yin Realms

Yin Realms, places of death, stillness, stagnation and "unlife," do not attract hengeyokai, who usually feel great distress there. Sunset People refer to the Yin Realms as the Dark Umbra and refrain from visiting its unfriendly shores. Occasionally, however, hengeyokai travel to the Yin Realms in search of wisdom, plumbing their darkest fears to find the dim light of knowledge and truth. The wise hengeyokai acknowledges that places of light need places of darkness for balance, and that nothing positive exists without its negative counterpart to define it.

Hengeyokai know of a few Yin Realms, described below. Storytellers should feel free to design their own Yin Realms for their chronicles.

The Cave of Centipedes

This dark and foul realm lies deep beneath the surface of the Tapestry. A large cave-mouth blocked by many stones appears to be the only entrance, but those who ascend the wall of rocks eventually find fissures or cracks which they may squeeze through. Inside the cave, a phosphorescent light provides a dim illumination; most hengeyokai prefer to rely on their senses of smell and hearing rather than risk drawing the unwanted attention of other spirits by bringing an outside source of light. The Cave of Centipedes consists of a maze of endless tunnels and passages, spiraling and twisting in a bizarre and disturbing pattern of descent. Attempts to mark the way with rope or string usually fail; travelers find themselves holding a broken rope or feeling a curious tug from the *other* end. ... Any who come here usually have to rely on their own instincts to keep track of their route into and out of this Realm.

All manner of spirits of the dead as well as centipedes, worms and other underground spirit-creatures wander aimlessly through the tunnels and



corridors of this endless warren of caves. Kumo search for secrets and lost things. Rumors allege that one of the Yama Kings keeps a fortress here specifically for the purpose of torturing captive hengeyokai. In fact, screams travel on the fetid breezes that flow through the Cave, creating an atmosphere of perpetual discomfort and unease. Many who have walked this Realm swear that the Wyrms considers this realm a breeding ground for its twisted minions.

Deep within the Cave of Centipedes, the spirits of the newly dead roam restlessly, crying for attention. Although most simply want an end to their torment, most hengeyokai know to avoid them, lest these spirits try to force an exchange of souls in order to effect their own return to the physical world. Creatures whose spirits have perished in the Umbra at the hands (or claws) of the Wyrms's forces undergo torment in this realm before passing on to their true judgment. Here, Banes try to elicit from them the names of their allies and win them over to the service of the Wyrms. Everywhere, the sickly green glow of balefire so familiar to Western Garou illuminates the torture pits and horrors.

Legends tell of hengeyokai who have voluntarily entered the torture pits of this realm to save the spirit of a friend or loved one; the best stories say that if the hengeyokai succeeds, the spirit she rescues returns to life in the physical world.

Sample Spirit: Hungry Ghost

Spirits of those who died unfulfilled, these pitiful creatures hunger and thirst for fresh spirit-flesh to slake their emptiness. They often attack in groups, seeking to overcome hengeyokai foolish enough to approach them. Those Storytellers familiar with Spectres may wish to substitute them here.

Willpower 7, Rage 6, Gnosis 4, Essence 15

Charms: *Frozen Breath*

Lord Spider's Web

This enormous web lies far from other Realms of the Tapestry. Crossing a vast chasm whose edges cannot be seen, this deceptively fragile construction appears as nothing more than a thin cobweb fluttering in the winds that blow up from the bottomless deep below. No one knows the true nature of Lord Spider, who is a being distinct from the Weaver. Some say that he is a benevolent spirit who attempts to rescue lost spirits from the Void. Others claim that Lord Spider once loved the Weaver and now mourns her, building his huge web as a monument to his passion for her. The Kumo claim that Lord Spider is no less than Marawa, one of their great totem spirits, and avoid the place lest they intrude upon their patron. Many hengeyokai claim that Lord Spider is long dead, since no one living has ever seen him. But some travelers on the web tell of feeling the web shake and hearing screams in the distance.

Many hengeyokai believe that Lord Spider's Web spans the Abyss and even extends beyond the Yin Realms. A few intrepid souls have even



traversed the strands of the web and arrived in other Realms. Some Tengu claim that a violent struggle takes place in the center of the web, but no one has made it to that place to verify the truth of the matter.

Sample Spirit

No spirits are native to this place. Those who do enter Lord Spider's Web are usually encountered as mummified husks trapped in its strands.

Desert of Visions

The Realm known as the Desert of Visions consists of a harsh and desolate environment. Lit by the light of Tsuki-Yomi with a cold glare that penetrates the heart and scours the spirit, this place offers no comfort, only visions and hard counsel. A place of solitude and silence, travelers through this place meet no other living creature. Groups find themselves separated upon entering this Realm. The journey of the spirit through the Desert of Visions is of necessity a solitary trip toward enlightenment. Devoid of distractions, the pilgrim encounters visions and private ghosts. Here she confronts her past transgressions, reliving her offenses and shortcomings and learning through harsh contemplation of her weaknesses just what her strengths are. The desert torments her on every level. The surface of the desert contains slivers of silver, gold or any other substance that damages the seeker, burning and bruising her feet as she travels amid her desolate surroundings. Time becomes distorted here; the traveler may wander for what feels like centuries, encountering nothing but her own hallucinatory dreams. Eventually, the visions become more structured and revealing, replaying the events of the seeker's life in all its raw, uncompromising details.

Should the pilgrim attempt to attack the spirits to prevent the reenactment of her life story, she merely finds her suffering prolonged. Only if she allows herself to watch the pageant of her life, learning from her mistakes and growing in humility, can she rid herself of the burdens of her past transgressions. Once she has accepted her past, the hengeyokai receives the answers to the questions that brought her to this place, especially if they require her to make moral or ethical decisions.

Once she has gone through the struggles of the desert and reached a resolution of her dilemma, the hengeyokai finds herself at a fertile and verdant oasis. Here, in the waters of this desert haven, the hengeyokai may refresh her wounded spirit, renewing her Gnosis and Willpower and gazing at the familiar light of a now benevolent moon. When she has replenished her ailing spirit, she sees a dragon path open in front of her, leading her back to any point she designates.

Sample Spirit

The denizens of this realm have no statistics since their only purpose is to play out the lives of those who visit the Desert. Storytellers may assign powers and abilities as necessary.



The Forbidden Lands

This Realm's appearance deceives those who first come upon it. Utterly barren and desolate at first glance, the Forbidden Lands offer an unrelenting vista of blasted plains and cracked, parched ground. Only close attention to details reveals the signs of hidden life — a fragile blossom blooming through the cracks in the dry soil, a small lizard scurrying for the shade of an overhanging rock.

Banes and other evil spirits participate in an eternal hunt, pursuing anything that survives in this wretched land. Armed with cast-off pieces of modern weapons or simply using teeth and claws, these malevolent spirits roam at will through the Forbidden Lands. Many hengeyokai believe that this realm portends the Sixth Age, when the forces of destruction and decay rise to ascendancy.

Despite the doom-laden atmosphere, a faint thread of hope runs through this realm. The small, persistent examples of life that manage to survive bear the promise that Gaia still has a presence even in the dreariest of places. Rumors tell of secret underground enclaves of humans and other creatures, refugees from the perils of the surface. Here, in buried cities and cave complexes, survivors preserve the magic and wonder of the earlier Ages and await the turning of the Cycle to a more fortuitous time.

Some hengeyokai seek out the Forbidden Lands in order to gain a glimpse of the Sixth Age; many pay for their vision with their sanity, driven mad by the nightmarish experience. Others come from such an encounter refreshed and even more dedicated to working to prevent the greatest devastations of the next Age. A few believe that in the apparent scouring of the land, Gaia seeks to purge her creation in order to start again and renew the Cycle. Other reasons for visiting this realm vary. Hengeyokai attempt to test themselves against the worst the Wyrms has to offer; some seek ways to survive the coming Age for themselves and their Kinfolk. Still others merely want to practice for the future, a future they see as uncompromising in its desolation.

Sample Spirit: Ten Scorpion Devils

These creatures attack in groups, moving rapidly on their spidery legs. Each individual scorpion spirit has multiple chitinous appendages. In large enough numbers, they have the capacity to devour a large hengeyokai or a lesser Bane.

Willpower 7, Rage 9, Gnosis 7, Essence 45

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

Laws of the Wild provides more examples of spirits as well as rules on spirit creation and descriptions of Charms.



CAERNS AND DRAGON LINES

Caerns of the Middle Kingdom tend to be older and more powerful than those in the Western Lands. Both *hengeyokai* and local Kinfolk often share the duties of maintaining the upkeep of a caern, seeing to its physical appearance as well as its security in both the Middle Kingdom and the Mirror Lands. Wars between the *shen*, however, have resulted in the draining of many caerns and they are now drastically reduced in number. These battles for the sources of Chi power have raged for centuries and through all the preceding Ages. Because of this, the Beast Courts have had to come together to protect the remaining caerns. No longer can Tengu or Nezumi or Zhong Lung hope to have caerns that belong exclusively to them. In part, this scarcity has contributed to the high levels of cooperation among the *hengeyokai*. Better to share one caern than to lose it in petty quarrels over ownership.

One major distinction between Eastern and Western caerns lies in the appearance of a caern in the Mirror Lands. Each caern has its distinct nature in the Umbra, whether or not it is part of a larger Umbral domain, such as a Glen. Caerns in the Mirror Lands serve as the caern spirit's court.

Each caern in the Mirror Lands reflects the nature of its spirit. A spirit of Battle might dwell in a large fortress populated by spirit-armies; the caern's physical aspect, on the other hand, might be a simple forest grove. A healing spirit might reside in an alabaster hall crowded with spirits of healing herbs and filled with the sound of soothing music and the odor of invigorating incense; the physical caern might be located in an urban center.

The greater power of Eastern caerns comes at a corresponding price, however. Many caerns are quite dangerous. Their spirits too often grow arrogant or even insane due to the constant battles for their favors from the *shen* of the Middle Kingdom. Some caern spirits make impossible demands, such as sacrificial victims or the performance of impossible deeds. Occasionally, caern spirits attack the *hengeyokai* responsible for the caern. Some attribute this erratic behavior to the general breakdown of the Celestial Courts as the Sixth Age nears; others say that the Emerald Mother cannot always control her pain and that the insanity of her spirits is symptomatic of her anguish.

Eastern caerns are joined to one another not only by moon bridges, as they are in the Western lands, but by dragon lines as well. These stronger versions of the dragon paths connect the Middle Kingdom's caerns with the realms of the spirit lords. In past ages, observers for the dragon lords used these lines to travel from caern to caern, reporting back to their lords and, ultimately, to the Celestines residing in the Tapestry. Keeping the flow of Chi vital between the spirit world and the physical realm was a tremendously important task. In modern times, however, few remember when a dragon lord's spirit minister last made a transit of the lines. Nevertheless, *hengeyokai* strive to keep the dragon lines open.

Hengeyokai may use dragon lines as transport just as they would use a moon bridge. The amount of cooperation between the two caern spirits at



either end of the dragon line as well as the general state of the dragon line itself determines the speed and ease of travel. If the caern spirits are allied and the dragon line is frequently used, travel is easy. If hengeyokai attempt to use dragon lines to travel from their caern to that of an enemy or rival, travel is much more difficult. The Storyteller should assign a difficulty to any tests made to traverse the dragon lines based on the relationship between the caern spirits involved.

A hengeyokai who loses his way or fails to tread the dragon lines in the proper manner becomes lost in the Mirror Lands somewhere between the two caerns. Although her sentai may be able to locate and rescue her (assuming they aren't lost with her), she may draw the attention of a powerful spirit or two while she is waiting for help to come. Depending on her conduct, she may have a good experience and gain the assistance of the spirit or she may earn its enmity instead.

For general information on caerns, see **Laws of the Wild**.





Chapter Five: Nine Tails (Kitsune)

*I followed the scent of jasmine
and leapt at the sound of laughter
behind me.*

*Turning, I saw it was a fox who
hunted me*

As I thought I hunted her.

—Denjiro of the Thousand Songs, Kitsune Kataribe

Ayame turned restlessly in her sleep trying to recall the dream that had disturbed her. Finally she arose and lit the fragrant candle that rested before a picture of her mother on the small table in the room's corner. She studied her mother's face, so like hers in its angular prettiness. Her mother's lips curved in a small, secretive smile. The same smile, she knew, that she herself sometimes wore. The smile that had driven her father away. She heard him in her mind, leaving her again just as she had heard him that day four years earlier.

"I cannot look at her," he told her aunt and uncle. "She has too much of Haruko in her. When she smiles, all I can see is her departed mother. I apologize for this shameful lack in myself, but I continue to grieve. I shall never stop grieving for my dearest wife, who was like the sun and stars to me."

Her aunt had shaken her head. "It brings bad luck upon both of you to continue grieving past the proper time. You must stop!" she scolded.

I know," he replied, "but I cannot if I must look at her face every day. Please, I beg you to take her and raise her until I may return for her. I will send money. It will cost you nothing, I assure you. But I cannot simply abandon her. Will you take her? The difference she makes in your lives will be insignificant."

Insignificant, Ayame thought. *And that is what I will always be. Aunt and Uncle are civil to me. They make all the correct noises. I am fed and clothed. They*



see that I am schooled. But oh, my mother, why could you have not lived beyond my birth? Would you have thought me insignificant too? Father has not visited in all the years since he left me here. What is wrong with me? She caressed the frame of the picture, sadly wondering why she was counted for so little if her mother, whom she resembled, had so broken the heart of her father with her death.

She startled as she heard a scratching sound at the window. Gathering her courage, she flicked back the curtain and looked outside. Her father stood there, beckoning to her. Half-frightened, she opened the window.

"Get dressed and come out, Ayame," he called. "It is time you knew your true story. I am taking you to meet a teacher. One who can explain things to you far better than I ever could."

She hesitated, then thought, *Why not? No one here will miss someone as insignificant as me.* Quickly, she dressed and gathered a few things she treasured into a pillowcase. She placed her mother's picture where it would be protected.

"I'm on my way," she answered, and blew out the candle.

Introduction

So why are the Kitsune detailed separately from the rest of the hengeyokai, and since they are, why don't they get their own book? Because, while other Changing Breeds may be found worldwide, Kitsune are not. Asian Garou may think a little differently from their Western counterparts, but they still consider themselves to be part of a global family of Garou.

Kitsune think of themselves as hengeyokai, not Bête. Their race began in Japan, Korea and China, and, except for a few forays westward, that is where they still live. They took on the Court structure and learned of the Ages of the World. They have their own role to follow in assuring that the Wheel keeps turning. They feel a cultural and communal kinship with the shen. And they have no real counterpart in any other part of the world.

In short, they get a lengthy treatment here because they differ significantly from any other Changing Breed. They're featured in this book because they're hengeyokai. You can play a hengeyokai without knowing much about the Kitsune, but to play a Kitsune, you must also have the information on how to play hengeyokai. Besides, the Kitsune would think it only proper that they be accorded the proper respectful treatment and they also wouldn't mind cleverly concealing themselves within a larger book, the sneaky little buggers!

Lexicon

Batsu: A Kitsune's closest friends and allies.

Byakko: A white-colored fox — usually a servant of Inari.

Chie: (pronounced Chee-eh) Wisdom.

Doshi: One of the Four Paths; a Kitsune Sorcerer.

Eji: One of the Four Paths; a Kitsune Warrior.



Genko: A black-colored fox.

Go-en: Kitsune-go for contact and favor networks.

Gukutsushi: One of the Four Paths; A Kitsune Dreamweaver or Illusionist.

Inari: A Greater Incarna associated with Kitsune; A powerful Shinto Kami.

Ju-Fu: Kitsune paper and rune magic.

Jyu-ho: All Fox magic.

Kagayaki: Glory.

Kanji: Kitsune-go writing combining hengeyokai pictograms and Chinese characters.

Kataribe: One of the Four Paths; a Kitsune Bard.

Kiko: Spirit fox; a second-rank Kitsune.

Kitsune: A Nine-Tails; a werefox.

Kitsune-go: The language of the Kitsune.

Kojin: Human-breed Kitsune.

Koryo: Haunting fox; a third-rank Kitsune.

Kuko: Air fox; A Kitsune who serves the Wyrn.

Nine-Tails: Another term for Kitsune.

Nogitsune: A Kitsune without rank, usually a kit.

Origami: The art of folding paper; used by Kitsune in *Ju-Fu*.

Paths: The four callings or professions of the Kitsune; not 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; 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.

Bai Mianxi and the Birth of the Kitsune

Ayame waited, head bowed, hands gracefully folded as she knelt before the older woman dressed in vibrant blues and yellows. The woman's jet black hair belied her poise and grace, for Ayame would have thought such a grand personage would be much older. After an eternity, in which Ayame was certain



the woman was studying her and dismissing her as insignificant, she spoke, "Ayame. You are your mother's daughter, certainly."

Ayame jerked her head up in surprise. "You knew my mother?" she could not help but ask.

The older woman nodded, "I did, and we will speak much of her later, for I see you yearn to know more. If I were not your father's friend also, he would not have brought you to me. But that story is for another time.

"First, I must explain to you who I am. Then perhaps I may help you discover who *you* are. I am Miyoko of the Honeyed Tongue. I am Kitsune and Kataribe. We have much to do in the next few days, much for you to learn. Tonight, we open your eyes. And when you know what you are, you shall never be thought 'insignificant' again, that I promise you."

• • •

After the Rite, an amazed Ayame settled comfortably at Miyoko's feet, a look of wonder on her face. "But how..." she began.

"Hush, kit, and I shall tell you, for we owe what we are to Bai Mianxi, the White-Faced One, and it is her story I shall tell you now, as it was told to me long ago."

The Tale of Bai Mianxi and the Emerald Mother

Long ago, during the reign of the First Yellow Emperor, when China was but newborn, Bai Mianxi sat in her home in Henan surrounded by her court. Beside her sat Prince Inari. The windows were open and full moonlight illumined them as they enjoyed the night air. Suddenly, a white rabbit leapt through the window, landing in Bai Mianxi's lap. It bit her on the paw, then bolted away as quickly as an arrow in flight.

Bai Mianxi jumped up and flew after the rabbit, favoring her torn paw. Her little white feet became as red as lacquer from her blood as each foot stepped into the paw print of the foot before, with the bitten foot leading the rest.

The rabbit ran south into Vietnam and the jungles there, then flew west through the Taklimakan. It turned east and tore through Beijing's streets and bounded over Mongolia's mountains. Bai Mianxi wondered at its speed and craftiness. Finally it veered back into Sichuan, near enough to her den for her to hear Prince Inari laughing at this comical chase. And there, she lost the trail.

Her face grew pink with anger and humiliation. She leapt in rage. Then she moved more slowly, thinking what she could tell Prince Inari to stop him from laughing when she returned empty-handed. Finally, she saw a well ahead of her and thought how thirsty she was, for she had run far — crossing the Middle Kingdom in two different directions that night.

As the White-Faced One lapped at the dipper, she chanced to look down the well and saw the rabbit, curled atop the water as though he were asleep and glowing like a lantern. She pounced — and fell.



Down she fell and landed on her hind legs on a sparkling white path. Around her lay a beautiful, wild garden all a-riot with jasmine and chrysanthemums and roses. The trees were bedecked with the finest autumn colors and sweet berries hung in garlands wherever she looked. The sounds of water fell in tinkling harmonies and the lovely scents that wafted on the light breeze almost made her swoon with delight. Standing amid all this perfection was the most beautiful person she had ever laid eyes on.

When she first looked, she thought the stranger looked like a gold- and silver-furred fox. When she turned her head for a moment, the fox lady grew tall and raised up on two feet as Bai Mianxi herself sometimes did. The third time she blinked, and when she opened her eyes, the lady was human.

The lady spoke, saying, "Welcome to Heaven, Bai Mianxi."

"Heaven?" she ventured, thinking how foolish she had been to chase a reflection of a rabbit down a well and drown. She hoped the other ghosts wouldn't laugh at her.

"Only a little Heaven. Come, or you will be late for your audience."

Bai Mianxi being a fox and therefore proud of herself, asked, "I am giving an audience? To whom?"

The lady laughed a silvery, throaty laugh. "You are *granted* an audience. With my sister — your Mother, the First Goddess, the True Queen — Gaia. You have met Her in dreams. You have danced upon Her skin and suckled at Her breast. So, come. She is waiting for you.

Bai Mianxi followed the Silver Lady, keeping her eyes open and her mouth shut, so she learned much she would not otherwise have known about Heaven. The two stopped before an elegant golden gate that was taller than a dragon and wider than three elephants. The Silver Lady turned to Bai Mianxi and her face was stern. She admonished, "White-Faced One, you must behave as well as you are able. Your elder siblings have vexed your Mother and She is quite upset. Go in and kowtow. Do not look Her in the face unless given permission or She will be very angry at your presumption."

So Bai Mianxi took on her most pleasing shape, combed out her tail most carefully and nudged open the golden gateway just enough for her to slip through.

She could never say afterward what the room looked like. Some claim that she obediently kept her eyes on the floor; what is more likely is that she was clever enough to not give details of what she was not supposed to know. She came to a small cushion, much like the one you occupy now, kit. It lay at the foot of a dais on which was set a throne. There she prostrated herself.

She lay there feeling nervous and small and the tiniest bit angry — kowtows were what other foxes gave to her, not something she was used to doing. She also thought, as was her way for her mind was rarely still, while she waited. She thought to herself, *I have keen ears, when this Gaia comes in, I will hear Her and know something of Her. My nose is keen and I shall smell Her also.*



But she lay there for a long time and heard and smelled nothing. She was about to raise her head and sneak a peek, when she heard her name.

"Bai Mianxi."

She almost jumped out of her skin. She had not noticed the goddess coming and the voice was unlike anything she had ever heard, quiet inside her ears, but terribly loud inside her heart.

"My little one, this is the end of your childhood. From this time forward, you and your people must work and serve Us and fight Our enemies. Your people are too many. You breed so fast, almost as bad as Man. You anger Heaven because you do not pay proper respect to the gods. You play tricks on the local spirits. Legions of human ghosts say you steal from them and make mischief on their descendants day and night. We approve of your mischief, but you must leave alone those who do revere Us.

"We have spoken. Go to your aunt for instructions."

Bai Mianxi was stunned. She stammered, "But your Majesty...." Silence surrounded her, deafening in its brooding lack of sound. The White-Faced One felt another hole opening beneath her. She was terribly frightened and she knew her people would be frightened of what was asked of them. She had to fight for their freedom.

"Your Greatness," she continued, "my people are small and weak. We do not fight, we run from danger or trouble. If we have broken Heaven's rules and the gods are angry, well, we were never given those rules. It seems unfair of you to ask us to grow up when we didn't know we were children. How were we to enjoy it, if we didn't know? Please, you must have many servants, let my people go on as they always have. We will not trouble you anymore."

She waited, but there was no response. She tried again.

"Perhaps we could make a wager! If your praying mantis cannot outwrestle and bite the head off of mine, you will free me and my people to go on as we have been," she suggested. Behind her back, Bai Mianxi held a green painted stone shaped like a praying mantis.

Gaia sighed, "I'm afraid Coyote has been here before you."

"I do not know this Coyote, but perhaps, Your Radiance, I could tell you a secret. I know an amusing anecdote about the Yellow Emperor's favorite concubine and—"

"Raven was here last week and told Me that," the goddess replied.

"Ahem," Bai Mianxi was beginning to feel a little desperate now. "Perhaps I could show you a new Art," and she performed her most wonderful magic for Gaia, saying, "It is quite powerful, but it may have escaped your notice."

"I have a cat who can do that," replied Gaia.

Bai Mianxi had no clever tricks left, yet her people were still in danger. She tried one final time.

"My teeth and claws are small, but they are all I have left. I will fight your strongest champion, but please, Great One, please do not doom my people!" she cried.



"No," said Gaia, and Bai Mianxi shrank inward with despair.

"You are brave when you must be, and that is to the good," said Gaia, "but My champions would destroy you, tearing you to pieces. We did not allow you to possess intelligence only to have you commit suicide. We did not permit Our sister to create a new changing child to have you killed by your siblings."

And the White-Faced One knew joy for a moment as she cried out, "But Most Noble One, if you already have servants who do everything so much better than we, then you do not need us. We can go!"

She was so relieved and so taken with her own cleverness in solving the problem that she forgot and raised her eyes to the hem of Gaia's robe. And saw a great and impossible wonder.

The robe moved and changed. The fabric seemed to be part cobweb, part flame, part green serpent writhing between them. The webs trapped the flame, snuffing them out, but the smoldering edges of web blazed up again and the serpent wove in and out, tearing at the cloth with fearful teeth, then trying to patch it with his claws as he passed elsewhere.

Bai Mianxi's eyes stung, her head felt light, then darkness took her. When she awoke, her nose pointed once again to the floor where it belonged, and a cool white hand held her trembling paws, despite being engulfed in a howling whirlwind. Barely distinguishable words filled the vortex.

"They will betray Us! They will forget Us! We have had enough destroyed by Our own Children!" the voice cried out.

Terrified, Bai Mianxi tried to flatten herself into the ground.

"Ah, my sister, wait but a moment," the Silver Lady called. One white hand released the White-Faced One's paws and stroked her on her back. She felt an icy pain there.

"Look into her heart," the Silver Lady urged. Bai Mianxi again knew darkness.

When she awoke, she lay curled in the lap of the Silver Lady. "We shall allow you your chance, little Fox," Gaia's voice was not so loud now, and even sounded somewhat tender. Bai Mianxi trembled in Luna's arms, weeping.

Gaia continued, "We have three promises for you. Obey Us and Our sister Luna, and someday you will be best at something. Fight hard and We will help your people survive, even through the Sixth Age that looms ever nearer. Serve Us well and in the last Age of the world, We will return to your people their freedom. Now you must leave Us, for We would sleep."

And Luna carried Bai Mianxi from the audience chamber for the first. Kitsune was too shaken to yet walk with any dignity.

And here I shall stop my story for awhile, for your eyes fall shut even as you strain to keep them open. Rest, and dream. Tomorrow you learn more.



The Ages of the World

Ah! You are awake. And were your dreams different than they have been in the past? Good. Your eyes are open now and your dreams should change. Come, sit by me and eat while I start your lessons. We will start with the Ages of the World. As yet, you know only the human reckoning of things. Your head is filled with technology and modern science, advances in medicine, computers and cell phones. These things signal change, certainly, but not the truly important ones we Kitsune understand. So hear now the truth and know your part in what we do.

The Age of Gaia

The First Age was one of peace and harmony. All was balanced, dark and light, yin and yang, spirit and flesh, all were one and mingled within Gaia. She was everything, yet She was alone.

The First Age ended when Gaia thought to have children.

The Age of Birthing

At the beginning of the Second Age, Gaia gave birth to the universe. From Her body She creating yang things: life, land, light, heat, fire and daytime. From Her blood she made yin things: night, death, water, darkness, cold and ice. From the afterbirth, She made things that are neither one thing nor another. Then She put a little of the afterbirth aside in case something needed to be made later that She'd forgotten.

She placed Her eyes in the sky. One was golden and shone with intense light, while the other was silver and glowed with a cool radiance. Gaia was weak, for the birth was hard. Her moon-daughter Luna saw that Her mother had only bones and womb left and knew that Gaia was dying.

She said to Her: "Mother, I will take your bones and place them in your womb. I will gather Your children around You to keep You company. I will guard You by night as You rest and my brother Helios will keep You warm and guard You by day."

Thus Luna gathered the scattered pieces of the Mother together, and they became the world. The teeth and claws came to keep vigil and paced in circles around Her even as they do today. Gaia was silent for a long while, and then finally died.

Helios screamed in anger and became dark. Luna turned away in despair, then she heard a sound she thought was the sun's weeping. On turning back, she saw a new child, the last child of Gaia-That-Was, and her name was Gaia-That-Is. Luna's tending had given the Mother the strength She needed to finish the world. That is why even today the sun can go black and the moon turns away, for they do so in honor of their Mother.



The Triat

Using things Gaia-That-Was had created, Gaia-That-Is and Her brother and sister made the other spirits and creatures. But they all ran free, acting wild, doing what they pleased and bothering others. Nobody had planned how to keep them in one place or make them be quiet. No one knew how to destroy the creatures that there was no longer a use for either. It had never been thought about. All the Elders were tired of having to make everything themselves. Nobody had taken thought for how to get the new creatures to make each other or make things for themselves.

That was when three of the new children — old and powerful ones — offered to take on those jobs, explaining they had made important discoveries. A huge Spider-spirit called Weaver had just invented something she called Control. A mighty Elemental-spirit called Wyld boasted of a new thing called Propagation, and a gargantuan Dragon-spirit named Wyrn had invented the power of Destruction. They showed Gaia and the others how well their new magic worked, and the Elders appointed them to oversee the Balance of Creation. Then weary of all She had done, Gaia slept.

Monkey-Plague

Many years later, Luna looked down and saw tiny, red lights speckling her sister's face. These were fires, and there were too many at distances far enough from one another that they could not all have been started by lightning. They were also too small to be doing the job of clearing out old forest growth and fields. As she looked closer, she saw groups of Gaia's children gathered around the fires — naked monkey-children where it was too cold for monkeys to be. Luna awoke Gaia.

Gaia awoke and saw a monkey looking back at Her. It wore fur that didn't belong to it and wore polished bones on sinew around its neck. It carried a branch it didn't grow covered with teeth that were not its own. Worst, it was apparently in charge of a fire set on a rock. She called out, "Wyrn! Weaver! Wyld! What have you been doing? Who are these beings who wield the powers you showed Us?"

The three came running, and Gaia asked them who the monkey-beings were. They replied, "That is Man." They explained that this was new Man, more adaptable and smarter than the original Man Gaia had created. Worse, the new Man had gotten rid of the first Man-creatures by killing them. Gaia then said they must take their gifts away from Man, just as they had taught them. The three hung their heads and said they could not take away the gifts. They could only destroy Man or bind him or grow him, for that is what they do, but not take things away. Gaia wondered if Her children could not take these curses away, what would happen to creatures who could do all three things — bind, grow and destroy?



Hengeyokai

While the Three were arguing over whose fault it was and Gaia wept and grew tired once more, Luna picked up a handful of naked monkeys and a handful of other creatures and compared them. Man had no real fur, teeth or claws. He had poor hearing, no sense of smell and poor eyesight. Worse, he stank and had only a small bit of humor. She shook her head, for they truly had not much that counted. She spoke to Gaia, urging Her to rest and told Her she would make guardians for Her so Gaia might sleep safely. She promised the guardians would have the gifts the monkeys possessed and more and that they would know Gaia, Luna, Helios and their servants. She said they would be half of man, able to go among other men, yet not needing to live among them all the time, and half beast, to give them what they lack and teach them sense.

Luna laid out the creatures and chose the finest and wisest to serve Gaia: Wolves to fight for her, Cats to listen, Ravens to watch, Bears for healing. She chose Sharks to guard Her life's blood, Dragons to remember and Rats to live in the low places and catch whatever the rest missed. Snakes for making — no, no Foxes. Not yet.

Next, she chose the finest, wisest men and women and placed them next to the animal they seemed best suited for. Then she took some of the afterbirth that Gaia-That-Was had saved — material that was both yin and yang — and bound each pair together with a silver wire, her hair, and placed them back on the earth.

Luna spoke to each of its duties and gifts, its strengths and weaknesses, commanding them to all work together. She spoke of tending to Man and keeping him in his place, of watching the Three — especially the Weaver, for she seemed to be the one to blame for Man, and then asked the sun to make it colder because the monkeys were not where they were supposed to be.

Shen

Now it so happened that Luna had some creatures left in each hand after making the new Changing Children and put them back where they came from. Even though they weren't made into hengeyokai, her touch changed them too. The men and women saw things more clearly, heard more and grew wiser. They became shamans. The animals lived long, acquired wisdom and became chiefs among their kind. After a time, they learned to listen to Gaia and went into other Realms to watch over their kin. The trees and plants she touched as she set the creatures down gained sight and hearing and thinking and they went into the Realms as well. These became the Kami. And when she leaned down to replace the creatures, strands of her silver hair fell on other beings of all kinds and their souls joined with hers. They became *hsien* and are her children forevermore.

The Triat's Response

When everyone had left and Luna and Gaia had turned away, the Three remained behind. Wyrn shook with anger. He felt that Gaia had been unfair



in Her judgment. He felt that Weaver had fooled him into helping and that Gaia had abandoned him because She cared more about Her original Men than She cared how he felt. He didn't understand what was wrong with Weaver's idea of giving Man some help. They were pathetic without it. The Three had just made them useful. He resented being scolded for something he had thought was for the good of all.

Wyld sorrowfully hung his head and spun around and around for a long time before tearing off to a desolate wilderland to weep thunderstorms and beg his Mother's forgiveness. By the time She forgave him, he had forgotten the whole thing, for that is how he is.

Weaver sat quietly at the end of her thread and watched the newly created guardians with all eight of her eyes. After a time, Wyrms' rage attracted her attention and she turned toward him, smiling. Weaver whispered to Wyrms and spun her webs around him for eons, trying to control the power she felt in his anger. First she wrapped up his weakest coils — Duty, Judgment, Obedience and Sanity. When she had done that thickly enough, she laid threads across his rage.

This was a terrible betrayal, for she was meant to control lesser creatures, not her equal. In her arrogance, she forgot. The raw force of Wyrms' anger smashed through the strand of web, forcing its way into Weaver. She almost could not withstand it. She fought in terror to break the connection, but the strand was the strongest she had ever woven and she could not escape. At that point, she went mad.

The webs tightened and strangled Wyrms, and he was nearly cut in half. Broken ends of web slashed him and he howled in pain. His rage became hatred. The Weaver feared both the Mother and Luna. She knew she had committed a terrible crime and feared they would not let her live. Wyrms' wounds wouldn't heal by themselves, so she said nothing and covered up the evidence as best she could and began plotting how to escape punishment.

We believe the end of the Second Age came about when the Wyrms were wounded and the Weaver went mad.

The Age of Legends

The Third Age paid the consequences of Weaver's actions. Wyrms lost his hold over his servants. They didn't know what happened to him and many kept to their tasks, killing only what had been ordained by Gaia to die. Some still do this today, but not many.

Not wanting her minions to discover her true state, Weaver freed the more intelligent of her servants, but bound the rest to her, where they went mad as well. There exist descendants of the freed spiderlings even today, but do not trust them, for some were given to the Wyrms, some rejoined the Weaver and others serve powers we don't know.

Weaver convinced Wyrms that it was Gaia who hurt him and they created more servants. They tried wrapping Man in snake and spider skins, but it didn't



work well. Their experiments are the reason there exist so many kinds of bakemono. They could never get it quite right.

Ten Wyrmlordlings called the Yama Kings took advantage of the Wyrmling's distraction. In essence they were lesser servants in charge of only one thing: Yin, or decay. As such, however, they desired that there be no Yang in the world. The balance meant nothing to them. Together they gathered other Wyrmling children into their service. When they controlled Death as well, the Yama Kings built strongholds in a realm of their own and called it Yomi. From that kingdom, they set out to conquer the world, taking other creatures under their banner when they could — men, *shen* and others who could be persuaded to join them. Those who refused were destroyed. They fed Yomi power into their servants until there were no longer only 10 Yama Kings. They began taking over Gaia. Wyrmling and Weaver wreathed their faces in smiles to see this happen.

Gods and Heroes

A true accounting of all the heroics and tales of the Age would take years. Even then, I might forget some of the important things. So, Ayame, I will content myself to tell you three things only.

The first is this: The humans fought beside the *shen*. Mages, scholars and ordinary folk, too, could still feel the earth and fought for Gaia. Many still do, though their numbers are few compared to the many who are apathetic or corrupt or simply ignorant of what is going on in the world.

The second thing to remember is this: When the humans cried out, whether in supplication or thanksgiving, raising their voices alongside the *shen*, Gaia, Her siblings and their most powerful servants answered them. The Elder Ones sent servants to watch over those who called for them and wherever they went, these servants went, they spoke of their lieges by different names and showed each group a different face. They didn't mean to be confusing, but intended to make it easier to know where pleas for help arose as each group would use the name they knew. The names the humans learned were "god," "Kami," "avatar," and "angel." While it is possible to guess the god behind these titles, it seems rude to do so if the Elders prefer it this way.

The third thing to remember is: When the Elder Ones saw how many valiant warriors and wise counselors there were among the men, *shen* and *hengeyokai*, they were proud of them. They took favorites, rewarding especially tricky, valiant or smart ones. Some human favorites were given longer life spans or given a choice as to the form they would wear in their next life. Some were granted the gift of remembering their last life when they entered their next, which is how Man came to understand reincarnation. Some were taken after death to amuse or advise or become warriors for the Celestial Courts. These became the first men called "immortals" or "demigods." Some were preserved as they were killed and sent back to fight in more beautiful, terrifying bodies and they were given the name of Wan Xian, the Ten Thousand Immortals. So many



creatures and so many men that were neither Yin nor Yang gathered with the Kami and all fought to restore the balance. And they won.

The End of the War

All the Yama Kings' forces were driven back and sealed into the kingdom of Yomi, and the Wan Xian were given the task of guarding the portals in and out. The Elders decided they needed to make the living, the dead and the spirits easier to tell apart, they needed to divide the world into three realms. The dead were given the Yin Realm, an echo of the lands they were used to. They could still see their families from that place. The Kami were given the Yang Realm that was made of the life material they were made of, where gods and their servants could speak freely with spirits without burdening themselves with flesh. They gave the Middle Kingdom to the living — a place to call home, a chance to rebuild, and a respite from the constant meddling of their ancestors. The three were still very close together and those who wanted to could cross into another Realm whenever they liked.

The hengeyokai, Wan Xian and *shen* performed their offices as intended, man still felt the earth and lived as naturally as possible. Wyld acted as he was meant to, Wyrmsulked and Weaver spun her webs and continued her plotting. Peace stole over the earth, and Gaia smiled and slept and other Elders fell into slumber as well.

The Age of Testing

The Third Age thus passed quietly, kit. There was no great upheaval after the war, and it took much time before anyone realized the Fourth Age was upon us. You see, Gaia had so many servants, all assigned important tasks, that all it took was for a few to slip up and the balance would again be broken.

The Wan Xian

The Wan Xian, guardians of Yomi, failed because their masters did not tell them enough of what had come before. They had been given second lives, but no one explained anything that had happened before the Third Age. They knew nothing of Wyrms and his purpose, nor did they realize the powers he had gained while they fought open war with Yomi.

The Wyrms sent nine of his children as an embassy to the Court of the Wan Xian. Now I shall recite the downfall and the names of those who brought it about as I heard it from my sempai. Listen well, that you may know the children of Wyrms, who are our enemies:

"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 Wyrms' servants.



Man

Man also failed, also because he knew too little of the Triat. Weaver, Wyrn and Wyld had been their friends and given them wondrous gifts. They had raised them above other beasts. Weaver moved slowly and carefully, for she knew most were faithful to Gaia and that the hengeyokai would recognize her patterns even if she disguised herself. She sent one servant to tempt Man, a servant who craftily went from village to village weaving silken mind-webs. The servant left gifts behind: needles, seeds, flints and grinding stones. Soon the grateful humans hoped for Spider's visits, and realized they could invent things and make them themselves.

When they did so, Weaver's recalled her servant Progress and rewarded her with high station.

The Wall

When the Elders made the world into three Realms, they created a very thin barrier, almost like a shoji screen. It served for privacy but was not meant to be a true obstacle. Weaver smiled, for in creating the barrier, the Elders gave her the means to divide her enemies. She sent legions of tiny spinners out to run on the Wall. Each thread they pulled behind them thickened the screen. Where they crossed, the net toughened. As they ran and ran, the wall gained new layers, each stronger. And as it grew so gradually, no one caught on for a long time. By the time the Elders noticed, they would find it almost impossible to break the Wall without also breaking the Realms on either side.

The War of Shame

The clever Wan Xian knew they would have to rid themselves of the hengeyokai if they were to enjoy the fruits of their betrayal. The beast-folk had always partnered the Wan Xian in policing humanity so settlements didn't become too large and the caerns they guarded teemed with Chi. The Wan Xian sent skilled speakers to hengeyokai courts to speak of a great danger to the Beast-folk — other hengeyokai. They said the hengeyokai had fallen to the Wyrn and meant to turn on other Breeds and destroy them so their guardianship would fail. Ah, they were so clever! And the hengeyokai believed them. Why should they not believe trusted allies?

The War of Shame began. And the Okuma fell.

But Wan Xian could not fool the hengeyokai forever. One by one the Breeds smelled the rot beneath the clever lies. Though there were fewer of them left, the Beast Courts of the Emerald Mother united again and turned to war upon the Wan Xian and the human settlements that harbored them. Gaia awoke and saw Her children fighting a war they wouldn't lose, but couldn't entirely win. The healers were gone, lost to their own gentleness, and others were few where once they were many. Gaia formed a thought, gave it voice and sent it to birth a new child for her.



The White-Faced One

Bai Mianxi came into the world like any other fox, but she was the only kit her mother bore that year and her facial fur was white. She lived as any other fox, but was sneakier, cleverer, nimbler, faster and with greater wisdom than any fox that had ever before lived.

As she grew older, she found wisdom from voices in the wind, the water, the ground and the trees. She listened to the hunter and the prey and even to the fires. Many could hear the spirits of such things if they only stopped to listen (and many do), but she learned also how to speak to them and call them. Still, she was not yet Kitsune.

While the wars laid waste to the land, the Triat failed the Elders, the Wan Xian fell and the Yomi were released into the world, while hengeyokai died, Bai Mianxi played in field and forest. She found other foxes she thought clever and taught them what she knew and all played tricks on anyone they met. They rescued the downtrodden and mocked the powerful. They tormented the poor if that was more amusing, and killed when it suited them. They drifted across the Middle Kingdom, and this is where they were when Bai Mianxi chased a rabbit and fell down a well.

The Age of Darkness

The White-Faced One spent just a year in the little Heaven, but when she returned, she found that the Age of the World had changed in her absence. Her court was in ruins, her people gone. Prince Inari's den was empty. Vermin abounded and old runs were overgrown. Only one den remained lived in. In that den lived the last fox of the court, Burrs-in-the-Ears. He told her that the court had scattered when she didn't return and the foxes had gone elsewhere. Prince Inari's whereabouts he didn't know, but pointed westward. She wanted to go after him, but felt Luna watching her and knew she had other duties to attend to first.

She made Burrs her first pupil, and he became Fire-Splits-the-Sky, the first Doshi. They found others and Bai Mianxi stayed to teach them. When her mission was done and one fox of each path was five-tailed and an elder in her own right, she went searching for Prince Inari. His trail was long cold by then, but she followed Helios westward through China.

The Fifth Age

"This is the tale of the travels of Bai Mianxi, as handed down from Kataribe to Kataribe. Perhaps you will tell it one day as well, child." Miyoko smiled. Ayame said nothing, but her eyes were filled with dreams of foxes. Miyoko glanced knowingly at her. *"And, so," she said, "we begin again."*

Bai Mianxi found no trace of Prince Inari in Hubei, but one night by the side of the road, she met a demon. She called out to him, "Nihao, guardian of Yomi! How fare the Wan Xian?"



The demon flushed with shame and anger. "The Wan Xian exist no more, little fox," he replied. "Spare me your insults." Then Bai Mianxi smelled that the blood in his veins was not his and she heard the tatters of his flesh rattling. The Wan Xian had changed into the Kuei-jin for the gods had taken away their breath and blood.

In Sichuan the Prince was nowhere to be found, but she heard three ghosts talking in a cemetery. "Nihao, revered ancestors," she called to them. "How fare the fallen heroes?"

"No heroes remain on this side, small fox," said the first. "I am cursed to roam the dark because my family could not afford to bury me properly."

"There are no heroes on this side, small fox," said the second. "I am cursed because my family was too rich and buried me in jade."

"There are no heroes here, little fox," said the third, "They have left us to fight Yomi or to live again."

When she reached Qinghai, even the wind held no remembrance of Prince Inari, but she shared a rabbit with two starving *hsien*. "How fare Luna's people?" she asked them, but they were strangers to the area and lost. She caught more rabbits for them, for they were sickening from spider-bite.

In Tibet, she found footprints of many foxes, but none were Prince Inari's. She encountered a shaman who offered to find him for her for the price of a single word. As he would not say which word that was before she agreed to the bargain, she refused. In this, she was wise, for the shaman was a Namebreaker who wished to know her name so he could break it and learn her secrets.

In Nepal, she realized she was on the wrong path and climbed a high mountain to bring her closer to Luna while she prayed for guidance. Looking outward, she saw a Cat and a Raven watching her from another peak. "Nihao, Eyes of Gaia," she called, knowing both Raven and Cat loved that title. "How fare the servants of the Great Mother?"

"Poorly," replied the Raven. "We are decimated and betrayed. We are overrun with monkeys."

"Who wants to know?" asked the Cat. "We need tell you nothing until you tell us who you might be that we should speak to you."

"I am Kitsune and a servant of Luna and Gaia. I might be the White-Faced One, or I might not," she replied.

"Oh, Keetsnay," said the Cat as though he had heard the word before. "You are no one. We need not speak to you." So saying, though he was pricked with curiosity, he turned away so she would not know it, but he stayed within earshot.

"Please, Brother Raven, I would know more about our kin. Are there many nearby that I could meet?" Bai Mianxi asked politely.

"We are great in number," the Cat replied. He rolled over and continued, "Our Khan and Bagheera swarm through these mountains. We have enormous power to fight our enemies. For any foe you bring against us, we have two



veteran warriors, yet our kittens are so strong they could handle the enemy alone!" he boasted.

The Raven eyed the Cat in amazement. "Right," he cawed, "keep telling yourself such stories. We are not so very great in number, Sister Fox. There are three of us — we two and a wolf who weeps for his fallen packmates. This is the army of Gaia in the whole of these mountains."

Bai Mianxi wept for the world's changes. Her prince was gone, her heart in pieces, but such was a small wound compared to the multitude of dead, corrupted, broken and forgotten creatures who now roamed the world. "I will use no more time searching for what cannot be," she prayed to the Silver Lady. "Forgive me for wasting these years looking for my lost love. What do you want me to do, Great Lady?"

To her surprise, for she had asked so humbly, she had not expected Luna to even notice one as unworthy as herself, her prayer was answered. "The time was not wasted, dear one," the Silver Lady spoke. "Your journey allowed you to see the harm Yomi has caused to your Mother and Her servants. You traveled in the right direction, for now we would have you leave the mountains and make your way to India. We wish you to spend your time assassinating dynasties that are no longer deemed fit to rule by Heaven. Be warned, though — some of them do not yet exist, so you may be at this task for some time yet."

The Death of Empires

Bai Mianxi was not only the first but the best. We may destroy an evil person, be he ruler or politician and be proud of our deed, but she caused the fall of whole nations, yet left the populace alive.

In India, she helped good King Asoka achieve a long and fruitful reign, but his heirs she cast down. She tore down the Qin Emperors and weakened the Han until they fell to her machinations four centuries later. When the Sui had no more use for Heaven, she paid them a visit. None except her and the Elders know the full tale of her journeys and service for as the centuries passed, she took on many names.

When Emperor Toba of Japan lost the Mandate of Heaven, Bai Mianxi slipped into his very bedchamber by possessing the body of his favorite concubine. Her mission was to destroy the decadent court and its dark mages, but she was discovered too soon. The dark mages warned the emperor and exorcised Bai Mianxi like a ghost. The fools thought they had killed her. We know better. But the story of the first Kitsune does end with her expulsion from the Jewel Maiden. Why? The Silver Lady has not imparted that wisdom to me, child.

The Prince Inaki

The Prince proved more secretive than Bai Mianxi. Not even the most inquisitive Kataribe ever discovered where or how he came by his training as



Kitsune. Thus, I have no tale of his travels and exploits from Bai Mianxi's side to his caerns and shrines in Japan.

The Kataribe of Japan say that when he arrived and began teaching them to be Foxes rather than foxes, he had golden fur and five tails. He shone like the sun by day and glowed like the moon by night. He had powers no Nine-Tails has duplicated since. He sent his Court to the other islands, to China, Korea, Mongolia, Manchuria, Tibet and India. He led his Elders to the front gate of a Hakken Garou caern, traveling via a sky-splitting thunderstorm he had called up and Grandfather Thunder's family spoke with him. He'd sent his most harmless-looking, nimble and chatty Kataribe to gossip with the Tengu, and the youngest and most respectful and legend-seeking Fox to a Dragon. In time, the Zhong Lung accepted the honor of Grand Celestial Historian to Inari's Court. He sent his least scrupulous, ugliest and nastiest fighters to fight against the enemies of the Nezumi, and in time the Nezumi fought at his side. He sent the most attractive, coquettish and mysterious Doshi to the dens of the Khan, and the great Cats were his as well. He sent the kindest, most able and gentle Gukutsushi to tend the last dying Okuma in all Japan and they became friends. The Bear even remarked before he left this earth that the Kitsune might even be trusted in time. He did not send anyone to the Nagah, for he said an emissary would come from them someday and they should accord the Snakes all courtesy.

WORDS AND PAPER

Once we began growing into ourselves and learning what it meant to be Kitsune, we learned a most wondrous new thing, the most glorious creation of the Weaver ever.

Paper.

Some might think that paper is useless, that too many trees must die to create it. Perhaps the second thing is true, for to humans, paper is a dead thing, a convenience. But the first is not true! For paper, and its spirit-friend writing, is one of the most powerful things in the world. It is born of the earth, yet can catch the wind. It may hold water fast inside it, yet it may also nourish fire. The spirits trust paper, for it must be pure for a spirit to inhabit it, yet it can be easily torn to release the spirit once again.

Such magic in such a frail material! In this day, it has been made cheap. We have photocopiers and newspapers, and humans clean themselves with it, yet to those who know its secrets, paper is a most magical thing. Although it is a Weaver made thing, it can break the Weaver's webs, teaching new ways. We can use it to aid Gaia for it is our greatest discovery.

I will not bore you by relating a thousand tales of how we discovered its power and first used it. It is enough that you know that a Chinese Kitsune was the first of our kind to use writing and a Korean Kitsune the first to use rune magic. A Japanese Fox was first to master sacred paper and origami. We call this



magic *Ju-Fu* and it is one of the greatest shared secrets of the Kitsune. You too will learn its secrets once you know a little more of us and yourself.

Theft

Everyone knows foxes steal. We take eggs, berries, even hares from woodsmen's traps. We take what we need. Gaia knew this when She created us, and Luna was not disappointed when the Kitsune began to steal what we needed from our cousins. It was not much or anything really important. And we were not the only thieves. The Tengu were bandits too, and the Bastet were masters at theft, so much so that they learned to watch other *hengeyokai* and steal their Gifts.

The one thing we stole from the Bastet was this trick.

Once we knew the way of it, we weren't even really stealing as Kitsune, we were practicing a Bastet craft. We learned so many sorceries from the other *hengeyokai* that it would have filled many scrolls to write it all down. The Doshi were best at it, spending many days chasing other beast-folk to get a glance of something new.

One day, two Doshi noticed a strange-looking wolf, whose fur was black as a *Hakken's* but with green gums. The wolf tore at a human carcass, pulling out its entrails, studied them, then ran away. The Doshi nodded to each other happily, shouting "Divination!" and ran off to find a human on which to practice this new art.

When they returned to their court a week later, the Khan general's hackles rose and he leapt at them. They ran away — wouldn't you? They ran into some brambles and stopped to talk, trying to figure out what was wrong with the Khan. At that point they each realized that the other's breath smelled of the Centipede's waste. They were very sorry then. They immediately went to the Court of Ancestors, where they begged for someone to remove the taint that covered them. No one could help. They asked in Umi and the Tiger Lands, wherever they might find servants of Heaven who might help.

At last, an old, old Wolf answered them — not as they wished to be answered — but an answer that they could use. "Yomi is everywhere, even inside us. Some people have more of it. Those are eaten from within until there is nothing left but Yomi hiding beneath their skins. The wolf you stole your trick from was like that. When you stole the trick, you invited Yomi into yourselves. It is settling in and you cannot revoke an invitation. You must be careful you don't invite any more into yourselves.

The Doshi hung their heads, but exclaimed, "We won't! We have warned all our kind and made them swear never to steal Gifts again. But isn't there any way to make Yomi go somewhere else?"

The Wolf shook his head. "Not in this Age," he replied. "But if you keep from taking in any more Yomi, when the Wheel turns again, perhaps you will have performed enough penance. If not, when the next Age comes, there will be enough misery and horror that you may apologize for your actions by doing



many good deeds. In that time, we will either remake the world or destroy it. And if you help enough and we win, perhaps Gaia will become strong enough then to chase Yomi far away and you will be clean again." Not the most reassuring promise, but all Doshi who have lived since that time have never forgotten it.

Now you are tired and should rest. Tomorrow I will invite an old friend here. Although you may think you need no explanations of the modern world, you may find his view of things refreshing. Bed now — your eyes are closing.

MODERN TIMES

Ayame awoke to the sound of voices in the next room. One was her sempai, Miyoko. The other was somewhat whispery and low-pitched, with an undertone of mirth. Rising, she quickly dressed and rapped softly at the door. Miyoko bade her enter. Seated on a cushion sat a bright-eyed old man, his hair receding and gray, his face awash with wrinkles.

"Come in, kit," he motioned to her. "So, gifted Kataribe wishes for me, old flea-bitten Gukutsushi to finish what she start. I do now. Who I am? Might be Fur-Gone-Gray, might not. Born in fox den, not so good with monkey talk, so you forgive, yes?" Ayame nodded, intrigued by the old Fox's manner.

EAST

So, you want to know big important people, kings, emperors, presidents, you go read in books. History book even give you dates, but not tell you what I do. Here it is. East be all about empires. All about dynasties, no matter what cloak they wear. Be Imperial army or People's Republican Army, make no difference. No difference between purges of Duke of Chin and Cultural Revolution. Princes and sages in exile be today intellectuals in labor camps. Fights and bloody overthrows? Government in exile? Go to Taiwan. Meet King of China. King, President of Nationalist party, no difference.

East all about poor people get out from under fat ass of emperor, fat ass of party chief. Everywhere people, our friends, peasant superstition sophisticated people call them, silly followers of old religions. These be children of old heroes or people who still feel earth under feet. You can make wake up if know how. What? If too rotten to be saved? Use to fight another like self. Empires — and remember, all East is empire — breed bad men led to do anything by greed. Unfortunate, but also true have good men, good can take men anywhere by honor.

WEST

So, Western people they revere this Marco Polo. Say he come to China, ideas go back and forth. Make civilization great. What? Nobody in India? Everybody out to lunch in Nepal? No monkey-folk living in Tibet? So there no wars East with West? Why silk in West before Polo? Why green tea in India? Maybe West got big head, think they only ones ever think to leave home.



Hear much about democracy. I tell you secret — democracy is empire. Difference? In empire, big purge now and again at whim of ruler. In democracy, get change on schedule but all kinds reform always go on. In empire, many poor people downtrodden by law and others say, "Thank gods, am not one of them." In democracy, people tread on some, help others. Both systems bad for little folk.

Biggest thing about West this: once they meet us, they be thinking they know everything better. No matter our culture thousand and thousand years older. Think they know everything. Western humans, they take land for selves. Make people already live there servants and move around where want them to be. Not so nice as have you believe.

The Sunset People

Gaijin Garou think know better how to run caerns than hengeyokai just like western monkeys. They run hengeyokai out. Other places here they get rid of Pure Ones and Bunyip. Not know about Africa. Sunset People profit when monkeys slaughter other Changers. Bloodsucker come with Western humans. Try to take Kuei-jin territory. Kuei-jin kick Kin-jin butt so hard, make you laugh to see. Our ghosts, once fine neighbors. Now suffer. No help from West. Is problem in Fifth Age. Sorry for you. I see better days. You will not.

The Weaver's Web

Worst thing about West. Bring Weaver here like never before. When young, glass rare. Now monkeys build mountains out of glass and spiders run all over place. Not much difference Centipede or spider. Weaver also easy on Yomi. Where Weaver make Mirror Lands full spiders, Yomi make real bad. Go Hong Kong sometime. You see.

The Age of Sorrow

This on way. No doubt. See Bangkok, you think maybe already here. Big war on way. Kuei-jin say try to put out sun. Yomi run wild in streets. Monkeys get sick. Maybe some hengeyokai races die out like Okuma. Maybe this make way for new, maybe just gone. Not know.

If Yomi get good foothold and Wheel pop off axle and stop turn, we get darkness. Everything die. Maybe even Heaven. Gonna be bad. May never get better. You unlucky born now. But you Kitsune, best creation of Emerald Mother. If anybody gotta be ready change Sixth Age, be you. So you listen hard. Lot to learn, but you got great teacher. She tell you what need to know.

Who We Are: Laughter and Tears

After their visitor had gone, Miyoko stood studying her young pupil for a few moments. Finally, she sat and took Ayame's hands. "I have something to tell you now,



child, which may cause you great pain. You are strong. And this is something you must know. So, hold my hand, and I will help you through what I have to say first." Miyoko smiled sadly and stroked Ayame's hair. "I only hope you understand."

Kinfolk and the Curse

We call it our Curse. We have a hundred tales explaining how it was laid upon us and why. It doesn't matter if the stories are true. What matters is that for each kit born Kitsune a life is often given in return. Sometimes, but not often, both parents are spared. Sometimes both die. Most often, only one parent is taken.

Ah, my young friend, I see you understand now. Yes, for you, it was your mother. You have felt this all your life, but never knew why.

In older times, these things were arranged. We had contacts among certain families to send us brides and grooms. They knew they might die, but in those times, they believed it was a fair bargain. But do not believe that we never love our Kinfolk. Some of us, your father among them, feel the death of their mates quite keenly. Others never let themselves become too attached, remaining aloof, though mating dutifully. We cannot survive without birthing new kits like yourself. So such sad things are inevitable. Weep now, if you must, for the mother you never knew, and know that her sacrifice made it possible for you to live to serve Gaia. You might be the difference between our success and failure in the coming Age. You see? I told you that you could never be insignificant. I will leave you now to privacy until you are ready to go on.

Nine-Tails, Long Life and Laughter

You have heard much of our history. Now you should know more about being Kitsune. It is good that you have come to us now. We have great need of new kits, and you will be among us for a very long time — much longer than you probably think possible.

Luna rewards us for our great service to her and to the Mother by granting us additional tails. With each tail comes many, many more years of life. Bai Mianxi will probably never die of old age. Yes, I believe she's still alive. Did you truly believe that such a clever personage as the White-Faced One could be brought down by the Namebreakers of Japan?

I believe she lives and is still active, as it is very hard for us to retire. We are a curious breed, we Kitsune, and we love satisfying our curiosity, especially when the reward for a job well done is more tails and longer life to do more exploring. We all intend to continue our activities into the Sixth Age, and perhaps even beyond it if we are granted that chance!

Yet there is another gift we have been given. We've seen so much suffering and death, we've seen so many loved ones lost forever. And we laugh. We laugh because we must not cry. If a Kitsune must cry, she does it at home where others do not see and where our tears water the Mother's good earth.



Others may think we exhibit black humor. Some call us vindictive and malicious. But the gift of laughter — especially in the face of horror and despair — is a great and noble gift. Of the Mother's Children, only one other tribe was granted this great boon. Someday perhaps we may join them in bringing laughter to all the Changing Children.

Gatherings

When we gather in numbers smaller than a Court, we do so in auspicious numbers: one, two and four. You may laugh at the idea of one Kitsune being auspicious, but that is often the way things are. Since Bai Mianxi, we have been quite capable of getting things done on our own. Two Kitsune also mean luck for one is yin to the other's yang, one stays alert while the other rests, and yet they also work together. Now nowhere in the Middle Kingdom can be found others to acknowledge that four is an auspicious number except for us. For the Japanese, *shi* — four — is also the word for death, but for us it brings luck. Four Kitsune, one of each Path, forms an almost unbeatable team. They form the basis for a perfect sentai. With the addition of one other, whether a Hakken for a war party or a Tengu on a stealth mission, and you have perfection of purpose and execution.

The Beast Courts

Many of our kind find it peculiar for us to follow the dictates of the Beast Courts, but to be both Kitsune and courtier is not so difficult. To adhere to the Way of Emerald Virtue, to follow the Mandates of Heaven does not constrain us as some might believe. Our lives can be so long that the Courts provide us with great amusement and friendship to associate with so many other Changing Folk.

It is true that most of us serve the Kitsune first and the Courts second, and only one in four of us actually follows the Way of Emerald Virtue. But every Fox knows someone pledged to the Courts. If you decide to join the Courts, you will be among a noble assemblage and would be most welcome.

Not every Kitsune who pledges fealty to the Court does so forever. Many serve for one lifetime or the lifetime of another shapeshifter, leaving when their friend dies or devoting their next life to other pursuits. Still, while members of the Court, we prove impeccable courtiers. We serve in sentai, play at politics, and act as ambassadors to other *shen*. We may even rise to be among the *Gai'nan*.

We might serve as regent, though the post of seer also fits us well. General and historian we are not so suited to fill. The military acumen of Khan or Hakken far outshines our trickery and sad to say, we are too young as a race for the post of historian. Who would trust the words of those born late in the Fourth Age?



Moots

It is a rare thing for many Kitsune to meet together all in one place. For one thing, we have a great many enemies who would salivate to find so many of us together that they might destroy with one blow. For another, we keep busy! We have little time for great meetings. We also have few caerns of our own, the price of being born too late, though we may host meetings of our private business in courts that are commonly held.

When we do gather, it is a brief affair to discuss important issues. Usually, it's enough to spread the word from one of us to another. We are well-connected and news that affects Kitsune can be taken across the Middle Kingdom in a week or less. Despite how scattered we are, we're never really separated.

We even honor the spirits separately rather than doing so in a group who might be vulnerable. Even rites that require more than one Fox are performed in our auspicious gatherings of two or four, so why would we need these "moots?" Lastly, an entire group of Kitsune would prove to be a trying experience for everyone involved as each played tricks on the next and egos ran rampant.

Camps

So you see why the notion of gathering into cliques of Kitsune should seem so amusing to us. We don't have camps or little secret societies (many of which aren't terribly secret) like many other Changing Breeds do. We're young. We've hardly had time to so misinterpret our place on earth as to gather into little knots devoted to one silly idea. We know what's important.

Inari's Messengers

If we were to refer to anything as a "camp," it would be Inari's Messengers. They are a monastic order in the sense that they put aside their own personal goals for the time they spend in service, obeying their elders and carrying out tasks for the good of Foxes everywhere. A messenger is given specific duties when he joins the order, though these may be changed as the Elders see fit.

A messenger doesn't usually spend his entire life in service to the order. Many join as penance for improper behavior or to repay a debt to an elder or a sempai. Elders are quite happy to send indebted kits to serve the order rather than having an inexperienced and all-too-zealous kit stumbling behind them at every turn. Once the Fox has performed enough good deeds within the order that he is granted another tail, the Kitsune consider this a sign that the Fox has spent sufficient time within the order. Most leave after this, but some do remain, having found a calling they find important.

Walking the Many Lands

The world stretches out from the Middle Kingdom to faraway lands and deep, unfathomable waters. We do not restrict ourselves to so many elite groups and cliques that we cannot relish the joy of speaking freely with our kind



wherever they may be. Even though we are born to the Middle Kingdom and have our hearts firmly in place in these lands of the Emerald Mother, we also look with longing to places where we have seldom wandered. The Sixth Age, with its cleansing purpose, may just set the Wheel back on its course, even though it may not appear that way at the time. So long as that happens, there should be room to breathe for all the Mother's children in the Ages that follow.

In the meantime, you need to know as much about the entire world as possible. You never know when you may have to travel to some faraway place on the Mother's or Bai Mianxi's business.

Japan

This land in which you and I were born is full of beauty and splendor. The Kitsune proliferate here, both in the great cities and in the lovely but vanishing wilderness. From the snow-covered mountains to the carefully tended ceremonial gardens, Foxes have inserted themselves into every aspect of Japanese life and culture — not to mention her mythology.

We are often accused of feeling superior to other Foxes; perhaps we are, but when we can claim descent from both Prince Inari and the Lady Amaterasu, how can we not possess some small arrogance at the nobility of our blood?

Just as the Hakken lay claim to the defense of Japan, so, too do we recognize this as our special home. This is our garden-world and it is up to us to defend it and protect it to the best of our ability and with all our cunning. Some Foxes have a dream of cleansing Japan of all taint of corruption and using it as a base from which to invade and conquer the Yomi worlds. To me, that seems a bit over-ambitious, but then, who am I to trample upon another's hopes and dreams?

The Mainland

The race of Kitsune originated in China; here, Foxes — and foxes — still run through the vast wild lands of the mainland. Other hengeyokai may lay claim to China, but there are so many of us here and we are so widespread that our influence carries over into many places, however small that influence might be. Mainlander Kitsune have learned to adapt to the vastness of China and to the shifting political and social climate. More than anything, Chinese Kitsune have managed to flow with the changes and take a flexible attitude toward their business. Despite wars, coups, new political philosophies and cultural changes, the Kitsune that inhabit the mainland know how to cope with whatever comes their way. This is quite admirable, but then, it is only to be expected from any Nine-Tails.

The Kitsune of China generally prefer the wilderness to the cities, primarily because the Kuei-jin maintain great power in the cities and they are very ancient. Their politics and influence are hard to counteract. Still, we make our way to the Forbidden City, filled with beauty and culture; we flock to Hong Kong and revel in the excitement that fills the air — especially since its return



to its ancient homeland. We travel throughout Asia, from the Mongolian steppes to the jungles of Vietnam and Cambodia. We even traverse the sacred lands of India and Pakistan, though we need to be wary of the machinations of those lands' Kuei-jin.

If we can prevail in the mainland, surely we can make our way anywhere in the world!

KOREA

Lore tells us that this beleaguered land was founded by Bear's children. If for nothing else, we should respect and honor Korea. Through centuries of hardship, they have maintained their own identity, refusing to fall into mainland anonymity. The humans have divided the country, walls of hatred and ideological differences separate the people from one another, and throughout it all, the land has survived.

Korean Kitsune accept strangers with great kindness and tolerance. I suppose they have had to learn to make friends wherever they can. The Foxes of Korea willingly share their territory with their fellow shapeshifters. I suppose the death of the native Okuma so long ago and the demise of the Korean Khan have made them value other hengeyokai even more. They are not so friendly with the local Kuei-jin, though they maintain the barest of civilities with them out of necessity. On the whole, the Nine-Tails of Korea serve as competent and able diplomats with all the *shen* in their part of the Middle Kingdom.

The Americas

The lands of North America exert an unbearable attraction to us. Its countries are as babies in the age of the world and the vitality of its culture draws us to sample it and to see what it has to offer. Foxes are plentiful in North America, as are our elusive cousins, the Nu-Isha. The thought of establishing Kinfolk in the lands of the Sunset has occurred to us, but we do not wish to overstep the limits of civility and courtesy. Many of us have visited the United States and Canada; those that travel there seem to find endless ways to amuse themselves and many diversions to study closely, for their stays are lengthy. Perhaps one day, you will visit the great cities of North America or else travel through their vast wilderness before it disappears. Perhaps you will help nurture this part of Gaia's creation through the coming Sixth Age.

South America has less to commend itself to us than its northern neighbor. Foxes of a sort dwell there, but they are unfamiliar to us and we are not sure whether or not their bloodlines are worthy of Kitsune Kinfolk. Some say that if Gaia had intended for Kitsune to dwell permanently in South America, she would have created red foxes as natives of the lands there. Still, South America has vast stretches of wilderness to explore. Though the jungles of the Amazon are less hospitable to us than we would like, some of us have braved the mountains of Peru and have frolicked along the beaches of the continent's



northern coast. Perhaps as a place to rest and gather our energies, South American may still have some worth to us.

Europe

Foxes live in many European lands. We visit Europe in order to try to understand Gaia's plan for this small but significant part of the world. Our reports to date tell us that Kin-jin hold dominance over the cities, while the less populous part of Europe are divided among bickering families of werewolves who cannot work together long enough to unite in the face of the coming time of tribulation. Perhaps Europe has a part to play in the Sixth Age, but until then it has little import to us here in the Middle Kingdom. We surely cannot easily warm to a land that prides itself on the sport of hunting foxes.

Australia

No other place in the world is like Australia. Its strangeness beckons us, yet it is our shame that our fox kin have perpetrated much destruction of the native life. Still, since foxes do prosper in Australia, we find it relatively easy to visit the land and experience its secrets and mysteries. The fact that foxes threaten the delicate balance of nature in the island continent disturbs us, however, and we have yet to figure out a solution to this sticky problem.

We are intrigued, as ever, by the sorrowful tale of the Bunyip, a tribe of Sunset wolves that fell to the claws and talons of their own kind. Truly another skirmish in the War of Shame, which did not encompass one huge conflict but took the form of many small and bloody battles in as many lands. If we can solve the mystery of the Bunyip and unlock their secrets, perhaps we can make the Mother stronger and do our part to heal the wounds caused by the wolves' great mistake. If we can do this, we will surely make the wolves come to us for absolution — and perhaps they will remember that we helped them atone for their wrongdoing.

Africa

We know so little about this strange land. Africa has its own defenders and, we suspect, we would have a difficult time making our way through its interior. Those of us who dare travel there do so with the utmost care and do not overstay our welcome. The strange native magics hold some attraction for us, but we doubt that those who hold the knowledge are willing to part with it to outsiders.

The Middle Kingdom has so many things that demand our attention, we have to defer our explorations of Africa until a time when we can spare the time — perhaps in the Seventh Age?

Diplomatic Relations

We do not do Gaia's work alone, dear one. The Kitsune are the Mother's lastborn, but not, by any means, her only children. Each year, more dragon nests



fall to corruption or neglect. As the numbers of hengeyokai grow smaller, it becomes harder to maintain the sacred places for the Mother. Practicality demands that we seek alliances with others to protect and defend Gaia. When you participate in the functions of the Courts you will need to know the other shapeshifters, for they will be your allies and your rivals. When you join a sentai a Hakken or a Khan may become your most treasured comrade. You may have to rely on a non-Kitsune one day to save your life — or you may find yourself saving the life of one of the *shen*.

Getting along with other hengeyokai isn't always easy; many of our noble and respected cousins have... peculiarities... that test our will and our patience. Even more difficult to fathom and pact with are other *shen*, the Sunset People, the Kuei-jin and others touched by the supernatural. And then there are the mortals, another story in themselves!

These are my feelings about the others with whom you may someday have to deal. My opinions should spark some thoughts in your head and help you form your own, so that you may be better prepared to relate to them when the time comes. These are not just practical matters; if another great War among the hengeyokai does come to pass, we cannot afford to be without Batsu in as many camps as possible.

Hakken

These noble wolves take themselves very seriously and so, too, should we when we meet them. They conduct themselves with honor and know much about the world of humans. In war, they are brave and resilient warriors and generals; in peace, they wage a different kind of war, using what they think of as subtlety and guile. They have a very high opinion of themselves, and who are we to question whether or not they are wrong? When we work together, we complement each other. We are lightning to their thunder, wind to their wave, spark to their flame. I could go on, but I believe you understand what I mean. They overwhelm; we illuminate. Together, we create a poem on the battlefield.

Khan

Less arrogant and self-absorbed than most of the other Cats, the Khan still rise high on the ladder of self-importance. Nevertheless, they have reason to hold on to their egos and not let the events of the world overwhelm and cow them. The Khan are dying, dearest. Their numbers grow smaller from day to day and even the most desperate attempts by well-meaning organizations in the mortal world may not be able to save their tiger Kinfolk. Always remember that whenever you feel pricked by a Khan's self-aggrandizement. He is probably in great pain and lashes out to keep from falling into despair. Help them whenever you can, even at the expense of other hengeyokai. You may never get another chance.



KUMO

Spider's children have gone far astray, spinning webs of darkness and corruption wherever they nest. Though we understand using questionable methods to achieve noble ends, these creatures care not for noble ends; they merely revel in their dark and foul ways as ends in themselves. They feast on the pain and blood of others until they become bloated with all manner of vileness. Perhaps one or two might prove salvageable, but then they become targets for others of their kind. It is better to leave them alone except when you must deal with them. The best you can do is set them after other enemies in the hopes that they may destroy each other. If you must treat with them in civilized circumstances, take as many friends along with you as you can. The Goblin Spiders are crafty, cunning, highly intelligent and utterly venomous, and I do not speak only of the poison that flows from their bodies, but of the corruption that spills forth from their thoughts, words and actions.

NAGAH

I would prefer to say as little as possible about these creatures. May your contacts with them be minimal and in a well-lighted place with many others around you.

NEZUMI

Other hengeyokai may slight these practitioners of the arts of Low War. Cities teem with the Children of Rat, and they make their nests in the slums and most crowded areas of the great urban centers. Where they go, sickness and famine seem to follow, but are not these just aspects of nature as well as health and full bellies? The Nezumi have fewer scruples than most hengeyokai; they do not place great value on many of the noble virtues. Yet they also do not flinch from their duty to Gaia, however unpleasant that duty may be. We should respect their place in the Emerald Mother's plans. After all, we, too, are creatures who know how to dig with our paws in the dirt and how to seek shelter in the dark places where no one else will look. The Nezumi can be great and loyal friends and allies if shown kindness and respect. Above all, do not condescend to them. They do the work of the Mother as well as we do.

SAME-BITO

Gaia had a purpose in creating these fierce maritime warriors, and instilling in them a sense of humor and civility was not in her plan. These shark-soldiers have little on their minds except rending the Mother's enemies into small, bloody pieces. In their own way, they are a thing of beauty, just as an erupting volcano or a monstrous tsunami is awesome and beautiful. We should respect them for what they are. They have made some motions toward learning the finer things in life; we owe it to them to encourage this, but not at the expense of their purpose. It is easier to tame the ocean than to civilize one of



the weresharks. They do the Mother's work in the sea, and far better than any of us could ever hope to do.

STARGAZERS

These wolves have newly arrived in the Middle Kingdom, though there have always been a few of these thoughtful ones scattered here and there. The destruction of their great monastery at Shigalu signaled a great change in these former Sunset wolves; now they have acknowledged their true destiny as children of the Emerald Courts. We cannot afford to mistake them for their Hakken cousins; they are more open and guileless than the Japanese wolves. They spend much time in thought and meditation; we may be able to learn from them, so we should place ourselves in the position of teaching them our ways. Nurture them and take advantage of the opportunity afforded to you to shape their thoughts about the other hengeyokai, including their opinions of us.

Tengu

While we cultivate other hengeyokai for their prowess in battle or their cunning in survival, we treasure the Tengu for their joyful natures and their prodigious arsenal of information and gossip. Have tea with them and listen carefully to everything they say. This is not as easy as it seems, for the Tengu revel in conversation and delight in sharing their knowledge, a thing they do rapidly and without ceasing. They are the Mother's storehouses of trivia and matters of importance; they gather knowledge from all the lands of the Middle Kingdom and, some believe, beyond. They make great friends and companions. Treasure them.

Zhong Ling

Until you meet one of the Middle Dragons, you cannot know true nobility. I stand in awe of these creatures whose memories touch upon those of the Elder Dragons. Though their numbers are pitifully few, their wisdom and power more than make up for it. Revere them; do not be ashamed to bend low before them. They make allies beyond compare. Do nothing to antagonize them, not out of fear of their reprisal (which would be swift and thorough), but out of love for their great age and wisdom and their closeness to the Emerald Mother. To study at their feet is to reach the height of knowledge.

Sunset People

Watch these Western shapeshifters and learn what mistakes not to make. Gaia gave them the gift of many forms, yet they persist in using their powers in the worst possible way. They have failed in their attempts to keep the Wyrms out of the Americas, they lost the lands of Europe long ago. Now they set their eyes on the Middle Kingdom, thinking that they know what is best for Gaia even though they have such a poor record to recommend them. Their wolves are split into too many families that quarrel constantly over which family



should lead, thus leaving the doorways to their sacred places unguarded. Their cats spend more time considering their own magnificence than in protecting the Mother. Their bears have all but disappeared, though we have heard rumors about a resurgence and this alone gives us hope. Above all, do not mistake their Shadow Lords for our Hakken. They may seem the same on the surface, but the Shadow Lords long ago set aside true honor for cutthroat politics. Truly, they are but "shadows" of the real wolf-lords.

I could go on about the lack of civility and sense among the Sunset People, but I believe you already sense my meaning. Their Corax, similar to our Tengu, at least hold some promise. They are not too different from their hengeyokai cousins. We have also heard that their Nu-Isha — something like foxes but larger and less disciplined — might prove worth cultivating, if we could find them. Perhaps the Stargazers will eventually tell us more about their former allies. That would go a long way toward deepening our understanding of these elusive and destructive children, and toward preventing the disasters they are sure to cause if they attempt to come to our lands in force.

Kuei-jin

How can we forget the harm perpetrated by the Hungry Dead? Not only did they betray us when they were known as the Wan Xian and had great responsibilities to the Wheel and to the Mother, they continue their foul deeds even to this day. Yes, the Heavens punished them by removing them from the Wheel yet condemning them to remain in the world as walking corpses, but their curse resounds on us all as we must deal with the aftermath of their machinations. They stink of the stolen life they must absorb to survive; they reek of corruption. I could go on, but I have not the desire to enumerate the rest of their offenses.

After having said this, now, I must add the following. The Kuei-jin, whatever else they may be, are still creatures of the Middle Kingdom and, as such, we may have to treat with them from time to time. In their own way, they possess a sense of honor and civility, as do most intelligent creatures in these blessed lands. Make what alliances you must with them, but only temporary ones. Realize that they do nothing that does not advance their own purposes, so make certain you know what purposes you are aiding when you offer assistance or accept their aid. Sometimes you must join with them to fight a common enemy, but don't mistake a short-term alliance with a true association of friends. Tread carefully around them; trust them only as much as you have to and, even then, keep a bolt-hole open for the inevitable time of betrayal.

NAMEBREAKERS

These mortal sorcerers wield their magics without conscience or honor. They believe that they can simply exercise their will upon the world and change it to suit them. Have you noticed, however, that when they become too willful, the world slaps them down? Perhaps the Mother is trying to tell them something



they do not wish to hear. Perhaps one day She will smite them hard enough to force them to listen.

The Namebreakers believe that the world — and everything in it — is their playground. Be careful about revealing yourself to one of them; you might end up as a caged experiment or find yourself enslaved by their sorcerous powers. They are quite clever, as they would have to be to master the kinds of magics they control. This means that we have trouble making use of them. They are poor pawns and poorer allies.

All this aside, they have excellent bloodlines and make good breeding stock if you can find one who you can trust enough to dally with. Don't make the mistake of loving a Namebreaker, however. They will always put their magic first. And if they bear or father a Kitsune child, they may pay the ultimate price for doing so. Use your own judgment when dealing with them, but remember what I have told you.

Hsien

We have much in common with these flesh-housed spirits. Their nobles belong to the elemental world, just as we adopt elemental patrons for our paths. Their commoners understand the nature of animals, just as we combine human and animal in our own natures. The friendship and assistance of the *hsien* can prove useful and enjoyable in the coming times. The ways and affairs of these spirits are their own and do not bear much relevance to us in most matters, but there are many areas in which we can and should make common cause. Make as many alliances among them as you are able; they will prove well worth the effort and the rewards you receive from knowing them are incalculable.

Ghosts

When I speak of ghosts, I refer to those unfortunates who inhabit the Kingdom of Jade in the Yin Realms, not the spirits of our revered ancestors that dwell in the Yang Realms. Even so, ghosts can make worthwhile contacts. Once they no longer have mortal concerns, humans develop a greater perspective and become more intelligent, with insights they overlooked when they walked around in bodies of flesh.

The Kingdom of Jade is rife with intrigue, however, though this should not surprise you. Be careful when you contact a ghost that you do not embroil yourself in the affairs of the Yin Realms. Treat with the lower classes, for they have less to lose and are less likely to have their comings and goings watched by spying eyes. Make certain that the ghosts you speak with are not under the influence of their P'o, for you cannot trust them when they are attuned to their baser side. You will have to discover your own means of detecting whether or not you can trust a particular ghost. I cannot help you there.



MORTALS

Mortals. We love them, we hate them, we breed with them, we use them. They proliferate like the grass; like weeds, they die away only to return in greater numbers. Like roses, they radiate beauty for a brief time, but with their loveliness comes the threat of their thorns. Treat them like any other natural creature; when their number get too many or when some of them go bad, take the appropriate measures to bring things back into balance once again, and do not regret your actions.

There remain a few mortals who truly make the attempt to understand the Mother and who honor the earth and try to live gracefully under the laws of Gaia. These rare beings deserve our respect and encouragement. While most of them may never know what we are, we can still foster and nurture them in the same fashion as we cultivate promising buds and young animals.

As a whole, humans make too much noise and never stop to listen to the words of the Mother written in the silence of their hearts. Individually, some of them show promise. The Mother had a plan when She created humans; if we knew what it was, we would better know how to deal with the hairless monkeys. As it is, we must guess at why they exist. Fortunately for them, we enjoy such riddles.

The Laws of Heaven

Hear me, child, for this is the last and most important piece of information I have to give you about your place in the world. Whatever else you may forget or push to the back of your memory, for I have told you enough to crowd even the largest of minds, you must never forget these words. They mean everything to us. More important, they mean everything to those we honor and revere: the Emerald Mother, the Silver Lady, Bai Mianxi and Prince Inari. These laws, the Laws of Heaven, *are* what it means to be Kitsune.

There are many stories about how the Laws of Heaven came to be, but this is the one that I like best. It borrows from many stories that have gone before and I hope that others will borrow from my tale. Listen well and learn not only the words of the Laws, but their meaning and the story you are about to hear.

In the early days, earlier than any Fox can remember, when the Kitsune were still searching for answers to the most basic questions concerning their purpose in the world, Bai Mianxi came to Luna and asked for her guidance. Luna smiled upon the White-Faced One and offered her the guidance she asked for in the form of these words. Luna told Bai Mianxi that she would drill her in the exact wording of her Laws, which Luna herself called the Laws of Heaven. She would repeat them to Bai Mianxi and have the White-Faced One speak them back to her every day of the year that Bai Mianxi dwelled with Luna. Finally Bai Mianxi knew the Laws so well that she could — and did — repeat them in her sleep.



When Luna was satisfied that Bai Mianxi knew the words, she asked the White-Faced One what she thought the words meant.

Now I will give you the Laws as Luna gave them to Bai Mianxi, without altering a word of the original phrasing. I will also explain them in my own words as I composed them in my head after studying them with my own sempai. After you have spent a year studying these words and can recite them in *your* sleep, as Bai Mianxi did, I will require you to recite them for me, for your Clan, and for the other Kitsune who have watched your progress and growth. You may then add your own explanations of the Laws, for those interpretations will be the ones that you, in turn, will pass on to another young kit when her time comes to hear the Laws of Heaven.

I COMMAND YOU TO DESTROY THAT WHICH HARMS Gaia

The Laws of Heaven define the Kitsune as the Mandates define those of us who serve the Courts. Like the First Mandate, the First Law stands at the forefront of the Laws for a reason. First and foremost, our purpose lies in serving our Mother and fulfilling our sacred mission and promise to Her. Anything that harms the Mother violates Her trust in us and must be stopped. The means of destruction mean little to us. We do whatever we have to in order to rid the world of anything that would cause hurt to Gaia. We will use any weapon (even those that are cursed or tainted), ally with any adversary (even those we suspect of planning a later betrayal), to ensure that the immediate threat to Gaia meets its just end. If we find that the Kuei-jin share a foe with us, we ally ourselves with them in order to fight our common enemy. We are born in loss and dedicated to service. We must do all that is in our power to be worthy of the pain our birth has caused and to prove that Gaia's faith in us is well-placed.

I COMMAND YOU TO AID YOUR BROTHERS, YOUR SISTERS, AND THAT WHICH SERVES Gaia

We do not submit to the arrogant Khan or the ferocious Hakken; we do not bow to the Same-Bito or grovel before the Nagah. We do, however, consider all Gaia's changing children as potential allies and equals. The other hengeyokai serve the Mother just as we do, in their own separate and distinct ways, of course. Because of this, we cannot deny help to them when they need it, provided they request our help rather than command it. This law may even dictate that we lend assistance to those we would normally refuse, such as Sunset People, provided they meant well, or *shen* that serve the Emerald Mother. Such rare people do exist and those that do are worthy of our help.

Do you wonder why this Law stands next to the First Law? Does it not make sense that if we use any means at hand to destroy the Mother's enemies, we will also help others who attempt to do the same thing?



I COMMAND YOU TO REVERE YOUR MOTHER, MYSELF, YOUR AUNTS, YOUR UNCLES, AND OUR FAVORED SERVANTS

Our independent and willful streak often stands in the way of demonstrating humility in front of our superiors. We balk at bowing before kings, presidents, governors, magistrates and Party leaders, and this sometimes leads us into difficult circumstances. Despite our seeming pride, we should never hesitate to show the proper respect and deference to those who are our superiors in the hierarchy of the Heavens. Gaia, Luna, Bai Mianxi, Prince Inari and all those "aunts", "uncles" and patrons deserve our obeisance. So, too, do those who gave us birth, whether still living in the physical world or dwelling with the Fox-spirits in the Mirror Lands.

I COMMAND YOU TO KEEP YOUR DUTY FIRST IN YOUR HEART, AND TO LISTEN FOR MY TEACHINGS

While this Law may seem obvious, it has deeper meanings. The physical world abounds in temptations. Humans find the world a playground for their aspirations and a battleground for their struggles; too often they find the world a miserable place in which forces conspire to keep them from striving for perfection. We cannot afford to fall into those traps. The pleasures of the physical world, whether the joys of nature (which, alas, are quickly falling to the Mother's foes) or the wonders of urban life, must not distract us from our true purpose. It would be too easy to forget why we are put in the Middle Kingdom. We could, if we let ourselves, simply use our Gaia-given powers to please and pleasure ourselves and our friends and lovers, running free and wild in a world which we can manipulate to our own ends.

For us, this is no longer an option. We are no longer children who can spend our time in perpetual play. We have grown into our mission. As adults, we are servants of the Silver Lady. We must always listen for her voice in our hearts and follow her instructions whenever she bids us take up the challenge to fight her battles (or, more appropriately, outwit her foes). When we have succeeded, when the Wheel has turned toward the halcyon days of joy and wonder once again, then we shall be able to put down our burden and frolic as innocent children once more.

I FORBID YOU TO EXTERMINATE THE HUMANS

Humans are noisome, careless, thoughtless, cruel, impolite, slothful, rude, greedy, bloody-minded, overly fertile, selfish and utterly ignorant of the struggle going on all around them. Nevertheless, the Mother created humans in Her infinite wisdom and She intends them for a purpose, just as She has given us a reason for our existence. Even if Her creation has been tainted by the Three since that time, even if humans show no signs of ever achieving more than mere survival, we may not — I repeat, may not — destroy what the Mother has



deemed fit to exist. Humans must have some good points; after all, many of us have human parents, human Kinfolk and human allies and sometimes lovers. The blood of humankind flows in our veins, making us part of what we are. We are spirit and flesh, mortal and supernatural, and our blend of human and changer blood defines us. Perhaps humans have a purpose that will become clearer as the Wheel continues to turn. Perhaps they are merely taking longer to grow as a race and to assume their true responsibilities to the Mother. This Law does not forbid us from culling out the unworthy and evil humans, merely from destroying the race as a whole. We eliminate the bad ones and allow the good ones the chance to go about their lives and try to fulfill their own purpose.

I Forbid You to Make War on Your Brothers and Sisters

The Mandates of the Beast Courts have their own version of this Law. We have already seen wars among the hengeyokai. The War of Shame brought about the destruction of an entire race of shapeshifters. All have suffered because of that. We were not meant to repeat the mistakes of our cousins in Gaia. Unless we have no other option, we do not shed the blood of other hengeyokai, or even shapeshifters from the Sunset Lands. We will never demand a purge of the hengeyokai or launch a crusade to purify the world of certain other shapeshifters. The Sixth Age will claim enough lives as it is; we are not put here to do the work of the Centipede.

I Forbid You to Break Your Word

We honor the virtues of honesty and uprightness. All hengeyokai depend on honor and virtue to separate them from the vile Kumo and the corrupt Black Spiral wolves and other creatures who serve the Wyrms. This Law serves as Luna's reminder to us that our word is sacred and that we should not renege on promises made or vows given. We do have a bolt-hole, however. If we never make any promises or swear any oaths, we are not bound to actions we might regret. So this Law is also a warning; do not promise what you cannot make good on. Do not swear an oath or take a vow that you think you may one day have to forswear. When you do give your word, you are bound to it regardless of the consequences.

I Forbid You to Commit Suicide For Reasons of Honor

All life is precious; the lives of Gaia's children are doubly so. In Japan, the tradition of *seppuku* once served as the culmination of honor. Ritual suicide became an acceptable way of restoring lost honor, preserving virtue and admonishing errant superiors. Today, the practice has less meaning. Suicide in the name of a good cause only reduces the number of noble people who might spend their lives to better purpose. Why die for something when you can live for it instead? When Kitsune come into this world, one or more of their parents leaves it. Can we be so cavalier as to throw away our lives when we are already



the cause of death? We have no right to take our lives. We have a duty to survive and fulfill our purpose. We cannot shame the parent who died that we might know the wonders of life.

By the same token, rushing headlong into danger in search of a glorious death is just as foolhardy as performing a ceremony of death. All such stupidity does is cost the life of one of Gaia's children and reduce the number of hengeyokai sworn to Her service. On rare occasions, we must place ourselves in situations where death is the only outcome. When this happens, we know that our deaths serve a purpose. We do not die for honor's sake alone. The Zhong Lung can help you understand this Law if my words do not clarify it for you.

IFreeYouToDoAnythingElseNecessaryto AchieveOurGoals

This Law stands with the First Law as a means of empowerment. Just as the First Law sets forth our duty to do whatever is necessary to keep Gaia from harm, the Last Law gives us the means to do what is necessary. We need not fear that we will do something inappropriate or make the wrong choice in electing a means of fighting. Whatever leads us to the achievement of our goal is not only right, but mandated by Luna. This Law liberates us from false guilt or shame. It frees us from presuming that we do not need a variety of weapons and allies to win our battles against Gaia's enemies. Kitsune are vain by nature, but our vanity stops short of assuming that we must do everything in the traditional way. We have the freedom, according to this Law, to break the rules, if we must, and still remain Kitsune.

CHARACTER CREATION

Kitsune come into the world in a unique and painful way, often resulting in the death of one or both of their parents and ensuring that no Kitsune remains unaware that she lives at the expense of another's life. The birth process is extraordinarily painful and both parents share the experience empathically; the human or fox parent has only a 10% chance of surviving the birth, while the Kitsune parent has a 10% chance of dying during the process. In the case of a metis birth, each Kitsune parent has a 50-50 chance of surviving. On the rare occasion that a Kitsune mates with another shapechanger, the non-Kitsune parent has a 30% chance of surviving the birth of a Kitsune child. The odds are disturbing and affect the breed's personality as a whole.

Despite the initial proclivity to sorrow, Kitsune children manage to survive to adolescence and experience their First Change. When the other Nine-Tails come to claim the new Kitsune, removing her from her childhood home in most cases, the fledgling werefox is usually mentally and spiritually prepared to assume her place in hengeyokai society — that of Gaia's lastborn and, some say, Luna's dearest child.



In general, Kitsune follow most of the general guidelines for character creation outlined in **Laws of the Wild**. The special nature of the Nine-Tails, however, lends itself to a number of important variations detailed in this chapter.

CHARACTER CREATION CHART

Step One: Character Concept — Who and what are you?

- Choose Breed (Kojin, Roko or Shinju)
- Choose Path (Sorcerer, Warrior, Dreamweaver or Bard)
- Choose Totem, Sentai and Mission (if any)

Step Two: Attributes — What are your basic capabilities?

- Prioritize Trait Attributes (7/5/3)
- Choose Traits

Step Three: Select Advantages — What do you know and what can you do?

- Choose five Abilities
- Choose three Gifts (one each from breed, path and general)
- Choose five Backgrounds
- Note Renown (by Path)

Step Four: Finishing Touches — Fill in the details

- Record Rage Traits (by Path)
- Record Gnosis Traits (by breed)
- Record Willpower Traits (5)
- Record Rank (1)
- Choose Negative Traits and Flaws (if any)
- Spend five (or more) Free Traits and choose Merits (if any)

Step Five: Spark of Life — Narrative description and other details

Blessings: Advantages

Kitsune enjoy great diversity in magical ability. Not only do they have many Gifts of their own, the Nine-Tails may easily learn Gifts normally allotted to other Changing Breeds. Because of their great facility with magic, Kitsune tend to rely more on their Gifts than do other Changing Breeds.

They enter the Umbra with as little trouble as Garou. In Koto (Crinos) or Juko (Hispo) form, their teeth inflict aggravated damage. Kitsune also have the blessing of extreme longevity. When a Nine-Tails attains a new Rank, she effectively doubles her lifespan. Thus, elders among the Foxes usually more than deserve the term “elder.” Should a Kitsune achieve nine tails, which has happened only once throughout the Breed’s ancient history, she becomes, for all practical purposes, immortal.



Maledictions: Disadvantages

Just as they enjoy some distinct advantages, so, too, do the Kitsune suffer from significant drawbacks. As the lastborn of Gaia's changing children, the Foxes did not make their appearance until the Fourth Age. By that time, Gaia and Luna had grown considerably weaker. Neither possessed the strength to endow the Kitsune with some of the other advantages given to other hengeyokai.

First and foremost, Kitsune are born under the shadow of death. The birth of a Fox often results in the death of one or both of its parents. This sorrow colors the life of every Kitsune.

Kitsune also lack the regenerative abilities of many of the other shapeshifters. Unless they use healing Gifts or other forms of healing magic, Kitsune heal all wounds as if they were human. Thus, *all* damage counts as aggravated damage to the Nine-Tails.

Because the Kitsune date from the Fourth Age, they had no part in the shapeshifters' attempts to control the human population. Their Koto (Crinos) form, therefore, does not invoke the Delirium in mortals. Kitsune take great pains to hide this form from unwanted viewers.

While Kitsune frenzy as do most shapeshifters, they always enter fox frenzy (appropriately). Gaia did not intend for her lastborn to attack without thought; escape has always been the Nine-Tails' most prudent action in combat.

Breeds

Like the majority of hengeyokai, Kitsune have three breeds. The phenomenon of their shared birth-pain means that no Kitsune parent is ignorant of the birth of a Fox-child. There are, therefore, no "lost kits" except for those who lose their Kitsune parent before their First Change.

Kojin (Homid)

Kitsune born from humans realize their difference almost immediately. The mysterious death of one parent and the usual absence of the other parent often results in a child who grows up somewhat distanced from others, with an aloof and often independent attitude. Those who grow up in foster families remain mostly apart from any other foster-siblings and retain their intense curiosity about the mysteries of the world — particularly those surrounding their birth. Often such children feel certain that some profound secret is being kept from them — and they are not wrong in their belief.

Almost all Kojin Kitsune are Asian in origin, although in recent years some Kitsune have begun breeding with other races. Kitsune children tend toward hyperactivity. As adolescents, they are slender in build and extremely manipulative, though charming. Despite their usually traumatic First Change, Kitsune recover quickly, finding in their transformation confirmation that they are, in fact, different and special.

Beginning Gnosis: 3



Regarding Those Abominations...

Should a Western vampire decide to Embrace one of the Foxes, he discovers the Kitsune's startling reaction to such an occurrence. Gaia blessed Her last children with a peculiar and dramatic answer to the vampiric Embrace. Once a vampire has drained a Kitsune of all her blood and attempts to give her the vitae that will bring her into the ranks of the Kindred, the slightest touch of vampiric blood causes the Kitsune's body to erupt into a brief and intense pillar of flame. This conflagration not only destroys the Fox's corpse and releases her spirit, but in most cases annihilates her would-be sire as well. The Foxes regularly thank Gaia and the Silver Lady for such a quick release from an eternity of half-life.

Roko (Vulpine)

Fox-born Kitsune have extremely difficult "kithoods." First, they are missing a parent; second, they have to contend with the usual assortment of predators, both human and animal. Generally, the Kitsune parent of a Roko Kitsune stealthily places her kits in the litter of another fox to give them extra nourishment. The kit receives the protection of her "foster" parents, which increases her chances of survival. The Kitsune parent then watches the kits until one of them shows signs of its blossoming powers.

Roko Kitsune possess an insatiable curiosity. Most experience great elation at the First Change and the discovery that they can do so much more with hands (especially with those opposable thumbs!) than with paws. Roko tend to range across as much of the world as they can, exploring new territory and learning as much as possible. Although they suffer from the same restrictions as lupus Garou when choosing Abilities (see **Laws of the Wild**), they try their best to learn these restricted Abilities as soon as possible, seeking eventually to master the knack of driving a car, piloting an airplane or surfing the Internet.

Beginning Gnosis: 5

Shinju (Metis)

Though being born metis represents a curse to most hengeyokai, the Kitsune recognize the products of two Fox parents as a true blessing. Though only one in five such pairings produces a Kitsune child, shinju Kitsune have no deformities. Unlike their sterile metis counterparts in other hengeyokai Breeds, shinju are fertile; only one birth in 10, however, produces a Kitsune from a shinju parent. The great tragedy of a shinju birth, however, is the knowledge that one of her two Kitsune parents may have perished in order to give her life.

Shinju Kitsune cannot conceal their identity, since they are born in Koto form. They are, therefore, raised in the court of their parents and grow up surrounded by the knowledge of who and what they are. This often makes them insufferably proud and conceited, though they still retain their natural charm



and inquisitiveness. By the same token, shinju Kitsune are perfectionists who aspire to the highest of standards in their own conduct. The thought of failure terrifies them; thus they admire others who are successful and can teach them to be better at their chosen tasks.

Beginning Gnosis: 4

Paths

Instead of auspices, Kitsune have paths. Part sacred calling, part profession, paths are determined not by the sun or moon, but by each individual Kitsune. When a young Nine-Tails approaches the end of Nogitsune-time and stands on the verge of adulthood, a more experienced Fox performs the *Rite of the Crossroads* (see "Rites", below). The element chosen by the Kitsune kit during this rite determines her path for the rest of her life. Unlike other hengeyokai, Kitsune do not have the option of undergoing the *Rite of the Second Face*. What they choose in the beginning stays with them forever. Since the Kitsune's Path expresses her essence, assuming the *Rite of the Crossroads* is performed correctly, there is little or no need for a chance to try something new.

The Elements

Each of the four elements recognized by the Kitsune has an association with a specific path. Unlike other *shen*, however, Kitsune do not acknowledge the standard elements of Fire, Air, Earth and Water. Instead, they recognize elements made from a blend of two of these primary elements. The Kitsune's Four Paths thus correspond with these blended elements: Clay (combining Earth and Water), Fog (combining Water and Air), Lightning (combining Air and Fire) and Lava (combining Fire and Earth).

Besides using the advantages of their chosen element, Nine-Tails may also draw upon the strengths of spirits attuned to the two elemental "neighbors." For example, a Doshi, whose element is Lightning, finds Fire-, Heat-, Wind-, Storm- and Cloud-spirits respond to him with a greater degree of friendliness and cooperation.

Smart Kitsune (and what Nine-Tails isn't?) locate their chosen spirit and ally themselves with it early in their adult career. These spirits tend to enjoy their adoption, accepting the Kitsune's alliance as their due, particularly if the Fox incorporates the spirit's symbol or theme into their dress or name.

Doshi (doh-shee)

Translation: Sorcerer

Element: Lightning (Inazuma)

Description: Doshi resemble Theurges in many ways. They have an affinity for Gaia's magic and a great inquisitiveness about all sorts of knowledge, including forbidden lore and ancient secrets. Like Theurges, they enjoy an affinity with spirits and excel in communicating with the residents of the Tapestry and the Mirror Lands. Their practice of magic, however, has tainted



them slightly, touching their paws with darkness. The Gift: Sense Wyrms tends to pick up a faint trace of taint, though not enough to cause most shapeshifters to attack the Doshi on sight. (Storytellers should make this distinction clear in order to keep Doshi characters from becoming the target of every Wyrms-fighter in the region.) Aware of this taint, the Doshi maintain that the knowledge of evil is a prerequisite for combating it successfully, and they still cling to most of their questionable magics.

Sorcerers study the Centipede to increase their knowledge of their enemy. They occasionally subdue and enslave Banes and other Wyrms-creatures if necessary to advance the cause of the Emerald Mother. However, their proclivity toward dark knowledge tends to distance them from others. Because of this, many Doshi choose to dwell alone in abandoned shrines, monasteries, hermitages or other isolated places. There is a constant battle to maintain control of the darkness within themselves. Many Doshi seem cold and heartless at worst, cynical and uncaring at best. This does not make them corrupt beyond redemption; they use their base passions and dark desires, but do not allow themselves to fall under the control of darkness.

Beginning Rage: 3

Beginning Gifts: *Blessing the Blade, Sense Magic, Spirit Speech*





Eji (ay-jee)

Translation: Warrior

Element: Lava (Yogan)

Description: Unlikeliest of all the Kitsune, the Eji take a cavalier attitude toward battle. Kitsune are not built for war, yet these Nine-Tails revel in the finer points of battle. They often compare themselves to surgeons or sculptors, slicing away at the cankers on the body of the Emerald Mother or chipping away at Her impurities. Nevertheless, these Warriors have a genuine respect for life, moreso than many of their Fox-cousins. Though they kill without regret when necessary, they realize too keenly just how precious and valuable life is.

This appreciation for life does not stop them from excising the corrupt from the world; in fact, it underscores their work as Warriors. Like most of Gaia's fighting forces, they concentrate their wrath on the hordes of the Centipede. Occasionally, they also remove hostile mages or witch-hunters or anyone else who threatens the Mother or Her children. In their human life, they pass as adventurers, explorers, risk-takers, mercenaries or militant missionaries, urging others to adopt their passion for tradition and righteousness even as they clandestinely work to rid the world of individuals who actively work for the forces of corruption and destruction.

Beginning Rage: 4

Beginning Gifts: *Razor Claws, Resist Pain, Sense Hostility*

Gukutsushi (goo-koots-shee)

Translation: Dreamweaver

Element: Fog (Kiri)

Description: Dreamweavers occupy their own peculiar niche in the world of the hengeyokai. Part Ragabash, part Philodox and part healer, the Gukutsushi minister to the hearts and minds of Gaia's creatures. They bring healing, solace and comfort to those who suffer or mourn, and bring deception and madness to those whose conduct has earned the anger of the Emerald Mother. As masters of illusion and deception, Dreamweavers often take the part of either the Leaf or the Mirror when they join a sentai. This does not prevent them, however, from taking part in actively combating the enemies of Gaia.

Their Gifts can wreak devastation on their enemies, destroying their minds and deceiving their senses. They are generally experts at human psychology, a fact which they shamelessly use to their advantage. In their human life, Dreamweavers are often psychologists, healers, herbalists, counselors, entertainers and con-artists.

Beginning Rage: 2

Beginning Gifts: *Clear the Mind, Mother's Touch, Open Seal*

Kataribe (kah-tah-ree-bay)

Translation: Bard



Element: Clay (Nendo)

Description: The Bards of the Kitsune serve as creators and builders, in opposition to the works of selective destruction and deception practiced by the Eji and Gukutsushi. The Kataribe have an excessive love for lore, whether in the form of stories, songs, poetry or art. Most Bards spend their long lives accumulating as much traditional lore as possible, in all its variants and permutations.

Kataribe, of all the Kitsune, have the best relations with the Beast Courts. Most Kitsune who serve the Courts are Bards. They enjoy not only the trappings of court life, but also consider court historians and lorekeepers as their personal possessions and attach themselves to these figures with a religious devotion. The Zhong Lung hold a particular attraction for Bards, since they remember so much about the past Ages. Kataribe have little trouble mingling in the human world; there is always room for another artist or storyteller, musician or dancer. Some Bards prefer the academic life and associate themselves with colleges and universities as researchers or professors. They make knowledge their business.

Beginning Rage: 2

Beginning Gifts: *Beast Speech, Fable, Truth of Gaia*

Abilities

Kitsune use the same Attributes and Abilities as described in **Laws of the Wild**. Other than the restrictions that affect roko Kitsune, no other limitations apply. Storytellers may allow players to choose *Calligraphy* or *Origami* as their specific *Craft* when taking that Ability in order to reflect the culture and artistic skill of the Foxes and to make the Nine-Tails' ability with *Ju-Fu*, or paper magic, easier.

Backgrounds

Kitsune may purchase the Background Traits of *Ancestor*, *Fetish*, *Resources* and *Rites* as described in **Laws of the Wild**. Foxes who join a sentai may purchase the *Totem* Background. Occasionally a Kitsune may wish to have a personal totem, but this is a rare occurrence. Most Kitsune consider Luna as their patron spirit and prefer not to risk offending her by courting another spirit in her place. Kitsune have no need for *Pure Breed*; all Nine-Tails come from the purest breed imaginable, regardless of whether or not other *shen* recognize their august lineage.

Kitsune have their own version of *Allies*, *Contacts*, *Kinfolk* and *Mentor*. These changed Backgrounds are described below.

Batsu

Batsu represent the Kitsune's extended circle of friends and family. These are the people who matter to the Nine-Tails. They consist of siblings, adopted siblings, friends, lovers, relatives and other significant people who have made themselves part of the Kitsune's life. Standing by her in times of hardship, only



a phone call or an e-mail away, *Batsu* respond to a Fox's call for help or simply moral support. *Batsu* may include other *shen*, litter-mates, foster brothers and sisters, school friends, teachers, spirits attracted to the Kitsune, or even the Stargazer who sought an explanation for the strange customs of the Middle Kingdom and found kindness from a Fox. When the Kitsune calls, these are the people who render assistance without asking first what they have to do. These are the folks that are described thusly: "Friends help you move; good friends help you move bodies."

Each *Batsu* Trait purchased represents one individual who will go to bat for the Kitsune. The character and Storyteller should work together to detail each friend, for they will probably play important roles in the chronicle.

Clan

Kitsune Kinfolk enjoy immunity to the Delirium; Kitsune, however, don't cause the Delirium, so the simple fact of being Kinfolk means less to the Foxes than to other *hengeyokai*. A Kitsune's *Clan*, therefore, represents a network of individuals — friends and relatives — who know the true facts surrounding the Kitsune's existence and are aware of her great purpose in the world. Most members of a Kitsune's *Clan* are, in fact, Kinfolk, but some are not. Worthy outsiders are sometimes brought into the *Clan* and learn the truth about the werefoxes from other members.

1 Trait	3 clan members
2 Traits	5 clan members
3 Traits	10 clan members
4 Traits	25 clan members
5 Traits	50 clan members

Go-en

Just as other *hengeyokai* have *Contacts*, Kitsune have *Go-en*. This represents a complex network of minor contacts that work together to increase the Kitsune's overall influence in the world. Rather than relying on one or two significant individuals, Kitsune prefer to focus on acquiring the necessary information from any available source. *Go-en* insures the presence of multiple sources. Usually a reliable network, occasionally sources get their stories wrong. Storytellers should feel free to intersperse bad information along with the good.

1 Trait	local network
2 Traits	regional network
3 Traits	national network and slightly beyond
4 Traits	Middle Kingdom coverage
5 Traits	world-wide connections



Sempai

The Kitsune equivalent of the *Mentor* Background, Kitsune occasionally have a group of *hengeyokai* acting as patrons instead of a single *sempai*. A *sempai* may be anyone from a beloved "aunt" or "uncle," the actual Kitsune parent of a Nine-Tails, an entire court *sentai* who view the Kitsune as their particular project, or one of the Ministers of a court. Some *sempai* aid Kitsune out of altruistic motives, while others have more pragmatic aims in grooming a young Kitsune for an important task. Player and Storyteller should work together to create an interesting patron or several intriguing patrons for the character.

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 1 Trait | A Kiko or Iron-rank individual; a distant or newly formed <i>sentai</i> |
| 2 Traits | A Koryo or Steel-rank individual; an accessible and veteran <i>sentai</i> |
| 3 Traits | A Reiko or Gold-rank <i>hengeyokai</i> ; an important court member; an accomplished and easily reached <i>sentai</i> |
| 4 Traits | A five-tail Fox; a Gai'nan; a very powerful and helpful <i>sentai</i> |
| 5 Traits | A Fox with six or more tails; a powerful Gai'nan; a <i>sentai</i> legendary throughout the Middle Kingdom |

Kitsune-go: the Language of Foxes

During their *Nogitsune* time, all Kitsune pick up *Kitsune-go*, the spoken language of the werefoxes. Though Kitsune must "learn" this language, no Ability Traits need to be spent on acquiring it. *Kitsune-go* uses human writing and Japanese terminology, even though the Kitsune Breed originated in China.

The Kataribe maintain that the legendary Bai Mianxi and Prince Inari were responsible for the adoption of Chinese characters after the pair stole their first oracle bones. Not long afterward, the Foxes began stealing all sorts of runes, symbols and characters from the Garou, from the Bastet, from the Tengu and from any other race who possessed them. Writing came naturally to the Kitsune.

Most Kitsune believe that Prince Inari brought Japanese words back to China with him and this vocabulary proved easier on the Foxes' not-quite-human tongues than the highly tonal languages of Mandarin and Cantonese Chinese.

Modern fox-speech mixes uninflected Chinese words, Japanese terms, *hengeyokai* vocabulary along with Korean and traces of other Asian languages. Grammar uses the principle of "Fox-logic" and is thus incomprehensible to outsiders. Only Kitsune and a few trusted close Kinfolk learn the language.



FORMS

Kitsune possess five forms which, while not as combat-worthy as those of other hengeyokai, nevertheless serve as a source of pride to the Foxes, who appreciate the elegance of each form for its particular purposes. By succeeding in a Gnosis Challenge (difficulty equal to the local Wall rating), a Kitsune may manifest one or more of her tails in any of her forms. She may use the same test to hide her tails, though the Koto, Juko and Kyubi forms possess at least one tail naturally.

Hitogata

A Kitsune's Homid form resembles a normal human in every way. Most Kitsune have Asian features and possess a gracefulness of movement and a pleasantness of features. Many Foxes are very attractive in their Hitogata form. Their eyes tend to be bright and inquisitive, a trait that reveals their Fox-nature only to *shen* who know what to look for.

Sambuhenge

Comical in appearance, the Kitsune equivalent to Glabro is only rarely used by the Foxes. Body mass remains the same, but the ears take on an upward cast, the eyes become thinner and more slanted, the nose grows longer and whiskers appear on the muzzle. Sambuhenge naturally sport a fox's tail; roko often forget to retract the tail when first assuming this form. Useful to roko kits as an intermediary step to assuming Hitogata form, roko often learn to walk in Sambuhenge form. Otherwise, Kitsune adopt this form only to play tricks on another Fox.

Koto

Barely an inch or two taller than the Hitogata form, the Kitsune's Koto form does not increase perceptibly in bulk. The head becomes entirely vulpine but retains its bright, intelligent eyes. Fur covers the Koto's body and a bushy fox-tail emerges. Kitsune use this form for attending court functions, impressing visitors and enjoying the comfort and warmth of fur. The Foxes only assume this form when their privacy from outsiders is assured. The Koto's bite does an additional level of aggravated damage, but Kitsune rarely use this form unless there are no other choices available except for fighting.

Juko

This form resembles a wolf-sized fox. A Kitsune in Juko form enjoys enhanced "manual" dexterity with its jaws. Some Foxes learn to fight with mouth-held daggers in Juko form.

Kyubi

Kitsune in fox form are no different from normal foxes. Most Kitsune are red foxes though occasionally some appear as gray foxes. Kitsune do not or cannot breed with more exotic foxes.



Bonus Traits

Hitogata: no Trait adjustment

Sambuhenge: *Graceful, Tireless*. Negative Trait: *Callous*

Koto: *Graceful x 2, Energetic x 2, Resilient, Discerning*. Negative Trait: *Callous*

Juko: *Graceful x 2, Nimble, Enduring x 2, Resilient, Wiry*. Negative Trait: *Feral x 2*

Kyubi: *Agile x 2, Nimble, Lithe, Enduring, Tenacious, Observant, Vigilant*. Negative Traits: *Feral*

Note: The Koto form appears distinctly unattractive and frightening to mortals. *Shen* and other enlightened persons, however, recognize the exotic beauty inherent in the half-human/half-fox form of ancient legends.

Jyu-ho: Kitsune Magic

Kitsune thrive on magic. To the Nine-Tails, magic makes everything just a little bit better. While the Kitsune possess an abundance of Gifts which they call *Tamamono*), courtesy of the spirits, they have also developed a variety of “tricks” including an entirely new school of magic known as *Ju-Fu*, or paper magic. Young Kitsune learn quickly that success brings rewards from elders in the form of more Gifts and that each new tail they acquire enables them to progress further in their knowledge of the ways of magic.

Breed Gifts

Kojin

Kitsune born to the two-legs’ world excel in Gifts that enable them to communicate and interact with humans. They have less aptitude with wilderness or spirit-based Gifts. Some Kojin Gifts assist the Nine-Tails in protecting themselves from natural enemies and ill-meaning *shen*.

Basic Gifts

- **Jam Technology** — As the Homid Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Persuasion** — As the Homid Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Seduction** — The Kitsune becomes extremely attractive to mortals, who tend to fall in love with her, whether or not the Nine-Tails intends for such an attachment to occur. The player makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Empathy*). A target who succumbs to the Kitsune develops a powerful attachment to the Nine-Tails. The target may spend Willpower Traits to reduce the effect of the attraction. One Willpower Trait prevents the target from falling in love; two Traits lowers the attraction to a general fondness; three Traits allows the victim to ignore the effects of the Gift altogether. The effect lasts for one game



session or until the Kitsune acts in such a way as to break the attachment. A Fox who uses this Gift frequently may find herself with an unexpected attachment (it's a great way for Storytellers to make mischief!).

- **Silver Tongue** — As the Fianna Gift: *Glib Tongue* (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Smell of Man** — As the Homid Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**). Helpful to Kitsune who have little familiarity with the wilderness, this Gift discourages predators, including other foxes, from pursuing the werefox and allows the Kitsune to avoid territorial disputes while traveling in the wild.

- **Staredown** — As the Homid Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

Intermediate Gifts

- **Disquiet** — As the Homid Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Forgetfulness** — This Gift enables the Kitsune to remove memories or information from the mind of the victim. With this power, the Nine Tails make certain that their secrets do not fall into the wrong hands. The player spends a Gnosis and a Willpower Trait and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Subterfuge*). The target must spend one Willpower Trait for each tail the Kitsune possesses in order to resist the effects of this Gift.

- **Reshape Object** — As the Homid Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Spirit Ward** — As the Homid Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Tongues** — This Gift allows the Kitsune to read and write any language she hears or sees, even ancient, obscure or obsolete languages. The player spends one Willpower Trait and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Linguistics*). Although the player must make a separate challenge for each language encountered at one time, only one Willpower Trait needs to be spent. The effect lasts until the next sunrise.

Advanced Gifts

- **Assimilation** — As the Homid Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Call to Allies** — This very potent Gift rewards the Kitsune for her past good deeds, whether or not she was aware of them at the time. When a Nine-Tails finds herself in extreme circumstances, she may issue this spiritual "call" to all those she has befriended or for whom she has done a favor. Not only will her *Batsu*, *sentai* and *Clan* answer the call, but also other supernaturals who recognize their debt to the Kitsune or who feel a bond of friendship with her. This can include both known and unknown allies as well as kindly disposed neutrals in the area. On occasion, such a *Call* has resulted in the appearance of Kuei-jin vampires and other unlikely creatures, much to the consternation of others who have responded to the Nine-Tails. Each answering creature reacts in her own way. The Kitsune does not control those who respond, nor may she always agree with their choice of actions. Spirits may have certain limitations as to what they can do for the Kitsune, particularly if they are tied to a single location. Neutrals do not have to respond, and *hengeyokai* may refuse the *Call* if they choose to do so. Most who hear the *Call*, however, do answer it, since they know that their own good deeds earn recompense from the petitioning



Kitsune. Kitsune who use this Gift frivolously or too often incur the wrath of both spirits and *shen*.

This Gift costs nothing. The player declares that her character is invoking the Gift and takes whatever comes. The Storyteller should determine who hears the *Call*, but other players and Storyteller-controlled characters may decide how to respond to it.

Roko

Kitsune born from foxes have great skill with Gifts that pertain to the wilderness. Roko may also use their innate instincts and wisdom to master spiritual and elemental Gifts as well.

Basic Gifts

- **Burrow** — As the Metis Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Cricket Leap** — As the Silent Striders Gift: *Great Leap* (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Heightened Senses** — As the Lupus Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Scent of Sight** — As the Lupus Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Sense Imbalance** — As the common hengeyokai Gift (see Chapter Four).

• **Ten Chi** — With this Gift, the roko always knows the direction in which he travels and whether or not he is in the Middle Kingdom or one of the Yin, Yang, Yomi or other Realms. This Gift also allows the Fox to take his “territory” with him so that natural animals, including other foxes, cede safe passage through their lands without offering challenge. Usually other roko honor the passage of a Fox under the effects of this Gift. The player spends a Gnosis Trait to invoke this Gift. No test is required. When the Gift takes effect, the character immediately knows the cardinal directions, in which direction “home” lies and which Realm he is in.

Intermediate

- **Blind** — A Kitsune can use this Gift to strike an opponent blind for a day. Not only does the victim lose his sight, but a sharp pain accompanies the onset, though the pain does not last. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Medicine*). The target must make a Physical Challenge to resist the effects. The Gift lasts for 24 hours (game time).
- **Carrion Clothes** — Wild foxes use this to catch birds; Kitsune like to use it to catch larger “prey.” This Gift enables the roko to take on the appearance of death: the Kitsune possesses no aura, no apparent breath, no movement, no pulse. A faint smell of decay surrounds the Fox. Those affected by the Gift come to believe that the Kitsune is, in fact, dead. So convincing are the effects of the Gift that even supernaturals may be confused despite their enhanced senses and magical abilities. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical Challenge (retest with *Survival*). The Kitsune must confine her movements to small ones; attempts to creep away or to use Gifts requiring gestures break the illusion of death. Even so, mortals and *shen* unfamiliar with



Kitsune may take a few minutes to realize what they are seeing; some may even think that the Kitsune is one of the undead. *Shen* with the ability to sense such things may make a Static Mental Challenge (difficulty seven Traits, retest with *Occult*) to detect the presence of a living spirit within the “dead” Kitsune.

- **Catfeet** — As the Lupus Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Forest Lord** — As the Lupus Gift: *Beast Life* (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Name the Spirit** — As the Lupus Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Advanced

- **Elemental Gift** — As the Lupus Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Song of the Great Beast** — As the Lupus Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

The type of creature that responds differs depending on where in the Middle Kingdom the Kitsune is when she invokes this Gift. Lower Dragons, yeti, rocs, ki'rin or other ancient creatures may appear in response to the Fox's Song.

Shinju

Kitsune born from the pairing of two Kitsune grow up surrounded by the supernatural. Their Gifts, therefore, reflect their special attunement to the spirit world and the realm of magic.

Basic

- **Call to Duty** — As the Philodox Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Flow of Aura** — The Kitsune becomes so spiritually attuned to an area

that she can sense its personality and pick up psychic impressions present in the region. She can sense old battles, recent tragedies, births, deaths and other momentous emotional occasions attached to the area. The player makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Empathy*). The Storyteller may determine the type of information the character can glean from her Gift. Usually, impressions are vague (death has visited this area many times), but if the player spends further Mental Traits the character can learn more detailed information (a trusted samurai betrayed his lord on this spot and died for his crime).

- **Imperial Authority** — Shinju realize that they occupy the top echelons of society and they use this Gift to convince others of that fact. By gazing into the eyes of her target, a Kitsune can overwhelm an individual with the force of her personality. Animals defer to the Kitsune, human mortals assume the Nine-Tails comes from the nobility or holds a position of economic or political clout, as is appropriate. *Shen* with diminished will can also be fooled by this Gift. The player makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Intimidation* or *Leadership*). *Shen* may spend a Willpower Trait to resist.

- **Past Whispers** — This Gift allows the Kitsune to pick up fragments of sounds from the past of an area. Spoken words, cries, screams and other distinct audial impressions reverberate in the mind of the Shinju. The player makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Empathy*). The Storyteller informs the player what her character hears — usually bits and pieces of conversations or significant noises associated with the target area. By spending more Mental



Traits, the character can pick up entire conversations. Used alongside *Flow of Aura*, this Gift can present a very complete picture about the past.

- **Scent of the True Form** — As the Philodox Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Sense Wurm** — As the Metis Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Intermediate

• **Distant Whispers** — Similar to the Metis Gift: *Distant Speech*, this Gift bears the peculiar stamp of Kitsune-magic. The Nine-Tails speaks her message into a river, fire, breeze or other natural element — including the ground itself. The target of the message hears the Kitsune's voice coming from a similar source in its vicinity. Werefoxes are particularly fond of storms and other dramatic effects of nature and take advantage of these whenever possible to enhance the drama of the situation. The player makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Empathy*). Success allows the Fox to communicate with a known target up to 20 miles distant. A form of the element chosen as the carrier must exist near the target for the Gift to succeed. This Gift does not allow mind-reading nor does it work with someone the Kitsune does not know unless she possesses a personal totem of the target, such as a lock of hair or a fingernail clipping. Social Abilities may be used on the target so long as they are not dependent on visual clues.

- **Eyes of the Cat** — As the Metis Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Roll Over** — As the Philodox Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Scent of Beyond** — As the Philodox Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Wisdom of the Ancient Ways** — As the Philodox Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Wild).

Advanced

• **Imperial Obligation** — As the Philodox Gift: *Geas* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Marionette** — The Shinju, with this Gift, may make her target do whatever she wishes, merely by miming the desired activity. The player spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Subterfuge*). The target may spend a Willpower Trait to resist the effects; if not, the Kitsune controls her victim's actions for one scene.

Path Gifts

Doshi

Kitsune Sorcerers possess more *Jyu-ho* of their own than Foxes of any other path. Some believe that their Gifts are more powerful, as well. This advantage, however, comes with a high price: the Doshi bear a very slight taint stemming from at least one of the tricks they've stolen and the *shen* from whom they stole it.

Basic

• **Blessing the Blade** — A Kitsune Sorcerer may call upon a nearby spirit and ask it to inhabit a blade for a short period of time, thus infusing the blade



with power. The werefox may either prepare a blade beforehand or use this Gift instantly. Unless used during a battle, the Gift only functions if invoked with a specific foe as its intended target. The Kitsune uses a special cloth or leather wrappings to keep the spirit dormant until the bearer speaks the name of the enemy. The Kitsune may infuse only one weapon at a time and may not bless another blade until the previously bound spirit has served its time. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Willpower Challenge (retest with *Rituals*). Once the spirit within the blade is invoked, the weapon inflicts aggravated damage against its victim for one scene before the spirit is freed.

• **Blood Omen** — The Doshi can foretell the future through ritual sacrifice, usually reading the entrails of the victim, though occasionally some prefer to use the smoke of burnt offerings or scapulimancy. Legends claim that the Doshi originally stole this Gift from the Black Spiral Dancers, but Kitsune Sorcerers maintain that, unlike the Dancers, they never use hengeyokai, wolves or anyone's potential Kinfolk as victims. Humans, however, occupy a gray space in Kitsune morality; when Gaia's service is paramount, some indiscretions are overlooked. Doshi make certain that they dedicate their sacrifices to Celestines, Incarna or other totem spirits adamantly opposed to the Wyrms and not averse to bloodshed. Once the character has performed the sacrifice, the player makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Enigmas*) and spends one Gnosis Trait. The Storyteller determines what information the Doshi receives depending on the spirit invoked in the sacrifice and its knowledge of the future and willingness to impart such knowledge.

• **Breath of Yu-Chiang** — As the Black Fury Gift: *Curse of Aeolus*; Yu-Chiang is the Chinese deity of the Sea-Wind (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Command Spirit** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Exorcism** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Ghost Speech** — As the Theurge Gift: *Spirit Speech* with a few differences. While the Gift: *Spirit Speech* allows a Kitsune to speak with spirits in the Yang realms, this Gift enables communication with those who dwell in the Yin Realm, whether "demons" or spirits of the dead. In the Yin Realm, a Kitsune may speak as naturally to spirits native to that place as to Yang spirits in their own realm. Residents who were human in life may pose linguistic problems. If the Kitsune is in the Middle Kingdom, Yin spirits that can normally speak across the Wall find doing so an easier task than normally.

• **Name the Spirit** — As the Lupus Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Sense Magic** — As the Uktena Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Sense Wyrms** — As the Metis Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Spirit Speech** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Sight From Beyond** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Intermediate

• **By the Light of the Moon** — This Gift enables the Doshi to spot any hidden or invisible creature in moonlight. Thus, a Nine-Tails can see *Obfuscated* Kin-jin, spirits in the Mirror Lands, invisible Kuei-jin and any other creatures



who have either natural or supernatural means to make themselves difficult to see. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Awareness*). The Storyteller determines the effect of the Gift, depending on the creatures hidden and the circumstances surrounding their concealment. Large creatures are easier to spot than small ones, for example. The effect of the Gift lasts for as long as the moon is in the sky (i.e., until moonset), but the Kitsune must make a challenge each time she wishes to spot a hidden individual.

- **Feral Lobotomy** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Grasp the Beyond** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **The Malleable Spirit** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Pulse of the Invisible** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Spirit Drain** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Spirit Ward** — As the Homid Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Seal of Inari** — Doshi take nothing at face value. This Gift enables the

Kitsune Sorcerer to place a secret magical brand on any *shen* or mortal encountered, either as a warning to other Kitsune, as a request to protect the individual, or as a death mark. Only Kitsune can see the sigils, which appear as ghostly red or black symbols that hover above the skin. These marks appear over makeup, clothing or any other covering and are visible so long as the target's head can be seen. Chimerlings, Epiphings and similar spirits may share this Gift with worthy Kitsune; Doshi rarely teach it to one another. The player makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Occult*). This enables the character to inscribe one symbol of her choice on the target. A player may attempt multiple challenges to make multiple markings. Other Kitsune spot the *Seal* without any trouble and usually act in accordance with the meaning of the symbol or symbols.

- **Swarm of Servants** — Doshi have some strange powers; this Gift represents one of the strangest. The Doshi can call forth armies of miniscule vermin such as beetles, mice, frogs, lice, grasshoppers and other similar creatures from the fur of his tails. These hosts do the Kitsune's bidding. The player spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Physical Challenge (retest with *Occult*). Success means that 25 of these creatures comes forth and remains under the Doshi's mental control. They must remain within 20 feet of the Kitsune, but within those parameters, they may harass enemies, requiring them to spend a Willpower Trait in order to take any significant action (other than fighting off the vermin) or perform simple tasks. The effect lasts for one scene. The player may spend additional Willpower Traits to increase the number of summoned creatures (25 per each Trait).

Eji

Warriors of the Nine-Tails tread a delicate and fragile Path that often leads them directly into danger, something most Kitsune naturally (and sensibly)



avoid. Eji Tamamono emphasize solo combat, the long hunt and, ultimately, survival and escape.

Basic

• **Bolt** — The forces of nature respond to the Eji's call for assistance in combat, sending a powerful bolt of lightning, ice, fire or some other, rarer, element to strike down his opponent. The player spends one Rage Trait and makes a Physical Challenge (retest with *Occult*). Success inflicts three levels of aggravated damage on the enemy. In addition, the enemy is stunned for one combat round and loses her action.

• **Enduring Warrior** — This Gift enables the Eji to heal as if she were one of her hengeyokai cousins, regenerating damage as quickly as other shapechangers. Some detractors claim that the Kitsune originally stole it during the last War of Shame. Others hold that the Okuma gave the Gift to the Kitsune so that the Foxes would not perish in a future War. The player spends a Rage Trait. For the next scene, the character recovers one health level per turn, as if she were Garou.

• **Falling Touch** — As the Ahroun Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Razor Claws** — As the Ahroun Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Resist Pain** — As the Philodox Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Sense Hostility** — The Eji may sense hostile creatures within approximately 100 feet of her when using this Gift. The player makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Occult*). The Kitsune must deliberately invoke the Gift to determine whether any potential enemies are present.

• **Sense of the Prey** — As the Ragabash Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Spirit of the Fray** — As the Ahroun Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Intermediate

• **Call of the Dead** — The Kitsune's attunement to the Yin force enables them to affect an individual's vital energies, causing a wide variety of physical phenomenon including chills, confusion, injury and, on occasion, severe physical damage. The negative energy of the Yin Realms powers this Gift. This Gift is difficult to learn, for the spirits who teach it are rarely encountered. The player spends at least one Rage Trait and one Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical Challenge (retest with *Occult*). Humans, animals, supernaturals such as hengeyokai and *hsien* (changelings), and spirits of the Yang Realm take damage per the chart below, losing as many health levels as necessary to bring them to the point on the chart. For each additional Rage Trait spent, the effects move one step upward on the chart. Yin creatures or spirits do not suffer from the effects of this Gift; the Storyteller may even decide that such creatures receive healing or additional power from its use. Yang-attuned Kuei-jin and Kindred with a high Humanity take damage according to the chart; Kindred with low Humanity or Yin-aspected Kuei-jin are not affected.



Rage	Traits Spent	Effect
1	1	The victim still functions but suffers pain from chills, headache, fever and joint aches. He must spend a Willpower Trait to continue physical actions or complex mental processes. No health levels are lost.
2	2	The victim falls to Injured, with fever, cramps and sprains.
3	3	The victim becomes Wounded, experiencing convulsions which cause his body to tear itself apart from the inside.
4	4	The victim reaches Crippled as hypothermia and full-blown seizures occur. Untended humans generally die at the end of the scene from an attack of this power. Supernatural victims become only Wounded, but they take aggravated damage.
5	5	The victim is Incapacitated with aggravated damage. For humans, death is instantaneous.

• **Element Meld** — The Eji becomes one with a physical element of her choice, often decided by proximity. This Gift allows the Kitsune to meld with an element such as fire, water or earth and enables her to move through large portions of the element. Uses include surveillance, taking up a strategically advantageous position before combat or managing the perfect escape. The Kitsune may become part of the element water and join with the ocean in pursuit of a Wyrms-creature's oil tanker or step into a forest fire and emerge on the edge of the fire to run to safety. When a Kitsune who knows this Gift attains Rank Five, she may merge with secondary elements such as electricity, mist, moonlight or various metals. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Enigmas*). In order to change, the Kitsune must make physical contact with the desired element; the change happens instantaneously, so the Fox takes no damage from elements such as fire or electricity. Upon leaving the element, the Kitsune reverts to her natural form. While in elemental form, the Nine-Tails takes on the immunities of the chosen element (i.e., bullets cannot harm water; air can slip through even the smallest space) as well as its limitations (i.e., fire requires oxygen to burn, freezing



temperatures can immobilize water, water can douse fire). The Kitsune's body remains intact but may elongate, flatten or otherwise change shape to go around objects, turn corners and flow up or down slopes. The Fox moves at her normal rate. Silver harms the Kitsune as usual, as does radioactivity and toxic materials; all these interrupt the Kitsune's progress, forcing her to change her course or abort her action. Only Kitsune who have turned to the Wyrms may take the form of radiation or toxins. During her merger with the chosen element, the Kitsune is undetectable, having no scent, body heat or other evidence of her presence as a separate entity. Observers must have some sort of extraordinary senses or possess an appropriate Gift to attempt to detect a melded Kitsune and must succeed in a Mental Challenge (retest with *Occult*) to do so.

- **Song of Fear** — The Eji's control over her own fear allows her to inflict her fox frenzy onto other beings. Other creatures capable of berserk fury, such as Garou, Same-Bito and Kuei-jin, do not appreciate the use of this Gift on them. The Kitsune's enemies often swear oaths of vengeance on the culpable Nine-Tails, while allies and friends may seek some sort of compensation, even if the Kitsune has used the Gift to save the life of her target by forcing her to flee a hopeless situation. The player makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Intimidation*). The target runs in terror for one turn unless she spends a Willpower Trait to resist the Gift's effect.

- **Sorcerous Bite** — This Gift allows the Eji to transform his teeth to any desired substance. Most commonly, Eji use silver, gold, jade or some other substance known to inflict aggravated damage on certain supernaturals. Regardless of the material chosen, the teeth possess supernatural strength and rigidity, even if the Kitsune chooses teeth of water or ice. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Physical Test (retest with *Primal Urge*). Silver teeth do not harm the Kitsune unless she uses them upon herself, in which case she suffers aggravated damage as if she had bitten an enemy vulnerable to silver.

- **Weak Arm** — As the Philodox Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

Advanced

- **Dragon Ally** — Warrior Kitsune can call forth allies from the elements themselves, bringing forth a powerful fighter from nearby supplies of water, earth, fire or wind. The Kitsune must be close to or in the midst of a substantial amount of the desired element: storm-force winds, large pools of water and other significant elemental sources. The summoned creatures appears as a dragon formed entirely from its elemental origin. The player spends a Rage Trait and makes a Simple Gnosis Test (no Gnosis Traits are risked, but the Rage Trait is expended if the test fails). The dragon that arrives is five feet in length, possesses five health levels, two Stamina Traits and does two levels of aggravated damage per attack. It attacks with one bite and one body slam each turn (see **Laws of the Wild**). Each additional Rage Trait spent adds another five feet to the creature's length, five health levels of damage, two more Stamina Traits and inflicts an additional two levels of aggravated damage. A Kitsune may spend a



maximum of four additional Rage traits to bolster her dragon, thus creating a dragon of potentially awesome power. A Dragon Ally remains friendly toward its creator; in return, the Kitsune must maintain concentration to keep the creature from simply disappearing. The Fox can take only the simplest of actions while focusing on her creation. At the end of one scene or when it loses all its health levels, the creature vanishes.

- **Fire Immunity** — As the Ahroun Gift: *Kiss of Helios* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Gukutsushi

Kitsuni Dreamweavers earn fame for the visions they create in the minds of others, yet Gukutsushi also study all the strengths and weakness of the sane and insane mind, to mend or maim as they see fit.

- **Blur of the Milky Eye** — As the Ragabash Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).
- **Clear the Mind** — As the Children of Gaia Gift: *Calm* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Distant Whispers** — As the Shinju Gift (see above).

- **Dreamspeak** — As the Galliard Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Ebisu's Fingers** — As the Ragabash Gift: *Gremlins* (see *Laws of the Wild*), but named after Ebisu, the Shinto god of Luck and the patron of honest Work. According to the Kitsune, this Gift takes away the work of machines and returns it to honest laborers.

- **Fan-Shadow Robe** — This Gift enables the Kitsune to alter her appearance. The Nine-Tails lacks sufficient control over the change to impersonate a specific person or duplicate someone's exact manner of dress or copy complicated effects such as ceremonial garb, complex patterns or uniforms. Equipment may appear as something else. If a Dreamweaver holds a gun at arm's length, others may see her hold a leaflet or flower instead. The player makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Empathy*) using the rules for mass Challenges (see *Laws of the Wild*). As many individuals as fail the Challenge are affected. With only a few witnesses, the chances of someone getting lucky and penetrating the illusion grows smaller. This Gift takes its name from the props allegedly used by the legendary Bai Mianxi to enhance the Gift's effect. The effects last for one scene.

- **Moon-Fan-Face-Shadow** — As the Glass Walker Gift: *Doppelganger* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Mother's Touch** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Open Seal** — As the Ragabash Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Silver Tongue** — As the Fianna Gift: *Glib Tongue* (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Shadow-Fan-Flowers** — One individual within sight of the Dreamweaver experiences a vision which she believes. The Gukutsushi creates a perfectly detailed illusion, complete with color, motion, sound, lighting and other effects. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Mental Challenge (retest



with *Empathy*). The only escape from the vision is to find a flaw in the design that arouses doubt or disbelief. Mortals almost never break free of the illusion unless the Storyteller allows them to do so for some reason. Other creatures, particularly supernaturals of any kind, may spend a Willpower Trait to escape the vision once they have sufficient reason to doubt it.

- **Taking the Forgotten** — As the Ragabash Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Whelp Body** — As the Ragabash Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

Advanced

- **Madness** — As the Metis Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Violation** — As the Galliard Gift: *Head Games* (see **Laws of the Wild**).

Kataribe

Kitsune Bards know that stories hold power. Kataribe Gifts enable the Kitsune to locate and communicate with everyone, giving them stories that might serve them well in the future.

Basic

- **Beast Speech** — As the Galliard Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Centipede's Beckoning** — As the Galliard Gift: *Call of the Wyrms* (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Distractions** — As the Galliard Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Fable** — The Bard tells a story, using her natural performance abilities, expressiveness and will — enhanced by the power of this Gift — to influence her listeners. Through the appropriate choice of story, song or other interpretive art, the Kitsune can implant a suggestion into the minds of those who hear or see her. By singing a song lamenting caged animals, the Bard may rouse her audience to “liberate” creatures in a zoo or animal holding facility. The player spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Social Challenge (see **Laws of the Wild** for challenges involving multiple targets). Listeners who fail the challenge are swayed by the Kitsune's suggestion for a number of days equal to the total number of Traits the Kitsune possesses in *Manipulation* and *Performance* (or *Expression*). (For example, Sweet Flower Song has four Manipulation-related Traits: *Beguiling* x 2, *Persuasive* x 2, and possesses *Performance* x 3. She can influence her audience for seven days, if she succeeds. This Gift does not work on an audience compelled to listen and the Kitsune's performance must be live, not recorded or broadcast. The audience must be in the same room to experience the effect of the Gift.

- **Lore** — Kataribe Kitsune may contact the memories of other Bards, both living and dead, for specific knowledge concerning a person, place or important object. Similar to the Galliard Gift: *Wisdom of the Ancient Ways* (see **Laws of the Wild**), this Gift also recalls nursery rhymes, stories, riddles and other forms of information that Bards may enjoy but may not necessarily be able to use. The player makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Rituals*). Success gives the character access to the necessary (and unnecessary) information. The Kitsune



must have some personal connection to the subject of the Gift, either sight, touch or her own memories in order for the Gift's effects to take place.

- **Mindspeak** — As the Galliard Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).
- **Tongues** — As the Kojin Gift (see above).
- **Truth of Gaia** — As the Philodox Gift (see **Laws of the Wild**).

Intermediate

• **Kuei Dance** — This Gift elicits witness from the dead themselves, causing them to bear witness to some event — usually their own deaths. The Gift forces the target to be truthful but does not compel cooperation; fortunately, most restless ghosts are eager to communicate with the living world, particularly when they have the opportunity to testify as to the manner of their demise. By cooperating with the Kitsune, these spirits of the dead can make certain that their lives are remembered, their deaths avenged and their burials made according to tradition. The form of the Gift can vary, but frequently the Kataribe begins a story about the deceased and, part way through her recitation, she invites the ghost to step in and take part, acting out the story through dance or some other form of interpretive movement. The Kitsune can be as dramatic as she wishes, having the spirit step in at a critical motion in her tale. The player spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Gnosis Challenge (retest with *Empathy*) in order for the character to contact the spirit. Once contact has occurred, the player must make a Social Challenge (retest with *Performance*) to reach the audience. This Gift only affects dead who have retained at least some of their memories and personalities and includes hengeyokai ancestors, Spectres, wraiths and hungry ghosts. Living beings or souls who have reincarnated since their deaths are immune to the Gift. Rank Five Nine-Tails can affect Kuei-jin and Kin-jin vampires, though these creatures appear only in spirit (their bodies remain in their current location) and they return to their bodies unharmed, though generally annoyed or even angry at the unwanted intrusion.

• **Seek** — The Kataribe may initiate contact with a spirit to ask for the location of a particular individual. Spirits either give the Kitsune the correct answer, if they know it, or inform the Kataribe if the subject is not within their territory. The player spends a Gnosis point unless the character has actually traveled to the spirit's home or is in the presence of the spirit. The player then makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Occult*).

• **Silence** — The Kitsune silences an area, preventing all sounds from being heard. The player spends two Gnosis Traits and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Stealth*). The initial area affected is a five-yard radius, but the player may make attempt additional challenges to increase the affected area by five-yard increments. As soon as the player fails a challenge, she has reached the edge of the Gift's current range. Gifts or other actions requiring sound cause both the Kitsune and the affected party to make a resisted Gnosis Challenge. The winner's effect takes precedence, but the silenced area continues for the duration of one turn unless the Kitsune is rendered unconscious.



• **Uzume Sings** — The voice of a Kataribe holds tremendous beauty and seduction for the listener. With this Gift, the Kitsune may use the power of her song to forestall an enemy's attack or to lure her foe forward to his destruction. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Performance*). Success means that the target remains under the Kitsune's influence for a turn. The Kitsune may extend the Gift's effect by making additional Challenges, but failure ends the Gift's influence over the foe (although by then it may be too late). No additional Gnosis Traits are spent. The Kitsune may use the Gift to hold her victim motionless and unable to defend himself or may slowly lead the victim to another location — such as to a cell or place of confinement or judgment. If the Kitsune leaves or stops singing before the Gift's natural duration, the Gift's effects end.

• **Shadows By the Firelight** — As the Galliard Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Advanced

• **Assimilation** — As the Homid Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

• **Fabric of the Mind** — As the Galliard Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

General Gifts

Though Kitsune have some Gifts they hold in common, these Gifts do not compare in number with those dedicated to the various Paths. Once a Nine-Tails focuses her attention on the Gifts appropriate to her chosen Path, she finds the common Gifts less appealing. Nevertheless, the Gifts shared by all Kitsune display the Foxes' mysticism as well as their love for mischief.

Basic

• **Chi Sense** — A Kitsune using this Gift opens herself to the flow of Chi around her, sensing the energies of both Yin and Yang. Some Nine-Tails use this Gift in the practice of *feng-shui*. The player makes a Mental Challenge (retest with *Occult*). The Storyteller chooses how much information about the local Chi to give to the character. Additional challenges can yield more information, though failure ends the Kitsune's ability to sense the Chi-energies for that particular use of the Gift.

• **Ishin Denshin** — Two Kitsune may use this Gift to share in telepathic communication with one another. Both individuals must know the Gift and be on friendly speaking terms with each other. The Gift's name means "Mind-Heart Communication"; thus lying becomes extremely difficult under the influence of the Gift. Rarely do Kitsune who have something to hide use this Gift. A Snake-spirit teaches the Gift. The player makes a Mental Challenge as the character gazes into the eyes of the Fox-target. Once contact is established, neither Kitsune needs to make an effort to sustain the bond, but prolonged distractions, such as combat, end the link.

• **Moon Dance** — Provided she can avoid the light of the moon falling on her, the Kitsune becomes invisible through the use of this Gift. The Gift's name comes from the phenomenon caused by the Fox's ability to appear and



disappear simply by stepping into and out of the moonlight. The player spends a Gnosis Trait, but gains an entire night's duration for the Gift. The Gift does not mask the scent, sound or other sensory cues of the Kitsune, however. Only sight is affected.

- **Scent of Running Water** — As the Ragabash Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Sense Magic** — As the Uktena Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

- **Spirit Speech** — As the Theurge Gift (see *Laws of the Wild*).

Intermediate

- **Ghost Speech** — As the Doshi Gift (see above)

- **Puppeteer's Secret** — Like a good puppeteer, the Kitsune becomes not invisible but totally inconspicuous through the use of this Gift. A Fox using this Gift appears as part of the crowd or as someone who completely belongs in a given situation. In an emergency, people assume the Kitsune is part of the medical response squad. A Fox using the Gift in the vicinity of a police station seems part of the patrol unit. He becomes a non-descript Party member or embassy staff. No one questions the Nine-Tails' right to be in his current location. In fact, people assume that the Fox has been a familiar friend, distant relative or faithful attendant for years. This is the ultimate spy's Gift. The player makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Subterfuge*). Appropriate dress and behavior adds to the deception, while anachronistic costumes or actions detract from the ruse. This Gift can plug in the gaps made by a fallible disguise except for covering up ignorance; the Kitsune's best weapon in keeping this Gift active is anonymity. The less attention the Fox draws to himself, the better. The Storyteller may require additional challenges from the Kitsune to keep the Gift's effects viable, particularly if the Kitsune begins to step out of character or otherwise attracts attention. The Gift lasts until the ruse is broken or the Kitsune abandons his persona.

- **Shadow-Fan-Flowers** — As the Gukutsushi Gift (see above).

Advanced

- **Possession** — A Kitsune may leave her physical form and take over another's body. This is the most notorious power of the Nine-Tails and is feared throughout the Middle Kingdom. The Kitsune must be in close proximity to the victim through physical contact or must possess some of the victim's hair, nails or a personal token that has strong meaning for the victim (such as a wedding ring or locket). The player spends a Gnosis Trait to enable the character to assume total spirit-form. The player then spends a Willpower Trait and makes a Social Challenge (retest with *Occult*) to take over the host's body. Mortals cannot resist the Kitsune's initial possession; other *shen* must spend a Willpower Trait once a day to resist possession. Humans may enlist the assistance of priests, mages or shamans to attempt to resist the Kitsune once per week through the use of a Physical Challenge (no retest). The Gift: *Exorcism* can counter this Gift. If exorcised, the Kitsune returns unharmed to her physical form.



Ju-Fu: Paper Magic

Since they first discovered paper, Kitsune have been fascinated by its versatility and its variety. In Japan, paper has a strong religious significance; the Middle Kingdom reveres paper by making it part of their funerary rites. In the Japanese language, *kami* is a homophone for both paper and spirit. The Kitsune refer to their paper-spells as *kami*. While *Kami* (uppercase and normal type) refers to Gaia's flesh-bound spirits, the lowercase, italicized version of the word refers to the *Ju-Fu* spells of the Kitsune.

The Kitsune consider *Ju-Fu* an elegant and graceful form of sorcery, perhaps the most refined form of magic ever created. The ideograms used in *Ju-Fu* perfectly express the thought or idea conveyed in the spell. The practice of performing a rite-in-miniature, storing its magic in paper for later use, seems the ultimate in efficiency and economy. When Kitsune have an excess of Gnosis, they can spare some for creating *Ju-Fu* spells for the future, conserving this most precious of Gaia's resources. Many spirits, moreover, that dislike being bound to a fetish do not seem to mind inhabiting a *kami* for a brief period of time.

For Kitsune, learning a *Ju-Fu* "trick" resembles learning one of the common Kitsune Gifts. The main difference lies in the fact that other Kitsune, not spirits, teach *Ju-Fu* spells. When a Kitsune has learned a *Ju-Fu* "Gift," she may create the desired *kami* merely by painting the ideogram on a piece of paper appropriate for the spell. Paper used in *Ju-Fu* must be natural and should be able to be destroyed easily. Modern or mass produced paper such as photocopier paper or glossy pages from a magazine do not hold paper-spells. By spending an additional Gnosis Trait, a Kitsune may invest papyrus, cloth, bark or skin with *Ju-Fu* ideograms and power. Likewise, ink used in creating the ideograms and symbols must come from natural sources such as squid, octopus, blood, natural dyes and stains. Unnatural materials increases the Trait difficulty by three Traits.

Kitsune must expend at least one Gnosis Trait to create an individual *kami*, thus limiting the number of these items available to a Fox at any one time. The inherent limitations on replenishing Gnosis ensure that most Kitsune do not overload themselves with *kami*. In addition to the expenditure of Gnosis, a test of some sort must be made to determine whether or not the creation of the *kami* succeeded. If the test fails, the *kami* lacks power although the Gnosis Trait is gone. A Storyteller may allow a player to make a Physical Challenge (retest with *Crafts*) in order to create a particularly elegant or beautiful item, thus adding two additional Traits for retest purposes.

If something destroys a *kami* prematurely, its power leaves. Activated *kami* that have ongoing effects stop working if the host paper is ruined or destroyed.

Ju-Fu Gifts

Kitsune characters do not begin with any paper-spells. Unlike Gifts acquired from spirits and part of the Kitsune legacy, the Foxes themselves



discovered the secret of *Ju-Fu*. Once a newly-changed Kitsune finds another Nine-Tails who possesses *Ju-Fu* spells, she may begin learning them. From that time on, the Kitsune may pick up new *Ju-Fu* Gifts from other willing Foxes so long as she has the Experience Traits to purchase them (treat like Gifts on the Experience Trait Chart). In addition, the Kitsune must possess the proper Rank (and number of tails) to learn paper-spells beyond the Basic level.

Basic

- **Attraction** — Kitsune use this paper trick to repel or attract a particular type of animal through the creation of an appropriate *kami*. If a Kitsune wishes to travel safely through the jungle, she may create a *kami* to repel tigers; she may create a fish *kami* to attract dinner or a nightingale *kami* to sweeten the sounds in her night garden. The player makes a Standard Social Test (retest with *Animal Ken*) at the time of *kami* preparation. The Gnosis cost varies according to the type of animal to serve as the subject of the trick. Insects and vermin cost one Gnosis Trait; most animals cost two Gnosis Traits; particularly large or ferocious animals (tigers, water buffalo, elephants and the like) require an expenditure of three Gnosis Traits. This trick does not work against *shen* in animal shape. The character activates the *kami* by spitting on it.

- **Element Child** — By destroying a *kami* that bears the symbol of one of the basic elements, the Kitsune may create a small portion of that element. The Kitsune prepares the *kami* by inscribing a piece of paper with a mandala depicting the elements in relation to one another. To activate the *kami*, the Kitsune folds the paper into a shape appropriate to the element: a plane for Air, a stone for Earth, a flame for Fire, a wave for Water. The Fox tosses the paper where he wants the element to appear. The paper is destroyed in the process of producing the element. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Simple Test at the time of preparation. Except for the creation of the *kami*, this Gift is like the Metis Gift: *Create Element* (see **Laws of the Wild**).

- **Eyes of the Wall** — This trick results in the creation of two *kami*. The Kitsune cuts a hole in a piece of paper and places the cutout hole in a location she wishes to view later. The Fox can then look through the hole in the paper and see what the cutout piece would "see." By looking through alternate sides of the hole, the Kitsune may alter her point of vision by looking through the other side of the paper and see what the other side of the hole would "see." Kitsune kite-flyers have a great fondness for this trick, using it to view areas from an aerial perspective. The player spends two Gnosis Traits and makes a Simple Gnosis Test when crafting this two-in-one *kami*. The stealthy view lasts for an entire day and night.

- **Labyrinth** — A Kitsune may craft this *kami*, hide it in a room and, by speaking a word of binding, prevent anyone from leaving the room. If someone in the room attempts to climb out a window, she finds herself entering through the door; if she leaves by the door, she discovers she is entering through a window or another door. Anyone can enter the room normally; leaving it is the hard part. The Kitsune must also be present in the room to activate it, thus



trapping herself along with the other “prisoners” in the process. This is a perfect trick for solving a “locked-room” crime. The player spends three Gnosis Traits to prepare the *kami* and makes a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits (retest with *Enigmas*). Speaking the binding word activates the *kami*.

- **Lantern** — The Japanese consider will-o'-the-wisps as originating with the foxes. A Kitsune may craft a paper lantern or some other similar *kami* and later infuse it with an otherworldly luminescence. The light appears as trapped lightning, a baleful crimson glow, gentle moonlight or any other effect imagined by the Kitsune. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Gnosis Test when preparing the *kami*. Regardless of the appearance of the illumination, the actual light is as bright as if it came from a normal paper lantern. The Gift lasts for one scene unless the paper is destroyed before then.

- **Paper Speech** — The Kitsune may communicate with any animal or specific creature in their own tongue by crafting an origami replica or pictogram of the desired creature or animal. When the Kitsune activates the *kami*, an image of the creature depicted appears as an overlay of the Kitsune's own image in the mind of the subject. The speech of the Kitsune becomes transformed into the appropriate language of scent, gestures, body language, coloration and verbal sounds. The Kitsune hears the creature respond to her in her own mind using the fox-tongue, Kitsune-go. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits (retest with *Animal Ken*) at the time she crafts the *kami*. If the Kitsune wishes to use this Gift to speak other human or hengeyokai languages, the player must make a Static Mental Challenge against eight Traits (retest with *Empathy*) and must spend two Gnosis Traits instead of one. The effect lasts for one scene. The *kami* disappears at the expiration of the Gift's effects.

- **Silver Sigil** — Similar to the Fianna Gift: *Glib Tongue* (see **Laws of the Wild**), this trick allows a Kitsune to cause a sort of mass delusion in which a person or group of people see the *kami* as another paper object. The Kitsune may inscribe “badge” on a piece of paper and others will see it as a badge of the intended sort; she may also inscribe a paper with “driver's license,” “membership card,” or some other similar document title. The Kitsune cannot change the *kami* from one fake document to another, but the paper-trick affects as many people as necessary for one scene. Combat ends the effect of the *kami* as does destroying it. The player spends one Gnosis Trait and makes a Simple Gnosis Test. The first time human eyes see the *kami*, it activates. From then on, the Fox acts as if using *Glib Tongue*.

- **Umekochi's Mouth** — Umekochi is the Japanese goddess of food. This paper-spell allows the Kitsune to craft a small paper cup, dish, bowl or other eating vessel that can hold four times its apparent volume. The player spends a Gnosis Trait and makes a Gnosis Test.

Intermediate

- **Banishment** — Kitsune use this *kami* against spirits who have wandered afar from their home realms. The Fox inscribes a piece of paper with the spirit's name or ideogram. By brandishing the paper and demanding that the spirit



depart for its own home, the Kitsune may banish devils back to their Yomi World, make Crab Soldiers return to Umi or send a Goblin Tribesman back to the Goblin Jungle Realm. The player spends three Gnosis Traits and makes a Simple Gnosis Test at the time of *kami* creation. When the Kitsune activates the *kami*, the player makes a Static Willpower Test (against the errant spirit). Success forces the spirit to return immediately to its native Realm, or into the Mirror Lands if the spirit has no native territory but has materialized in the physical world. Unfortunately, this trick does not work to separate the Bane possessing a bakemono from its human host.

- **Beast Shape** — This *kami* enables the Kitsune to assume the form of an animal represented an origami figure or a paper inscribed with the animal's pictogram. Other than the need to prepare the spell ahead of time and its limited duration (one scene), this trick functions exactly as the Black Fury Gift: *The Thousand Forms* (see **Laws of the Wild**). The player spends two Gnosis Traits and makes a Static Physical Challenge (retest with *Animal Ken*).

- **Paper Beast** — The Kitsune fashions an origami animal or paints the animal's pictogram on a sheet of paper for this *kami*. To activate the *kami*, the Nine-Tails spits on the paper. The replica enlarges to a full-size likeness of the intended animal that obeys the Kitsune's commands. The player spends two Gnosis Traits and makes a Simple Gnosis Test. The creature that issues from the activation of the *kami* has all the capabilities, including strength, as its model. Paper tigers fight with a normal tiger's power and fury; paper elephants can move logs or carry heavy burdens; paper Chow Chow serve as loyal guardians. Since the creature, however, is made of paper, it has only one health level. Kitsune may only create normal animals using this trick, though some legends claim that Foxes with seven or more tails were known to create paper *ki-rin*, foo dogs, phoenixes and other creatures from the mythic times.

- **Walk** — This *kami* serves as a last-minute means of escape, allowing the Kitsune to vanish from view as she rips the *kami* in two. She reappears in the Mirror Lands in the form of her choice. The player must spend four Gnosis Traits and make a Simple Gnosis Test to prepare this spell. Once the power is activated, the Nine-Tails instantaneously steps sideways without having to make any additional tests.

Advanced

- **Kidnap** — This *kami* is one of the Kitsune's most devious strategies and one which has many uses. This trick enables the Kitsune to snatch a person or *shen* and abscond with them into the Umbra. A Nine-Tails already in the Mirror Lands can pull a target from the physical world into the Umbra with him or a Fox in the physical world can shove a target into the Umbra and either remain behind or go with his victim. The Kitsune throws the *kami* at the intended target and cries a word to activate it. If the Kitsune happens to be in the Mirror Lands, the paper appears out of nowhere to strike the target without warning. The target vanishes in a puff of smoke and a flash of light, while the paper — now unmarked — wafts slowly to the ground. The player spends two



Gnosis Traits and makes a Simple Gnosis Test against eight Traits to create the *kami*. In order to activate the *kami*, the player must make a Static Gnosis Test to overcome the Wall.

• **Paper Flesh** — This trick is identical to the *Ju-Fu Gift: Paper Beast* except that the creature created is made of flesh and blood and seems “real” in all respects. The player spends three Gnosis Traits and makes a Simple Gnosis Test to prepare this *kami*. The animal evoked by the trick possess full abilities and full health levels and is, for all practical purposes, real. If the animal is slain or when the scene ends, the creature reverts back to a simple piece of powerless paper.

Rites

Kitsune have few rites of their own devising. For one thing, they spend their time doing other things than inventing rituals to appease the spirits. For another thing, the Foxes find it easier and simpler to simply borrow, learn or steal the rites from other *hengeyokai*. Most of these rights work for the Kitsune without much variations.

Most Kitsune willingly extend admiration, flattery, and genuine respect to other *hengeyokai*, particularly if they will deign to teach the Fox a rite or two. While this behavior seldom gains the Kitsune access to advanced, secret or sacred rites of other shapeshifters, it usually has a fair degree of success in learning common or minor rites. Assume that Kitsune have access to all the Basic and Minor rites of the less secretive or withdrawn *hengeyokai*.

Characters who belong to a *sentai* or who have other *hengeyokai* as a *Batsu*, *sempai* or as members of their Clan may learn more complicated and advanced rites. Other legitimate reasons must have Storyteller approval, but theoretically, Kitsune may learn any rite practiced by any other *hengeyokai*. Elder Nine-Tails might know just about any existing rite, and maybe even some that have been lost to their original creators. These borrowed or stolen rites work for the Kitsune unless the spirits involved in the rite have no reason to heed the petition of the Kitsune. For example, the Baptism of Fire Rite involves *Garou* tribal spirits and pertains only to the werewolves.

There are, however, two rites that the Kitsune claim as their own, though they have been known to share the first one with other *hengeyokai*.

Basic

Rite of the Opening of the Eyes (Mystic) — Kitsune use this rite when a Fox kit first exhibits his powers, which may not take the form of the young Kitsune’s First Change. While this rite originated with the Kitsune, it is not their exclusive province. Kitsune teach this rite to other *hengeyokai* Breeds because of its usefulness. Sometimes they even instruct other *shen* in the use of this rite, in the event that a young Kitsune needs awakening before the arrival of any Kitsune is possible. The rite takes only five minutes to perform; a *shen* of any kind must touch the eyelids of the kit and intone a few purposeful words



informing the young one of his heritage and his future role in Gaia's pattern. The character makes a Social Challenge. The newly awakened Kitsune adapts to the traumatic First Change (when it happens) and soon becomes as full of joy and mischief as any Nine-Tails.

Advanced

Rite of the Crossroads (Mystic) — This rite serves the same purpose for the Kitsune as the Rite of the Opened Way does for the Beast Courts. The Nine-Tails harness the power of the four directions to discover and celebrate a young Kitsune's first — and sole — choice of path.

The rite takes place in a location associated with transitions. While crossroads provide the most auspicious omens, bridges spanning rivers or streams, doorways, covered walkways and similar sites also fulfill the requirement admirably. The ritemaster purifies the kit who is the subject of the rite and brings her to the location of the rite. After making proper obeisances to the Emerald Mother, the Silver Lady, Bai Mianxi and Prince Inari (usually in that order), the ritemaster requests all four patrons of the Kitsune to bless the arrival into adulthood of their newest child. The ritemaster places four bowls in front of the young Kitsune, one at each of the four directions (as determined by Kitsune lore). To the kit's eyes, each of the bowls appears filled with one of the four Paths' ruling elements: clay, lava, mist or lightning. The kit must reach into the proper bowl, the one to which she feels most strongly drawn. While reaching into a bowl of lightning or lava may be an excruciatingly painful experience for a fledgling Doshi or Eji (respectively), the kit takes no permanent damage from contact with the element. Once she has made her choice and her paws are dripping with the symbol of her path, the ritemaster ends the rite and salutes the new Yakan (or Rank One Kitsune), taking her to receive further training in her chosen path. The player of the ritemaster character makes a Static Social Test against eight Traits (retest with *Rituals*). At the rite's end, the kit officially attains Rank One. Performing the rite brings great honor to the ritemaster. The successful sponsorship of a new Kitsune earns the ritemaster two points of temporary Toku (see below).

Renown

At first glance, the Renown system followed by the Kitsune bears many similarities to the systems used by most other Changing Breeds. If queried about the Nine-Tails' code of Renown by someone the Kitsune respected enough to allow such an intrusion into her personal life, the Kitsune might say that her Breed placed great value on the three principles of Honor, Glory and Wisdom, just as the werewolves do. This would, in fact, be the truth — most of it, anyway — and would probably satisfy the querent. However, the real truth — the "Fox" truth — is at once more complex and more subtle. This should come as no surprise to those who know anything about the Kitsune.

This section takes a look at how the Kitsune view Renown and Rank and the real meaning of the actual titles for their Renown categories: Chie, Toku and Kagayaki.



In truth, Kitsune don't place much value in Renown; it just doesn't *matter* all that much to the Foxes. Recording the deeds and accomplishments of her fellows makes up only a very small part of what a Kataribe does for her Breed. Of course, great deeds and admirable actions deserve respect and acknowledgement, but the actual principle of Renown, with the attendant bragging rights so vocally demonstrated by some of the other hengeyokai species seems frivolous and overblown to the Nine-Tails. The main reason that Kitsune keep track of Renown is because hengeyokai customs and traditions demand it. Everyone else does it and to fail to do so would be impolite and arrogant. After all, the Kitsune maintain cordial relations with most of the Beast Courts and often assist them in their endeavors. Individual Kitsune join sentai and find great fulfillment in helping their fellow sentai members serve the Emerald Mother. To belittle their allies' system of Renown would be imprudent. Furthermore, Kitsune who distinguish themselves in the eyes of other hengeyokai have an advantage when they take place in any Court functions.

Rank, however, has great value and meaning to Kitsune. While mortals may crave fame and face from their peers and superiors, for the Kitsune the only real rewards come from Luna herself through the granting of tails. Only when she finds value and merit in the eyes of the spirits does a Kitsune gain a new tail. Kitsune cannot lie about their tails (though they may hide them); they cannot claim more tails than they actually have. They have no right to boast of or exaggerate their tails; the truth of the matter is easily discovered. They cannot fake their tails. Gaining tails (and Rank) is an absolute measure of a Kitsune's true value. Kitsune who leave Gaia's service may never gain new tails, no matter how powerful they grow in the service of their new master or masters.

Each time a Kitsune advances in Rank beyond Rank One, she acquires a new tail. The tails are not always visible; most of the time, Kitsune carefully stash their tails in the same "nowhere" space that a werewolf's Crinos bulk goes. Kitsune may cause their tails to manifest or, alternately, hide their tails by making a Static Gnosis Challenge against the strength of the local Wall.

No rules exist at this point to handle Foxes with more than five tails. To advance from one Rank to the next is a slow procedure, one which grows more slowly as a Kitsune goes higher and higher in Rank. To reach Rank Six from Rank Five requires an extremely long time — and Kitsune, fortunately, have the lifespans to do so. However, the Wheel will most likely turn to the Sixth Age before a player character spends enough time to gain her sixth tail.

The three Kitsune virtues are described below.

Chie

(chee-yay)

Most closely related to Wisdom, Chie also means intelligence, talent, ingenuity, cleverness and cunning. Kitsune use the characters for "know" and "blessing or kindness" in writing this word. These meanings might come as a surprise to enemies of the Foxes, since the Kitsune use Chie when evading or destroying (through cleverness) their opponent, emphasizing cunning ruses,



clever tricks, intelligent application of both Tamamono and *Ju-Fu* Gifts, disguises, tricks and traps and other evidences of a sharp mind and an insightful heart. The concept at the heart of Chie is the image of defeating two enemies by conning them into killing one another, preferably while the Kitsune is in another part of the Middle Kingdom entirely.

Toku

(toe-koo)

Akin to Honor, Toku also means virtue, moral strength, ethical integrity and similar qualities. The characters which make up the word represent "upright" and "heart." Kitsune earn Toku for living their lives according to the principles of Gaia and Luna. They lose Toku for deeds that earn the distaste of the Foxes. Kitsune do not quibble about backstabbing or ambushing a huge and monstrous opponent; they do, however, look down upon neglecting one's sentai or ignoring the needs of a young kit. Such deeds result in loss of Toku and seem far less ethical than attacking a larger enemy from behind. Toku stands for a Kitsune's determination to embrace everything that being Kitsune means, compromising with nothing and flinching from no challenge that belongs to the essence of the Nine-Tails.

Kagayaki

(kah-gah-yah-kee)

Sometimes translated as "Glory," Kagayaki more appropriately means magnificence or brilliance. The character for "shining," combined with a partial ideogram for "army" or "military," aptly describes the essence of the word. Kitsune award Kagayaki to those Kitsune who have distinguished themselves in the eyes of other *shen*, who see the shining essence of the Nine-Tail's deeds and approve of them. While Foxes care little for brilliance on the battlefield for its own sake, they recognize that other hengeyokai place great value on such tactics of ferocity and courage (and, occasionally, foolhardiness).

Kitsune also earn Kagayaki for performing good deeds where people that matter can see them. The Nine-Tails anticipate that another phase of the War of Shame will precede the entry into the Sixth Age and they intend to rack up as many points, winning allies and sympathizers as they can, with other hengeyokai to ensure their survival. Kagayaki is particularly appropriate for Foxes who act as ambassadors or envoys to other *shen*.

Experience

Kitsune gain and spend Experience Traits just as other shapeshifters. Use the Experience Chart and guidelines in **Laws of the Wild** for tracking a character's progress. The main difference between Kitsune and other hengeyokai lies in the Foxes' facility with learning Gifts and Rites from other shapeshifters. Instead of spending an extra Trait to learn an outside Gift or Rite, Kitsune learn these powers at the same cost as they do their own Gifts, provided they find someone willing to teach them the Gift and make the appropriate pleasantries to gain their favor.



Renown Chart

Rank 0 (Nogitsune)

The Kitsune holds no Renown and does not yet have a 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

Gukutsushi

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



Appendix: Antagonists

The hengeyokai of the Middle Kingdom have their share of enemies, creatures from the Yomi World, forces of the Centipede and others who stand against the Emerald Mother and whose presence threatens the health of the world. The shapeshifters of the East realize that the Sixth Age must come in order for the Wheel of the Ages to continue its cycle toward perfection, but some creatures desire to stop the Wheel at its nadir and bring about a world of complete darkness and utter despair. From devils of the Yomi World to the armies of the Wyrn, the roster of antagonists is long and varied. This chapter looks at a few of the most common — and deadliest — foes of the hengeyokai. Storytellers should consider this a starting point for their own imaginations. The myths and legends of Asia have many more monsters just waiting for the chance to call challenge on the shapeshifters of the Middle Kingdom.

Bakemono

The Sunset People know them as fomori, mortals possessed by Banes and enslaved thereby to the service of the Wyrn. Bakemono represent the classic antagonists for hengeyokai. Serving the Centipede or the Yama Kings, these repellent creatures were once humans. Whether they were originally unfortunates duped into dealing with the devil — or the Yama Kings — or greedy men and women who willingly traded their souls for a chance at power, revenge or some other dark purpose, bakemono no longer resemble the humans they once were. Now they stand as mockeries to humanity, distorted reflections of the basest desires of mortals.

Unlike Western fomori, however, bakemono often retain a great deal of self-awareness. While most of them have no concept of what has happened to them, others walked knowingly down the path of corruption and damnation, agreeing to make a pact with the agents of the Yama Kings, the Kumo or the devil-Banes of the



Centipede. Sometimes the stories of bakemono are rife with tragedy and pity; other times, they are simply tales of small minds twisted by promises of immortality and power. Storytellers should remember that each bakemono is an individual whose former life still influences the horror that he has become.

Bakemono usually bear bizarre and repulsive physical deformities that outwardly reflect their inner corruption. Many resemble the mythical ogres of Eastern legends. Others possess a multiplicity of arms and legs, extra eyes, bloated bellies, mottled skin or some other grotesque bodily characteristic. They tend to exude a stench of decay and are often accompanied by the symbols of rot and decomposition — flies, maggots and other carrion-loving insects. Bakemono harbor diseases and can infect entire cities with their presence. They dwell in the crowded slums of Singapore and Hong-Kong, in warrens deep beneath Calcutta and Seoul. They haunt villages decimated by famine and plague, and bring blight and barrenness to the countryside. Those who do not feed directly on corruption sate their hunger with human flesh.

Powers

In general, bakemono have three powers; though some have more powers while others possess only one or two. The **Book of the Wyrms** lists a number of these powers and Storytellers should feel free to use them for Asian fomori where appropriate. The guidelines for creating fomori presented in **Book of the Wyrms** also apply to creating bakemono.

Other possible abilities are described below and are particularly suitable for bakemono.

Armor — The bakemono possesses scaly skin, a chitinous carapace or an outer surface that resembles stone or calcified bone. As effective as personal body armor, this “natural” armor provides three extra Physical Traits (*Resilient* x 2 and *Rugged*) and give the bakemono an additional three health levels that can absorb damage.

Biting Plague — The belly of the bakemono roils with demon insects which the creature may vomit forth in a projected stream at will. This attack causes three levels of aggravated damage to its target, who may attempt to soak them normally. Armor does not protect against these creatures since they flow toward unprotected parts of the victim’s body. The bakemono may use this power twice per day before his supply is exhausted; remaining insects breed to capacity within 24 hours.

Centipede’s Kiss — The bakemono may spit a poisonous needle at his enemies. The dart does one health level of normal damage, but if the target does not soak the damage, the hallucinogenic poison on the dart takes effect. The victim succumbs to nightmarish hallucinations and may not interact functionally with the world around him until the poison wears off (after one scene). When the toxin fades, the victim takes another health level of damage. Spirits, ghosts and Kuei-jin are immune to the toxin. The Gift: *Resist Toxin* may flush the poison from the system without causing further damage. Bakemono generally prefer to use this ability on humans who have less resistance to it than other *shen*. Those who possess both this power and *Hellish Beauty* (see below) often prefer to deliver the poison by means of a kiss or during the course of intimate relations.

Fleshflow — This power enables the bakemono to rearrange his flesh into any form necessary for a given situation. Flesh melts, bones grow soft and malleable, and



hair sprouts from odd places as the bakemono's body contorts itself painfully into the desired shape. The bakemono does not increase or decrease bodily mass but may take on a variety of disguises, from that of a large dog to a misshapen beast to an extremely ugly person. Some forms are chosen merely to horrify onlookers and create panic.

Hellish Beauty — Using a blend of pheromones and physical attractiveness, a bakemono with this ability radiates an exotic and compelling beauty. The creature gains the Social Traits *Alluring*, *Gorgeous* and *Seductive*. Although many grotesque bakemono may possess an inexplicable attraction to mortals through this power, most creatures that manifest *Hellish Beauty* can pass for human.

Razor Tattoos — The bakemono's body bears numerous tattoos that represent a snake's coils or a centipede's many-segmented body. At will, these tattoos animate in three-dimensions, sliding across the creature's body to attack opponents with their razor-sharp edges. The tattoos give the bakemono an extra attack in combat and do three levels of aggravated damage if the attack succeeds.

Spirit Eye — The bakemono possesses an oversized, brilliant eye in the center of its forehead. This may either be the creature's only eye or else it may constitute a third eye. The bakemono can spend a Willpower Trait and use this eye to gaze across the Wall into the Mirror Lands for a period of time up to a scene in length. The creature may not look simultaneously into both the physical world and the Mirror Lands. These bakemono often serve as sentries for more powerful creatures of the Centipede or of the lords of the Yomi World.

Thousand Jaws — Bakemono with this ability have multiple mouths, which emerge from shoulders, belly, knees and other places on the creature's body. While all the mouths may not bite at the same time, the bakemono does gain one extra attack per combat turn doing two levels of aggravated damage. The mouths have no throat or gullet and cannot swallow what they bite; they can, however, hold flesh within their mouth cavity long enough for it to dissolve and be absorbed into the bakemono's body. This process creates a nauseating stench that adds to the creature's already repulsive presence.

Banes

These spirits of the Yomi world plague the Tapestry and serve as one of the chief targets of hengeyokai wrath. Banes come in many shapes and sizes; they possess a number of strange abilities and a variety of appearances. Storytellers should use their descriptive skills to bring across the hideous nature of these foul spirits, tributes to the fertile cesspool that is the Centipede's imagination. See **Book of the Wyrms** for examples of other Banes and **Laws of the Wild** for descriptions of Charms.

Bhuta

Shapeshifters who manipulate and bind themselves to mortal hosts, making them fomori, bhuta instill in their hosts their own shapeshifting ability (see *Fleshflow*) in order to practice their creative contortions as often as they like. Cunning and subtle to a high degree (for Wyrms spirits), Bhuta possess great arrogance and a sense of their own superiority. This conceit is their greatest



weakness, for many a clever hengeyokai has tricked a Bhuta into revealing itself to gloat — only to find itself the victim of an accomplished war sentai.

Willpower 6, Rage 4, Gnosis 8, Essence 40

Charms: *Corruption, Materialize, Shapeshift, Possession*

FaceJackets

These Banes wear tunics of flayed human faces stitched together, forming a hideous outer garment displayed with pride in the courts of the Hells. Face Jackets haunt places where atrocities take place, providing them with victims that are not missed. They manifest in the physical world, slice away a mortal's face with their sharp, razor-like claws and don their gruesome trophies. The Beast Courts have unanimously agreed that these monstrosities deserve nothing better than a quick and merciless extermination.

Willpower 6, Rage 8, Gnosis 7, Essence 35

Charms: *Materialize, Claws, Possession, Throw Glass*

Mukade

These horrific monsters prowl the Yomi Worlds, consuming all in their path. Appearing as huge centipedes, images of the Wyrms, they can attain the length of a train car and exude a carrion stench that announces their approach well ahead of their arrival. Mukade often have humanlike faces protruding from their chitinous heads. Their huge mandibles drip with corruption. Once, hengeyokai sought to slay a Mukade as a rite of passage; hengeyokai who did so could join the ranks of heroes. Now, too many other threats draw the hengeyokai to seek out lesser and more immediate evils. Meanwhile, the Mukade proliferate in the Yomi Worlds.

Willpower 7, Rage 10, Gnosis 6, Essence 50

Charms: *Armor, Blighted Touch, Create Fires, Reform, Shatter Glass, Umbraquake*

WaterGhosts

Mortals believe that these sobbing creatures are the unfortunate souls of drowned individuals. Hengeyokai, however, know the truth of these monsters. Water Ghosts are Banes created out of the despair of those *about* to drown. Ever thirsty for more waves of hopelessness, these foul spirits assume the shape of beautiful men and women and lure their victims into deep water. Some even take the forms of children or pretty stowaways and creep aboard ships or venture onto the shore to find potential victims.

Willpower 5, Rage 4, Gnosis 7, Essence 35

Charms: *Airt Sense, Flood, Materialize, Water Sense (as Forest Sense)*

YomiBloodGuards

These elite Banes serve as guardians in the realms of the Yomi World. Most often appearing as gigantic, well-muscled humans with the heads of beasts, they wear blackened armor and carry giant polearms. Their faces are permanently fixed in grimaces of hate and anger; their fists grasp their weapons so tightly that blood oozes down the hafts. Most often they guard the homes of important spirits of the Hells or else act as personal guards to some powerful bakemono.



Willpower 5, Rage 8, Gnosis 4, Power 40

Charms: *Armor, Blast Flame, Guard Domain (as Forest Sense), Incite Frenzy*

Kuei-jin

The vampires of the East are nothing like their Western cousins. Sunset People would likely be baffled by the eccentric evils of the Kuei-jin. Also called the Hungry Dead, these creatures are literally spirits from Hell that have returned to their bodies. There is no Embrace, no lineages from sire to child. They keep courts like the other *shen*, and maintain relations with the rest of the supernatural family of Asia, including *hengeyokai*. Many *hengeyokai* still remember the manipulations of the Fourth Age and yearn to offer up vampire flesh to avenge their ancestors, but as the Kuei-jin must surely have some greater purpose (else why should Heaven allow them to exist?), relations remain polite.

The Hungry Dead are considered to be debased things at best. Some are coldly callous to the suffering of others, while others revel in it and even encourage it with their own foul acts. Terrible as all this is, it is no less than what Fate intended for them. Kuei-jin were once mortals who lived or died so brutally that they fell instantly to Yomi upon death. The Yama Kings intended for them to serve as their playthings, but these souls somehow managed to avoid the guards of Hell and returned to their bodies. The Cycle allows this, for this fulfills the curse levied on the Wan Xian. The *hengeyokai* are grateful that the Emerald Mother (or, in the case of the Kumo, their dark patrons) does not permit such a horrible fate to befall them. As far as anyone can verify, no *hengeyokai* has ever returned as Kuei-jin. While there are tales of those extremely rare *hengeyokai* traitors who fell so far that they entered the Yomi world upon death, it's unlikely that the Yama Kings would allow such prizes to escape the very special treatment in store for them.

Kuei-jin feed on Chi, which they inject as blood, flesh or even breath. Some can even draw the Gnosis from *hengeyokai*. They do not burn in the sun like Western Kindred; instead, they slowly rot. They seek dragon nests whenever they can, which frequently puts them at odds with the Changing Breeds. Almost all follow some path of dark enlightenment, perhaps seeking to return to the blessed state of the Wan Xian, although most *hengeyokai* have their own opinions regarding the likelihood of *that*. The powers of the Hungry Dead are better simulated with *bakemono* powers rather than Gifts. They have been known to sprout bone weaponry from their bodies, detach their heads, shapeshift into strange demonic creatures and all manner of strange magic.

For more about the Hungry Dead, see **Laws of the East**.

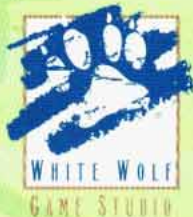
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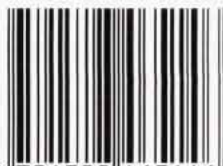
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