

Chapter 3: Gu

Humans are the spirit of all living beings and Gu are the essence of heaven and earth. Mortal Gu represent fragments of the great Dao, or laws of Heaven, and are ranked from 1 to 5, just like mortal Gu Masters. Gu come in many different forms, with bugs being a common motif, but there are just as many that take the forms of beasts and objects. Gu can be either wild or refined; wild Gu usually refers to those birthed from natural primeval essence. These can come into being in any manner of places as long as the conditions are right. Sometimes they are carried by beasts, or roaming the earth alone, or staying sedentary in the place they were born. Refined Gu are those under the direct control of a Gu Master. They obey the user's commands without fail, even destroying themselves with a single thought. The Gu Master can acquire refined Gu by refining wild Gu, creating them themselves using their Refinement skill, or acquiring them from others. Refined Gu may become wild Gu if their master is killed, but this process takes some time.

Gu are separated into different categories based on the effect created when they are activated. These categories have minimal mechanical importance but give a good idea of the Gu's purpose.

Attack - Shooting a blade, controlling someone's mind, or softening a person's bones are all attacks. If the primary use of the Gu is to kill or apply negative effects to a person against their will, it is an attack.

Manifestation - Creates an object, such as a beast, house, or even wings under the user's control. Can be permanent or temporary.

Guard - Forms a defensive barrier with the primary focus being blocking attacks.

Celerity - Enhances speed or maneuverability.

Divination - Gathers information, whether from a short distance or across the continent. Investigative Gu that increase a user's perception are included, as well as those that surveil areas or probe into people's minds.

Concealment - Hides the user's presence in any number of ways.

Tonic - Gu with a restorative effect. There exist tonic Gu for humans, beasts, and even other Gu.

Container - If objects can be placed inside, the Gu is typically a container. They can store objects, gu, and sometimes even people. Convenient for storing items and resources safely within your aperture.

Catalyst - A catch-all category for Gu that can be used to supplement other Gu and actions. Gu that increase the likelihood of refinement success, improve cultivation speed, or amplify the effects of other Gu are all catalysts.

Carver - Carves dao semi-permanently into the recipient. The most common carvers belong to strength and information path, used to increase a user's strength and create binding agreements, respectively.

Below is a sample statblock for the rank 1 *Moonlight Gu*. This is the signature Gu of the Gu Yue clan, and cannot be found anywhere else in Southern Border.

Moonlight Gu *Rank 1 Attack (This signifies that the Gu is of Rank 1, and is an Attack-type Gu)*

Cost: 5 portions (*This Gu costs 5 portions to activate for a rank 1 Gu Master. Rank 2 and above Gu Masters instead only spend 1 portion*)

Range: 10 meters

Health: 10 (*This Gu has 10 health. If it hits 0, it dies*)

Food: Moon orchid petals (3 primeval stones) (*This gu eats moon orchid petals. Since it is a rank 1 Gu, it eats every 3 days. When you have access to a market, you can substitute the materials with 3 primeval stones.*)

Effect: You hurl a flat, crescent-shaped beam of light. Make an attack roll with a -10 bonus. On a hit, deal 8 rending damage.

Vital Gu

The first Gu you refine gains the **[Vital]** keyword and becomes your Vital Gu. Yours and your Vital Gu's lifeforces are connected, and if your Vital Gu should die, you would as well. The Vital Gu has a major advantage, however; It cannot die due to backlash during refinement, instead dropping to 1 hp and being unusable in refinement until its hit points are restored to their maximum. This makes your Vital Gu a very important choice for progression, as you can attempt to refine it to a higher rank many times without worrying about its death.

To change your Vital Gu, you must spend a day in closed cultivation with the new Gu. When you change your Vital Gu, your current hit points are reduced to 1 as you suffer backlash. Your Vital Gu can be of any rank.

Rank

Mortal Gu have a rank of 1-5. Some Gu exist only at a single rank, others are found at several ranks, and others can only be raised in rank through refinement. For example, the rank 1 Dog Enslavement Gu can enslave a single dog. Rank 2 dog enslavement Gu can enslave a Hundred Beast King dog, rank 3 can enslave a Thousand Beast King dog, and so on, with each being found on increasingly strong dogs. The higher the rank of the Gu, the rarer it is, and their strength increases exponentially.

Gu above rank 5 are called Immortal Gu. Most can only be activated with Immortal Essence, though a few have other costs that can be paid by mortals. Forgetting mortal Gu Masters, even Rank 6 Gu Masters may live their entire life without owning an Immortal Gu. Each one is unique, and for however long it exists in the world, nobody else can refine a copy. When one appears, many Gu Immortals will fight to the death to get their hands on it, and when they fight, many tens of thousands of mortals can and do die in the crossfire.

Series

Some Gu belong to a series that spans multiple ranks. Some have additional effects based on their rank and will be listed separately. Others just scale up in numbers and will be under the same listing. If several values are inside curly braces, they represent the value at different ranks. If a Gu exists at ranks 3-5 and creates {1, 10, 100} fireballs, then it creates 1 fireball at rank 3, 10 at rank 4, and 100 at rank 5.

Price

Price is largely dependent on the rank of the Gu in question, but the market also needs to be considered. Relic Gu, for example, are quite rare and of an enormous help to a Gu Master's cultivation, which makes them significantly more expensive than other Gu of the same rank. Smelly Fart Gu, on the other hand, is practically worthless except as a refinement material, and thus would be cheaper than other Gu of the same rank. Use the prices below as a starting point.

Rank	Price
1	500
2	2,000
3	10,000
4	100,000

Rank	Price
5	250,000+

Rank 4 and rank 5 Gu are significantly rarer than Gu of rank 1 to 3. It may be difficult to find a seller, and you may even encounter schemes and resistances from your opposition when trying to buy them.

Primeval Essence Costs

Gu statblocks will have a number of portions it costs to activate. This assumes you are of the same rank as the Gu. If your rank is lower than the Gu, your primeval essence is too weak, and the Gu costs 4 times as many portions to activate for every rank above you the Gu is. If you are Rank 2 and try to activate a Rank 4 Gu that costs 10 portions, instead it will cost you 160 portions. If the Gu is below your rank, it only costs a single portion of your primeval essence to activate.

Wild Gu

Wild Gu are found in the wilderness, typically in an environment rich with Dao of the Gu's path. Wild Gu have a speed of 8 meters and will attempt to evade capture. Wild Gu can see through *concealments* of a lower rank than itself.

Refining Gu

Refining Gu can refer to two processes; the first is turning a wild Gu or a Gu refined by someone else into your own. The second is the act of following a recipe to create a new Gu. You cannot activate a Gu that is wild or belongs to someone else, unless the owner is willing.

Refining Existing Gu

When refining a wild Gu, the Gu must be subdued first. For smaller Gu this usually just involves catching it, but larger or more aggressive Gu may require you to weaken it in battle or through other means. If the Gu is owned by someone else, they can weaken their will to allow you to refine the Gu for free. Otherwise, your will is pit against theirs. Make an opposed Wisdom test against the owner of the Gu, with the higher ranked Gu Master gaining a -30 bonus for each rank they are above their opponent. If you win the test, the owner's will is driven out and you gain ownership of the Gu. If you lose, they retain control of the Gu, you take 1d4 damage to your soul, and you gain a stacking -10 bonus on subsequent rolls made to refine the Gu.

Once a wild Gu is subdued, you must be touching it to refine it into your own. To do so, you must spend 50 portions of primeval essence. If the Gu is of a higher rank than you, it costs 4 times more portions to refine for each rank above you.

If the Gu is below your rank, it costs a single portion of primeval essence to refine.

If you do not have enough primeval essence to do so in one sitting, you may have to refine the Gu for a longer period, using your natural recovery and/or primeval stones to supply the rest of the required portions. Taking a break from the refinement causes it to fail, and the primeval essence used in the process is lost.

Following a Recipe

Refinement recipes will have many required materials. Common materials are included in the recipe's primeval stone cost, assuming you have access to a market to purchase the materials. Rarer materials will be specified, and you may have to seek out a seller or go find these materials yourself. Some recipes will also have an associated ritual which will have to be completed for the refinement to succeed.

To begin refinement, you must have all the necessary materials on hand. Make a **Refinement** test with a penalty or bonus according to the recipe's difficulty. If you've already successfully refined the

Gu before, you gain a -20 bonus on the test. On a success, roll the failure die. If the number rolled is anything except a 1, you have succeeded in creating the Gu. If you do roll a 1, the refinement fails, representing the flat chance of failure all refinement recipes have. If you succeeded, however, cut the duration in half for every degree of success on the refinement test (barring any rituals involved that take a set amount of time).

On a failure, you and all Gu being used in the refinement process take a backlash. If you failed the roll by less than 10, or if the failure was caused by a 1 on the failure die, the backlash is negated. Otherwise, you take damage to your soul equal to the degrees of failure multiplied by the rank of the Gu you're attempting to refine. Every Gu being used in the refinement takes the same amount of damage to their health. If your Vital Gu would be killed in this manner, instead it drops to 1 hit point.

For every 8 hours you spend refining Gu without a rest, take 1d6 damage to your soul.

Sample Recipe: Four Flavors Liquor Worm *Four Flavors Liquor Worm*

Rank: 2

Cost: 25 primeval stones, 2 Rank 1 Liquor Worm Gu, Spicy wine, sweet wine, bitter wine, sour wine

Additional Gu: none

Duration: 4 hours

Difficulty: -10 bonus

Failure Die: d10

Market Value: 20,000 primeval stones

Improving a Recipe

You can leverage your **Deduction** skill to reduce the cost, duration, difficulty, or failure rate of any Gu recipe. To do so, you must have a **Refinement** skill of $(20 * \text{recipe rank})$ as well as *intermediate* attainment in the path of the Gu in question to attempt the refinement. If you do, start by paying 4 times the total cost of the recipe, to represent the materials needed to practice and attempt to improve the recipe. You must also spend an amount of time equal to 4 times the duration of the recipe in refinement. This time does not need to be sequential, and you can break as long as you need and however often you need. Then, make a **Deduction** test with a +10 penalty per rank of the Gu recipe. On a fumble, you do not succeed in improving the recipe and take damage to your soul equal to the degrees of failure multiplied by the rank of the recipe. On a failure, you do not succeed in improving the recipe, but don't face a backlash. On a success, you make a breakthrough and gain a new recipe for the Gu, with one of the following improvements:

- The failure die is increased by one step; d2 -> d4 -> d6 -> d8 -> d10 -> d12 -> d20 -> d100
- The difficulty is reduced by 10
- The primeval stone cost is reduced by 25% OR remove one additional cost (you cannot remove a Gu from the cost if the recipe is to advance that Gu up a rank)
- The duration is reduced by 50%

The recipe you've created is different from the previous one, and both can still be used and sold. The market value of the new recipe is worth double that of the original. You can improve a recipe a number of times equal to 10% of your refinement skill, rounded down.

Creating a Recipe

Creating a recipe is a collaborative effort between the player and GM.

Feeding Gu

Gu are living beings and need to be fed. What they eat is determined by the Gu, while how often they eat is determined by the rank. Some Gu will have a number of primeval stones in parenthesis next to

their food. If you have access to a market, you can spend that number of primeval stones for a feeding. Gu also cannot be fed during combat.

Rank	Interval
1	3 days
2	7 days
3	30 days
4	250 days
5	10 years

If the food does not have a primeval stone cost next to it, that does not mean it is impossible to purchase, just that it is a rarer material. You can find your own out in the Southern Border, or seek out a seller of rare items.

To track food, mark the Gu's feeding interval in days inside the "Days Until Feeding" column on your Gu sheet. Every time a day passes in game, subtract 1 from the number. When the Gu eats, set it back to the original feeding interval. If it hits -1, the Gu starves to death. You can feed a Gu outside of combat whenever you wish as long as you have the materials.

Detonating Gu

As a reaction or at any time during their turn, a Gu Master can self-detonate any Gu owned and refined by them with a single thought. The Gu Master must be conscious to do so, and can detonate as many or as few Gu as they want, from any distance. If the Gu is being suppressed, for example by the land spirit of a blessed land, the Gu Master cannot self-detonate it. Otherwise, the chosen Gu instantly die, with no other effects. If the Gu has a self-detonation ability, it does not trigger, since the Gu was not activated.

Healing Gu

Gu have a pool of hit points, and thus need to be healed when damaged. Most Gu heal back to full health when they are fed. Some Gu can only be healed by other Gu or an obscure process.

Gu against Gu

Sometimes the effects of Gu will be pit against one another. In most circumstances, the higher rank Gu's effect takes precedence. If both are the same rank, the defending Gu should block the effect. For example, if a Gu Master is attacked by Rank 2 Vein Burst Gu, but has strengthened his blood vessels with Rank 2 Iron Artery Gu, then he would be unaffected, despite neither Gu explicitly mentioning the interaction. Concealments are considered the defender when pit against Divinations.

The Gu system has a lot of moving parts, and it would be unfun and tedious if every effect listed every possible counter and use case. When there's uncertainty about whether a Gu would affect a target, use common sense, and if that fails the GM will have to make a ruling.

If a Gu would negate the damage of a Gu of higher rank (like a guard Gu that negates damage of a certain type), instead it reduces it to 1/2 (rounded down).

Gu Keywords

Deductive

When activated, [**Deductive**] Gu unlock a special *Deduction* action. To take it, you must spend an hour deducing a specific subject and make a **Deduction** test. Penalties and Bonuses are determined by the amount of supporting information available to you. The subject can be something that occurred in the past, such as who might have committed a murder, or something happening in the present or future,

like why a rival clan may have purchased a huge amount of an unusual refinement material. Deductions cannot create information out of thin air, and a success does not necessarily mean your deduction is correct if you lack a key piece of evidence. For every degree of success on the check, however, you gain one additional conclusion about the subject.

Dao

Gu with the **[Dao]** keyword contain much higher traces of dao than most mortal Gu. Dao of different paths naturally conflict, and a Gu Master cannot gain the effect from a **[Dao]** Gu if they are already under the effect of a **[Dao]** Gu of a different path.

Defensive

[Defensive] Gu can be activated as a reaction to being hit by or affected by another Gu or attack.

Fast

[Fast] Gu have a movement of 12 meters instead of 8.

Expendable X

[Expendable] Gu are destroyed after X uses. If there is no number, the Gu can only be used a single time before it is destroyed.

Low Vitality

[Low Vitality] Gu do not regenerate hit points when they are fed. Most will clarify the necessary Gu or process used to recover their health instead.

Piercing

[Piercing] Gu can pierce through any material that lacks dao. The only barriers with dao would be either refinement materials or barriers created by Gu. Mundane armor worn by a creature struck by a **[Piercing]** attack does not reduce the damage of the attack, and the armor takes damage equal to the damage of the attack to its hit points.

Shield

When you take damage, it is first dealt to any active **[Shield]** Gu, so long as the Gu can block that damage type. If you use a **[Shield]** Gu to reduce damage, the Gu takes that damage to its hitpoints. If a **[Shield]** Gu would die from sustaining an attack while active, you may use a reaction to deactivate the Gu at 1 hit point, taking the remaining damage to your hit points or another **[Shield]** Gu.

If you have multiple **[Shield]** Gu active, you choose in what order they absorb damage and can split incoming damage between any number of active **[Shield]** Gu. This way, if you have a shield that negates fire damage and another that negates rending damage, you could split all rending and fire damage in a way that negates all of the incoming damage.

Size

If size is not listed, the Gu is the most common size, **[Tiny]**; that of an insect. If the Gu is **[Small]** it is the size of a child, and **[Medium]** is the size of a man. **[Large]** Gu take up 4 squares when outside of your aperture, and **[Huge]** Gu take up any area greater than 9 squares.

Size	Penalty/Bonus to Hit
Tiny	+40
Small	+20

Size	Penalty/Bonus to Hit
Medium	0
Large	-20
Huge	-40

Steed

A **[Steed]** Gu can be ridden while outside your aperture. While mounted, your movement is replaced with the **[Steed]** Gu's movement statistics.

Supplementary

Supplementary Gu can change the properties of your subsequent activations. When used outside of killer moves, **[Supplementary]** Gu have no effect on Gu of a higher rank than itself. When used as supplementary Gu in a killer move, you will require a number of the same **[Supplementary]** Gu to properly apply the effect equal to $2^{(\text{killer move rank} - [\text{Supplementary}] \text{ Gu rank})}$.

Sustained

You must pay the cost of **[Sustained]** Gu at the start of each of your turns as long as you keep the effect active. Paying the cost does not use one of your activations. While a Gu is being sustained, it cannot be activated (because it is already active). If you are sustaining more than 1 Gu at the same time, take 1 damage to your soul for every Gu being sustained above your **Activations** attribute at the start of each of your turns.

You may stop sustaining a Gu at any time, whether or not it is your turn. If you fall unconscious or are *stunned*, you automatically stop sustaining all Gu.

Unreactable

Attacks made with **[Unreactable]** Gu are too fast for the defending Gu master to react in time. When a Gu Master uses a reaction in response to the activation or effect of an **[Unreactable]** Gu, their reaction is delayed until after the Gu's successful activation and application of its effect.

Vital

A Gu Master can only have 1 **[Vital]** Gu at a time. If a Gu with the **[Vital]** keyword dies, the owner of the Gu dies as well. When taking damage from refinement backlash, a **[Vital]** Gu cannot be brought below 1 hit point.

Creating Unique Gu

While I've made an expansive list of many of the Gu paths, in reality there is a basically unlimited number of Gu. Once you're more familiar with the system and balance, you're encouraged to make your own Gu. Here are some guidelines;

- Gu type (attack, guard, celerity, etc.) has no mechanical effect and only exists for easier categorization.
- Rank 5 Gu are at the peak of the mortal realm, and have the power to clear sections of a battlefield single handedly. Rank 1 Gu are sometimes strong enough to kill a person. Keep in mind that a Gu of higher rank should usually have an advantage over lower ranked Gu.
- The rules already account for the differing primeval essence quality between ranks. Costs are proportional to the power of the Gu within its rank. A rank 1 Gu with a high cost can be similar in strength to a rank 2 Gu with low cost.
- Health is usually only relevant to Gu with the **[Shield]** or **[Steed]** keywords or for refinement. Gu with higher health are more likely to survive backlash from refinement and are thus more viable for improvement.

- Range can be Self (an area of effect centered on yourself or an effect that only applies to the user), Touch, or a distance in meters.
- Duration can be permanent or have a specified duration. Duration can be in the form of time (minutes/hours/days/years) or with respect to the turn. If the Gu applies an effect for 1 turn, its typically better to say “until the end of your/their next turn.” This is because the number of turns remaining on an effect ticks down at the end of the creature’s turn; if you buff yourself on your turn, and the duration of the effect is 1 turn, it would disappear at the end of your turn and not be active when you take any of your reactions outside your turn.
- Overall, the strength of the Gu should be relative to all these factors. If it is more expensive in primeval essence, has a short range, eats expensive food, and/or has major drawbacks to its use, the power of the Gu should be increased relatively. This can mean more damage, more health (for [**Shield**] Gu), making the Gu harder to counter, and so on. A Gu that costs 2 portions, eats dirt, and affects 1km better have a much weaker effect than other Gu in its rank. Adding the [**Expendable**] or [**Low Vitality**] keywords can also be used to balance a Gu that’s on the stronger side.

Most importantly, be creative! There is a Gu for any purpose you can think of. There are Gu suited to cure any affliction, make any attack, cause any event that you can think of. Some Gu might seem practically useless, but they can always be used to improve some killer move or refine a new Gu.