

Mind's Eye Theatre™

# LAWs *of the* EAST



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of the



## To Hell and Back

You remember searing winds and grinning devils. You remember your failure. You remember swearing that you would pay your debts to Heaven one way or another. And with that, you clawed your way out of the bowels of Yomi and back into the shell of your body. That was the easy part...

## The Heavenward Path Beckons

Laws of the East is a guide to creating and playing the Kuei-jin, one of the mysterious vampires of Asia. Completely unlike their Western brethren, the Kuei-jin seek a return from their fallen state on a road fraught with peril — from the machinations of the terrible Yama Kings to the whispers of the Demon that lurks in every heart. Here is everything you'll need to play an Eastern vampire — from Dharmas to Disciplines — or if you wish to stalk the night-people as one of the solitary Shih or even as a member of Strike Force Zero.



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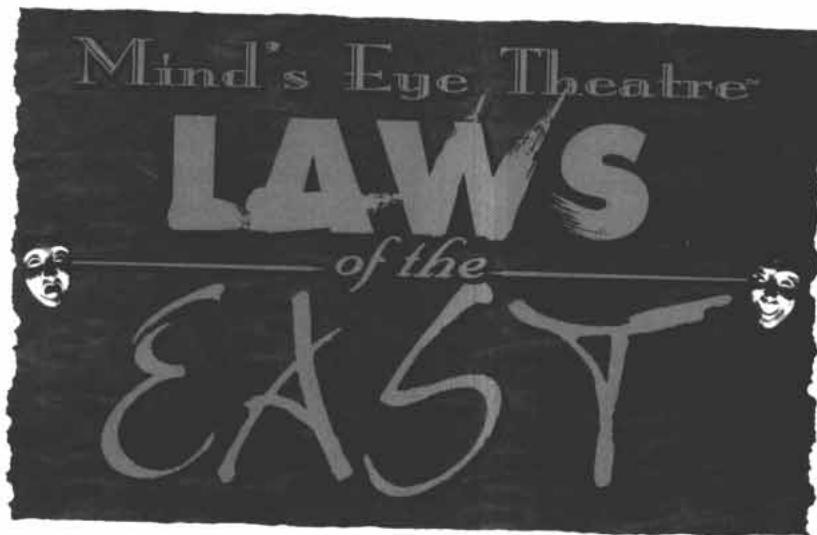
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## CREDITS

**Written by:** Peter Woodworth

**Developed by:** Cynthia Summers

**Edited by:** Carl Bowen

**Previously published material has appeared in:** Laws of the Night, Oblivion, Kindred of the East, Demon Hunter X, Kindred of the East Companion, The Thousand Hells

**Art Direction by:** Richard Thomas

**Art by:** Laura Robles

**Layout and Typesetting by:** Becky Jollensten

**Cover Design by:** Becky Jollensten

**Playtesters:** Bruce Baugh, Scott Bogumil, Diedre Brooks, Kwei-Cee Chu, Mike Elsner, Amanda Gallagher, Erik Gurule-Long, Brian Hudson, Nicole Knight, Josh Moore



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

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Mind's Eye Theatre

# LAW<sup>S</sup>

of the

# EAST

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robert wheeler (order #36511)

# LEAVES OF AUTUMN: A FACE OF THE SECOND BREATH

Dear Umeiko,

My *sifu*, Tadashi Fujiwara, instructed me to write to you and describe my Second Breath. He thought it would be helpful to me, a reminder of why I was here, particularly after the poor results of our *wu*'s last mission. I would have told him that I was past the age for assignments, but a Fujiwara is not used to being balked.

I was the child of ambitious parents, which may not sound very unusual in Japan, but mine were exceptionally so. My father was a high-ranking civil servant, and my mother the daughter of one. Both came from families where civil service was considered both a high honor and a duty. All my life my parents held the hope that I would follow in the footsteps of my father, my grandfather, and more relatives than I care to relate. My destiny was mapped out for me from the beginning.

I worked hard in school, the better to get into college, and as a matter of course, I was asked by a rather timid student named Kenji if I could tutor him. In those days, asking another student for help was tantamount to admitting weakness, and I was appalled that he would be so revealing. I accepted, and considered how I could best use this to my advantage, even as I worked alongside him. I extracted payments from him, such as cash, his lunch or some trinket that caught my fancy. I even had him running my messages. My parents, of course, saw this leech as draining away my talents, which I could put to much better use in cram school. I didn't agree, believing myself more than capable of handling things, but I did often let him know that I was making a great sacrifice for such a blockhead.

Kenji took the abuse in stride. He willingly took on whatever assignment I gave him, gladly handed over what little cash he had, and accepted all my scorn as being merely the right and due. He even seemed to like it.

After a semester of struggling with him, I cut him off. I claimed it was because I needed to study myself, and couldn't waste time on him. It was right before exams, and I thought for sure that he would slide into helplessness. Imagine my shock, then, when Kenji came rushing to find me after the scores were posted — he had managed to score much higher than expected, enough to consider university, and he babbled that he owed it all to me. It was like fire in my ears, and my face burned with shame. I had abused him, and he thought I was his



savior. For the first time, I understood what it was like to be someone's hero and idol, and instead of savoring it, I felt dirty.

I continued to see Kenji and tutor him through public school. He would never be quite as smart, quite as good-looking or quite as polished as myself, but he seemed to see me as his ideal to strive for. Sometimes it enraged me and I would heap scorn on him, and sometimes I felt sorry for him and treated him kindly. If he noticed a difference, he never mentioned it. He was always a gentle soul, always polite, even to those who sneered at him, and especially me.

Years passed, and Kenji and I went to university. Though apart, he continued to call on me for advice, and I would give it when in the mood. More and more, he would write me letters simply for chat's sake, and always addressed me warmly. I didn't think of him as a friend, but there was something creeping into me that I could not define. I thought about him at odd moments, and felt strangely disappointed when there was no letter from him.

When I finished university, after many cups of tea and much first-impressing, I did indeed become a civil servant as my parents had wished. Kenji was less fortunate in his job search, but did manage to acquire an office position through his own work (although he insisted that I had given him guidance). We both advanced, he more slowly, but every time I did, he celebrated by sending something that was both cheap and beyond his means to give. Eventually, it happened that I threw a party to celebrate a particular promotion, and in some fit of malice perhaps, I invited Kenji.

A sad figure he cut among these powermongers, these movers and shakers. Though he was not built much differently than them, he seemed fearful to be in their company, and I was of no help whatsoever. He was deferent and polite, but always with the eyes of a rabbit among a nest of snakes. Everywhere, the comments about the cheapness of his suit, his "scuttling manner", and questions to me about why I should keep company with such a "creature." When the sake had passed too many times, the talk became a little vulgar, and I, thinking to preserve my dignity in the face of all this, blurted out that Kenji was a pet project of mine, had been since we were classmates, and frankly wouldn't have succeeded at anything at all if it hadn't been for me.

When I said those words, the party had become very quiet, so my voice was quite loud. People were looking at me — the women in their kimono and evening gowns, the men in their suits, and in the middle of them all was Kenji. He looked far less like a man of similar age to myself, and more like a schoolboy in those long moments. He stared straight back at me, unable to speak, his eyes seeming to grow big in his face. Everything about him seemed to be in perfect clarity, while the rest of the party faded out to fuzzy grays and browns.

It finally came to me, in a moment that I cannot drive from my mind, even when I'm drunk. In a single fell swoop, I had betrayed Kenji, all that he had felt for me, and everything that had passed between us. He had loved me like a friend, had trusted me implicitly. I had betrayed this innocent man. I had betrayed my friend.

I couldn't live with the shame. Everyone seemed to be looking at me, and everything seemed to be wrong in the worst ways. I charged out into the night, got stinking drunk, and wandered into the path of a bus.

If I thought I could erase my sin, myself, from the world, I was in for a surprise.

What can I say about Yomi? It was the same terrible shame over and over and over again, tormented by demons who sometimes looked like Kenji, or worse, who looked like me, heaping the same kind of scorn as I had on Kenji. When the demons weren't having their way with me, I was surrounded by classmates, who were teasing me over the thick glasses clamped to my face or the ugly shoes strapped to my feet. I walked through long trackless wastes of blistering cold where the snow was more like tiny icy shards of glass, struggling with my clumsy shoes and a satchel so heavy that I had to drag it, knowing that I must not be late, but that I always would be. Sometimes I would see my teachers, and they would call on me for answers to questions I didn't know, with the books written in gibberish. I took tests for which I was not prepared, and no matter how I struggled, I failed miserably and was



humiliated by teacher and students. On "holidays", there was a particularly creative demon who subjected me to whatever torments using whatever grab-bag of tools he had found. Over and over and over, I realized, to the marrow of my spirit-bones, what a terrible wrong I had done on a soul who had done nothing to deserve it.

It was that shame that eventually drove me out of Yomi — I had injured my friend for no reason than my own selfishness. I had tormented him and those like him to prove my non-existent superiority. Shame poked me in the back all the way up the Scarlet Path, prodded me through the sticky red mud and Goblin Jungle, back into my body, and goaded me not to back down from my P'o when we faced each other over that neglected grave and my body. When that first breath knifed through my dead lungs, I howled — perhaps from the pain, perhaps from grief, or even perhaps because it was the first sound I had made in years.

In the *ré*, I was further led to understand what I had done. While I labored under the tutelage of my *sifu* — one of the Fujiwara, who are notoriously intolerant of failure — I found myself grateful for any scrap or crumb of recognition or knowledge, no matter who it came from. Such often came at the price of being mocked for my poor skills, my appearance or some other flaw that did not measure up to the exacting standards of my elders. Karma, the gods of *joss*, every force in the world that had a finger upon such things seemed determined that I should know exactly what wrong I had done a thousand thousand times.

I found Kenji not long after my *ré* ended. He was still working away at that low-end manager's job, still slaving and suffering, and praying he'd never be noticed again. He looked so old, Umeiko, growing that haggard, tired face that I see in the mortals around me, the rest of the Kenjis — the neglected, the abused, the forgotten, who did nothing to deserve what's been done to them, except be a little slower, a little quieter, a little less than someone's standards.

I've been working on finding him a wife — a challenge for Lady Uguisu, but she prefers it thus, claiming she produces the best finds for more difficult cases. I want him to have a woman who will look up to him and be his greatest fan, as I think that will do more for his self-confidence. I also discovered that he has a fine eye for antiques — I heard him speaking to a dealer once regarding some pieces of raku pottery, and Hideo, who prides himself on his craftsmanship and knowledge of the art, was quite amazed with the accuracy of Kenji's knowledge. Hideo is now seeking a way to make *joss* and circumstance do his bidding, that Kenji will take up a position with his shop, where I think he will finally succeed as he has wanted to. Most of all, I'm trying to make sure he never learns who I am. I can't make up for what I did to him in life, and I'm sure he wishes nothing to do with me, so I hope that in death, I can at least drive away some of that misery I created. For Kenji, for the woman who will be his wife, for the children they will have.

I walk in the streets, and they are all around me, these Kenjis, who have been abused and humiliated by men like me — like I was — I am not certain which it is. I see and hear them being dressed down by managers, by other men, all because they had the misfortune to be born. If there is one thing I have learned through all this, it is that each man is his own treasure, and who is to say if Heaven's eyes find a single pearl to be worth more than a whole string worn by an emperor? Who shall determine the value of these men? Not these sneering ones as I was. No — I shall let Heaven be the judge of the Kenjis. I shall be the judge of their "judges."

Yours, in honor and penance,  
Takeo Yoshiro  
Of the Gray Willow Screen Wu



robert wheeler (order #36511)



# CHAPTER One: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## WHAT THIS Book Is

You hold in your hands *Laws of the East*, a live-action adaptation of *Kindred of the East*, the *Kindred of the East Companion* and *Demon Hunter X*. No longer are pale Western devils the focus of the tales of the night. Now the disciplined, enigmatic creatures of Eastern legend have come to the fore. Forget what you know about the World of Darkness. Enter the exotic and deadly mysteries of Asia, and discover what it truly is to walk among the supernatural.

## THE RULES OF SAFETY

Behave yourself so that everyone can enjoy this game. *Laws of the East* is to be played in the home, at conventions or at other safe locations. At all times, you should remember that it is a game, only a game and nothing but a game. If you feel yourself getting too wrapped up in what's going on, take a step back from game-play for a moment. It's for your own good.

## WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

We have been telling each other stories since the earliest days, when cavemen acted out the tales of their hunts around their fires. Live-action roleplaying (LARP), which grew out of the table-top roleplaying games of the '70s, is just the kind of "participatory" tale-telling that we can still recognize among cultures around the globe. It places the same emphasis on character and story that you can find in the myths of our most ancient cultures, and that tradition leads to the creation of what we call "storyteller" games.



# WHAT IS MIND'S EYE THEATRE?

This game is probably different from any game you have played before. In many ways, it is not really a game at all. You will find that this game has more in common with childhood games of adventure than with card games or Monopoly-type board games. This book contains all the information necessary to catapult you into worlds of imagination. You create the action, and you choose your own paths. We have a name for this style of game. We call it **Mind's Eye Theatre**.

Playing **Mind's Eye Theatre** is like being in a movie. You and your friends portray the main characters, but the script follows your decisions. The director of this improvisational movie is called the Storyteller. He, along with his assistants, called Narrators, creates the stage and the minor characters with whom you interact during your adventure. Most scenes play out in real-time, and always in character. You should only break character when a rules dispute or a change of scene requires adjudication from the Storyteller or Narrators.

## THE CHARACTER

When you play **Laws of the East**, you take on the persona of a soul returned from the hellish ravages of the Underworld to fulfill an unfinished destiny in the world of the living. You walk above society's laws, preying on mortals to survive, yet you must also obey the moral and temporal laws that your own beliefs and your role of the greater scheme of things ordain for you. Discipline is everything (whether you find it in adhering to the ways of your higher self or in directing the raging Demon within), for without discipline you are nothing but a mindless monster that is better off destroyed. It is a path beset with perils to challenge even the sturdiest soul, filled with moments of transcendent enlightenment and periods of despair and frustration, and only those who master themselves can hope to prevail. Your character can be anyone from any walk of life. The only limit on your character concept (besides the rules) is your imagination. You create a character, then roleplay her over the course of a story and perhaps a chronicle (a series of connected stories). You decide what your character does and says. You decide what risks to accept or decline.

During the game, you speak as your character, unless you're talking to a Narrator or Storyteller. Because most of what a **Mind's Eye Theatre** player perceives depends on the characters around him, players must be vivid and expressive. The characters direct the plot, but at the same time, the events of the game guide and develop the characters, helping them to achieve the story's goals. To an extent you have a responsibility as a player in a storytelling game that goes beyond portraying your character. You need to consider the story as a whole and your role in making sure that other players enjoy the game.

Creating a character for **Laws of the East** is easy, and it takes only a few moments. Once you've taken the few necessary steps to define a basic character, you can play the game. There's another phase to creating a character, though; one that makes playing **Mind's Eye Theatre** all the more rewarding. Your character should be more than just a series of Traits and numbers. Rather, she should be a living, breathing personality with a past, motives, drives, likes, dislikes — everything you want to see from a character in a movie or a novel. It's a good idea to take time to figure out *who* your character is as well as what she is before you start playing. While certain details and personality traits will emerge after you play her a few times, you'll want to have the basics in place before you start playing.



## THE ONLY RULES THAT MATTER

Here are the rules of Mind's Eye Theatre (MET), the only rules that absolutely must always be obeyed. They are common-sense guidelines to keep everyone—other players, yourself, strangers in the area and the police—safe and happy with your game.

These rules are designed to limit the opportunities anyone has to destroy the fun of your game. They're not intended to interfere with gameplay or your enjoyment; they're here to make sure that you play sensibly and safely.

### #1 - IT'S ONLY A GAME

This rule is the most important one, by far. If a character is killed, if a plot falls apart, if a rival wins the day, it's still only a game. Don't take things too seriously, as that will spoil not only your fun but also the fun of everyone around you.

Leave the game behind when it ends. Playing **Laws of the East** is a lot of fun; spending time talking about the game is great. However, calling the person who plays the ancestor at 4:13 A.M. on Sunday to discuss an idea your character has for a new Scarlet Screen is another matter entirely. Make sure to keep a little perspective.

### #2 - NO TOUCHING

Never actually employ physical contact with other players, no matter how careful you are. Accidents happen, and someone will get hurt. Rely on the rules to cover physical logistics.

### #3 - NO STUNTS

Never climb, jump, run, leap or swing from anything during a game. Keep the "action" in your action low-key. If you can imagine you're a bloodsucking fisherman returned from death to atone for his daughter's dishonor, you can imagine that you're diving across a table as well. Avoid attracting the attention of people who aren't playing, and use your imagination to its fullest.

### #4 - NO WEAPONS

Fake or real weapons of any sort are absolutely forbidden. Even obviously silly toy weapons are not allowed. Such props give other people the wrong impression as to what you are doing, and they could conceivably be mistaken for the real thing in the dark. Use item cards to represent weapons instead, no matter how cool you think it would be to use a pair of water pistols for your Chow Yun-Fat impression.

### #5 - NO DRUGS OR DRINKING

This one is a real no-brainer. Drugs and alcohol do not encourage peak performance. They reduce your ability to think and react, meaning that your roleplaying ability will be impaired, among other things. Players impaired by drugs or alcohol are a danger to other players, and to the game as a whole. There's nothing wrong with *playing* a character who's drunk or stoned, but actually bringing such stuff to a game is in bad taste at best and illegal at worst. Don't do it.



## #6 - BE MINDFUL OF OTHERS

Remember, not everyone you see, or who sees you, is playing the game. A game can be unnerving or even frightening to passers-by. If you are in a public area, be considerate of "mundanes" in your vicinity, and make sure that your game-play actions are not going to alarm anyone. Trying to explain to a policeman at 3 A.M. that the reason a player was screaming for help was only because you banished his character to Yomi is often an exercise in futility.

## #7 - THE RULES ARE FLEXIBLE

Feel free to ignore or adjust any of the rules in this book if doing so will make your game better. We at White Wolf call this tenet "The Golden Rule." If some rule included in this book (beyond the eight listed here) doesn't work for your troupe, change it. Just be consistent and fair. Nobody likes rules that change every week or "no-win" scenarios. If your troupe finds a new way to handle, say, the Yomi World, that works better for you than the one in this book, go for it. The idea is to have fun.

## #8 - HAVE FUN

Not "Win." Not "Go out and kill everyone else." Just "Have fun." The object of *Laws of the East* is not to win. In fact, there are no rules for "winning." The goal is to tell great stories, not to achieve superiority over the other players. In *Laws of the East* it's not about how the game ends, it's about the journey and what happens along the way.

Characters are the heart and soul of a story. Without them, all the patient efforts of the Storyteller would be for naught. Appreciate the Storyteller's efforts by following the rules and taking an active part in the game.

### NARRATORS

In *Laws of the East*, Narrators are the people who help the Storyteller present adventures. Narrators are the impartial judges who describe scenes and events that cannot be staged. They adjudicate rules and occasionally play the roles of antagonists as well. Generally, enlisting the aid of one Narrator for every 10 players makes for a good ratio. The best number of Narrators for your game usually depends on the gaming experience of the players; the more experienced your players, in all probability the fewer Narrators they'll need. Narrators usually play characters of their own as well as helping out certain situations. That way they can be a part of the action instead of just trying to correct it from the outside.

### STORYTELLER

Every game must have a Storyteller who serves as the ultimate authority and final judge in any game of *Laws of the East* you play. The Storyteller creates the basic elements of the plot and makes sure that the story unfolds well—in addition to doing everything the Narrators do. Storytelling is a demanding job, but it is also a very rewarding one, for it is the Storyteller who creates the framework on which the players build their experiences.

The Storyteller makes certain the story has content, interesting hooks and a narrative flow. Not that a Storyteller should just sit back and dictate the plot—characters who don't have free will are no fun to play. Instead, a Storyteller creates the elements of the plot, then turns players loose in order to see what happens.



During the game, the Storyteller must be watchful and ready to create new elements to make sure that the story works out well. He is also responsible for safety, ensuring that all of the players have something to do and that everyone is abiding by the rules. Although performing all of these tasks simultaneously can be exhausting, the sense of accomplishment gained from creating a successful story makes the whole process worthwhile.

In the end, the goal of **Laws of the East** is for everyone to have fun.

## Props

Props can be anything that the Storyteller approves of that helps to define your character, including costumes, makeup and jewelry. Have fun and employ any props that you feel are necessary to enhance your character. However, if you have any doubts as to whether a prop (such as anything remotely resembling a weapon) will be allowed in-game, consult your Storyteller and abide by her decision.

## Elegantly Simple

This game was designed to be easy to learn and easier to play. The rules are aimed at resolving conflicts quickly so that players can stay with the story without ever stepping outside their characters to figure out what happens. We have made every effort to create rules that maintain the integrity of the story and the background in which the story is set.

In **Laws of the East**, you take the part of one of the Kuei-jin, an Asian vampire. Most of **Laws of the East** is dedicated to describing the ways and powers of these beings, with a smaller section devoted to those dedicated souls who dare to hunt the shen on their home ground. However, these elements are just a small sample of the range of the Eastern supernatural kingdom. Tales of laughter and tragedy, passion and sorrow, strife and serenity stretch ahead of you, borne on the back of a Wheel of Ages that grinds closer to a catastrophic change with each passing day. Welcome to Mind's Eye Theater: **Laws of the East**.

# The Middle Kingdom

For those of you familiar with the World of Darkness, an earlier directive will now be repeated: Forget what you know about vampires, werewolves, spirits or any other supernatural beings. Most Eastern creatures abide by such different rules that any knowledge of their Western counterparts will only reveal you as one of the barbarians to whom they are so directly opposed. For those of you unfamiliar with previous World of Darkness releases, prepare for a unique combination of modern horror with ancient legend as the Middle Kingdom comes alive before your very eyes.

The Middle Kingdom resembles the rest of the World of Darkness in many respects. Days pass by much as they have for millennia: Children are born, they grow up, they follow careers, they grow old and they die. Modern life rushes in every direction through the crowded city streets, spreading progress and pollution alike in its wake. In isolated peasant villages, ways of farming deemed old by the life span of forests continue on as they have for generations, heedless of the modern crush only miles away. Many ancient superstitions still hold sway, from offerings to placate angry spirits to the hallowed art of *feng shui*, and people whisper behind closed doors of the Night People who hold entire regions in their grasp. The bleak touch of the World of Darkness lies heavily on this world. The times are darker, the world dirtier, the streets more dangerous, the people harder. Pain, suffering, corruption and violence are even more common, and governments that are harsh



## YEAR OF THE LOTUS

The basic premise of *Laws of the East* derives from the table-top roleplaying game books *Kindred of the East*, *Kindred of the East Companion* and (to a lesser extent) *Demon Hunter X*. These books are derived, in turn, from *Vampire: The Masquerade*. It is not necessary to own or know any table-top materials in order to play *Laws of the East*, but the source material they contain (especially any of the books in the Year of the Lotus series) can be adapted easily for games of *Laws of the East*.

and repressive in our world lengthen into nightmare shadows that loom over every part of their citizens' lives.

However, the Middle Kingdom encompasses more than just the gothic ambiance or punk rage of the rest of the World of Darkness. It is a world where the supernatural is not only recognized but expected, where the legacy of ancient civilizations and the traditions they established make it possible for the worlds of spirits and men to interact. Understanding this relationship, and the attitudes that stem from it, is a crucial step in understanding the Middle Kingdom as a whole.

### THE SHEN

Supernatural beings exist in the same array of varieties that can be found in the West, even if their methods are different. Vampires (*Kuei-jin*) stalk city streets while shapeshifters (*hengeyokai*) prowl the wilderness, and magicians (*chi'n ta*) ply their secret arts. Ghosts (*kuei*) haunt the living from a dark world just beyond their senses, while faeries (*hsien*) punish those who dishonor the ancient ways. Many of the same ancient rivalries and hatreds of the West can still be found here, such as the enmity between vampires and werewolves, but a sense of belonging to a larger community of spirit beings binds all together under a common destiny of sorts. Most Eastern supernaturals use the Chinese term "shen" to express this unique bond with each other.

*Shen* also take few precautions against discovery in the Middle Kingdom. Discretion is of the highest importance to all *shen*, from the courts of the *Kuei-jin* to the packs of *hengeyokai*, and those who flaunt themselves have a way of disappearing or at least receiving a painful lesson on the importance of minding their manners. Fortunately, the legends and superstitions of many Asian cultures hold the supernatural to be a fact of life, as inevitable as the American notion of death and taxes, and this acceptance provides the *shen* freedom to operate as long as they do not overstep their traditional boundaries. More than one Western barbarian has wandered into a city slum only to find it guarded by a supernatural patron of some kind, who exists in full sight of the community, rendering them favors in exchange for their silence about his existence. Truth be told, most folk would rather leave the Night People to their matters than become involved, an attitude which helps keep the *shen* from prying eyes more than anything else.

### EXISTENCE IN BALANCE: YIN AND YANG

The central aspect of the philosophy of the *shen* in the Middle Kingdom is the belief in Yin and Yang, the negative and positive elements that make up the universe. Yang is the force of life, creativity and action, while Yin is the force of death, negativity and passivity. Yin is often personified as the Ebon Dragon, while Yang is called the Scarlet Queen. Care should be taken to understand that Yang



is not necessarily good, nor Yin necessarily evil. As the *shen* understand it, both forces are necessary to sustain the cosmos, and such a simplistic distinction invites a disruption of the balance. For example, a being with a high amount of Yin energy may seem cold and callous, but one overflowing with Yang is often highly demanding and impulsive, and neither make for good company. Rather than suppress a raging Beast, most Kuei-jin strive to maintain harmony in their soul and thus attune themselves to their greater purpose in the All rather than being tugged one way or another by imbalance.

## THE MANY WORLDS

Yin and Yang are far from mere notions in the Middle Kingdom. The name for the realm itself derives in part from its position between the various spirit worlds. The Middle Kingdom stands at the nexus of countless spirit domains, the bulk of which are loosely divided into the Yin, Yang and Yomi Worlds. Once all of these realms overlapped with reality, but that day has long passed, and it gets harder and harder to travel beyond the earthly realm every year. One must first cross a spiritual barrier known as the Wall in order to visit the spirit realms, and safety is far from assured even then.

The Yin World is the realm of the dead, where human souls pass on to their final reward or linger to resolve to tasks they could not attend to in life. Much of that world appears to be a decaying, depressing reflection of the Middle Kingdom, but a journey deeper into this bleak realm reveals a land without the slightest counterpart in mortal reality, known as the Dark Kingdom of Jade by those who have studied its mysteries. It is a haunting, desolate land of bleached colors and imposing structures carved from White Jade (which is forged from the souls of unfortunates deemed unworthy of residing in the Dark Kingdom), ruled by the first sovereign emperor of China, Yu Huang. The Dark Kingdom of Jade extends over almost all of Asia, thanks to the emperor's ruthless policies, and his minions patrol the outlying lands regularly for new souls or stragglers to feed to the forges. Few living (or undead) beings care to come here on anything but the most dire business, as the wraiths of this land make bitter enemies.

## CULTURE SHOCK

Astute players, especially those of Asian heritage, will likely notice a great deal of cultural crossover in this book, which means that sooner or later some of the material will appear to contradict a particular nation's traditions or legends. Furthermore, the bulk of the phrases in the Middle Kingdom lexicon are derived from only one or two languages. Many in-game reasons exist for such decisions, but it should be known that this system has also been developed for ease of reference and as a means of assimilating the staggering amount of mythic lore from Asia. No disrespect is intended to any nation or ethnic group that appears to have been "left out" in this process, but players should bear in mind the sheer scope of trying to cover all of Asia completely. That is to say, take the legends and background material presented here with a grain of salt. If your troupe wishes to rewrite some of the material to create a game centered more around Vietnamese, Korean or other Kuei-jin, feel free to do so. Do understand, however, that this system exists as a means to let Kuei-jin from many different nations understand each other and otherwise minimize cultural conflicts.



By contrast, the Yang World teems with life-energy, and while it too reflects the mortal world at first, it is an image swimming with color and personification. Orderly structures appear as collections of spider webs, while spirits of the six elements — Water, Wood, Fire, Air, Earth and Metal — carry out their ancient roles of calling storms and other natural disturbances as animal-spirits scurry amidst the spirits of electricity and radiation. Locations and people conform to their mortal counterparts, but their true natures shine through in the Yang World. A well-kept glade glows with serenity and beauty, a polluted dump attracts twisted spirits, and a devious person looks vaguely like a weasel. Many hengeyokai and *hsien* call the Yang realm their home, and they can often be found walking the spirit trails here. Entering here can mean a quick end for an unwary Kuei-jin unless she has some unusual friends or is especially strong or clever. Farther away from the Middle Kingdom, the Yang realms become fantastic beyond compare, resembling mythic lands, nightmares and much more.

The Yomi World is not truly a spiritual land of its own, but a collection of corrupted portions ripped away from the Yin and Yang Worlds made into personal havens for demons known as Yama Kings. These powerful creatures command immense realms where they collect and torture the souls they have snared in their evil designs. These realms are often twisted beyond imagination, serving only to inflict pain on others at the amusement of the reigning demon lord. These realms vary in size according to the power of the demon lord and the number of lesser demons in its service, but now smaller demons are finding defiled areas to call their own in this modern age of suffering. This trend bodes ill indeed for the Middle Kingdom, as the spread of Yomi poses a direct threat to the balance of Yin and Yang that keeps the universe in harmony. Eternal enemies of demons, most Kuei-jin work to stop the spread of Yomi, if for no other reason than to exact revenge for the time their souls spent being tortured before reanimating their bodies.

## Chi

The direct representation of Yin and Yang in the Middle Kingdom is known as Chi, a spiritual force that pervades all existence. Chi is a deceptively simple concept to grasp, especially for most Westerners, who tend to see it as a "cosmic battery" or equate it to a certain mystical "force" from popular science fiction movies. Chi encompasses both notions, but that is downplaying its true importance. Chi is what makes the turning of Ages possible, what makes Ages possible in the first place. Chi is the spark that flies when Yin and Yang strike together, the energy of life and death, the building block of reality and the force that tears it apart. On a very basic level, Chi can be seen as a way of expressing an object's disposition — a person with a high amount of Yin Chi tends to be cooler than an impassioned Yang soul. Similarly, moments of great joy and energy produce Yang Chi, while times of sadness and introspection call up Yin Chi. As those examples prove, Chi is not simply a static quantity, but rather a quality in itself, ever-changing in accordance with *joss*. An ancient library, for example, may invoke a calm Yin aura around it, but it could change to a place of great Yang Chi if a flurry of violence occurs within its walls.

All beings use Chi in their daily lives — eating, breathing, working, even sleeping — but their actions also generate it, a great give-and-take that helps maintain the universe. For all but the most exceptional mortals, the amount of Chi they can use is minimal, as is their awareness of it. Many *shen* — especially hengeyokai and *hsien* — are potent cultivators of Chi, and they work to ensure that their supplies are maintained. All *shen* are aware of Chi more intimately than



mortals, and they can track both potent expenditures of it from quite some distance and each other by the amount of Chi that resides in them.

Kuei-jin are the great exception to the natural way. As walking dead, they do not generate Chi, and so they must steal the Chi of others to survive. Unlike Western vampires, who can slake their thirst on any blood, Kuei-jin do not simply live on the blood itself. Rather, Kuei-jin live on the Chi within blood, which is colored by the state of the victim at the time it is taken. For example, Chi taken from the dying, or from victims in fits of terror, is often laden with Yin energies, while Chi wrested from those in the throes of passion is laced with Yang. Kuei-jin — like all *shen* beings — must mind the amount of each type of Chi they consume if they wish to avoid imbalancing their souls. Of course, some Kuei-jin pay no attention to such, entranced at the imitation of life that Yang imbalance offers or the knowledge of death that Yin imbalance provides, but they suffer a stiff penalty for such.

Chi provides a means of expressing complex attitudes and compositions in brief ("You sense strong Yin Chi in the area — looks like that hidden burial ground might be here after all"), but should not be simply a way of describing items — Chi is the item as well. It is a way to bring the philosophy of Yin and Yang to life, as well as a way to police the actions of the players and remind them that great consequences lie in store for those who embrace one side of existence over another. Chi as a whole takes some getting used to, but the result is well worth it.

### DRAGON NESTS

Places where high amounts of Chi naturally tend to concentrate are known as dragon nests, and control of these vital areas remains a constant source of intrigue and warfare. Variously known to Westerners as freeholds, nodes, caerns or Haunts, these sites allow Kuei-jin to refresh their energies and use their supernatural talents more easily. Travel between worlds is also easier in these places, as the Wall is thinner here than elsewhere. Dragon nests tend to be aligned toward a type of Chi appropriate to the history of the site they're founded on. For instance, battlefields and graveyards tend to fill a place with Yin energies, while a preschool or nightclub focuses Yang Chi. Polluted or otherwise defiled sites may provide tainted Chi, which seems normal but slowly builds up the P'o of those who consume it, or the worst places may pour forth Demon Chi outright.

Different *shen* have different habits when it comes to dragon nests: Hengeyokai and *hsien* tend to prefer Yang-oriented places, while *kuei* choose those of Yin, and *chi'n ta* and Kuei-jin take dragon nests based on their personal needs. The ancient art of *feng shui* concerns the locations of dragon nests and the lines of Chi — called dragon lines — that feed them, and is of prime importance when choosing a location. Good *feng shui* ensures that Chi flows freely and in harmony, while bad *feng shui* can attract unrest and evil spirits to the area.

### THE WHEEL OF AGES

Many Kuei-jin have a very fatalistic outlook by Western standards, which is derived in part from belief in *joss*, or fate, which binds certain events to one's destiny for better or worse. However, this fatalism also comes from the way the Kuei-jin view the passing of millennia and the future, a model commonly known as the Wheel of Ages. The First Age, which took place before the creation of the world, is seen as the time when all things were One, a One known as the August Personage of Jade. A time of ultimate harmony, also dubbed the Age of Heaven, the First Age is also seen by many as a model of what pursuing one's Dharma may



achieve — complete oneness with All. The Second Age, the Age of Beauty, arose when Yin and Yang separated from the Middle Kingdom and the first people were created, along with the first *shen*. The ancestors of the Kuei-jin were among them, but they were known as the Wan Xian — the Ten Thousand Immortals — and they were a far cry from the degenerated state of most modern Kuei-jin. In time, the Third Age (the Age of Legends) came to pass, and with it tales of wars between the Wan Xian and the legions of their sworn enemies, the Yama Kings. During this time, the Wan Xian learned how to steal Chi from living beings, and while they were content to steal it from only their foes at first, the seeds of disaster were sown.

During the Fourth Age (the Age of Beautiful Sadness), the Wan Xian broke from their fellow *shen* and invested themselves as god-kings over the mortals, disobeying the August Personage of Jade and waging countless bloody wars. Their hunger grew until the universe could stand it no longer and *karma* balanced things by levying a terrible curse on the Wan Xian. The greedy immortals, who hungered so much for the Chi of others, would live no other way, cut off from the universal flow of Chi. Not truly dead, but never to be truly alive again either, theirs was a punishment to make the pillars of Heaven shake with its terrible weight. Having levied this great indictment against the Wan Xian, the August Personage turned his gaze from the Middle Kingdom, and as he did, the walls between worlds thickened and cries to spirits went unheeded. Only spirits of great savagery and hate could break through to become Kuei-jin, and thus, those who had been meant to guard humanity became its burden. They had become the Wan Kuei — the Ten Thousand Demons.

Now, the Fifth Age (the Age of Darkness) encircles the world, and the debt to the gods looms large overhead, crushing modern Kuei-jin beneath its burden. Most Kuei-jin give in to selfishness and short-sighted pursuits, and only the wisest and most dedicated souls have the ability to pursue their true state, be it god or demon. From the Yomi World, the Yama Kings laugh as their ancestral enemies pledge loyalty to them in exchange for petty mortal power or influence, and the world groans as violence and despair escalate on a global scale. There is still light (else there could be no darkness), but it is all the more precious for its rarity, as good deeds are looked upon with cynicism and suspicion. The Fifth Age is not old, but already it has left its bloody mark on the world.

However, the Wheel of Ages is known as such for a reason, and it will turn once more, reaching the lowest point of the Great Cycle. Soon, the sages and madmen say, will come the Sixth Age, the long-fabled Age of Sorrow. In this time, it is said the Yama Kings will emerge triumphant over the world, which will drown in an even greater orgy of depravity, carnage and misery. Most *shen* will be obliterated during this time, and the world will be thrown into great darkness. It is a time whispered of in frightened voices, for the signs are right, and it is difficult to dispute the dark times that have fallen on the world. Many young Kuei-jin and other *shen* dismiss tales of the Sixth Age as superstition, nonsense conjured to scare them into line, but others are not so sure, and many secretly seek to secure a place in the new world order "just in case." Those Kuei-jin who know Kindred lore are especially disturbed at the similarity in legends of Gehenna, and some clandestine exchanges are in the making between elders of East and West as to how to deal with this threat.

Many say the Sixth Age is but another turn of the Wheel, and for all its terror, the universe will right itself again eventually. Some optimists even hope the Sixth Age can be abbreviated or circumvented back into a glorious First Age once more,



and they work feverishly to bring about such ends. However, some whisper that there is so much defiled Chi in the Wheel, so much bad *karma* from the Fifth Age, that the Wheel will stop altogether this time, ground to a halt from all the abuse it has suffered. If this happens, it will be the end of everything, but ultimately only joss will decide what is to come.

## KUEI-JIN (KOO-EH-JEEN)

Many Western vampires are creatures of accident, created by sires in fits of passion and abandoned soon afterward, cast adrift on the sea of eternity. Not so the Kuei-jin—they are creatures of purpose, returned from death not by a few drops of spilled blood but because of some overpowering need to fulfill an unfinished destiny in the land of the living. They are souls who have clawed their way back from Hell itself and reanimated their bodies once more, spirits of surpassing strength and determination, and the sense of uselessness that hinders so many Kin-jin is unknown to them. Not that the path to fulfilling the destiny they returned for is any easier to achieve. Enlightenment, even dark enlightenment, is a goal worthy of the greatest of legends, but the presence of this goal gives them a drive from the very first moments of their new existence.

### THE SECOND BREATH

Kuei-jin call the process of their rebirth the Second Breath, since it is their return to the world of the living. However, not just any soul can achieve this cursed (or blessed, depending on one's outlook) state — there are several conditions which must be met for a Kuei-jin to be possible. First, the soul in question must be extremely determined and purposeful — those without any direction in life seldom have pressing reasons to return to their bodies. Motives vary wildly, but typical sparks include revenging a wrongful death, righting some personal or family dishonor, reuniting with a lost lover, or protecting a person or place important in life. This aspect is one of the most important parts of a Kuei-jin character, as the reasons one returns from death obviously guide every other step in the process of creating a character, so spare no effort when designing motivations for returning to life.

Second, the Kuei-jin's soul must be strong enough to survive being severed into its Hun and P'o parts, which occurs immediately after death. Joined before as one whole personality, the dark P'o and benevolent Hun are at last pried apart, the P'o sent screaming to Yomi while the Hun typically watches over the body and its grave. No description can fully recount the tortures of the Yomi World that the P'o suffers, but this period also serves to give the P'o the necessary hatred to finally break free of its punishment and seek out its body once more. When it does, if the Hun is still present, perhaps due to resentment over improper burial rites or a need of its own to watch the mortal world, the two must strike a bargain to return to the body. Few Kuei-jin remember the terrible moments as the two parts of the soul face each other, but it is clear enough that without the enraged strength of the P'o to claw through the Wall, the Hun cannot make it on its own. Both are necessary to strike the bargain, though what fate befalls them after that is up to them to determine.

Finally, the soul must have a body to inhabit, or the whole process is lost. Together the Hun and P'o restore their corpse, bringing bodies long drowned back to the surface, collecting bits blasted by a grenade and other tremendous feats of reanimation. In some rare and unfortunate cases, the soul returns in a body that is not its own, either because its corpse was beyond the powers of its particular Hun



and P'o or due to some arcane demand of joss. It is more common for the Kuei-jin to find her own body once again. Of course, reclaiming even an old body is still traumatic. After the dim, colorless vistas of the Yin Worlds, the mortal world is an intense sensory experience, and many Kuei-jin are literally stunned at first, unprepared for the amount of sensation they are exposed to. Worse still, since it is the P'o's savage strength that allows the final crossover, the new vampire is often at the mercy of her dark side for the first nights of her new existence, a monster who exists only to kill and feed. Some few Kuei-jin manifest their Hun sides and gain control of themselves, but most never do on their own, and they either die of hunger or are put down by mortals or other hunters. The Kuei-jin as a race might not go on if it weren't for the efforts of their own community to track down these "new arrivals" and instruct them in the ways of their kind.

### **PATHS OF THE SOUL (TRAINING / DHARMA / DIRECTION / WU)**

Most of the time, future Kuei-jin are captured by others of their kind and, if deemed worthy, brought before the local Kuei-jin population for judgment as to whether or not they merit training. Those who resist capture too savagely, or who are deemed unworthy of the trouble of training, are destroyed on the spot, their souls sent spinning forever into the Yin or Yomi realms. Those who are considered worthwhile are immediately assigned to a mentor, or sifu, to begin their training, often along with a group of other young Kuei-jin. This mentor is a pivotal figure in the life of one of the Hungry Dead, as the lessons she imparts and the methods she uses to teach them will remain with a Kuei-jin long after a hundred mortal lifetimes.

This training period is known as the *ré*. Training takes place for a minimum of one year, typically five and sometimes even up to 10 years. Many elder Kuei-jin ruminate on how this study used to take two entire cycles of the zodiac (24 years) before the arrival of the short attention spans that accompanied the Age of Darkness. During this time, the *hin* (students) are entirely at the mercy of their sifu, every aspect of their existence carefully monitored and every decision closely scrutinized. Studies vary from mentor to mentor, but all invariably include lessons on etiquette, history and the unique philosophies the Kuei-jin have developed regarding existence. Mentors often stress physical and martial training, both as a

### **"HE CALLED ME A WHAT?"**

All this cross-cultural banter can get confusing, even when just the names of the vampires are involved. Here's a quick summary of the most common terms for vampires used by both East and West, as well as who they are used by:

**Eastern vampires:** Wan Kuei (archaic/ formal address), Hungry Dead (folklore term), Kuei-jin (common term), *kyonshi* (Eastern slang for young vampires, slightly negative connotation), *gaki* (Japanese vampires, loose term), Cathayans (Western term for Asian vampires, derived from Marco Polo's original name for China).

**Western vampires:** Cainites (archaic/ formal address), Kindred (common term), Licks (Western slang, slightly negative connotation), the Damned (folklore term), Kin-jin (derogatory Eastern term for Western vampires; comes from "people of Caine" and is used so often that many Westerners are unaware of its negative connotation).



means of honing and disciplining the body as well as a nod to the violent tenor of the times. Students also cultivate supernatural Disciplines during this time, according to the abilities of the sifu and the natural talents of each student. Finally, teachers place much emphasis on meditation, prayer, structured debate and sparring, allowing the students to observe their lessons in action and understand their true meaning. Those who fail to abide by the strict rules that the sifu requires are summarily destroyed — this period is a time to learn one's place and what it means to draw the Second Breath, not to assert some notion of individual grandeur. Even the kindest sifus do not hesitate to destroy students who prove rebellious or slow learners, since the unfortunate would no doubt have been a disgrace on those close to him. Furthermore, such a weak or impudent spirit would be unable to deal with life as one of the Hungry Dead. It is also a public service, keeping the Kuei-jin ranks from swelling with unruly and uncouth members, a means of ensuring that only the strongest and ablest souls enter the ranks of Kuei-jin society.

The final test of the *hin* is known as the Fire and Water Test, and it takes place on the 23rd day of the month of the Dragon, often under the guise of some mortal festivity or function. The *hin* must display exceptional subtlety, politeness and poise, as well as demonstrate their excellence in any special fields of interest they chose during training, be it etiquette or warfare. Powerful undead patrons sometimes back particular *hin* who draw their eye, rewarding those who pass with influence and a place in Kuei-jin society, but those who fall short of expectations disgrace their patrons and are seldom seen again. Indeed, those who display any failings at all that night "disappear" as the final process of selection takes place. At the end of the event, those who remain are drawn into a highly ritualized secret ceremony, attended only by their fellow undead. There each of the *hin* receives a "direction," an astrological distinction thought to govern a vampire's general outlook and personality, as well as membership into a *wu*, or "blood family" of undead. Finally, the *hin* swear oaths of loyalty to their court and their elders in return for their right to be recognized as "full persons" in Kuei-jin society, and the *hin* graduate to the status of *shen*. It is a proud moment for the newly instated Kuei-jin, and one for which little expense of coin or pageantry is spared.

## DHARMA

More important than perhaps anything else in training is a vampire's choice of Dharma, the path she will blaze to her destiny. Dharmas are philosophies, prejudices and ways of living all wrapped in one; they are existence itself for their practitioners. One does not simply pay lip-service to an abstract set of laws and codes — rather, a Dharma is a reflection of the natural disposition of each new Kuei-jin, not an outside influence forced on them. Not that a Dharma is completely free-form — on the contrary, Kuei-jin sages have spent weeks, years, even centuries debating minor points of doctrine with each other, even within the same Dharma. Each student tends to gravitate toward the Dharma that suits his soul and joss best, and outside attempts to pressure him into taking another path often backfire disastrously. It is the duty of each sifu to guide the *hin* and determine which paths suit them best.

Western notions of sin and evil are foreign to Eastern philosophy, and as such, most Kuei-jin are more tolerant to those among them who choose darker or different paths than their own, since even demons have a place in the scheme of things. Simply following the tenets of one's Hun or Yang nature does not make one "good" any more than serving one's Yin nature or P'o automatically makes one "evil," and individual progress along one's Dharma is far more respected than the



choice of Dharma itself in most circles. Better an enlightened devil than a reluctant saint, or so the saying goes. By and large, though, the celestial persecution complex that many Kuei-jin develop as they seek to flee their curse is absent in Kuei-jin. A person may bemoan the bad joss that led him to his current state, but only the most foolish and ignorant Kuei-jin deny that the Dharmas offer an understanding of one's place in the Wheel of Ages. Without a Dharma, one is lost. When one's soul is focused and disciplined along a proper Way, one can grasp the greater destiny that joss has bestowed on him. Enlightenment, however dark, remains enlightenment nonetheless, and all things can grasp the Ten Thousand Joys of serving Heaven if they learn to accept their role under the rule of the August Personage.

Outside of the *sifu*, elder Kuei-jin often track the progress of individual students and confer on those who are best suited to each Dharma. If auspicious circumstances smile on a particular student, sometimes a great master arrives to take over her training personally. Regardless of instruction, however, finding or choosing a Dharma is a crucial time for a *hin*, because although a Dharma may be changed due to tremendous events in a student's life, it is never a decision made lightly. Changing one's Dharma is tantamount to saying that one's actions until then have been misguided at best — outright foolish at worst — and it results in having to relearn vampiric existence from the ground up once more.

Five Dharmas, each associated with a fundamental part of Kuei-jin existence, are commonly recognized: the Howl of the Devil-Tiger (*P'o*), the Way of the Resplendent Crane (*Hun*), the Song of the Shadow (*Yin*), the Path of a Thousand Whispers (Balance) and the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon (*Yang*).

### **Kōa**

Once a Kuei-jin has received her Dharma, direction and recognition in the eyes of her fellows, she enters a period of freedom called the *kōa*, during which she is allowed to revel in her vampiric state somewhat and come to terms with her mortal days. Often constrained to one mortal lifetime, during this period, the Kuei-jin — known as a Running Monkey because of her fascination with the mortal world — is allowed to fix old scores, deliver final messages to loved ones, and otherwise resolve any issues she might have regarding her former existence. This way, the Kuei-jin believe, the vampire gets to flex her new muscles in a relatively harmless way, as well as remove any distractions related to her previous life that might interfere with her future duties to her fellows. In the West, a mighty Ventrule prince might still weep over a beloved doll lost 600 years ago, or obsess over a husband long since turned to dust. By revisiting their old lives and confronting lingering questions they might have, new Kuei-jin not only speed the realization of the transformation that has occurred, but they prevent the kind of emotional blockage that occurs from being forbidden to acknowledge their old lives. Once the Running Monkey time is over, a Kuei-jin should be tired of playing entirely in the fleeting world of mortals and ready to move on to her true destiny as a whole individual once more.

Many initiates are given specific goals to accomplish during this time as well, based on their direction and the nature of any *wu* they might be part of. How well these tasks are performed has a great impact on the nature of the reception the Kuei-jin will finally receive when joining the court proper. This period is also perhaps the one time when the new vampire is allowed to make mistakes and receive forgiveness from her elders (or at least less severe punishment). The rigid rules in place during the *ré* are lifted, but the Kuei-jin is not expected to maintain a normal court position yet. In these dark days, many *kōa* are cut short at the



insistence of elders, or the Running Monkeys are ordered (or manipulated) into furthering the goals of their courts rather than being more free to make their way as they were in times past. Many younger *kyonshi* also use this time to express their individuality and make their mark on both mortal and immortal society. This behavior shocks many elders, who remember more traditional times when the young respected obedience and the good of Kuei-jin society as a whole instead of heeding only their personal ambitions and vices.

Of course, some boundaries remain inviolate, despite the traditions protecting the freedom of Kuei-jin during their *kōa*. For example, even Running Monkeys know the value that their elders place on subtlety and secrecy, and those vampires whose actions or intentions threaten to expose any part of Kuei-jin society to the mortal world — for whatever reason — “disappear” swiftly. Even those Kuei-jin who attempt to develop connections among their fellow *shen* are watched closely for any sign that they have betrayed Kuei-jin secrets to their more exotic friends, especially if hengeyokai are involved. Running Monkeys would do well to remember that no matter how long a leash a dog is wearing, it can still be pulled back to its owner at a moment’s notice.

## KUEI-JIN SOCIETY

### THE WU

A character’s closest contacts within the Kuei-jin world are his *wu*, a group most often chosen after passing the Fire and Water Test, but sometimes also decided by joss as two decimated *wu* join together or similar circumstances combine different groups. *Wu* (which means “house” or “five,” depending on tone) are close-knit groups of Kuei-jin united by ties of friendship, loyalty and common experience. While personal interest may play a part in choosing one’s *wu*, the bond between *wu*-mates ensures that no one is simply out for his own gain. While they can (and often do) disagree with each other, particularly if they represent different Dharmas or lifestyles, members of a *wu* always present a united front against outside forces. It is considered a very auspicious sign if a *wu* contains at least one member representing each direction, but in these troubled times, many courts allow the creation of *wu* that do not have the traditional array of directions. Sometimes, especially if a *wu* is formed from the remains of other *wu*, it may have no real purpose at all, let alone the proper number of directions. This disorganization becomes increasingly common as the Sixth Age approaches and young malcontents band together out of common interest.

The original *wu*, known as the Hundred Corpse Families, are storied institutions in their own right, with personalized symbols, honored membership lists and impressive stories associated with them. Their alliances are legendary, as are their enmities, and some have been fighting shadow wars with their fellow *shen* for millennia. A *wu* typically has a name that encompasses the disposition of its members and any purpose they had for coming together, but is often quite elaborate and beautiful — even poetic — as well. A warrior *wu* might call themselves the Righteous Phoenix Fists, while a diplomatic *wu* might be called the Great Bonds of Heaven, and a covert *wu* (when its name is known) could choose a title such as the Raven Shadows Falling. Even in this Age of Darkness, young *wu* still choose very traditional-sounding titles, even if their tongue-in-cheek references are lost on their elders. A grand *wu* name demands respect from those who hear it, and such respect is critical to success in the ever-shifting world of Kuei-jin society.



Beyond mere oaths and even shared experience, a *wu* is further bound by two spiritual factors: the soul-bond between its members, called the *guanxi*, and the *wu*'s guardian spirit, known as the *nushi*. Initially, the *guanxi* is the result of the ritual that forms the *wu*, but the bond grows beyond the shallow magic cast by elder Kuei-jin into a full-fledged sense of unity and camaraderie. Although the level of the bond varies from individual to individual (those with high Yin or P'o natures have an accordingly hard time joining in such a free emotional bond), over time the *guanxi* becomes second nature. One would sooner cut off one's hand than harm a *wu*-mate, and true treason is all but unthinkable barring powerful demonic influence or great personal degeneration.

Furthermore, all *wu* have a *nushi* of some kind, said to watch over its children and provide certain gifts to them, but those Kuei-jin who pursue a relationship with their *nushi* actively may reap such benefits directly instead of metaphorically. Like the name of a *wu* itself, a *nushi* typically represents the purpose of a *wu* — a warrior group might choose a *nushi* such as one of the Three Storms (Thunder, Rain or Lightning), while a peaceful one might select a wise entity such as Tengu or Butterfly. *Nushi* are not limited to elemental or animal spirits, however. An honored ancestor or public figure might also serve as a *nushi* if properly contacted and appeased. Many elders view the choice of *nushi* as one of the most revealing traits of a *wu*'s character, and how well they honor that spirit reflects heavily on their reputation as a whole. A well-treated *nushi* may pull characters out of the fire, while one that is constantly offended might withdraw its aid at the worst of times or refuse aid entirely until properly appeased.

## THE COURT

If the basic building block of Kuei-jin society is the *wu*, then the most common structure built therefrom is the court. A court is a body formed from one or more *wu* that oversees a certain duty or a specific physical territory. One court might preside over a large but relatively unpopulated area of countryside, for example, while a large city such as Hong Kong might be divided into several smaller courts by district or purpose. Unlike the *wu* that compose them, courts typically serve a very clear political or social purpose, such as maintaining order in an area or addressing concerns raised by other local *shen*. Since most *wu* choose the court they serve, or are assigned to it due to the talents of their members, there is typically an excellent level of cooperation within a court, as the *wu* have a personal interest in its success. Most courts, especially those concerned with the "floating world" of mortals, have a great deal of temporal resources at their disposal, which are known as Scarlet Screens and are vital in the shadow plays of the undead world. A corporation owned by Kuei-jin or their servants classifies as a Screen, as would a government agency, tong or triad controlled by one of the court's *wu*. Most Western vampires, used to the paranoid back-stabbing of their own halls, are amazed to see how *wu* politely carry out missions that they receive from their courts. They are unused to the value that the Kuei-jin place on obedience and respecting one's place within society. However, these traditions have begun to erode as young *kyonshi* adopt the rebellious and impudent ways of the Kin-jin. Therefore, many courts are that much more strict with those under their command, seeking to squelch any sign of dissension, which in turn feeds youthful dissatisfaction and starts the cycle anew.

Indeed, while a great deal of harmony exists on the surface in most courts, the politicking and maneuvering that occurs behind closed doors is as vicious as that of any other ruling body. Favors owed, toadying, personal prejudices, *wu* grudges,



## ASCENDING HEAVEN'S STEPS: TRADITIONAL STATIONS ALONG THE DHARMIC JOURNEY

While the Road Back is different for every Kuei-jin, there are certain steps that every Kuei-jin takes, from the most debased Devil-Tiger to the loftiest Resplendent Crane. Obviously, how each individual Kuei-jin reaches them is also a highly personal process, but like the Western mythological archetype of the Hero's Journey, these points remain pivotal moments in the existence of the Kuei-jin. Bodhisattvas explain the different stations of the ultimate Dharmic journey as follows:

*Sataa* — Death, the Yomi World and Rebirth.

*K'naa* — The Hunger; the time of the *chih-mei* and disgrace at the hands of the P'o.

*Ré* — Instruction; the time of discipline and the embrace of one's new heritage.

*Kōa* — The Running Monkey; the time of youthful experiments and mistakes.

*Dēn* — The Ten Dawns; first realization of higher aspirations than the material plane.

*Na Tou* — The Wandering; the time of searching for the way of release.

*Suru'a* — Finding a Place; the journey home, to Dharmic bliss and karmic balance.

*Dāh* — All-Awareness, the Eternal Lotus; perfection of the undead form and transcendence.

conflicting interests and other familiar factors affect relations both inside and outside a particular court. Likewise, the place that face or respect holds in many Eastern cultures means that any personal failings must be buried behind a mask of poised perfection, and added on top of the demanding discipline of the Kuei-jin lifestyle this calls for tremendous self-control indeed. As a result, white-hot hatreds often boil beneath pleasant meetings, and when the facade of harmony finally gives way, the results are explosively bloody as old tensions are finally released. Different courts act at cross-purposes all the time, deliberately or otherwise, and when two courts both decide that they wish to claim dominion over a particular sphere of influence, the results are as ugly as any battlefield of the Jihad.

However, unlike Western cities or coteries — which are typically self-interested at best and Machiavellian at worst — Kuei-jin courts are not all as bad as might be believed. New courts, or those composed mostly of young *wu*, can be quite open and friendly in their ways, and even older courts are not necessarily at each other's throats all the time. This lack of outright infighting derives in part from the hierarchical system that controls Kuei-jin society, but it is also because of the great respect placed in those who rule over one or more courts.

### POSITIONS AT COURT: DISCIPLES, JINA AND MANDARINS

Of course, some order must be established even within a *wu*, and the future Kuei-jin become acutely aware during the *ré* of the elders that move the wheels of court around them. Upon achieving her full standing in Kuei-jin society, the vampire becomes known as a disciple, since she is only beginning her Dharmic



journey. *Wu* composed of disciples are typically responsible for much of the legwork of a court, whether it's sealing deals in the mortal world or battling invading *shen*. This responsibility tests the character of disciples, as well as giving them valuable experience "in the trenches." Most players' characters begin as disciples, still learning about their new life and receiving orders constantly from those above them that further the interests of the court. In this way, the players can experience the full spectrum of Kuei-jin existence, as their *wu* works to advance their personal Dharmas and complete the various tasks set before it. Disciples have little say in what happens in court, but they are still forgiven some minor errors during this time, since they are privately acknowledged as new to the great games of court. (Those who fail to learn after the first time, however, are punished harshly — the Kuei-jin do not suffer fools gladly, and ignorance only goes so far as a justification.) In this terrible and violent Age, many *wu* are lost on one mission or another, and many more disciples lose their way and spiral back to the Yomi World. However, if *joss* is on their side and they mind the lessons that their Way teaches them, players will eventually find themselves granted the honor of being considered "jina," or gurus. It is a position with a bit more freedom but naturally more responsibility to accompany it.

As the next rung on the Dharmic ladder, *jina* are the next most common type of Kuei-jin encountered after disciples, but since they have managed to escape some of the drudgery of a disciple's existence, their eyes are more open to the possibilities of eternity. The title of *jina* is awarded when a disciple reaches a state known as *ling*, or the realization of his true power and how to control it. The primary responsibility accorded to *jina* is to look after the training of *hin* and disciples, and many of them form a close bond with their younger counterparts and identify with them more readily than more distant elders. *Jina* are not forgiven as many errors as disciples are (after all, they are expected to know better now), but likewise, they are allowed a greater freedom to speak their minds and suggest policy for the court. They must still obey the wishes of mandarins, however, and *jina* may still receive missions for the court, which are expected to be conducted nearly flawlessly at this level of enlightenment. However, the missions *jina* receive are rarely as direct as those given to disciples. While a *wu* of disciples might be ordered to battle a pack of *hengeyokai*, a *wu* of *jina* would be charged with forging a treaty to prevent further conflicts. Unless a chronicle is particularly long-running, *jina* is the highest rank most players will attain.

Chinese society accorded intellectuals a special status in society, almost a caste unto itself, and Kuei-jin politics mirror this notion. Above status to *jina* and considered the final authority in all but the most powerful courts are those known as mandarins, who act as spiritual advisors to *jina*, ambassadors to distant courts and arbiters of disputes. Mandarins may also hold specific offices suited to their talents, such as Spirit-Battling General or Mistress of Western Affairs, and their word holds absolute authority in these areas. Despite their highly visible role in Kuei-jin affairs, mandarins are fabled for their insular ways, and they possess all manner of rites, traditions and customs unknown to other Kuei-jin. Although they are loath to admit it, few Kuei-jin understand what lies behind the mysterious aura of a mandarin, especially since the status is conferred based on a high level of Dharmic advancement and mandarins are accordingly powerful in their own right outside of their office. As those who pass final judgment and select ancestors and other powerful offices, however, mandarins seldom need to use their personal powers day to day. Others are wise enough to know that mandarins can make



anyone's existence miserable enough without wasting one iota of their personal Chi to do it.

### **THE ANCESTOR**

It takes a powerful individual to demand the respect of entire courts of Kuei-jin, and while most positions are filled by jina or mandarins, protocol or necessity demands occasionally that a greater figure take the head of Kuei-jin politics. Known as ancestors, such Kuei-jin are accorded honor by all who know them, and they are obeyed without question by those under them in court. (Females are known by the title "ancestress.") Even their hated enemies give ancestors a respectful distance, since the method of selection required to assume the mantle of ancestor is grueling, and only the most capable and determined Kuei-jin are able to pass it. Although Kin-jin often equate the position of ancestor to that of a "prince," the only similarity exists in the fact that both hold sway over a particular court or region. After that, an ancestor is about as different from a prince as could be imagined.

Most Western princes hold power through violence and fear, cowing all who oppose them until they are eventually replaced (usually by assassination or "disappearance"). By contrast, ancestors are often well-liked by those who will serve under them — or at least considered competent for the job — since they are chosen by the mandarins of a court. As a result, ancestors are seldom concerned about being ousted by those around them, and they can focus on matters of importance to the court, while princes must divert their attention constantly ensuring that their own vassals aren't plotting against them. Furthermore, princes are appointed in places where they may not even be needed, creating positions of power that are more a symbol of pride than a necessity, while an ancestor is only appointed when the court's mandarins deem such a figure necessary to maintain order. And while princes may be installed through any number of means, ranging from public and honorable to brutal and treacherous, Kuei-jin ancestors must undergo an extremely taxing and specific series of tests known as the Three Dialogues, which are designed to test every bit of their character. These tests are never undertaken lightly, and since their components are widely known, all Kuei-jin know that an ancestor must have passed each with flying colors to assume his position. Thus, all Kuei-jin know from the beginning that an ancestor is a formidable individual and treat him accordingly.

As might be expected, ancestors hold absolute power over their domains. While they often retain a staff of mandarins as advisors on different matters, their word is law and that is all. Only a fool would object to their judgment. If player-controlled mandarin characters are extremely rare, ancestors should be non-existent — they are simply too powerful, as they tend to outshine entire *wu* and handle easily what threatens to overcome the toughest of their fellow characters.

### **BODHISATTVA**

As a Kuei-jin nears the end of her Dharmic path, an irresistible call builds within her to abandon the civilized world and take on a spartan existence of solitude and contemplation. These few dedicated souls — who have withstood the ravages of the P'o and the trials of the world for centuries — achieve a near-perfect harmony with the many worlds as they near the end of their journey. They begin communing regularly with ancestors, spirits of Yin and Yang, even demons as they seek the final answers. Though most choose to spend this time entirely alone, sometimes several bodhisattvas congregate in one place, the most famous of these



being the Shaolin Monastery in China. Sometimes, even more rarely, a bodhisattva will travel from place to place teaching those who will listen. In any event, these Kuei-jin serve as shining examples to their fellows that there exists some purpose to vampiric existence, that Dharma is a way to true satisfaction of one's place in the Wheel of Ages. However, as they are immensely powerful on their own, resplendent with Chi and nearly perfect, many bodhisattvas are outright physically painful for imperfect young vampires to approach. Thus most lessons from bodhisattvas are taught in secrecy, or given to a seeker to be understood many years later after the bodhisattva has presumably passed on.

Those bodhisattvas who approach the last stages of their Dharma become known as arhats, and while records exist of many bodhisattvas over the course of Kuei-jin history, few arhats have ever been reliably noted. Many bodhisattvas choose to stay on Earth a while longer, or pass centuries puzzled by a final question. Thus arhats are almost mythical creatures, holy men and legends without par. In these final stages, the arhat becomes entirely solitary until her essence is finally reabsorbed into the Great Cycle and her Dharma at last resolved. Tales persist of an arhat appearing to smite some great evil (or perpetrate it, in the case of Devil-Tiger arhats), or to reward a faithful seeker along his own Dharma, but while such stories would certainly be within the power of an arhat, no instances have ever been substantiated.

Obviously, bodhisattvas and arhats are beyond the scope of players' characters, and they should appear rarely even as Storyteller characters in most chronicles. They represent the essence of the vampiric ideal in the Middle Kingdom, and they are just as difficult to reach.

### **TWO PATHS DIVERGING IN THE JADE FOREST: AKUMA & HEIMIN**

There are those who fall between the cracks of the rigid structure of Kuei-jin society, whether by personal choice or force of circumstance. Unlike the undisciplined policies of the Western devils, Kuei-jin society permits no openly reluctant souls in its midst. One is either part of court and country or divorced entirely from them. There is no middle ground.

#### **HEIMIN**

Derived from a Japanese term meaning "half-person," heimin are those who have turned their backs on Kuei-jin society, often because they realize their personal wishes are completely irreconcilable with the ways of Kuei-jin society. This status can also be given as an option to those who have shamed themselves and their court but who still merit unlife. Heimin are outcasts who receive no backing from their home courts or ancestors, and they are traditionally seen as rootless vagabonds without place in the world. Most elders will not allow them to speak in their presence, nor will elders allow talk of them in any official capacity — heimin truly are "non-persons" as far the mandarins are concerned. Nonetheless, as long as they continue to pursue their Dharmas (or at least keep from succumbing to their P'os), heimin are allowed to exist in relative peace, and those who parted gracefully from Kuei-jin society often retain informal ties with their old *sifus*, *jina* or even their old *wu*. Indeed, many courts employ heimin as couriers in these dangerous times, granting them freedom to travel from court to court in exchange for swearing powerful oaths to uphold their given task. All these arrangements occur off the record, but the practice is becoming increasingly common.



The greatest fear that most ancestors have is that heimin will come in contact with Western vampires and spill some of the secrets the Kuei-jin have worked hard to conceal. However, since they are considered more or less expendable by their elders, and perhaps better suited to understand the Western mindset, some heimin are prized for their ability to act as intermediaries between East and West, and they find employment in this manner throughout the Middle Kingdom. Even they must tread a careful line, however. The prohibition against unauthorized dealing with the Kin-jin is one of the few rules a heimin is still held accountable for by his fellow Kuei-jin, and it doesn't trouble the warriors of the court to destroy a restless vampire for disobeying such an important law.

Being heimin does not mean that one acts like a hellion and is constantly advocating change — south-oriented Kuei-jin fill that role. Nor is the title reserved for simple loners — many Yin-aspected vampires are quite solitary. Rather, it is the realization that one cannot, will not and will never fit into Kuei-jin life, even if only to turn it on its head. After the long period of training that Kuei-jin undergo and the degree of bonding to the *wu* that takes place after that, those who survive and still cannot find a place in Kuei-jin society are very few. (For the record, 99% of Brujah-wannabe punk-rockin' death-on-wheels *kyonshi* are killed off for their impudence long before the point one decides to take the path of the heimin.) It takes a great deal of resolve to turn away from everything that has been taught since the first moments of the Second Breath, and for better or worse, a heimin always bears the scars of such a difficult choice.

### **Akuma**

*Akuma* is derived from a Japanese word for "devil," and the loathsome beings called such every ounce of hatred and disrespect that follows such a pronouncement. This term is most often used for those Kuei-jin who have abandoned their Dharmas in favor of serving the Yama Kings, seeking the quick path of demonic investment over the trying way of personal enlightenment. By doing so, *akuma* have betrayed the sacred trust of their ancient purpose to defend humanity from the Yama Kings, and thus, they are considered the basest of traitors, a shame to any who know them. Most *akuma* are hopelessly twisted — often bearing physical and mental signs of corruption — and even though other Kuei-jin are far from sainthood, even Devil-Tigers seek a better fate than eternal servitude to a dark master. Furthermore, elders have also begun labeling as *akuma* any Kuei-jin who feeds habitually on the defiled Chi of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, regardless of Dharma or allegiances. However, the terrible burning illness that results from consuming the tainted Chi is sentence enough in most cases. It should be noted that many *akuma* actively in the service of the Yama Kings are known to frequent both these sites as well, though it is not known if these wicked beings fall prey to the degeneration.

Although it was once reserved for only tainted Kuei-jin or those in the service of demonic masters, the pronouncement of *akuma* has been extended for lesser crimes as well in the Fifth Age, ranging from simple disobedience of the court's rules to freely associating with the Kin-jin. Being declared *akuma* is the most severe humiliation a Kuei-jin can endure, not to mention often the most fatal. It proclaims that the Great Cycle has cast the individual out forever, her karmic debt to remain eternally unpaid. While a heimin is an outcast as well, that tradition is still respected as a conscious (if sometimes forced) decision. Being branded an *akuma* reflects a judgment that one's soul is so poisoned as to be unfit to associate with honorable Kuei-jin anymore. When this pronouncement is fueled more by



politics or revenge rather than a righteous declaration of demonic influence, it breeds hatred in the hearts of those slandered, which in turn makes it more likely that they'll join the Yama Kings in their despair. The Yama Kings merely smile and laugh at such joss.

History records that use of *akuma* declaration as a means of censuring enemies is far from common, and though the term has begun to lose some of its true meaning from such abuse, it still carries with it powerful connotations of demonic evil that make other Kuei-jin bristle. Anyone is free to attack an *akuma* on sight, even Kin-jin (though their efforts to capture even an *akuma* for study are foiled swiftly), and among other *shen* the hengeyokai make it a point to destroy those who bear the touch of the Yama Kings. Most courts will go to great trouble to avoid pronouncing a Kuei-jin to be *akuma*, but no expense is spared to enforce the severity of the verdict once such a declaration has been passed. Nonetheless, even with such strict punishments, more *akuma* have been created in the past few hundred years than any elder would care to see, a fact that is often whispered about as a sign of the impending arrival of the Sixth Age.

## **Foes Locked in Harmony: KUEI-JIN ATTITUDES TOWARD THE OTHER SHEN**

As indicated previously, the Kuei-jin see themselves as one extended spirit family, and while their mythology places them as first among their brethren, they still recognize the divine right of the others to exist. Indeed, interaction with other *shen* is often a basic fact of unlife in the modern world, and some *wu* even include several hengeyokai or *hsien* as friendly "unofficial" members. Such alliances are rarely permanent, however.

### **HENGEOYOKAI (HEN-GAY-YO-KAI)**

Once there existed as many types of shapeshifters as there were beasts on Earth, but time has since cut their numbers to a small but resilient few. Kuei-jin do not bear the same genocidal hatred for the hengeyokai as their brethren do in the West, but relations are seldom polite just the same. Kuei-jin crave the potent dragon nests the hengeyokai hold outside the reaches of the city, and the hengeyokai despise them for preying on mortals and helping pollute the earth. As the embodiment of the natural order, most hengeyokai see themselves as inextricably pitted against the Kuei-jin, who represent an aberration in the natural order that has forgotten the purpose Heaven once had for it. Each hengeyokai has several forms, but all share at least three in common. Those forms include the human form, which seems that of a normal person; the animal shape, which appears to be a normal version of its species; and the war form, which is an amalgamation of both the other forms and perfectly suited for savage combat. Like Kuei-jin *wu*, most hengeyokai travel in packs (called *sentai*), many of which are composed of several different types of hengeyokai, making them as versatile as they are deadly. The known types of hengeyokai in the Middle Kingdom include:

Hakken — The wolf-shifters are the most commonly encountered type of hengeyokai for Kuei-jin, as well as the most deadly. The basic social unit is the pack, and each pack moves as one heart and serves a nushi of its own — often a natural spirit or animal kami. While they respect strength and honor, all wolf-folk possess powerful tempers that can lead to a Kuei-jin's rapid undoing. Most of the wolf-shifters feel they are the front-line soldiers against the decay of the world, and they have accordingly large chips on their shoulders, which tends to make their



interaction with Kuei-jin short and unpleasant unless some important interest is shared between them.

**Kitsune** — The fox-spirits are unique among their fellow shapeshifters for the simple fact that they are aspected to Yin rather than Yang. Most Nine-Tails know a great deal of Yin magic, and many have traveled extensively in the spirit worlds. However, because they are so often misunderstood by their brethren, most Kitsune keep to themselves, acting when they feel it is truly necessary. Some Kitsune establish friendships with enlightened Kuei-jin (especially those balanced toward Yin), and they will trade stories and secrets with them.

**Zhong Lung** (Middle Dragons) — Descended from the ancient Dragon Kings, Zhong Lung take the animal form of crocodilians. They have long memories, and they can live for centuries between their magics and their talent for hibernation. When they are angered, their war forms resemble the Great Dragons of legend, which have been known to exceed 80 feet in length. Many *shen*, including Kuei-jin, seek out Zhong Lung for primordial wisdom, but pilgrims beware, for the dragons put great stock in manners and those with loose tongues usually wind up as a bloody mist on the wind.

**Khan** (Tiger-Children) — Ferocious hunters and cunning warriors, the children of Tiger have suffered along with their feline cousins in recent years, but this treatment has only fueled their rage. They are determined to make their mark before extinction visits them in the Sixth Age. Many keep a close eye on the Kuei-jin, and those vampires who stray from the path of Dharma often find that a tiger has been stalking them in the tall grass....

**Tengu** — Raven's children see much and know more, and while their tongues are rarely still for long, Kuei-jin are not often made privy to their conversations without first heaping lavish favors on their winged friends. Tricksters, messengers and spies, the Tengu can be found anywhere in the Middle Kingdom, and so most *shen* feel it is wiser to curry their favor than to have the ravens air their dirty laundry to the world. Some whisper that the Tengu train mortals to fight other *shen*, and thus to indirectly battle their enemies. If this practice is proven true, the hand of the Kuei-jin may be moved to action against the winged folk. Until then, the Kuei-jin merely pay for information and bide their time.

**Kumo** (Goblin Spiders) — Like ancient tales of devilish spiders brought to nightmare life, these bizarre shifters subsist on blood. Few of them care to see the sun for very long (although it does not truly harm them), making them partners of a sort with the Kuei-jin in the night life and even often mistaken for Kuei-jin by other *shen*. While not all Kumo are evil, the good ones are few and far between compared to the rest, who are known as Goblin Spiders. They often serve as spies and assassins, and it is known that they can take the forms of many-limbed monsters or even a horde of tiny spiders. Kuei-jin fear and distrust them as a whole, and rumors persist the spider-folk have made pacts with the centipede devils, the Mukade, of the Yomi World, which only fans the flames of fear.

**Nagah** — The snake-shifters traditionally lived in India, although they have since traveled and are rumored to have spread across the globe. The Nagah are among the deadliest natural assassins on earth, and their blood is said to run through many royal families in Southeast Asia, where their word is law from the royal palace to the deepest jungle. Since their venomous bites are said to be capable of poisoning even the unliving Kuei-jin, most vampires stay a healthy distance from the Nagah, although a daring and ruthless few are rumored to have made alliances with the subtle snake-folk.



Same-Bito — Shark-shifters rarely encountered inland, they are nonetheless the undisputed masters of the ocean, and even the mightiest Kuei-jin never forgets to give them an offering before crossing a large body of water. While matters of the land world do not concern them, the Same-Bito are enraged at modern ocean pollution, and boats are beginning to mysteriously disappear as they vent their rage. No one on the sea is safe from these oceanic samurai, and when the shark-folk start coming inland to deal with pollution problems at their source, the streets will shake with their fury. As for vampires, Same-Bito have three simple steps for dealing with Kuei-jin: bite — chew — swallow.

Nezumi — Rats are the invisible "second empire" of the Middle Kingdom, and wherever they are found, the Nezumi are not far behind. Now largely confined to cities thanks to the bullying wolf-shifters, the rat-folk are masters of intrigue and information-gathering, often serving supernatural courts as counselors or informants. Adept as they are at finding hidden passages and traveling in tight quarters, many Nezumi also work as killers and plague-bearers, although few will whisper

## THE GREAT PRINCIPLE

*"Sidney, sometimes I don't think you're even human. You're more like a dog."*

*"In some ways dogs are more honorable than men."*

—Eddie and Sidney, "The Killer"

Also known as the Fivefold Way, this ancient code originated with a Kuei-jin named Xue, and it was handed down to his disciples as a means of practicing honor and attaining enlightenment. It is far more than a mere set of laws, such as the Traditions that the two-faced Westerners abuse constantly. The Great Principle is just that, a way of living. It is a path that the most savage Devil-Tiger and the most saintly Resplendent Crane both recognize as valid, though their interpretations of individual points would likely vary widely. Indeed, different courts and even different regions vary widely in their treatment of the Fivefold Way in the Fifth Age. Some hold it strictly to the letter and enforce its doctrines rigorously, while others are more loose and lenient in policing it. Knowing the local attitude toward the Great Principle is critical to making a good impression and saving face, and it can even mean saving one's unlife in an unfamiliar court. Here is the most commonly accepted text of the Great Principle:

### The Way of Origin

*Remember whence you came, for it is the unchanging whole of your purpose.*

### The Way of Lineage

*Heed well those who have come before, and respect those who come after, for they are all part of the truth.*

### The Way of Integrity

*Maintain your honor and trust in all thought, word and deed, for the behavior of one affects the entire community.*

### The Way of Obligation

*Understand your duties to your brethren, to the forces of the universe and to yourself, and do all to fulfill them.*

### The Way of Propriety

*Practice correctness in all you do, for the Great Cycle, in its every aspect, has its own nature, and that nature must be followed.*



this suspicion where tiny ears might hear. Like the Tengu, the Kuei-jin tend to have businesslike arrangements with the Nezumi, and while neither side trusts the other much, the information gleaned from such exchanges is often beyond compare.

For more information on the hengeyokai, see **Hengeyokai: Shapeshifters of the East**.

### **Chi'N TA (CHEE-NN-TAH)**

Kuei-jin are eternally amazed and frustrated by those humans who find their own path to enlightenment, and who derive from it power over reality itself. Yet, while subject to the same traps of pride, selfishness and blind obedience to a cause that other mortals fall prey to, even a single "Lightning Person" is a frightening force to reckon with when his attention is directed. The Five Metal Dragons (a.k.a. the Technocracy), is a group based around the supremacy of science. The Traditions represent a loose confederation of magical Arts (including Western ones). The Wu Lung are once-proud Dragon Wizards and masters of the many different Eastern magic styles. Finally, the Wu-Keng is an all-female group dedicated to subverting the Wu Lung and all others who would oppose them. Of the Traditions, the warrior-monks of the Akashic Brotherhood are most commonly encountered, followed by the mystic shamans known as the Dreamspeakers.

Mages may be only human, but their power over reality makes even the most sickly of them a daunting target. Some more philosophical Kuei-jin attempt to discuss matters of Dharma and enlightenment with individual wizards, finding such dialogues extremely informative (if confusing), but that is by far the exception rather than the rule. Most Kuei-jin have little cause to speak with the Lightning People, and when they do, most of them keep the exchange brief and personal contact to a minimum.

For more on the Wu Lung and the Wu-Keng, see the **Mage: The Ascension** supplement **The Book of Crafts**.

### **Hsien (SYEN)**

Long ago, the spirit worlds employed servants and messengers, beings who answered prayers, levied punishments and otherwise facilitated communication between the two worlds. Chief among these were the *hsien*, or faerie folk, who enjoyed great powers in both worlds and helped maintain the harmony of the universe. However, as magic gradually faded from the world, *hsien* were forced to adopt mortal guises to prevent the theft of their Chi and the ravages of spirit-hunting beings. Passion and creativity literally fuel their lives, while boredom and stagnation harm them. *Hsien* are divided into two loose groups, the *kamuii* (kam-wei), faeries tied to one of the five elements, and *hiranyu* (he-ran-you), animal-fae who walk among mortals and watch over them. While *hsien* carry faerie selves under their mortal guises, and the *kamuii* and the *hiranyu* are roughly similar to the familiar noble/commoner dichotomy, Eastern fae share little else in common with their Western changeling counterparts. *Hsien* have a great range of powers, most of which derive from their affinity (elements for the *kamuii*, animal for the *hiranyu*), and as spirits given shape, they often startle adversaries with the versatility and raw ferocity of their power when they are backed into a corner.

Not that Eastern fae are all doom and duty, of course. *Hsien* have a tradition of pranks and boons as old as any Kithain history, and they take great satisfaction in the arts and inspiring creativity just as Western changelings do. However, they were created for a more specific purpose than Kithain were, and this sense of duty



to the will of Heaven is never far from their minds. They are fiercely protective of their dragon nests, and they will go to great lengths to keep the Kuei-jin from their private retreats. For this reason, and the fickle nature of *hsien* whims, Kuei-jin typically ignore *hsien* unless they make their dealings simple and watch for any clauses the spirits might try to take advantage of in the future.

For more on the *hsien*, see the *Changeling: The Dreaming* supplement *The Land of Eight Million Dreams*.

### KUEI (KOO-EH)

Asia is the most populated part of the world, with over a billion souls in China alone, and as such, the afterlife is a teeming place beyond the dreams of most Western wraiths. Many oppressive regimes exist in the mortal world, and the violence and despair these governments engender creates many wraiths. Even without the help of such governmental evil, however, the ordinary trials and tribulations of life ensure that some spirits cannot find the final rest (or punishment) that they deserve upon their deaths, and so the Jade Kingdom adds another soul to the emperor's coffers.

As indicated in the section on the Yin World, the afterlife of the Middle Kingdom is known as the Jade Kingdom or the Yellow Springs, and it is presided over by the First Sovereign Emperor of the Dead, Yu Huang. The emperor's Immortal Guardsmen ensure that any talk of rebellion is quashed, and they battle the demons and other wicked spirits that threaten Imperial citizens. The four Ministries of the empire ensure prosperity throughout the realm and monitor relations with the barbarian souls of Stygia in the West. Great families of the dead, whether born of actual blood ties or simple need, sail shifting currents of alliances and betrayal, but they are poisoned shelters at best, where favor is fleeting and enmity eternal. Those souls who dare defy the Emperor or move against their families are banished to one of the many hells or forged into White Jade. No matter how the emperor would like to see things, however, trouble is brewing under the strict, orderly, hierarchical facade. Many young souls are the products of cultures where ancestor-worship and absolute obedience to the established order are rapidly fading notions. While the problem has been contained so far, things are reaching a boiling point in the Jade Kingdom as the Fifth Age grinds away in the Middle Kingdom. Wraiths are divided into Hun and P'o sides, much as Kuei-jin are, and they know many of the same difficulties in controlling their dark urges lest they drag them down into Oblivion.

As they have already been through death and back, all but the most Yin-aligned Kuei-jin have no desire to interact regularly with ghosts. However, many wraiths are unwilling to let their living—or unliving—relatives go quite so easily. Many wraiths (enraged at the disgrace of having a Kuei-jin descendent) harass the vampire however they can, while others take pity on their poor relative and do their best to aid her. Elder Kuei-jin caution their younger charges to bear in mind a simple axiom when dealing with the Restless Dead: *All spirits want something*. Those who keep this tenet in mind can often strike bargains with spirits, but those who don't seldom remain much longer in the land of the living....

For more on the Jade Kingdom, see the *Wraith: The Oblivion* supplement *The Dark Kingdom of Jade*.



## THOSE WHO STALK THE SHADOWS: EASTERN HUNTERS

Although most *shen* think of themselves as lords of the material world, there are those mortals who dare to strike back. Like their Western counterparts, those who hunt the *shen* are typically loners and outsiders, ignored by the same society they are trying to save. However, years of working in secret and being forced to rely on their own resources have provided these hunters with a multitude of skills and powers that amaze their allies as easily as they destroy their prey. Two groups are responsible for hunting most Eastern supernaturals, the Shih and Strike Force Zero.

### THE SHIH

Not all demon hunters seek to eradicate the *shen* outright. Some brave mortals, knowing that everything has a place under Heaven, hunt only those who have stepped outside their traditional roles. Considered shiftless vagrants or dangerous lunatics, these dedicated souls travel through the wilds of the jungles and teeming cities with equal ease. They seek out those *shen* who have disobeyed Heaven, and dispense the appropriate justice before vanishing into obscurity once more. They are thieves, judges, philosophers and warriors all in one breath. They are the Shih, and they watch.

### STRIKE FORCE ZERO

When it comes to a high-tech solution to the supernatural menace, look no further than the halls of Strike Force Zero. Charged with identifying and eliminating the *shen* wherever they may be found, the cyber-warriors of SF0 use a combination of high firepower and high technology to contact and combat the supernatural. A relatively new agency, and thus lacking in detailed information about the supernatural history of the Middle Kingdom, SF0 makes up for its relative inexperience with a near-limitless budget, the fanatical dedication of its agents and the full sanction of the Japanese government. Unfortunately, the agents discover all too often that mankind's toys are lacking indeed next to the powers of the *shen*.

For more on these two groups, see *World of Darkness: Demon Hunter X* and the Appendix.

### LEXICON

**Akuma** — “Devil”; Japanese-derived name for those Kuei-jin who serve the Yama Kings.

**Ancestor** — An old and honored Kuei-jin; specifically, the vampiric ruler of a court or region. Similar to a Western prince (at least superficially).

**Arhat** — A vampire who has mastered his Dharma.

**August Personage of Jade** — According to Kuei-jin legend, the current ruler of Heaven. Believed inactive now, the Personage will step down in the Sixth Age and be replaced by the Demon Emperor.

**Balance** — See Center.

**Bishamon** — Once mistakenly translated as “Bushi,” a house of Japanese vampires.

**Black Chi** — Yin Chi (of the type used by vampires).

**Bodhisattva** — In the Kuei-jin context, a vampire who has nearly attained *dâh*, but chooses to forego the final step and remain as a teacher to other Kuei-jin.

**Cathayan** — Cainite term for Asian vampires.



**Center** — To Cathayans, the perfect midpoint between life and death.

**Chi** — The concentrated essence of the universe, often expressed as a specific quantity or type of energy flow. Most supernatural powers of the *shen* are fueled by Chi, as are dragon lines and dragon nests. Chi is divided into two types: Yin and Yang.

**Chi'n ta** — An enlightened mortal who practices True Magic; known in the West as a mage.

**Chih-meい** — A "feral" vampire who has yet to attain the enlightenment of a Dharma, or one who has forsaken the path to transcendence.

**Ch'ing Shih** — A vampire whose Yin aspect has overwhelmed it.

**Clans of the Sun** — Collective term for the houses of Japanese Kuei-jin. (Note: This term does not have the same meaning as a "clan" in the Kindred sense.)

**Court** — A group of Kuei-jin who join together due to common spiritual or material goals. Similar in many ways to Western groups as anarchs, but a court also often claims a specific geographic or sociological area as its protectorate.

**Dâh** — "All-Awareness," recognized by Westerners as Golconda and achieved by very, very few.

**Daimyo** — Japanese term for ancestor or house leader.

**Demon Emperor** — In Kuei-jin myth, the ruler who will replace the August Personage of Jade at the coming of the Sixth Age. Some hold that this figure will be one of the Yama Kings, while others contend that Yu Huang of the Jade Kingdom will claim the office.

**Dêñ** — A small satori, or flash of insight, which makes things clear. Indicates progress in a Dharmic journey.

**Diao** — A stumbling block in pursuit of Dharmic advancement, when the vampire becomes lost in the mortal world and its illusions.

**Disciple** — A student who studies a specific school of enlightenment or under an noted master; in the Kuei-jin context, a vampire who has just begun his Dharmic journey and who has little status in Kuei-jin society.

**Dharma** — A Kuei-jin's path to *dâh*. Derived from Di'hana, a term which older Kuei-jin prefer.

**Direction** — Astrological distinction that allegedly governs a Kuei-jin's personality and duties. Five directions exist: north, south, east, west and center.

**Dragon Line** — A line of strong Chi that connects two or more dragon nests. Knowledgeable *shen* can transport themselves along dragon lines; Yang paths are known as "Moon Bridges" in the West, while Yin bridges are called "Byways."

**Dragon Nest** — An area of strong Chi and a weak Wall. Known in the West as Haunts, caerns, freeholds, nodes, etc.

**Ebon Dragon** — Hun Dun, first lord of the Dead. Considered a representative of Yin, now whispered to have been destroyed by the Jade Emperor. Of course, others contend the Jade Emperor is just another guise of the Ebon Dragon....

**Fire Soul** — Frenzy.

**Fivefold Way** — The five principles which the original vampiric bodhisattva Xue taught his disciples. See *Great Principle*.

**Gaki** — A loose term for Japanese Kuei-jin.

**Genji-myо** — A "noble house" of Japanese vampires involved with modern corporate culture.

**Ghost Dancer** — A Cathayan whose duties involve dealing with the spirit worlds; a common term for those of the west direction.



**Golden Courts** — General term for vampiric societies in the geographic region of Southeast Asia and Indonesia, often considered a wild and somewhat "barbaric" region by other Kuei-jin. Female Kuei-jin traditionally receive much more respect in these courts.

**Great Cycle** — See *Wheel of Ages*.

**Great Principle** — A commonly accepted code of unlife through which the Kuei-jin cultivate correct behavior.

**Green Courts** — Courts of Kuei-jin inhabiting Korea and neighboring regions of China.

**Gweilo** — A Chinese term for a foreigner (usually white) who seems to have been born, bred and educated exclusively for the purpose of being an asshole. The more commonly known Japanese term, *gaijin*, means more or less the same thing.

**Harmonic** — A Cathayan of the center direction, whose duties include exploring the specifics of the vampiric condition and the soul.

**Harvester** — A Kuei-jin who moves among the mortal "herd" as a trouble-shooter and *agent provocateur*; a vampire of the east direction.

**Heaven** — In the Kuei-jin sense, the inexplicable force overseeing the interaction of Yin and Yang, ordaining what should and should not be. Those who transcend the eternal cycle of life and death are said to have reached Heaven, but most Kuei-jin consider the Middle Kingdom and the world at large to have fallen from Heaven's favor.

**Hengeyokai** — Shapeshifter.

**House** — Synonymous with "court," used mostly in Japan.

**Hsien** — Spirit beings disguised in mortal bodies, similar to Western changelings.

**Hun** — The rational half of the soul.

**Hundred Corpse Families** — The famed original *wu* of the Kuei-jin, whose histories (and rivalries) date back millennia, and who are commonly seen as a model of Kuei-jin existence.

**Hungry Dead** — Another common name that the Kuei-jin have for themselves.

**Jina** — A vampire who has gained some standing in Kuei-jin society.

**Kaja** — The ancient, formal ideographic script of the Wan Xian, which influenced and was influenced by early Chinese characters. Extremely complex, *kaja* is not known by many young Kuei-jin in these dark times.

**Kata** — A series of ritualistic movements used to focus Chi properly and precisely.

**Ki** — The Second Disciple of Xue; author of the *Ki Chuan*, a Kuei-jin holy book which contains the wisdom of Xue.

**Kin-jin** — Contemptuous slang for the Kindred, or a Western vampire, derived from "people of Caine."

**Kôa** — Vampiric adolescence; one mortal lifetime during which the Kuei-jin is allowed to act like a child before assuming his duties under Heaven.

**Kuei-jin** — Recently coined polygot meaning an Asian vampire, used mostly by younger vampires. Thought to derive from *Gui Ren* ("demon people").

**Kyonshi** — Insulting term for a young, impudent and often Westernized Asian vampire. Also pronounced as *ki-wan chi*.

**Leyak** — An Indonesian term for *shen*.



**Magistrate** — A Cathayan whose duties entail interpreting tradition, enforcing the Fivefold Way, arbitrating disputes and other legal and procedural tasks. Synonymous with the north direction.

**Mandarin** — A Kuei-jin official who has achieved good progress in her Dharma and who has specific duties in Kuei-jin society.

**Mandator** — A Cathayan whose duties involve instigating change and carrying out the will of a court; generally meaning the south direction.

**Middle Kingdom, the** — General term coined by the *shen* used to encompass all of Asia, usually its material aspect but sometimes its spiritual reflection as well.

**Na Kua** — Primordial ancestress of Kuei-jin myth, believed to have some similarity to Lilith of the West. See *Scarlet Queen*.

**Nushi** — A spirit which has adopted a particular *wu* and acts as its patron and protector. If the bond is strong enough, the nushi can even offer some of its powers to the *wu*. Similar to Lupine pack totems.

**Oni** — A Cathayan who makes excessive use of the *Demon Shintai Discipline* (see *raksha*).

**Palace** — A communal meeting place for the Kuei-jin of a court or region. Often, but not always, the haven of the most powerful court or ancestor.

**Penangallan** — Name for certain matriarchal sects of vampires in the Golden Courts, who hone the *Flesh Shintai Discipline* to perfection and revere the Scarlet Queen.

**P'o** — The dark, "lower" half of the soul. Known as the Beast to Kindred.

**Quincunx** — A sect formed by five important Chinese courts.

**Raksha** — Name for P'o-aspected vampires, especially ones who make frequent use of the *Demon Shintai Discipline*.

**Road Back, the** — The trials and events along the metaphorical "path" each Kuei-jin travels while heading toward enlightenment. Also used in a general sense to indicate the events occurring from the moment of the Second Breath onward.

**Running Monkeys** — Slang term for young Kuei-jin, those 40 years old or younger. Also a Kuei-jin insult for Westerners, who are believed to act childlike no matter what their true age might be.

**Satori** — A sudden flash of enlightenment that turns one's world upside-down. This process can take years or occur in an instant of clarity, but whenever it happens, the world is never the same. See *dēn*.

**Scarlet Chi** — Yang Chi (of the type used by vampires).

**Scarlet Queen** — Legendary female progenitor of the Kuei-jin, the representative of Yang (traditionally a masculine force). Compared to Lilith of the Kindred.

**Scarlet Screen** — A mortal or mortal institution used as an unwitting pawn for Kuei-jin activity.

**Second Breath, the** — The return from the spirit worlds; the Cathayan rebirth.

**Shadow Soul** — Period when a Kuei-jin's P'o becomes dominant over his body.

**Shadow War** — Formally declared, ritualistic combat between Kuei-jin *wu* or courts, usually conducted in very subtle and precise power plays and backroom maneuvers rather than outright attacks. Can be (very) deadly, but it is considered a bold and honorable means of airing aggressions. **Midnight War** is the term used when two groups declare a no-holds-barred, all-out feud between them; obviously, Midnight War is seldom declared formally.

**Shen** — Any supernatural/ Awakened being.



**Shih** — An ancient order of Chinese witch-hunters renowned for martial arts prowess and the ability to harness personal Chi with amazing results.

**Sifu** — A respected teacher; also known as *master*, *sensei*, *sabom* or *tetsu*.

**Spirit Courts** — The intangible realms adjoining the material world, where spirits and Chi come from. Known as the various Umbrae to Westerners.

**Strike Force Zero** — A top-secret, ultra high-tech agency of the Japanese government dedicated to investigating all reports of the supernatural.

**Ten Thousand Things** — Creation and everything in it; the Tellurian.

**Tong** — Traditionally, a gang or similar criminal organization, often simultaneously dedicated to protecting and shaking down a particular neighborhood; in the vampiric sense, any group of mortals that willingly and (in most instances) knowingly serves a vampiric master. Compare with *Scarlet Screen*.

**Uji** — A Japanese term for a court of like-minded Cathayans.

**Urn** — A mortal who has the potential to become a Kuei-jin, or has actually done so.

**Wa Soul** — The “normal” state of the Kuei-jin personality/ soul, when she is not frenzied or possessed by the P'o.

**Wall, The** — The mystical barrier which separates the Middle Kingdom from the Yin, Yang and Yomi Worlds. Known to Westerners as the Gauntlet or the Shroud.

**Wan Kuei** — “Ten Thousand Demons”; elder Cathayans’ name for themselves.

**Wan Xian** — “Ten Thousand Immortals”; allegedly the original name of the Kuei-jin.

**Wave Soul** — Fear frenzy, known to Westerners as Rötschreck.

**Wheel of Ages** — The eternal cycle of existence, in which the earth suffers increasing darkness and torment until the cycle reaches its nadir and begins to right itself toward Paradise.

**Wraiths** — Ghosts, spirits of deceased beings who have lingered in the Yin World after death, usually to fulfill a specific purpose. Also known as the Restless Dead. Note: This term is used to prevent confusion with other types of spirits, such as demons, faeries or elemental forces.

**Wu** — A Kuei-jin “family”; similar in some respects to a Sabbat or Lupine pack.

**Xue** — The first and foremost vampiric arhat, founder of the Fivefold Way.

**Yama Kings** — A host of malignant spirit beings who control great territories in the outer reaches of the Yin and Yang Worlds. Many seek to subvert the Kuei-jin, their ancestral enemies, to their service. Yama Kings of Yang are known as “Banes” in the West, while those of Yin are termed “Malfeans” by Western wraiths.

**Yang** — The active, positive principle of life, as well as Chi derived from that principle.

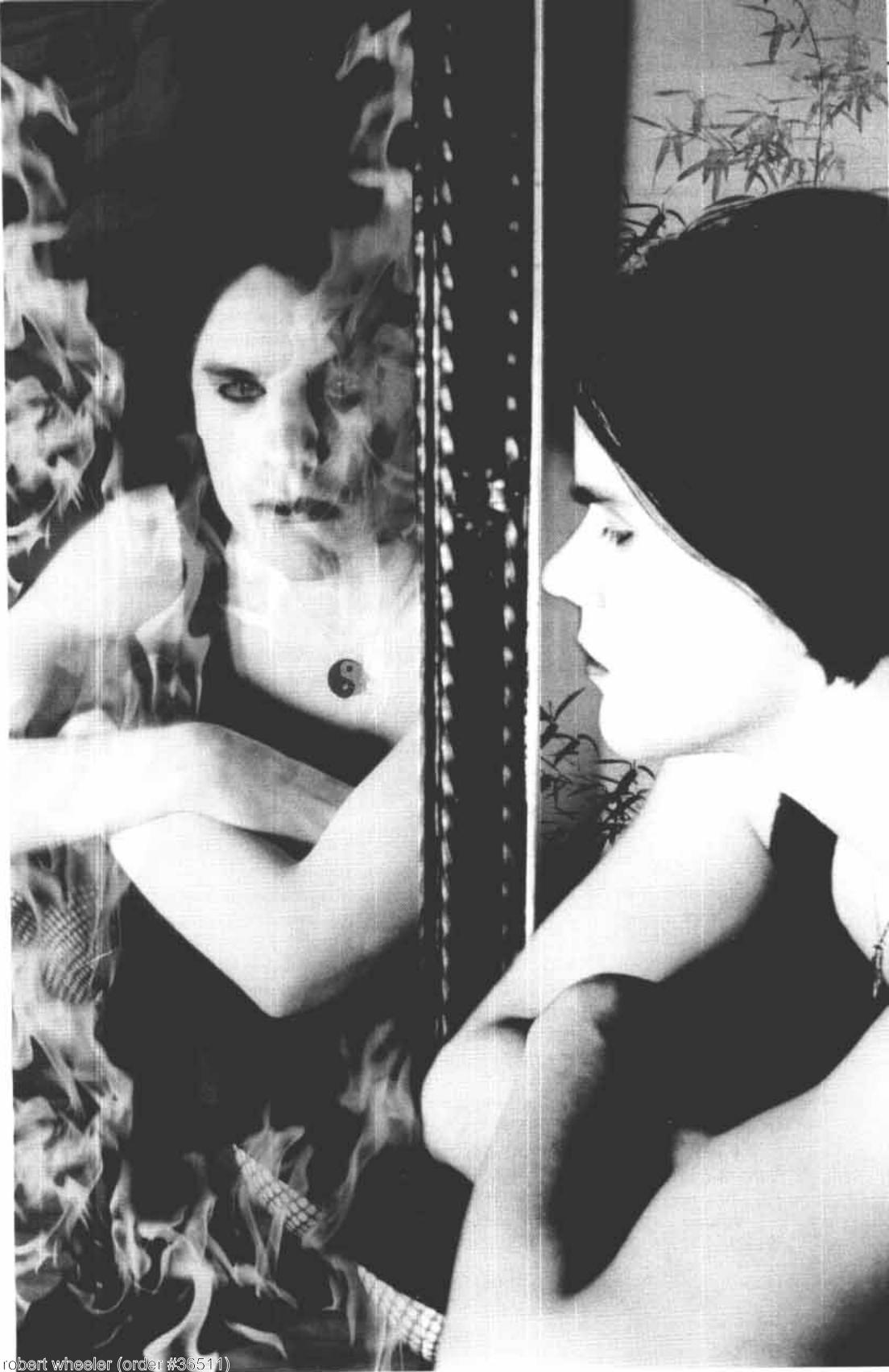
**Yang World** — The tumultuous, “higher” spirit world of Yang energy inhabited by nature-spirits and kami.

**Yin** — The passive, negative principle of death, as well as Chi derived from that principle.

**Yin World** — The negative, “lower” spirit world of Yin energy inhabited by wraiths and Spectres.

**Yomi** — A nightmarish “hell world” formed from defiled areas of the Yin and Yang Worlds. The Yama Kings have domains here, and the P'o of a soon-to-be Kuei-jin goes here to be tormented.

**Zao-lat** — Saulot, founder of the Salubri bloodline in the West; Xue’s first disciple.



robert wheeler (order #36511)



# CHAPTER TWO: CHARACTER CREATION AND TRAITS

Without characters, there can be no game. Each player takes on the role of a character, a persona within the context of the game. To guarantee that all players use the same potentials and capabilities for their characters, the rules of *Mind's Eye Theatre* provide a single simple set of guidelines for character creation.

## STEP ONE: INSPIRATION

Arguably the most important step in character creation is the formation of the basic concept. Before death, every vampire was once a normal human, with hopes, fears, dreams and ambitions. Once the Road Back begins, however, the character brings her particular views to her new unlife. These strengths and weaknesses shape the character's Traits, capabilities and limitations.

The first step in creating a character is to come up with a basic idea of the person. This initial concept can be summed up in a single word — warrior, scholar, diplomat, playboy, peasant. Don't worry about details now; think more in terms of broad brushstrokes. Create the *person*, before you create the vampire.

## PARTS OF THE SOUL - BALANCE, DIRECTION AND DHARMA

With a base concept in mind, determine your character's Chi balance. Doing so filters your concept through a different lens than just a simple idea. For example, a scholar concept inclined to Yin is likely a distant, impartial bookworm of a researcher, while a character with the exact same concept but who is inclined to Yang is more likely to be an outgoing, energetic field researcher. A scholar inclined to Balance would have a measure of both ends of the spectrum but not be overly inclined to either. It's fine to break stereotypes, of course, but the decision of balance affects how your character looks at unlife in a very primal way, so choose carefully.



## QUICK CHARACTER CREATION PROCESS

- Step One: Inspiration — Who are you?
  - Choose a concept
  - Choose a balance
  - Choose a direction
  - Choose a Dharma
  - Choose a Nature & Demeanor
  - Choose a P'o Archetype
- Step Two: Attributes — What are your basic capabilities?
  - Prioritize Attributes (seven primary, five secondary, three tertiary)
  - Choose Traits
- Step Three: Advantages — What do you know?
  - Choose five Abilities
  - Choose three Basic Disciplines (at least one must be spent in Demon Arts)
  - Choose five Backgrounds
  - Assign Chi Virtues (four points; characters begin with one point in each Virtue)
- Step Four: Last Touches — Fill in the details.
  - Record beginning Soul Virtues: Hun (one Trait) and P'o (three Traits)
  - Record starting Willpower (two Traits)
  - Record beginning Chi Traits (equal to permanent Yin/ Yang)
  - Record Dharma rating (one Trait)
  - Choose Negative Traits and Flaws (if any)
  - Spend five (or more) Free Traits and choose Merits (if any)
  - Determine *guanxi* rating to *wu*-mates
- Step Five: Spark of Life — Narrative descriptions

The choice of direction is also an important choice in a character's development. Direction adds a sense of role to a concept — continuing with the scholar concept from before, a scholar of the north direction is likely a meticulous and demanding researcher who thrives on objectivity and perfection. A scholar of the south direction, on the other hand, is more likely to be a subversive writer who challenges established doctrine with her work. A scholar of the east would be more inclined to seek out eyewitnesses as opposed to dry book research, while one of the west direction would probably be interested in the spiritual and philosophical questions raised by her work. One of the center would look toward the value that she and others can gain from her field. Again, it's fine to break stereotypes, but remember that most Kuei-jin find that their directions suit them well — if not always in the way they expected.

Finally — and most important to playing the game — you must answer the question of Dharma, the philosophy that guides the character's actions toward redemption on the karmic cycle. While some Kuei-jin have their Dharmas forced on them by fate or authority, they arise more than likely from the expression of feelings the Kuei-jin instinctively knows to be true as soon as she begins her Road



## CHI BALANCE

- Yin — Attuned to introspection, darkness and decay, Yin-aspected vampires represent the value of potential energy rather than active force.
- Balance — Vampires of Balance struggle to maintain some kind of inner harmony between the forces of Yin and Yang, Hun and P'o.
- Yang — Attuned to the pulse of life itself, Yang-aspected vampires revel in their second lease of life and enjoy many of the same pleasures they once did as mortals.

## DIRECTION

- North — Your duty is to uphold traditions, as well as enforce and interpret the law.
- West — Your duty is to bear witness to the spirit worlds and carry out their will on Earth.
- Center — Your duty is to guide yourself and others to enlightenment.
- East — Your duty is to look after mortals and their fleeting society.
- South — Your duty is to upset order, spark creativity and lead others to new ways.

## DHARMA

- The Howl of the Devil-Tiger (P'o) — The Way of the south, of fire and of Ghost-flame. Vampires of this Dharma teach through pain and seek nothing less than to become demons in the flesh.
- The Way of the Resplendent Crane (Hun) — The Way of the north, of water and of blood. Vampires following this Dharma seek to restore purity to the world by any means necessary.
- The Song of the Shadow (Yin) — The Way of the west, of metal and of bone. Vampires who choose this path deal with the politics of the dead and spare little time for the petty concerns of those around them.
- The Path of a Thousand Whispers (Balance) — The Way of the center, of earth and of jade. A vampire on this Dharma path seeks enlightenment by adopting a multitude of different identities over time, each time hoping to gain some new insight.
- The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon (Yang) — The Way of the east, of wood and of flesh. Vampires who choose this path revel in endless carnal delights and seek transcendence through pushing the limits of experience.

Back. A Dharma is more than just a set of ideas to which one gives lip service. It is the very *essence* of the character and her outlook on her place under Heaven. Never choose it lightly.

## STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

Natural capabilities use Attributes for descriptions. Every character has certain innate qualities. Attributes describe these qualities, marking a character's particular areas of intrinsic talent.



## NATURE AND Demeanor

To define a character's personality, choose a particular Archetype. Each Archetype lists an underlying motivation, a reason for a character to behave in specific ways. The Archetypes described here are, by no means, the final list of personalities. Storytellers can suggest and approve any further numbers of Archetypes.

A character's Nature is her inner-most persona, the true basis of her motives. Though many people bury their desires behind facades, the drives of the Nature often shine through. Since the character's Nature is a result of her upbringing and life experiences, Nature changes rarely. It takes extraordinary events to cause someone to change Natures.

By contrast, the Demeanor is the public face, the one a character shows to everyone else. Even if radically at odds with the character's Nature, the Demeanor provides a convenient mask against intrusion. Demeanors are subject to change at whim; some characters may change Demeanors like some people change socks, while others may choose a single face to present to the world. On occasion, Nature and Demeanor may be the same, but few individuals are so open, especially in the shadow world of Kuei-jin society.

## ARCHETYPES

Architect, Autocrat, Bon Vivant, Bravo, Caregiver, Celebrant, Child, Competitor, Conformist, Conniver, Curmudgeon, Deviant, Director, Fanatic, Gallant, Judge, Loner, Martyr, Masochist, Monster, Pedagogue, Penitent, Perfectionist, Rebel, Rogue, Survivor, Thrill-Seeker, Traditionalist, Trickster, Visionary

## CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

Each character has areas of modest skill and other areas of excellence. You determine your character's natural talents, selecting whether your character is to be physically adroit, mentally agile or socially adept. The character's concept should guide these choices, so a martial-artist is likely to be physically exceptional while an investigative reporter probably has more social development.

- Physical Attributes measure your character's general health, stamina, agility and power. A character with modest Physical Attributes is probably not very athletic, while a character with high Physical Attributes is exceptionally strong, dexterous or tough.
- Social Attributes determine the force of a character's personality and her ability to interact well with others. If your character has few Social Traits, she may be awkward, shy or just plain-looking. A socially potent character is attractive, compelling or smooth.
- Mental Attributes help in problem-solving, learning, deduction and general alertness. With limited Mental Attributes, a character is not particularly well-educated, quick-thinking or perceptive. Conversely, a mentally focused character is attentive, logical or intuitive.

Choose the priority of your character's Attributes. Each character is stronger in some areas than in others, at least at first. Obviously, Dharma and concept shape these Attributes to some degree, but only a broad outline is needed in this step.



## P'o ARCHETYPES

Every Kuei-jin has a dark side to his soul. The P'o Archetype reflects the personality of each character's particular Demon, as well as the type of temptations it offers the character and the type of actions it takes during shadow soul. This list is far from exhaustive, and experienced players should feel free to work with their Storyteller to develop new P'o Archetypes custom-fitted to their characters.

- **The Bandit** — Your P'o is a self-serving criminal, determined to thwart those who would "put it in its place."
- **The Barbarian** — Your P'o rejects traditional ways in favor of the decadent Kin-jin.
- **The Deceiver** — Your P'o undermines the Hun through lies and treachery.
- **The Demon** — Your P'o is a hideous monster that exists only to destroy.
- **The Fool** — Your P'o is a lazy creature who distracts you from the true path in favor of the easy way.
- **The Legalist** — Your P'o insists on rigid obedience and even more rigid punishments.
- **The Monkey** — Your P'o is a capricious creature bent on preventing inner harmony.
- **The Slave** — Your P'o seeks to abase you before your "superiors."

## CHOOSING TRAITS

Once you've decided on your character's inherent strengths, you should describe exactly the sorts of exceptional characteristics he possesses. In your primary area of Attribute development, choose seven Traits; in your secondary, choose five; in your tertiary area, select three Traits. Traits are adjectives describing the character, just like the descriptions in a novel or play. Thus, a Mentally focused character might be more *Intuitive* than *Rational*, or a strong Physical character could be *Brawny* and *Tough* but not very *Quick* or *Nimble*.

A complete list of Traits starts on p. 71. Pick Traits that describe your character as if you wanted to write down the particular qualities of the individual. You can pick a particular Trait multiple times, if you like, to denote spectacular depth in an area.

## STEP THREE: ADVANTAGES

No character begins play unformed and without education. The skills and training picked up in the course of life, and the friends made among various fields of work, all gift a character with special resources. Furthermore, vampiric powers, called Disciplines, come from the Chi energy powering all Cathayans, granting them superhuman capabilities. Collectively, these advantages are learned or developed benefits not inherent to one's raw potential.

Advantages are divided into several categories. Abilities represent skills or training, allowing characters to perform tasks. Backgrounds are connections among the mortal and immortal communities, representing such diverse facets as friends, social standing or Cathayan patrons. Disciplines are powers derived from Chi, arts carefully cultivated during a character's ré period. Lastly, Chi Virtues



## ATTRIBUTES

- Physical Traits: Agile, Brawny, Brutal, Dexterous, Enduring, Energetic, Ferocious, Graceful, Lithe, Nimble, Quick, Resilient, Robust, Rugged, Stalwart, Steady, Tenacious, Tireless, Tough, Vigorous, Wiry
- Social Traits: Alluring, Beguiling, Charismatic, Charming, Commanding, Compassionate, Dignified, Diplomatic, Elegant, Eloquent, Empathetic, Expressive, Friendly, Genial, Gorgeous, Ingratiating, Intimidating, Magnetic, Persuasive, Seductive, Witty
- Mental Traits: Alert, Attentive, Calm, Clever, Creative, Cunning, Dedicated, Determined, Discerning, Disciplined, Insightful, Intuitive, Knowledgeable, Observant, Patient, Rational, Reflective, Shrewd, Vigilant, Wily, Wise

represent part of the composition of a character's soul, how the positive and negative energies balance within him.

### CHOOSING ABILITIES

Select five Abilities that represent your character's education and training. Whether learned in mortal days or honed after death, Abilities set apart your character by letting her attempt tasks that less skilled compatriots cannot understand or complete. You can choose an Ability multiple times, if desired, to show greater expertise. A complete list of Abilities starts on p. 80. Note that your Storyteller may restrict some Abilities.

### CHOOSING DISCIPLINES

Select three Basic Disciplines for your vampire character. You must select them in the order listed (that is, you must take the first Basic level before taking the second Basic level in any given Discipline), and you can only take the Basic levels at this time. Remember, at least one of the first Disciplines you take must be a Basic Demon Art — representative of the legacy of darkness already inherent in every Kuei-jin.

Kuei-jin Disciplines are divided into several categories. Shintai Disciplines seek to master the immortal form and its relation to the world. Chi Disciplines tap into and alter the universal energies at play all around. Soul Disciplines allow the Kuei-jin to control his dichotomous natures and dominate the spirits of others. Demon Arts express the talents of the character's dark side.

A complete description of Disciplines is found in Chapter Four. See the previous table for a quick list of the Disciplines in each category.

### CHOOSING BACKGROUNDS

You may take five Background Traits for your vampire. Each Background represents a tie to a particular agency, organization or resource, whether mortal or Cathayan. You can have up to five Traits in any Background, though your Storyteller may prohibit certain Backgrounds based on your concept. Most Storytellers will scrutinize heavily any Background above three Traits.

Background descriptions start on p. 93.

### CHI VIRTUES

Your character begins play with four Traits to divide among her Yin and Yang scores (characters begin with one Trait in each Virtue already). Remember that a character is considered permanently imbalanced toward a particular virtue if their



## ABILITIES

*Academics, Alertness, Animal Ken, Athletics, Brawl, Bureaucracy, Computer, Crafts, Dodge, Drive, Empathy, Enigmas, Etiquette, Expression, Finance, Firearms, Hobby/ Professional/ Expert Ability, Intimidation, Investigation, Law, Leadership, Linguistics, Martial Arts, Medicine, Meditation, Melee, Occult, Performance, Politics, Repair, Science, Scrounge, Security, Stealth, Streetwise, Subterfuge, Survival*

permanent ratings are three or more Traits apart. (Yin 5 and Yang 2, for example, indicates a permanent Yin imbalance.)

Characters whose Yang rating is out of balance in relation to their Yin rating tend to appear very much alive, and they shake off wave soul easily. They can also fall prey to killing rages due to their high emotional levels, and they have trouble concentrating on long-term goals.

Characters with Yin ratings much higher than their Yang tend to appear much more corselike and indifferent to the suffering of those around them. Due to their emotional detachment, they also have little trouble quenching fire soul when it arises.

Characters whose Yin and Yang ratings are fairly close may exhibit signs of both ends of the spectrum (especially if their temporary Chi levels differ greatly), but almost never to extremes.

For more on Chi imbalance and its effects, see pg. 206.

## STEP FOUR: LAST TOUCHES

The final character Traits come together once concept, direction, balance, Dharma, Attributes and advantages are chosen. Your last touches include Soul Virtues, Chi Traits, Willpower Traits and Dharma Traits. They also offer a time to personalize your character further through the selection of Free Traits, Merits, Flaws and Negative Traits.

### SOUL VIRTUES: HUN & P'o

Beginning characters receive one Trait in their Hun category and three Traits in their P'o category — a mark of the savage drive required to rend the Wall and return to the living lands.

Both Traits may be improved by spending Free Traits, but beware of raising one too far in favor of the other. A soul stifled by order is just as impaired as one riding high in the grip of the Demon.

These starting totals may seem to favor P'o-oriented Dharmas such as the Devil-Tigers, but there is a difference between controlling the Demon and having it control you. As they cultivate the darkness within themselves, Devil-Tigers must always strive to stay one step ahead of the Demon, since their own plans strengthen its hold.

### CHI TRAITS

Each vampire has a certain number of Chi Traits, or energy at hand. This energy can be used for a variety of different tasks, from temporarily improving one's physical prowess to healing wounds to powering Disciplines. You may hold up to 10 Traits of each type of Chi at a time, but be warned that habitually holding more



## QUICK DISCIPLINES

### Shintai Disciplines

- *Blood Shintai* — The art of channeling Chi through the humors of the undead frame.
- *Bone Shintai* — Focusing the undead frame as a receptacle for eerie death energies.
- *Jade Shintai* — Polarizing the body to act as “soul stuff” for focusing Chi.
- *Flesh Shintai* — The horrific and malleable art of infusing the flesh with Chi.
- *Ghost-Flame Shintai* — Conjuring the fire of the spirit worlds.

### Chi Disciplines

- *Equilibrium* — The power to restore (or upset) the harmony between the energies of Yin and Yang, Hun and P'o.
- *Yang Prana* — Attuning the body to the inner potential of its Yang energy.
- *Yin Prana* — Attuning the body to the inner potential of its Yin energy.
- *Tapestry* — Manipulation of the ambient Chi in the environment.

### Soul Disciplines

- *Cultivation* — The fearful art of understanding and assimilating the P'o.
- *Chi'iu Muh* — The true secrets of the third eye and its insight into the soul.
- *Internalize* — Focusing one's will for mighty feats and incredible insights.
- *Obligation* — The strongest soul prevails; the weaker souls obey.

### Demon Arts

- *Black Wind* — Fearsome physical power and ruthless efficiency, as granted by one's inner Demon.

energies than your character's body can handle often has extremely irritating (if not outright lethal) side effects. For more on Chi imbalances, see p. 206.

## WILLPOWER TRAITS

When you exhaust all other avenues, your Willpower measures your innate drive for self-preservation, your sense of mental fortitude and your ability to resist temptation and defeat. You can use Willpower Traits for a variety of tasks, like redoubling your efforts in a task or resisting supernatural coercion.

You come into play with two Willpower Traits, since it takes a tough soul to return from the ravages of Yomi. The maximum Willpower available to a character is determined by the Dharma. Characters cannot purchase more than four Willpower Traits until their Dharma Traits have reached a correspondingly high level — a character with six Dharma Traits may have up to six permanent Willpower Traits, for example.

You may choose to have a card for each Trait of Willpower you possess, and you must turn the card over to a Narrator or Storyteller when you expend Willpower.



## BACKGROUNDS

- **Allies** — Mortal confederates and aides.
- **Contacts** — Sources of reliable information.
- **Fame** — Outstanding reputation in mortal society.
- **Herd** — Mortal followers or acolytes who provide easy access to Chi.
- **Horoscope** — Heaven has smiled (or frowned) on your character.
- **Influence** — Sway over the institutions of mortal society in any number of areas: *Bureaucracy, Church, Finance, Health, High Society, Industry, Legal, Media, Occult, Police, Political, Street, Transportation, Underworld or University*.
- *Jade Talisman* — One or more items you possess act as natural Chi receptacles.
- *Magic Artifact* — You possess an item of mystical power.
- *Mentor* — An older or more experienced Cathayan *sensei* and patron.
- *Nushi* — Your *wu* has earned the patronage of a totem spirit of some kind.
- *Resources* — Material wealth and access to ready cash.
- *Retainers* — Loyal servants who oversee projects and property.
- *Rites* — Sacred rituals of the Kuei-jin your character has learned.

## DHARMA TRAITS

You begin play with one trait in your character's chosen Dharma, representing the first faltering steps your character has taken toward enlightenment and karmic freedom. If joss flows in your favor, you may find yourself acquiring more Dharma Traits following certain auspicious occasions. Besides enlightenment, Dharma offers certain game benefits as well, from higher Willpower totals to being able to absorb Chi from different sources than simple flesh and blood.

If moments of blindness strike and your Dharma Traits ever fall to zero, you are reduced to a *chih-mei*, a mindless flesh-eating monster, and the character must be given over to Storyteller control until either a Dharma Trait is restored or the monster is destroyed.

## NEGATIVE TRAITS

Some characters have particular weaknesses or shortcomings. Others just never developed in some fashion, or they suffered injuries that set back otherwise strong attributes. Such hindrances are represented with Negative Traits. Though Negative Traits are not required, they represent a deficiency or injury in your character.

Since few people actually want to play a character with handicaps and problems, Negative Traits grant bonuses in other areas of character creation. Each Negative Trait taken is good for one Free Trait later. You may take up to five Negative Traits, though you should not take more than three Negative Traits in any one Attribute category.

Unlike other Attributes, you should only take Negative Traits from the list here. Although there are certainly other adjectives that would describe a character's drawbacks appropriately, nobody can be expected to guess a Trait that isn't covered in the rules.



## NEGATIVE TRAITS

- Negative Physical Traits: Clumsy, Cowardly, Decrepit, Delicate, Docile, Flabby, Lame, Lethargic, Puny, Sickly
- Negative Social Traits: Bestial, Callous, Condescending, Dull, Feral, Naïve, Obnoxious, Repugnant, Shy, Tactless, Untrustworthy
- Negative Mental Traits: Forgetful, Gullible, Ignorant, Impatient, Oblivious, Predictable, shortsighted, Submissive, Violent, Witless

Remember to take Negative Traits that you can roleplay accurately and well. The Storyteller may force you to "buy off" Negative Traits that you ignore consistently.

A complete listing of Negative Traits, and how they affect play, begins on p. 117.

## **CHOOSING FLAWS**

Representing specific deficiencies or drawbacks aside from inherent weaknesses common to many people, Flaws showcase particular problems. As with Negative Traits, Flaws grant additional Traits to the user. Each Flaw is rated in terms of its value, ranging from one to seven Traits. The higher the value, the more debilitating the Flaw. A character may total up to seven Traits of Flaws, though elder characters may have more Flaws. After all, age takes its toll....

Flaws begin on p.117.

## **FREE TRAITS**

Because no two Cathayans are alike, each character gets an allotment of Free Traits to spend on any area of development desired. If you want your character to be socially adept but also intelligent, for instance, you can use Free Traits to improve your Attributes so that you have a high number of Traits in both categories. You could decide to use Free Traits for extra Backgrounds if your character has strong mortal connections, or for Disciplines if she has studied her vampiric powers especially well.

Each character gets five Free Traits at this stage. Additional Free Traits come from Negative Traits, Flaws or derangements taken earlier. One Negative Trait grants a single Free Trait. Flaws have variable values listed individually.

- One Free Trait can be spent to take an additional Attribute Trait.
- One Free Trait allows for an additional Ability Trait.
- A single Free Trait allows you to declare a specialization in one Ability Trait. Remember that each Ability can only have one specialization.
- One Free Trait converts to an additional Background Trait, though subject to normal Storyteller approval.
- One Free Trait can be used for an extra P'o Trait.
- Three Free Traits can be used for an extra Chi Virtue or Hun Trait.
- Three Free Traits allow for an extra Willpower Trait, subject to Dharma limits.
- Four Free Traits can be used to purchase the Basic level of *any* one Discipline, in the usual progression, subject to Storyteller approval.
- Merits have a variable Free Trait cost, depending on the individual Merit.



## CHOOSING MERITS

Merits, the antitheses of Flaws, represent special bonuses and capabilities beyond the norm. Each Merit is rated in terms of its Trait value. To take a Merit, you must expend Free Traits equal to the Merit's value. You can take no more than seven Traits of Merits, though some older vampires may have more.

Merits start on p. 117.

## STEP FIVE: SPARK OF LIFE

Your character is more than a summation of Traits and adjectives. At this stage, take the concepts that you've emphasized and develop a story for your character. Look for explanations to why the character learned certain things, failed in others and developed as she did. Think about the sort of person that you're playing and the motives of the individual.

These considerations are especially important for players in *Laws of the East*, most of whom are generally unfamiliar with Asian culture. While one is not required to become a cultural expert in order to play the game, some basic thought is required to avoid descending into crude stereotypes and broad character generalizations. Players are encouraged to look into the regions and cultures their characters will be drawn from. Not only does this research help them step more fully into their roles and understand their character's point of view, it also helps other players get more into character themselves while increasing the overall ambiance of the game.

- Mortal Background — Think about the mortal life from which your character came. Where and when were you born? How were you raised? What sort of education did you have, if any? Did you believe in the occult from an early age or dismiss it as mere superstitious fantasy? Did you have any particularly spectacular successes, failures, romances or businesses? If a character's past is shallow and hastily drawn, chances are good that the final character will be too.

- Yomi — You died, and when you did, you spent time in Hell. Sit back a minute and let this really sink in. Your character has experienced worse tortures than any living mind could possibly comprehend. Even so, simple suffering is not enough — what moment, what purpose finally gave your character the strength to escape Hell itself in order to return to his body? What does he remember of his time in Yomi? How does his experience there color his outlook on existence? Did it rob him of any joy, or did it simply sharpen his appreciation for life that much more?

- The Second Breath — Fleeing Hell is but the beginning. How did your character first view life as a vampire? Was it a curse, a blessing or something else entirely? When did you first encounter others of your kind? Who was your sifu, and how did she train you? Was she cruel, kindly or simply indifferent? Did your character fit into the rigid hierarchy of Kuei-jin society naturally, or does it still chafe him? When did you first meet your fellow *wu* members, and why did you choose to be with them (or did you have a choice)? A character's introduction to court and the world of the Kuei-jin should be a time of great ceremony and mystique, and no Kuei-jin graduates into society without some opinion on the matter.

- The Road Back — Like it or not, all Kuei-jin must admit to some greater plan than the mundane world. What does your character think of direction and astrology in general? How did your character first decide on the Dharma he follows? Was it forced on him by his teacher, revealed to him in a dream or simply an extension of his existing attitudes? Does he tolerate those of other Dharmas, or are



there some he simply cannot stomach? As Dharma and direction often form the backbone of all the character's other motivations, it is important to consider how he views each of them in relation to himself. A character who follows his path out of a sense of cosmic destiny behaves much differently than one who believes he is laboring under a divine punishment.

• Secrets — Secrets are one of the major commodities of Kuei-jin society. Do you have any secret regrets? Hopes? Ambitions? Do you know something that you shouldn't?

• Motivations — Dharma is one thing, but also take time to figure out why your character interacts with other Kuei-jin and how he deals with vampire society in general. Do you seek personal gain? Are you hunting someone or running from persecution? Perhaps you want to impress your sifu or find a mortal companion. If you have trouble figuring out why your character would show up in the game, ask a Narrator or Storyteller for a couple of possible motives.

• Appearance — The Road Back is seldom kind to a character's appearance. Yin-aspected vampires are usually chilling to behold, and even the most lifelike of Yang-aspected Kuei-jin often exhibit some subtly monstrous traits. On a mundane level, consider also how your character stands, walks, holds a cigarette or dresses.

• Equipment — Your character's Backgrounds may grant access to certain pieces of special gear. Whether you have a silk kimono, a katana or a jade necklace, you should talk to your Storyteller to make sure that your character's gear is accounted for. You can have a card for each special item that you carry, representing the object in question (especially for weapons, armor and other conspicuous devices that you shouldn't be lugging around in real life).

• Quirks — Everybody has distinctive behaviors. These things can be anything from constantly pushing hair from your eyes to saying a prayer before every battle. Such a mannerism serves to show off your character's uniqueness. A quirk can even be used to distinguish you when in disguise or using Disciplines to possess another body. Or you could copy someone else's quirks....

## Chi Balance

A character's personality is affected a great deal by his Chi Virtues. A character whose Yang rating outstrips his Yin is likely to be edgy and constantly on the go, while a character with a Yin rating surpassing her Yang will typically be far more cool and collected, even callous. A vampire who favors neither extreme overly much is said to be Balanced, her living and dead aspects in harmony. Although the Trait ratings for the Chi Virtues are not assigned until later, a character's Chi balance is chosen early on because of the effect it has on the remainder of the character creation process. A character's Chi balance should influence every step, from choosing Traits (a character with a high Yin isn't very likely to have many *Energetic* or *Quick* Traits) to Disciplines (a Yang vampire is obviously more likely to choose the *Yang Prana* Discipline).

### Yin

Called "ebon worms" (though seldom to their faces), vampires with high Yin scores are at home with all things dead and dying, and a quiet moonlit night is like a balm on their troubled souls. They make no pretense at being the least bit human — though many are attractive in a pale, Goth-ish way — and they perform many of the unpleasant tasks their more squeamish cousins shun, a reason many other



Kuei-jin find them uncomfortable to be around. Skilled necromancers and natural liaisons with the Underworld, it is Yin vampires who frequently work to appease angry ancestor spirits and tend to the neglected graveyards of the Middle Kingdom. Freed of human standards they held in life, Yin Kuei-jin pride themselves on their efficiency, pragmatism and their contemplative natures. The fact that other beings would classify those same traits as merciless, unfeeling and morbid means little to them.

**Weakness:** Vampires of Yin are vulnerable to the element of wood, which represents Yang. Wooden stakes paralyze them just the same as Western vampires. The challenges required to do so are identical, as are the effects. Note that metal stakes do not affect Yin vampires, only wooden ones.

### BALANCE

Those Kuei-jin whose Chi Virtues are equal, or close to equal, are said to be aspected to Balance. They are all things their fellow vampires are not: equal parts dead and alive, Yin and Yang, light and dark. With such a philosophical standing in unlifé, it is only natural that some of the finest sages among the Kuei-jin are found among the Balanced, since this state fosters many meditations on the nature of vampirism and the place of the Kuei-jin under Heaven. Many fine warriors follow the path of Balance as well, since that philosophy stresses the perfection of being and mastery over the divided self that the vampire has become. Kuei-jin of Balance are perhaps the easiest of their kind to approach, since they are typically the most comfortable with what they have become, and they see their state not as a curse to endure but a riddle to puzzle out. Yet, paradoxically, by having the best grasp of what it is to be Kuei-jin those of Balance are perhaps the most desirous to transcend that state.

**Weakness:** Vampires of Balance cannot be staked. That's the good news. The bad news is that Balance is a delicate condition, and therefore the Kuei-jin is considered temporarily imbalanced any time that he possesses two or more Traits of any one type of Chi than its opposite. When thus imbalanced, any use of Chi has the potential to provoke a bad reaction.

### YANG

These "scarlet dragons" embrace all things living with the characteristic passion of Yang, and they are the most lifelike of the Kuei-jin, determined to cross the Wall into the living world once more. Their flesh is hued, they eat and drink normally, and they can even consummate a union with a mortal (though whether that mortal lives to tell of it is unlikely). Despite all their new powers and sensibilities, however, they are still unable to enjoy the pleasures of life the same way they once did, which is a source of endless frustration for them. For this reason, vampires of Yang are the Kuei-jin most likely to regard their state as a curse or some form of karmic punishment, a sentiment for which they are teased constantly by their more Yin-aspected cousins. The "hot blood" of Yang also makes them dangerous to be around at times, since these Kuei-jin are quick to fly into rages and demonstrate other lapses of self-control. However, when the zeal of Yang is focused toward attaining a specific goal, the scarlet dragons become ferocious figures indeed, and their warriors are legendary among the Kuei-jin for their bravery and determination.

**Weakness:** Yang vampires are vulnerable to metal, the element of Yin. A metal blade or shaft thrust through their heart disrupts their Chi balance and paralyzes them just as a wooden stake does for Kin-jin. Bullets, metal-tipped arrows and the like do not cause this effect — it takes an impaling hit from an all-metal



weapon at least a foot in length. Otherwise, the tests required to stake are identical to those for staking a Cainite, as are the results.

## DIRECTION

One of the reasons the Kuei-jin know that they are superior to the Western rabble is that no vampire of the Middle Kingdom floats around without purpose. Every being has a role under Heaven, and the Kuei-jin take their assigned duties very seriously. One of the primary means of determining the celestial obligation of a particular Kuei-jin is her direction, the astrological sign which points to the duties she is to carry out along the Road Back. Direction is assigned as part of the initiation ceremony into Kuei-jin society and is passed around the cardinal points of the compass, with each point corresponding to different predispositions and duties. While some directions are traditionally associated with certain Chi balances—north and west to Yin, south and east to Yang—the turmoil of the Fifth Age has seen even those ancient laws fall by the wayside.

Direction should not be seen as a straitjacket on roleplaying, but rather a gentle suggestion of how a character is *expected* to act, especially by superstition-prone elders. In this manner it is similar to the auspices of the hengeyokai or the Western Garou—other characters will view a character's behavior through the lens of direction, but that is all. How seriously the vampire regards the duties of her direction is up to her, her *wu* and the court involved. A vampire of the east need not always work among mortals, nor should one of the west always be plumbing the spirit worlds. However, many Kuei-jin find over time that their direction suits them in surprising ways, even if they bridled at the suggestion that their personality might be dictated by the stars. Heaven knows the truth of a Kuei-jin's soul, after all.

**North** — These Kuei-jin are the magistrates, arbiters and tradition-keepers of vampire society, passing judgment on their fellows and upholding the Fivefold Way. Typically, though not always, attuned to Yin, these Kuei-jin are seen as cold but fair and given a wide berth by other vampires. They take a very dim view of those who flout Kuei-jin tradition, and they have even less regard for outsiders who interfere in vampire affairs. Woe to anyone, mortal or *shen*, who violates a law laid down by one of the north. North's color is black, and its lucky number is six.

**Common Natures:** Curmudgeon, Director, Fanatic, Judge, Traditionalist

**West** — Those vampires of the west are the tie between the worlds, maintaining relations with the dead and exploring the many spirit realms. Even in the bizarre world of the Kuei-jin, these vampires tend to be regarded as eccentric, since their extended contact with spirits typically gives them many curious habits and superstitions. In the Middle Kingdom, these Kuei-jin act as the messengers and agents of the mandarins, and they carry out their dictates vigorously. They are also responsible for seeing that the will of the spirits is interpreted and enforced, even if it means acting as executioner from time to time. Their color is white, and their number is nine.

**Common Natures:** Autocrat, Conformist, Deviant, Loner, Survivor

**Center** — Vampires at the center of the Great Wheel are the essence of Kuei-jin society, those who look inward while their fellows attend to the matters of Middle Kingdom. These Kuei-jin explore their own nature, and they help guide others to finding their place under Heaven. Many vampires of the center direction help in the training of younger Kuei-jin, which makes them more attuned to the concerns of the young than their contemporaries and offers them a better



picture of the grave state of the Fifth Age than most. Some center vampires shun the company of their kind and quest into the wilderness or the spirit worlds to seek enlightenment, but whatever their path other Kuei-jin respect their insight. Their color is yellow, and their number is five.

**Common Natures:** Deviant, Loner, Martyr, Trickster, Visionary

**East** — These Kuei-jin are the "harvesters," those who walk among mortals, seeing to it that all is harmonious. They ensure that an ample food supply exists for their fellow Kuei-jin, maintain Scarlet Screens, preserve the secrecy of the *shen*, punish those who overstep their bounds (including overzealous Kuei-jin) and otherwise monitor the mortal population. Vampires of the east direction typically feel very at home with mortals, and they are adept at manipulating them to achieve the results they desire. However, they are also the Kuei-jin most likely to try to return to their old lives, which invariably results in disaster. Their color is blue, and their number is eight.

**Common Natures:** Architect, Bon Vivant, Caregiver, Conniver, Director

**South** — Wild and unpredictable, Kuei-jin of the south direction are the force that keeps the Wheel of Ages turning with their ceaseless activity. This duty puts them at odds with more traditional elders, but even the stodgiest mandarin will admit that when it comes to creating breathtakingly original art, winning impossible battles or deciphering an inscrutable enemy, one need look no further than a vampire of the south direction. Their duties give them a high casualty rate compared to other Kuei-jin, but those south vampires who survive long enough to temper their actions with wisdom become some of the most formidable minds in Cathayan society. These Kuei-jin lead vampire society — and destroy it. Their color is red, and their number is seven.

**Common Natures:** Bravo, Gallant, Martyr, Rebel, Visionary

## DHARMA

*Be, do not Do, for in Doing there exists fault, but in Being, none.*

— Zen saying

### THE WAY OF BEING

Without question, the single most important factor in the Road Back is a Kuei-jin's choice of Dharma, for it is the path that guides his every action from the first moment of unlife to its ultimate conclusion. A vampire who follows the Dharma of his destiny may still be cut down by the dictates of *joss*, but one who fails to follow his Dharma will *never* reach his goal, even if he sees the passing of ten thousand years.

Western vampires of the "Camarilla" cling to their humanity and regard their unlives as a constant struggle to preserve what once was. The Kuei-jin regard this practice as pitiable, even laughable, for such vampires are denying all the evidence of their very senses — they are no longer human, and never will be again, so why try to preserve a state they can only lose in the end? By the same token, the Kuei-jin have nothing but disdain for the mindless monsters of the "Sabbat," who seek to ride their "Beast" instead of truly understanding it. A Dharma is much more than feeling sorry for oneself or reveling in one's monstrous nature. It teaches its adherents which actions are wise and which to avoid, it colors their attitudes and dealings with others, and it even offers them a taste of the enlightenment necessary to regain the good graces of Heaven. It is not a simple series of rules (though each



Dharma has basic guidelines followers would do well to heed), but a Way of the soul, a Way of *being*. This fact puzzles those Kuei-jin who try to pinhole their Dharma into "to-do" lists and otherwise uphold the letter rather than the spirit of its teachings, not realizing that a Dharma has as many gray areas as life itself and cannot be confined to mere words on a page. Countless variations have appeared throughout the ages, and disputes can — and do — arise among followers of the same Dharma as to the "correct" way of pursuing enlightenment. Ultimately, each Kuei-jin is responsible for following his own path, no matter what others might say.

Fortunately, most Kuei-jin recognize the Dharma that is right for them instinctively, and thus, they are better suited to understand the philosophy behind its teachings as well as what is said outright. It should be noted that while most Kuei-jin choose their Dharmas during their *ré* period, sometimes Heaven itself expresses which Dharma a Kuei-jin should follow, resulting in what others might consider some bizarre pairings. (This case is especially common for those Kuei-jin with high ratings in the *Horoscope Background*.) For example, a former Buddhist monk might return as a Resplendent Crane to continue his old ways, but he might just as easily find that he is destined to follow the Howl of the Devil-Tiger in order to make up for his past disdain for all things physical and wicked. Such is *joss*; while it is possible for a vampire to change Dharma, it is far from common even in the Fifth Age. To reject one's previous Dharma is to say that all a vampire once stood for was wrong, and that is a difficult thing for anyone to admit.

**Note:** A character who chooses a different Dharma immediately drops down to Dharma 1 in his new path, he may never again follow his old Dharma, and he loses his old Dharmic Strength in favor of his new one. However, the old Dharmic Weakness remains even as the character acquires the Weakness for his new Dharma (although the old one may now be bought off as usual). It's costly to change one's fundamental philosophy. Kuei-jin who fall from all the Dharmic paths in this manner are sent screaming into Yomi, their soul forever adrift.

**Each Dharma description fits this basic format:**

**Virtue:** The Virtue that this path embraces, and the Trait employed during any Dharma Tests. (If a Discipline calls for a Dharma Test, the permanent rating of this Trait applies.)

**Overview:** A brief description of the path, its origins and its Ways.

**Training:** The trials and teachings that all students of this path experience, as well as common skills members possess.

**Dharmic Strength:** A talent that arises from the studies and training of this Dharma, and which is unique to members of this Way. This talent does not cost anything to acquire, although it may cost something to use.

**Dharmic Weakness** The philosophical or material "blind spot" of the Way, or a common error its members make in pursuing their goals. Note: Characters do not receive compensation for any Flaws or Negative Traits gained from their Weakness.

**Concepts:** The type of people drawn to the path — or shaped by it.

**Tenets:** Eight lessons imparted to students of this Way, the "ground rules" of the Dharma. Pursuing these lessons should be a primary goal of adherents.

**Affiliations:** The elements connected to the Way. Most followers style their dress, behavior and practices after the elements they revere, and they employ samples of these materials in their meditations and rites.



**Auspicious Omens and Symbols:** Important signs to watch for and keep around. Many followers of the Way integrate these symbols into their homes and temples. Bodhisattvas manifest such phenomena — cold breezes, blooming plants, etc. — whenever they appear.

**Quote:** A comment that sums up the attitude of the Way.

## THE HOWL OF THE DEVIL-TIGER

### VIRTUE: P'o

Not every soul fears the torments of Hell. Some even come to enjoy Yomi, and they bring that suffering with them on the Road Back. Pain is the greatest truth of this wicked Dharma, the scourge that clears the mind, destroys imperfections and allows healing to begin. Likewise, Devil-Tigers view true demons as the surgeons who bring such pain to creation, increasing suffering only to improve the eventual product. Make no mistake, however — vampires on this path are often sadomasochists of the highest order, welcoming the same type of anguish they so readily inflict on others for the wisdom that comes of it. Yet many of their younger members have lost sight of the true goal of the Dharma, and they simply bring suffering with no eye toward enlightenment. Such brings great shame to their elders, who do their best to "awaken" these headstrong youths with excruciating lessons. The Fifth Age is a great playground to them, for never before has pain been so accepted — so mass-produced — and never have so many implements for delivering agony been easily available. At the same time, though, most mortals now believe they are used to pain and suffering, and so revealing the wisdom of true agony becomes that much harder. But oh, the fun of opening their eyes!

The Searing Wind (another name for this sect) was supposedly created when the Grand Arhat Xue first learned the wisdom to be gained in suffering. Since then, Devil-Tigers have embraced this original goal gleefully and committed all manner of conceivable atrocities on themselves and others. Devil-Tigers prefer dragon nests in locations that sicken and horrify other vampires, and so their sites often seethe with evil spirits and unclean practices. The Chi gathered there is often tainted with the anguish of countless victims. Lesser beings sometimes take such horrors as signs that these Kuei-jin are devil-worshippers, but few live to repeat such misconceptions to them, as foolish infernalists who begin talks with such overtures learn (in the seconds before their flesh is seared away and scattered to the night winds). Devil-Tigers seek to *become* demons, not serve them, and they have nothing but contempt for those who would settle for the lesser goal of serving a demonic master. In this fashion, if none other, the Devil-Tigers are better than many of their fellows in remembering the original purpose of the Wan Xian — to protect humanity from the Yama Kings. Indeed, Heaven surely smiles at the irony of this Dharma comprising one of the largest forces actively seeking to thwart the ambition of the Yama Kings. (Of course, in battling demons, most Devil-Tigers are simply trying to eliminate potential rivals more than protect humanity, but at least they recognize their purpose.)

As the Sixth Age dawns, the Devil-Tigers prepare to take their place at the head of creation, and they enjoy letting other Kuei-jin know it. The Searing Wind can be found in nearly every corner of the Middle Kingdom teaching mortals the mantra of pain, but they are just as often found eliminating those who understand the lesson too well, as the surgeon must cauterize disease to keep it from spreading unchecked. Devil-Tigers may relish agony, but they much prefer it when they control its applications rather than some impudent mortal bully with a weapon. It



should be noted that a Devil-Tiger does not walk around shooting random passersby and kicking puppies. While often far from subtle, this Dharma teaches that targets should become more enlightened as a result of their "lesson." Random cruelty and violence generally precludes Dharmic advancement (though many Devil-Tigers still indulge on occasion). These Kuei-jin and their philosophy may make Sabbat vampires look like a Sunday school choir, but that doesn't mean they are as blatant in their means.

**Training:** Devil-Tigers learn from pain. Each scream is a new insight learned; each trial endured a new level of strength. As a sudden lightning flash leaves deeper darkness, so too does a brief agony engender a greater calm. Most Masters abduct their charges and torture them in a variety of indescribable ways, seeking to force them to accept their new existence and begin learning the mantra of anguish. Many Devil-Tigers endured lives of great pain and conflict (and more than a few added to the violence in their own way), but nothing can prepare one for the torments of Yomi and the razor-keen lessons of this Way. Skill and finesse are treasured in this Dharma, while raw carnage and brutishness are disparaged. Even a monkey can be taught to fire a gun, but it takes an artist to teach with pain. If the students of the Fifth Age are slower to learn the value of exquisite suffering, that thickness just makes their teachers work harder to impart the lesson (at an ever-greater cost to the students' minds and bodies).

**Dharmic Strength:** Evil's Entrancing Eyes

Attuned as they are to the P'o within, Devil-Tigers have a keen understanding of what drives the Demon within other beings, and they can speak to the evil halves of others in an enticing manner. Once they realize that another being has fallen under the influence of the dark side of her nature, the vampire's player may attempt to appeal to the target's "dark side" by spending a Social Trait and making a Social Challenge. If successful, the wicked being will be inclined to view the vampire as a friend for the remainder of the scene (longer if she is treated well). This state ends if the character is attacked or otherwise abused directly, and the target likely becomes extremely enraged at the Kuei-jin. This talent may work only on beings whose dark nature is very close to the surface. Some examples include wraiths with active Shadows, Spectres, Kuei-jin in shadow soul, Kin-jin with low Humanity ratings, some werewolves and very violent or degenerate humans. Due to their ancient enmity, this talent never works on demons.

**Dharmic Weakness:** Sharpening the Soul-Knife

Most Devil-Tigers are far too impulsive for their own good, and even their elders have trouble creating long-term plans if the opportunity for a quick scream is readily available. These vampires aspire to be *demons*, after all, and humility and restraint are in very short supply. To reflect this Dharmic predisposition, vampires of the Devil-Tiger sect must take one of the following Negative Traits, which cannot be bought off short of reaching *dāh*: *Condescending*, *Impatient*, *Tacless* or *Violent*.

**Concepts:** Philosopher, demon-fighter, assassin, entertainer, torturer, wandering stranger, enforcer, prostitute, bureaucrat, fallen monk.

**Affiliations:** Fire, the number two, the color red and the south direction.

**Auspicious Omens and Symbols:** Tigers, thunderstorms, lightning strikes, huge fires, burning lotuses (often represented by floating flower-candles).

**Quote:** "I'm a friend, remember?"



## TENETS

- 1: Ride the Demon, do not let it ride you.
- 2: Glory in the fires of the flesh and the passions of the soul.
- 3: Teach others to live joyfully through pain.
- 4: Throw fear into the flames and encourage others to do likewise.
- 5: Do not hesitate — act!
- 6: Seek out the brightest embers and feed them until they become bonfires.
- 7: Meditate upon the flash of passion, the dazzle of its afterglow and the darkness that follows.
- 8: Be cultured in your passions and magnificent in your evil. Any imbecile can act like a madman; it takes true wisdom to become a devil.

## THE WAY OF THE RESPLENDENT CRANE

### VIRTUE: HUN

There are those who submit in the inevitability of the Sixth Age, and then there are those who fight back, striving to purge corruption and set the world back on a path harmonious with the will of Heaven. The Shining Ice Guardians — as many Resplendent Cranes dub themselves — are just such a force, seeking to bring order from chaos and right the terrible imbalances of the world before it is too late. Being a bringer of law is a lonely existence and one that demands absolute discipline. Adherence to both the Fivefold Way and the Eight Lotus Path (a series of laws developed by the Dharma) is a must, lest the vampire succumb to the same evils that led to his inauspicious return as one of the Hungry Dead. Like Legalists and Confucians, the Resplendent Cranes see evil as flowing from imperfection, and therefore, harmony is restored and the Middle Kingdom prospers only if enlightened rulers can set examples for the people. Unfortunately, there are few such enlightened leaders in the Fifth Age, and most of the Kuei-jin are too busy battling over Chi scraps to right the situation. Therefore, it falls to the Shining Ice Guardians to remember the original purpose of the Wan Xian, the defenders of humanity, and set the examples their mortal leaders cannot.

As noble as their goals sound, most Resplendent Cranes suffer from a crippling sense of guilt over their very return to the world. After all, if evil flows from imperfection, then they must have been imperfect in life indeed! Resplendent Cranes are said to be as honest, cold and merciless as the winters they love. With the exception of the Thrashing Dragons, the Shining Ice Guardians are the most likely Dharma to view their very existence as a curse or punishment, since Kuei-jin violate so many laws of harmony and Heaven simply by existing. Maybe once the Wan Xian were noble and glorious protectors of the Middle Kingdom, the Resplendent Cranes reason, but they shamed their posts long ago, and even a fool can see that their modern descendants have slid even farther from the favor of Heaven. Duty is still duty to the vampires of this Dharma, and they carry out what they perceive as their ordained role to the best of their ability, but they are often driven more by a sense of grim determination than true confidence of purpose. Because of these perceived failings, many Resplendent Cranes also practice



"penance" in whatever way they see fit, and the punishments they assign to the transgressors they find typically reflect their own lack of pity for themselves.

The Resplendent Cranes are said to have originated when Xue pondered why Heaven had not destroyed those it had evidently found unworthy, but rather left them to ponder their curse. After a long period of meditation, he wandered until he came upon a frozen pond. There he saw a crane pluck a frog from the ice and set it aside. The frog became a butterfly, and in a flash, Xue was enlightened. Unfortunately, too many Resplendent Cranes have lost track of the true lesson to be found in the tale of their origin, focusing on their own unworthiness instead. If the Shining Ice Guardians are to have any hope in reversing the coming of the Sixth Age and restoring an Age of Heaven to the Middle Kingdom, they must scourge the corruption that affronts the August Personage of Jade instead of concentrating ceaselessly on their own souls. The corruption in the Middle Kingdom has spread to the point where not all of creation can be saved — maybe even not the Resplendent Cranes themselves — but if that's what it takes, then so shall the will of Heaven be served!

**Training:** Resplendent Cranes must purge their own impurities through rigorous exercises of both the body and the mind. Mortification is considered improper, but asceticism is encouraged, and pupils are expected to be both prudent and frugal when conducting their temporal affairs. Having shamed their ancestors (or believing they have), the Resplendent Cranes practice generosity, benevolence and other charitable habits in the hopes of righting their past sins.

The Eightfold Lotus Path is another crucial part of training — each Lotus is a lesson that the Kuei-jin must recognize and practice if he wishes to attain salvation. The First Lotus recognizes hope, while the Second Lotus demands a virtuous existence. The Third Lotus involves nurturing the good of the world, the Fourth Lotus demands the purgation of the wicked, and the Fifth Lotus encourages the instruction of others on the proper way of being. The Sixth Lotus requires law just as the Seventh Lotus shows mortal law giving way to harmony, and the Eight Lotus completes the cycle and unites the living world with the spirit. By considering the Eight Lotus Path in addition to the Fivefold Way, the Resplendent Crane can determine what the virtuous course of action might be at any given time.

#### Dharmaic Strength: Strength of the Oversoul

Resplendent Cranes learn early on that the P'o is their enemy in the eternal struggle for enlightenment, and while they know it cannot be entirely banished if their Dharma is to be truly realized, that doesn't mean they have to like it. In particular, Resplendent Cranes learn how to shake off the yoke of the P'o in times of dire distress, calling on their devotion to the Hun and its laws to give them a burst of resolve. Once per story (not per session), an Ice Guardian may address his P'o aloud, reminding it of its foul nature in the eye of Heaven. The player may then spend a Willpower Trait to receive an automatic victory when resisting shadow soul, or to avoid taking one action that the P'o desires, if the P'o has already taken control. The Crane can do so only at a time appropriate to the Kuei-jin's Nature, and the act should be a point of high personal drama if at all possible. At the very least, the speech should be quite commanding and poetic in its descriptions of the P'o's foulness.

#### Dharmaic Weakness: Unbending Bonds of Law

In theory, the Resplendent Cranes are enlightened rulers dispensing Heaven's justice. In practice, however, many are regal monsters who enforce the law when and where they see fit. Conversely, some Resplendent Cranes lose sight of the



elegant simplicity behind the Eightfold Lotus Path and the Fivefold Way, writing volumes of laws and by-laws describing the "proper" code of behavior in a futile attempt to codify enlightenment on parchment. In either event most of them have little tolerance for any kind of deviation, let alone outright rebellion, and Ice Guardians are swift to punish those who dare to question their laws. In particular, each Resplendent Crane receives the Flaw: *Intolerance* for a particular type of crime or other activity of which they disapprove, usually one that reminds them of their own past sins or that they consider responsible for the corruption of the world. They are one Trait down to resist fire soul in any situation involving their *Intolerance*, in addition to the regular effects of the Flaw. This Flaw cannot be bought off short of reaching *dāh*.

**Concepts:** Policeman, priest, soldier, lawyer, teacher, martial-artist, honorable outlaw, technician, paramedic

**Affiliations:** Water, the number one, the color yellow and the north direction.

**Auspicious Omens and Symbols:** Eight-petaled lotus flowers, cranes, butterflies, cold wind, ice and snow.

**Quote:** "Those who wish to become heroes must defeat the Demon within a hundred times before they can claim a single victory against an enemy without."

### TENETS

- 1: Follow the Eight Lotus Path.
- 2: Follow the Fivefold Way.
- 3: When you lose control, make amends. The Demon guides you but does not own you.
- 4: When injustice or corruption appears, correct it to the best of your ability.
- 5: Be generous to the worthy, defend the weak and instruct the young and errant.
- 6: When the wicked will not listen to reason, straighten them as you were once straightened.
- 7: Defend the ghosts of your family and protect your living relations. Do not let them see you, however — you have become a disgrace to their honor.
- 8: Maintain your dignity, honor and composure. You are an example of what the Damned can become.

## THE SONG OF THE SHADOW

### VIRTUE: YIN

Once, long ago, Xue fell in love with a ghost of the forest and traveled to the Yin World to be at her side. Unwelcome in the land of the dead, Xue was turned to dust, but born again from the tear the ghost shed upon hearing him declare his everlasting love for her. The Song of the Shadow Dharma came into being that same hour, born from the knowledge that a fragile bridge exists between the land of the dead and the realm of the living, and these Kuei-jin have maintained that delicate link ever since. Ambassadors of the dead, punishers of the disrespectful and historians of Cathayan society, the Bone Flowers (so nicknamed for a passage in one of their crucial texts, *The Midnight Jewel*) attend to all their duties with an eerie grace that unnerves most other *shen*. They see it as only natural that the Kuei-



jin—dead things that live still—act as the caretakers of the passage between both worlds, and they take great stock in gathering information from both worlds, ensuring that truth endures. Indeed, they are considered meticulous even by the superstition-prone spirits they deal with, and no fact passes by them without being carefully examined for its connection to anything else the Bone Flower knows. This sifting weeds out useless data and sometimes yields amazing results from what is apparently a collection of trivia, but it also tends to try the patience of more dynamic beings, who view the Bone Flowers as cold and distant.

For the most part, Bone Flowers lived unfulfilled lives as mortals, often neglecting family ties and relationships in their quest for academic or artistic excellence. Many of them committed suicide or suffered from terrible illnesses. While the Second Breath cures the scars of the latter, it cannot heal the emptiness that many Bone Flowers feel regarding the pleasures of life that they passed by. The longing engendered by such regrets is powerful, and those of this Dharma who succumb to their desires do so with the urgency of a hundred abandoned dreams. Such moments are as rare as a midnight sunrise, though the powerful Yin bonds of the Bone Flowers tends to make such pleasures of the flesh seem fleeting and temporal; unworthy of exploration. Only the hunger for knowledge seems to survive, and thus, the reason many of these Kuei-jin are such avid historians. It is the only hunger that they still recognize as worthy of feeding. Even as flesh fails and goods fall apart, truth preserved is truth eternal. Oddly enough, it is this same curiosity that leads Bone Flowers to seek out their fellow *shen*, making them the most common ambassadors of the Kuei-jin not only to the Jade Kingdom but the other supernatural denizens of the Middle Kingdom as well. They even serve as guides to those who seek out the paths of the Yin and Yomi Worlds, though such guidance does not come cheaply or easily, as negotiating with an elder Bone Flower is a long, delicate process at best.

Perhaps the most critical duty of this Dharma in the turbulent Fifth Age is preserving the ancient traditions of honoring the dead, which are rapidly being ignored out of existence in the hectic rush of modern life. Angry ghosts howl at the injustices that their thoughtless descendants are visiting upon them, and other wraiths wail piteously for the living to take even the slightest notice of them, reduced to begging for attention instead of receiving their due honorably. In some circles the old ways are even mocked openly, a blasphemy that the Bone Flowers will not tolerate. Offenders are first “persuaded” to amend their ways by the tender mercies of the Bone Flowers representing their ancestors. Those mortals who continue disrespectful or derelict in their duties are introduced to the truth of the afterlife firsthand. Other Dharmas are concerned with the material world, convinced it is the linchpin of existence, but the Bone Flowers know better. The spirit worlds are in chaos, and whatever happens in realms beyond has direct repercussions on the Middle Kingdom. A chain reaction capable of ushering in the Sixth Age may finish in the material realm, but it does not have to begin there, and the Bone Flowers are constantly alert to the threats posed by wicked spirits and other malign creatures. If the other Kuei-jin cannot be made to see the truth of this danger, they are only getting in the way.

**Training:** Many Bone Flowers are taken on long spirit journeys by their *sifus*, especially through the Yin and Yomi Worlds, where they can witness the existence of the spirits firsthand. Also stressed during training are the unraveling of complex, symbolic enigmas and long periods of meditation, since so much of the spirit world relies on the vampire centering her thoughts and interpreting what she sees. All



Bone Flowers must learn at least the basic rules of etiquette governing interaction with the spirits, a time-consuming and extremely meticulous process that must be performed with tact and precision. Finally (and perhaps most importantly), the vampire must immunize herself to the pains of the living world and the spirit realm alike, for doing so is the only protection against the immense suffering that arises from dealing with both realms at once. Some Bone Flowers welcome such numbness and embrace it to an inhuman degree, but others try to fill the emptiness within them that this training creates by pursuing other passions than simply the study of death.

#### Dharmic Strength: Mantle of Tears

Bone Flowers are keenly sensitive to the events of the many spiritual realms around them, especially the Dark Kingdom of Jade. As such, Bone Flowers have little trouble attracting the attention of *kuei* and other wraiths. With the expenditure of a single Mental Trait, the Bone Flower may cause any spirits of the dead in the area to notice her. (Wraith characters should be notified by a Narrator as to the vampire's exceptional presence.) This talent, while occasionally dangerous if malignant spirits are nearby, is often very useful to the vampire, since it allows wraiths to find and interact with her more easily. Furthermore, by dropping her voice to a whisper the Kuei-jin may be clearly heard in the Yin World, although she cannot hear any responses without the benefit of Disciplines or the wraiths employing their own powers. Those wraiths who do attempt to contact the vampire while she uses the Mantle of Tears are two Traits up on all related challenges to communicate with her.

#### Dharmic Weakness: Hell's Freezing Talons

Attuned as they are to Yin, most Bone Flowers appear cold, pale, icy and inhuman to those with whom they interact. While some beings are attracted to this alien charm, most are repelled by the palpable aura of death that surrounds the vampire. And no matter how romantic their detached unives may seem to others, the truth is that most Bone Flowers are as impassive to the joys of existence as they are to its pains, and few indeed are those beings who care to make close acquaintances with these inhuman creatures. (Even Devil-Tigers at least have some wicked charm going for them.) Due to their perceived heartlessness and the rigorous lessons that these Kuei-jin undergo, which are designed to desensitize them, Bone Flowers may never have more than three permanent Social Traits relating to warm, friendly relationships (such as *Empathetic*, *Friendly*, *Genial*). In addition, due to the touch of the grave these vampires carry with them, most hengeyokai instinctively bristle as one of these Kuei-jin passes by. Shapeshifters' players receive a free retest on all Gifts and Abilities used to detect the presence of a Bone Flower in the area.

**Concepts:** Artist, archivist, priest, detective, wandering sage, necrophiliac, graveyard weirdo, ambassador to other *shen*

**Affiliations:** Metal, the color black, the number four and the west direction.

**Auspicious Omens and Symbols:** Bones, cool springs of water, autumn leaves, theater masks, chill breezes, withering plants, dead flowers, funerals.

**Quote:** "There, there, do not worry so. Your uncle rests peacefully, I assure you, and he has forgiven you for the harsh words that you spoke to him the last time you saw him. How do I know? Well, let's just say I spoke to him not long after you did."



## TENETS

- 1: Bathe in the breathe of the Ebon Dragon, but hold fast to the Scarlet Queen's teardrops.
- 2: Behold the pillar of the family and safeguard it against all vandals and thieves.
- 3: Kiss the spirits in their houses and the ghosts in their shrouds. Both are lonely and adore the healing touch.
- 4: Gather what you can from the falling leaves of knowledge.
- 5: Press the truth like fine paper and ink it with the visions you have seen.
- 6: Give freely of your knowledge, but wrap it up like a precious gift.
- 7: Look beyond the obvious and discern a deeper meaning.

## THE PATH OF A THOUSAND WHISPERS

### VIRTUE: BALANCE

Many Kuei-jin, like their Cainite counterparts, puff themselves up with pride in their powers, their immortality, even their so-called "place under Heaven." They use the ancient legends of the Wan Xian as proof of their superiority over everything in the Middle Kingdom and enforce their laws arbitrarily, becoming the very sort of tyrant they were created to defend against so long ago. Not all Kuei-jin choose this way of arrogance, however. Some vampires seek instead to emulate the hollow reed, which sustains itself on water and yet remains empty, grounded in earth and reaching to the sky at the same time. Enlightenment for these Kuei-jin comes from seeing old truths from a new perspective, from learning to balance the conflicting urges of the vampiric self into one functioning whole. It is said that Xue compared three insects he saw along his journey — the jumping grasshopper, the flying wasp, and the humble trundling centipede. Unlike its prouder cousins, the centipede moved slowly, but each of its 100 segments moved in harmony with the others, and each segment contained its own legs, shell, even heart. While considering the centipede's design, Xue became enlightened. The Path of a Thousand Whispers seeks to enact the lesson handed down by Xue long ago, its followers still practicing the lesson of perpetually changing their point of view in order to achieve enlightenment.

Easily the rarest of the Dharmas, the Path of a Thousand Whispers puzzles many *shen*. While most beings seek to establish their identity and hold fast to it above all else, the Whispers forsake just one life for maintaining three or four identities at once, identities that are often as different as the vampire can make them in order to encourage multiple insights. When a Rootless Tree (so dubbed for the peculiar wandering existence common to this Dharma) feels that she has learned all that she can from a particular identity, she stages a tragic death and moves on to a new life. Needless to say, this adherence to the Dharma means that a vampire eventually feels the need to leave her court and even her *wu* in pursuit of a new perspective on existence, making other Kuei-jin hesitant to trust those Whispers they know. After all, who is to say if they will be around when they are needed? After all, running one life alone is a full-time ordeal, and the time required for maintaining three or four is nothing less than incessant, especially when one can only come out at night! To compensate for the most obvious demands their



philosophy places on them, Whispers make up some of the most talented actors and shapeshifters among the Kuei-jin, and they can slide through a bewildering array of personalities with little trouble. Furthermore, they place special emphasis on maintaining a balance in all things: Hun and P'o, Yin and Yang, fury and calm. This careful tending of their soul keeps Rootless Trees from losing their minds in the endless identity shifts they undertake, and it makes them surprisingly stable and confident for those with such a transitory lifestyle.

Of course, it is not only the demands of time and talent that make this Dharma the rarest — vampires are not creatures of intrinsic balance by any means, and keeping up such a delicate state requires great self-mastery. Many are the Whispers who are blown off the narrow path, and on top of that, the Rootless Trees tend to fall harder than other Kuei-jin when they lose their Dharmic Way. The luckiest of these vampires merely stumble about until they have regained their focus, but many more fall into madness or other permanent imbalance as a result. Even when undertaken correctly, gathering insights from different lives and personalities requires a great deal of time, more than most young Kuei-jin are willing to spend for such a high-risk philosophy. However, true Whispers understand that vampires have nothing else but time, and are willing to wait as long as it takes to achieve even the smallest moments of enlightenment. In the meantime, they dispense the wisdom learned of living multiple lives to any who will listen and hone their skills in preparation for donning the next pair of eyes they will wear.

**Training:** Kuei-jin on this path must endure continuous symbolic death and rebirth, and followers of this Dharma are buried for a time after the “death” of each identity, during which time they contemplate the lesson to be learned from that lifetime. This practice begins during the *ré* period but continues beyond that time, becoming ingrained into the Kuei-jin as she travels, and it often marks the times when the vampire chooses to leave her *wu* or court as well. The first introduction to the Broken Mask technique comes when the master assigns his pupil her first three identities and an impossible question to answer for each, then sets her free to learn what she may. Necessary skills, funds, sutras and other tools are provided for these identities, although all future lives are the vampire’s responsibility. After those three lives have been completed, the pupil is free to pursue her own destiny.

Identities of a Whisper do not include taking on new Dharmas, or even the semblance of them. After all, one already has a Dharma to consider and fulfill.

#### Dharmic Strength: Ten Thousand Whirling Thoughts

Maintaining so many identities at once is very exacting, but it also lends the vampire certain benefits when it comes to resisting mental domination, especially against those unfamiliar with the ways of these strange Kuei-jin. When another supernatural creature attempts to read or manipulate the thoughts of one of these Kuei-jin, the defending Whisper may attempt to confuse the probing party by mixing in details of other lives in a nonsensical torrent. This tactic translates in game terms as one free retest per different identity the Whisper is currently maintaining. Once one of these retests is used, however, it is not regained until a new story begins. A Whisper must already have been using an identity for at least a few weeks before it can add to the Ten Thousand Whirling Thoughts. If in doubt, consult a Storyteller about which identities are “involved” enough to be useful. This talent works only against powers which attempt to read thoughts, manipulate **memories** and otherwise investigate or alter the mind of the Kuei-jin. Powers that affect emotions or auras or that control the mind directly without seeking to explore it (such as *Obligation* or *Dominate*) are not affected by use of this Strength.



### Dharmic Weakness: Life Among the Faceless

Balance is a demanding lifestyle to maintain, and the Kuei-jin must be willing to take extreme measures to preserve this state, even destroying things and people he loves too much in order to maintain an even perspective. Obviously, such behavior does little to endear Whispers to their fellow vampires and *shen* alike, for who knows if a Whisper won't suddenly turn on friends in order to maintain her own internal harmony? To reflect the suspicion with which they are met by their fellow Kuei-jin, all Whispers receive a permanent *Untrustworthy* Negative Trait, and many of them accumulate more such Traits if they stay in one place too long (or betray those dear to them one too many times). Narrators should also be alert to the mental health of Whispers and make sure the rules regarding insanity and derangements are followed carefully. Keeping up so many separate lives can sometimes be more than one sane mind can handle.

**Concepts:** actor, spy, doctor, philosopher, rootless artist, conniving seducer, substitute teacher, or all the preceding at once

**Affiliations:** Earth, the color white, the number zero and the center direction.

**Auspicious Omens and Symbols:** Jade masks, caves, centipedes, tunnel complexes, boulders carved into human shapes.

**Quote:** "Only a fool would disagree with the fact that life is an ever-changing art form, and yet you would hold yourself to just one shape for all eternity?"

### TENETS

- 1: Live 1000 lifetimes, each one different from the last.
- 2: Learn what you can from each life.
- 3: Change as much as possible between breaths.
- 4: If you grow too close to something, kill it. It will only hinder you.
- 5: Turn your back on each life as you leave it.
- 6: Give when generosity is needed; take when theft is required.
- 7: Pry open the eyes of the sightless and make the mute defend their wordless state. All beings must confront their choices, so question them as you pass.
- 8: When something appears to be out of balance, correct it. If you cannot, destroy it.

## THE DANCE OF THE THRASHING DRAGON

### VIRTUE: XANG

Never content with the way things are, always searching for a new pleasure or thrill to enjoy, the Thrashing Dragons are as vibrant and lifelike as vampires can be, reveling in the carnal delights of the Middle Kingdom as they move among the teeming masses. Bursting as they are with life-force, most Dragons seem too vivid to be real to those around them, like the forces of nature to which they pay homage. This Dharma's origin is said to have been found when Xue was resting during a rainstorm, and the despair that so often clouded his thoughts became cast aside in the favor of the soothing embrace of the rain. Sitting there in the middle of the storm, Xue saw the insects crawling around him, the birds taking shelter in the trees, the earth drinking deep of the storm — no matter what he did, he could not



deny the vibrant pulse of life all around him. When the storm passed and birds began flying through the rainbow that followed, Xue laughed and in that moment he was awakened. The Laughing Rainbows follow this example as literally as possible, never shutting out a new life experience or a new perspective they come across no matter what may come of it, and their carnal appetites are legendary (perhaps infamous would be a better term for it) among their fellow Kuei-jin. Many Dragons denied laughter and physical delight during their lifetimes, and only since their death and rebirth have they begun learning how to enjoy themselves in the world of the flesh. Now they do so with a lust so strong it blasts aside all mortal standards. Of course, sex is not the only means these vampires use to explore the life-force around them — any pleasurable activity, no matter how perverse it may seem to outsiders, will eventually draw the eyes of the Dragons.

Indeed, this same appetite is the basis for the primary flaw infecting the Dharma — no matter how much Yang energy a Thrashing Dragon may possess, it is still stolen energy, a pale shadow of the life-force that once flowed naturally through his veins. Most Dragons thirst secretly to be alive again, but no matter how much life-energy the vampire consumes, his curse cannot be undone — an unpleasant truth that makes even the most brazen Dragons falter in their endless quest for pleasure. This same reason leads the vampire to explore ever more twisted and alien pleasures in the hopes of finding one that will reverse his condition. While this Dharma is not necessarily evil in and of itself, many of its members become hedonists to such a degenerate degree that other Kuei-jin do their best to avoid contact with them and their "temples." Buddhist Kuei-jin bear a particular disgust for the Laughing Rainbows, and they often bar them from their courts. As might be expected, though, Dragons have little use for societal taboos, and enjoy shocking mortals out of their daily routines by cavorting about naked or nearly so, indulging their passions openly in the streets and otherwise destroying the propriety and decorum of an occasion. Many Laughing Rainbows are also expert shapeshifters, since flesh is just one more medium and those who wish to become animals had best learn how to run alongside them. No matter how degenerate the Dragons become, however, they are careful to honor the kami of their animal and elemental companions. Most of these vampires offer a thoughtful thanksgiving after stealing the life-force of a mortal — after all, the Yang would be useless without a vessel to concentrate it.

With so many other problems in the world as the Sixth Age approaches, other Kuei-jin look on the antics of the Laughing Rainbows and shake their heads in sorrow. Why do they waste their time inventing more and more pleasurable pursuits when so much important work needs to be done? For their part, the Dragons refuse to dignify such speculation with an answer — as those Kuei-jin most comfortable dealing with mortals, they have their finger on the pulse of the world (literally!). Cities are their playgrounds and humanity is the clay in their expert craftsmen's hands. Most other vampires are unaware of just how much sway the Dragons would have if they chose to exercise it, but for their part, the Laughing Rainbows have yet to deem such action necessary. Instead, they play the part of the capering fool, dancing with the Scarlet Queen while they figure out new ways to beat the Ebon Dragon into submission at every turn. After all, reality may be nothing more than a rainbow — illusory and colorful — but those who know each color inside-out are still best suited to be its masters. It remains to be seen if this Dharma will understand the lessons learned of ten thousand impassioned nights

## Character Creation



and take hold of the rainbow at last, or whether they will simply laugh as the colors slip away.

**Training:** Business is pleasure for these hedonistic Kuei-jin, and their training period is a hectic rush of pleasures followed by strict physical training regimens. Martial arts and Tantrik yoga practices are common, but other strenuous pursuits are encouraged as long as the vampire pushes his body to the limit. Especially talented students may also receive instruction in the arts of shapeshifting or spirit-travel, but attracting the eye of a worldly elder Laughing Rainbow can be difficult indeed. The culmination of many Dragons' training comes with an exhaustive night-long revel designed to test their endurance as well as their expertise in their chosen passions, and only the most aggressive and good-humored Dragons pass.

**Dharmic Strength:** Typhoon of Lotus Petals

As dancers with the Scarlet Queen, the Dragons seem to many of their contemporaries to be the embodiment of dynamism itself. They perform actions with a living grace unseen among their fellow undead. Though the voice of the Queen calls to them in myriad ways, often pulling them in two directions at once, each Dragon learns to trust one inner voice that expresses his connection to the Yang energy of the cosmos more deeply than any other. Essentially, the Laughing Rainbow's player must choose one dynamic activity — martial arts, vigorous sports, dance, etc. — that she feels best captures the joy of life that her character strives to maintain. Once per story (not per session), the Dragon's player can refresh her character's Yang Chi pool up to the level of her permanent Willpower Traits by performing an energetic display of her chosen form and spending a Willpower Trait. This performance can never be the same twice, and should be breathtaking to behold — a successful *Performance* or other Ability Challenge is also required for a vampire attempting the Typhoon, and it should never be too easy. (In other words, a use of the Typhoon should always add something to the mood or atmosphere of the game, and not just be used as a quick "recharge.")

**Dharmic Weakness:** Honeyed Touch of Sinful Flesh

Even as this Dharma gains strength from its dynamic lifestyle, it is also far too easy for Kuei-jin along this path to lose sight of their goal in favor of the diversions found along the way. Just as each of the Laughing Rainbows has a favorite means of expressing his Yang drive, so too does this constant exposure to pleasure engender certain unhealthy vices. Each new story (not each session), the Dragon is assigned one hedonistic activity — sex, drinking, drugs, etc. — in which he must indulge at least once per session. If the Dragon fails to indulge his vice during the session, he gains the temporary Negative Traits: *Impatient* and *Oblivious*, indicating his distraction until he takes care of the matter. This hedonistic impulse must change from story to story, as the Laughing Rainbows are experimenting with new means of pleasure-seeking all the time. Players and Storytellers are encouraged to be creative in designing these vices and to try to weave them from the context of a character's personal story line, although the Storyteller's word is final on what vice is assigned. This Flaw does not always have to involve a degenerate pleasure (though many are, especially those of elder Dragons), but the behavior is very compulsive and the need for such desires cannot be escaped before attaining *dāh*.

**Concepts:** Artist, yoga master, extreme sports enthusiast, doctor, farmer, entertainer, prostitute, daredevil, activist, Tantrika, cannibal, martial artist, eco-terrorist, hengeyokai ambassador

**Affiliations:** Wood, the number three, the color green and the east direction.



**Auspicious Omens and Symbols:** Rainbows, thunderstorms, blooming flowers, blood, yoni and lingam symbols.

**Quote:** "What does it say of you that my dead flesh has seen far more sensations than your living skin will ever know? Now who's the bigger abomination, the being who once lost his life and now lives it as fully as possible, or the one who lives still but ignores all there is around him?"

### TENETS

- 1: Attune yourself to life in all its forms.
- 2: Meditate upon passions. Do not shut them out, but experience them, learn from them and encourage them in others.
- 3: Use your powers as a farmer employs his threshing-tools: Break the stalks, gather the rice, scatter the seeds, help them grow.
- 4: Help all living things thrive. When something appears to be dying, consume it and send it back to the Cycle.
- 5: Half-life is an abominable state. Be as alive as you can be.
- 6: Guide the sun up each morning. Sleep when it is risen.
- 7: Laugh often and help others to see the humorous shadows.
- 8: Protect the spirits. Without them, the life-dance stops.

## ARCHETYPES

Each Archetype describes an essential form of personality. Though a character is more than a simple set of drives, an Archetype provides a basic springboard from which the character's motives and behaviors can develop. An archetypal Nature shows the underlying elements making up a personality, while archetypal Demeanor is the face the character shows to the world around him.

In the course of play, a character's Nature Archetype serves to provide concrete goals and codes of behavior, which means that a player can call for a retest on a Virtue Test automatically if a frenzy would violate the character's Nature. However, if someone discovers your character's Nature, it can be used against you in the same way a Negative Trait might be, forcing you into a challenge.

**Example:** Lao Yuen, a Thrashing Dragon with a Bravo Nature and a seething hatred of the tongs who caused his death, is leading a Scarlet Screen of five mortals against his killers' tong. One of the thugs brandishes a Molotov cocktail at Yuen, whose player tests for *wave soul* and fails. However, Yuen's player calls for a retest based on Yuen's Nature — he's too bent on dealing some grievous bodily harm to let some tattooed punk scare him away from his revenge. The player makes a second test and wins. Yuen pauses only for a moment at the sight of the Molotov before sneering slightly and launching himself at the terrified goon.

Later, Yuen is wounded and low on Chi, and the jina overseeing the raid asks him to charge into another den of killers in a clean-up action. Yuen is in no shape to do so, and he refuses. The jina scolds him angrily: "You swore on your honor to do away with these impudent fools, and I'm too Commanding for you to refuse so easily." The jina then adds mockingly, "Has the mighty Bravo let his prey escape him so easily?" The jina's player calls for a Social Challenge, and because he guessed Yuen's Nature correctly, Yuen's player must advance two Traits. The challenge is made, and Yuen loses. Wearily, the Laughing Rainbow rises to his feet and prepares for the next assault.



- Architect — You hope to leave a lasting legacy; to build something for the future.
- Autocrat — You want to take charge, since nobody else can do the job right.
- Bon Vivant — Only a good time can assuage your otherwise empty existence.
- Bravo — Other people only get in your way of doing things, and you do not hesitate to bully them into line.
- Caregiver — You protect and comfort others.
- Celebrant — You find that joy springs from your overriding passion.
- Child — You need others to nurture and help you.
- Competitor — Everything is a contest, and you plan to win.
- Conformist — You take the lead and the cues from someone else, letting others handle the responsibility.
- Conniver — There's no point to doing it yourself when you can get someone else to put in the effort.
- Curmudgeon — Nothing's perfect, everything sucks, and you're going to make sure that everybody knows it.
- Deviant — Normal? What's that? You have no use for social norms and mores.
- Director — You feel an overriding need to impose order.
- Fanatic — One cause, one truth, one purpose — you serve and proselytize with absolute conviction.
- Gallant — Everything you do is geared toward flamboyance and excess, since you need the attentions of those around you.
- Judge — You have a deep sense of right and wrong, and you seek justice measured by your principles.
- Loner — You just don't belong, either by choice or by nature.
- Martyr — Everyone benefits when you shoulder the burdens of your ideals.
- Masochist — You test yourself through suffering, and you find meaning in enduring pain.
- Monster — Build your purpose from a malignant drive to showcase evil through your actions.
- Pedagogue — Everyone can learn from your example and experiences. You were born to teach others.
- Penitent — You have sinned, and you cannot rest until you atone for it.
- Perfectionist — You do everything with wholehearted zeal aimed at immaculate completion. There's no excuse for flawed efforts.
- Rebel — Whether from habit or drive, you lash out at the system and try to break it down.
- Rogue — First and foremost, you look out for number one.
- Survivor — Nothing stops you, for your drive to pull through is indomitable.
- Thrill-Seeker — You're always after the next high, by pushing danger to the edge.
- Traditionalist — The old ways are the best ways, so you preserve and protect them.
- Trickster — Existence is absurd, so you fill it with humor and irreverence to avoid looking too deeply at the pain.
- Visionary — A goal fills your mind, and your dreams bring faith to others.



## ATTRIBUTES (BIDDING TRAITS)

The Traits that describe your character's innate capabilities are called Attributes. You use these Attributes in the game to perform actions and overcome obstacles. While certain situations may also require Abilities, such matters are a function of training. Even with the appropriate training, you must call on your own strengths to finish the tasks set before you.

When you enter a situation with a questionable outcome, you bid a Trait appropriate to the challenge. If you are trying to knock someone over, for instance, you might bid the Physical Trait *Brawny* as you use your strength. The nature of the challenge determines the Trait used — Physical, Social or Mental.

You should try to bid a Trait appropriate to the nature of each given challenge. That is, using your strength may call on the *Brawny* Trait but not the *Dexterous* Trait. If you and your opponent agree, you can use other Traits, but in general, choose Traits fitting the challenge.

When you bid a Trait for a challenge, remember that you risk that particular Trait. If you fail the challenge, you may lose the use of the Trait temporarily, as you exhaust your resources and lose your confidence. Some situations may require the use of an additional Trait or more. Any time that you are considered "bids down," you must risk additional Traits. Conversely, if you are listed as "Traits up" or "Traits down," you modify your current number of Traits when comparing for overbids or ties.

For the purposes of determining what kinds of Traits are appropriate to specific challenges or Disciplines, the Trait listings include a run-down of what sorts of Traits fit into what specialized categories. For example, the Physical Trait *Tough* may be appropriate for the Discipline of *Black Wind* because it is a strength-related Trait. Of course, you can ignore these categories if you wish, in favor of speeding the game. Remember, unique situations may allow Traits to be used in unusual ways.

New players may find it easier to bid a generic Trait from the appropriate pool instead of picking a specific one. Doing so allows them time to get the hang of the system. When they're more comfortable with bidding, then start having them choose Traits.

### PHYSICAL TRAITS

**Strength-related:** *Brawny, Brutal, Ferocious, Stalwart, Tough, Wiry*

**Dexterity-related:** *Dexterous, Graceful, Lithe, Nimble, Quick*

**Stamina-related:** *Enduring, Resilient, Robust, Rugged, Tireless*

**Miscellaneous Physical:** *Agile, Energetic, Steady, Tenacious, Vigorous*

**Agile:** You have a well-honed and flexible body. You can bend, twist, run and jump with ease.

Uses: Sports, duels, running, acrobatics and grappling.

**Brawny:** With arms like coiled dragons and legs like mountains, you possess bulky, muscular power.

Uses: Punching, kicking or grappling in combat when your goal is to inflict damage. Power-lifting. All feats of strength.

**Brutal:** Honorable or not, there's no action that you're not capable of doing if it means survival.



Uses: Fighting an obviously superior enemy. Shutting out distractions or emotions in order to act.

**Dexterous:** You have excellent manual dexterity and general skill with your hands.

Uses: Weapon-oriented combat. Picking pockets. Punching.

**Enduring:** Sturdy in the face of persistent physical opposition.

Uses: When your survival is at stake, this is a good Trait to risk as a second, or successive, bid.

**Energetic:** A walking advertisement for Yang, you have a seemingly endless well of energy and zeal for your tasks. In stressful situations, you can call on reserves most people can't imagine.

Uses: Combat. Sports.

**Ferocious:** Tigers prowl in your eyes and cobras flinch at your strikes. You engage physical situations with brutal intensity, and you have no trouble inflicting serious harm when necessary.

Uses: Any time that you intend to do serious harm. When in fire soul.

**Graceful:** Your balance seldom wavers, and your motions are confidently efficient.

Uses: Combat defense. Whenever you might lose your balance (crossing a river on stepping stones, fighting on four-inch-wide rafters).

**Lithe:** You possess excellent flexibility and suppleness.

Uses: Acrobatics, gymnastics, dodging and dancing.

**Nimble:** Skillful and light.

Uses: Dodging, jumping, rolling and acrobatics. Hand-to-hand combat.

**Quick:** Excellent reaction time coupled with fast, precise movements.

Uses: Defending against a surprise attack. Running, dodging and attacking.

**Resilient:** Very healthy and able to recover from injury easily.

Uses: Resisting adverse environments. Defending against damage in an attack.

**Robust:** As unflinching as jade itself, you take physical damage in stride.

Uses: Defending against damage in an attack. Endurance-related actions that could take place over a period of time.

**Rugged:** Hardy, rugged and extremely healthy, you can shrug off wounds to complete your duties.

Uses: When resisting damage. Any challenge that you enter while injured.

**Stalwart:** Physically strong and unwilling to bow to pressure, you stand your ground and impress even the lowliest of *akuma* with your courage.

Uses: Resisting damage, or when making a stand against overwhelming odds or a superior foe.

**Steady:** You have a firm understanding and control over everything you do, which keeps you unfaltering and balanced.

Uses: Weapon attacks. Fighting in exotic locations. Piloting oil tankers.

**Tenacious:** Like a mongoose once its fangs sink in, you refuse to give up actions once you've begun them, even if it isn't always the wisest course of action.

Uses: Second or subsequent Physical Challenge.

**Tireless:** Gifted with a runner's stamina and great physical patience, your endurance outstrips most people easily.

Uses: Any endurance-related challenge, second or subsequent Physical Challenge with the same foe or foes.



**Tough:** A bad-ass to the end, you could lose an eye in a gun battle and still feel fit enough to light a cigarette off a burning car before going a few more rounds with your foe.

**Uses:** Whenever you are wounded or winded.

**Vigorous:** A combination of energy, power, intensity and resistance to harm.

**Uses:** Combat and athletic challenges when you are on the defensive.

**Wiry:** You possess streamlined, muscular power.

**Uses:** Punching, kicking or grappling in combat. Acrobatic movements. Endurance lifting.

### **NEGATIVE PHYSICAL TRAITS**

**Clumsy:** Nobody asks you to hold a drink, much less a child or anything else valuable. If anyone drops a gun clip or trips on a tree root, it's likely to be you.

**Cowardly:** You've been dead once and are in no hurry to experience it again. Any time danger rears its head you can be found pounding on the nearest exit. Even when you're winning, you sometimes lose your nerve and back off anyway, just from habit.

**Decrepit:** Whether by age or other cause such as disease, you move as if you're old and infirm. Recovery from even slight injuries takes a long time, you tire out fast, and you are unable to apply all your physical strength.

**Delicate:** Perhaps you are very slight of build, or maybe you just have never had to undergo any real physical hardship. Regardless, you are hurt easily by physical forces.

**Docile:** The opposite of the *Ferocious* and *Tenacious* Traits. You aren't the type who gets over being bullied very easily. You lack physical persistence, and you tend to submit rather than fight long battles.

**Flabby:** You have trouble using your strength against opponents, since your muscles are underdeveloped and your body has seen a lot of time since any kind of exercise.

**Lame:** Whether due to accident or battle damage, you're crippled in one or more limbs. This defect can be as easy to spot as a missing leg or as subtle as an arm that just isn't quite right anymore.

**Lethargic:** Passivity is a virtue of Yin, but you overindulge in this virtue as much as possible. You have trouble mustering any substantial energy or drive, and others tend to see you as lazy and blasé.

**Puny:** To be honest, you are weak and inferior in strength. Having this Trait often also means being of diminutive size.

**Sickly:** Whether you're actually sick or not, your body responds to stress as if it were in the last throes of a debilitating illness.

### **SOCIAL TRAITS**

**Charisma-related:** Charismatic, Charming, Dignified, Eloquent, Expressive, Genial

**Manipulation-related:** Beguiling, Commanding, Ingratiating, Persuasive

**Appearance-related:** Alluring, Elegant, Gorgeous, Magnetic, Seductive

**Miscellaneous Social:** Compassionate, Diplomatic, Empathetic, Intimidating, Friendly, Witty

**Alluring:** Beauty is only part of seduction. Presentation is also key to ensnaring the hearts of others, and you're skilled at using your natural presence to inspire such desire.



Uses: Seduction. Convincing others.

**Beguiling:** Tales told by you have more twists than a hundred knots, and when you choose to, you can weave believable lies and other misleading phrases together with ease.

Uses: Tricking others. Lying under duress.

**Charismatic:** You are gifted with a personality that appeals to others, from small groups of friends to crowds at a rally, and you have the raw material of a strong leader.

Uses: In a situation involving leadership or the achievement of leadership.

**Charming:** You know how to choose your words and actions in a pleasing fashion, and people tend to consider you a friend — or at least an ally — very quickly.

Uses: Convincing. Persuading.

**Commanding:** People tend to obey orders you give just because of your force of presence and appearance of command. You just have a knack for bringing people in line and getting them working on what needs to be done.

Uses: When you are seen as a leader. Direct confrontations.

**Compassionate:** Your empathy for the suffering of others is admirable, and in the right situations, you have little trouble convincing others of your sincere desire to aid those in need.

Uses: Defending the weak or downtrodden. Defeating major obstacles while pursuing an altruistic end.

**Dignified:** No matter what your appearance may be, you carry yourself well and seldom seem ill at ease, no matter the circumstances. Honor exudes from your every move.

Uses: Leadership situations. Important for being taken seriously by the elders of many courts.

**Diplomatic:** Blessed with a tongue skilled at keeping harmony and reaching accord, your careful speech and thoughtful manner ensure that few walk away from conversations with you with hard feelings.

Uses: Very important in intrigue. Leadership situations.

**Elegant:** You give off an air of sophistication and taste, and refinement seems to follow in your footsteps wherever you go.

Uses: High society. Impressing elder Kuei-jin.

**Eloquent:** Your way with words is well-known, and your ability to put a convincing phrase or moving speech together is quite respectable.

Uses: Convincing others. Swaying emotions. Public speaking. Storytelling.

**Empathetic:** The true moods and emotions of others are unknown to most, but you are naturally adept at guessing what others are really feeling. Sometimes this gift is a curse as well. At times, you tend to feel what others feel rather than your own emotions.

Uses: Sympathy. Gauging the feelings of others.

**Expressive:** You possess a powerful and memorable presence when you choose to express yourself, and you can be counted on to add some color to any scene.

Uses: Producing art, acting, performing. Any social situation in which you want someone to understand your meaning.

**Friendly:** Always ready with a smile and an easy joke, you impress others as likable and trustworthy even if they haven't known you for very long.

Uses: Convincing others. Gaining the trust of strangers and suspicious folk.



**Genial:** Your presence is polite, warm and unobtrusive, making others feel at ease around you naturally.

Uses: Mingling at parties. Generally used in a second or later Social Challenge with someone.

**Gorgeous:** You body and face are attractive to most people you meet.

Uses: Modeling, posing and flirting. Seduction.

**Ingratiating:** You know how to speak to those of higher station in a way they find pleasing and unthreatening, and you tend to be well regarded by your superiors.

Uses: Gaining favor with elders in a social situation; kissing up to someone.

**Intimidating:** Thunder rolls, lightning crashes, and the pillars of Heaven shake when you vent your fury. You know how to inspire fear and respect in others.

Uses: Inspiring common fear. Ordering others. Staredowns.

**Magnetic:** Others find your speech and actions interesting, and drawing a crowd (or a lover) is seldom difficult for you.

Uses: Seduction. Intimation. Leadership.

**Persuasive:** You have a way of getting others to accept what you have to say, and you win more arguments than you lose. When others are unsure of what to do, you have a talent for getting them to accept your point of view.

Uses: Cajoling or convincing others.

**Seductive:** You exude a great deal of sexual energy. You can use your body and manner to ensnare others, and once you've got them it's often a simple matter to get what you want.

Uses: Subterfuge and subversion.

**Witty:** A true monkey to the last, jokes and jests come naturally to you, and being perceived as a funny person takes very little effort.

Uses: At parties. Entertaining someone. Goading or insulting someone.

## NEGATIVE SOCIAL TRAITS

**Bestial:** Kuei-jin or not, there's something about you that is deeply not right to human eyes, and you look decidedly inhuman. Maybe you somehow bear obvious scars from your death, or your eyes simmer with the fire of your P'o, or maybe your skin is just a little too pale for comfort.

**Callous:** Others see you as cold, aloof and uncaring, no matter what the truth of your emotional state may be. Common with those with an overly strong Yin side.

**Condescending:** You have trouble hiding your contempt for those beneath you, and it shows.

**Dull:** You have trouble making yourself seem interesting to others, and most people go out of their way to avoid making conversation with you.

**Feral:** There is more of a raging animal about you than just in the way you look. Your actions and manners suggest something less than human.

**Naïve:** A true Running Monkey at heart, you are wide-eyed and untouched by the air of worldliness that others carry. Not good if you plan on impressing others with talk of Dharma or enlightenment.

**Obnoxious:** Whether it's because of the way you act, what you say, or just how you look, you strike others as irritating and unpleasant to be around. This Trait is common to *kyonshi*, especially those with overtly Western mannerisms.

**Repugnant:** Your appearance disgusts others, and you make a terrible first impression on those you meet.



**Shy:** You have trouble speaking up at social gatherings, and those who know you are surprised if you say more than three words to someone you don't know.

**Tactless:** What is "proper" for a situation always seems to be just the opposite of what you manage to say or do. In the rigid courts of the Kuei-jin, this habit can be very, very bad.

**Untrustworthy:** Perhaps you are rumored to have a shady past, or maybe you just can't keep a secret, but no matter what the cause (or if there's any truth behind it), you are considered untrustworthy and unreliable by others.

## MENTAL TRAITS

**Perception-related:** Attentive, Discerning, Insightful, Observant, Vigilant

**Intelligence-related:** Cunning, Disciplined, Knowledgeable, Rational, Reflective

**Wits-related:** Alert, Clever, Intuitive, Shrewd, Wily

**Miscellaneous Mental:** Calm, Creative, Dedicated, Determined, Patient, Wise

**Alert:** Your mind is trained to expect the unexpected, and you react to danger quickly.

Uses: Preventing surprise attacks.

**Attentive:** It takes thousands of tiny threads to make a tapestry, and you have the presence of mind to take note of each piece as well as the larger puzzle. Events seldom surprise you, since you tend to catch all the warning signs.

Uses: Preventing surprise attacks. Finding small, overlooked details.

**Calm:** You are collected and composed regardless of the situation. Self-control is second nature to you, and it takes a lot to get under your skin.

Uses: Resisting commands that provoke violence. Whenever a mental attack might upset you. Used primarily for defense.

**Clever:** A real fox at heart, your mind is quick, and you think well on your feet.

Uses: Using mental-related Disciplines. Riddle contests. Good for any prankster... or spy.

**Creative:** An inventive and original thinker, you find answers to problems that no one has ever thought of before. You can also develop new designs, blend existing creations in striking new ways, or even come up with artistic pieces. This Trait is essential for any true artist or inventor.

Uses: Defending against aura-readings. Creating or inventing anything.

**Cunning:** Your mind and your methods are hard for others to anticipate, and your craftiness is the stuff of legend.

Uses: Tricking others.

**Dedicated:** You pour all your heart and soul into supporting those causes or duties you claim as your own. You stop at nothing to see them through.

Uses: Useful in any Mental Challenge when your beliefs are at stake.

**Determined:** You are seldom swayed from the path you chose to take, and those who have tried can attest to the fierce devotion of your will.

Uses: Staredowns. Useful in a normal Mental Challenge.

**Discerning:** Fine details, little faults and other things normally overlooked appear clear to your eyes.

Uses: Researching or when perception-based Disciplines are being used.

**Disciplined:** Either through formal training or just a ramrod disposition, your mind is under tight control, and battles of will are little trouble for you.

Uses: Staredowns. Asserting your will. Concentration.



**Insightful:** You have a formidable ken for figuring out the dynamics of a situation at a glance.

Uses: *Investigation* (but not defending against it). Reading auras. Using *Sharpened Senses*.

**Intuitive:** You have excellent instincts, and you have learned to trust what your gut tells you is right or wrong. Others may have trouble understanding what you base your choices on, but you don't worry — you just *know*, and that's good enough.

Uses: Reading auras. Seeing through Disciplines or Disciplines meant to cloud your mind. Taking a guess.

**Knowledgeable:** You've dedicated a good deal of time in your life to serious scholarly study, and it shows. You have a lot of detailed information about a wide variety of subjects, reflecting true "book-learning."

Uses: Remembering information your character might know.

**Observant:** You tend to miss very little, and you can sum up many situations with just a quick glance. Your ability to notice and remember important details is well known.

Uses: Picking up on subtleties that others might overlook.

**Patient:** Mountains move in less time than it takes for you to lose your temper, and you can wait out both stress and boredom.

Uses: Facedowns or other mental battles after another Trait has been bid.

**Rational:** You have a firm grasp of reason, logic and sobriety when it comes to analyzing the world around you, and your talent for reducing problems to their barest terms has served you well in your time.

Uses: Defending against emotion-oriented mental attacks. Not used as an initial bid. Analyzing information.

**Reflective:** A thoughtful soul and deep thinker, you consider all aspects of a problem before offering a solution.

Uses: *Meditation*. Remembering information. Defending against most mental attacks.

**Shrewd:** You have a considerable talent for settling disputes, escaping jams and otherwise accomplishing mental feats with efficiency and finesse.

Uses: Defending against mental attacks. Plotting tactics or playing politics.

**Vigilant:** You are watchful and alert, missing little while on duty, and you do not relax your guard often.

Uses: Defending against *Investigation*. More appropriate for mental defense than for attack.

**Wily:** Full of trickery and guile, you can come up with complicated plots and schemes on short notice, and you always seem to find room to weasel out of tough spots.

Uses: Tricking others. Lying under duress. Confusing mental situations.

**Wise:** You have absorbed the lessons that life, death and unlfe have offered you, and you are even able to impart them to those who'll listen. You strike others as thoughtful and intelligent.

Uses: Giving advice. Recalling ancestral wisdom. Dispensing snippets of Zen.

## **NEGATIVE MENTAL TRAITS**

**Forgetful:** Who shot who in the what now? You have trouble remembering things, even very important ones.

**Gullible:** A con man's dream, you tend to be overly trusting of others and believe what is said to you, even if it's not always in your best interest.



**Ignorant:** You never seem to know anything, and elders sneer at your inability to display any wisdom at all.

**Impatient:** Restless, edgy and rude to those who stand in your way, you want your way and you want it now! Common Trait for those with an overly strong Yang side.

**Oblivious:** You tend to miss important details, and you often seem very "out of it" to those around you.

**Predictable:** As the Wheel of Ages turns ever onward, never varying, so do you go night to night without a change in your routine. This failing makes your actions easy to guess even for those who barely know you. It is not an excellent Trait for aspiring generals.

**Shortsighted:** Let the Sixth Age come and burn away the rest of the world. If you've got a roof over your head and a source of Chi for the night, you're happy. Planning of any kind is alien to you.

**Submissive:** You are the proverbial nail that's been hammered down, and now you don't even bother to stand up anymore. Retreat, repent and surrender are your watchwords, as long as they keep you from having to stand up for yourself.

**Violent:** Fire flares in your soul at the slightest provocation, and you have a great deal of trouble keeping your temper in check. Considering the destructive power of an angry Kuei-jin, this can be very bad indeed. This is a Mental Trait because it represents mental instability.

**Witless:** In times of stress you're slow to react, and you tend to be ill-informed on current events both living and undead.

## Abilities

The particular bits of knowledge learned over the years, the tricks of the trade and the hard-won secrets of crafts are all Abilities. A character's Ability Traits represent special training or talent, and as such, they often allow performance of tasks that would be otherwise impossible. Even with more mundane situations, Abilities allow for a much improved chance of success.

When a character performs a risky or uncertain action, Abilities aid the outcome. If you try a task and fail, you can expend one of your appropriate Abilities temporarily, to gain an immediate retest. You lose the Ability used and the initial Trait(s) bid for the task (if any) because you lost the initial test, but you can still overcome the challenge. Abilities used thus are recovered at the next game session.

A character with multiple levels in a given Ability is certainly more experienced and proficient than an individual with just one. Most characters will fall into one to three levels of Ability. Greater amounts are very rare, and anything beyond five levels is almost certainly superhuman (and limited to elder vampires and their ilk). The total level of Ability in a given field corresponds roughly to the character's professional capabilities:

**Competent** (Able to earn a living)

**Professional** (Licensed, capable of supervision)

**J Journeyman** (Bachelor's degree or instructor)

**Expert** (Master's degree or researcher)

**Master** (Doctorate or true innovator)

Some tasks are simply too difficult, or they require too much skill, to be attempted by a character without the requisite Abilities. The Storyteller may



occasionally require the possession or use of an Ability Trait to perform a specific task. In this case, characters without the Ability, or who have already used all of their levels of the Ability, cannot attempt the task at all.

When an Ability is used against a set scenario or object (such as using *Security* to pick a lock), the feat usually has a difficulty assigned by the Storyteller. In such a Static Challenge, you may be required to risk a Trait for a trivial task, or even be asked to bid two or more Traits for a difficult, risky or frustrating undertaking.

Some Abilities can be used against an opponent instead of facilitating a regular task. In this case, the Ability is expended to gain a retest in a challenge with the opponent. See the rules for challenges and retests on p. 175 for complete details.

## FOCUSING ABILITIES

A few Abilities specifically require a concentrated area of study. One cannot study all *Crafts* or *Sciences* at once. These Abilities are noted specifically in their descriptions. When you take such an Ability, you must choose an area of study, a specific topic that you have concentrated on. Each area is considered a separate Ability, so *Science: Biology* counts completely separately from *Science: Metallurgy*, for instance.

## ABILITY SPECIALIZATIONS

Within a given area of expertise, some practitioners further hone their knowledge to a razor's edge. By choosing a specialization in an Ability, you hone your skills with a particular facet of that talent.

Ability Specializations are a wholly optional rule. Remember to ask your Storyteller before taking a specialization.

Taking a specialization requires that you spend one Experience Trait or Free Trait on an Ability that you already have. Then, you can declare a particular specialization. Whenever you perform a task with that specialization—even if you do not expend the Ability—you gain a one-Trait bonus on resolution of challenges, as long as you have at least one level of the Ability left. You may only have one specialization in any given Ability. You cannot take *Firearms: Pistols* and *Firearms: Rifles* together, for instance. You also can never gain more than one Bonus Trait at a time from specializations, even if more than one would be appropriate to a given challenge. That is, even if you have *Medicine: Physiology* and *Science: Biology Research*, you only get a one-Trait bonus on a test of biochemistry, despite your multiple specializations.

A specialization is a fairly narrow area of research or practice. You cannot, for instance, take a *Melee* specialization in "swords," nor could you have an *Occult* specialization of "writing." An appropriate specialization refers to one small class of items or to one type of practice within the Ability, such as *Melee: Katana* or *Occult: Superstitions*.

You may take a specialization in an Ability with an area of study. In such a case, you concentrate your research in one particular facet of that sub-Ability, or in one application of it. Thus, you could have *Crafts: Woodworking* with a specialization in *Hidden Panels*, or *Science: Botany* with a specialization in *Bonsai*.

Note that the Bonus Trait from a specialization does not have an adjective, and it is not bid or used like other Traits. You simply are one Trait up on challenges within the specialization.



## ABILITIES

### Academics

Kuei-jin see themselves as beings on a divine mission for Heaven itself. Accordingly, they place a great deal of importance on education, since ignorance only serves to slow the Road Back. In addition, the tests required to obtain mandarin and ancestor status often require a great deal of intellectual vigor. You possess a level of education and general knowledge beyond rudimentary schooling. With *Academics*, you can express artistic criticism, debate the classics, consider philosophy and indulge in studies of culture. This broad Ability covers all sorts of humanities in learning.

*Academics* allows you to recognize historical, art and cultural references. You can use *Academics* when working in such fields, when developing a critique or researching. Calling on *Academics* Ability may require a Mental or Social Challenge to determine your exact level of competence.

You may further direct your studies by choosing a specific field, such as *Art Criticism, Classical Studies, History, Journalism, Theology* or anything else that could be studied with higher education.

### Alertness

You're never caught unaware. You pay attention to your surroundings, and even if you aren't particularly perceptive, you've learned to pick up on subtle cues. The information your senses gather gets processed immediately for danger signs and unusual signals.

When you are surprised, you may expend a Trait of *Alertness* to negate the surprise. You may then respond normally, although you still do not have enough forewarning to use any sort of supernatural speed until the next turn.

### Animal Ken

As beings cut off from the Great Cycle, Kuei-jin are alienated from nature, and consequently most animals tend to become very nervous or hostile in their presence. This Ability allows one to understand the actions of animals and influence their behavior. Taking this skill represents a character having carefully re-established the bond between herself and the animals of the world (or perhaps she never lost that talent to begin with, unlike most other vampires). Characters with this Ability can not only live normally alongside animals and predict their actions, but they can also calm or enrage them.

Given time, you may train an animal to perform simple tasks like fetching, guarding and attacking. When a command is given, the animal must make a Mental Challenge to understand and carry out the order. In order to give a successful command, you must bid between one and three Traits, depending on the difficulty of the task. You may also attempt to calm an injured, attacking or frightened animal by defeating it in a Social Challenge.

### Athletics

Whether due to a background in sports or just personal talent, you are skilled in all manner of athletic endeavors. You can throw a ball, sprint, climb, jump and swim. This last can be especially useful to vampires, who do not float naturally.

Your *Athletics* Ability is used for retests on most forms of raw physical activity: acrobatics, swimming, jumping, throwing, climbing and running. You may choose to focus on something you do especially well.



### Brawl

You know how to fight bare-handed, down-and-dirty style. This skill includes a general aptitude for punching, kicking, grappling, throttling, throwing, gouging, clawing and biting, techniques that come to all creatures instinctively. This skill does *not* cover martial arts. Rather, *Brawl* serves as a catchall term for any form of unarmed combat, not necessarily untrained (boxing falls under this skill, after all) but not on the level required of true martial arts. For example, street thugs and mindless extras in kung-fu movies have *Brawl*, while Shaolin monks and the main villains in kung-fu movies have *Martial Arts*.

### Bureaucracy

*Bureaucracy*, a.k.a. the System, is theoretically an organization for getting things done more efficiently. *Bureaucracy* can allow you to access to appropriate licenses, use contractual agreements to your advantage, and recover, alter or destroy records. *Bureaucracy* often requires a Static Mental or Social Challenge, depending on the type of roleplaying performed, or as a Storyteller sees fit. In an age where even a minor corporation generates a sea of paperwork every day, the ability to track particular items in the mess — or manipulate the mess itself — is a subtle but extremely potent talent.

Many places protect their computer records with paranoid degrees of security, but very few are able to keep their paperwork closely under wraps to those who know what they've doing. Difficulty depends on such factors as security, accessibility, nature and cooperativeness of the target or information.

### Computer

Some Kuei-jin have difficulty adapting to modern innovations. As a result, an understanding of cutting-edge technology makes for dangerous knowledge. With the *Computer* Ability, you understand how to use, program and access computers of all sorts.

Use *Computer* with a Mental Challenge (difficulty determined by the Storyteller or Narrator) to break into systems, alter data, write programs or figure out unfamiliar operations.

### Crafts

Whether sculpting beautiful objects from jade or processing machine parts on an assembly line, the urge to craft and create runs strong even in an undead heart. Many mortals in the Middle Kingdom are skilled in at least one manual trade, if not several, and dependence on these crafts is still fairly high in many countries. A character with the *Crafts* Ability has the know-how to fashion and critique objects within a single field of expertise, which must be chosen at the time the Ability is taken. Most tests involving this Ability require either Mental or Physical Challenges, with a difficulty depending on such factors as materials at hand, tools available and time taken to complete a project.

Some fields of *Crafts* include sword-making, engraving, tanning, carpentry and blacksmithing. Of course, this Ability may be taken more than once to reflect training in multiple fields of craftsmanship.

**Note:** While fudging times for *Crafts* project a bit in the interest of playability is recommended, very few craftsmen can work with serious distractions, and some projects — like forging a superior katana — should remain outright impossible to complete in just a few hours.



### Dodge

When trouble rears its ugly head, you know how to get out of the way. Unhesitating reactions let you evade blows and shots, getting out of the way of injury. You can use *Dodge* against any attack that you're aware of: diving for cover as someone fires a gun or twisting away from a sword, for instance. *Dodge* may be used as a retest when defending against an attack that you can see or otherwise sense coming.

### Drive

Though most people can drive in the modern age, you can drive well. You're equally at home with a stick-shift or an automatic, rush hour is no concern, and you can evade traffic or even use your vehicle as a weapon. Bear in mind though that you can't exactly drive a semi with the greatest of ease just because you can parallel park a station wagon on a slant. A Mental Challenge may be required to allow you to figure out where everything is in an unfamiliar vehicle.

*Drive* Tests most often involve a Physical Challenge of your reflexes.

### Empathy

You are sensitive to the moods and emotions of people around you. When you listen to someone, you understand her feelings. You can identify with others and tell when people are lying or holding back while talking to you.

With a Social Challenge and the expenditure of an *Empathy* Ability, you can determine if the last thing that someone said was a lie (although *Subterfuge* can defend against this Ability). Alternately, you can attempt to determine the subject's current Demeanor.

### Enigmas

This Ability concerns solving mysteries and puzzles. In essence, it is a measurement of your problem-solving skills and how well you combine scattered details into a coherent solution. *Enigmas* comes in handy when navigating mazes, answering riddles and the like. It is also a crucial tool along the path of enlightenment in deciphering the riddles and koans of bodhisattvas, or when trying to determine the path that's best for your Dharma when you're faced with a difficult decision. This Ability applies to Mental Challenges designed to see if you can figure out a problem set before you.

The Storyteller may require a variable number of Traits to be risked, depending on the relative difficulty and the character's familiarity with the enigma in question. This Ability should not substitute for actual puzzle-solving, but it allows players to receive some help from the Storyteller when they're stumped.

### Etiquette

Knowing the taboos of different cultures is essential in many parts of Asia, where typical Western manners quickly label one as uncouth and unclean. Among the refined courts of the Kuei-jin, such social grace is demanded, and characters who step on the wrong toes find themselves in a great deal of trouble. Characters are assumed to know basic etiquette for their home culture (even if the players do not), but when it comes to traveling abroad and creating a real impression, *Etiquette* is often the only way to go. Characters with this skill know the proper way to greet someone, when to rise and how to make introductions in a variety of different cultures. You can keep your cool in any social scenario, from a bodhisattva's blood tea ritual to a back alley tong party.



The *Etiquette* Ability can be used with Social Tests to impress or blend in at parties. If you make a social *faux pas*, you may immediately expend an *Etiquette* Ability to negate the gaffe — your character knew better than to make the mistake.

### **Expression**

Words and feelings flow freely from you. When the muse strikes, you put pen to paper and pour out a torrent of emotion and stirring imagery. You can convey message and meaning in your art, from novels to haiku, and whatever you write is both clear and moving.

When writing or composing, you can sink true *Expression* into the work. Works created with *Expression* x 3 or more have the potential to entrance especially sensitive onlookers.

### **Finance**

You can manage money, and you even have some limited resources to draw on. Major companies employ hordes of accountants to keep track of their books, and so do a surprising number of triads, especially those in very lucrative fields of business. This Ability allows you to follow money trails, verify accounting and understand such concepts as investments, shares and bonds.

These actions are a function of a Mental Challenge, the difficulty of which depends on any precautions taken by the subject, the amount of money in question and the availability of information. Storytellers should set reasonable totals for monies that can be gained through the use of this Ability each session, although combining this Ability with the *Finance* Influence can make for a wealthy character in no time.

### **Firearms**

This Ability covers both how well you can shoot and your skill at maintaining, repairing and possibly making minor alterations to firearms. In the two-fisted, pulse-pounding, twin hand-cannons blazing world of modern underworld violence (not to mention action films), this Ability is essential, although many elders despair over the dependence younger vampires have on their firearms rather than their wits.

The most common use of this Ability is in combat, but a Storyteller can also allow you to attempt a Mental Challenge in order to perform other functions (such as hunting or repair). Those with the *Firearms* Ability may choose to use Mental Traits instead of Physical Traits during a challenge in which a firearm is involved.

### **Hobby/Professional/Expert Ability**

In a certain area of expertise not covered by another Ability, you have achieved some level of skill. You may have a small grasp of a trade due to some work on the side, or perhaps you've specifically studied a topic.

*Hobby/ Professional/ Expert Ability* is a catchall category for highly unusual Abilities like *Akuma Lore*, *Yomi Geography*, *Demolitions* and so on. Any Ability of this type must be approved specifically by the Storyteller, and the Storyteller must define its capabilities.

### **Intimidation**

*Intimidation* represents any of a broad variety of techniques for terrifying people into compliance. These techniques include anything from relying on physical size, to having a particularly frightening grin, to knowing which emotional buttons to push. It can also aid in staring down opponents without actually needing to harm them.



You can use *Intimidation* when trying to scare someone via a Social Challenge, or with certain Disciplines (such as showing off the horrors of one's *Demon Shintai* form).

### **Investigation**

Whether a hard-boiled cop, an avid fan of detective novels or even someone who's been on the wrong side of the law often enough, you are familiar with the proper methods of conducting an investigation, from going over the scene of the crime to interviewing witnesses and analyzing clues. You are able to get to the real cause and determine the most likely suspect of many minor crimes in no time (although catching the guilty party is something else entirely). Even masterful criminal works are not beyond your capabilities to puzzle out.

By succeeding at a Mental Challenge (no Traits are at risk for either party), you can even tell if a person is carrying a concealed weapon or the like. When dealing with plots, you may also request a Static Mental Challenge against a Storyteller to see if any clues have been overlooked, piece together existing clues or uncover information through formal investigation. Unfortunately, many hunters also employ this Ability to track down *shen*.

### **Law**

This Ability is the measure of how well you understand the legal system in which you are entangled. In the world of humans, you can use the *Law* Ability to write up binding contracts, defend clients and know the rights of yourself and others. In the complicated courts of the Kuei-jin, this Ability represents a knowledge of the many interpretations — both classic and popular — of the Fivefold Way, as well as other important concepts of undead law. It just might be your only chance to avoid being branded *akuma* by an unfriendly court.

The difficulty of the Mental Challenges necessary to accomplish these tasks depends on factors like the precedents for and severity of the crime, not to mention legal complexity of the subject or legal action desired.

### **Leadership**

*Leadership* is a function of confidence, bearing and a profound understanding of what motivates others. It is more than barking orders. It measures how well you can get others to obey your decisions. It also covers how willingly people accede to your wishes, as reluctant followers are worth far less than willing ones. To use this Ability, they must first be under your command or in some way your subordinates, like the relationship between a *wu* leader and her *wu*-mates, a triad boss and his men or a CEO and his underlings.

You may use this Ability to cause others to perform reasonable tasks for you. These requests may not endanger the subjects or violate the subjects' Natures or Demeanors. *Leadership* works with a Social Challenge. This Ability should not be allowed to override a player character's free will, but if a character is uncertain about following an order, the outcome of the challenge can assist in roleplaying their eventual decision.

### **Linguistics**

One fact many Americans have trouble understanding is just how multilingual the rest of the world is. In Hong Kong alone one can easily find people fluent in Cantonese, Mandarin, English, Japanese and French, and that's just the beginning. This Ability represents your skill at comprehending various spoken or written languages. Its common use is to represent tutelage in one or more languages other than your native tongue. The language(s) learned can be anything from



ancient hieroglyphics to common national languages to complex dialects. It may even be the ancient stylized script of the Kuei-jin, known as *kaja*. In the case of languages known, they must be specified when the *Linguistics* Ability is chosen. One level of *Linguistics* allows a character one language in addition to her native one, two levels allow two additional languages, a third trait allows four languages, four levels indicate eight languages, and five levels of *Linguistics* means a character can know up to 16 languages.

This skill allows you and anyone who also knows the language to speak privately. Those who wish to converse in another language (but cannot actually do so) should hold up one hand with the first finger and thumb making an L-shape to indicate to other players the characters are not speaking English. Those who wish to listen in must also possess the language. Furthermore, you can translate data for yourself or others, though a Static Mental Challenge may be required to do so. *Linguistics* also allows for identifying accents, reading lips, picking up slang and a certain amount of linguistic mimicry.

Finally, since many Eastern languages have wildly different dialects or alphabets, a character may spend one "language" level to become familiar with one whole language family. For example, a character whose native tongue is Shanghainese could take one level of *Linguistics* and select "Chinese" for her language, thus becoming fluent in Mandarin, Cantonese and all other dialects of Chinese. The Storyteller has final discretion over what constitutes a language family.

**Note:** Yes, the "language family" rule is somewhat simplistic, but in the interests of game-play some shortcuts must be made. This version of *Linguistics* can also be considered to supersede the rules for *Linguistics* given in all previous *Mind's Eye Theatre* games.

### Martial Arts

Perhaps no other Ability matches the path of Dharma as closely as *Martial Arts* does. Those trained in this Ability learn how to perfect themselves and how to harness that perfection to achieve dramatic results in the world around them. However, such training is extremely demanding, requiring countless hours spent in training and testing, making this Ability accordingly expensive to purchase. *Martial Arts* costs two Traits per level to purchase at character creation. Additionally, absolutely no character may start with more than two levels of *Martial Arts* without an excellent reason for doing so and the express permission of the Storyteller. It costs three Experience Traits to buy a new level of *Martial Arts* once play begins, and new levels may be purchased only with Storyteller permission.

*Martial Arts* is more than simple fighting practice. It reflects a learned system of attacks and defenses that give the student the benefit of trained, effective reactions to danger rather than mere instinctual flailing. There are countless varieties of martial arts, many of which have sub-schools and splinter groups within them. However, for game purposes, a character must declare only whether they have learned a "hard," "soft" or "weapon" style. While players are encouraged to research specific styles for fun and authenticity, they need not to be martial arts experts to play their characters correctly. The immortal Kuei-jin have combined and invented many forms of martial arts unknown to the mortal world, after all.

Hard styles focus on swift, powerful strikes delivered by any number of methods: fists, feet, knees, forearms, elbows, even the head. Karate, tae kwon do, kickboxing and many kung fu forms would be considered hard styles. Soft styles focus on defense, redirection and incapacitating a foe through nerve locks or joint



holds. Aikido, judo, jujutsu and tai chi chuan are all examples of soft styles. Weapon styles are just that — training in the use of a melee weapon which goes beyond the basic techniques of the *Melee Ability* into true mastery of one's weapon. A single, specific type of weapon (katana, bo, nunchaku, etc.) must be declared for every two levels of a weapon style when it is purchased. Only these weapons receive the appropriate training bonuses. Wushu and ninjitsu are just a few of the many styles that contain weapon training. Many Kuei-jin see the hard styles as Yang-based, full of action and activity, and the soft styles as rooted in Yin, outwardly passive but inexorably efficient.

*Martial Arts* replace *Brawl*. A character cannot possess both Abilities. A character may still purchase the different styles of *Martial Arts*. Each new style is treated as a different skill, and it must be paid for and advanced accordingly. (Thus, it is possible for a character to have three levels of hard-style *Martial Arts* and two levels of soft-style *Martial Arts*, two levels of hard style and one level of weapon style, or some similar arrangement.) With the exception of weapon styles, however, a character cannot "double up" on a style. He cannot learn two levels of tae kwon do and three levels of karate, for example, since both count as "hard" styles for the game purposes. In the case of weapon styles, the character may still possess the *Melee Ability* as a reflection of general armed talent, but he *cannot* use it for any retests with weapons for which he possesses a *Martial Arts* weapon style. A character who has three levels of *Melee* and one level of *Martial Arts* with the katana, for example, cannot use his *Melee* levels to retest any challenges he undertakes with his katana. That weapon is now solely the domain of his *Martial Arts Ability*.

#### Benefits of Martial Arts

**Both Styles:** Characters using their chosen style add their current level of *Martial Arts* to their Physical Traits for the purposes of resolving ties and overbids. This factor reflects the edge that martial-artists have over average brawlers. This bonus applies *only* if the martial-artist is using *Martial Arts* and attempting a challenge that falls within his style. A hard stylist delivering a kick, for example, or a soft stylist attempting to grapple an opponent. It would not apply, however, if the former was attempting to dodge an opponent or if the latter was trying to punch his foe, and it never applies to a character trying to simply soak damage. If in doubt, consult a Narrator as to whether a martial-artist's bonus applies to a particular test he is undertaking.

**Hard Style:** Practitioners of a hard style may expend one level of *Martial Arts* to attempt to deliver a lightning fast strike at the end of a normal combat turn, even if they lose the regular challenge itself. (Think of it as a blazingly quick strike that follows up another hit, or when a fighter gets hit with a kick only to smash the foe's ankle in return.) This attack is conducted like a regular Physical Challenge except that the opponent may not attempt to harm the martial-artist as a result of the challenge, only attempt to soak the attack, unless he too expends a level of *Martial Arts*. This follow-up/ counterattack is resolved before a new round begins or any extra actions due to supernatural powers are taken, although pre-emptive powers (such as *Alacrity*) may be used to try to prevent this strike. Only one follow-up/ counterattack may be delivered per turn, and it cannot be retested with Abilities by the martial-artist (although he may attempt to overbid, if applicable).

**Soft Style:** Many soft styles stress trips and throws. However, the real strength of such styles is the ability to put submission holds or nerve locks on enemies, thus greatly reducing their ability to fight effectively. This process is more difficult than



the aggressive action of hard styles, but if executed successfully, it allows much greater control over one's enemy. Accordingly, the benefits of a soft style are harder to enact than a hard style, but more potent once secured. First the martial-artist must specifically declare that he is attempting a hold or lock of some kind and win a Physical Challenge to that effect (which does not inflict damage). If successful, however, the stylist may spend a level of *Martial Arts* to fully assert the powerful advantage he now holds. His opponent must first win a Physical Challenge to break free of the hold before she may make any attempt to injure him. Furthermore, he may choose to spend a level of *Martial Arts* to inflict damage as outlined in the description of hard styles. This damage does not come from a lightning-fast reprisal, but instead from the martial-artist ripping nerves and twisting limbs.

**Weapon Style:** The player may add his current levels of *Martial Arts* to his Physical Traits for the purposes of resolving ties and overbids for challenges using his chosen weapons (and *only* those weapons). These Traits add to any bonus Traits the weapon may have. In addition, opponents may not block the character's retests with his weapon unless they too expend a level of *Martial Arts* to do so. The character is simply too skilled with his weapon to be so easily thwarted.

#### Requirements of Martial Arts

**Training:** Unlike the *Brawl* or *Melee* Abilities, characters cannot learn *Martial Arts* without a tutor. While many courts have a few warriors willing to teach the fighting arts, such training is seldom free, and it requires a great deal of time and discipline in any event. No teacher can teach a student a higher level of Ability than he himself possesses. A sensei with three levels of *Martial Arts* cannot train a student to the fourth level of *Martial Arts*. Whole stories can be constructed around the search for advanced masters to study from, and the Storyteller is free to forbid advancement in this Ability to any character who cannot meet the proper requirements of time and teacher.

Furthermore, once a degree of mastery in the martial arts is obtained, it must be maintained with regular training and exercise. As a rule of thumb, at least one half-hour of practice per level of *Martial Arts* is required *per night* if the character wishes to retain his fighting edge. Characters who use weapon styles are likewise expected to spend the necessary time keeping their weapons in top condition. Storytellers should feel free to reduce the levels of *Martial Arts* available to a character temporarily if some sort of regular training schedule is not met. Obviously, a character should not be docked levels if he just skips one or two nights at the dojo, but a character who misses practice constantly should expect his skills to grow a little "rusty" before long. This fact should be especially clear as characters reach the higher levels of *Martial Arts*, since such mastery requires constant attention to keep in top form.

**Presence of Mind:** *Martial Arts* absolutely may not be used while a character is in a state of fire or wave soul. Characters in those states have been reduced to total, primal instinct, and they do not have the patience or presence of mind for proper martial arts techniques. (Note: This applies to other character types as well. Hengeyokai, Western shapeshifters and Cainites in frenzy are likewise banned from employing *Martial Arts*.)

**Retests:** With the exception of the special style abilities outlined above, opponents may still use *Brawl*, *Melee*, *Dodge* or even *Firearms* normally to block or retest any *Martial Arts* Challenge whenever applicable. Martial-artists are tough foes, but a student with only one level of *Martial Arts* still has little chance of besting a veteran fighter with five levels of *Brawl*.



**Applicability:** The Storyteller is the final arbiter of when martial arts benefits may apply. For example, soft styles may not work well against some non-humanoid creatures (where are the pressure points on a rampaging Mukade?), while hard styles often have trouble with the vaporous nature of many spirits.

### Medicine

This Ability represents your skill at treating the injuries, diseases and various ailments of living creatures, as well as how well you understand undead physiology and ailments. It also (naturally) includes Eastern medicinal practices such as acupuncture or even Taoist alchemy. Narrators can allow a living being under the treatment with someone with the Medicine Ability to recover a single health level per night with time and a Mental Challenge. The severity and nature of the damage, the equipment at your disposal and any assistance or distractions nearby all influence the difficulty of the challenge.

Other uses of this Ability include some basic forensic information, diagnosis and pharmaceutical knowledge. Of course, knowledge of healing also implies a knowledge of what is harmful to the human form as well.

### Meditation

Often considered absolutely essential to the Dharmic process, especially in its advanced stages, this Ability is the talent to focus and center one's thoughts, calming the emotions, controlling the mind and relaxing the body. Kuei-jin may use this Ability to channel their thoughts and renew their resolve. To meditate, one does not necessarily need to be in any special position or have any special philosophy. While many schools exist that teach meditation postures and mantras, this Ability is ultimately very personal, and one for which you must develop your own technique.

At the Storyteller's discretion, a player who has prepared herself with a suitable period of meditation — at least half an hour of uninterrupted contemplation, with no combat, conversation or heroics — and a successful *Meditation* Mental Challenge may put herself two Traits up on all tests to resist fire soul. Likewise, the Kuei-jin's player may put herself two Traits down, if she wishes it to be easier to enter the battle state.

### Melee

Learning from time spent running with vicious tongs, spending countless nights breaking bottles and chairs over the heads of others in seedy bars, or undergoing lethally efficient government training — whatever it took, you are now versed in a wide variety of armed combat skills. You can pick up just about anything, from a katana to a broken bottle to a billy-club, and use it effectively. The *Melee* Ability comes with knowledge of proper care for your weapons as well. A character without this Ability may not use any of the advantages of Abilities in armed combat, including retests. Note that highly specialized training in a particular weapon is the territory of the *Martial Arts* Ability.

### Occult

The Middle Kingdom is a treasure trove of occult information derived from an explosive mix of cultures, and with the *Occult* Ability, some of these secrets are yours. *Occult* implies a general knowledge of things such as curses, *feng shui*, fortune-telling and dragon lines as well as information more specific to the supernatural beings that inhabit the world. Examples of applications include identifying the use and nature of visible magics, rites and rituals, understanding basic fundamentals of the occult and having knowledge of cults, tomes and artifacts.



Most uses of the *Occult* Ability involve a Mental Challenge. The difficulty of this challenge can be subject to many factors, such as obscurity, amount of existing data and the character's individual scope of understanding (Kuei-jin know more about their own rites than they do those of the Sabbat, for example.).

### Performance

This Ability actually covers the gamut of artistic expression, including singing, acting, dancing, playing musical instruments and similar skills. It grants you the gift to make your own original creations and/or express these creations to your peers, in a chosen medium. The genius of your creativity or the power with which you convey it is determined by a Static Social Challenge. Some particularly sensitive types, such as Thrashing Dragons and Toreador Kindred, can even become entranced by the use of this skill — after first being defeated in a Social Challenge.

In addition to actual performing ability, this Ability also measures how well you know the society surrounding your particular art form and how you fit in with that crowd. Advanced levels of *Performance* always involve some form of specialization. This Ability can also be used to critique the works of others.

### Politics

The world of influence-trading and favors is extensive enough among mortals. In the courts of Kuei-jin society, where one must struggle to balance outward obedience with inner ambition, the game of *Politics* is pervasive, if a bit more subtle than among the decadent Westerners. Through observation, intrigue and a bit of spin-doctoring, you've learned how to handle appearances, understand what a speech *really* means, and know where the deal-making is going on. In short, it's *Politics* as usual.

The *Politics* Ability is useful primarily in dealings with mortal society or Influence. You may be able to manipulate the outcome of local political actions, with the proper Influence and some well-placed Social Challenges. *Politics* Ability ensures that matters proceed in the direction that you desire. *Politics* is also used to discern hidden motives and broker deals, and as such, it can prove invaluable in detecting a double-cross or power play. The hierarchies of power are also often visible as well: You can discover which of the mandarins holds true authority, for example, and which are largely figureheads at their posts. *Politics* can also makes you aware of who's in favor and who's out. You can determine roughly how much faith a court entrusts in a particular vampire, given advance knowledge of the local court scene and a successful Social Challenge.

A knowledge of *Politics* includes, by extension, an understanding of the bureaucratic levels of power. You know how to cut through red tape, or how to obstruct others with it. By determining who's important in a given social situation, you can usually avoid wasting time and go straight to the person with the power to do what you want.

### Repair

You possess a working understanding of what makes things tick. This Ability covers everything from fixing cheap watches to overhauling expensive luxury cars, assuming, of course, that you have the time, tools and parts. You can fix or slightly alter most of the trappings of modern society. This Ability also allows you to excel at sabotage, should you choose to do so. Using this Ability usually calls for a Static Mental Challenge, the difficulty of which depends on such factors as the subject



of your attention's complexity, the tools and parts available, the extent of the damage and the time spent on the repairs.

### Science

The modern world invokes different mystic formulas to accomplish tasks than those used in previous Ages. Now, most of these spells are not found in tea leaves or dusty tomes, but in the precision and dedication of science. You happen to be trained in using and understanding these modern arts of miracle-working: You have a degree of factual and practical expertise in a single field of the hard sciences. This Ability measures not only theoretical knowledge but also how well you can put it to practical use. This knowledge allows you to identify properties of your field, perform experiments, fabricate items, bring about results and access information a player could not utilize normally. A Static Mental Challenge is necessary for all but the most trivial uses of this skill. The difficulty of the challenge depends on resources (equipment, data and so forth) available, complexity of the task and time.

A field of study must be chosen when the Science Ability is taken. A few examples include physics, biology and chemistry. Other fields can be allowed at the Storyteller's discretion.

### Scrounge

Scrounge allows you to produce items through connections, trading, wits and ingenuity. While most people think all purchases are a matter of cash or credit, you know otherwise. You have a talent for acquiring items through less conventional channels, and while your means and suppliers may be less than reliable sometimes, there isn't much you can't get your hands on with enough time. Materials acquired with Scrounge aren't always brand new or exactly right, and they often require some time to come by, but this Ability sometimes works where *Finance* and outright theft fail. A Static Mental or Social Challenge is necessary to use Scrounge. Some factors that influence the difficulty of the challenge include rarity and value of the item sought, as well as local supply and demand.

### Security

Whichever side of the law you've worked on has granted you experience in Security techniques. You know about police operations and guard work, how they make their schedules and how they undertake their business. (Not to mention how to disrupt such operations.) Locks, traps, security systems and alarms are all within your purview. With a little time, you can put together security measures for a location. You can also defeat such measures.

Use the Security Ability with Mental Traits to set up a secure area or network, or to formulate a plan for breaching such a network. At the discretion of a Narrator, you may be required to use a Physical Trait related to dexterity when attempting to bypass a physical lock or alarm.

### Stealth

By blending into cover, blurring your lines and moving carefully and quietly, you can evade notice or sneak past people. You know how best to take advantage of surrounding cover and how to use light and shadow. Opportunities for unnoticed movement are not lost on you, as you understand the uses of timing and diversion.

With an appropriate Physical Challenge, you can sometimes sneak past the notice of guards and searchers (who contest your Ability with their Mental Traits and *Investigation Ability*). You also use *Stealth* to augment certain Disciplines, such as the Basic level of the *Yin Prana*.



### Streetwise

You are well-versed in dealing with the underside of society, and you are able to walk in relative safety through neighborhoods and situations most people would rather avoid. This Ability is especially vital if one wishes to avoid a bullet in the head when dealing with tongs and triads, but it is also helpful when dealing with mundane criminal activity as well. Some uses of *Streetwise*, such as rumor-gathering, require a Social Challenge, the difficulty of which is influenced by such things as composition of the local community and the current situation (hot with crime or cool with indifference).

### Subterfuge

*Subterfuge* is the art of deception and intrigue, and it relies on a social backdrop to work. When participating in a social setting or conversation with a subject, you can attempt to draw information out of him through trickery and careful probing. Information, such as one's name, nationality, Negative Traits, friends and enemies can be revealed by a successful use of *Subterfuge*.

The first requirement of gleaning information in this way involves getting your target to say something dealing with the desired knowledge, such as entering a conversation about foreign culture when you are really itching to find out where he comes from. If you can draw him out, you may then propose your true question and initiate a Social Challenge. If you win, then your target must forfeit the information (hopefully by roleplaying his *faux pas*). To use the Ability again, you must once again lure the target into a conversation. *Subterfuge* can be used to scent out a character's Negative Traits, but may not reveal more than one Negative Trait per session. Furthermore, it may be used to defend from others with *Subterfuge*.

Conversely, the *Subterfuge* Ability may also be used to conceal information or lie without detection.

### Survival

Not all places in the Middle Kingdom have been swallowed by the hectic crush of the cities. Indeed, the wilderness beyond the urban lights remains vast and frightening in many places, especially for those unversed in surviving the elements. You have the knowledge and training to find food, water and shelter in a variety of wilderness settings. (While Kuei-jin have no need of conventional food and water, a source of Chi is still a must, as is a place to hide from the sun each day.) Each successful Static Mental or Physical Challenge allows you to provide the basic necessities for yourself or a single living creature for one day. This Ability can also be used to track down someone in a wilderness setting. The Storyteller sets the nature and difficulty of the challenge.

You should choose a concentration each time you take this Ability, such as desert, arctic, plains or forest. While your training allows you to know the essentials of surviving any clime, you're most likely better acquainted with one or two familiar ones, which is a factor in determining the difficulty of the *Survival* Challenge. Other important factors include the abundance or scarcity of resources, time of year, equipment and type of wilderness.



## INCORPORATING MARTIAL ARTS INTO EXISTING MIND'S EYE THEATRE GAMES

Naturally, many players are going to want to use *Martial Arts* in other *Mind's Eye Theatre* games as soon as they can grab this rulebook. Storytellers would do well to consider a few factors before allowing such conversion, however, or risk turning their *Laws of the Night* games into bad Jackie Chan movies.

First of all, true training in martial arts is seldom easy to come by, especially in the West. Not many reputable dojos keep the kind of hours that vampires require for training, for example, and even those few that do pose a risk if they begin to ponder a particular student's nocturnal inclination. With a good number of martial artists already in their ranks and the tacit bonds that many courts have with their communities, Kuei-jin are able to largely circumvent such restrictions. When it comes to Western devils and their paranoid Masquerade however, the Kin-jin are usually out of luck, especially in Cathayan territory. The penalty for teaching such secrets to *gueilo* is harsh indeed, and the Kuei-jin are quick to silence any masters they discover instructing Western supernaturals in even basic techniques.

Even for non-vampires, the restrictions on learning martial arts are still high. Hunters, changelings and werewolves may be able to visit dojos during regular hours, but even so it's unlikely the neighborhood karate instructor can teach more than one or two levels of *Martial Arts* at most. Characters in search of high levels of *Martial Arts* must make an effort to search out masters of sufficient skill to train them, masters who typically live in (you guessed it) Cathayan-monitored territories. Even outside of Asia, the community of true martial arts masters is fairly small, and you can bet that Kuei-jin pawns will begin looking into any reports of especially skilled supernatural creatures coming to them for training. The results of such inquiries are seldom pleasant for the Westerners involved. The reach of the Asian dragons is long and growing longer all the time.

Above all, keeping *Martial Arts* under control is a question of game balance. If you feel that your game can handle the incorporation of a few characters with advanced fighting techniques, then by all means include it. If those characters would likely begin to dominate the game and make the lives of others miserable at every turn, however, then your troupe is better off sticking to the basic Abilities presented in the various core rulebooks. By acknowledging a game difference between martial arts and regular fighting skills, you as the Storyteller should likewise require more responsibility and character background for possessing those advanced skills than a simple cry of "My character used to take karate, so gimme gimme gimme!" Storytellers are also encouraged to reward players who use martial arts with style and flair over those who simply try to min-max their character into undead Bruce Lee wannabes.

Players with existing characters who wish to switch from *Brawl* (or *Melee*, in the case of those learning weapon styles) to *Martial Arts* simply divide their existing score in half (round up). The result is their new *Martial Arts* rating. In the case of weapons styles, the character may divide his current *Melee* rating in half (round up), and distribute the result between *Martial Arts* levels in his chosen weapon style and regular *Melee* levels.



## BACKGROUNDS

Your character's Backgrounds help to flesh out ties with mortal agencies, role in vampire society and beneficial resources available. Each Background is used differently. In general, having multiple Traits in a given Background allows for better or more common use of that benefit. Some Backgrounds affect your character's creation and development directly; others come into play later during the game.

### ALLIES

A few friends, either kept from your mortal days or made after the Road Back began, help you out in your endeavors. You can make a few calls and cut a few deals to get assistance in a wide range of activities. Your Storyteller will probably require you to define how you keep your allies and their relations to you.

Each Allies Trait possessed represents one person that you can call on for aid. Unlike Influence, your allies have special talents that make them better than the average person on the street. Though your allies may not be aware of your vampire nature, they can be quite useful if directed properly.

In general, your allies do not show up in play directly. Instead, you can use them for certain services between play sessions, by notifying your Storyteller:

- An ally can be directed to follow up on research or activities that you have started. If you undertook a specific task previously, like tailing someone, researching a project or building a device, your allies can continue the work, doing so with one Ability Trait's worth of expertise. As long as they work on the project, your Allies Trait for the individual is tied up.
- If you need a particularly competent ally, you can expend multiple Traits to gain access to a mortal with multiple levels of an Ability or Influence. Each Allies Trait that you spend after the first gives an extra level of expertise to your allies. They may use this expertise on your behalf, though rarely with your own skill, and they only help as long as you tie up your Allies Background Traits in this manner.
- An ally can help you to hunt, though obviously, it's not a good idea to rely on your allies as Chi sources, or to even tell them exactly what they're doing when they bring people to you. Each Trait of Allies that you use for hunting lets you make a Simple Test. A win or tie grants you one additional Chi Trait. Doing so counts as a project that lasts for the entire time between game sessions.

Be wary of calling on your allies too often. An ally may call on you for mutual aid or refuse to help if pressed into dangerous or illegal activities.

### CONTACTS

With the right contacts in all walks of life, you can get a line on all sorts of useful information. Although having an "ear to the wall" doesn't necessarily provide you with good help or loyal servants, it does mean that you know who to ask when looking for the movers and shakers behind the scenes.

In game terms, your rating in Contacts allows you to discern rumors and information. When you call on your contacts, you make a few phone calls, check with likely snitches and grease a few palms. In return, you get rumors and information as if possessed of a certain amount of Influence. Doing so lets you find out exactly what's going on in the city within a particular area. You can get information of a level equal to however many contacts you use. If you use Contacts



x 3 on *Industry*, for instance, you get information as if digging up dirt with *Industry* x 3 Influence. The advantage of the *Contacts* Background is that contacts can be switched from place to place each game, getting information in different areas at your demand.

Using *Contacts* for especially dangerous or secret information may require you to spend some money or perform a few favors, at the discretion of a Storyteller. On occasion, accidents can cause contacts in one area to dry up, such as a strike that affects your *Industry* contacts, or a particularly unlucky astronomical conjunction sends your *Occult* contacts running for the hills. Your contacts will not generally function as aides or lackeys. That behavior is the purview of the *Allies* and *Retainers* Backgrounds.

Example: Uncle Chu, a Westernized Bone Flower *heimin*, knows someone just about everywhere in Hong Kong (i.e., he has *Contacts* x 5). This month, his player, Phong, decides that Chu is going to engage in a little local rumor-mongering. Phong allocates *Contacts* x 4 to *Media*, learning about local news stories that haven't quite made the papers and who has their hands in those pies still on the shelf. He leaves one level of *Contacts* in reserve, for unluck's unexpected crises. Next month, he plans to use his contacts to find a few High Society types who would be happy to pay for a little dirt on their rivals....

## FAME

Some Kuei-jin were famous during their breathing days, ripped from the ranks of the wealthy or talented elite by their death. As a result, many Cathayans can make a claim to some distinction in their mortal years. Though such notoriety often fades with the years, your *Fame* lingers on to influence mortal society.

*Fame* allows you to exercise your connections over a longer distance than usual. Certainly, if you've got the right Influence, you can push things around on a provincial or even national scale, but with *Fame*, you can just make a few calls and get your *Contacts*, *Influence* or *Resources* exerted over a greater range without any impediment. Not that you must have *Fame* to get anything done, only that it may help. Your total *Fame* determines your maximum range for unimpeded use of your *Contacts*, *Influence* and *Resources*.

When you make an effort to exert your *Contacts*, *Influence* or *Resources* over a long range, you lean on your popularity and image, thus expending your *Fame* Traits until the next game session. *Fame* is most often used in the downtime between sessions to facilitate long-range plans.

In a less mechanical fashion, your *Fame* also dictates how recognizable you are to mortals, for one reason or another. The Storyteller will certainly make the effects of your *Fame* apparent, and mortals may take notice of you at bothersome times. Having your likeness known to all the local police or being spotted at the prime minister's estate does things to one's reputation, after all.

*Fame* does have its limitations. It makes little sense for you to have this Background if you're known to be dead in the mortal world, unless you somehow acquired your *Fame* after the Second Breath (and have managed to keep your vampiric nature secret). Also, *Fame* does not always indicate widespread instant name recognition. You may be known to only a subset of a particular group or a recognized expert in a field who's unknown to those outside.



## FAME RANGES

Fame Traits	Maximum Range for Backgrounds
Fame x 1	Local scene
Fame x 2	City
Fame x 3	State/Province
Fame x 4	Adjoining province
Fame x 5	Entire country

## HERD

Whether surrounding yourself with mortal cultists (as do many Kuei-jin), or just making sure that you have regular access to fresh Chi reserves, your herd gives you a guaranteed volume of Chi for sustenance. You don't have to go very far to hunt. When available to you, your herd offers you a safe and easy way to sustain your powers.

You should work with your Storyteller to describe the exact nature of your herd, since these Traits can be lost through hazards or deliberate sabotage. You could have mortals who have come to enjoy elaborate blood tea ceremonies, access to medical blood supplies outside of the normal channels or a religious cult that gives you blood freely. Each Trait of *Herd* can be used to gain one extra Chi Trait once per session. You can partake of your herd immediately on entering the game to represent that you have fed previously, thus improving your blood from your starting Traits for the evening. You can also take 15 minutes out of play to call on a herd and gain a Chi Trait. You can split up *Herd* Traits if you wish, so you may use some Traits to start with extra blood, then use more later to replace spent reserves.

Members of your herd (assuming it is composed of people and not plastic bags) are not necessarily particularly competent or loyal — they simply let you feed from them, for whatever reason. You must take *Allies* or *Retainers* if you want them to do other tasks for you. Note also that the type of Chi gained can vary widely depending on the herd itself — fresh, Yang-laced blood of ecstatic cultists is quite different from Yin-laden medical supplies — and the Storyteller is free to change the type of Chi received depending on the circumstances of your feeding.

## Horoscope

You were born under especially auspicious — or baleful — stars. Many vampires treat such omens very seriously, and new Kuei-jin are often subjected to a thorough astrological analysis before they are presented to the court formally. One's horoscope is often equated with one's destiny, and those with high ratings in this Background often find themselves the beneficiaries (or victims) of strange coincidences, *deus ex machina* events and other oddities, which provide ideal material for a clever Storyteller.

In game terms, a character who wishes to invoke his *Horoscope* rating must corner the Storyteller, expend a level of *Horoscope* and perform a test. In this test, both parties display a number of fingers from zero (show a fist) to five, adding the two numbers together to get a result between zero to 10. If the result is one of the vampire's "lucky numbers," she receives some boon from fate. The Storyteller has the final say on what occurs, but it should be beneficial for the vampire, and it can be quite dramatic. (This is Heaven talking, after all.) Some examples of *Horoscope*

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benefits include: a Fair Escape, a surprise, an automatic success on one challenge or a few temporary levels of Influence. Storytellers are encouraged to go beyond simple numbers and game mechanics when invoking *Horoscope*, however. A vampire's lucky numbers are determined by his direction and his Dharma as follows: North 6, West 9, Center 5, East 8, South 7; Devil-Tiger 2, Bone Flower 4, Resplendent Crane 1, Thousand Whispers 0, Thrashing Dragon 3. If a "10" is the result, shoot again at no cost to the vampire.

**Example of Play:** *Kun Allen, cornered by a vicious tong, spends a level of Horoscope and calls on joss to help him. He is a Thrashing Dragon of the south direction, so his lucky numbers are 3 and 7 (Dharma/direction), and he has three permanent levels of Horoscope. The Storyteller comes over and the two of them shoot fingers. Allen's player shows three fingers, the Storyteller two — a five, no luck. Allen spends a level of Horoscope to retest — zero fingers to four, resulting in a four and more tough luck for Allen. He spends his last level of Horoscope and they shoot — zero fingers to three, resulting in a three and success! Allen breathes a sigh of relief as the Storyteller announces a police cruiser has picked this moment to drive by the alley, causing the tong to flee... for now.*

## **INFLUENCE**

Mortal society builds on institutions. As humans raise their cities, they form gatherings of expertise that are manipulated by the Cathayans hiding in their midst. If you have Influence, you can sway the direction of some areas of mortal society, pushing cities to grow as you direct. Your Influence can be used to strike indirectly at your foes while protecting your own assets, or to gain information and special resources. Kuei-jin may have some relaxed restrictions on dealing with mortals compared to the Westerners and their Masquerade, but raw supernatural might will only carry one so far. After a certain point, knowing where to turn to get things done is far more important than shaking down clerks and otherwise throwing one's weight around.

Influence comes in many different areas. You must allocate Traits separately to each Influence; thus, if you have *Legal* x 4, you could still have *Police* x 3 independently but you would have to spend the Traits for each.

You cannot manage more Influence than the sum of your permanent Physical, Social and Mental Traits combined. This limit counts against all of your total Influence — your combined levels cannot exceed this total. After all, there are only so many things you can do in a night.

When you exercise Influence, you expend temporary Influence Traits. The tables for various Influence areas detail what you can do with a specific number of Traits. Performing an action requires a number of Traits equal to the level of the action. (You must use three Traits to perform an action listed at the third level of an Influence chart, for instance.) Thus, with high levels of Influence, you can perform many small actions, or a few significant ones.

Certain levels of Influence gift you with items, money or aides. Unlike the Resources Background, money and equipment garnered with Influence does not come automatically each month. If you want a steady income from Influence, you must direct your Influence in that direction continually, and this income does not come with any associated trappings of wealth (you'd have to buy a house and car separately, for instance). Aides garnered with Influence generally help only for one specific task, and they usually have the equivalent of only one level of Ability in their area of skill — for more competent and readily available help, take *Allies*.



Most cities have only a set amount of Influence in various areas. For instance, Hong Kong has a great deal of *Finance* Influence, because it is one of the commercial centers in Asia, while Shanghai would have a lot of *Transportation* and *Industry* Influence. A rural city, on the other hand, might have very little Influence to go around. You can only squeeze so much from a community of farmers and tradesmen, after all.

Storytellers should map out the total amount of each type of Influence to be had in the city. Once all of the Influence of a given type is used up, the only ways to get more are to grow that area of society (making new projects or sponsoring investment), to destroy someone else's Influence in order to free up those resources or to acquire an adversary's Influence in an area. Also, each city may have different reflections of the Influences listed here. A city with a thriving independent film community is going to have a different picture of *Media* or *High Society* than a city where the arts are being literally starved out due to budget cuts or are scrutinized closely by the government.

Each area of Influence has its own description. Elder vampires may possess truly far-reaching Influence, giving them the power to exert control beyond the levels included here.

### **BUREAUCRACY**

You can manage various government agencies and bureaus. By dealing with social programs and public servants, you can spin red tape, bypass rules and regulations or twist bureaucratic regimentation to your advantage. *Bureaucracy*—endemic in many societies of the Middle Kingdom—is essential for operating or shutting down businesses, faking or acquiring permits and identification papers and manipulating public utilities and facilities. Government clerks at the city and county level, utility workers, road crews, surveyors and other civil servants are potential contacts or allies.

Cost	Effect
1	Trace utility bills
2	Fake a birth certificate or driver's license Disconnect a single small residence's utilities Close a small road or park Get public aid (\$250)
3	Fake a death certificate, passport or green card Close a public school for a single day Shut down a minor business on a violation
4	Initiate a phone tap Fake land deeds Initiate a department-wide investigation
5	Start, stop or alter a city-wide program or policy Shut down a big business on a violation Rezone areas Obliterate records of a person on a city or county level

### **CHURCH**

The lure of faith is strong, and wily Kuei-jin can use the appeal of religion to achieve great results among the policies. Organized religion still exerts considerable influence over the direction of communities (which may influence politics), and it can even be used as a weapon against one's enemies in the form of protests

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and the like. Knowing the appropriate people allows insight into many mainstream religions, such as Hinduism, Shinto, Buddhism, Islam or Christianity (fringe or alternative groups, such as Scientology, are considered *Occult*). When you exercise *Church Influence*, you can change religious policy, affect the assignment of clergy and access a variety of lore and resources. Contacts and allies affected by *Church Influence* would include priests, bishops, church-sponsored witch-hunters, holy orders and various attendees and assistants.

Cost	Effect
1	Identify most secular members of a given faith in the local area Pass as a member of the clergy
2	Peruse general church records (baptism, marriage, burial, etc.) Identify higher church members Track regular church members Suspend lay members
3	Open or close a single church Find the average church-associated hunter Dip into the collection plate (\$250)
4	Access private information and archives of a church Discredit or suspend high-level church members Manipulate regional branches of the church
5	Organize major protests Access ancient church lore and knowledge

## FINANCE

Manipulating markets, stock reports and investments is a hobby of many Cathayans, especially those who use their knowledge to keep hidden wealth. Though your actual available money is a function of your *Resources*, you can use *Finance Influence* to start or smother businesses, crush or support banking institutions and alter credit records. Clearly, such power over money is not to be trifled with — fortunes are made and destroyed with this sort of pull. CEOs, bankers, stockbrokers, bank tellers, yes-men, financiers and loan agents are found among such work.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn about major transactions and financial events Raise capital (\$1,000)
2	Learn about general economic trends Learn real motivations for many financial actions of others Trace an unsecured small account
3	Raise capital to purchase a small business (single, small store) Purchase a large business (a few small branches or a single large store or service)
4	Manipulate local banking (delay deposits, some credit-rating alterations) Ruin a small business
5	Control an aspect of city-wide banking (shut off ATMs, arrange a bank "holiday") Ruin a large business Purchase a major company

Laws of the East



## HEALTH

Some vampires rely on connections in the medical community to acquire blood. Flesh-eaters and practitioners of arcane arts may also require body parts or medical data to further their studies. Furthermore, the carnage caused by *chih-mei* and other crimes unique to the Kuei-jin often calls for alteration of medical records or faking of particular diseases. Some Cathayans even specialize in the study of blood-borne ailments. All of these sorts of research and development fall under the purview of *Health* Influence. Coroners, doctors, lab workers, therapists, pharmacists and specialists are just a few of the people found in this field.

Cost	Effect
1	Access a person's health records Fake vaccination records and the like Use public functions of health centers at your leisure Get a single Chi Trait of mortal blood (almost certainly heavily aspected to Yin)
2	Access some medical research records Have minor lab work done Get a copy of a coroner's report Instigate minor quarantines
3	Corrupt results of tests or inspections Alter medical records
4	Acquire a body Completely rewrite medical records Abuse grants for personal use (\$250) Have minor medical research performed on a subject Institute large-scale quarantines Shut down businesses for "health code violations"
5	Have special research projects performed Have people institutionalized or released

## HIGH SOCIETY

The glitterati at the top of society move in circles of wealth and elegance. Many Kuei-jin find such positions alluring, and they indulge in the passions of the famous and wealthy. In some parts of the Middle Kingdom, the elite live like royalty of old, and the benefits of such standing are obvious to even the most anarchistic individuals. Access to famous actors, celebrities and the idle rich grants a certain sway over fashion trends. Combined with *Fame*, a modicum of *High Society* Influence turns a vampire into a debonair darling of the most exclusive social circles. Among these circles, one finds dilettantes, artists of almost any stripe, old-money families, models, rock stars, sports figures and jet-setters.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn what is trendy Obtain hard-to-get tickets for shows Learn about concerts, shows or plays well before they are made public
2	Track most celebrities and luminaries Be a local voice in the entertainment field "Borrow" idle cash from rich friends (\$1,000)



Cost	Effect
3	Crush promising careers Hobnob well above your station
4	Minor celebrity status
5	Get a brief appearance on a talk show that's not about to be canceled Ruin a new club, gallery, festival or other posh gathering

## INDUSTRY

The grinding wheels of labor fuel the economies and markets of the world. Machines, factories and blue-collar workers line up in endless drudgery, churning out the staples of everyday living. Control over *Industry* Influence sways the formation of unions, the movements of work projects, locations for factories and the product of manufacturing concerns. Union workers, foremen, engineers, construction workers, manual laborers and all manner of blue-collar workers exist among these ranks.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn about industrial projects and movements
2	Have minor projects performed Dip into union funds or embezzle petty cash (\$500)
3	Arrange small accidents or sabotage Organize minor strikes
4	Appropriate machinery for a short time Close down a small plant
5	Revitalize a small plant Manipulate large local industry

## LEGAL

Since many of the operations that Cathayans undertake are at least marginally illegal, a good amount of sway over judges and lawyers is indispensable. Those Kuei-jin who dabble in law often pull strings in the courts to make sure that the questionable practices of Cathayan society go unnoticed and unpunished. Of course, a little Legal Influence is also excellent for harassing an enemy's assets, too. Such Influence ranges from law schools and firms, to lawyers, judges, DAs, clerks and public defenders.

Cost	Effect
1	Get free representation for minor cases
2	Avoid bail for some charge Have minor charges dropped
3	Manipulate legal procedures (minor wills and contracts, court dates) Access public or court funds (\$250)
4	Get representation in most court cases Issue subpoenas Tie up court cases
5	Have most legal charges dropped Cancel or arrange parole Close down all but the most serious investigations Have deportation proceedings held against someone



## MEDIA

Directing media attention away from vampire activities is a key component of nightly unlif. Putting specific emphasis on certain events can place an enemy in an uncomfortable spotlight or discredit a rival. With *Media*, you can crush or alter news stories, control the operations of news stations and reporters and sway public opinion, with DJs, editors of all varieties, reporters, cameramen, photographers and broadcasters at your disposal. At Storyteller discretion, *Media* Influence may also allow access to the more technical areas of television, radio or movies.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn about breaking stories early Submit small articles (within reason)
2	Suppress (but not stop) small articles or reports Get hold of investigative reporting information
3	Initiate news investigations and reports
4	Get project funding and waste it (\$250) Ground stories and projects
5	Broadcast fake stories (local only) Kill small local articles or reports completely

## OCULT

The hidden world of the supernatural teems with secrets, conspiracies and unusual factions. Obviously, a vampire is aware that there are strange things out there by dint of his very existence (after all, if vampires exist...), but hard knowledge of such things is a function of Abilities. By using *Occult* Influence, you can dig up information to improve your knowledge, get inside the occult community and find rare components for magical rituals. *Fangshih*, cult leaders, alternative religious groups, charlatans, occultists, New Agers and a few more dangerous elements can be found here.

Cost	Effect
1	Contact and make use of common occult groups and their practices Know some of the more visible occult figures
2	Know and contact some of the more obscure occult figures Access resources for most rituals and rites
3	Know the general vicinity of certain supernatural entities and (possibly) contact them Access vital or rare material components Milk impressionable wannabes for bucks (\$250) Access occult tomes and writings
4	Research a Basic Rite Research an Intermediate Rite
5	Access minor magic items Unearth an Advanced Rite

## POLICE

"To protect and serve" is the motto of the police, but these days, Kuei-jin and mortals alike may have cause to wonder who is being protected and served. That said, *Police* Influence can be very handy to assist with Shadow War, to protect one's holdings or to raid the assets of another. After all, no amount of swagger will save



the *kyonshi* whose haven is the target of a daylight raid. Police of all ranks, detectives, clerical staff, dispatchers, prison guards, special divisions (such as SWAT or homicide) and local highway patrol make up these ranks.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn police procedures Hear police information and rumors Avoid traffic tickets
2	Have license plates checked Avoid minor violations (first conviction) Get "inside information"
3	Get copies of an investigation report Have police hassle, detain or harass someone Find bureau secrets
4	Access confiscated weapons or contraband Have some serious charges dropped Start an investigation Get money, either from the evidence room or as an appropriation (\$1,000)
5	Institute major investigations Arrange setups Instigate bureau investigations Have officers fired

## POLITICAL

Deal-making is second nature to most vampires, so they can get along very well with other bloodsuckers — that is, politicians. Altering party platforms, controlling local elections, changing appointed offices and calling in favors all falls under the purview of *Political Influence*. Well-timed blackmail, bribery, spin-doctoring or any sundry tricks are stock in trade on both sides of this fence. Some of the likely contacts and allies include pollsters, lobbyists, activists, party members, spin-doctors and politicians from rural zoning committees to the mayors of major cities or parliamentary representatives.

Cost	Effect
1	Minor lobbying Identify real platforms of politicians and parties Be in the know
2	Meet small-time politicians Garner inside information on processes, laws and the like Use a slush fund or fund-raiser (\$1,000)
3	Sway or alter political projects (local parks, renovations, small construction)
4	Enact minor legislation Dash careers of minor politicians
5	Get your candidate in a minor office Enact encompassing legislature



## **STREET**

Ignored and often spat on by their "bettters," those in the dark alleys and slums have created their own culture to deal with life and any outsiders who might come calling. When calling on Street Influence, you use your connections on the underside of the city to find the homeless, gang members of all sorts, street buskers, petty criminals, prostitutes, residents of the slums and fringe elements of so-called "deviant" cultures. In many Asian cities (Calcutta, Jakarta, Shanghai, Bangkok), where the streets are small metropoli unto themselves, those with Influence there wield far more power than many might suspect.

<b>Cost</b>	<b>Effect</b>
1	Open an ear for the word on the street
2	Identify most gangs and know their turf and habits
3	Live mostly without fear on the underside of society
4	Keep a contact or two in most aspects of street life
5	Access small-time contraband
1	Get insight into other areas of Influence
2	Arrange some services from street people or gangs
3	Get pistols or uncommon melee weapons
4	Mobilize groups of homeless
5	Panhandle or hold a "collection" (\$250)
1	Get hold of a shotgun, rifle or SMG
2	Have a word in almost all aspects of gang operations
3	Control a single medium-sized gang
4	Arrange impressive protests by street people

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Most Cathayans make their havens in defensible parts of cities. Traveling across the wilderness is difficult, with the problems of daylight, hengeyokai and even mortal hunters such as the Shih. Without this Influence, the vampiric world shrinks into islands of "civilization" with dangerous wastelands in between. Getting access to special supplies and services can also take a measure of Transportation. All these things can be controlled with a bit of sway over truckers, harbors, railroads, airports, taxis, border guards, pilots and untold hundreds, as well as more mundane aspects like shipping and travel arrangements.

<b>Cost</b>	<b>Effect</b>
1	Know what goes where, when and why
2	Travel locally quickly and freely
3	Track an unwary target if he uses public transportation
4	Arrange passage safe (or at least concealed) from mundane threats (robbery, terrorism, sunlight, etc.)
5	Avoid most supernatural dangers when traveling (such as Hakken)
1	Shut down one form of transportation (bus lines, ships, planes, trains, etc.) temporarily
2	Route money your way (\$500)
3	Reroute major modes of travel
4	Smuggle with impunity



## **UNDERWORLD**

The world of crime offers lucrative possibilities to strong-willed or subtle leaders. Guns, money, drugs and vice — such delicious pastimes can be led by anyone talented or simply vicious enough to take them. *Underworld* Influence lets you call on such favors for all manner of illegal dealings, and its ranks are filled by tongs, triads, drug dealers, bookies, Yakuza, hitmen, fences and criminal gangs.

<b>Cost</b>	<b>Effect</b>
1	Locate minor contraband (knives, small-time drugs, petty gambling, scalped tickets)
2	Obtain pistols, serious drugs, stolen cars Hire muscle to rough someone up Fence stolen loot
3	Prove that crime pays (and score \$1,000) Obtain a rifle, shotgun or SMG Arrange a minor "hit" Meet someone in "the Family"
4	Make white-collar crime connections
5	Arrange gangland assassinations Hire a demolition man or firebug Supply local drug needs

## **UNIVERSITY**

Institutions of learning and research are the purview of the *University* Influence. Access to the halls of learning can help you with any number of resources, from ancient languages to research assistance to many impressionable young minds. School boards, students from kindergarten through college, graduate students, professors, teachers, deans, scholastic orders and a variety of staff fill the ivy-covered halls.

<b>Cost</b>	<b>Effect</b>
1	Know layout and policy of local schools Have access to low-level university resources Get records up to the high school level
2	Know a contact or two with useful knowledge or Abilities Have minor access to facilities Fake high school records Obtain college records
3	Call in faculty favors Cancel a class Fix grades Discredit a student
4	Organize student protests and rallies Discredit faculty members
5	Falsify an undergraduate degree

## **JADE TALISMAN**

You own a talisman of true jade, jade which is attuned to either Yin or Yang energies. This item may take any form from a figurine to a sword guard, and it allows

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you to store Chi of the appropriate type in it for later use — a mystic battery, if you will. Such pieces are very rare, and you may have to fend off jealous rivals, especially if it is very powerful. Charging the talisman is accomplished by traveling to an area where the Wall is thin (rated 6 or lower) and making a number of Simple Tests of the talisman's rating against the Wall's rating, one Simple Test for each level of the talisman. For each Simple Test you win, the talisman gains one point of Chi. You may attempt to do so only once per night.

To use the stored Chi, you need only touch the talisman and concentrate (putting you two Traits down if you are attempting actions such as combat at the same time). When you do so, the desired amount of Chi enters your body to be used normally, to power Disciplines, heal wounds or engage in other activities. Note: This talisman does not allow you to use more Chi per turn than your Dharma rating allows.

## MAGIC ARTIFACT

The myths and legends of the Middle Kingdom are full of items that possessed mystical power and legendary histories, and many courts pass such artifacts down to their younger members as a tangible means of handing down tradition, provided the young ones seem worthy. Many families (both living and unliving) also pass down ancestral relics and heirlooms to worthy ancestors, some of which may also contain mystic properties. You are one of these lucky souls.

You possess a mystical item of some sort that is capable of producing supernatural results. If you are chosen to carry one of these items, you have received a great honor, and you should take your responsibility very seriously. A Kuei-jin entrusted to carry one of these items may draw on its powers. The Storyteller assigns an item appropriate to the level of Background taken. Picking your own magic artifact is not allowed. You may attempt to persuade the Storyteller with an excellent story as to why your character would have a particular item, but in the end, her decision is final.

## MENTOR

An older or more experienced Cathayan looks after you and comes to your aid occasionally. Whatever the case, you can get assistance from your mentor, though his favor may be fickle.

When you call on your mentor, you risk a certain number of Traits to achieve a given effect. A lowly one-Trait mentor probably knows only little more than you, while a five-Trait mentor may well have luminous standing within your court and a wide range of potent powers. Regardless, taking up your mentor's valuable time is costly. You must engage in a Simple Test when you call on your mentor. If you succeed, your mentor deigns to aid you. If you tie, your mentor grants you assistance, but then requires something in return. If you fail, your mentor demands the favor first before helping. In any case, your mentor can be called on only once in any given game session, and only if you have an appropriate way to contact him or her. In tradition-bound Kuei-jin society, abusing one's mentor without a trace of gratitude is a fast way to lose that mentor.

The level of aid that your mentor can give depends on the number of Traits in this Background (and Storyteller approval, of course):

- For one Trait, your mentor is privy to a single piece of specialized information at a level above your own. If you have *Kuei-jin Lore* x 2, for instance, your mentor can be called on to gift you with one piece of information from *Kuei-jin Lore* x 3.



- For two Traits, you can borrow one level of *Contacts*, *Influence*, *Resources* or *Status* from your mentor for the duration of the game. If your mentor is very powerful (four or five Traits), you can borrow two levels.
- Two Traits allow your mentor to instruct you in a Basic Discipline that you do not know.
- For three Traits, your mentor can instruct you in an Intermediate Discipline that you do not know.
- Your mentor can also train you in the ways of a special *Hobby/ Professional/ Expert Ability* that is outside your normal ken (such as *Hsien Lore*) at a cost of three Traits.
- For four Traits, your mentor can train you in an Advanced Discipline beyond your grasp.
- For five Traits, your mentor can train you in the phenomenal powers of the elders, if you are up to the challenge.

Since mentors can prove unbalancing by providing too many different powers over the course of a long game, the Storyteller may lower your total Mentor Traits as you call on his knowledge. This decrease represents the fact that as your character learns the mentor's secrets, the mentor has less left to teach.

## NUSHI

You (or your *wu*) has a nushi spirit that watches over you. When a *wu* is formed, its members often choose a nushi spirit to adopt them. This spirit is then summoned by all the members of the *wu*, and is created using the total score of the *wu*'s Nushi Background. Costs to build the spirit are as follows:

<b>One Trait</b>	Provides three Traits to divide among the nushi's Willpower, Yin and Yang ratings (minimum of one each).
<b>One Trait</b>	Provides 10 Traits of Chi.
<b>One Trait</b>	The nushi can speak aloud (you do not require a spirit-speaking power to converse with it).
<b>One Trait</b>	The nushi can locate and appear in the presence of any <i>wu</i> member.
<b>Two Traits</b>	The nushi spends the majority of its time with the <i>wu</i> , and is ready to help out.
<b>Two Traits</b>	The nushi has a degree of respect among fellow spirits (may retest a single Social Challenge with another spirit per session).
<b>Two Traits</b>	Provides one Charm.
<b>Three Traits</b>	Per extra <i>wu</i> member who can use the nushi's powers in the same turn. (See page 228)
<b>Four Traits</b>	Nushi's mystical connection to the <i>wu</i> members is so strong that they can communicate mentally with one another effectively at any time (at Storyteller's discretion).
<b>Five Traits</b>	Nushi can contact and interact with the physical world for brief periods of time when the need is great.
<b>Five Traits</b>	Nushi is feared by agents of the Yama Kings (allows <i>wu</i> members to incite wave soul in demonic creatures, as per Charm: <i>Incite Frenzy</i> ; cost is three Yin Chi; Mental Challenge versus target's Willpower).

For more information on building a nushi spirit, see page 228.



## RESOURCES

You have access to liquid capital and spending money. You also have some solid resources that you can use when times are tight. Unlike the use of *Finance*, these resources are always readily available, and they come to you automatically due to your investments, jobs and holdings.

Your number of Resources Traits determines the amount of money and capital that you can secure. By expending temporary Resources Traits (which return at the next game session), you can draw on your regular income, as shown in the accompanying table. If you expend permanent Resources, you can divest yourself of holdings, allowing access to 10 times the amount shown on the table. However, the limits of what you can buy are always adjudicated by the Storyteller. Truly powerful uses of Resources are best left to downtime and moderation between game sessions.

### RESOURCE ALLOCATION

No Traits: Poverty. Income \$200. Get roommates. Bus pass.

One Trait: Small savings and holdings; income \$500. Have apartment, cheap means of transportation.

Two Traits: Modest savings and holdings; income \$1,000. Have condo and motorcycle or modest car.

Three Traits: Significant savings and holdings; income \$3,000. Own house, car.

Four Traits: Large savings and holdings. Income \$10,000. Own large house or some small properties, two vehicles, some luxuries and unusual items.

Five Traits: Rich. Income \$30,000. Own estate and grounds, multiple small properties, several vehicles, arts and treasures, luxury items.

## RETAINERS

Whether out of personal loyalty, love, Soul Disciplines or some other power, you have managed to secure the fellowship of a mortal (or several mortals) who obeys your every whim. Unlike the Allies Background, your retainers are nearly always around, overseeing your personal effects, defending your property and furthering your goals. They may not have the specialized knowledge of allies, but they are mostly loyal to your cause, and they serve your needs first.

You should work with your Storyteller to determine how you managed to secure a loyal retainer. Your retainer's exact capabilities are up to the Storyteller. A retainer may be skillful but unmotivated, or loyal but inept. No retainer is ever perfect, but they all can be a great help.

- A retainer can be assigned to watch over a particular location. Generally, if someone attempts to break into your house, the retainers there will attempt to stop the intruder. In this case, they are treated as normal humans, run by Narrators.
- A retainer can be used to manage your assets and perform tasks. Retainers tied up in this fashion allow you to manage more Influence than normal; they add to the number of Attribute Traits that you possess for purposes of counting your total Influences. Each retainer directed in this fashion adds one to your maximum Influence Traits. If retainers are later lost, killed or reassigned, the excess Influence Traits are lost, starting with the highest levels of Influence held.
- A retainer can perform other menial functions, as allowed by the Storyteller. You can get someone else to pick up your character's dry-cleaning.



## RITES

The Kuei-jin have many mysteries, rites and celebrations, and thanks to this Background, you know some of them intimately. You are versed in the traditions and order of these rites, and you can identify them by drawing on your knowledge of them (the player must win or tie a Static Mental Challenge to do so). Furthermore, you may have been taught how to perform a few of these rites.

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>One Trait:</b>    | Has knowledge of Basic Rites and can perform one Basic Rite.  |
| <b>Two Traits:</b>   | Has knowledge of Basic Rites and can perform two Basic Rites.   |
| <b>Three Traits:</b> | Has knowledge of Basic and Intermediate Rites, and can perform three Basic Rites.   |
| <b>Four Traits:</b>  | Has knowledge of Basic and Intermediate Rites, and can perform four Basic Rites   |
| <b>Five Traits:</b>  | Has knowledge of Basic, Intermediate and Advanced Rites, and can perform five Basic Rites and one Intermediate Rite.<br>Individual rites may be learned by any Kuei-jin who can find a willing teacher and is willing to pay the appropriate experience cost. Teachers often ask would-be students for hefty favors or require difficult quests before passing on their guarded knowledge. But in these troubled days, the truly wise realize the importance of making sure the ancient rites are remembered and passed on. |

**Note:** What this Background purchases is the ability to learn and perform rites eventually — not immediately. Rites is a measure of a Kuei-jin's potential at the beginning of the game, not her current skill, although at her discretion the Storyteller may allow her to have learned one or two very basic rites already, especially if doing so would facilitate playing the game.

## CHI VIRTUES: YIN AND YANG

### YIN

Yin records the character's facility for absorbing and controlling dark, negative energies. Yin aids in resisting fire soul, using Yin-aspected Disciplines and when dealing with ghosts and other Yin-spirits. Vampires with high Yin ratings commonly master Disciplines relating to death and decay. Because they are repositories for such dark energies, they often seem eerie and repellent to mortals, although some humans with high Yin scores themselves find the Kuei-jin oddly attractive. Vampires who have imbalanced themselves with Yin tend to be even more extreme, often appearing corporeal or even putrescent. Such undead are known as *ch'ing shih*.

Kuei-jin have two Yin ratings. The permanent Yin rating measures the character's total control over negative energies, while the temporary Yin rating measures how many Chi Traits of Yin energy the character has currently for powering Yin Disciplines and the like.



### Using Yin

• **Fire Soul** — Whenever fire soul threatens to overcome the vampire, she resists using her permanent Yin rating. Characters with high Yin ratings are simply too calm and collected to fall victim to such petty concerns as rage.

• **Awakening** — The Kuei-jin may spend a Trait of Yin to awaken at sundown. Once spent, the Kuei-jin is considered "black cycled," and she need not spend Chi to awaken for another 10 days! However, the dark energies animating her give her a more corporeal pallor than normal. She is considered one Trait down on all Social Challenges with mortals except those involving intimidation, and she must describe her pallid visage to those who would notice the change (such as close associates or those who normally see her charged by Yang energy, for example). She must still spend Chi for Disciplines and other things.

• **Ghostsight** — By spending an appropriate Chi Trait, the Kuei-jin can attune himself to his inner Yin, allowing him to view the effects of Yin all around him. Doing so has the following game effects:

First, the character extends his sight beyond the Wall into the Yin World, thus allowing him to see Yin-spirits such as wraiths and Spectres. To do so, the Cathayan's player must concentrate for one minute and win or tie a Simple Test (retested with the *Occult Ability*). This vision lasts for one hour or until the end of the scene, whichever is longer.

Second, the character may scan objects or living prey (undead and Risen count, ghosts don't) for weaknesses. The player must spend at least three turns watching his target (no combat or fast movement), then make a Static Yin Challenge against eight Traits. If successful, the next attack the Kuei-jin makes (hit or miss) inflicts an extra level of the appropriate type of damage if it lands. Once that attack is made, the Kuei-jin must reattune himself to the target to receive the bonus again.

Third, the vampire can study the mystic marks on a target's aura for signs of weakness and decay, thus allowing him to deduce any physical ailments plaguing her. Doing so requires a Static Mental Challenge against a difficulty of the target's Mental Traits, but if successful, it tells the Kuei-jin if the target is injured, any diseases she is suffering from or how much blood she's lost. Note that unless the Kuei-jin has at least two levels of the *Medicine Ability*, he will understand complex ailments only in simple terms: a target is "weak," "feverish" or "wasting away."

Finally, the vampire may use Ghostsight to look at broken objects and deduce how they once went together by tracing the lines of decay. Doing so requires a win or tie on a Simple Test with the *Crafts* or *Repair Ability* to function, and it gives the vampire a good idea of how to repair the object (if possible).

## YANG

Yang is the energy of dynamism, of change and of renewal. Despite the positive connotations given to it by many Westerners, it is something of a perverse force. Yang gives the Kuei-jin the energy to draw their Second Breath, but it also fuels the ravenous hunger that sends many Kuei-jin spiraling into depravity. As the Cathayans say, Yang is simply the energy that powers a Kuei-jin's actions; whether those actions are "good" or "bad" is up to the Kuei-jin himself to determine. Yang energy is important when resisting fear and connecting with other living things. Kuei-jin with high Yang ratings are often very human in appearance, the kind of undead who arose to avenge families or hold fast to a love they cannot bear to leave. However, they are sometimes all too human in action. The life-force they have is



secondhand at best, nothing more than stolen life, and when their pretense of humanity fails, it often leads Yang-aspected vampires to great fits of rage and destruction.

### Using Yang

• **Wave Soul** — Those with high Yang ratings are simply too brave — too full of the fire of creation — to bow to such ignoble motives as terror. The permanent Yang rating is used to resist wave soul.

• **Healing** — Dead as they are, Kuei-jin may use either type of Chi to heal themselves. (See the healing section on p. 180 for details.) However, the Kuei-jin may also heal others by preparing an elixir with her own Yang Chi. Each Trait invested in the mixture heals one level of lethal damage or two levels of bashing damage.

• **Awakening** — Spending a Yang Trait for this purpose causes the character to enter a “scarlet cycle.” She appears more human than normal for the duration of the night, and she endures no penalty to Social Tests. While not entirely lifelike, the vampire displays enough mortal traits (blinking, coughing, cold but passable skin) so that only those who are trained to search out the undead will usually ever suspect anything is amiss. Of course, the vampire must spend a Chi Trait every night to remain in scarlet cycle, which makes such benefits quite costly in the long run.

• **Lifesight** — By spending an appropriate Chi Trait, the Kuei-jin can attune herself to her inner Yang, allowing her to view the endless tapestry of Yang all around her. Doing so has the following game effects:

First, the character extends her sight beyond the Wall into the Yang World, thus allowing her to see Yang-entities such as kami and other natural spirits, as well as detect physical beings with abnormally high amounts of Yang energy (such as hengeyokai and *hsien*). To do so, the Cathayan’s player must concentrate for one minute and win or tie a Simple Test (retested with the *Occult Ability*). This vision lasts for one hour or until the end of the scene, whichever is longer.

Second, the character may sense the emotional “flares” that occur when two or more beings meet each other, thus often sensing their true feelings about their relationship. For example, the Kuei-jin might observe two lovers meeting and see that one flares feelings of love and devotion, while the other projects nothing but nervousness and guilt over an affair he’s having behind his partner’s back. To use this talent, the character must succeed at a Simple Test against each target she wishes to scan. If successful, she may ask the target to provide a brief summary of his true feelings about the person he just met with. *Shen* may spend a Willpower Trait to dim their reactions and render this power useless against them, although they may only do so if they are aware that they’re being watched by another party (not necessarily the character). This power is best reserved for mortals alone, since using it on *shen* and other Kuei-jin is considered a serious insult and breach of etiquette. However, Kin-jin and other barbarians may be scanned at will.

Finally, the vampire can use her attunement with life energies to “home in” on a particular overriding passion in the surrounding area. The range of this power is 20 paces plus one pace per Mental Trait the vampire possesses. The passion chosen must be a strong one. Momentary annoyance or casual flirtation is not strong enough for this talent to detect, but deep hatreds and true love are certainly fair game. The main advantage of this talent is for hunting (searching for lust when looking for a mortal who will be easy to seduce, for example), although it also acts



as a good general detector for individuals with strong emotional energy. To use this power, the Kuei-jin's player must first pick a particular emotion. She may then ask (out of character) any character she passes if he is currently experiencing the emotion she is searching for, and the subject must answer honestly. If used for hunting, the player may subtract five minutes from his hunting time for each Trait of Yang he possesses (minimum five minutes).

## SOUL VIRTUES: HUN & P'o

Traditional Chinese thought divided the soul into two halves: the lower, animalistic soul (the P'o), and the higher, rational soul (the Hun). While Kuei-jin of other cultures know them by different names, for the most part all Hungry Dead accept this dichotomy as representative of their condition.

### Hun

The Hun reflects a character's spirituality and sense of duty, her capacity for abstract thinking, aesthetic thought and her remaining empathy for humanity. Hun is sometimes seen as a sense of conscience, but that description is not quite right (at least not in the sense of goodness and "Christian charity" that most Westerners attach to that word). Rather, Hun is a measure of a character's sense of honor and devotion to duty — whether that duty is the lawful administration of the Resplendent Cranes or the wicked ministrations of the Devil-Tigers is irrelevant. A Kuei-jin with a high P'o and low Hun, for example, is little more than an animalistic killer, while one with high P'o and strong Hun rating is far more refined — a demon, but an honorable one nonetheless. Characters with high Hun ratings seem very "in control," and they possess a great deal of spiritual strength in the face of adversity. Their rational side is well cultivated, and they seldom feel any pull to give in to momentary urges or selfish impulses. Characters with low Hun ratings tend to view existence in a very brutish and animalistic way.

#### Using Hun

- **Demon Arts** — When invoking one of the *Demon Art* Disciplines of the P'o, the Hun may be used to harness the P'o into a controlled frenzy. After (and only after) the *Demon Art* is activated, the Kuei-jin's player may make a Static Hun Challenge against a difficulty equal to her P'o score. Success enables her to evoke the *Demon Art* while retaining her own Nature. Failure means the P'o takes over the body while the *Demon Art* is used.

- **Empathy** — A Kuei-jin may never have more empathy-related Attribute Traits (*Empathetic*, *Compassionate*, etc.) than he has Traits of Hun.

- **Shadow Soul** — Hun is the Trait used when resisting the takeover of the P'o during shadow soul. Characters with high Hun ratings are too disciplined to let the animalistic P'o take control on a whim.

- **Sharpened Senses** — This power is identical to the *Auspex Discipline*'s power of *Heightened Senses*. The Kuei-jin may spy on distant conversations, detect invisible foes and otherwise enjoy the same benefits as that Discipline, although strong stimuli such as bright lights or sudden loud noises may likewise incapacitate the character temporarily. All this power requires is a minute of concentration to enact. In particularly chaotic circumstances, the Narrator may rule that a win or tie on a Simple Test is required to focus the Kuei-jin's sharpened senses. This power lasts for a scene or until the Kuei-jin shuts off her increased sensitivity willingly.



• **Spirit Speech** — A Kuei-jin may make a Static Hun Challenge against a difficulty of the local Wall to speak with a spirit, provided she can detect it in the first place.

• **Tempering the P'o** — A Kuei-jin who succumbs to shadow soul is not entirely at the mercy of the P'o. While her higher side is powerless to stop the rampages of the Demon during this time, characters with enough resolve may remember the actions of the P'o and even subtly influence its behavior. The Kuei-jin's player must win a Static Hun Challenge against nine Traits to temper the P'o. Success does not prevent the shadow soul change, but it allows the Kuei-jin to remember the actions that the Demon takes during this time. Furthermore, the character may spend a Willpower Trait to modify an action the P'o takes (such as maiming a target instead of killing him) or delay one action the P'o wishes to take until the next turn, such as hesitating to allow an innocent victim time to escape. Finally, a Kuei-jin whose Hun soul stays aware during shadow soul may spend a Willpower Trait to speak one lucid sentence (such as yelling "Run, you fool!" at the innocent victim from earlier, assuming he didn't get the point already).

## P'o

All Kuei-jin bear the taint of Yomi, an exaggeration of the darkest aspects of their own soul that rides their shoulders like a demonic imp, urging them toward self-destruction constantly and occasionally (or not so occasionally, depending on the strength of the Kuei-jin in question) taking the reins to perpetrate unspeakable rampages of cruelty and perversity. The P'o is animalistic but fiendishly clever as well, not like the mindless Beast of the Kin-jin, and the lures of the Demon are often as subtle as they are wicked. The P'o is the force that turns minor irritation into killing fury, but the strength of the Demon is often also the only thing that can save the Kuei-jin from certain destruction, a fact the Demon uses to its full advantage.

It is important to remember that the Kuei-jin have studied the Demon for millennia, and they do not seek only to contain and suppress it as the Kindred do with the Beast. The P'o is as much a part of the character's soul as anything else, maybe not a part to be proud of, but a part nonetheless. It is not some alien presence to be destroyed, but the character's own voice as heard through the winds of Hell. As the greatest teachers of the *shen* teach their students, the P'o must be understood and assimilated if enlightenment is to be achieved, and characters who see the Demon within only as their enemy are doomed to a narrow existence indeed. The P'o does offer its Hun side some potent advantages, but always with a price that most Kuei-jin would do well to inspect carefully before they pay, lest they become nothing more than pawns to their own depraved urges or worse.

### Using P'o

• **Berserk Rage** — The character may attempt to prod his P'o into a berserk rage. Doing so is risky at best, but it can sometimes turn the tide of a desperate battle. A Static P'o Challenge against a difficulty of the character's Hun rating + 3 (max 10) is required. If successful, the character enters fire soul immediately (see the systems chapter for the benefits/ drawbacks of fire soul). He also gains access to Demon Chi during this time.

• **Demon Arts** — A character cannot possess a higher level of a *Demon Art* than his P'o rating, which translates in the following manner. Characters with 1-4 P'o Traits are limited to Basic *Demon Arts*; those with 5-7 P'o Traits can have



Intermediate Demon Arts; those with 8+ P'o Traits can possess Advanced Demon Arts.

• **Demon Chi** — The character may attempt to channel the strength of his Demon into his actions, though doing so leaves him vulnerable to falling into shadow soul during this time. For each Trait of permanent P'o, the character is considered to have one Trait of Demon Chi. Demon Chi may be spent in a similar manner to the *Black Wind Demon Art*, even if the character doesn't actually possess that Discipline. Each Chi Trait spent in this fashion counts as a temporary level of the *Black Wind* for the turn. (Thus, the character could spend three Demon Chi and receive three extra actions or three temporary levels of supernatural strength.) To gain access to Demon Chi for a scene, the player must make a Static P'o Challenge against a difficulty equal to his Hun Virtue + 3.

Once spent, Demon Chi is gone for the night, although feeding at some defiled sites may restore Demon Chi earlier at the Storyteller's discretion. Upon awakening each evening, the character may make a number of Simple Tests equal to his permanent P'o rating. Each success indicates a Trait of Demon Chi regained.

• **Fangs** — Unlike the Kin-jin, Cathayans have no natural fangs, but by spending a Trait of Demon Chi they may sprout fangs that are, in all respects, identical to those of a Western vampire. By spending two Demon Chi Traits, they may sprout a hideous fanged maw. The character is two Traits up on all biting attacks, and he inflicts aggravated damage with his bite, but the maw cannot be hidden. Both such uses of Demon Chi last for one scene.

• **Nature Shift** — The P'o is usually the Virtue used to determine if the character enters fire, shadow or wave soul. See the individual descriptions of these states for more details.

• **Resistance** — If the Kuei-jin suffers from magical mind control, he may attempt to use the savagery of the P'o to break the bond. The player must win a Static P'o Challenge against nine Traits. Success means the control is broken, but the player must also test for shadow soul immediately.

• **Shadow Soul** — The most feared power of the P'o is to take over the Kuei-jin's body, subsuming the Hun nature to carry out its darkest desires. When the P'o is dominant, the character's P'o Archetype replaces the character's normal nature, and the player must roleplay the dominance of his character's dark side appropriately. If the player is incapable of doing so, the Storyteller is free to step in and dictate the P'o-dominated character's actions. Shadow soul typically lasts for one scene, at which time the Hun may reassert itself, although the Storyteller may modify that time according to the nature of the incident that provoked the change and the relative strength of the character's P'o. It is also important to note that unless the character uses his Hun to temper the P'o, the Hun remembers *nothing* of what happens during the time of the P'o's control. The character must find out from other sources what his Demon made him do during this time, and the answers often aren't very pretty. More than one Kuei-jin has gone mad or even spiraled back into Yomi after "awakening" to discover slain loved ones or see centuries of planning undone in a single moment of darkness.

(For more on roleplaying shadow soul, see the systems chapter on p. 195.)

## P'o ARCHETYPES

If none of these Archetypes seems appropriate, work with the Storyteller to design your own P'o. **Wraith: The Oblivion** and the **Shadow Players Guide** have a number of suggestions that could easily be adapted for P'o Archetypes.



**The Bandit** — The Bandit sees no use in the Great Cycle. It ignores the mandates of Heaven and Hell, preferring chaos to order, and any servant of order makes a fine target. The Bandit can force a test for shadow soul whenever anyone orders the Kuei-jin to do anything or tries to put him "in his proper place." Bandits ascendant are out to smash and destroy, less for sheer pleasure like the Demon, but to invite chaos and destroy order. Many enjoy committing crime, and it is not uncommon to find a Bandit at work in a tong or some other criminal organization.

**The Barbarian** — The Barbarian prefers the relative freedom of the West over what it sees as the stifling confines of useless, antiquated Eastern formality, and it never fails to take any opportunity to compare Cathayan and Cainite ways. A test for shadow soul is in order whenever adhering to some traditional practice would cause the Kuei-jin pain or other hardship. The Barbarian may also attempt to manifest if it encounters Kin-jin. Once in shadow soul, a Barbarian may deal freely with Kin-jin, trample on traditional beliefs or even dare to disrespect to the elders.

**The Deceiver** — The Deceiver has no use for the truth in any form. It lies for the sake of practice, occasionally sprinkling in flattery, followed with wild falsehood, all to render the Hun unable to trust himself or move without the advice of his P'o. The Deceiver seeks to take over whenever an opportunity to lie would be more advantageous, usually after the Hun has tried and failed to solve the situation through truth. A Deceiver in control merely has a larger field in which to spread his lies, often laying a number of unpleasant surprises for the Hun to find.

**The Demon** — All that the Demon sees exists for its own whim, to devour and destroy as it sees fit. There is no other need but its own, no other pleasure but its own. Western eyes would see the Demon as a sociopath. The Demon attempts to take over when it sees an opportunity to make itself stronger by the destruction of another. Demons ascendant can be terrifying. Some are out-and-out destructive, seeking to slake their hungers in the most gruesome manner (such as through torture or murder — serial killers are often sociopathic). Others are more insidious and cunning, looking for pleasure in stalking, psychological games or traps laid for the Hun. Demons, however, prefer to be their own masters, and even the most depraved Demon is disinterested in a deal with the Yama Kings.

**The Fool** — The Fool is, to put it kindly, simple-minded. It demands explanations for even the most self-evident action, and it is incapable of planning and executing anything but short-term plans with no complications. A Fool also is rarely silent, continually prattling, wanting explanation and generally trying to get the Hun to take the easy way out. The Fool can attempt to take over whenever the Hun finds itself at a loss for words or in an awkward situation. Once in shadow soul, the Fool usually demonstrates why he is called the Fool — upsetting careful, long-range plans for immediate action, saying exactly the wrong thing, and trying to find the easy way out of any situation.

**The Legalist** — The opposite of the Bandit, the Legalist is order to the point of rigidity. There is a correct way to do everything, and the Legalist will give the Hun no peace about mistakes or "insults" to the divine order of things. The Legalist threatens takeover if an inferior is disrespectful of the Hun (and the Legalist alone knows who's inferior), or if the Kuei-jin herself is disrespectful. Legalists in shadow soul can be unpleasant to deal with, haranguing other Kuei-jin about their bad behavior and seeking the power to enact punishment against those so "disrespectful."

**The Monkey** — Capricious, easily distracted, full of grandiose ideas for very little gain — that is the Monkey. If the Kuei-jin has an overarching goal for her



return to the Middle Kingdom, the Monkey doesn't care, preferring pleasures and novel distractions to serious matters. The Monkey attempts to take over when it sees a diversion that would distract the Hun from its business, particularly one that the Hun would be interested in normally. A Monkey in shadow soul is exhausting to keep up with, running hither and thither, letting anything remotely important to the Hun fall into ruin. Many's the Hun who's awakened from shadow soul to discover himself with a small hoard of trinkets and his plans in shambles.

**The Slave** — The Slave has no belief in the Kuei-jin, and it seeks constantly to place the Kuei-jin under the control of another, because obviously the Kuei-jin can barely take care of himself. It questions the Kuei-jin's judgement continuously, forcing him to admit that he has no self-worth and is incapable. Even worse, the Slave wishes to serve the Yama Kings, and a Cathayan with a Slave P'o risks becoming *akuma*. The Slave attempts to take over whenever the Hun is in the presence of someone older, stronger or wiser, or if a plan of the Kuei-jin's goes disastrously wrong. When the Slave achieves shadow soul, it sets about its primary goal of finding masters to yoke the Kuei-jin; many times, the Slave uses such times to attempt to further contracts with the Yama Kings.

## Chi

Chi is the energy that fuels all vampires. Unable to enjoy the pleasures of mortal flesh or the comfort of more mundane gratification, only Chi itself offers sustenance to Cathayans. Most Kuei-jin must consume blood or flesh to survive, although elder vampires are rumored to be able to subsist on other things. It is with the Chi contained in blood that a vampire draws on the strengths of the undead condition.

Chi Traits do not have adjectives. Rather, each Trait simply represents a quantity of energy. Chi Traits can be represented with cards. When a character gains Chi Traits by feeding, take the cards from the victim. When Chi Traits are spent, give the cards to a Narrator or Storyteller.

Your starting Chi Trait total is determined by your Dharma. When you come into play for an evening's game, make a test with a Narrator as you pick up your character sheet. If you win, you come into play with all of your Chi Traits, as determined by Dharma. If you tie, you have half your Dharma limit of Chi Traits, rounded up. If you lose, you come into play with only four Chi Traits. Certain Merits, Flaws, Dharma disadvantages or other circumstances may alter your number of Chi Traits at the beginning of play. Possession of the Herd Background, however, allows you to come into play with more Chi Traits, up to your Dharma limit (see the appropriate Background descriptions on p. 95 for Herd).

When you have expended a great deal of Chi, you become hungry. A hungry vampire is susceptible to the Demon's urges and to fire soul due to the ravenous lust for sustenance. You are considered hungry if at five or fewer Chi Traits. You may be susceptible to fire soul at the sight, smell or taste of blood or other applicable sources of nourishment (see "Chi Virtues" on p. 108). If you have two or fewer Chi Traits, you are ravenous, and your difficulty to resist fire soul due to hunger goes up by one Trait, making it very likely that you enter fire soul at the first opportunity to feed.

Feeding is the only way to replenish Chi. You can take Chi Traits from mortals, other vampires or other creatures with Chi energy, such as animals or hengeyokai. However, each Chi Trait drained inflicts a level of lethal damage on



the victim. Up to three Chi Traits may be drained each turn. You can close the wound by licking it to seal up traces of your feeding. You may only heal such wounds that were made by your fangs, which means that most Cathayans must be careful when feeding, since fangs do not come naturally to them as they do to the Kin-jin.

You can expend Chi Traits for a variety of functions:

- You must spend a Chi Trait each night at sunset, for simple sustenance. See the Chi Virtue descriptions for the effects of each type of Chi when used for animation.

- One Chi Trait heals two health levels of bashing damage or one level of lethal damage. You are still limited to your Dharma limits of blood expenditure (so most young vampires cannot heal more than one or two health levels of damage in a turn). Healing in this fashion requires your concentration and a full turn. It cannot be done in the same turn that the character makes an attack.

- Spending one Chi Trait grants an extra Physical Trait for the duration of a conflict. You can bid this Trait like any other ("by the blazing power of Yang"), and you can count this Trait in ties and overbids. You can spend Chi in this way as a reflexive action at any time, not counting as your turn, though you still obey the limits of Chi-expenditure according to Dharma level. You can raise your Physical Traits up to the limit of your Dharma for one conflict. Any additional Traits added with Chi beyond that remain only for the duration of a single challenge.

**Note:** You may use this benefit only if you possess a *Shintai* Discipline which allows you to improve your Physical Traits (it's listed in the Discipline descriptions), and you may gain only Traits appropriate to the type listed in the shintai. If your shintai specifies strength, for example, you cannot bid the Trait gained in challenges related to speed or stamina, unless you possess another shintai that would allow such usage.

- Three Chi Traits can be spent to heal one level of aggravated damage. This damage heals over the day, as the vampire sleeps. Chi Traits spent this way can be accumulated. That is, you need not spend the three Traits all at once, or even all in the same day. You should note Traits expended in this fashion with marks next to your level of aggravated damage. Once you have spent three Chi Traits on the injury, it heals the next time the sun sets. You can heal only one level of aggravated damage per day in this fashion, though, unless you also spend a Willpower Trait for each extra wound healed in the same rest period.

- Many Disciplines require the expenditure of Chi Traits, as listed in their individual descriptions. If a particular Discipline costs multiple Chi Traits but your Dharma prohibits you from spending all of the blood at once, you must spend the blood on successive turns. Spending blood in this fashion is usually reflexive, though the Discipline itself may require an action. For instance, activating *Black Wind* is reflexive. You spend a Chi Trait and still get your normal action, plus extra actions or other benefits from *Black Wind*.

## WILLPOWER

Willpower Traits measure the strength of your character's resolve and sense of self. By exerting your Willpower, you can withstand otherwise untenable conditions, renew your commitment to a course of action and empower certain difficult Disciplines.

Willpower Traits are not described with adjectives. You simply have permanent Willpower — your normal limit of Willpower Traits — and temporary Willpower, your expendable Traits. Your Dharma also determines the maximum



level to which you can improve your permanent Willpower. When you expend temporary Willpower Traits or raise your permanent Willpower, you regain temporary Traits at a rate of one per game session (although your Storyteller may vary this pace to suit the needs of her game or to simplify bookkeeping).

Expending a Willpower Trait allows for one of any number of effects. Generally, Willpower Traits allow you to keep self-determination and to empower extremely difficult or complex actions. Using Willpower is almost always a reflexive action, and it does not count as your turn.

- A Willpower Trait can be spent to refresh all of your lost Traits in one Attribute category — Physical, Social or Mental. You may do so once per category per game session.

- Expenditure of a Willpower Trait allows you to gain a retest when defending against a Mental or Social Challenge. Trait loss works as normal for such retests. Note that certain Disciplines or powers may override this stipulation.

- Spending one Willpower Trait enables you to enter a challenge for which you lack an appropriate Ability. Thus, you can make a test even if you would normally require a specific Ability that you don't have (or have used up).

- You can spend a Willpower Trait to try to control yourself briefly while in fire, wave or shadow soul. You are able to act normally for one turn when you spend Willpower in this fashion, though you otherwise keep all the other stipulations of such states — ignoring wound penalties and so on. You do not actually regain control so much as you fight mightily to direct yourself for a few moments in the face of overwhelming rage, terror or inner corruption. Roleplay your actions appropriately.

- You can expend a Willpower Trait to ignore all wound penalties, up to and including Incapacitated, for the duration of one full turn.

- Certain Disciplines or powers require the expenditure of Willpower.

## NEGATIVE TRAITS

As listed previously under Attributes, you can take Negative Traits to specify particular weaknesses inherent to your character. The listings of Negative Traits are included with the other Traits on p. 71–78.

When someone guesses your Negative Trait successfully in a challenge, you are forced to risk an additional Trait to continue with the challenge. Thus, if you enter a Mental Challenge but your opponent guesses one of your Negative Mental Traits successfully, you must bid and risk an additional Trait to continue with the challenge. If you do not have any more Traits to risk, you lose the challenge automatically.

## MERITS AND FLAWS

As optional Traits to flesh out your character, Merits and Flaws allow you to specify particular advantages or disadvantages that are not covered by Attributes, Abilities or Backgrounds. All Merits and Flaws are organized into specific categories, according to their type. To purchase a Merit, you must expend Free Traits equal to the cost of the Merit. Conversely, taking a Flaw hinders you with a handicap of some sort, but it offers additional Free Traits for character creation. You can take up to seven Traits each of Merits and Flaws. Some elder characters may have more. Certainly, very old vampires may develop potential capabilities



and resources outstripping their younger counterparts, or they may succumb to more terrible illnesses of body and mind.

Normally, you must purchase Merits and Flaws during character creation. However, with an appropriate story, you may be able to buy a new Merit (with Experience equal to double its value) or overcome a Flaw (again, with Experience equal to double its value).

## **PREVIOUSLY LISTED MERITS AND FLAWS**

In the interests of time and space, not all of the Merits and Flaws listed in **Laws of the Night** and other books are reprinted here. Rather, what follows is a list of which previous Merits and Flaws are and are not appropriate in **Laws of the East**, followed by a listing of Merits and Flaws entirely unique to the exotic inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom.

### **Psychological**

Recommended — *Code of Honor, Higher Purpose, Intolerance, Nightmares, Prey Exclusion, Territorial, Vengeance, Driving Goal, Hatred*

Disallowed — *Berserker, Dual Nature* (buddy, you are a dual nature!)

### **Mental**

Recommended — *Common Sense, Concentration, Light Sleeper, Iron Will, Amnesia*

Disallowed — None

### **Awareness**

Recommended — Any are fine, though none especially appropriate.

Disallowed — None

### **Aptitudes**

Recommended — *Natural Linguist*

Disallowed — *Eat Food* (Cathayans automatically have this advantage)

### **Supernatural**

Recommended — *Medium* (Yin vampires), *Spirit Mentor, Destiny, Repulsed By Garlic* (this lore is thought to have originated in China!), *Haunted, Dark Fate*

Disallowed — *Light-Sensitive, Unbondable* (blood bonds have no effect on Kuei-jin), *True Faith* (Dharma replaces such devout faith, though Kuei-jin can certainly still practice religion if they choose)

### **Kindred Ties**

Disallowed — All, unless the Kuei-jin is infiltrating Kindred society or otherwise operating in a Kin-jin centered chronicle. A few (*Enemy, Notoriety*) may also be appropriate, but be careful.

### **Mortal Society**

Recommended — *Nightclub, Hunted* (by Shih or Strike Force Zero especially)

Disallowed — None

### **Physical**

Recommended — *Huge Size, Allergic, Disfigured, Child, Deformity, Monstrous*

Disallowed — *Baby Face* (automatic for Yang vampires, impossible for Yin), *Misplaced Heart, Efficient Digestion, Selective Digestion, Thin-Blooded*

## **KUEI-JIN TIES**

### **Akuma (3 Trait Flaw)**

Whether because you have been revealed to be a servant of one of the Yama Kings, or because you have violated Kuei-jin tradition once too often, you have



been branded *akuma*, a devil-infested exile. Any Kuei-jin may hunt you down and destroy you without fear of retribution, and you are a true outcast, beneath consideration of the laws and practices of Cathayan society (even the Fivefold Way). Due to the immense size of the Middle Kingdom, *akuma* can occasionally travel ahead of their reputation for quite some time, or maybe even set up a new identity. It is unlikely, however, that you will have an easy unlife in any case, as your secret could be revealed at any moment. If and *only* if you actually do serve one of the Yama Kings, you may purchase the *Demon Mentor* Merit (5 Traits). Your demonic master visits you often in nightmares with orders and advice, and while he may gift you with a magic talisman from time to time, most demons are notoriously intolerant of failure. In any event, the Narrator is responsible for playing the Yama King. See p. 211 for more on "true" *akuma*.

## **PHYSICAL**

### **Different Body (1 Trait Flaw)**

Most Kuei-jin return in their original bodies, even if they have to scrape them from the ocean floor or piece them together from blackened fragments, but for some reason, you came back in another person's body. Perhaps it's karmic retribution, or maybe Heaven is just having a joke at your expense, but this condition is a source of great shame and embarrassment to most Kuei-jin, not to mention constant minor annoyances. Uncomfortable as you are with this new frame, you shift and fidget constantly, and you even exhibit some of the body's old mannerisms or physical tics from time to time. Most Kuei-jin with this Flaw will go to great lengths to "establish" their identity with their clothing or other external modifications. Of course, if the body's original spirit is still around, things can get interesting indeed....

## **SUPERNATURAL**

### **Defiled (6 Trait Flaw)**

You have ingested corrupt or infected Chi at some point, and this inauspicious action will haunt you until your — likely untimely — death. Defiled vampires are in constant pain from the burning, boiling Chi within them, and they suffer terrible nightmares as well (that Flaw is included in the cost of this one). Thus, their wound penalties are treated as one level less than they are actually suffering unless they are reduced below Incapacitated, since defiled vampires are used to constant suffering. However, the benefits end there. Any time the Kuei-jin's player fails a challenge directly involving Chi or Willpower, he must make a Simple Test immediately. On a win or a tie, nothing happens. On a failure, the character gains a "Defiled Trait," which should be recorded by the Narrator. Once the character gains enough Defiled Traits to equal his permanent Hun rating, he vomits up three Chi Traits and loses a *permanent* health level as the defiled Chi burns away his insides. If he does not have enough Chi Traits, substitute Willpower Traits instead. Few Kuei-jin with this Flaw live very long unlives, and while some bodhisattvas are said to know a cure, no one has ever proven one to exist. Most defiled Kuei-jin are labeled *akuma*. This Flaw is most common to those Cathayans who feed near Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but any defiled site can give off defiled Chi.

### **Vengeful Ancestors (4 Trait Flaw)**

Your very existence is a mark of shame on your family honor, and your ancestor spirits are not content to let your conscience be the only reminder of that sad fact. Indeed, one or more of them often appear to you and plague you with visions of your miserable existence and their deep sorrow at what you have become. Some of them



even try to ruin your feeding habits by scaring off prey or committing other annoying acts. By behaving piously and otherwise appeasing their wishes, you may satisfy them temporarily, but they will always return until this Flaw is bought off. Those Kuei-jin wise in the ways of spirit manipulation beware: Those who try to deal forcefully or disrespectfully with their own ancestors are severely punished by the spirit worlds for such a grave breach of etiquette. Optionally, you may take this Flaw in the form of a former lover or other soul dear to you who disapproves of your standing as one of the Hungry Dead.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL

### Superstitious (1 or 3 Trait Flaw)

Many legends Westerners commonly associate with vampires actually originated in the East, and you have inherited a potent belief in more than a few of them. Perhaps the sifu who taught you had a twisted sense of humor, or maybe you clashed with a mortal who had the power to actually enforce these old chestnuts, but whatever it is, you believe absolutely in the validity of common mortal superstitions. The number of traditions you are bound by and the commonality of their occurrence determines the value of this Flaw. For example, vampires who recoil from mirrors or are unable to enter holy sites suffer from a one-Trait Flaw, while those who compulsively count grains of rice thrown in their path or recoil from human saliva suffer from a three-Trait Flaw.

## APTITUDES

### Illiterate (3 Trait Flaw)

You cannot read or write, no matter how many levels of the *Linguistics* Ability you might possess. Furthermore, you may not learn to read until this Flaw has been bought off.

## CATHAYAN SOCIETY

**Note:** With rare Storyteller exceptions, these Traits are only available to Western characters playing in Middle Kingdom games, and they are intended to act as flavor for the chronicle, not to allow every Western character to pick up some extra Negative Traits just by hopping a plane to Hong Kong for the weekend.

### Kanbujian (4 Trait Flaw)

This Flaw is somewhat deceptive, since *kanbujian* ("unable to see," derived from their Dharmic blindness) are not actually Westerners, but rather Kuei-jin who have arisen outside of the Middle Kingdom, typically amidst the Chinatowns and Little Indias of the world. This Flaw is considered a Cathayan Society Flaw because of the disadvantages they suffer there. *Kanbujian* are extremely rare, to say the least, and most never surpass the *chih-mei* stage before being destroyed by the area's supernatural population, but those that do survive present an interesting puzzle to Kin-jin and Kuei-jin alike. Players seeking to play *kanbujian* characters should remember that their characters must be of pure (or very nearly so) Asian lineage, no matter where they hail from, and that they will likely be treated as pariahs by both East and West if they are ever discovered. However, those looking for a challenge or who seek to play among a group of unsuspecting Westerners may find that *kanbujian* are right up their alley, provided they secure Storyteller permission first, of course. *Kanbujian* characters are created exactly the same as regular Kuei-jin, with a few important exceptions:

- *Kanbujian* have no Dharma; they start with Humanity, much as Kin-jin do. (See *Laws of the Night* for details.) Only with the training of a Kuei-jin mentor



can *kanbujian* hope to begin their Dharmic journey, although if they manage to begin such training, they advance normally.

- *Kanbujian* cannot learn any complex Disciplines: *Tapestry*, *Yin* or *Yang Prana*, *Chi'iu Muh* or any others the Storyteller deems require too much knowledge of traditional Kuei-jin ways. Of course, the *kanbujian* still cannot learn Kin-jin Disciplines, no matter who takes them in. *Kanbujian* pay for Disciplines as do regular Kuei-jin, provided they have a Kuei-jin mentor to teach them.
- *Kanbujian* cannot take *Mentor*, *Rites* or other Backgrounds specific to Cathayan society during character creation. They may be learned at normal cost later on, provided again that a suitable teacher can be found.
- *Kanbujian* know nothing of Kuei-jin society, and they are typically treated as nonpersons by other Kuei-jin, meaning they have no standing in court. They must often endure long hours of instruction and training before they can hope to be accepted into one.

#### Gaijin/Gweilo (6 Trait Flaw/5 Trait Merit)

By taking this Flaw, you are marked as thoroughly Western by everyone you meet. Whether it's your dress, manners, accent, looks or some other factor, you are perceived as very unappealing by the native population, and they tend to make their dealings with you as quick and unpleasant as possible. At best, you typically get polite but curt responses and inflexible prices. At worst, you are picked as easy prey by criminals and otherwise taken advantage of whenever the natives feel they can get away with it. Not that strangers will attack you on the street at every turn, but you are unwelcome, and the native population will do its best to make sure you know it. You have a two-Trait penalty on any non-supernatural Social Challenges with mortal natives of the area, it costs roughly twice as much to live in the area as it would for a native, and all uses of Influence that are locally based take twice as much time as normal. Otherwise, the real nuances of this Flaw are largely up to the Storyteller to enforce, but they should be a constant irritation at the least. Note that this Flaw is not based on your actual personality in any way, but on the native perception of foreigners. You may be a kind and gentle soul, but the fact of your origin has marked you as unwanted from the beginning.

Taking this Trait as a Merit means that you have undertaken the painstaking process of acclimating yourself to the native accents, points of etiquette and other fine cultural nuances that separate those merely familiar with a culture to those who truly live in it. What's more, you have mastered them to a degree where you have earned the acceptance of the natives and are treated as an honored equal in most situations. While a great deal of stigma is attached to foreigners, an equally great sum of respect is accorded to those foreigners who take the time to learn the native ways and honor them. You are one Trait up on non-supernatural Social Challenges with natives, your lifestyle costs a normal amount (perhaps even a little less), and Influence use takes the standard time. Furthermore, in a group of Westerners you are probably the only character who would be allowed to exist in an Eastern court, much less be taken seriously when addressing one. If anyone has a chance at getting the other Westerners forgiven for their barbaric mistakes before they're extinguished, you're the one. Otherwise, it's up to the Storyteller and other characters to fill in the details of how well you're treated, but it should be quite different from Westerners without this Merit (much less the Flaw). Naturally, you must keep up on your manners if you wish to retain this Merit. Doing so typically means possessing several *Etiquette* and *Linguistics* Traits, though not always—and



the Storyteller may revoke it if he finds you have been acting in an overly Westernized manner.

**Note:** Not every Western character must take this Merit/Flaw. Those without either are assumed to fit in adequately, not so well that they attract a great deal of respect but not so poorly they are lumped in with the great mass of boorish Westerners. Characters of Asian descent but Western upbringing, or natives who have been "Westernized" and then returned, may take this Flaw with Storyteller permission, but even so, it is only worth half as much to them. (They cannot take the Merit, since they are assumed to fit in well enough unless otherwise specified.) Some enlightened individuals may go from having the Flaw to possessing the Merit over time. The Pilot character from *Shogun* is a perfect example of a foreigner who began as a nonperson but wound up learning the native ways and earning their respect.

#### Court Appointment (2 Trait Merit)

A rare specimen indeed, not only have you been recognized as a full person by a particular court of the Kuei-jin, but unlike other Kin-jin, you can expect to be treated as an insider by the local undead, even if their fairness and respect is sometimes delivered a bit coolly. As far as the court is concerned, you are a true member, and you may enjoy the full measure of its justice and protection from any who would attempt to harm you. You may even have a voice in court affairs, albeit usually a rather small one.

Naturally, the Cathayans do not extend such permission lightly. Simply deciding to drop by the area for a spell is not enough justification for this Merit. Rather, a court appointment is typically granted in exchange for some duties or other benefits you agree to provide the court, and the court is well within its power to renounce its recognition if you prove deceitful or otherwise unwilling to fulfill your obligations. Bear in mind as well that one court's protection may not save you from the wrath of another court, nor necessarily insulate you from the intrigues of your "home" court. Most Kuei-jin would have no qualms about sacrificing a foreigner if it meant saving the court as a whole. Likewise, other Kin-jin will almost certainly consider appointment to such a post high treason, even if you are not actually betraying the secrets of other Western undead, and they will take steps to remove such a dangerous informant from the presence of the Cathayans. Court appointees therefore walk a dangerous line between two cultures, but they stand to gain much in the shadows if they are strong enough.

This Merit differs from the Merit: *Gaijin/ Gweilo* in that the former concerns Kuei-jin politics alone, while the second addresses mostly mortal society. You do not need to purchase the Merit: *Gaijin/ Gweilo* to purchase this Merit, though it would certainly help. However, it is extremely unlikely that you can possess this Merit if you have purchased the Flaw: *Gaijin/ Gweilo*; the court would have to stand to gain something *extraordinary* to justify putting up with such an obnoxious foreign devil!

**Note:** Cainites without this Merit are not necessarily killed on sight, but they are considered to have no voice in court and no recourse in the eyes of Kuei-jin justice. They exist even more at the whim of the mandarins than most. Unrecognized Kin-jin also tend to make excellent scapegoats/ target-practice for a court when things go wrong, so while they may take tea with whoever will have them, such Kin-jin had best step lightly indeed and keep one eye on the exit at all times.



## THE BONDS OF IMMORTALITY: KUEI-JIN & GUANXI

Unlike the fractious lives of the Westerners and their paranoid coteries, the Kuei-jin are bound together on many levels by powerful ties of loyalty. Perhaps none are so binding, however, as those which hold a Kuei-jin *wu* together, a bond which is known as *guanxi* by the Kuei-jin. It is the result of a Reciprocity spell cast on the *wu* by the elders of the court when the *wu* is recognized. In game terms, the *guanxi* acts exactly like a Sabbat Vaulderie score, cementing the bonds of the *wu* to something mystic and nearly unbreakable. A character arrives at his *guanxi* rating with each of his *wu*-mates by means of the following formula:  $5 + (\text{wu-mate's Charisma-related Social Traits}) - (\text{your character's P'o or Yin score, whichever is higher})$ . The final score is considered the character's *guanxi* rating toward that particular Kuei-jin. Note that a *guanxi* rating can and likely will change over time. Characters who acquire more Yin or P'o Traits start becoming too callous or self-centered to feel a strong bond, while a character who blossoms into a charismatic leader over time attracts more favorable attention from her fellow *wu* members. Note, however, that unless their bond is somehow broken, even characters with little or no *guanxi* rating are still bound to all their *wu* brethren. They simply have much less trouble than the others might about acting against their fellows. Only if the bond is specifically dissolved do all the emotional attachments and feelings of loyalty disappear.

For those unfamiliar with the Vaulderie system, more information can be found in the Sabbat section on p. 224-225 in *Laws of the Night*. A brief summary of relevant points is as follows, however. The *guanxi* is a bond as strong as any blood bond of the Kin-jin, and it carries all the relevant emotional and intellectual weight. In effect, Kuei-jin view those vampires that they share a *guanxi* with as old, true friends, and they should act accordingly around them. These are not simply good buddies or fellow soldiers. They are the ones a character turn to when he needs help the most, no matter what their Dharma or direction might be. To be sure, characters who share *guanxi* may still argue, think ill of each other and even spar on occasion, but they stand as one against any outside threat or coercive force, no matter what. In order to actually plot against someone for whom the character has a *guanxi* rating of 3 or higher, the player must spend one Willpower Trait. In order to plot against someone for whom the character has a *guanxi* rating of 6 or over, the player must spend two Willpower Traits. It is one thing to vent one's frustrations about how pig-headed or obnoxious a *wu* member may be; it's quite another to plot to disgrace or assault someone that the character knows at heart to be a close and trusted friend.

To attempt the destruction of someone for whom the character has a *guanxi* rating at all, the player must burn two Willpower. Without the burned Willpower, the character finds herself realizing the person she hates is loyal to the *wu* and therefore worthy of respect. Characters with a *guanxi* rating of 6 or over must burn a Willpower Trait *every turn* they wish to assault their *wu* member, so strong is their bond of friendship. In other words, while the characters may even come to blows under harsh circumstances, it is nigh impossible in the Kuei-jin's mind to find circumstances that justify actually *destroying* a *wu* member. Even if they discover the unthinkable — that a *wu* member has betrayed them — most Kuei-jin still cannot bring themselves to kill their former friend, overwhelmed as they are by memories of better days and moments of emotional solidarity with the traitor. Such wrenching scenes should be moments of impassioned high drama if there ever were any.



Unlike the Sabbat, however, who actively frown on the destruction of a Vaulderie, Kuei-jin do not automatically distrust those who choose to leave a *wu* (though habitual deserters are often labeled heimin and regarded with great suspicion). While most Kuei-jin treasure their *wu* as a prime source of friendship and support in their unives, they all agree that those who do not wish to be part of such a group do both sides a favor by removing themselves from it. All that is required to remove one or more *wu* members from their *guanxi* is to petition the court to lift the *Reciprocity* spell in question. It is within the power of the court to question and even veto such a request, although the latter is seldom the case unless the court truly suspects foul play. It is also rumored that the Yama Kings can free one of the bonds of *guanxi*, though the whispers say that one must become *akuma* to be granted this "privilege." If the request is approved, though, the *guanxi* ratings in question are dissolved and the character is free to choose his own path. However, such feelings do not fade so quickly, and players whose characters leave the bonds of *guanxi* are strongly encouraged to roleplay the fact that while they are no longer bound to their former *wu*-mates mystically, they typically still harbor some strong feelings for them, good or bad.

Overall, it is not unusual to find a *wu* composed of individuals with vastly differing Dharmas, directions and Natures who fight with each other like cats in a sack on their own time, but who band together with frightening efficiency in the field. Such are the bonds that hold Kuei-jin society together. Without the unity of the *wu* contributing to the stability of the whole, the Cathayans claim, their society would be as fractious and squabbling as that of the petty Kin-jin.

## EXPERIENCE

As sentient beings, we collate the information that is presented to us in our daily lives and hopefully become better people for our experiences. During our life, we learn from the mistakes of yesterday and prepare for the challenges of tomorrow.

Experience in *Laws of the East* is represented by giving each character one to three Experience Traits at the end of each session. The number of Traits awarded is based on how well a character performed during the course of the story and how active a player was in the game. The Narrator decides how many Traits each player receives on completion of the session. All players receive a standard one Trait. Exceptional roleplayers, those who played an exceptionally memorable part, should receive two. Three Traits should be awarded to those characters who performed acts of incredible insight and courage, making the game truly memorable for everyone involved. On a normal night, each player will receive one Experience Trait.

If you are a Narrator, you should be consistent and fair in awarding Experience. Do it in the open, and be prepared to explain the rationale for your decisions in accordance with the rules. If the players disagree, hear them out and make sure you know the whole story, then award Experience to those who have earned it.

Be careful, as awarding too many Experience Traits can make characters too powerful too quickly and give players lax attitudes toward working for their goals. However, awarding too few disheartens the players and damages their sense of achievement.

Awarding Experience Traits, therefore, requires a delicate balance between satisfying players and maintaining the integrity of the game. If you follow the guidelines listed here, you probably won't get into too much trouble.



• **Automatic** — Each character receives one Experience Trait per game, representing the acquisition of common, everyday knowledge.

• **Roleplaying** — Narrators should encourage roleplaying. The best way to do so is to reward it tangibly with Experience.

• **Leadership** — You should award one Trait to each of those few players who had starring parts in a story. Someone who got involved, and propelled the plot by her efforts, deserves a third Trait. It should be noted that if more than one of the players were integral to the progression of the story, each of the players who showed such leadership should be awarded a Trait.

## Using Experience

Experience Traits may be spent to purchase new Abilities, Traits and Disciplines, improving a character and giving the player a sense of satisfaction as he watches his character grow more potent. The following chart lists the costs for improving Traits, Abilities and Disciplines.

- **New Attribute Trait** — One Experience per Attribute Trait.
- **New Ability Trait** — One Experience per Ability Trait up to 5. Two Experience per Ability Trait 6-10 (as you learn more, it becomes harder to find things you *don't* know).
- **New Background Trait** — One Experience per Trait with Storyteller approval. Backgrounds may also rise or fall based on roleplaying.
- **New Discipline** — Four Experience Traits for Basic Disciplines, seven for Intermediate Disciplines and 10 for Advanced Disciplines.
- **New Merit** — Double the listed cost of the Merit, with Narrator approval. This acquisition should not happen instantaneously; it should be worked into a character's ongoing story. The addition of a Merit should not be treated lightly.
- **New Rite** — Two Experience for a Basic ritual, four for an Intermediate ritual and six for an Advanced ritual. A character must possess the appropriate level of the Rites background and Storyteller approval before new rites can be purchased.
- **New Specialization** — One Experience Trait in an Ability already known.
- **New Virtue Trait (Hun/Yin/Yang)** — Three Experience per Trait, plus the change must be an important part of a character's ongoing story-line somehow. A character who is on the go and tending to carnal concerns constantly cannot expect to increase his Yin Virtue, nor has a Kuei-jin who spent all of the last several sessions in shadow soul learned the right lessons to raise his Hun Virtue.
- **New Virtue Trait (P'o)** — Two Experience per Trait, plus the character must have earned the increase in his Demon. (Yeah, yeah, it's not really *that* hard, but still, you have to make the effort.)
- **New Willpower** — Three Experience per Trait.
- **Buy off Negative Trait** — Two Experience per Trait.
- **Buy off Flaw** — Double the cost of the Flaw, with Storyteller approval, and worked into the character's ongoing story.



## SAMPLE CHARACTER CREATION

Always interested in things Asian and looking for a new troupe to join, Jim decides to enter a local game of **Laws of the East**. After checking with Evan, the Storyteller, he decides he wishes to play one of the Kuei-jin. Jim puts on an inspirational CD while the two of them take a copy of the rulebook and sit down to create a character.

### STEP ONE: CONCEPT

Jim begins by looking for a concept, a basic idea around which he can build his character. Knowing that Kuei-jin frequently return to life to settle old scores, Jim thinks for a while before coming up with an idea. He imagines a simple laborer and devoted family man who was murdered by a vicious tong for failing to pay protection money, and who was forced to watch his children be murdered before his own death came. Now his character seeks to punish his killers and defend any helpless children he finds. Such a powerful and wrenching motive could easily inspire a soul to return from Yomi, and Evan approves the idea. Looking further into the concept, Jim settles on Yang for his character's Chi balance (he came back because of his deep love of life), as well as choosing the eastern direction (also a natural choice for a character devoted to protecting mortals). Weighing several possibilities, Jim settles on the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon Dharma for his character. Seeing Evan's curious look, Jim explains that while the hedonistic tendencies of the other Laughing Rainbows disturb his character, their deep connection to the pulse of life is more important to him than anything else. Thinking about how he wishes to play the character, Jim selects a Trickster Demeanor and a Caregiver Nature. While fun-loving and accessible around children, his character is actually quite nurturing and caring at heart. To balance this concept, Jim selects the Fool as his P'o Archetype. His Demon is forever trying mock his gentle ways and exaggerate the simple goodness of his nature into failure. For the last part, Jim consults a name book and selects a good Chinese name for his character — Jo-Loung. Jim is ready to move on to the next step.

### STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

Jim now has to prioritize Jo-Loung's Attribute categories, to determine his basic strengths and weaknesses. He takes Physical as Jo-Loung's primary Trait category, Social as his secondary, and Mental as his tertiary. Jim explains that Jo-Loung was a construction worker by day, building the high rises of Hong Kong (Physical), and that he has always had a good sense of humor and related well to people (Social), but that sometimes his wit runs ahead of his smarts (Mental). Now Jim must choose individual Traits for each category, beginning with seven Physical Traits. He picks *Nimble*, *Robust*, *Wiry*, *Quick*, *Robust*, *Enduring* and *Steady*. That selection reflects Jo-Loung's construction background and conjures an image of a sturdy worker who's still pretty quick on his feet when he has to be — not a bad thing when you're 70 stories up! Next is Social, with five Traits, and Jim chooses the Traits *Charismatic*, *Empathetic*, *Witty*, *Persuasive* and *Empathetic*, demonstrating Jo-Loung's strong sense of humor and his easygoing appeal to others, as well as his natural respect for the feelings of others. Finally comes Mental, with only three Traits. Jim selects *Clever*, *Creative* and *Wily* — Jo-Loung is pretty sharp when it comes to a con or a story, but a bit out of his league when it comes to book-learning and perception skills.



### STEP THREE: ADVANTAGES

Now Jim has to choose Jo-Loung's Abilities. He decides that hanging around with the rough-and-tumble lot of construction workers rubbed off on Jo-Loung a bit during his life, and he selects the *Brawl*, *Dodge* and *Athletics* Abilities. These skills should prove helpful along the Road Back as well. However, he wants to make sure that he details Jo-Loung's sensitive side as well. Jim picks a level of *Empathy* and *Medicine*, reflecting the care the vampire has taken to learn to mend as well as injure. There are some other Abilities Jim would like Jo-Loung to have, but that's all the levels he gets for now, so Jim makes a note to return to this section during the Free Trait stage and continues.

Disciplines come next; Jim decides that rather than focusing his powers in one particular area, Jo-Loung has learned a wide variety of powers from his Thrashing Dragon teachers. With only three levels of Disciplines to use (and at least one of which must be a *Demon Art*), Jim examines the choices carefully before selecting one level of the *Flesh Shintai*, one level of the *Yang Prana* Discipline, and for his *Demon Art* he chooses a level of *Black Wind*. Jim rationalizes the first two choices as natural extensions of his character's love of and mastery over the living, dynamic form, while the *Black Wind* is a reminder of the sometimes grim nature of Jo-Loung's Road Back. Evan looks the choices over and approves them, liking what he's seeing develop before him.

Jo-Loung's has five levels of Backgrounds to spend. Jim selects more mundane ones first, taking *Contacts* x 2 (local street urchins who keep him informed) and a level of *Allies* (a dedicated child services worker who knows the nature of his quest and who often cuts through red tape on his behalf). Looking to add a more exotic twist to his character than the "average Joe" image that started coming across, Jim spends the last two levels on the *Horoscope* Background. Jo-Loung may think his quest is humble enough, but certain celestial powers have taken notice of his efforts so far, for better or worse. Such a mysterious thread is bound to make for some interesting stories later on. Finally, Jim must assign Jo-Loung's Chi Virtues (he begins with one Trait in each type automatically). He assigns three Traits to Yang and one to Yin, giving him permanent ratings of four Yang Traits and two Yin Traits. Once play begins, he will have to be careful if he wishes to avoid imbalancing himself with Chi energies, but otherwise, the choice makes perfect sense for the life-driven Jo-Loung. Jim is now finished with this stage of character creation.

### STEP FOUR: FINISHING TOUCHES

Jim must now record Jo-Loung's starting Soul Virtues, Willpower, Dharma and beginning Chi Traits. He begins with the Soul Virtues. All Kuei-jin begin play with one Trait of Hun and three P'o Traits, so he indicates these on his sheet. All Kuei-jin also begin with three Willpower Traits and one Dharma Trait, so he writes these down dutifully as well. As for his beginning Chi, Jo-Loung starts with a number of temporary Chi traits equal to his ratings in each Chi Virtue — in his case, that is four Yang Traits and two Yin Traits. Not bad, but not excellent either. Jim also records the effects of his Dharma Strength and Dharma Weakness on his sheet at this time. The ability to restore Yang will no doubt prove helpful, but Jim will have to work with Evan to help figure out his beginning vice, since none spring to mind for someone like Jo-Loung. He makes a note to record one before play begins and then moves on to the next part of this stage.

Jim now has the option to choose Flaws and Negative Traits for his character. Looking over the Negative Traits, he gains an extra Trait by taking *Gullible*. Jo-



Loung is a sucker for a hard-luck story, and he will have to work hard to overcome this weakness if he doesn't want to get walked all over by the other Kuei-jin. Jim then takes the Flaw: *Hatred (Child Abusers)*, worth three Traits. Evan pauses at this point, asking Jim to justify a Flaw that might not be encountered often. Jim explains that Jo-Loung has come to realize just how poorly many children in the Middle Kingdom are treated since his Second Breath, and as such, he has developed a seething hatred of adults who mistreat children. The Flaw is detrimental because, while such individuals typically deserve some justice, Jo-Loung bears such a strong animosity that it can get in the way of his reason. It may even threaten his Dharma as he indulges in terrible punishments against the offenders he catches. Evan feels the threat posed by the Flaw is being properly approached and approves it. Finally, Jim selects the Flaw: *Phobia (Claustrophobia)*, worth two Traits. While many Kuei-jin are at least mildly claustrophobic due to their time in the grave, Jo-Loung was murdered and left in a small closet with the bodies of his children. Entering any such confined area forces him to resist wave soul as he remembers the staring eyes of his dead sons.

After taking one more look, Jim is satisfied by his choice of Flaws and moves on. The combination of Negative Traits and Flaws has now given him six extra Traits to spend on top of the five Free Traits he normally receives, for a grand total of 11 Traits. Right away Jim goes back to the Abilities section and purchases a level each of *Streetwise*, *Intimidation* and *Brawl*, rounding out his rough edges a bit and making him more of a formidable fighter as well. Next Jim spends four Traits to buy an extra Discipline, selecting to take a second level of *Yang Prana*, connecting Jo-Loung deeply to the life-force within himself. Jim then spends a Trait each to purchase the Traits *Friendly*, *Determined*, *Tenacious* and *Expressive* — these extra touches add some depth to his personality in play, as well as bolster a few areas of his character that he wasn't able to cover completely before. Since he hasn't met the other players of his *wu* yet, Jim makes a note to record his *guanxi* ratings toward them as soon as he finally meets them. Jim looks his sheet over, making sure he's got what he wants, then hands it to even for inspection. After making sure all the numbers add up, Evan approves it, and there's only one more stage to go.

### **Step Five: Spark of Life**

All the game mechanics, Traits, powers and skills are now laid out. Jim has developed a much better image of Jo-Loung than when he first started, but these are still some things not covered, things that can't be captured by rules and character sheets; specifically, the details that make Jo-Loung live and breathe to the other players. Jim has to think about ways to convey his character's personality to the other players, to create a host of little identifying quirks that come with roleplaying him. Does Jo-Loung still wear the stained work clothes of his mortal days, or has the Road Back garbed him in more traditional attire? Is he usually gruff, happy, pleasant or simply indifferent? Does he have a certain smile that comes through when he's thinking of a prank, or a habit of snorting instead of laughing? Does he tend to talk with his hands and otherwise exhibit extra levels of nervous energy, or does he sit more passively than his Yang tendencies would indicate? There are countless subtleties that can be added to make a character seem more real, and which make for an entertaining and memorable personality for everyone in a game to interact with. More character history also can't hurt — Jim has already gone beyond a stereotypical Thrashing Dragon hedonist to create an intriguing past, but more detail is still possible. Has he actually avenged his children's murders yet, or is he still searching for the parties responsible? Did his sifu approve of his



more mundane interests, or are they now bitterly parted? How does his *wu* look on his habit of protecting children? Does he have anyone particularly close to him now, or are his "adopted" children his only real friends? What would he do if he saw another Kuei-jin feeding from a child? Or for that matter, what would he do to himself if he awoke from shadow soul to find a drained child's body next to him? Exploring all of these questions and more will help Jim further define Jo-Loung and his vampiric existence, but for now, Jim is satisfied with the progress he's made, and he knows that a character is only fully realized once play begins. After he and Evan work out the details of his introduction at the next game session, Jim's all ready to begin, and Jo-Loung will stride by the sides of his fellow *wu* members into the mysteries of the Middle Kingdom.

### [Character Creation]



robert wheeler (order #36511)



# CHAPTER THREE: DISCIPLINES

Upon their return from death, Kuei-jin find themselves the beneficiaries of many strange and potent supernatural powers, which they believe come from the Chi they absorb and the way it is channeled through their unique dual soul. Some of these powers are instinctual responses developed by the soul after its escape from Yomi, while others stem from the dark side of the Kuei-jin's soul, but most are the result of long and painful hours of training and study during the *ré* period. Many Kuei-jin of the center direction spend entire mortal lifetimes testing and cataloging different aspects of just one power from one Discipline. All Cathayans know that it is not mere acceptance of their state that allows them to use Disciplines, but understanding it as well. Power comes easily at first, especially through the *Demon Arts* of the P'o, but further enlightenment comes only after much dedication and practice. Sutra-chanting, kata, meditation and even communication with the spirit worlds are all methods demanded in the study of certain Disciplines. Thus, those Kuei-jin who prove their mastery over one or more Disciplines are given respect and no small amount of distance by their peers, since all are aware of the great knowledge required for such a claim to prove true.

Many Cainites have expressed interest in the seeming resemblance of the Disciplines of the Kuei-jin (use of the terms "Disciplines" and "arts," for example) to those of the Westerners. It is true that some Kuei-jin powers produce similar (if not identical) results to various Western arts, but the similarity ends there. Obviously, Kuei-jin are not limited by any constraint of bloodline in their choice of Disciplines, so they can study any art that they like. At the same time, however, the rigorous training and wisdom required for Eastern arts makes advancement slower. Yet, since they have a better chance to explore their arts as they learn them than Westerners, Kuei-jin are often able to evoke a wide variety of effects at the same level rather than simply learning one use. Such versatility makes Kuei-jin very dangerous and unpredictable opponents, especially against Cainites, and it makes up for the relative slowness with which they advance. As karma teaches, all things under Heaven naturally come to a balance.

Disciplines



This selection does not represent the full range of Disciplines available in the Middle Kingdom. Many courts, such as the *gaki* of Japan, practice their own exclusive arts, and some *wu* can even lay claim to individual arts of their own design. These listings are merely the most popular and most commonly encountered refinements of Chi that Kuei-jin are likely to encounter, ones likely to have been taught during the *ré* period.

**Note:** Many Disciplines, especially high-level ones, require the expenditure of multiple Chi Traits. However, vampires are still limited by their Dharma as to how many Chi Traits can be spent in a single turn. Lower-Dharma vampires *can* use these arts, however — they must simply spend more than one turn “charging up” the power before it can be used. Thus, if a power requires four Chi Traits, but a character can only spend one Chi Trait per turn, he must spend four consecutive turns building up the requisite Chi energy before unleashing the power. Characters “charging up” Disciplines in this fashion are at a one-Trait penalty to any other actions during this time (due to the attention required to focus the Chi). Characters who are injured or otherwise have their concentration broken severely may even have to start the process all over again at the Storyteller’s discretion. Any Chi already spent in such a disrupted process is lost, dissipated back into the Great Cycle. That is the risk of using such potent arts in the midst of great turmoil. Those with active *Chi Sight* can detect Kuei-jin “charging up” a Discipline immediately, and those with other supernaturally heightened senses can make a free Mental Challenge (no Traits risked) to notice the growing nexus of Chi nearby....

Think of “charging up” Disciplines like the special techniques featured in many kung fu and anime movies, where the villain shakes, mutters evil words and turns red for a few minutes before finally winding up and letting loose with his Hell

### “EAST IS EAST AND WEST IS WEST...

...and never the twain shall meet.” That’s the rule when it comes to Cainites trying to learn Kuei-jin Disciplines (or vice versa). No matter how much vocabulary they have in common, the Disciplines are fundamentally different. Kuei-jin are spirits rebirthed from Hell and gain power from a dual soul powered by Chi, while Kin-jin were mortals who essentially cheated true death by the barest of margins. They derive their powers from the blood of Caine flowing through their veins. Created differently, taught differently and powered differently, it only makes sense that learning the Disciplines of the other vampire type is fundamentally impossible. Understand, perhaps, but learn — *never*. An Asian who is Embraced by one of the Cainites will never be anything more than a Western vampire, and regardless of how long a Westerner lived in Asia he cannot become a Kuei-jin upon death. The Kuei-jin experience is a part of the mythology of the Middle Kingdom, and it is reserved for those of Middle Kingdom heritage alone. Even those of mixed blood rarely return as Kuei-jin. In short: *Cainites may never learn Kuei-jin Disciplines, and Kuei-jin may never learn Cainite Disciplines.*

(Yes, the barbarian Saulot did so, but how he managed to do so is still unknown. Besides, look how much good all that Eastern knowledge did for him in the end. After all, Heaven *still* seems to have it in for his descendants.)



of the Upside-Down Sinners Punch. If the heroes can take advantage of his distraction and stop him before he can prepare this devastating move, they spare themselves a lot of trouble in the long run.

## Chi Arts

These potent Disciplines allow the Kuei-jin to play with the very essence of the universe itself by manipulating Chi at a basic level. As the world's Chi reserves fade away, and more and more battles erupt over control of the remaining dragon nests, those Kuei-jin who learn to conserve and control the Chi within and without are potent allies indeed. Many ancestors look favorably on those who employ these arts for the good of the court, and in the contentious times of the Fifth Age, such experts are in high demand indeed.

### Equilibrium

This Discipline allows the Kuei-jin to balance the Chi flowing within their bodies and learn how to control this sacred flow in the bodies of others as well. Most *Equilibrium* powers require physical contact to function, which means that a Physical Challenge may be necessary to get a grip on the target if he resists.

#### Basic

**Master Flow** — With this handy Discipline, the Kuei-jin learns to balance the levels of Chi in his body, turning Yin Chi to Yang Chi and vice versa. After at least two minutes of meditation, the player may spend two Mental Traits and engage in a Static Mental Challenge against a difficulty equal to the number of Chi points he wishes to convert + 2. If successful, the Chi is converted immediately. (Note that the Kuei-jin may ignore the prohibition against only spending either Yin or Yang in one turn with this power, and he may convert a number of Chi Traits up to the level his Dharma allows each turn until the process is complete.)

**Adjust Balance** — Having learned the paths of her own internal Chi, the vampire may now tinker with the Chi of others, and she may use this power to heal those in a state of imbalance or cause any number of harmful effects by tampering with this delicate balance. The Kuei-jin must first touch her target, and the player must win a Mental Challenge. If successful, the vampire may spend one Mental Trait per point of Chi to be converted in her target to attune her target to Yin, Yang or Balance as she desires.

If the target is imbalanced to Yang, he becomes feverish and completely devoted to whatever tasks he chooses to undertake, expending retests (and even Willpower) on his goals freely. Vampires in this state are two Traits down to resist fire soul. Those with active mania derangements such as *Obsession* and *Crimson Rage* are particularly susceptible to this state, and the players should roleplay accordingly.

If the target is imbalanced to Yin, he becomes preoccupied with dark thoughts, and suicidal feelings may even set in. Lethargy and apathy are the rule, and all Willpower Tests incur a one-Trait penalty. Kin-jin are two Traits down to resist Rötschreck in this state, and any beings with active regressive or dissociative derangements such as *Catatonia* or *Depression* should roleplay their exaggerated state.

If this power instills a balance in others, there are no other effects than an overall feeling of health and vigor, and most illnesses are cured (although AIDS or other such devastating conditions are beyond the scope of this power). In addition, those suffering derangements find it easier to control their thoughts, receiving a free retest on one challenge to resist madness. (Sorry, Malkavians —



the truly and supernaturally insane do not gain this benefit.) This state lasts for roughly one month, and any Cainites who receive the benefit of this power are one Trait up to resist frenzy for the remainder of the night.

#### Intermediate

**Shift the Balance** — With this potent ability, a vampire may adjust the base levels of Chi in his body. By spending a Willpower Trait and winning a Static Mental Challenge, the vampire's player may raise a permanent Chi Virtue by one while lowering its opposite at the same time. A Chi Virtue may never be lowered below one by this power. If the result of the power is a difference of three or greater between his Chi Virtues, the vampire suffers the normal effects of imbalance for as long as the power lasts. This power lasts for one scene.

**Chi Interrupt** — The Kuei-jin may now attempt to block the Chi flow through another temporarily, causing paralysis and even death if the attack is potent enough. The vampire must touch her opponent and win a Physical Challenge. If successful, the player may spend a number of Physical Traits up to her limit of Chi she may spend in one round. Each Trait spent puts her opponent at a one-Trait penalty to all challenges for the remainder of the scene. At the Storyteller's discretion, mortals with weak hearts may die when this power is used on them, as the Chi block stops their heart.

#### Advanced

**Chi Mastery** — Those Kuei-jin who master this Discipline are feared and respected by their peers, for they have supreme control over the Chi in the bodies of others, and they may bleed or infect Chi with even the slightest touch. After winning a Physical Challenge to touch her target, the Kuei-jin's player may elect to disperse or infect Chi, with the following results:

If the Kuei-jin chooses to disperse Chi, the player must win an additional Physical Challenge after touching her target (those without *Equilibrium* are two Traits down to resist). If successful, she may spend one Physical Trait per Trait of Chi she wishes to disperse. All Chi lost vanishes into the surrounding atmosphere, unrecoverable to all but the most enlightened Kuei-jin. Against Western vampires, this art renders one Blood Trait inert per Trait dispersed, and other *shen* suffer the loss of one Trait of Gnosis/ Glamour/ Pathos/ Quintessence per Trait the vampire disperses. Mortals suffer one health level of damage per Trait of Chi lost.

If the Kuei-jin chooses to infect Chi, the process is the same as for dispersal but rather than losing Chi Traits, the target's Chi becomes infected, rotting him from the inside out. One Chi Trait becomes infected per Physical Trait spent. Those who harbor infected Chi suffer one automatic health level of damage every turn until the "infected" Chi is spent. Again, this power corrupts the advantages of other *shen* as well (a *hsien* would have his Glamour infected, for example). Mortals afflicted with infected Chi suffer horribly and die quickly unless treated by someone with the Medicine Ability who is trained in traditional Eastern medicine. A successful challenge by such a doctor will halt the damage and allow the patient to begin recovery, although recovery takes twice as long as normal due to the severe nature of the infection.

Kuei-jin with both Basic levels of *Equilibrium* may attempt to halt an infection as well, though they must succeed at using the power normally (the target is not allowed to relent) and spend at least as many Physical Traits as the original vampire did.



## TAPESTRY

The Eastern concept of *feng shui* (literally “wind-water”) relies heavily on the placement of dragon lines, natural pathways that Chi takes across the land. A place that is harmonious with local dragon lines encourages benevolent spirits and good *joss*, but sites suffering from bad *feng shui* open themselves up to great tragedy and all manner of *evil spirits*. Vampires with the *Tapestry* Discipline have achieved a more direct control over dragon lines and — like a mortal *fang shih* (a practitioner of *feng shui*) — they can attempt to alter an area’s relation with the spirits and Chi flowing around it. Obviously, due to the high level of interaction with the spirit worlds that this Discipline implies, the Unseen Master (a.k.a., the Narrator overseeing the spirit aspects of the game) should be contacted when many of these powers are used.

**Note:** The maximum area a vampire can affect with *Tapestry* (unless otherwise noted) has a radius equal to his permanent number of Mental Traits + one step per level of *Tapestry* possessed. However, the Storyteller is encouraged to use common sense in all applications of *Tapestry*, especially if the game takes place in a very small or very large setting. If in doubt, try to use “the immediate area” as a guideline before whipping out the yardsticks and calculators.

### Basic

**Spirit Call** — A Kuei-jin with this art has learned how to call spirits by reweaving ambient Chi in interesting or irritating patterns. Both nature spirits and the ghosts of the dead may be called by this power. To call a spirit, the player must concentrate for one minute and spend one Chi Trait of the appropriate type (Yin for wraiths, Yang for natural spirits). Once this act is complete, a spirit will arrive at its leisure, although it is under no immediate obligation to the vampire (who must use other powers to control or even perceive the spirit). If the Kuei-jin wishes to call a specific spirit, a Social Trait must be spent in addition to the regular cost, but that spirit alone will hear the call and respond, provided it is in the area. Spirits respect those who use this power wisely, but those who call spirits continuously merely to beg favors or bully them are in for a tough time as word spreads in the worlds beyond.

**Chi Ward** — By strengthening or weakening the Chi patterns in the area, the vampire can effectively raise or lower the level of the local Wall, making crossing between worlds harder or easier as he sees fit. The vampire must engage in a Static Willpower Challenge with a difficulty equal to the normal level of the local Wall. Success means the Wall’s level drops by one for the remainder of the scene. This power may only be used once per scene. The Wall may never be reduced below 1 by this power, and if raised above 10, no being may use any Chi powers for the remainder of the scene (including the *Tapestry*-using vampire himself). Spirits around an area with a Wall rating of 10 will be very uncomfortable and unable to spend Chi.

### Intermediate

**Chi-Shaping** — With this potent Discipline, the Kuei-jin may create invisible patterns in the local Chi lines, forming nets, boxes and other shapes to affect the world around her. The vampire’s player must spend at least five minutes in contemplation of the shapes to be created (acting at a two-Trait penalty to all other actions, including combat, during this time), spend a Trait of Chi and succeed at a Static Mental Challenge against a difficulty of the local Wall. The effects created last for one scene, and each different effect desired requires another use of this



power (in other words, creating a defensive Chi spiral and fashioning a spirit trap are two separate uses of the power). The following uses are the most common things formed with this power, but they are not the only effects possible. Players should work with the Storyteller regarding any other uses of the Discipline they wish to attempt to generate.

A vampire may generate a defensive spiral or other shape around herself, deflecting attacks formed of raw Chi aimed at her and channeling their energy back into the All. The Kuei-jin gains a free retest to resist the effects of any Chi-based or magical projectile sent against her. Such effects include *Chi-Breath* and *Ghost-Flame* attacks, elemental shapeshifter Gifts, the *Lure of Flames* path of *Thaumaturgy*, fae *Pyretics Arts*, and most rituals with such effects that target the vampire directly.

By adjusting Chi in the proper fashion, the vampire may infuse a target with good or bad joss. Doing so requires an additional Social Challenge for the power to take effect, but those under good joss receive one free retest during the scene, and they generally walk under auspicious stars (the Storyteller's discretion as to specifics). Those under bad joss are at a one-Trait penalty on all challenges for the remainder of the scene. However, the effect is not lost as normal if the vampire loses the Social Challenge when placing bad joss. Rather, the effect spreads over the maximum area her *Tapestry* rating allows and affects everyone in range. Cumulative castings do not increase the effect of either type of joss.

The Kuei-jin may attempt to trap a spirit, provided she first can see it. Doing so requires a Social Challenge against the spirit's Gnosis rating. Success means the spirit is trapped for the remainder of the scene unless it agrees to perform some service for the vampire. Using this power is not considered an intrinsically belligerent or dishonorable act on the part of the vampire — many spirits will award at least grudging respect to those who catch them — but what treatment comes of the entrapment will certainly affect the vampire's reputation.

**Ride the Dragon** — With this power, the Kuei-jin may travel from one place to another using dragon lines as his path, effectively teleporting from place to place along the Chi flow. Most of the time this means traveling from one dragon nest to another, although clever vampires have learned how to appear in other destinations of choice. This power does not grant teleportation on a whim, however. The vampire must first locate and center himself above the proper dragon line, a process that takes at least as many minutes as the level of the local Wall (and possibly longer, at the Narrator's discretion). During this time, the vampire may speak and perform other small tasks, but entering combat breaks his concentration, and he must start over. Once the Kuei-jin locates the dragon line, his player must spend a Physical Trait and an additional minute to center himself above it, after which the vampire disappears instantly and reappears elsewhere. The maximum range of this Discipline is one hundred miles, though the vampire may reappear anywhere within that distance as he desires. This power may be used to gain the element of surprise (such as by appearing in an enemy's bedroom out of nowhere). Even if the surprise fails, the Kuei-jin is still three Traits up on all challenges for the first turn.

#### Advanced

**Chi Rift** — This awesome power allows the Kuei-jin to force open a yawning rift between the Middle Kingdom and one of the spirit worlds. The storms from beyond lash violently at the Middle Kingdom with their raw spiritual power, often blossoming beyond control by their creator, and abuse of this Discipline can lead to extreme punishments by Heaven and fellow Kuei-jin alike. The Kuei-jin's player must spend 10 minutes in studious concentration before using this power,



spend three Chi Traits of the type of rift she wishes to open, then win a Static Mental Challenge against a difficulty of the local Wall. If a portal to Yang is opened, it creates what the hengeyokai call a Wyldstorm, as storm-spirits (disguised as a mighty typhoon) whirl gleefully about destroying everything in their path. If a rift of Yin is opened, a wraithly Maelstrom results, seen in the Middle Kingdom as an apocalyptic thunderstorm with bone rains, howling spirits and ebon lightning (this type of storm is not considered strong enough to constitute a Great Maelstrom). Regardless of the type of storm summoned, those within its radius take three health levels of damage per turn. The Kuei-jin may attempt to exercise some control over either type of storm by speaking to the spirits and spending two Social Traits per request. It should be noted that the spirits forming such storms are quite fickle and often malicious, however, and the Storyteller is under no compunction to be merciful to a Kuei-jin who has misguidedly called up such a mighty tempest.

### **YANG PRANA**

Kuei-jin become intimately familiar with the concepts of Yin and Yang throughout their unlives, but not all Cathayans are content with knowing them on a purely philosophical level. Some Kuei-jin study these elder forces by learning how to evoke and control them. The *Yang Prana* Discipline is half of this equation, allowing its practitioners to channel the frenzied motions of their bodies into raw Yang energy.

**Note:** Both the *Yin* and *Yang Prana* Disciplines require a character to complete a series of katas, yogic exercises, stretches and other motions to achieve results. The motions of Yang may be as frantic as those of Yin are subtle, but they are still required. These Disciplines require a certain minimum time spent completing focusing exercises before the power may take effect, in addition to any Trait costs listed under each power. Bound or immobilized vampires are incapable of using these Disciplines, and any substantial interruption in their exercises cancels the power they were trying to use (though no Chi is spent in such a case). As a rule of thumb, assume that Basic powers require 10 seconds worth of exercises, Intermediate powers 30 seconds and Advanced powers one minute, unless otherwise noted. Of course, players are strongly encouraged to work out routines and act out katas during play if they are comfortable with performing them (and as long as they do not descend into parody). Those who do not wish to act out their katas may simply count down the time required and describe what their characters are doing, should any other characters in the area notice.

#### **Basic**

**Principle of Motion** — Kuei-jin have studied both the fury of action and the perfection of stillness, and they can spring into a devastating tornado of activity from absolute calm in less than the blink of an eye. This power costs one Trait of Yang Chi, and it is identical to the Cainite power of Alacrity in all respects. It allows the user to pre-empt one physical action he can see — an attack, a falling object, etc. — with an action of his own, such as an attack or a dodge, before the first action takes place. If the pre-emptive action fails, the other action takes place normally. If two vampires use the *Principle of Motion* simultaneously, its effects are essentially nullified, although one vampire may still attempt to overcome his foe by bidding additional Chi Traits. (The vampire who spends the most Chi takes the pre-emptive action.) **Note:** This power requires no preliminary exercises to enact. That would sort of defeat its purpose, really.

In addition, the Kuei-jin may spend a Trait of Yang Chi to perform an extra action in a turn, up to a maximum number equal to the levels of *Yang Prana* beyond



Basic that he has learned. Thus a Kuei-jin who has learned one Intermediate Yang *Prana* power can take one extra action, while a vampire who masters this Discipline can spend up to three Yang Chi for three extra actions in a turn.

**Yang Mantle** — This art is the first step a Kuei-jin takes in learning how to manipulate his animus, the Chi aura that registers the user as a powerful entity of Yang. Invisible to mortals, who simply sense electricity in the air, the animus shows up clearly to supernatural powers such as *Aura Perception* or *Chi Sight*. It often resembles a spiritual double of the vampire, although some Kuei-jin manifest anima in the shapes of zodiacal animals or other things of Dharmic significance. (If the P'o is dominant, the animus often resembles the *Demon Shintai* form, although the P'o may hide its influence by causing the animus to appear as nothing more than a shapeless cloud.) The Yang animus costs one Yang Trait, and it gives the following benefits:

By using *Lifesight* to sense the emotions of a person or animal, then defeating the target in a Mental Challenge (default to three Traits for animals if necessary), the vampire may attune his animus to that person or animal's aura. Doing so puts the vampire up two Traits on all Social Challenges with that target for the remainder of the scene, and animals will be especially inclined to treat the vampire favorably.

The vampire may attempt to influence Yang-spirits with the mantle, provided he can see them. While the animus is active, the Kuei-jin may attempt to intimidate and even use Abilities such as *Subterfuge* on any Yang-spirit he sees.

Finally, a vampire whose animus is active may channel Yang Chi through his weapons, turning them into potent tools of destruction, as long as they are made of wood, the element of Yang. By spending one Yang Trait, the vampire causes all damage inflicted by one wooden weapon he is holding to become aggravated as long as he keeps the weapon in hand. For an additional Yang Trait, the vampire can cause the weapon to spark with crimson Yang energy and be capable of striking spirits for a single turn, during which time the weapon inflicts damage directly to a spirit's Chi. Alternatively, the vampire can fire this spark at a material foe in his line of sight, inflicting one aggravated level of damage if successful.

#### Intermediate

**Dragon Dance** — As essentially a controlled state of fire soul, this potent power allows the Kuei-jin to harness the destructive potential of frenzy without losing his intellect by completing a series of wild leaps and combat mantras. This power costs one Yang Trait, but once it is in effect, the vampire suffers no wound penalties, he receives a free retest on all attempts at mental domination, he may use all other Disciplines as he wishes, and he may even activate the *Black Wind* if he chooses. It is also important to note that Kuei-jin using *Dragon Dance* are able to utilize the *Martial Arts* Ability in this state, since they retain full control of their mental faculties.

**Eightfold Yang Mantle** — The vampire may now exert even greater control over her animus, either by concentrating its power within herself or dispersing it throughout the general area. This power requires the expenditure of at least one Yang Trait. If used to concentrate her Yang energy, the vampire receives an extra Bruised health level per Trait of Yang she wishes to spend, which is only usable against Yang-based damage such as that from fires (including magical fire) or wooden weapons. These extra health levels fade at the end of the scene, and if they are the only damage the Kuei-jin has suffered, she is unharmed when they vanish. If the vampire chooses to disperse her animus, she may spend a Mental Trait to



reshape it into anything she desires, essentially cloaking herself in an illusion. Those who view the vampire with such powers as *Lifesight* or *Chi Sight* realize what they are seeing is radiant with Chi, but they cannot pierce the veil without beating the cloaked vampire in a Mental Challenge. This illusion lasts for one scene or until the vampire chooses to cancel it.

This power's effects may be added onto the Basic power of *Yang Mantle*, if the Kuei-jin is willing to pay the cost for both of them.

#### Advanced

**Simblance of the Scarlet Queen** — With this Discipline, the Kuei-jin is able to transform his body into pure Yang energy, pouring his spirit across the Wall. This power requires 30 seconds to enact, in addition to the expenditure of three Yang Traits and a successful Static Yang + Rituals Challenge against the level of the local Wall. In spirit form, the vampire is invisible and incorporeal (although he can choose to appear if he likes), and material attacks and barriers mean nothing to him. Chi-based attacks still affect him, as do mental powers such as Soul Disciplines, but the users must still be able to perceive him somehow. Of course, the vampire may see and affect Yang-spirits normally, and they can affect him right back. (The Kuei-jin is considered to have spiritual health levels equal to his regular health levels + his permanent Yang rating in this state.) While incorporeal, the vampire does not need to spend Chi to animate himself, though he may still use Chi to heal himself and power other Disciplines. This power lasts until the vampire chooses to cross the Wall back to the material world (a Static Challenge against the level of the local Wall).

### **YIN PRANA**

Like its counterpart, the *Yin Prana* Discipline allows practitioners to channel the delicate energies of Yin through slow, thoughtful motions and poses. While they may seem tedious to outsiders, the routines of this Discipline enable the Kuei-jin to tap into the great reservoir of Yin energy that exists throughout the universe, making them deadly opponents indeed.

#### Basic

##### **Shrouded Moon** — Shadows naturally seem to concentrate around those

with high Yin energy, and this Discipline takes that affinity to the next level, allowing the vampire to blend effortlessly into the shadows around her. By spending a Yin Trait and performing the requisite exercises, the Kuei-jin becomes invisible and inaudible, provided she remains within an area of at least moderate shadow or other concealment and moves no faster than walking speed. This power is effectively almost identical to the *Obfuscate* power of *Cloak of Shadows*, and the same hand gesture for concealment should be used as is used for *Obfuscate* (arms crossed over the chest).



**Yin Mantle** — This power is identical to the *Yang Mantle* power above, except of course it channels Yin energy and deals with Yin-spirits.

By using *Deathsight* to sense the Passions of a wraith, then defeating the target in a Mental Challenge, the vampire may attune her animus to that wraith's aura. Doing so puts the vampire up two Traits on all Social Challenges with that target for the remainder of the scene, and the wraith will be inclined to treat the vampire favorably.



The vampire may attempt to influence other Yin-spirits with the mantle, provided she can see them. While the animus is active, the Kuei-jin may attempt to intimidate and even use Abilities such as *Subterfuge* on any Yin-spirit she sees, including wraiths.

Finally, a vampire whose animus is active may channel Yin Chi through her weapons, turning them into potent tools of destruction as long as they are made of metal, the element of Yin. By spending one Yin Trait, the vampire causes all damage inflicted by one metal weapon she is holding to become aggravated as long as she keeps the weapon in hand. For an additional Yin Trait, the vampire can cause the weapon to spark with icy black Yin energy and be capable of striking spirits for a single turn, during which time the weapon inflicts damage directly to a spirit's Chi. Alternatively, the vampire can fire this bolt at a material foe in her line of sight, inflicting one aggravated level of damage if successful. (No, bullets cannot be charged with Yin, as the vampire is not touching them once they leave the gun.)

### Intermediate

**Bone Dance** — A Kuei-jin who has mastered this level of the *Yin Prana* has learned how to channel his Yin energy into a slow, delicate dance that is capable of rendering mortals unconscious and even knocking strong *shen* out cold. The vampire's player must concentrate for 30 seconds before spending a Yin Trait to activate this power, at which time, he begins to dance in a slow, hypnotic fashion. Any targets he wishes to affect must be able to see him perform the dance, but he may challenge a number of targets up to the number of levels he possesses in *Yin Prana* without penalty. (That is, the group does not receive any extra Traits for outnumbering him until they have at least one more member than the vampire has levels of *Yin Prana*.) Once the dance has begun, it continues each turn the vampire engages his target(s) in a Physical Challenge. For each victory, the vampire must spend an additional Yin Trait. The effects of the number of successes (and minimum number of turns spent dancing to achieve them) follow:

1 success/ turn — Victims begin growing drowsy. Mortals are one Trait down on all challenges, and vampires are one Trait up to test against fire soul, but *shen* are otherwise unaffected.

2 successes/ turns — Mortals become extremely suggestible and subject to a two-Trait penalty on all actions (including resisting the vampire's suggestions). They are not zombie minions, but they indulge gladly in suggestions that they sit back, calm down, ignore someone or otherwise behave passively. Unless the target spends a Willpower Trait, he will be unable to remember meeting the vampire. *Shen*, on the other hand, grow sluggish, and they are one Trait down for the remainder of the scene.

3 successes/ turns — Mortals must spend a Willpower Trait to avoid falling asleep. *Shen* are extremely drowsy and two Traits down on all challenges for the rest of the scene. Cainites and Kuei-jin must make a Static Willpower Challenge against five Traits to avoid falling into torpor for the rest of the night.

**Eightfold Yin Mantle** — The vampire may now exert even greater control over his animus, calling Yin energy for all sorts of useful purposes. This power requires the expenditure of at least one Yin Trait. The vampire may take his summoned Yin energy and shape it into different objects, which seem to have been formed from an icy black substance, and which sap the heat from the living things they touch. The cost of this use of the *Yin Mantle* depends on what is created — ropes, chains or other mundane tools cost a single Yin Trait, while *Melee* or thrown weapons cost two Yin Traits. Weapons created thus inflict aggravated damage, and



all things created from Yin energy require a supernatural level of strength (such as *Potence* or one of the *Shintai Disciplines*) to break. Yin firearms and other complex devices may not be created, although individual Yin bullets may.

If used defensively, concentrating one's Yin energy gives the vampire an extra Bruised health level per Trait of Yin he wishes to spend, which is only usable against Yin-based damage such as that from water, wind or metal weapons. These extra health levels fade at the end of the scene, and he is unharmed when they vanish as long as they are the only damage the Kuei-jin has suffered.

Finally, the vampire may attempt to use Yin energy and part of his P'o nature to breathe life into his very shadow. By expending three Yin Traits, he creates a savage, shadowy creature (known as a *wayang*) which possesses the personality of the Kuei-jin's Demon and is best used as an attack dog. The *wayang* inflicts aggravated damage with its teeth and claws, has Physical Traits equal to those of its creator and four health levels. It may also crawl up walls and ooze in between cracks, making it a persistent and frightening foe. The *wayang* is loyal only to its creator, but quite savage by temperament. If it is destroyed the Kuei-jin's player must test for shadow soul immediately as the P'o returns in full force. Otherwise, the *wayang* remains in existence for as many minutes as the vampire's permanent Yin rating.

This power's effects may be added onto the Basic power of *Yin Mantle*, if the Kuei-jin is willing to pay the cost for both of them.

#### Advanced

**Semblance of the Ebon Dragon** — With the exception that this power uses Yin energy for activation, and the vampire travels to the Yin World instead of the Yang, this power is identical to the *Semblance of the Scarlet Queen*.

### Demon Arts

Each Kuei-jin's P'o demands a study of the darkness within, and from these savage and primal studies come Disciplines every Kuei-jin knows, at least in part. *Demon Arts* are born the moment the Kuei-jin crosses over, and like it or not, they are useful in a way that causes many Kuei-jin to cultivate them in secret, even if they deplore them publicly. Since they do not have traditional "Basic/ Intermediate/ Advanced" levels, it bears noting the cost of *Demon Arts* once play begins. The first two levels cost four Experience Traits each, the second two levels cost seven Traits each, and the fifth (and final) level of a *Demon Art* costs 10 Experience Traits.

**Note:** Whenever a *Demon Art* is used in a scene, the Kuei-jin employing it must make a check for shadow soul immediately after using the *Demon Art*, as the P'o attempts to use the doorway of evil the Hun has created to take over the vampire's body. This fact holds true even if the character uses the *Black Wind* for only one action, which means all but the most wicked or strong-willed Kuei-jin typically use their *Demon Arts* as tools of last resort. This shadow soul state lasts for one scene (which defaults to the next scene if the character ended the current one while still using *Demon Arts*, such as finishing off a combat or using his *Demon Shintai* form to escape his foes).



## DEMON SHINTAI FORM CHARACTERISTICS

**Blinding Breath** — By projecting bluish-white Yin energy from his eyes or mouth, the character may attempt to blind opponents up to 15 paces away with a Mental Challenge (retested like a regular *Firearms* challenge). Blinded characters fail all tests involving vision automatically, including most combat tests, and players should act out this condition as best they can without breaking any rules of safety. Using this power costs one Yin Trait per use, and the blindness lasts for one scene or until a character's eyes are splashed with cold water (though not many know of this cure).

**Claws** — The character sprouts fearsome claws, which inflict aggravated damage in combat. These claws are otherwise identical to the Kin-jin *Protean* power of *Feral Claws*, including their lack of concealability.

**Demon Armor** — Some form of protection (scales, samurai armor or even thick fur) appears around the character. This armor soaks one health level of damage, even aggravated damage. This characteristic may be taken more than once, and the armor gains the ability to soak an extra health level of damage each additional time it is taken.

**Demon Weapon** — A mystical weapon materializes in the character's hand. This weapon must be of an ancient type (no firearms or missile weapons), but its appearance is quite intimidating. It might drip gore continuously, wail as it is swung or otherwise frighten onlookers. It confers the regular amount of bonus Traits for a weapon of its type, and it inflicts aggravated damage.

**Extra Arms** — Two extra arms sprout from the character's torso, allowing him to manipulate several objects at once and perform an extra attack each turn at a one-Trait penalty (due to the split concentration involved). This extra attack comes after regular attacks have been resolved but before extra actions such as *Celerity* are performed.

**Foulness** — The character's demonic form is extremely sickening to look at — be it coated in some foul matter or surrounded by maggots and flies — and all those who fail a Static Physical Challenge against seven Traits are at a two-Trait penalty on all challenges within 10 steps of the character. Even those who succeed are one Trait down due to sickness and distraction. The vampire is unaffected by her own aura, of course, but she gains an additional two *Repugnant* Negative Traits.

**Horror** — The character affects mortals who look at him with the Delirium (see *Laws of the Wild* p. 200). Those without *Laws of the Wild* may assume that mortals who fail a Static Willpower Challenge against three Traits run in terror or are otherwise rendered helpless with fear. Further, mortals who fall to Horror eventually forget they ever saw the vampire. This effect is continuous, although if this characteristic is selected twice, the character may turn it on and off at will. Other *shen* are completely unaffected by this power.

**The Host** — Demonic fanged faces sprout from all over the character's body, and by winning a Simple Test (no Traits at risk for either party) the vampire may inflict an aggravated wound level on any opponent she has successfully grappled (including with soft-style *Martial Arts*).



**Huge Size** — The character swells to between nine and 12 feet tall, gaining two extra Bruised health levels in the process. Legends of Japanese *oni* and similar demons arose from this characteristic, and the player should adopt a pose or props to indicate his increased size to other players in the area.

**Maw** — A vicious tusked maw forms from the character's jaw, and if the player wins a challenge to bite, she may make a Simple Test immediately to attempt to inflict a second aggravated wound.

**Spikes** — Long barbs and spikes erupt from the character's body, causing his body slams to inflict aggravated damage. Those who fail any *Martial Arts* or *Brawl* challenges against the character must win or tie a Simple Test to avoid impaling themselves accidentally on the barbs for an aggravated health level of damage.

**Tail** — The character grows a prehensile tail. This tail can be used for *Martial Arts* maneuvers (if the character knows them) and to wield weapons or otherwise attack normally (it inflicts bashing damage on its own). If this characteristic is selected a second time, the tail grows a scorpion's stinger, delivering a level of aggravated damage with a successful strike. Furthermore, following a successful hit, the character may spend one Yin Trait to inject a poison that afflicts mortals and *shen* alike. The victim must make a Static Physical Challenge against five Traits or immediately suffer an additional level of aggravated damage.

**Third Eye** — A third eye sprouts from the middle of the character's forehead. This eye is not the same as the Soul Discipline of *Chi'iu Muh*, but rather a specific demonic power. The character is two Traits up on all challenges involving perception in this form.

**Wings** — Batlike wings sprout from the character's back, allowing for (clumsy) flight at up to 25 miles per hour. This advantage may cut travel times between scenes at the Narrator's discretion, as well as allow a character to reach all manner of otherwise inaccessible places.

## Black Wind

This power essentially channels the Demon through a Kuei-jin, allowing her to become inhumanly fast and shred foes like paper. It is very common among more warlike Kuei-jin, who savor its savage efficiency. Characters using the *Black Wind* risk fire soul, and those who succumb forego all other methods and means of attack for simple face-to-face pounding and tearing. While using the *Black Wind*, the vampire may use no other Discipline, except for *Demon Shintai*, although he may maintain previously activated powers. On that same line, the vampire must perform deeds suitable to channeling the Demon through one's body; attacking or moving with unnatural speed are considered suitable, but playing a guitar is not.

**Note:** There are no Basic, Intermediate or Advanced powers in this Discipline *per se* — rather, the character simply gains the ability to use more and more powers of this Discipline simultaneously. Thus, with one level of this Discipline, the character may use one power from this list per turn; with two levels, he may select two powers (or one twice, where applicable), and so on. This Discipline costs one Trait of Demon Chi per turn of use, no matter how many powers are activated. The character may mix and match different effects from this list from turn to turn as he desires, making this Discipline as versatile as it is deadly.

## Disciplines



**Example of Play:** Lei Ko has three levels in the Black Wind Discipline. In one turn, he chooses to use all three for Hell's Howling Typhoon (thus gaining three extra actions); the next turn, he chooses to take one level of Hell's Howling Typhoon, one of the Ten Thousand Steps and one Tiger Slashing Heaven. For the next turn, he pumps three levels in Tiger Slashing Heaven, effectively gaining three levels of the Potence Discipline for that turn. Regardless of how he chooses to distribute his Black Wind levels, the power costs a base of one Demon Chi per turn to maintain. Once he stops using the Demon Arts, he must test immediately to see if he falls into shadow soul.

If any of these powers (such as the Prowess effect of Tiger Slashing Heaven) are stated as requiring the expenditure of a Blood Trait or other non-Middle Kingdom quantity, the character must pay the extra cost in Demon Chi instead.

**Hell's Howling Typhoon** — For each level dedicated to this aspect of the Black Wind, the vampire gains one extra action that round. These extra actions take place after all regular actions have been resolved, and they are otherwise identical to extra actions granted by powers such as Celerity, Rage or the Yang Prana Discipline.

**Ten Thousand Steps** — Each level dedicated to this aspect increases the vampire's running speed arithmetically. That is, one level doubles it, another quadruples it, and so on. This power allows for a Fair Escape unless foes are capable of keeping up somehow, and it may cut travel times between scenes up to one-eighth their regular time at the Storyteller's discretion.

**Tiger Slashing Heaven** — Each level placed in this aspect grants the user a power of the Potence Discipline for the remainder of the turn, cumulatively. Thus, a vampire who places two levels in Tiger Slashing Heaven effectively possesses Prowess and Might, while a mighty Kuei-jin who allocates all five levels of the Black Wind to Tiger Slashing Heaven has full command of the Potence Discipline for that turn. For details on Potence, see *Laws of the Night* p. 165-167.

## Demon Shintai

This fearsome Discipline transforms the character's outer self into an image of the Demon within, terrifying onlookers and attracting the attention of spirits (particularly evil ones). While this form typically has potent advantages, particularly in combat, those who assume their demon shapes too often tend to gain the notice of the Yama Kings, a condition no reputable Kuei-jin seeks to achieve. Players are encouraged to let their imaginations go wild with the details of their Demon Shintai's appearance, bearing in mind that the P'o Nature also influences this form as well. A Demon might be hairy and cored with muscle, a Slave shackled and covered in filth, and a Legalist the image of a Judge of Hell.

**Note:** As with the Black Wind, there are no Basic, Intermediate or Advanced powers in this Discipline *per se*. Instead, the character gains two advantages from this Discipline: First, for each level of Demon Shintai possessed, the character gains one Physical Trait when transforming into her Demon Shintai form. Thus a character with three levels of Demon Shintai gains three Physical Traits, and a character with one level gains one Physical Trait. These Physical Traits are bid and lost normally.

Second, for each level of Demon Shintai possessed, the character may select one demonic characteristic from the given list, to reflect a particular advantage of her demon form. Each time the character gains a new level of Demon Shintai, she may choose a new characteristic, but a characteristic may not be changed once it has been chosen. The Storyteller should feel free to work with players on creating new



characteristics for their *Demon Shintai* forms, but his word is final as to what may be allowed.

It costs three Demon Chi and three turns to assume the *Demon Shintai* form, and the player may not make any Social Challenges, except those involving intimidation, while the character is in this state. The character gains the Negative Traits: *Bestial* x 2 and *Repugnant* automatically.

## HELLWEAVING

This Discipline is reserved for *akuma* only, those that have made a soul pact with the Yama Kings and earned a degree of their favor. The elders of the courts consider Hellweaving a cancerous growth, but it continues to spread throughout the Middle Kingdom despite their best efforts. Listed with each power is the sacrifice required, which adds to any costs the power itself might have. The Yama Kings are careful to remind their servants who is in control at all times, and those who fail to offer the appropriate sacrifice find their *Hellweaving* talents lost until they cough up the demands of the Yama Kings. Rapacious as they are, Yama Kings hate to be cheated by such base creatures as Kuei-jin.

### Basic

**Glimpse of Yomi** — This hideous power allows the Kuei-jin to visit a vision of the horror of Yomi upon a target. It is a brave soul indeed who can withstand such a terrible sight and not run screaming into the night. The *akuma* must make eye-contact with the target, spend a Trait of Demon Chi and defeat him in a Mental Challenge. If successful, the target must flee the presence of the *akuma* for the remainder of the night, and he is at a two-Trait penalty on all Social Challenges for the next hour due to the malaise engendered by a glimpse of Hell. At the Narrator's discretion, especially elderly or infirm targets may need to make a Static Physical Challenge or suffer a heart attack. *Shen* and especially well-trained mortals (such as Shih or SFO agents) may ignore this power's effects with a Willpower Trait.

Sacrifice: Gold (at least one coin's worth)

**Razor Winds** — Servants of the Yama Kings are targets for any number of foes in the Middle Kingdom. This power allows them to defend themselves by opening a temporary window into Yomi and allowing the lacerating winds of that desolate realm to rend a single target in their line of sight, slashing their enemy's body and soul. The power requires a Trait of Demon Chi to use, as well as Physical Challenge to hit the *akuma*'s target. The winds inflict one level of lethal damage, plus an additional level of damage for every extra Trait of Yin or Demon Chi the *akuma* spends. (Remember that Dharmic restrictions on spending Chi still apply.) Attacks with *Razor Winds* are horrific to behold and easily recognizable as the products of dark arts. Therefore, an *akuma* is advised to use them only if they intend to reveal their true loyalties... or leave no witnesses.

Sacrifice: A Trait of Yin or Demon Chi (in addition to the power's activation cost).

### Intermediate

**Favor of the Yama Kings** — An *akuma* with this power can invoke the Yama Kings to bring good *joss* to any actions furthering their objectives, making their humble servant more likely to succeed. The character must spend a Trait of Demon Chi. For the rest of the scene (or longer, at the Storyteller's discretion), the *akuma* is one Trait up on all actions relating directly to furthering the schemes of the Yama Kings. He may even receive one free retest on a single challenge during this time. Those who possess the *Demon Mentor* Merit (see p. 119) and who remain in good



standing with the Yama Kings (Storyteller's discretion) are especially blessed by this Discipline. They are two Traits up on all actions furthering the Yama Kings' plans, and they receive two free retests during the time the power is in effect. Note that the actions blessed by this power must serve the goals of the Yama Kings directly. A character would likely not receive the *Favor* for hunting, for example, since doing so serves his own needs, while a character hunting for victims to sacrifice to the Yama Kings would receive the blessing. (While the first action might *seem* to be eligible as aiding the Yama Kings, this power reflects the personal notice of the Lords of Hell on some level. Such petty interests on the part of the *akuma* just don't arouse that notice. The Yama Kings are interested in what is being done for *them*, not what it might take their pawns to produce it.)

Sacrifice: A Trait of Yin or Demon Chi (in addition to the power's activation cost).

**Invocation of the Yomi Soul** — By drawing on and intensifying a Kuei-jin's horrific memories of the Yomi World, the *akuma* may force his target to enter shadow soul. Perhaps the most feared of the talents of the *akuma*, prolonged exposure to this power has been known to send some Kuei-jin spiraling away from their Dharmic paths with appalling speed, and those undead even suspected of possessing this power are hunted down and destroyed without mercy by the courts. To use the *Invocation*, the *akuma* must spend two Traits of Demon Chi and touch his target. This touch *always* requires a Physical Challenge, even if the target is unaware of any threat. Her Hun side senses the danger subconsciously and attempts to shy away from the *akuma*'s touch, even if the conscious mind is unaware of any danger. If successful, the target enters shadow soul immediately. The Kuei-jin spends at least one hour in this state, committing acts from the deepest depths of her P'o nature. At the end of the hour, the victim may attempt to wrest control of herself from her Demon with a Static Hun Challenge against a difficulty of four Traits. If this test fails, the character may make the attempt every hour on the hour until she is successful or the Kuei-jin is destroyed. Needless to say, prolonged time in shadow soul may easily imperil a Kuei-jin's Dharmic rating, and *akuma* who use this power had best expect a bloody and thorough reprisal from their target if they are ever discovered.

**Note:** Unless the *akuma* gives her identity away (or the Kuei-jin tempers her P'o during shadow soul, remembers exactly when the state began and manages to link it to the *akuma*'s touch somehow), the target does not necessarily know who forced her into this condition. It should also be stressed that targets who win the Physical Challenge to slide away from the *akuma* do not consciously know anything is wrong — they are simply avoiding the tainted character as best they can, without even realizing that they're doing it! Of course, *akuma* who are indeed discovered after using this talent face the considerable wrath of the court, so it is a talent best invoked sparingly.

Sacrifice: Jade (And not a pair of fancy earrings, either — a piece weighing at least one pound for a start)

#### Advanced

**Weaving the Yomi World** — This dread power allows the *akuma* to spread the taint of Yomi into the Middle Kingdom, turning a normal dragon nest into an outpost of corruption. The *akuma*'s player must be physically present in the territory he wishes to corrupt, concentrate for at least a minute and spend three Traits of Demon Chi. He must then succeed at a Static Social Challenge against nine Traits. Success indicates that the dragon nest has been permanently defiled. Defiled nests provide no Chi except Demon Chi, and any characters are two Traits



up on any challenges to cross into, open portals to and otherwise interact with the Yomi World within the bounds of the dragon nest. This power can be undone with some elders with a high knowledge of the Tapestry Discipline and the completion of many grueling rituals of purification. Otherwise, the effects can only be removed by a great and noble quest requiring some kind of truly heroic sacrifice. This power deals a terrible blow to the forces of Heaven each time it is used, ripping away another source of comfort and support and replacing it with lurking evil. On the other hand, the Yama Kings smile on those *akuma* who use this power successfully, since it does so much to advance their plans for the Sixth Age to come....

**Sacrifice:** A service, rendered to the Yama Kings, Demon Mentor or other inhabitant of the Yomi World who grants the *akuma* the power to perform the ritual. This Discipline can never be performed without sufficient sacrifice.

## **SHINTAI; DISCIPLINES**

The term "shintai" originates from a Japanese word meaning "god body," and indeed these Disciplines allow the character to perform all manner of wondrous and spectacular feats with her physical form. Each shintai corresponds with a specific natural element of the ancient Chinese scheme, and a vampire who masters a particular shintai is considered to have taken a considerable step toward enlightenment. The shintai are also the only means Eastern vampires have of raising their Physical Traits like Cainites do. Each shintai has a Chi Attunement to a particular type of physical prowess (strength, dexterity, stamina), and once a vampire has learned a shintai, she may spend one Chi Trait to gain an additional Physical Trait that turn, just as Kin-jin spend Blood Traits on Physical Traits. She may spend as many Chi Traits as she likes in this fashion each turn, up to the maximum number of Chi Traits she can spend per turn. These extra Traits disappear at the end of the turn, but they count for all extra actions, overbids and retests during that turn. The Physical Traits gained may be of only the type the shintai is conducive to; thus a Kuei-jin with a strength shintai may not gain *Quick* or *Dexterous* Traits unless she also possesses a dexterity-related shintai. Normally this distinction matters little for game-play, but it should be considered when describing actions boosted by these extra Traits.

### **BLOOD SHINTAI;**

By studying the paths of blood within his body, the Kuei-jin may manipulate its ebb and flow. As the analog of water, this Discipline is widely known among the Kuei-jin because it does not favor Yin, Yang or Balance. As the blood teaches, all things ebb and flow in time, and Yin and Yang are no exception to this rule.

**Chi Attunement:** Strength

**Basic**

**Permeate** — The character may control the blood flow in his body, using it to puff up like an adder or concentrating it within himself so that he appears to shrivel up. Each use costs one Chi Trait of either type. Concentrating blood makes it easier to slip through narrow spaces or out of confining devices (two Traits up on all such challenges), while selectively swelling and shriveling parts of the body enables the character to disguise his appearance. While not refined enough to allow the Kuei-jin to attempt to impersonate someone else, a character who uses this Discipline to veil his features looks different enough that others must make a Mental Challenge (no Traits at risk) to recognize him through the deception. This power lasts for one scene.



**Blood Atemi** — The Kuei-jin may control the blood flow in others, delivering devastating strikes or speeding healing times as he sees fit. To use this power, the vampire's player must first touch his target and spend a Chi Trait, then beat his target in a Mental Challenge. If the challenge is successful, the target is overwhelmed with feelings of numbness and nausea, and her player must sit down and count out 15 seconds (during which time her character is considered to be retching). If attacked during this time, the target is at a two-Trait penalty, and even after the 15 seconds pass, the character is down one Trait for the remainder of the scene. Kuei-jin may spend a Chi Trait (and Kin-jin may spend a Blood Trait) to stabilize their blood and cancel the effects of this power. At Storyteller discretion, mortals may suffer strokes from this power.

If used as a healing touch, a successful use of this power on a mortal or animal halves the time taken to heal any wound. Obviously, this power relies on the target having a bloodstream to be of any use — vampires, shapeshifters and faeries are fair game, but wraiths, Risen and spirits are not.

#### Intermediate

**Flow Like Blood** — By using his bloodstream to disperse Chi throughout his body, the Kuei-jin's body becomes as fluid as blood, making him impossibly hard to strike, even when it appears he is standing perfectly still. This power costs one Yang Chi and lasts for three combat turns, but the vampire gains the Physical Trait: *Lithe* x 2 and receives a free retest automatically on any successful attack by an opponent while it is in effect. This retest may only be used to avoid damage, not to attack. If the retest is successful, the attack is considered to have been dodged normally.

**Bloodlash** — By concentrating his Chi into a single stream of blood that pours from the mouth or wrist, the Kuei-jin is capable of extending this lash and wielding it like a weapon. Two Physical Traits and a single Chi Trait are required to create the lash. The lash hums with Chi energy (black and bubbling for Yin, red and hissing for Yang), cuts easily through flesh and bone and gives its wielder three Bonus Traits when in use. The lash inflicts aggravated damage, although its wielder can choose to have it inflict less severe damage and instead attempt to constrict victims after a successful hit. Those so caught suffer one health level of bashing damage every turn until they break free with a successful Physical Challenge.

#### Advanced

**Blood Awakening** — At this level of enlightenment, a Kuei-jin learns how to use the innate potential of his blood to achieve yet more wondrous tasks. By sprinkling Yang-laden blood over an object, the vampire may awaken the spirit within. Objects to be animated must have some form of mobility or this power is useless. However, the object gains two Physical Traits and a single health level for each Yang Trait spent. (At the Storyteller's discretion, objects may have other properties appropriate to their nature: A brass dragon could bite, for example, or a jeweled bird could fly.) Objects must be well-crafted to be awakened, and they tend to interpret any orders given to them by the Kuei-jin very literally. Complex commands ("Wait here until six sunsets have passed, a code phrase is spoken and a tall man in a green suit passes by) are beyond the limited understanding of these creations.

If the vampire chooses to use his Yin nature instead, he becomes capable of spitting Yin-heavy blood at spirits, trapping them in the material world in the form of statues of pure white jade. The character must spend a Yin Trait, declare that he is spitting (calling out "Ptooe!" will suffice) and beat the spirit or ghost in a Mental Challenge for this power to work. If beaten, the spirit falls through the Wall in



statue form and is at the mercy of the Middle Kingdom. A vampire may drain the Chi of the spirit, destroy the statue (sending the spirit through the Wall to reform), or make any other manner of demands while the spirit is in this state. Would-be Chi-hunters beware, though — routinely using this power to hunt spirits for their Chi has dire repercussions in the spirit community, and Heaven's fury is terrible indeed.

### **BONE SHINTAI**

Widely feared and distrusted for their eerie ways and formidable combat prowess, these Kuei-jin study the movements of bone within their bodies, enhancing their already corpselike natures in frightening ways. As cold as the metal element this Discipline pays homage to, most students of this art are heavily aspected to Yin, preferring to congregate in small, like-minded groups to study their powers in places of strong Yin Chi, such as cemeteries.

#### **Chi Attunement: Stamina**

##### **Basic**

**Corpse Skin** — By channeling Yin energies through her body, the Kuei-jin may cause her skin to take on a corpse's appearance, becoming preternaturally chilled and tough like a zombie's. By spending a Yin Trait, the vampire may ignore all wound penalties beyond Bruised. Each additional Yin Trait beyond that spent on this power gives the Kuei-jin an additional Bruised health level, up to a maximum of three total Yin Traits. All Yin Traits must be spent at the time the power is activated, but *Corpse Skin* lasts for an entire scene. While *Corpse Skin* is in effect, the vampire is two Traits down on all Social Challenges due to her deathly pallor.

**White Tiger Corpse** — With this power, the Kuei-jin concentrates her skin and bones with Yin energy, rendering herself transparent and effectively invisible. This power costs one Yin Trait and lasts for one scene — invisibility should be indicated by the crossed-arm symbol. This power does not include clothing or other possessions unless the vampire spends an additional Yin Trait and 15 seconds spreading liquid Yin over the objects to be affected. (The Storyteller has the final word on what objects may or may not be included this way.)

##### **Intermediate**

**Bone Obedience** — This frightening power allows the vampire to command her very bones in ways that would make hardened Tzimisce Kin-jin wince. A very versatile talent, *Bone Obedience* requires at least three turns/ 15 seconds to take effect as the bones themselves grow and shift into position. Needless to say, this sight is very disturbing to onlookers, and weak-hearted mortals frequently pass out when this Discipline is used around them. With the exception of the *Bone Blade*, all changes last for one scene. The actual Yin Trait cost of this power depends on which one of the following uses is employed:

**Talons** (1 Chi) — By extending bony talons from the nails or knuckles, the Kuei-jin may inflict aggravated damage with her hand-to-hand attacks. As with the *Demon Shintai* power of *Claws*, these talons are grotesque and not easily hidden.

**Bone Blade** (2 Chi, 1 Chi/ three turns to maintain) — The Kuei-jin extends the bones in her forearm to form a blade approximately two feet in length. This blade inflicts aggravated damage and is otherwise the same as a short sword (see the weapon section on p. 188).

**Bone Armor** (1 Chi) — By strengthening her skeleton with Chi, the Kuei-jin gains an additional two *Tough* or *Enduring* Physical Traits. This power may be

used more than once per scene, up to a maximum number of times equal to the vampire's levels of *Bone Shintai*.

**Visage** (2 Chi) — The Kuei-jin gains the ability to alter her appearance by shifting bones, increasing or decreasing her height by up to six inches and otherwise changing her body type. While she is unable to imitate a specific individual, the vampire is unrecognizable as herself to all but those with some form of supernatural perception who defeat her in a Mental Challenge (the vampire wins on all ties, since her body has actually been altered).

**Key** (1 Chi) — A literal skeleton key is formed from the bones of one of the Kuei-jin's fingers, conforming to any normal lock and putting the vampire three Traits up on any Security Challenges against such a lock.

#### Advanced

**Five Poison Cloud** — Focusing her Yin into one deadly blast, the Kuei-jin exhales a cloud of pure Yin energy that ravages anything it touches with decay. The icy black cloud encompasses an effective area of five steps by five steps immediately in front of the vampire, and it is fully capable of corroding steel, rotting stout wood and otherwise removing inanimate obstructions from her path. Living (or undead) creatures caught within the cloud suffer two health levels of aggravated damage for each turn they spend within it, although the target may attempt to dodge the attack if he sees it coming. This power costs two Yin Traits and two Physical Traits to enact, but it does no damage to its creator.

**Ch'ing Shih** — Saturating her physical form with Yin energies, the Kuei-jin undergoes a revolting transformation — her skin compresses and turns gray, her bones turn jet black, her fangs lengthen and drip venom, and black spikes jut from her back, joints and rib cage. She glows faintly in the dark (enemies have no problem targeting in low-light conditions), and Yin energy seems to drip from her pores. This form is known as the *ch'ing shih*. This transformation costs five Yin Traits and takes five turns to complete, at the end of which time the vampire's player is incapable of making any Social Challenge except those relating to intimidation. However, her control of her skeletal structure is near absolute, allowing her to extrude spikes and spurs at will, effectively allowing her to deal aggravated damage with any hand-to-hand attack, even grapples or body slams. She also may strike wraiths, Spectres and other Yin-spirits normally, though they may return the favor. She may even feed them her Chi on a one-for-one basis.

Finally, the venom secreted by the *ch'ing shih*'s fangs is highly deadly to mortals, *shen* and Kuei-jin alike. Anyone bitten by the vampire suffers an aggravated health level of damage each turn until he dies or his player succeeds at a Static Physical Challenge against seven Traits. If a mortal is killed in this fashion, he returns in the next scene as a zombie under the Kuei-jin's control. The zombie possesses no Social or Mental Traits, but it retains any Physical ones it had, and it follows simple orders to the best of its ability. Zombies require at least one Yin Trait per day to maintain, and they wither instantly if confronted by sunlight.

### JADE SHINTAI

This versatile Discipline teaches the constant wisdom and endurance of the very earth itself to its students, but like the ever-shifting ground it also contains many surprises for the unwary. In particular, adepts of the *Jade Shintai* are able to turn the area itself to their own advantage, making them dangerous foes no matter where they are.

**Chi Attunement:** Strength



### Basic

**Stand Upon the Dragon's Back** — By understanding the interplay between her personal Chi and that of the Earth itself, the Kuei-jin bonds herself to the ground, becoming completely immovable. She may not be thrown, tripped or otherwise knocked down, and all attacks are considered to come from the front (i.e., she suffers no penalty meeting any attack and may not be surprised by someone sneaking up behind her unless they are invisible or otherwise additionally hidden). This power becomes reflexive once learned, and it costs nothing to enact, although it must be declared at the beginning of a combat turn or before to be considered effective that turn.

**Tread the Thrashing Dragon's Tail** — Aligning her Chi with that of her surroundings, the Kuei-jin gains the power to walk up walls, across ceilings, even over a body of water, without leaving a single track to tell of her passing. She is one Trait up on all challenges related to stealth and silent movement. Furthermore, as a side effect of her light steps, the vampire doubles all jumping distances, and (while she still can fall) all damage taken in falls is halved. As with *Stand Upon the Dragon's Back*, this power is reflexive once learned (and it costs nothing to use), although other characters should be notified what is going on if a character visibly begins walking across walls or otherwise positioning herself strangely.

### Intermediate

**Placate the Earth Dragon** — After spending at least one minute communing with the local spirits and spending a Chi Trait, the vampire must win a Static Social Challenge (against a difficulty of the local Wall) to sink into the protective embrace of the earth. Doing so provides an ideal shelter during daylight hours, and it is invaluable to traveling Kuei-jin for just such a reason. This power is otherwise identical to the Cainites' *Protean* power of *Earth Meld*, with one exception: By placing one hand on an earthen or stone obstruction and completing the Chi expenditure/tests required, the Kuei-jin may pass through the barrier as if she were incorporeal. This barrier can be no more than one foot thick for such a passage to work, and only the vampire may travel this way.

**Harnessing the Dragon's Breath** — Attuned to local Chi currents, the Kuei-jin may actually fly along natural energy "updrafts." She may even fight in such a state (although complex aerial maneuvers require a Static Physical Challenge to perform). This process requires the vampire to succeed at a Static Physical Challenge against the local Wall, after which the Kuei-jin may hover, glide or fly at a speed related to the strength of the Wall. (Top speed in a "normal" area is around seven steps per turn, while areas with a very low Wall might reach 10 steps and very high Wall as low as five steps.) Obviously, a Fair Escape is possible with this ability, and a Narrator should be called to resolve any conflicts resolving the flying vampire or where she winds up. This power does not need to be re-used if the vampire travels from an area with one Wall rating to another with a different Wall rating, although she may choose to do so in order to make use of a stronger Chi current.

### Advanced

**Jade Servant of the August Personage** — Calling on the mightiest of the Five Element powers as well as her own enlightened understanding of the Chi in her surroundings, the Kuei-jin may fill her being with the properties of one element she is in contact with, conferring an elemental "mantle" of great power upon her. Regardless of the specific application, the elemental mantle that accompanies all transformations soaks two levels of any kind of damage as if it were body armor, and the vampire's skin grows slick and hard at the same time, like liquid jade. All uses



of the mantle last for one scene and cost one Willpower Trait in addition to the Chi costs listed here:

**Black Tortoise** (4 Yin Traits) — By touching a body of water at least the size of a large fish tank, the vampire's body chills to inhuman levels — all foes she touches must immediately win a Simple Test or be frozen in place for 10 seconds (counted out loud). During this time they are at a three-Trait penalty to defend themselves, and they may not use Ability retests of any kind, only overbids.

**White Tiger** (3 Yin Traits, 1 Yang Trait) — The vampire must touch a piece of metal at least as large as a human-sized statue, at which time she begins to crackle with static electricity. Any opponents who touch her with bare skin, metal weapons or other conductors must immediately make two Simple Tests. For each one they tie or fail, they suffer a health level of lethal damage from the static electricity.

**Yellow Emperor** (2 Yin Traits, 2 Yang Traits) — After making contact with the earth itself, the vampire's body grows rock-hard, and all who strike her with bare fists or feet must win a Simple Test immediately or suffer a health level of bashing damage. In addition, any time the vampire is struck with a *Melee* weapon, the weapon suffers a level of damage. It is up to the Narrator to decide how tough a particular weapon is, but most weapons can sustain only one or two levels of damage before breaking.

**Azure Dragon** (1 Yin Trait, 3 Yang Traits) — By touching a piece of wood at least as large as a door or sapling, the Kuei-jin's skin becomes tough as per the *Yellow Emperor* mantle, including dealing damage to those who attack with bare fists or feet. Weapons are not affected by the *Azure Dragon*, however, but the Kuei-jin may attempt to punch or kick a Kin-jin and inflict the paralysis normally associated with staking. That is, the player may attempt to make the extra tests required for staking without actually having a stake at hand, and the vampire is considered staked for the duration of the mantle if she succeeds on said tests.

**Scarlet Phoenix** (4 Yang Traits) — Ouch. The vampire must place her hands into a fire at least the size of a fireplace and make a check against wave soul as normal. If successful, however, the Kuei-jin ignores the first health level of damage inflicted by fire in a combat, and those striking the vampire with bare skin or combustible materials must win a Simple Test or suffer an aggravated health level of damage due to the heat radiating from her body.

### FLESH SHINTAI

This extremely disturbing shintai, analogous to the wood element, allows the Kuei-jin great control over their flesh itself, with amazing and disgusting results. As heavily attuned toward Yang as the Bone Shintai is toward Yin, most of these vampires appear very human — until they begin using the powers of this Discipline, that is.

#### Chi Attunement: Dexterity

**Special Note:** Due to the bizarre requirements of this Discipline, the player should wear a special descriptive tag or adopt a specific pose when the vampire elongates or detaches a limb, in order to describe the appearance of the power and alert other players to the use of these powers.

#### Basic

**Long-Neck** — Somewhat misleading, this useful and horrifying power allows the Kuei-jin to extend his neck or limbs at will, slithering them around corners or up walls as he desires. Note that skin does not extend with this process, meaning onlookers are in for a freak show of tendons and viscera as the limb stretches. No



Trait expenditure is required to use this power, and the neck or limb can stretch up to a maximum of two feet per Physical Trait the vampire possesses. Obviously, the vampire can bite, strike or grapple at range with this power, although the limbs may be attacked anywhere along their length, and decapitation still kills the vampire normally. While this power is in use, the player should leave a token to indicate the position of his body and follow the limb or neck to its target/destination. His body may be attacked normally at any time, and a body that the head cannot see is considered surprised automatically for the purpose of combat.

**Detach Limb** — Further mastering his control of the Chi in his form, the Kuei-jin can actually detach part of his body and send it afield. This power costs one Yang Trait and 15 seconds of concentration to activate. Heads and hands are the most commonly detached parts used with this power (legs are typically not very helpful and really kind of silly), and though they are limited to slithering/scuttling along, they can both prove quite useful at range. Detached hands may manipulate objects or strangle a foe, while detached heads can bite, spy and even use some Disciplines in this state (Storyteller's discretion). If the dormant body is staked, any detached parts fall paralyzed immediately; the head continues on if the body is destroyed while it is away. (However, it cannot regenerate a body, and it must spend an additional Chi Trait to animate itself.)

Detached parts travel at roughly half regular walking speed, but they may travel up walls and across ceilings at the same rate. They possess between one and three health levels (hand/ limb/ head) and all the Physical Traits and Abilities of the vampire. Obviously, the player should indicate the state of the body part immediately to other players, and a Narrator may be required to coordinate events if actions are taking place both back at the body and at the site of the distant body part.

**Note:** As with *Long-Neck*, the vampire receives no special power of perception with a detached body part. A hand that travels out of sight is effectively blind unless the vampire possesses some manner of clairvoyant power to direct it, and a head that leaves sight of its body is incapable of directing the body it has left behind (which is treated as blind in such cases). As long as a detached head can see its body, though, the body may act (albeit freakishly) without penalty.

#### Intermediate

**Lotus Cloud** — Combining the dynamic act of breathing with one's own Chi, the vampire may exhale a sweet-smelling cloud of Yang energy, which makes those within it feel giggly, dreamy and generally incoherent. This power has no effect on vampires, spirits or other unliving things, but mortals and shapeshifters are susceptible. One Yang Trait is required to use this power, which covers roughly a five step by five step area directly in front of the vampire. Mortals are affected automatically. Players of vulnerable *shen* and certain highly trained mortals (Shih hunters and Strike Force Zero agents, for example) must make a Static Willpower Challenge against four Traits to resist the effects of the *Lotus Cloud*. Those who fall under the sway of this power gain the Negative Traits: *Submissive* x 2, and they are likely to accept any pleasurable request. They cannot take aggressive action, but they may defend themselves at a one-Trait penalty. This power's effects last for one scene.

**Pelesit** — The vampire can command parts of his flesh to detach themselves and travel about. These creatures usually resemble insects or deformed homunculi, although many vampires tattoo themselves and bid the tattoos come to life at will. Regardless of the shape, these creatures — known as pelesit — cost one Yang Trait



and a variable number of health levels. The pelesit gains two health levels for each health level the vampire "loans" it. In addition, the pelesit has three Physical Traits, two Mental Traits, a single level of *Brawl*, and it can bite for a level of lethal damage. It may also speak in a shrill, abrasive voice, and it can be sent on any number of errands. The pelesit should be represented by a prop card and played by a Narrator if it travels beyond the character's line of sight. The vampire cannot heal health levels "loaned" this way until the pelesit returns to his flesh, although the vampire must heal the damage as normal if the creature is killed before it rejoins him. Extra health levels from powers such as *Corpse Skin* cannot be loaned. Pelesit last for one session/ night, but they die instantly at dawn.

#### Advanced

**The Thousand Forms** — Using his mastery of the Yang Chi in his flesh, the Kuei-jin may alter his shape into any living thing of roughly the same mass, even an animal. He may even attempt to impersonate a specific person by changing his hair, skin and body parameters, though such an exact transformation requires a Static Mental Challenge in addition to the regular cost of the power. The difficulty of this Challenge is determined by how unlike the two individuals are; the standard difficulty is six Traits. Less specific uses of this power cost two Yang Traits, and the Kuei-jin may shape himself into almost any form he can imagine. For an extra Yang Trait, the vampire can even sprout wings or an extra pair of arms. Treat such adaptations as identical to those listed under the *Demon Shintai* characteristics of the same name. Since it is a true alteration of physical shape, this altered state cannot be seen through by any power short of *Aura Perception*, although *Chi Sight* will recognize a higher level of energy than is normal for a creature of the type the Kuei-jin is posing to be. Returning to his original form requires a second use of this power.

### **GHOST-FLAME SHINTAI**

While most undead fear and loathe flame, students of the *Ghost-Flame Shintai* learn how to harness their own bodies to produce mystical bursts of fire. Depending on whether Yin or Yang Chi is used, the flame is either deathly cold or blazing hot, but the end results are typically little different. Many users of this Discipline bear burn scars, marks of their time spent in training. When this Discipline is used incorrectly, the vampire typically suffers terribly from the burning Chi unleashed inside herself.

#### Basic

**Goblin Face** — A mere trick of Chi manipulation, but a terrifying one to behold. The Kuei-jin concentrates for a turn, and her eyes and mouth blaze with eerie flame (color determined by the type of Chi spent — red for Yang Chi, black for Yin Chi). She may see perfectly well in darkness, and the player may attempt to win a Simple Test after a successful bite-attack challenge to deliver a second level of lethal damage. *Goblin Face* lasts for one scene, though it may be extinguished by the vampire at any time. This power is extremely intimidating for mortals and animals to behold, and the vampire is two Traits up on all Social Challenges related to intimidation against such targets for the duration of the power. The player should alert all those who see her to the use of *Goblin Face* whenever it is activated.

**Goblin Spark** — By spending a Chi Trait, the Kuei-jin calls into being a quantity of Ghost-flame equal to a three-foot diameter "lantern." This flame is not strong enough to burn, but it lights up a full-sized room easily. At the vampire's



command, the Ghost-flame may split into smaller pieces under her mental control. The Kuei-jin may also release the flame in the form of a single minor attack, which has different effects depending on the type of Chi used. Yang flames spark brightly and explode, allowing the vampire to make a Mental Challenge (as per *Firearms* rules) to attempt to blind a foe with a spark. This blindness lasts for a single turn. Yin flames spark and explode in the same way, but they scare away spirits and ghosts with a challenge of the vampire's Yin versus the spirit's Willpower.

### Intermediate

**Goblin Shapes** — With this versatile power, the Kuei-jin spends a Chi Trait to summon forth an approximately human-sized amount of Ghost-flame and shape it into whatever form she desires. These illusions can be composed of many colors, and they are fairly convincing to those unaware of the *Ghost-Flame Shintai* — although few *shen* are likely to be fooled. Spirits must defeat the Kuei-jin in a Mental Challenge (no Traits risked) to realize it is not another spirit. When any material being comes in contact with a *Goblin Shape*, the shape flares up instantly, causing no damage and removing a single Chi Trait of the type opposite to that with which it was created. (Thus a Yin-created Ghost-flame wall steals Yang Chi.) Against other supernaturals a Trait of Gnosis, Quintessence, Glamour or Blood is stolen instead. Furthermore, those who trigger Ghost-flame constructs are two Traits down on challenges in the next turn due to the shock of the Chi loss. *Goblin Shapes* should be represented by normal prop cards, although material attacks pass through them without triggering them.

**Goblin Scorch** — This terrible power allows the Kuei-jin to spew forth blazing streams of Chi from her mouth, in the manner of dragons from earlier Ages. The type of Chi used to create the *Goblin Scorch* determines the damage caused by this power. Yang flame is blazing hot, inflicting a level of aggravated damage for each Yang Trait spent. Yin flame, on the other hand, "burns" the victim's spirit, destroying one temporary Willpower Trait on a successful hit. This flame requires a Mental Challenge to hit, and it may be dodged/ retested as per the rules for *Firearms* Challenges. *Goblin Scorch* may hit only one target per use.

### Advanced

**Goblin Lantern** — Igniting his body in a spectacular display of Chi mastery, the vampire surrounds himself with a glowing ball of Chi energy (known as the *hima*). This power takes three turns of concentration and costs three Chi Traits and one Willpower Trait. It confers different benefits depending on the Chi used. Those engulfed in Yang Chi inflict aggravated damage with *Brawl* or *Martial Arts* attacks, ignore the first two levels of fire damage per combat, and any who grapple or touch them receive an automatic aggravated health level of damage. However, Yang-infused vampires are walking bonfires that ignite any combustible materials or explosives they encounter. Those surrounded in Yin energy may strike spirits or ghosts with *Brawl* and *Martial Arts* maneuvers, inflicting damage directly to the spirit's Chi (or Pathos, if *Oblivion* is used). Against material foes, one temporary Willpower Trait is destroyed with a successful strike, but the vampire suffers an extra level of aggravated damage from fire-based attacks.

Additionally, the vampire may choose to "flare up" the Chi aura around him for one turn by spending an extra Chi Trait. During this turn, he delivers an extra level of aggravated damage with his attacks, and those who grapple him suffer an additional level of aggravated damage. Furthermore, those who act while looking directly at the vampire are at a one-Trait penalty due to the intense glare from the Chi aura. If the vampire chooses to spend two Willpower Traits rather than one

during the beginning of this power, he may compact his entire mass into a sphere of Ghost-flame instead of simply surrounding himself. This state confers the same benefits, but the vampire may also fly at roughly six steps per round, ignore the first level of damage from one material attack (because he is semi-solid) and bite foes, though this form has no hands and thus cannot manipulate anything.

**Note:** While using the *Goblin Lantern*, the Kuei-jin is especially vulnerable to attacks based on the opposing type of Chi (such as a Yin *Goblin Scorch* against a Yang *Goblin Lantern* vampire), and he suffers an additional level of damage from all such attacks.

## SOUL DISCIPLINES

These Disciplines deal with the relations between the Hun and P'o, and skilled users are able to use this understanding to dominate others or perform amazing feats of will. The Kuei-jin are also noted perfectionists, since the kind of control these Disciplines require is staggering and the margin of error allowed is nonexistent. Any time a Kuei-jin attempts to use one of these powers and fails, a shadow soul Test may be called for at the Narrator's discretion. Failing to read someone's aura through *Obligation* does not typically provoke shadow soul, but failing to use *Soul Shackles* is certainly grounds for a test.

### CULTIVATION

Widely distrusted and always the center of controversy in a court, these Kuei-jin study the Demon within and learn how to use it to their full advantage. Many of them choose to adopt their P'o sides as often as their Huns. They are most feared due to their ability to master the P'o nature in others, which gives them a great deal of insight into a target's dark desires. However, many courts consider Kuei-jin schooled in this art a necessary evil in these dark times, since their arts are especially useful against the encroaching Kin-jin (who have little knowledge of the workings of their "Beast" and thus make easy prey to users of this Discipline). Those who step out of line and abuse this art are dealt with quickly and harshly.

#### Basic

**Scrutinize** — By attuning himself to the dark tides of P'o, the Kuei-jin may calm his Demon a bit or peer into the dark side of others. This power requires at least 30 seconds of preparation and a Mental Challenge (Static if used on the Kuei-jin himself, with a difficulty of his P'o rating + 2). If used successfully on himself, the vampire is one Trait up on his next fire, wave or shadow soul challenge, and the player may even spend a Social Trait to force a "dialogue" with his P'o (played by a Narrator or Shadowguide). The P'o is typically a reluctant conversationalist, but a clever character may still extract some useful information from it, especially if he talks to it of evil or demons.

Used against another character, this power reveals the relative strength rating of a P'o (Kuei-jin), a character's Humanity/ Path rating or derangement (Kin-jin), or a "mere" dirty secret or hidden vice (mortal or other *shen*). This power may only be used on a target once per scene, and only one bit of information comes across at a time. The player may ask the Narrator to make the Mental Challenge on his behalf in order to disguise who is using this power on a target. The power never reveals good qualities or other facts — only things related to evil and the P'o.



**Cleave the Demon** — By spending a Chi Trait and a minute in concentration, the vampire may separate her warring personality sides, giving one control of the physical body while the other hovers about in the Mirror Lands. The Kuei-jin then determines which part takes control of the body by making a Static Challenge of permanent Hun rating versus permanent P'o rating (Hun wins all ties), with the winner retaining control over the physical form. The losing half is immediately displaced into the spirit worlds, where it can wander no more than 50 steps from its home body. The displaced half is considered a spirit of the appropriate type (Yin for P'o, Yang for Hun), and it may interact with other spirits normally, making it an excellent way to spy in the Mirror Lands. In times of danger, the displaced part may take shelter in the body and thus become immune to spirit attack. The dominant side may force the loser out at any time, however, which can lead to some interesting internal negotiations. Both parts of the soul can act in tandem at no penalty — the physical part can fight or use Disciplines while the other half takes actions in the spirit worlds — and they are linked telepathically at all times. Each part also possesses the basic powers of the Kuei-jin (*Lifesight*, *Ghostsight*), although only one half can use them in a turn. The displaced part may be commanded to whirl about the body in a kind of holding pattern, which eliminates surprise attempts from behind. This power lasts for one scene, at which point the two halves merge once more.

**Note:** The P'o is just as evil and destructive as it ever was while this power is in effect, and it will continue doing its best to cause harm and misery at every opportunity.

#### Intermediate

**Lash the Demon** — By establishing eye-contact with her target, the Kuei-jin may attempt to cleave the target's Hun and P'o parts, leaving her at the mercy of her stronger nature. The vampire's player must spend two Mental Traits and defeat the target in a Social Challenge; if successful, the target must compare his permanent Hun and P'o rating immediately. If the Hun is higher, the target becomes extremely passive, cannot take any aggressive action and obeys any orders given to him unless they are of an aggressive or self-destructive nature (or he spends a Willpower Trait to resist). He may defend himself normally if attacked, but he may not pursue fleeing enemies. If the target's P'o is stronger, he immediately enters fire soul, unless he was already in fire soul, in which case he becomes confused and listless. If the target's Soul Virtue ratings are equal, the two sides go to war immediately in a challenge of Hun versus P'o. If the Hun wins, nothing further happens, but if the P'o wins, it takes control of the body. The effects of this power last for one scene.

#### "HE'S GONNA SUCK ME DRY!"

Many users of Soul Disciplines eventually learn how to drain temporary or even permanent Willpower Traits from their targets. These attacks are quite serious, as they threaten the very soul of the target. If a target loses all temporary Willpower, any additional damage is done directly to health levels (no soak is possible) as the body begins to break down without its soul. Furthermore, the victim must make a Static Willpower Challenge against three Traits or lose a permanent Hun/Humanity Trait or gain a permanent derangement (Storyteller's choice). No matter what the outcome, the victim gains a temporary derangement until he regains at least half his Willpower.



If this power is used on a Cainite, ghoul or other creature with a Beast, the target frenzies immediately. If the target is a mortal, he becomes passive as with the Hun effect, unless the Narrator rules the target's bestial side is strong, in which case he frenzies (and often startles the Kuei-jin using this power).

**Yoke the Demon** — A Kuei-jin this adept at *Cultivation* may put a hold on the Demon within, forcing it to obey her commands and harnessing its menacing presence for her own ends. The P'o hates this power like nothing else, and those Kuei-jin who make frequent use of this Discipline are in for a dangerous time the next time the P'o assumes control. The Kuei-jin must spend two minutes in concentration and a Willpower Trait to begin the process of yoking the Demon, and it is complete only when the player wins a Static Physical Challenge (against nine Traits) to suborn the Demon. Failing the Static Challenge drops the unlucky vampire into shadow soul immediately with an unhappy P'o at the helm. However, a successful use of this power protects the Kuei-jin from shadow soul, allows the P'o to do nothing without the Hun's permission, forces mortals to spend a Willpower Trait even to approach her and allows the Hun to use the P'o as a "demon" detector. This last usage detects Kuei-jin, hengeyokai, Kin-jin, crazed mortals and other "wild souls" with a successful Mental Challenge. This power cannot pinpoint invisible creatures, but it does alert a character to their presence. The character may not use Demon Chi or *Demon Arts* while the P'o is yoked. This power lasts for one scene, but it is broken if the Kuei-jin enters fire soul (which is why the P'o will do its limited best to provoke such a state during the use of this power).

#### Advanced

**Two Become One** — This power offers Kuei-jin a taste of true enlightenment, as it put the soul's dichotomy to rest temporarily, blending the Hun and P'o into one personality as they were in life. The player must spend a Willpower Trait and win a Static Social Challenge against six Traits for this power to take hold. Once it is in effect, the vampire is immune to fire, wave and shadow soul, and he may use *Demon Arts* or P'o powers without fear of backlash. Since the character effectively has two minds, any opponent using mind- or emotion-controlling powers must make two different checks to use such powers. If either fails, the Kuei-jin is completely unaffected. This power offers a glimpse of true enlightenment, but the overconfidence spawned by such a taste can lead to an even more rapid degeneration than normal if the vampire isn't careful.

### CHI'U MUH (DRAGON TEARS)

Long ago, the sages say, the great dragons bore bright pearls on their foreheads, pearls which supposedly acted as receptacles of great celestial power. The Kuei-jin developed this Discipline in order to pay homage to the dragons and learn some of their secrets. However, this art has fallen into disrepute of late, for the Discipline is treated as a *Demon Art* if the vampire's P'o side is dominant. Normally used for healing, knowledge and defense, this Discipline becomes instead a potent tool for savaging the souls and bodies of others when the P'o rules. This Discipline is also widely distrusted because some of its teachings were corrupted by the barbarian Zao-lat centuries ago. Even worse, this Westerner was able to slink back to his homeland and pass the evil perversions on to his twisted chilid before dying a suitably ignominious death at the hands of other Western devils. However, in the hands of a wise Kuei-jin, this Discipline may be used for degrees of healing that are nothing less than miraculous.



**Note:** Kuei-jin who study this Discipline develop a physical third eye in the center of their forehead, which is always visible when this Discipline is used (although it may be retracted at other times with a Static Physical Challenge against three Traits, no Traits risked). At the Basic levels, this eye appears to be a bright jewel in the center of the forehead. By the Intermediate level, it is a full third eye. At the Advanced stage, the third eye becomes a great blazing orb in the center of the forehead.

#### Basic

**Rasa** — At this basic level of enlightenment, the character is just beginning to understand her place in the Great Cycle, and vivid, prophetic dreams become commonplace. Interpreting them typically requires a Static Mental Challenge (the *Enigmas* Ability is useful here), and of course, the nature of any prophecies is up to the Storyteller, but many of them are quite helpful once they are understood properly. If the P'o is dominant, it dreams of how to keep the Hun subdued, and it may even receive offers from Yama Kings if it shows sufficient "promise." The dreams of the Fifth Age have become noticeably darker, contributing to the gloom and despair found in so many courts.

**Chi Sight** — Increasing experience with the spirit worlds hones the vampire's already superior senses, expanding her powers of *Lifesight*, *Ghostsight* and *Sharpened Senses*. This power costs one Yang Trait and one Yin Trait, but once activated, the third eye opens and the vampire gains the full benefits of all three of those powers plus several additional benefits. The vampire may see any spirits in the vicinity, and she can make a Mental Challenge to gauge their power. She may also sense any dragon nests, Chi patterns (such as those from the *Tapestry* Discipline), defiled Chi or dragon lines in the area, and if major events occur in the spirit worlds, she will be the first to know. (The Storyteller should keep the character apprised as to changes in the spirit worlds while this power is in use.) The Kuei-jin may also use *Lifesight* to read the auras of material beings with a Mental Challenge in a manner similar to the *Aura Perception* power of *Auspex*, and the amount of Chi in a material being is likewise easily discernible. While this power is active, *Ghostsight* enhances to the degree where the vampire can determine a wraith's Passions and Pathos count with a Mental Challenge. *Chi Sight* lasts for one scene.

#### Intermediate

**Dragon Ward** — In ancient days, the majesty of dragons kept mortals from approaching them, and the Kuei-jin can harness part of that power to forbid others from approaching her. By spending two Mental Traits, the vampire blocks all those not already within 10 feet of her from approaching (both material beings and spirits) unless she drops her guard voluntarily or the opponent defeats her in a Mental Challenge. If a foe challenges the *Dragon Ward* and fails, however, he is paralyzed for five minutes by the Chi flows emanating from the character. If the user of *Dragon Ward* takes any hostile action, the ward is canceled immediately.

**Purification** — Once the noble Wan Xian used this power to cleanse their subjects of demonic taint, but most uses of this Discipline are far less dramatic in the Fifth Age. Indeed, if the vampire's P'o is dominant, the subject of her attentions winds up far worse for the visit. When the Kuei-jin's Hun is dominant, the power works thus: The player must come within five feet of her target and succeed first at a Mental Challenge (where she learns a target's derangements or other mental afflictions) and then at a Social Challenge (which cures the condition if successful). A separate set of tests must be made for each affliction to be cured. The



Kuei-jin may quiet a P'o for a scene by winning such challenges. If successful, the P'o is unable to inflict fire, shadow or wave soul for a scene, but the target cannot use Demon Chi or *Demon Arts* during that time. In addition, a Kuei-jin may attempt to cleanse a defiled area by placing her hands on it and succeeding at a Static Physical Challenge (difficulty of eight Traits). Success means that the third eye cleanses the taint from the area, while failure means the vampire must try to resist for shadow soul immediately.

If the P'o is active, the vampire must first bite the target, spend Demon Chi Traits, then beat the target in a challenge of her P'o rating versus his Willpower. If successful, the target gives in to dark desires and follows the Kuei-jin as a willing slave for a number of days equal to the number of Demon Traits spent. *Shen* and rare mortals (such as Shih hunters) may attempt to resist by spending Willpower for a retest.

**Note:** Neither this power nor *Spirit-Eating* can cure a Malkavian's starting derangements permanently, although the afflictions can be made dormant for the remainder of the session. The Malkavian's player cannot relent to the challenges required to quiet the madness, however (it's not that simple to get rid of something rooted that deeply).

#### Advanced

**Spirit-Eating** — This mighty power allows the Kuei-jin to cleanse another's soul of pain and suffering... or damn it to a nightmare existence, depending on whether the Hun or P'o is using it. Regardless of which side is dominant, the target must be within 10 feet and stare into the vampire's third eye with his own, at which time the vampire's player must win a Mental Challenge with her target. Success literally pulls the victim's soul into the third eye, where the process of healing (or harming) begins. If the Hun is dominant, she may spend Willpower Traits on a one-for-one basis to restore lost Traits of Hun or Humanity in her target, or to cure a permanent derangement. For three Willpower Traits and an additional Mental Challenge (the target may not relent), the vampire may restore a Dharmic Trait lost within the last month.

If the P'o is dominant, it may attempt to use the soul as a "chew toy," and winning a challenge of the vampire's P'o rating against the target's Willpower allows the vampire to torture the soul, inflicting a permanent derangement on it. The vampire may even change the subject's Nature in this process, although the P'o usually picks a detrimental personality shift for its victim. The P'o may also choose to eat the soul, fusing it to her own. Such a depraved act costs the Kuei-jin a Dharma Trait automatically unless she follows the Howl of the Devil-Tiger or is in the service of a Yama King. In so doing, the vampire gains the victim's memories and knowledge-related Abilities for one day per permanent P'o rating. Those whose souls are eaten die immediately. *Shen* may resist the indignity of having their souls eaten by spending a Willpower Trait. In either case, the vampire may release the soul whenever she chooses.

**Note:** None of the P'o-dominant powers of *Spirit-Eating* can be used on a Kuei-jin with a higher Dharma rating. Period. End of story. Furthermore, a body without a soul becomes catatonic, and it must be told to eat, avoid harm and perform other basic functions.

#### INTERNALIZE

Most Kuei-jin suffer the curse of their dual soul nightly. However, Kuei-jin who study the ways of this Discipline learn how to overcome such limitations and achieve feats of willpower beyond the dreams of their Kin-jin foes. Few are the



Kuei-jin with the patience and self-control to master more than the basics of this art, but those who do are among the most centered and disciplined vampires in existence. Like the *Yin* and *Yang Prana* Disciplines, students of this art must practice rigid meditative poses, grueling katas and other exercises constantly if they wish to keep in top form.

### Basic

**No Mind** — Through a simple meditative exercise, the Kuei-jin banishes surface thoughts and opens himself to the will of the All, making it harder to influence his thoughts. One Mental Trait is required to enter the *No Mind* state, but all attempts to read or influence the Kuei-jin's thoughts are two Traits down for the remainder of the scene, and the Kuei-jin is two Traits up on all tests to resist frenzy in this state. However, the vampire may not use the Disciplines of *Cultivation*, *Obligation* or *Chi'iu Muh* while *No Mind* is active. The aura of a vampire using *No Mind* is blue-white.

**Blood Yoga** — By centering his thoughts and engaging in deep meditation to banish the ever-present nightmares of the Kuei-jin, the vampire may attempt to replenish his inner resolve by coming to peace with himself for a while. This power requires a Chi Trait and *at least* an hour of meditation (more or less at the Narrator's discretion), at the end of which time the player must make a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits. This challenge can be retested with the *Meditation* Ability. If successful, the character regains one Willpower Trait. This power may be used only once per night, and it is best used either before play begins, or in the downtime between sessions due to the time required.

### Intermediate

**Distant Death Kata** — By forcing himself to inhale while concentrating on a single attack routine, the Kuei-jin executes a perfect strike as he exhales and forges spirit and action into an attack that actually damages his foe. A standard *Brawl*, *Melee* or *Martial Arts* Physical Challenge must be made, but if successful, the foe takes damage as if the vampire actually struck him (*Martial Arts* maneuvers may even be used at this range). This attack may not be dodged, but it can be soaked normally.

**Iron Soul** — Having tempered both body and mind through rigorous exercise and contemplation, the Kuei-jin is able to boost his physical capabilities greatly though force of concentration alone. The player must spend three turns/ 15 seconds in contemplation, spend a Willpower Trait, and then make a series of Simple Tests. On a win or a tie, the vampire gains two Traits on the next Physical or Willpower Challenge attempted, which must follow the period of meditation immediately. (In other words, the vampire cannot meditate in preparation for an action to take place a half-hour later.) The number of Simple Tests is equal to the vampire's permanent Hun rating. The extra Traits cover one challenge alone, but they apply to all overbids and retests of that challenge.

**Example of Play:** Tsang Xiang is preparing to break down a door, and he decides to use Iron Soul to aid his efforts. He spends a Willpower Trait and 15 seconds in meditation, then makes his Simple Tests. Xiang has a Hun rating of four, so he receives four Simple Tests. He wins three of the Simple Tests, thus boosting his Physical Traits by a mighty six Traits for the challenge to knock down the door.

### Advanced

**Harmony with the All** — By opening his consciousness to the Great Cycle, the vampire trusts Heaven to guide his actions and becomes able to perform heroic feats with perfect precision spontaneously, even if he had no skill in such actions

before. This power requires two Willpower Traits, two turns of concentration and a successful Static Dharma Challenge (against five Traits) to activate, and it lasts for one scene. While in this state, the Kuei-jin receives the following benefits:

The vampire does not suffer from wound penalties, Trait penalties, distractions or any other situational modifiers of any kind.

He may challenge with any Ability, even one he is unskilled in or has spent all his levels of that session, without spending a Willpower Trait to do so.

The vampire suffers no penalty from fighting multiple opponents (nor do they gain any benefits), he may fight with two weapons without penalty, he can locate invisible creatures with a Mental Challenge, and he cannot be surprised.

The vampire resists mind control as if under the *No Mind* power, and he is immune to Shadow and fire soul, although he may not spend Demon Chi or use *Demon Arts*.

At the Storyteller's discretion, the character may receive flashes of insight or precognition while in this state, although the exact nature of such visions is typically shrouded in symbolism and mystery.

**Note:** The character still cannot perform actions in this state that are patently impossible. A vampire with only one hand cannot wield two pistols, for example.

### OBLIGATION

Kuei-jin used to be regarded as gods by the mortals, among whom they walked, and this Discipline is a prime example of how they used to maintain such control. Adepts of *Obligation* learn ways to amplify their Hun soul to inspire — or dominate — the souls of others, and others typically give them a wide berth. Their words resonate with power, and their slightest movement can set off a flurry of action from their devoted followers. Unlike the *Dominate* Discipline of the Kin-jin, there are no restrictions about using this power on one's elders. However, such upstarts had best tread carefully, lest the mandarin they just subjugated break free and use her

### VAMPIRE'S NET WINS

1 challenge

2 challenges

3-4 challenges

5+ challenges

### EFFECT

Target loses a temporary Willpower Trait and loses one Trait on all challenges for the remainder of the scene.

Target loses an additional temporary Willpower Trait, is three Traits down on all challenges (excluding the *Thousand Hell Stare*), cannot attack the vampire and is likely to flee or obey simple commands to make the pain stop.

Target cringes and gains the Negative Traits: *Submissive* x 2. He will do nearly anything the vampire asks, short of self-destruction. Kuei-jin and Cainites must make *wave soul*/Rötschreck checks.

Target collapses in a useless heap for the remainder of the scene, gains a permanent derangement.

**Note:** Kuei-jin and hengeyokai may attempt to use their P'o/ Rage to break this power (as on p. 113).



influence to take vengeance on the Running Monkeys impudent enough to play with her thoughts.

#### Basic

**Evaluate** — A Kuei-jin with this power may look into the Hun soul of his subjects, thus learning personal information about them. A Mental Challenge is required to use this power, but if successful, the vampire may learn the following information about the target: Demeanor, surface likes/dislikes or true name. Each piece of information desired requires a different Mental Challenge to uncover. The Kuei-jin's player may also detect if the subject is lying for the remainder of the scene by winning or tying a Simple Test following each dubious statement. If the Kuei-jin wishes to probe more deeply, he may spend a Willpower Trait to uncover one of the following bits of information: Nature, repressed memories, hidden likes/hatreds, Willpower total, even Humanity/Path/Dharma and rating. At this level, any of the subject's spirit or blood bonds are also visible (at no cost).

**Soul Bridge** — By establishing a rudimentary psychic link with his target, the Kuei-jin may begin influencing her thoughts directly. This power does not function on Kuei-jin with higher Hun scores. A Social Challenge is required to enact this power, but if successful, the vampire may choose one of several possible effects:

The vampire may establish a sympathetic bond with his target, putting himself three Traits up on his next Social Challenge against her.

The Kuei-jin may view the target's surface thoughts (Narrator's choice, defaults to most immediate matter at hand). These thoughts usually appear in pictorial form, like paintings. One Social Trait per thought must be spent if the vampire wishes to view any surface thoughts beyond the first.

Using the empathic link as a carrier, the vampire may transmit emotions to his target by spending a Social Trait. Any one emotion can be sent — fear, anger, sorrow, friendship — and while it isn't quite strong enough to force the subject to act against her Nature, it will certainly color all her actions for the rest of the scene. Kuei-jin may resist this tampering with a challenge of Hun versus Hun.

#### Intermediate

**Authority** — While Heaven has disposed of the mandate the Kuei-jin once held over mortals, the vampires themselves have not forgotten. With this potent power, the Kuei-jin may assume a position of power and authority in the eyes of those around him, making others quick to please him and otherwise act subservient. A Willpower Trait must be spent to assume Authority, but once it is in effect, the vampire is considered up three Traits on all Social Challenges involving giving orders or assuming command (including *Obligation* powers). Those affected by his Authority may not lie to him, much less attempt to harm him or be directly disrespectful to him. In addition, the Kuei-jin may issue commands to those cowed by his Authority and expect them to be obeyed. By beating his subject in a Social Challenge and spending a Social Trait, he may even order them to perform potentially life-threatening actions or other feats contrary to their Natures. Such orders must be given vocally and understood clearly by the subject, who may attempt to resist by spending a Willpower Trait for a retest. This power has no effect on Kuei-jin of a higher Hun or Dharma rating, and other shen may resist Authority by beating the vampire in a Social Challenge. This power lasts for one scene.



To indicate that *Authority* is in effect, the Kuei-jin should use the same hand gesture as for the *Majesty* power of *Presence* (they are similar). However he should bend his hands upward with his palms facing him in addition to holding his arms out at his sides, in order to indicate the different power being used.

**Thousand Hell Stare** — With this terrible power, the Kuei-jin may channel all his dark passions into his Hun and project them into his target

like a knife, causing the target to feel as if a demon is judging her soul. Traditionally reserved for respected mandarins, this power has spread throughout the Fifth Age to the point where some *akuma* and other riffraff have picked it up, much to their elders' sorrow. To use this power, the Kuei-jin must spend a Willpower Trait and enter a series of challenges of his Hun versus his target's Hun or Humanity rating (whichever is higher). If the victim wins this or any subsequent challenge, the power ends immediately. However, the target suffers immense psychic torment for each challenge the vampire's player wins as per the following chart (cumulatively). In addition, the player gets to make another challenge immediately after each successful challenge to try to inflict further punishment.

#### Advanced

**Soul Shackles** — With this level of *Obligation*, the Kuei-jin has learned how to twist the very spirits of others to his own, creating lasting bonds of friendship and loyalty even if only bitter hatred and suspicion rested there before. This power does not affect a vampire of higher Hun or Dharma. To use *Soul Shackles*, the Kuei-jin's player must concentrate for one minute, spend a Willpower Trait and succeed at a Static Hun Challenge (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Success creates a Friendship Bond, similar to the *guanxi* bond of *wu*-mates (or a basic Sabbat Vinculum bond). The target is friendly toward the vampire, but not blindly so, and he will generally view him and his actions in a favorable light. If the vampire wishes to continue the bonding process, he may do so with another minute of concentration, a Willpower Trait and a Hun Challenge (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). Failing this challenge breaks the bond previously established and fills the victim with revulsion, but success creates a *Giri* Bond (equivalent to a strong Vinculum). The victim is exceedingly loyal to the vampire, and she will do her best to carry out his wishes, although certain concerns (true love, deep-rooted personal honor) still exceed the vampire's mastery.

The vampire may choose to continue on a final time at this point with the familiar cost of one minute of concentration, a Willpower Trait and a Hun Challenge (same difficulty). Failure breaks the previous bonds and generates the same dislike in the victim, but success creates a *Spirit Bond*, the equivalent of a full-fledged blood bond toward the vampire. This *Spirit Bond* overrides all other forms of loyalty, even previous blood bonds.

The effects of this power last for one night, although the vampire's player may expend an extra Willpower Trait at any stage of the bonding process to extend that time to one month. He may even spend three permanent Mental Traits to make the effect permanent. Such increases of duration must be performed during the bonding process, not after. Those targets that beat the vampire on a *Soul Shackles* Challenge, are immune to further use of this power by that vampire for the remainder of the session, aside from the revulsion listed previously.



## RITES OF THE KUEI-JIN

Disciplines are not the only media through which Kuei-jin can manipulate Chi. Ages of teachings and traditions passed down from sifu to student have left them with a wealth of intricate rituals designed to generate effects in the local Chi. In some senses, these rites are similar to Thaumaturgy rituals in that they achieve specific supernatural effects for their user, they often require material components of some sort (especially jade), and they demand intensive study and practice from their participants. However, unlike the rituals of the Kin-jin, Cathayan rites are far from mere utilitarian services. Kuei-jin also use them to celebrate all manner of events, from the passing of seasons to an individual's decision to pass from Kuei-jin society. They are as much a part of Cathayan culture as courts and *wu*, and most vampires would feel lost without them. Rites are what allow these souls, torn from the routine of daily life that once was their whole existence, to find some sense of community and belonging along the Road Back.

There are two ways for characters to learn rites. One is to begin play with the Rites Background, which represents rites a character knows before play begins, and another is to find a mentor who will teach a character rites once play begins. While most Kuei-jin take part in many different rites, most masters are very sparing in choosing who they teach entire workings of a rite to, since some rites can be very dangerous in the hands of the wicked or foolish. Learning a rite in this fashion typically takes at least two weeks per level of the rite, and it requires Experience Traits as well.

### POLISHING THE DRAGON'S SCALES: CHI RITES

These rituals deal directly with the forces of Yin and Yang, and they are among the most commonly learned rites of the Kuei-jin for their everyday practicality.

#### Basic

**Trace the Dragon's Blood** — Like knows like, as the ancient saying goes, and using this old wisdom, the Kuei-jin may call out to dragon lines in the area by invoking the power her own Chi. She must spend between 10 to 20 minutes (depending on the level of the Wall) petitioning the local spirits, spend a Yin or Yang Trait and make some small sacrifice such as incense or lucky money. At the completion of such expenditure, all the dragon lines in sight become visible, the vampire may determine if they are Yin or Yang lines, and she may follow them unless they have been cloaked deliberately (something known by only powerful Kuei-jin). If a line is cloaked, the Kuei-jin's player must beat the one who cloaked it in a Mental Challenge to detect it, and she will not be able to determine their destination points until she arrives there even if she is successful. (Default to a Static Mental Challenge against the local Wall.) The Storyteller may be required to guide the character. Naturally, this rite is usually invoked at a place that gives the vampire a view of a large area. However, another casting might be required to trace the dragon lines seen from afar if she is especially far away (such as atop a mountain or skyscraper).

**Behold the Spirit's Doorway** — Not every Kuei-jin has access to the high-level *Prana* Disciplines or jade artifacts necessary to cross over into the spirit worlds, and so this rite was created. By locating what he believes to be a likely site for a gateway (gates are always in dragon nests, though not all dragon nests have gates) and inscribing the *kaja* ideogram for "gate" nearby, the vampire may petition the spirits to show him the gateway there if one exists. Each gate opens to a specific destination in the Yin or Yang Worlds, making this method of travel quite



accurate. While rumors persist of gateways to Yomi existing, no Kuei-jin has ever found one. It is up to the discretion of the Storyteller if an existing gateway becomes visible at the Kuei-jin's call. Most of the time the spirits will comply without undue hesitation, but rude or impatient *kyonshi* may find the spirits have decided to teach them a lesson in respecting the unseen world. Note that this ritual does not open the gateway, it merely locates it. Opening such portals is the province of the *Rite of Supplication*.

### Intermediate

**Imbuing the Jade** — With this ritual, the Kuei-jin may imbue small jade statues with power to act as aides during her travels in the spirit worlds. Using white jade (for the Yin World) or red jade (for the Yang), the vampire creates tiny likenesses of either herself (for use in following the crab's footsteps) or boats (for riding the dragon's tongue). The likenesses need not be especially skilled, only the vaguest resemblance is needed. This ritual may create up to 12 such "travel jades" in any combination. To activate the magic, the Kuei-jin must spend two Chi Traits and immerse the likenesses in water which has been set out in moonlight for at least an hour. The jade is then imbued with power, and the water used is charged with Chi that aids the growth of night-blooming flowers if poured across them. (For more on travel jades, see p. 222.)

**Rite of Supplication** — Having located a gateway to the spirit worlds with the *Behold the Spirit's Doorway* rite, the vampire may attempt to open it and cross into the unseen worlds. All that's required is a simple bell or gong, which is struck five times. The portal opens at the final dying of the fifth peal. This rite is deceptively simple, though, as most gateways have guardians of some kind either in the Middle Kingdom or beyond who must be placated or bested before the vampire will be allowed passage. The Storyteller is responsible for creating such guardians, and with the trials of the Sixth Age so close at hand, she is under no compulsion to be merciful.

### Advanced

**Cloak the Dragon's Passage** — This potent ritual allows the Kuei-jin to cloak the presence of a dragon line to everyone's eyes but his own, creating a private passage of sorts. The ritualist must travel the length of the path he wishes to conceal in a jade boat, strewing a powder of precious materials behind him and invoking the spirits to hide the path from his enemies. He must also spend two Chi Traits. This powder can be quite costly, as the spirits prefer that a bit of crushed jade and other exotic mixtures be used in its creation. Once completed, the dragon line is concealed until another Kuei-jin is able to pierce the veil (see *Tracing the Dragon's Blood*).

**Creating the Rivergate** — To ride the dragon's tongue, the Kuei-jin must sail the river of Chi from one destination to another. These destinations are called rivergates, and they must be renewed every New Year's Day. Each gate has a protector, who may bar visitors, charge a toll or allow anyone access, all as he sees fit. To renew the rivergate, the Kuei-jin responsible for its care must go to the gate, spend a Chi Trait and sacrifice a fine piece of jade or pearl. Otherwise, the gate closes, and only enacting the same ritual — with three Chi Traits this time — beneath the next full moon can reopen it. Anyone can reopen a gate, though the responsibility usually falls on the assigned guardian. The elders punish usurpers stiffly for taking control of a gate without proper authority.



## TRAVELING THE INNER PATHS: INDIVIDUAL RITES

Kuei-jin commemorate many different landmarks along one's personal journey, and these rites are one way they use to record a character's progress along his Dharmic path and toward enlightenment. Some of these rites announce a formal decision, while others only lend credence to a standing decision. As highly personalized as these rites are, Storytellers and players should feel free to add new rites or alter these existing ones as they see fit for the flavor of their own chronicle.

### Basic

**The Way of the Lone Walker** — On rare occasions, a Kuei-jin discovers that he does not conform to the strict hierarchy and rigorous protocol of Cathayan society, and rather than be declared an outcast, such a rebellious or eccentric vampire willingly and willfully turns his back on the ways of the courts and *wu*. By announcing his intention to become heimin, the Kuei-jin takes an honorable path out of Cathayan society without cutting himself off from it entirely. Perhaps more importantly, he avoids its active hostility. Most heimin still hold fast to their Dharma and direction — they just do so outside of Kuei-jin society. This rite requires no Trait expenditures, but it is a deeply personal time to each heimin. Its only requirement is that he perform a tea ceremony with his *wu*-mates (if he has any) and at least one elder of the court he is leaving (usually a mandarin or his former Sifu). He may not drink (symbolizing his break with society), and at the end of the ceremony he breaks the vessels and turns his back on his guests, who depart and leave the new heimin free to his destiny.

**Taking the Left-Hand Path** — Occasionally, a Kuei-jin may discover that her Dharma no longer suits her and her path along the Road Back, and this rite may effect a change. Performed in private or before the court, as suits the vampire's taste, this rite involves a lengthy series of ritual purifications and periods of meditation. The Kuei-jin must also create a list of reasons why her Dharma no longer suits her, which is destroyed at the culmination of the rite as the vampire begins writing a new list or paints a picture illustrating her new Dharmic path. A Yin Trait and a Yang Trait must be spent during this rite, and once it is completed, the character loses all levels of her previous Dharma and begins anew with a Dharma rating of 1.

### Intermediate

**Restoring the Dharmic Balance** — This rite corrects the paths of fledgling Kuei-jin who have relapsed into the mindless *chih-meい* state (zero Dharma), and it is composed of a series of ritual purifications involving water, mantras and incense. Sites rich in Chi are typically chosen, although areas of deep significance to the subject or the ritualist also suffice. The *chih-meい* goes through the purifications (typically after being subdued forcibly) as the player of the Kuei-jin enacting the rite forces her efforts on a Static Mental Challenge (difficulty of the subject's Willpower + 3, maximum 10). If successful, the ritualist's player may spend a number of Mental Traits; for every two Mental Traits spent, the subject is one Trait up on the challenge to regain grasp of his Dharma. The subject must make a Static Willpower Challenge — boosted by the number of Traits gained from the ritualist, as determined previously — against eight Traits. Success brings him back from the ranks of the *chih-meい* and restored to a Dharma rating of 1. The subject may make only one such challenge per night, and he may spend Willpower Traits to retest the challenge on a one-for-one basis.



## SOCIAL RITES

### Basic

**Embrace the Spirit's Change** — As a Kuei-jin travels through eternity along the Road Back, he experiences great changes in personality that mark him as a different being than he was when he was alive (or even when he was a younger vampire, in the case of elders). Many vampires signify these changes by the adoption of a new name, thus severing their ties with their old self and marking another turning point in their unives. To effect a formal name change, the Kuei-jin must obtain permission from his *wu* or the court mandarins, then spend three nights in meditation (usually considered to be performed during "downtime") as he decides on his new name. After completing this time, the vampire goes before the court and announces his desire to change his name, reciting it to each of the five directions. The assembled vampires then address him by his new name, cementing will with reality. The character must spend a Chi Trait to link the new name to his inner being and cut off the old identity. If he wishes to keep his old name as well (showing continuity of personality), a Chi Trait is required to link the name in the eyes of the spirits.

## RITES OF WIND AND WATER

Based on ancient *feng shui* principles, these useful rites are designed to take advantage of the Chi lines surrounding one's haven or turn the Chi of the area against another character.

### Basic

**Harmonious Shielding of the Guarded Home** — Similar to the *Thaumaturgy* ritual *Defense of the Sacred Haven*, this rite allows the Kuei-jin to shield her tomb or dwelling from harmful or defiling influences. The site to be guarded must be cleansed and prepared for an hour (the character need not indulge in the labor herself, but she must be physically present), symbols of protection must be painted around the inside of the area, and aromatic herbs must be burned. One Chi Trait provides 24 hours of protection, and up to three Chi Traits may be spent in this fashion during any one casting of the rite. While the rite is in effect, sunlight cannot pass through closed doors or windows of any kind, and the vampire awakens instantly the first time anyone (including friends or servants) crosses into the area of protection during that time. Those in the spirit worlds do not set off the alarms.

### Intermediate

**Construct the Dragon Bone Prison** — This ritual allows the target to trap another Kuei-jin within her own haven by means of auspiciously designed Chi lines, provided the vampire has had the time to study the location thoroughly and place the objects that allow for the Chi lines to be redirected in the desired manner. The number of such objects needed and the time required to place them is up to the Narrator, and these factors should depend on how large an area is to be covered and how well the items (represented by prop cards) are concealed. Once the arrangements are in place, the Kuei-jin's player must make a Static Physical Challenge (difficulty of the target's Willpower + 4). Success creates a prison that lasts for one day, although the Kuei-jin may spend a Willpower Trait to increase its effects for an entire week. During the time the prison is active, no one inside the area of effect may leave. Those wishing to do so must spend two Mental Traits and win a Static Willpower Challenge against three Traits. Success on this challenge means that a character can leave the prison for up to one hour, time that is typically spent searching out the objects generating the prison and removing them. Doing



3



so requires at least one Static Mental Challenge (which can be retested with the Investigation Ability) against a difficulty of the ritualist's Physical Traits. If the victim cannot find all the imprisoning objects in that one hour, she must return to the prison for another 24 hours.

**Note:** Despite rumors that the Kuei-jin have developed a version of this rite to use against the Kin-jin, this rite cannot be used unless a Kuei-jin is within the area to be effected.



robert wheeler (order #36511)



# CHAPTER FOUR: RULES, SYSTEMS AND DRAMA

*The Master said: "To employ uninstructed people in battle is to abandon them."*

—Confucius, *Analects*

Rules are an integral part of any game. They define what characters can and cannot do. Only when confrontation does occur are rules necessary to govern those situations. Still, the primary focus of this game is to tell a good story.

## CHALLENGES

There comes a time when two or more players come into conflicts that cannot be resolved through roleplaying alone. The system detailed in this chapter allows for the resolution of conflicts efficiently and quickly. This sort of face-off is called a challenge, and it makes for a very simple system of conflict resolution. In most cases, a Narrator does not even need to be present when a challenge is played.

Roleplaying does not necessarily have to end when a challenge begins. In fact, roleplaying becomes more important than ever if players intend to enjoy a confrontation and avoid disputes. Experienced players can integrate a challenge into their roleplaying so seamlessly that outsiders don't even know that anything unusual is going on. At the players' option, special hand signals can be used to indicate when certain Traits and powers are being employed.

In order for this system to work, players need to work together. They have to educate each other on the rules and agree on what Traits can be used in a challenge. Compromise and cooperation are the bywords of the game. Arguments over whether or not a particular Trait is appropriate wreck both the momentum and the mood of a game.

The challenge system presented in this chapter is part of the basic rules for the **Mind's Eye Theatre** system. Although alterations would need to be made to recreate the truly exotic elements of **Laws of the East** with other games in the



Storyteller series, players can have vampires interact with hengeyokai, *hsien*, wraiths, Sunset Folk and other types of characters with just a little extra effort. (See the setting chapter for more details.) This system of challenges is also included in *Laws of the Night*, *Oblivion* and *The Shining Host*.

## USING TRAITS

Before you can begin to learn how challenges work, you must first understand what defines a character's capabilities. A player creates a character by choosing a number of adjectives that describe and define that person as an individual. These adjectives are called Traits, and they are described fully in Chapter Two. These Traits are used to declare challenges against other characters or against static forces represented by a Narrator.

### INITIAL BID

A challenge begins with a player "bidding" one of her Traits against her opponent. At the same time, she must declare what the conditions of the challenge are — like firing a gun, attacking with a knife or using *Obligation*. The defender must then decide how she will respond. She can either relent immediately or bid one of her own Traits in response.

When players bid Traits against one another, they may use only Traits that could sensibly apply to that situation. Essentially, this restriction means that a player can use only those Traits from the same category as her opponent's Traits. Most challenges are categorized as Physical, Social or Mental, and all Traits used in a challenge must be from the same category. Experienced players may offer each other more creative leeway, but only by mutual agreement.

If the defender relents, she loses the challenge automatically. For example, if she were being attacked, she would suffer a wound. If she matches the challenger's bid, the two immediately go to a test. Those Traits bid are put at risk, as the loser of the test not only loses the challenge, but the Trait she bid as well for the rest of the evening.

### TESTING

Once both parties involved in a challenge have bid a Trait, they engage in a test immediately. The test itself is not what you may think — the outcome is random, but no cards or dice are used. The two players face off against one another by playing Rock-Paper-Scissors.

If you lose the test, you lose the Trait you bid for the duration of the session (usually the rest of the evening). Consider this loss to be reflective of the outcome of the challenge. The character suffered a wound, her fingers slipped at a crucial moment, her opponent called her bluff or she just couldn't remember something. Mistakes can make people reluctant to put their full trust back into something that made them slip; therefore, you're not at full strength when you bid again.

The test works like the moment in poker when the cards are turned over and the winner is declared. The test produces one of two possible outcomes — either one player is the victor, or the result is a tie.

In the case of a tie, the players must then reveal the number of Traits that they currently have available in the category (Physical, Social or Mental). The player with the least number of Traits loses the test and the challenge. Note that the number of Traits you've lost in previous challenges, or lost for any other reason, reduces the maximum number of Traits you can bid in ties. You may lie about the number of Traits you possess, but only by declaring fewer Traits than you actually



have. You may never say that you have more Traits than you actually do. Doing so allows you to keep the actual number of Traits you possess a secret, although doing so may be risky. The challenger is always the first to declare his number of Traits. If both players declare the same number of Traits, then the challenge is a draw, and both players lose the Traits they bid.

**Example of Play:** Quon and Po Sin are locked in combat over a valuable jade artifact. Quon begins with an aggressive Trait for his initial bid ("Time for a Quick punch in the jaw, akuma!"), and the Infernal responds in kind ("I give you a Ferocious roundhouse to the head"). The two test; both shoot Paper — a tie. Now they have to declare their total number of Traits to resolve the tie. Quon believes he'll need everything he's got against the akuma, so he declares all eight Traits he has. Po Sin has 10 Traits, however, so he wins the challenge. Quon loses the Trait he bid, suffers a health level of damage and faces a more uphill battle against the dreaded demon-worshipper.

### ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS

What we mean by Rock-Paper-Scissors is the following: You and another person face off, and, on the count of three, you show one of three hand gestures. "Rock" is a basic fist. "Paper" is just a flat hand. You represent "Scissors" by sticking out two fingers. You then compare the two gestures to determine the winner. Rock crushes Scissors. Scissors cut Paper. Paper covers Rock. Identical signs indicate a tie. Certain advanced powers allow some characters to use gestures other than Rock, Paper and Scissors. Before players can use the gestures in a test, however, they must explain what they are and how they are used.



ROCK



PAPER



SCISSORS

### ADJUDICATION

If you have a question or argument about the rules or the conditions of a challenge, you need to find a Narrator to make a judgment. Try to remain in character while you look for a Narrator. Any interruption in the progress of the story should be avoided if at all possible, so work problems out with other players if you can. If you do not know the correct application of a certain rule, it's usually better to wing it rather than interrupt the flow of the game.

It should be noted that a challenger who fails on a Social or Mental Challenge must wait at least five real-time minutes (and not spend them arguing over the results of the previous challenge) before repeating the failed challenge. You can't protest a ruling with a Narrator for 4:58, then drop your argument and say, "Oh look, time's up." This rule includes supernatural powers that use Mental or Social Challenges unless they specify otherwise. A character cannot continue attempting one Soul Bridge after another until he finally succeeds. This stricture does not include trials that are failed but then redeemed through retests or overbids.



## COMPLICATIONS

There are a number of ways in which a challenge can be made more complicated. The basic rules are enough to resolve most disputes, but the following rules add a few bells and whistles.

### NEGATIVE TRAITS

Many characters have Negative Traits, Traits that can be used against a character by his opponent. During the initial bid of any challenge, after you have each bid one Trait, you can call out a Negative Trait that you believe your opponent possesses. If he does indeed possess the Negative Trait, your opponent is forced to bid an additional Trait, although you must still risk your one Trait as usual. If he does not possess that Negative Trait, you must risk an additional Trait. You may call out as many Negative Traits as you wish during the initial bid phase of a challenge, as long as you can pay the price for being wrong.

If your opponent does not have additional Traits to bid, then your Trait is not at risk during the challenge. Additionally if you guess more than one Negative Trait that your opponent cannot match, you gain that many additional Traits in the case of a tie or an overbid (see below). The same works in reverse, favoring your opponent if you do not have additional Traits remaining to match incorrect Negative Trait guesses. It is very cheap to list off which Negative Traits a player might possess, if you have no valid reason to suspect as much in-game.

*Example of Play:* Lian is trying to manipulate Gan, a vain Devil-Tiger, into revealing the location of a dragon nest he and his wu have discovered. She begins with her initial bid ("I'm very Seductive when I want to get something."), but Gan isn't buying it ("I'm too Dignified to seriously consider such advances."). Desperate, Lian then suggests that Gan possesses the Negative Trait Condescending ("You're so Condescending, you probably wouldn't believe I could manipulate you that way."). She's in luck—Gan does in fact possess that Negative Trait, and he must bid an additional Trait if he wishes to continue trying to avoid her charms. If Gan had not possessed that Negative Trait, Lian would have had to bid an additional Trait to have continued the challenge, having underestimated her opponent. However, joss is on her side, and the Devil-Tiger must consider whether the information is worth risking the additional Traits.

It can be risky to bid Negative Traits, but if you're sure about what you're doing, you can raise the stakes for your opponent, possibly even to the point where she relents rather than risking additional Traits.

### OVERBIDDING

Overbidding is the system by which powerful characters may prevail in a challenge, even if they lose the initial test. An ancestor with 16 Physical Traits should be able to crush a Running Monkey who has only three. This system is designed to make that possible.

Once a test has been made, the loser has the option of calling for an "overbid." In order to call an overbid, you must risk a new Trait, since the original one has already been lost. At this point, the two players must reveal the number of applicable Traits they possess in the appropriate category, starting with the player who called for the overbid. If you have double the number of Traits as your opponent in that category, you may attempt another test. As with a tie, you may state a number of Traits less than the actual number you have and keep your true power secret. Overbidding can be dangerous unless you are confident in your estimation of your opponent's abilities.



**Example of Play:** Shaiming, ancestor of the Hundred Swirling Flowers Court, is attempting to intimidate Cheung, a young Thrashing Dragon, into giving up the names of his fellow tong members. The ancestor begins politely ("Young one, I am so Commanding that you have little hope of resisting me."), but the impudent kyonshi actually dares to resist ("You don't scare me, old man; I'm too Intimidating for that to work."). They test and Cheung wins, but there is no way Shaiming will allow such an insult to go unanswered. Confident that he has more social aptitude than the little barbarian, Shaiming bids an additional Trait ("Now you'll see what Intimidating really means!") and calls for an overbid. Cheung, being the defender, does not need to risk an additional trait. Shaiming announces all 16 of his Social Traits, while Cheung admits that he has only seven, and so the overbid proceeds. They test again, and Shaiming wins. Cheung loses the Intimidating Trait he bid, and Shaiming still loses his initial Commanding Trait, but he has won the final challenge and so the Thrashing Dragon must divulge the information he was seeking (not to mention brace for some serious punishment).

### STATIC CHALLENGES

Sometimes you may have to undergo a challenge against a Narrator rather than against another player. For example, a hacker may use a Static Mental Challenge with the Computer Ability to break into another computer system. In such circumstances, you bid a Trait that would be appropriate and perform a test against the Narrator. Before the test, the Narrator decides on the difficulty — i.e., the number of Traits you compare against in the event of a tie — of the task that you are attempting. The test proceeds exactly as it would if you were testing against another character. Of course, you may attempt to overbid in a Static Challenge, but beware, because the Narrator can overbid as well. The number of Traits attached to the challenge should represent the difficulty and danger inherent in the challenge.

Sometimes Narrators may leave notes on objects, such as books, doors or even magical items. These notes indicate the type of challenges that must be won for something to occur (such as deciphering a tome or picking a lock).

### SIMPLE TESTS

Simple Tests are used to determine if you can do something successfully when there is no real opposition. Simple Tests are often used when using Disciplines. Most Simple Tests do not require you to risk or bid Traits, though some may.

When a Simple Test is called, you play Rock-Paper-Scissors against a Narrator. In most cases, the player succeeds on a win or a tie, although it may be necessary in some cases for the player to win in order to receive any benefit from the challenge.

### RETESTS

Certain Traits allow a character to retest. A retest allows a character to ignore the results of the first test and test again for a new result. Retests are most commonly gained through Abilities, but other Traits may also provide them. Generally, expending one level of an appropriate Ability allows for one retest.

Multiple retests are possible on a single challenge, but each retest must come from a different source. A character may retest a challenge once using a level of Martial Arts and then retest again through the Merit: Lucky, but he may not gain multiple retests with the Martial Arts Ability on the same challenge.

Retests may be canceled ("blocked") by a character who is capable of matching the conditions of the retest. Thus, if a player uses Firearms to retest when



firing a gun, the opponent may expend a level of Dodge to block the retest and force the attacker to accept the results of the original test.

**Example of Play:** Wei-Quo, a crazed triad hitman, is attacking Xiang, a noble Resplendent Crane. First the hitman draws his hand-cannon and fires ("I am too Alert with my weapons to let you get away, Xiang!") while Xiang attempts to even the odds somewhat ("I am Quick enough to knock your pistol away with my staff"). They perform a test, and Xiang loses. However, Xiang is an excellent staff fighter ("All my years of Melee training won't fail me now!"), and he calls for a retest. The two test again, and Xiang wins. Wei-Quo is now disarmed, although no other damage is inflicted.

Wei-Quo tries to recover by kicking Xiang in the stomach ("I deliver a Ferocious roundhouse kick"). Xiang responds by striking with his staff ("I'm Tenacious enough to knock your legs out from under you with my staff."), and the two perform another test. Wei-Quo loses and calls for a retest with Martial Arts immediately ("My Martial Arts skill is formidable!"). Xiang blocks the retest with Melee ("I use my Melee knowledge to block your strike and smash your knees."), and no retest is performed. Wei-Quo is now injured and at the mercy of Xiang's whirling staff.

## RELENTING

A player may choose to acquiesce and admit defeat at any time before the actual test is performed. Characters who relent lose the challenge automatically, but they do not lose any Traits, even if they bid one before relenting. They also help the game flow along more smoothly than extended Rock-Paper-Scissors matches do.

## BONUS TRAITS

Certain weapons and special powers grant a character bonus Traits during a challenge. You may add these extra Traits toward a character's total when determining a tie involving that weapon or special Ability.

## ORDER OF CHALLENGES

Since multiple challenges will inevitably occur simultaneously during any given fight, the Narrator occasionally needs some means of determining who acts first and who acts last. Each person involved in a given turn checks the current number of Traits appropriate to the action he wishes to attempt. A character punching someone would use Physical Traits to determine speed, while a character casting a spell would probably use Mental Traits. If an action does not require any sort of Trait challenge, it occurs last in the turn. As with overbidding, you may declare fewer Traits than you possess if you wish. Characters with equal numbers of Traits are assumed to go "simultaneously," though the Narrator may just choose one to act first for resolution purposes.

Sometimes, a character with a high number of Traits will attack a character with fewer Traits, who will decide to strike back. In this case, the character with fewer Traits resolves his action in the same test as the faster character. In doing so, however, he loses the ability to take any aggressive action for the turn, using up his one action with the counterattack.

Some people also question exactly how a player can respond when challenged. Typically, if someone initiates a Physical Challenge, the defender can only respond with Physical Traits, unless he possesses a Discipline or some other Ability that is considered to be always active. He cannot respond with the activation of a Discipline or another Ability until after the first challenge has been completed. Social and Mental Challenges work the same way.



These rules can occasionally cause as much confusion as they're trying to solve, and the Narrator may choose to apply this standard only when there is a debate or other critical need to establish who's going first or how a response should be handled.

**Example of Play:** Wei-Quo and Xiang are still locked in combat, and Wei-Quo decides that his only chance is to try to grab Xiang's mortal wife as a hostage. Unfortunately for Wei-Quo, Xiang's Kin-jin ally Lou takes this moment to run into the room and tackle the killer before he can make his move. Wei-Quo has eight Physical Traits left, and Lou has only four Traits. Lou pounces in front of Wei-Quo ("I'm Energetic enough to catch you!"), and Wei-Quo elects to counter by raking the barbarian across the face ("Suffer a Brutal strike for your insolence, gweilo!"). They perform a test, and Lou loses. He suffers a wound from the attack and sprawls backward. However, Wei-Quo cannot grab Xiang's wife — he's used up his action this turn by striking Lou. Meanwhile, Xiang declares that for his action he'll move in close with the hitman to finish the battle.

## THE MOB SCENE

It's a fact of life that a large group of characters will decide to mix it up sooner or later. Group challenges can seem intimidating even to experienced Narrators and Storytellers. These rules are meant to streamline the process and make such situations easier to resolve, rather than devolving into endless matches of Rock-Paper-Scissors.

First of all, find who is challenging whom. The easiest way is to count to three and have everyone point to the person they wish to target in that turn. If no one is being challenged by more than one person, then challenges are carried out normally.

If one character is challenged by several targets, or he tries to challenge multiple opponents at once, resolve it in the following manner. First deal with groups in the order of largest to smallest, just for ease of play. Each attacker must bid an appropriate Trait as normal for the challenge required. Logistics puts a limit of up to five characters attacking another character at once.

Next, the defender character must bid enough Traits to counter every opponent in the group. If he does not have enough Traits, he must relent to the rest of his opponents (although he may choose which ones he relents to). Resolve such relented challenges first. It is very possible the defender may fall before the rest of the group can act!

Finally, the defender and any remaining attackers engage in one simultaneous test. The defender then compares his sign to each of the attacker's signs, applying the appropriate results. Thus, if the defending character throws Scissors and his attackers throw Rock, Scissors, Paper and Paper, the defender is considered to have lost to the first challenger, tied the second (resolved like any other tie) and beaten the last two. The defenders and attackers lose Traits bid in any given loss. If the defender in the previous example had bid one Trait against every attacker, he would have lost one Trait to the first attacker, and an additional Trait if he had lost the tie as well.

Once the tests have been made, they are resolved in the standard order of actions and initiative. It is possible for a defender to lose Traits to the first attackers and then lose a tie to an attacker later in the same mob challenge. That's okay — the first attackers "softened up" the defender. However, unless the defender has a special power that allows him to take multiple actions, he may only attempt to



injure one of his attackers, and it must be one who lost a challenge. If none of the attackers lose, the defender simply suffers the results of their actions.

When the defender in a mob challenge uses Abilities or other powers to gain retests, each attacker's challenge is treated as a separate test. Thus, a defender would need five *Melee* Traits in order to retest against five attackers in a melee combat.

## TIME

Time in **Mind's Eye Theatre** works as it does in real life. It moves forward inexorably, relentlessly. For the most part, everything is played out in real time, and players are expected to stay in character unless they have a rules question.

It is assumed that a player is always "in character" during the course of a story. A player should never drop character when interacting with other players. Doing so ruins the atmosphere for everyone involved. Challenges may be talked through, but a player is always considered to be active in the game. If a player needs to take a break, he should inform a Narrator. That player should not interact with any of the other players while out of character.

The only other exception to the "in-character rule" is when a Narrator calls for a "timeout." This call may be necessary to resolve a dispute or to change the scene if the story calls for it. When "Timeout!" or "Hold!" is called, all players within hearing distance must stop whatever they are doing until the Narrator calls out, "Resume" or "Lay on!" Timeouts should be kept to a minimum, since they interrupt the flow of the story.

## CHRONICLES, STORIES, SESSIONS AND SCENES

**Mind's Eye Theatre** time breaks down into five major allotments: chronicles, stories, sessions, scenes and turns. A chronicle is defined as a series of smaller stories that are all connected somehow, and which may take months or even years to complete. Each complete plot line within the chronicle is called a story. A session encompasses one night of play, although Storytellers may define a session as one night of game time if the action stops *in media res* at the end of the previous game. (Since many characters regain spent Traits between sessions, this distinction can be important.) Finally, a scene encompasses the amount of time it takes to resolve the action in one location. Once the characters shift locations, the scene has ended. If a session will be taking place entirely at one location, a scene can then be defined as roughly one hour.

## TURNS

When players start throwing challenges around or attempting complex actions, the time is right to start using turns. Turns are considered to last about four seconds, although this measure may vary from challenge to challenge at the Storyteller's discretion. In any given turn, a character may take one action. Some actions may take multiple turns to complete, such as hacking a sophisticated computer system. Other actions, like speaking a short sentence, do not use up a character's turn at all. Once everyone involved in a turn has taken an action, the turn ends and another turn begins.

In some instances, a character may be interrupted before he can take his action, or be forced to respond to events developing around him. In such instances, a character may always defend himself, although doing so uses up his available action for the turn.

If a power affects a character for 15 seconds, it is assumed to be in effect for four turns when turn-based time is in effect. In normal roleplaying, such powers work for their allotted amount of time.



## DOWNTIME

Many aspects of a character's unlif e are critical to her continued existence, yet they do not make for dramatic roleplaying, or they are too intricate to take time during sessions to perform. Storytellers are encouraged to use "downtime" between sessions to allow characters to maintain their holdings, learn Disciplines and see to other facets of their existence. Other actions and interactions may take place during this time, with Storyteller supervision. As long as players don't abuse downtime privileges, the time between sessions can be a rewarding roleplaying experience in itself.

## HEALTH

*The heavens endure; the earth is very old. Why?*

*Because they do not exist for themselves,  
they therefore have long life.*

— Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

A character in a **Laws of the East** game has different health levels that represent the amount of injury he can endure. These levels include: Healthy, Healthy, Bruised, Bruised, Wounded, Wounded, Incapacitated, Torpor and/or Final Death. If a Healthy character loses two health levels from a combat challenge, she becomes Bruised. If she loses three more health levels, she becomes Wounded, and so on.

• **Healthy** — When a character is Healthy, he is virtually or completely uninjured. He suffers no penalty aside from possibly being cosmetically scuffed up a bit.

• **Bruised** — A Bruised character is more seriously roughed up, and his injuries have started to impair his viability a bit. He is considered one Trait down on all tied challenges.

• **Wounded** — When a character is Wounded, he is seriously injured in one or more locations. To reflect this injury, he must risk an additional Trait to attempt a challenge, and his opponent wins all ties, regardless of who has more Traits. If the injured character has a power that normally allows him to win all ties, ties are resolved through comparing Traits instead. Note: A character may always attempt to overbid.

• **Incapacitated** — When a character is Incapacitated, he is completely out of play for at least 10 minutes (typically knocked out the entire time). Even if awake, the character is still effectively immobile, although he may whisper pained sentences. He may not enter into challenges until he has healed at least one health level. He is at the mercy of other characters, and he may do nothing more than heal himself. Kuei-jin suffer Final Death if they suffer aggravated wounds at this point.

• **Torpor** — Kuei-jin who are injured beyond Incapacitated by lethal damage, but who retain some Chi in their bodies, fall into a limbo state they call as the Little Death, more familiarly known as torpor.

• **Final Death** — Kuei-jin injured beyond Incapacitated by aggravated damage, or by lethal damage if they have no Chi in their bodies, do not enter torpor. They are destroyed permanently instead, their karmic debt to remain eternally unpaid and their souls hurtled screaming into the searing razor winds of Yomi forever.

**Example of Play:** Zhixin is captured by the forces of a nasty akuma. During the battle, he was kicked once for a level of bashing damage, putting him at his second Healthy level. Another one of his attacks slashed him for two levels of lethal damage, dropping him to his second Bruised level. The final insult came from the barrel of one of the goon's



pistols, causing another two health levels of damage and reducing Zhixin to his first Wounded level. Upon arriving at the akuma's lair, Zhixin is tied and beaten by some of the guards inflicting two health levels of bashing damage and reducing him to Incapacitated. Zhixin slumps in his chair, helpless, and he is now at the mercy of his torturers. If he takes any more lethal damage, he will enter torpor (provided he has some Chi left in him). If he suffers aggravated damage, however, or more lethal damage if he doesn't have any Chi in his system, he will succumb to Final Death instead. (Further bashing damage will merely render him unconscious again.)

### THE LITTLE DEATH

Kuei-jin who receive injuries past Incapacitated from lethal damage but who retain some measure of Chi in their bodies cling tenuously to their undead shells, poised at the brink of destruction but still able to recover. At this level of damage, the soul leaves the body, and it may do nothing but hover near it in the spirit worlds and try to restore the corpse. Restoring one (and only one) health level to the corpse costs one Chi Trait and takes a number of real-time hours equal to the Kuei-jin's permanent Yin rating. After that time has passed, the vampire — now at the Wounded health level — rises once more and continues her existence. A test for shadow soul is also required at this time to determine whether the Hun or P'o is in control after the character's return. During the time, the spirit is parted from the body, it may be seen and affected by any characters using the appropriate powers, though the soul itself can use none of its own Disciplines until it returns to its body once more. Once the vampire has risen again, she may begin healing herself and using her other Disciplines normally.

The time required to escape torpor can be reduced at the Storyteller's discretion, but it should never be reduced below at least one hour. This edge is the nearest one to final destruction the Kuei-jin is standing on, after all, and if torpor is to remain a threat with teeth, it cannot seem like just a "time out" for the soul. Another option would be to allow hurried healing without argument, but give Negative Traits such as *Lame*, *Repugnant* or *Decrepit* to characters who try to rush the restoration. In her hurry to return, the character corrects her body imperfectly, and the player must buy off these Traits normally. In the end, what times work best for game balance are what should be upheld, but never forget that torpor is a serious moment in the character's existence, not just some exaggerated "vampire coma."

### HEALING

Vampires are dead and unable heal wounds naturally. Only by utilizing their Chi can they repair damage to themselves. One Chi Trait heals one health level of lethal damage, or two health levels of bashing damage. This process can be performed at the same time other actions are performed, even alongside Discipline use, provided the character can spend the necessary amount of Chi per turn.

### BASHING / LETHAL DAMAGE

Some types of damage are more dangerous than others: A punch to the jaw is less likely to kill than a knife wound. Bashing damage is defined as any injury that is painful but fades relatively quickly, such as kicks, punches or tackles. Lethal damage (from bullets, swords, knives, etc.) is intended to kill, and it takes mortals a long time to heal. The Narrator is the final arbiter of what counts as bashing or lethal damage. Characters put below Incapacitated by bashing damage are rendered unconscious for one scene/ hour (although the Narrator may rule that they are put in torpor or killed if the beating is fierce enough). Mortal creatures pushed



past Incapacitated by lethal damage simply die, while vampires with Chi in their bodies enter torpor. Those without Chi in their bodies are simply destroyed.

Because their corporeal bodies simply don't bruise and break like mortals' bodies do, Cathayans halve all bashing damage received, round down (minimum one level of damage inflicted).

### **AGGRAVATED WOUNDS**

Wounds that are beyond the normal bounds of even the Kuei-jin's unnatural healing powers are called aggravated wounds. Such wounds are usually caused by injury from fire, sunlight or the teeth and claws of a supernatural creature (such as hengeyokai or certain Kuei-jin with the *Demon Shintai* Discipline). A Narrator can also deem any other injury to be aggravated, depending on the circumstances. Three Chi Traits, a Willpower Trait and a night of rest are required to heal one level of aggravated damage.

### **SUNLIGHT**

Sunlight is the one of the great banes of all undead. However, unlike Western vampires, Kuei-jin rot when exposed to sunlight rather than burn. Fortunately, the Yang energies in their bodies allow them to withstand the sun a bit better than other vampires, but the ultimate price is still high indeed. A Kuei-jin may withstand direct sunlight for one minute per permanent Yang Trait he possesses, unless he suffers from Yang imbalance (see p. 208). In no event can any vampire withstand direct sunlight for more than nine minutes. This time limit is cumulative, and it resets every session/ 24 hours. After this "grace period" passes, the Kuei-jin loses one Yin Trait and takes one aggravated level of damage each turn as his body begins to rot away. During the time he is exposed to the sun, the vampire cannot spend Yin Chi at all. If the Kuei-jin is reduced below Incapacitated by this damage, he is destroyed permanently, rotted away by the sun's rays. Even if the damage is not fatal, Yin-imbalanced vampires cannot heal the damage to their looks until balance has been restored, and the Storyteller may choose to take away any Appearance-related Social Traits these characters possess (or even assign Negative Traits such as *Repugnant*) until the damage has been healed.

Kuei-jin may spend Yang Traits to resist the sun's energy. Each Yang Trait allows the vampire to resist the effects of sunlight for one additional turn. Once his Yang supply is gone, however, the rotting begins anew....

### **FIRE**

Folklore worldwide agrees on one fact — the undead fear and loathe fire, and its slightest touch causes them great agony. Kuei-jin are no exception to this rule, and most vampires are immensely more uncomfortable around open flame than mortals are, since it is one of the few things that can destroy them permanently. Perversely, some Kuei-jin (especially those of the south direction) are intensely attracted by the self-destructive lure of the flames. Many elders credit such dangerous fascination as being the reason behind the initial development of the *Ghost-Flame Shintai*. In game terms, wounds inflicted by fire do aggravated damage to Kuei-jin, and sufficiently large sources of flame may even provoke a challenge to resist wave soul.

### **LACK OF CHI**

Unlike the Westerners, who are basically functional (if hunger-crazed and exceedingly irritable) when they are entirely drained of blood, Kuei-jin require a constant supply of Chi to sustain their bodies, lest they begin to crumble and fall



apart. Each time a Kuei-jin without any Chi must expend Chi (to activate a Discipline or even merely animate herself for the night), she suffers a health level of lethal damage instead. A Kuei-jin who loses all her health levels in this fashion dies in a heap of dust and bones, her dual souls spiraling into the dark pits of Yomi forever.

## COMBAT

*"Old kung-fu movies, very bad. From the beginning, fighting. Fight fight fight. After fighting, bad guy turn around, look at me. 'Why you look at me? You look at me—I don't like it!' Fighting—another ten minutes. I turn around. 'You look at me again.' Fighting—another twenty minutes. The whole movie—just fighting. Makes the audience very tired." [sic]*

— Jackie Chan, *A&E Biography*

Combat is the usual intent behind Physical Challenges. Essentially, combat involves two characters in physical conflict. The players agree what the outcome of the challenge will be, each player bids an appropriate Trait and performs a test to determine the victor. The following section allows for variations on those basic rules, such as situations using surprise or weapons.

The agreed outcome of a Physical Challenge is often the loser being injured. This result is not the only possible one, though. The two parties can agree to nearly anything, be it tripping an opponent or throwing him through a plate-glass window. The results of a combat challenge may also be different for both participants. For example, if a Thrashing Dragon in fire soul is trying to tear apart a fleeing mortal, the mortal might try to get away from his opponent instead of hurting her.

## SURPRISE

If a player does not respond within three seconds of the declaration of a Physical Challenge, the character is considered to have been surprised. He is not fully prepared for what's coming. Sometimes a player is busy with another activity or is playing a character who just isn't prepared for the attack. Any player who sneaks around whispering challenges to get the element of surprise is cheating, plain and simple.

Surprise simply means that the outcome of the first challenge in a fight can harm only the surprised defender, not the challenger. For instance, if a player did not respond in time to an attack, but still won the challenge, the challenger would not be injured. Furthermore, if the challenger loses the test, she may call for a second challenge by risking another Trait. After this second challenge, regular challenge rules resume. Overbidding is permitted for both challenger and challenged in surprise situations.

## MOVEMENT IN COMBAT

### Three-Step Rule

Anyone in or just entering combat is subject to the "three-step rule." You may take up to three steps during any combat action and still attack. Moving one step is considered walking cautiously, two steps is moving directly (down one Trait in Physical Challenges), and three steps is running (also down a Trait in Physical Challenges). A Discipline that allows for an additional action would allow you to take three additional steps, and so on.



## Fair Escape

Fair Escape is a simple rule that allows characters to escape from potentially dangerous situations without players actually bounding over furniture or diving out of windows. This rule also allows players to avoid combat without going through cumbersome challenges to see if they can "get away."

When you use this rule, you can call "Fair Escape!" any time you see another player approaching with whom you do not wish to interact. Once you call "Fair Escape," you may leave the area without being pursued. There are several guidelines that must be followed when using this rule, however:

- You may not use the Fair Escape rule if the person approaching is nearby (within conversational distance). In such cases, you must initiate a challenge in order to flee. Use common sense in places where there is a great deal of noise and conversational distance is reduced to a minimum (e.g., a crowded nightclub).
- Situations which involve an ambush (all exits blocked or the target is surrounded) or ranged weapons can sometimes negate the use of Fair Escape. Again, use common sense.
- A character using *Shrouded Moon* or similar powers may employ a Fair Escape at any time before a challenge has been initiated, unless someone with some form of heightened senses counters him.
- Characters with supernatural speed such as the *Black Wind* Discipline may gain a Fair Escape by activating their speed before a challenge is initiated. In the case of two characters using supernatural speed, whoever uses the highest level of speed wins (all ties go to the fleeing party). Thus, a character using *Basic Celerity* cannot Fair Escape from a foe using *Advanced Black Wind* for speed.

These rules are meant to hasten play, not complicate it. Always try to employ common sense when using Fair Escape. (As a rule of thumb, if it takes several minutes to explain why a Fair Escape would be justified, it probably isn't.)

## WEAPONS

For obvious reasons, no real weapons are ever allowed in *Mind's Eye Theatre* games. Even nonfunctional props are forbidden if they can be mistaken for weapons. This system does not use prop weapons of any kind, nor are players required (or allowed) to pretend to strike one another. Instead, characters should use weapon cards, which display the Traits and pertinent details of a particular weapon.

A weapon gives its wielder extra Traits for combat or other appropriate challenges. Sometimes this advantage is offset by a disadvantage in terms of a Negative Trait. Each weapon has one to six extra Traits that may be used in any challenge in which the weapon is employed. These Traits *cannot* be used as an initial bid. Instead, they add to the user's total when she is comparing Traits. In addition, some weapons have special abilities that may be used, such as causing extra levels of damage or affecting more than one target at a time.

Statistics for weapons are written on cards and carried along with your character card. Weapon cards specify the capacities of each weapon and allow other players to see that you actually possess a weapon. When you have a weapon card in your hand, you are considered to be holding the weapon.

Some weapons have Negative Traits that can be used by the wielder's opponent in precisely the same way as regular Negative Traits. The weapon's Negative Traits can be used only against the wielder of that weapon. Negative Traits for a weapon must be appropriate to the situation. For instance, if you are



firing a pistol and your opponent wants to use the gun's Negative Trait *Loud* against you, that Negative Trait could be ignored if you have a silencer on the gun.

#### **Concealability**

Each weapon has a concealability rating. If the weapon is not concealable, or if you do not have the proper amount of clothing or cover to conceal it, you must have that card on display at all times. You cannot, for example, pull a katana out of your pocket. Instead, you must carry that card in hand at all times or, optionally, you could pin the card to your shirt, indicating that the sword is slung over your shoulder.

#### **Availability**

Serious firearms and archaic melee weapons can take some time to locate. Firearms also require permits to obtain, which involves undergoing background checks or waiting-periods in some areas. A character can turn to more "colorful" channels in order to procure equipment, but dealing with the black market often involves shady dealings and vastly inflated prices. Weapons that have Influence values listed under Availability indicate the level and type of Influence required in order to procure the weapon through illicit channels. Finally, of course, there's cost. A character must have some level of the *Finance* Ability or money-raising Influence to procure exotic melee weapons and nearly all firearms.

Bear in mind that many Asian nations have very strong weapons laws, especially regarding gun-control, with accordingly stiff sentences for those caught using illegal weapons. Most police don't hesitate to order in heavy firepower to take out characters with serious weaponry, and even the most warlike undead are no match for battalions of ill-tempered riot police. Cantonese cinema notwithstanding, gun violence is far less common in most parts of Asia than in many Western territories, and characters who consistently blaze away at their opponents (especially with shotguns or automatic weapons) will face extremely zealous persecution. Likewise, characters who expect to carry their katana or nodachi about with them on the street are in for a rude surprise from the local authorities, court sanction or not.

In short, once a character has a weapon, he can't necessarily keep it forever. Too often, characters run about firing shotguns and large automatic weapons without facing the massive police manhunts that such battles invariably provoke. Take care that characters with powerful weapons understand the equally powerful repercussions that come from their use. These consequences not only preserve game balance, but they enforce a sense of realism as well, keeping the game from turning into *Hard Boiled* with fangs.

### **SPECIAL WEAPON CAPABILITIES**

Some weapons have special abilities, allowing an attacker to inflict extra damage, ignore certain types of protection or strike multiple opponents. (Such powers are noted under the weapon descriptions.)

#### **Armor-Piercing**

Special rounds, generally Teflon-coated, are able to pierce armor with ease. Although they do not inflict extra damage, armor-piercing rounds ignore any defenses from armor. Such rounds are typically tricky to acquire, though, and legal inquiries often follow their use.

#### **Destroy Shield**

Although rare in this day and age, certain hunters and anachronistic elders still use shields. A weapon capable of destroying a shield penetrates it automatically and renders it useless after a certain number of blows, no matter what the size or strength of the shield may be.



### Fully Automatic

A firearm with this ability is capable of emptying dozens of rounds into a single target at close range. This attack inflicts an extra health level of damage automatically due to sheer volume of fire. However, the character must spend one action reloading the weapon after emptying the clip from fully automatic fire, before it may be fired again.

### High-Caliber

Firearms of particularly high caliber can cause crippling wounds with only a few shots. When a high-caliber weapon hits a target, the attacker should make a Simple Test immediately. A win indicates that the target suffers an additional health level of damage from the shot.

### Incendiary

Burning weapons cause aggravated wounds to just about anything. Some, like flame-throwers or Molotov cocktails, burn the target with streams or explosions of fire, while others such as incendiary rounds ("hot loads") burn the target with superheated ammunition. See the damage section for the effects of fire.

### Mass-Trauma

Certain weapons are so powerful they inflict massive damage on a target, literally tearing away portions of flesh. Such weapons score an extra health level of damage when used appropriately.

### Speed

Fast weapons can be used to "pre-empt" an opponent's attack, allowing the attacker with the speedier weapon to strike and resolve his challenge first. A character must have the Melee Ability to use this special ability, and he must be attacking or otherwise actively using (parrying, disarming) the weapon in order to gain this benefit. Fast weapons only gain a preemptive strike against opponents in hand-to-hand or melee combat.

Since many attacks are handled simultaneously for ease of play (both players testing at once and the winner scoring a hit), this ability is not always very useful. However, if the Storyteller opts to allow each attacker to test individually (attacking striking defender, then defender counter-striking), this ability puts characters with fast weapons on the offensive.

### Spray

The weapon can strike several targets at once, as noted under the weapon's specific parameters. The shooter makes one test against all the targets simultaneously. Each target who fails the test suffers the weapon's damage, while each target who succeeds avoids the weapon's damage. The shooter risks enough Traits to test against each member of the group, and he loses Traits only if any of the defenders win the test.

### Staking

Staking weapons paralyze vampires when a successful blow penetrates one's heart. The attacker must win or tie two successive Simple Tests in order to stake the vampire successfully.

## BIDDING WEAPON TRAITS

During a normal hand-to-hand fight, characters bid Physical Traits against their opponents' Physical Traits. However, if a character is using firearms, he may use Mental Traits instead. If his opponent is also using a firearm, she bids Mental Traits as well. If the opponent is not using a firearm and is merely trying to dodge,



then the attacker uses Mental Traits to attack, while the defender uses her Physical Traits to dodge. This instance is one of the few in which Traits associated with different Attributes may be used against one another.

## WEAPON EXAMPLES

**Knife/Dagger** — These easily concealed weapons are very common, lightning fast in the hands of a skilled user, and they can also be used as ranged weapons if a character uses the *Athletics* Ability properly. Tanto, sai and similar short weapons are also included in this category. (Their appearance may differ, but the essential function is the same.)

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Short*

Concealability: *Pocket*

Damage: One health level

Availability: Any

Special Ability: *Speed*: In close combat against any weapon that has the Negative Traits: *Clumsy*, *Heavy* or *Slow*, the knife-fighter gains the option to pre-empt the opponent's attacks and strike first in any turn, as long as he has the *Melee* Ability.

**Shuriken** — These small thrown weapons—the “throwing stars” of ninja legend—come in an endless variety of shapes, and they are easy to conceal. This category also covers any thrown weapon that does not normally double as a regular melee weapon, such as some throwing knives and even hair needles. A character must possess either *Melee* or *Martial Arts* to throw shuriken. Mere *Athletics* is not enough, though *Athletics* may be used to throw them if the other requirements are met.

Bonus Traits: 1

Negative Traits: *Tiny*

Concealability: *Palm*

Damage: 1 health level

Special Ability: *Spray*: Those with at least one level in both the *Melee* or *Martial Arts* and *Athletics* Ability may attempt to throw multiple shuriken in a single attack, up to as many shuriken as half their permanent levels of *Melee*/*Martial Arts* (round up).

**Broken Bottle** — A good example of a weapon made from scratch.

Bonus Traits: 1

Negative Traits: *Fragile*

Concealability: *Vest* (ouch!)

Damage: 1 health level

Availability: Corner bar, maybe the floor

**Sash** — A weapon unique to the East, a sash may be used as a weapon by any character with appropriate *Martial Arts* training. *Melee* alone is not enough. Skilled practitioners can entangle and blind their foes, and true masters can even whip the sash with sufficient force and precision to slash their foes as if it were metal!

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Delicate*

Concealability: *Pocket*

Damage: 1 health level

Availability: Almost any clothing store, though most Kuei-jin prefer sashes of fairly high quality, if only for aesthetic purposes.



**Club/Ax**—These two common weapon types can be anything from chair legs to hand axes to billy-clubs. One bludgeons while the other chops, but the essential function is the same.

Bonus Traits: Club: 2, Ax: 3

Negative Traits: *Clumsy*

Concealability: Trenchcoat

Damage: Club — One health level; Ax — Two health levels

Availability: Any

Special Ability: Ax: *Destroy Shield*. Axes render shields useless after three blows.

**Nunchaku** — Popularized by Bruce Lee in the West, there are actually thousands of variations on this concept in the East. The manriki-gusari, sa tjat joen and the kawanga are but a few of the more well-known examples. They deliver their damage primarily through crushing force delivered by lightning-fast strikes. Some are bladed, while others are nothing more than a humble length of wood and chain. However, they are considered to have the same basic characteristics for game purposes.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Short*

Concealability: Jacket

Damage: One health level

Availability: Any

Special Ability: *Speed*: In close combat against any weapon that has the Negative Traits: *Clumsy*, *Heavy* or *Slow*, the nunchaku-wielder gains the option to pre-empt the opponent's attacks and strike first in any turn, as long as he has the *Melee Ability*.

**Staff/Spear** — A stout length of metal or wood, staves (often known as jo or bo) were the favorite weapon of monks and wanderers for many years. Spears have a blade of some type attached to one or both ends. Spears such as the naginata and the yari slash or pierce opponents rather than bludgeon them as staves do, but the basic characteristics of both weapons are more or less the same.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: *Clumsy*

Concealability: None

Damage: Staff — 2 health levels; Spear — 3 health levels.

Availability: Most martial arts stores carry suitable staves. Spears typically require a bit more effort to procure, but they are not widely monitored. Staves also attract much less attention than most other melee weapons.

**Stake** — A short length of wood or metal sharpened at one end, these humble weapons have nonetheless been the downfall of many vampires over the centuries.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Short*

Concealability: Jacket

Damage: One health level

Availability: Any

Special Ability: *Staking*: A stake can pierce the heart of a vampire (thus paralyzing the unfortunate Kuei-jin) if the wielder wins or ties two successive Simple Tests after striking. Remember that to be effective the stake being used



must be made of material appropriate to the Kuei-jin in question — a wooden stake for Yin vampires, metal for Yang vampires.

**Shortsword** — Any bladed weapon that falls between the size of a dagger and a katana is covered in this category. The most notable weapon in this group is the wakizashi, a short blade typically worn paired with a katana.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Short*

Concealability: Trenchcoat

Damage: 2 health levels

Availability: Typically must be special-ordered, although cheap versions are available in many military-supply stores (these are of dubious quality at best).

Special Ability: *Speed*: In close combat against any weapon that has the Negative Traits: *Clumsy*, *Heavy* or *Slow*, the wielder gains the option to pre-empt the opponent's attacks and strike first in any turn, as long as he has the *Melee* or *Martial Arts* (weapon style) Ability.

**Longsword** — Any blade of medium length (excluding the katana) falls under this purview, from scimitars to Western broadswords.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: *Heavy*

Concealability: Trenchcoat

Damage: 2 health levels

Availability: Typically must be special-ordered, although cheap versions are available in many military-supply stores (these are of dubious quality at best).

**Katana** — Creations of master swordsmiths, these powerful blades are deadlier than many firearms in close combat, and they are especially favored by elder Kuei-jin both as weapons and status symbols.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: None (Flawed katanas are rejected by their craftsmen.)

Concealability: Trenchcoat

Damage: 3 health levels

Availability: Katanas are almost certainly crafted for the individual wielding them. While mass-produced katanas do exist, these are treated the same as longswords due to their inferior craftsmanship. Hand-crafted katana command extremely high prices and are worth every penny. They never dull, and they win all ties to resist breaking or shattering.

**Greatsword** — These mighty blades require two hands to wield, such as the Japanese nodachi.

Bonus Traits: 5

Negative Traits: *Heavy*, *Clumsy*, *Slow*

Concealability: I think not, *gaijin*.

Damage: 3 health levels

Availability: Expensive but available through the same sources as other swords.



## ARCHAIC RANGED WEAPONS

**Longbow** — These huge, powerful bows make mincemeat of regular armor, and many older Cathayans are trained in the arts of Zen archery. Modern compound bows are smaller and use pulley systems to generate powerful pull. These bows do not have the Negative Trait: *Clumsy*, but they give the user only five Bonus Traits.

Bonus Traits: 6

Negative Traits: *Fragile*, *Clumsy*, *Heavy*

Concealability: No way.

Damage: Two health levels

Availability: Any.

Special Ability: *Armor-Piercing*: Longbows ignore chain armor. Staking: Arrows may stake a vampire if the archer's player wins or ties two Simple Tests after a successful hit. *Destroy Shield*: One shot from a longbow renders a shield useless.

## FIREARMS

**Pistol** — This designation covers nearly any sort of small- and medium-caliber handgun commonly encountered, from zip guns and holdout pieces to 9mms and standard police-issue sidearms.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: Pocket

Damage: Two health levels

Availability: Any, if registered; Police 4, Street 3 or Underworld 2 otherwise.

**Heavy Pistol** — This designation covers the monsters of the handgun range, from the Desert Eagle to a .454 Cassull. These tremendous guns use high-caliber ammunition to punch large holes in their targets.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: Jacket

Damage: Two health levels

Availability: Any, if registered; Police 4, Street 4 or Underworld 3 otherwise.

Special Ability: *High-Caliber*: Heavy Pistols allow a Simple Test on a successful hit. Success indicates the target takes an extra level of damage.

**Rifle** — Favored by many hunters and snipers.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: None.

Damage: Two health levels

Availability: Any, if registered; Police 4, Street 4 or Underworld 3 otherwise.

Special Ability: *High-Caliber*: Rifles may be loaded with high-caliber ammunition. Note that the character must specifically acquire such ammunition to gain this benefit — it is not included automatically when using a rifle.

**Shotgun** — This powerful weapon fires a spray of pellets, making targets easy to hit.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: None

Damage: Two health levels



Availability: Any, if registered. *Police 4, Street 4* or *Underworld 3* otherwise.

Special Ability: *Spray*: A shotgun may affect up to three targets if they are standing immediately next to each other and are further than 20 feet from the person firing the shotgun. This effect can be gained only if the shotgun is loaded with pellets, not slugs. *Mass-Trauma*: A shotgun can cause an extra health level of damage to a single target standing within five feet.

**Submachine Gun** — These weapons are very powerful, and they fire a large number of bullets very quickly, making them the favorite weapons of many gangs, where accuracy isn't as important as hitting a large number of targets at the same time. The law requires these guns be sold as non-automatic weapons, with only single-shot capability, but a use of the *Repair* Ability can convert them to fully automatic fire.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: *Jacket*

Damage: Two health levels

Availability: Any, if registered and non-automatic. *Police 4, Street 4* or *Underworld 3* otherwise.

Special Ability: *Spray*: A submachine gun may affect up to five targets if they're standing immediately next to each other and are further than 10 feet from the person firing the gun. *Fully Automatic*: A submachine gun inflicts an additional health level of damage if the entire clip is emptied into a target standing no more than five feet away.

## ARMOR

Since it stops incoming damage, armor effectively grants a character extra health levels. These health levels are lost before the character himself suffers any damage in combat. Of course, armor does not soak all attacks. A suit of chain-mail does little good for a character whose soul is being stolen through the use of *Chi'u Muh*, for instance.

Different types of armor can absorb different amounts of punishment before losing their effectiveness. It should be noted that armor that has lost all its health levels is not necessarily completely destroyed, but more likely that it has been rendered temporarily useless instead. Of course, some attacks may destroy armor beyond repair. Fixing armor requires the proper tools and a Static Physical Challenge with the *Repair* Ability.

Armor has two different traits for game purposes. Health levels indicate how many levels of damage the armor can absorb before becoming useless and in need of repair. Negative Traits are the drawbacks a wearer gains for donning a particular type of armor.

**Chain-mail** — This category covers most medium levels of armor, including scale and brigandine. True chain-mail is quite rare in the modern age, but many elders and some mortal hunters keep a suit on hand. This category also covers leather armor reinforced with plates (metal or ceramic) or rattan armor.

Health levels: 2

Negative Traits: *Heavy*

Availability: Any. Chain-mail generally must be custom made, and it can cost upward of \$500 or more.



**Plate mail** — Extremely expensive and hard to come by, these ornate suits of interlocking metal plates provide excellent protection but sacrifice a great deal of mobility. This category also covers full samurai armor, which is most likely antique.

Health levels: 3

Negative Traits: *Heavy, Clumsy*

Availability: Any. Plate mail generally must be custom-ordered, and it can cost upward of \$3000 or more.

**Ballistic vest** — This basic level of protection shields the wearer from some dangers, and it doesn't attract the same kind of attention that more complicated forms of armor are bound to bring.

Health levels: 2

Negative Traits: *Heavy*

Availability: *Police 4 or Underworld 3*

**Reinforced (bulletproof) vest** — The favored type of armor for military personnel and law enforcement officers expecting dangerous situations. These vests provide excellent protection, even stopping many types of small-arms fire.

Health levels: 3

Negative Traits: *Heavy, Clumsy*

Availability: *Police 5 or Underworld 4*

## RANGED COMBAT

Many weapons allow a character to stand at a distance from a target and engage him in combat. In such situations, the character must still go over to the target (after shouting "Bang!" or "Twang!") and engage in a challenge.

If a character has surprised her opponent, even if she loses the first test, she has the option of calling for a second test. Once the second challenge is called, play continues as normal with that new challenge. The target is considered surprised for the first attack, and if he has no ranged weapon with which to return fire, he is considered "surprised" for as long as the aggressor can attack him without facing resistance. That is, if he wins on a challenge, he doesn't take damage.

If the target is aware of the attack before it happens, and he has a ranged weapon of his own, he is not considered to be surprised for the first attack. He may shoot back right away, and challenges are resolved as stated.

After the first shot is fired (and the first challenge is resolved), the target may attempt to return fire (assuming he is armed). The loser of a firefight challenge loses a health level.

Characters using the *Athletics* Ability to throw projectiles like knives or axes fall under the same rules for regular ranged combat, including cover. Questions of range should not be a problem, but use common sense if it becomes an issue, and don't forget to make allowances for factors like the *Black Wind Discipline*.

## Cover

Fighting with ranged weapons allows combatants to stand some distance apart; participants can therefore "dive for cover." When resolving each ranged combat challenge, each combatant can present one Trait of cover to add to his total number of Traits. These cover Traits may not be used for bidding, but they do add to a player's total if Traits are compared. This cover can take the form of whatever obstacles are around and within reach (*don't* actually dive for them). A Narrator



might be required to describe what cover is around, unless the combatants can agree on what cover is available.

If cover is extensive, it may be worth more than one Trait. The number of Traits available for cover is left for challengers to agree on, or for a Narrator to decree. Hiding behind a boulder, for example, might be worth two Traits, while hiding behind a thin wood fence might only count as one. If one combatant goes completely under cover (he cannot be seen at all *and* is thoroughly protected), he is considered impossible to hit. The attacker must change his position to get a clear shot.

### **MELEE AND BRAWLING**

Melee fighting can occur only when two parties are within weapon's reach of each other. Characters using melee weapons often have access to special abilities if they also possess the *Melee* Ability. For example, a trained character using a wakizashi can take advantage of his weapon's speed when fighting a character wielding a battle ax.

Brawling can only occur when two characters are within arm's length of each other. Characters engaged in brawling may use unarmed combat techniques on each other, including trips, kicks, punches, wrestling holds and throws. However, regardless of the description, all brawling tests result in one health level of bashing damage unless the character possesses some supernatural power or other ability that allows specifically for extra damage.

### **SPECIFIC FIGHTING STYLES**

Buying a specific fighting style under the *Martial Arts*, *Melee* or *Brawl* Abilities allows you to describe how your character moves to allow retests and permits a certain flair for your attacks and defenses. These skills do not allow you to do extra damage or specific injuries beyond what is listed in those skill descriptions.

## **FACEDOWN**

A facedown is an honored tradition in Kuei-jin society. It occurs when two characters lock eyes in a test of wills for the purpose of intimidating each other. The idea is to force one's rival to back down before a conflict actually comes to blows. Kuei-jin commonly employ facedowns, primarily to settle minor disputes, scold impudent younger Kuei-jin and (for the very brave) show discontent with an elder's decision.

Success in a facedown is determined in one of two ways. First, if one of the players relents while roleplaying this action, his opponent is considered to be the winner, and he is allowed to gloat over his victory as he pleases. If one of the players does not relent during a facedown, a Social Challenge is necessary to determine the victor. The Social Challenge proceeds as normal, with the loser breaking eye contact and losing the contest.

## **Fire Soul**

Fire soul is an uncontrollably violent state suffered by all Kuei-jin. When they set out along the Road Back, the P'o within them is loosed forever, causing them to succumb to a vicious form of madness where they are little more than a wild animal. While in fire soul, a character feels no pain and acts on instinct, using his bare hands and fangs to rip apart anything in his path. Some Kuei-jin invoke fire



## FLYING MONKEY KICKS AND OTHER BAD-ASS MARTIAL ARTS TRICKS

Okay, you caught us. We here at White Wolf like crazy martial arts maneuvers and wildly improbable melee moves as much as the next gaming company, but as you know, the *Mind's Eye Theatre* system is designed with minimal stress on combat. When you put yourself in the live-action world of *Laws of the East*, the idea is to interact with the other characters in a mature and entertaining fashion, not to start knocking out everyone in sight with your character's Thousand Bloody Cyclone Kick technique. Besides, the rules strongly prohibit stunts, physical contact and other essential parts of any devastating martial arts routine, which further discourages wild antics in any other realm than the imagination of the players involved.

However, we also know that many players are avid fans of martial arts movies. Therefore, it is almost inevitable that Storytellers will eventually hear the following complaint: "Why does my character, whose five levels of *Martial Arts* qualifies him as the equal of Bruce Lee, still do only as much damage as a guy with just one level of *Martial Arts*? I paid my 10 Traits; I want to do more damage than some regular schmoe with *Brawl*." This kind of question is especially pertinent in the Middle Kingdom, where exotic fighting arts are the rule, and so handling it will be addressed here. Storytellers have two options when faced with such arguments:

**Stick to the rules.** This is no cop-out. *Mind's Eye Theatre* is designed to facilitate intrigue and social settings, not mass battles and meticulously detailed melees. Storytellers have our full support if they choose to tell insistent players that only the basic combat rules listed apply. Players are still encouraged to be as colorful as they wish when describing their combat maneuvers, but aside from any benefits they might gain due to Disciplines or Abilities like *Martial Arts*, they receive no additional bonuses. These rules are quick and simple, and they keep the game flowing smoothly while still allowing for player creativity.

**Use the following optional system.** If you wish to allow for a bit more realism with combat, or perhaps just speed up the process a bit from time to time, then the following system — called "Dragon Rules" — may be adopted. For every two levels of *Brawl*, *Melee* or *Martial Arts* beyond the first that a character possesses (round up), he inflicts an extra level of damage when attacking with that skill. Thus when Dragon Rules are in effect, a character with five levels of *Martial Arts* inflicts three additional damage levels with a successful martial arts attack, for a brutal total of four health levels of damage with a single strike. Likewise, a character with four levels of *Melee* adds two levels of damage onto the damage value his weapon already possesses, making even minor weapons deadly in the hands of a master. Keep in mind that *Dragon Rules* are strictly optional, and they may not apply unless a Storyteller/ Narrator allows them in their game and both parties in a particular combat agree (out of character!) to their usage.

That said, the danger and excitement of using Dragon Rules add a great deal to climactic duels and other critical showdowns. It is a recommended feature for games that include a good deal of martial arts, in order to show the characters' true prowess.



soul as a last-ditch tactic in combat, but it is a risky prospect at best, since friends are targets of the vampire's rage just as often as enemies are. What brings on fire soul in a Kuei-jin is often highly personalized — a Devil-Tiger and a Resplendent Crane have very different intolerances — but common triggers are hunger, passion, defeat, humiliation at the hands of a rival or threats to a vampire's loved ones.

However, discretion is advised. A character in constant fire soul is no fun to be around, and he will likely be "put down" by his fellow Kuei-jin (or at least severely disciplined). Players are also advised to try to be consistent when playing what causes a fire soul. Frenzies are personal and situational things, but a player cannot ignore something that would normally cause fire soul simply because it isn't expedient for them to be in fire soul at the time.

To see if a character resists entering fire soul, the player performs a Static Yin Challenge (Yin versus half P'o, round up, no Traits risked). Failure indicates fire soul takes hold.

A character can also try to instill fire soul in another character by taunting him and calling for a Social Challenge. If the attacker (the taunting character) wins the challenge, the defender must then test to resist fire soul. If the defender wins the challenge, nothing happens and the story continues as usual.

Once in the state of fire soul, a character attacks all those around him violently and without discretion. A frenzied character does not suffer penalties from wounds (simulating the blind, uncontrollable anger of a frenzied Kuei-jin). Frenzies usually last only about 10 minutes, or until the object or person that triggered the fire soul is removed from the character's vicinity.

A character may also enter fire soul voluntarily by succeeding at a Static P'o Challenge against his permanent Hun Trait rating. Such an action can prove useful in a combat situation in which fire soul might be necessary to achieve victory — or even just surviving. However, doing so forces a test to resist shadow soul immediately — the character has opened the door for the Demon, and he must struggle to keep it at bay. Fire soul has its uses, but it is a dark advantage at best.

**Note:** Be cautious when roleplaying fire soul. Do not jump about screaming at people, kicking the furniture and slashing at other players. Remember, although fire soul is a violent state of mind, *you absolutely cannot strike other players, even in jest*. Just because your character is in an uncontrollable rage does not mean that you can forget the rules and become reckless. Use your own discretion, but act out only as much fire soul behavior as the environment allows without upsetting your fellow players.

## WAVE SOUL

Having already died and seen the Yomi Hells once, Kuei-jin are in no hurry to experience the afterlife again. This primal survival urge sometimes manifests as a state of utter terror where the vampire flees the object of his fear any way he can. This state is known as wave soul (since the Kuei-jin is seemingly buffeted about by waves of fear). Cathayan society considers wave soul extremely shameful, and most Kuei-jin avoid it at all costs, especially in front of their peers. As with fire soul, the causes of wave soul can vary from vampire to vampire, but common triggers are exposure to fire, sunlight and the presence of powerful demons. Likewise, a Kuei-jin cannot choose to ignore potential wave soul triggers when it wouldn't be expedient to panic. This state is identical to the Cainite condition of Rötschreck.



Wave soul is resisted with a Static Yang Challenge (Yang versus half P'o, round up, no Traits risked).

Acting out wave soul follows similar guidelines to those for fire soul; don't run around screaming your head off and smashing windows in your haste to escape the object of your terror. Remember, running and other stunts are still forbidden by the rules of **Mind's Eye Theatre**. Once again, your own discretion is the guide, but act out only as much of the wave soul reaction as the environment will allow.

## SHADOW SOUL

The Kuei-jin fear few things as widely as the condition known as shadow soul, when the Demon within attempts to take over the Kuei-jin's body and use it to fulfill its own selfish, destructive desires. This coup comes to pass when the Hun loses an inner battle to keep control of the P'o and the Demon spreads its poisoned lies and wild rages for as long as it can. Making matters worse, the Hun remembers nothing of the actions taken by the Demon during this time, unless the character makes an effort to temper the P'o (see the Soul Virtues section on p. 195). Characters often "awaken" from such spells in the midst of terrible carnage without any idea how it happened... or how much of it is their fault. Prolonged entrapment in the shadow soul state can send a character falling away from the path of Dharma and among the ranks of the *chih-mei* (or worse, a pawn to one of the Yama Kings). Even Devil-Tigers do not relish lengthy times in the shadow soul state, since their Demons often attempt to yoke them to Yomi rulers rather than further their schemes to attain demon status. However, many wicked Kuei-jin still indulge their P'os from time to time as it suits their dark desires. Shadow soul's most common triggers are a violation of personal honor or Dharma, emerging from fire or wave soul, failure to use Demon Arts successfully, prolonged use of Demon Arts (especially Demon Shintai), great stress or shame and the conditions listed for an individual Kuei-jin's P'o Archetype. If the troupe is using the optional rules for Shadowguiding in regards to playing the P'o, the character's Shadowguide effectively controls the actions of the character for duration of shadow soul.

You resist shadow soul with a Static Hun Challenge (permanent Hun versus permanent P'o rating, no Traits risked). Failure places the Kuei-jin under the control of the P'o for the remainder of the scene, during which time the P'o will do its best to spread its wickedness and otherwise undermine the Hun persona's efforts. Please note that these techniques do not always mean indulging in mindless rampages or blatant treachery. Indeed, one of the reasons shadow soul is so widely feared is that many P'o identities are very subtle in their activities, which means that one never knows when another's dark side might be in control. Wu-mates often become able to tell when one of their own is in the thrall of her Demon, but as for anyone else....

### THE DARKEST HOUR OF THE SPIRIT: ROLEPLAYING SHADOW SOUL

**Laws of the East** leans heavily on shadow soul for one simple reason: The player is entrusted to play her P'o Archetype honestly during this time, and to "forget" what occurred when she resumes playing her Hun side (to represent the memory block on the Hun during shadow soul). This lapse can present a problem, as many players are uncomfortable at first when playing the Demon, since the actions they take in shadow soul will usually hurt their character's regular plans (not to mention friends and innocent bystanders). On the other hand, some players become all too accustomed to the P'o and delight in all manner of



## RETESTING FIRE, WAVE AND SHADOW SOUL

Characters will obviously wish to avoid succumbing to one or more of these three states from time to time, and those who fail the initial test will doubtless immediately ask "Is there any way I can retest that?" To answer that question succinctly, yes, but it is a limited list at best — these conditions are due to the fragmented nature of the Kuei-jin's very soul, not simple personality disorders.

- A player may spend a Willpower Trait to succeed at any Static or Simple Challenge automatically, just as with any other test.

- The character may attempt to overbid if possible.

- A level of the appropriate Chi Virtue may be expended temporarily to call for a single retest on fire or wave soul — a character who fails a wave soul check may expend a level of her Yang Virtue to retest, for example. Regardless of the outcome, the character's relevant Trait limits and so on are adjusted accordingly for the remainder of the night, which may put the character at increased risk of Chi imbalance and other unpleasant things. This condition does not affect the actual Chi Traits in a character at the time, only the overall levels he may contain. By relying on his Chi Virtue, the character is pushing his Virtue to the limit and thus exhausting a portion of it for the time being.

**Example of Play:** Kun Allen is confronted by a Strike Force Zero agent wielding a flame-thrower. Kun's Chi Virtues are three Yang and four Yin. The Narrator calls for a test for wave soul, and Kun fails. However, he cannot afford to give in to fear right now, so Kun's player expends a level of his Yang Virtue for a retest. This time he succeeds, but now he is considered to be imbalanced toward Yin for the remainder of the night, since the expenditure has lowered his effective Yang score to two. Doing so has no effect on the two Yang Chi and four Yin Chi he has in his system currently, only his ability to manage them quite so effectively.

- In regards to Soul Virtues versus shadow soul, the player may expend a level of Hun temporarily to resist the urges of the P'o and call for a retest. Doing so is handled identically to spending Chi Virtues.

debauchery. They hide behind the words "I was in shadow soul" to justify all manner of disruptive game acts, no matter what their actual P'o Archetype might be. Others just happen to "coincidentally" remember actions their P'o took, even if there is no way their character should know what occurred. If some balance is not struck early on in the game, much of the drama and tragedy of Kuei-jin existence will be lost. Therefore, take time before the game begins to explain to players the role of the P'o and why it deserves to be treated seriously. Without the constant threat of shadow soul, Cathayans quickly become one-sided super-vampires.

Rather, encourage players to view the threat of P'o-dominance as a challenge from within, not simply a game mechanic used to "screw them over," and to explore the P'o as deeply as they do the Hun persona. After all, the P'o is another part of the character's soul, a dark one perhaps, but a part nonetheless. Over time, finding ways to control the curse of the P'o while doing one's best (as the demonic half) to avoid such domination simultaneously is a unique roleplaying experience, and experienced players come to relish playing the shadow soul nearly as much as the Hun persona. Hun and P'o are, after all, two halves of one tragic whole, and failing



to play both parts to the best of one's ability does a disservice to the character and to the game in general. In other words, not only does failure to play the P'o accurately show substandard knowledge of the game, but it's cheating as well. Don't do it.

Of course, if a Narrator feels the player is skirting too many evil impulses while he's in shadow soul, she may step in and dock the character one or more Willpower Traits for so obviously "suppressing his dark urges."

### **HANDS OF THE PUPPET MASTER: USING THE SHADOWGUIDING SYSTEM FOR THE P'o**

Some troupes, especially those whose players have known each other for some time, may wish to experiment with using the Shadowguiding system (derived from *Wraith: The Oblivion*) for handling the state of shadow soul. For those unfamiliar with Wraith, Shadowguiding is a system where each player is assigned to portray the P'o of another character, whispering dark temptations in their target's ear from time to time and taking control of the other character's actions during shadow soul. The Shadowguide must be told the details of the target's life and unlife (or at any rate those that the P'o should know, which is extensive). She must also accept the challenge of roleplaying the target's P'o Archetype as well as she can, leading the target into darkness as suits the nature of the Demon. The idea behind this system is to portray the P'o as an unpredictable and dangerous antagonist, since the player will typically have no idea what the Shadowguide is planning until she springs her latest trap. (During the time of shadow soul, the player whose character is being controlled should take some time out, go assist a Narrator or even focus on her own Shadowguiding activities in order remove herself from play if at all possible. This technique aids in roleplaying the amnesia that marks a time of shadow soul. When the player returns, he will have to find out what happened to his character during shadow soul, just as his character tries to find out as well. It also ensures that the P'o is a real threat to the player, since this system prevents players from "forgetting" their P'o sides at convenient times or coddling their characters during periods of shadow soul. By the same token, the Shadowguide must take her responsibility seriously and never act on information she has acquired solely by virtue of being another character's Shadowguide. Such behavior is cheating, plain and simple. However, when played correctly, the Shadowguide experience is well worth the effort. The Demon is no longer an abstraction of one's character, but a dangerous foe stalking the character at every turn and whose next move can almost never be predicted.

At the same time, there are dangers to the Shadowguiding system that even experienced troupes need to look out for during play. First of all, the system can be logically difficult (to say the least) in very large games, since it's hardly dramatic to stop play for a half an hour to find one's Shadowguide after failing a shadow soul test. Running back and forth across the game location to tempt other characters can disrupt one's own roleplaying as well. Some people also lack the assertiveness or interest in other characters to Shadowguide correctly, which causes their targets to ignore the Demon's efforts or come to view their P'o as a weak distraction instead of the formidable foe it should be. Finally, as the efforts of the Demon begin to thwart their regular plans, players sometimes forget that the Shadowguide is simply doing her job, and they come to resent her when she causes embarrassing or destructive actions. Likewise, some Shadowguides occasionally abuse the power they hold over their target and step beyond the boundaries of the role, bogging the player down with challenges and temptations to the point of distraction. The fights



and grudges engendered by such feelings are far more trouble than sitting down before the first few sessions to make sure everyone understands that Shadowguiding is an impartial act of roleplaying and not a venue for personal vendettas on either side. Those who take the actions of their Shadowguide too personally should be assigned another Shadowguide, or in the most extreme cases asked to sit out the game for a session or two and cool off.

Ideally, the Shadowguide should save most of her attention for situations that warrant the Demon's interest (determined by P'o Archetype) and remember the P'o's personality above anything else when roleplaying shadow soul. For their part, players should never ignore the Demon outright, though their *characters* may try, and weigh the words of the P'o when choosing their actions in times of stress. Out of character, it's easy for the player to realize that the Shadowguide is trying to lead them to ruin. However, they must remember that the voice of the Demon stems from deep within, and that kind of temptation is not as easy to shake off as one might think (or hope). Shadowguiding is not for all troupes or all games, but in the right hands, it can add a wonderful layer to the overall roleplaying experience.

### *ROLEPLAYING THE P'o*

- 1) The P'o is not *your* enemy, it is *your character's* challenge to assimilate/ overcome.
- 2) The P'o Archetype is just another dimension of your character to explore, so treat it like you would your character's regular Nature. Play it as fairly and as well as you can.
- 3) Never hold another character's shadow soul actions against them out of character any more than you would want someone else to blame you for the actions your character takes while in shadow soul.
- 4) Finally, remember that shadow soul is a time of evil instincts and wicked scheming. Enjoy yourself! Be a *villain*! Not every shadow soul has to be a period of bloody carnage. After all, some of the best villains are the subtle ones who manipulate from the shadows. A character whose P'o is obviously in control may be terrifying, but he is also easily marked as "contaminated." Instead, the P'o who do the most damage to their Hun sides are usually the ones who take pains to look perfectly normal while in control.

## **DHARMA**

While the main differences are entirely philosophical, there are some tangible differences between Running Monkeys and bodhisattvas. The following chart illustrates these disparities.

### **SOUL IN ZENITH AND ECLIPSE: ADVANCING / LOWERING DHARMA**

Enlightenment is all well and good, but sooner or later, players are going to want to know how exactly it is they advance (or degenerate) along their Dharmic path. Likewise, the Storyteller will want to highlight moments along a character's Dharmic journey, and such profound instances require a method of determining whether a character learns the intended lesson or walks past it. There are two occasions that demand the attention of game mechanics involving Dharma — auspicious occasions and moments of blindness.



## AUSPICIOUS OCCASIONS

Auspicious occasions are moments of pure *den*, tremendous insight that shatters the illusion of the mortal world and the poises the character at the edge of some insight that will change her view of reality forever. However, *den* is also the time the Demon fights hardest of all, trying desperately to drag the character down away from the truth of her destiny, so an auspicious occasion is not without danger!

When a character reaches such a moment of insight, the player and the Storyteller must perform a Dharma Test. Each of them make a series of Static Challenges against a difficulty equal to the character's permanent Willpower rating (one must first overcome ego to realize wisdom, after all). The character uses the Virtue appropriate to her Dharma — a Thrashing Dragon uses her permanent Yang rating, for example. Characters whose Virtue is Balance use the average of their highest and lowest Virtues for this test. Characters who follow multiple Virtues (such as the heretical Flame of the Rising Phoenix Dharma, which respects both Yang and Hun) must use the average of the appropriate Virtues as well. The Storyteller uses the character's permanent P'o rating, even against a Devil-Tiger or others who follow the P'o as their Virtue. There is a big difference in becoming a demon and being controlled by one. Each side makes a number of tests equal to the permanent rating of the Virtue involved, and the side that collects more total successes is declared the winner. If a tie occurs during these tests that cannot be resolved (a vampire using Hun that ties and who has both three Hun and three Willpower, for example), it is retested at no cost until a win or loss outcome is determined.

The possible results of the Dharma Test for auspicious occasions are as follows:

If the Dharma Virtue wins, enlightenment strikes and a point of Dharma is gained. All of sudden, temporal concerns vanish, and the truth of reality is glimpsed — if momentarily — for what it really is. A sense of peace descends over you, and the next few actions you take will likely come straight from the heart of

## AUSPICIOUS OCCASIONS

Being instructed by a Kuei-jin who has achieved a higher level in your Dharma

Being taught by a Kuei-jin who holds a higher rank than yours, but in a different Dharma

Receiving instruction from a bodhisattva

Receiving instruction from a Yama King or similar powerful spirit\*

Journeying into the spirit worlds (for the first time)

Understanding a master's koan

Doing something within the tenets of your Dharma that costs you something important

Meditating for at least one week with a specific, Dharma-appropriate training method

Coming very near to death (within one health level of final destruction)

Receiving an auspicious omen\*

\* See Dharma description for details.

## DHARMA

Traits	Social Bonus	Virtue	Pair Max	Trait Max	Chi/Turn Status	Age
0	-4	1	10	one	<i>chih-meil hin</i>	any
1-3	0	10	14	one	disciple	any
4-5	0	10	14	two	jina	5-10 yrs
6	1	12	16	three	jina/mandarin	100 yrs
7	2	14	16	four	mandarin/ancestor	250 yrs
8	3	16	18	six	ancestor	500 yrs
9	4	18	18	eight	bodhisattva	1000 yrs
10	?	?	?	?	bodhisattva/arhat	?

In addition, Kuei-jin have a maximum of five levels in an Ability until they reach six Dharma Traits, at which point, their maximum is equal to their Dharma rating. For the maximum number of Willpower Traits allowed, double this total, with the exception of Kuei-jin of one and two Dharma Traits, who may purchase up to five Willpower Traits.

**Example of Play:** *Lo Fan, a Kuei-jin with one Dharma Trait starts play with three Willpower Traits, and he may have up to five Traits until his Dharma reaches three, at which point, he may have six Willpower Traits, and so on.*

**Traits:** The number of Dharma Traits the Kuei-jin possesses.

**Social Bonus:** Enlightenment shows. This number equals how many Traits the Kuei-jin is up against other vampires of lower Dharma in all non-Discipline related Social tests.

**Virtue Pair Max:** The maximum number of traits allowed in either the Soul Virtues or Chi Virtues. For example, if a vampire has a pair maximum of 10, her combined permanent Yin and Yang Traits cannot exceed 10—Yin 6 and Yang 4 is acceptable, but Yin 6 and Yang 5 is not. The same goes for Hun and P'o.

**Trait Max:** The maximum number of Traits allowed in a particular category — Social, Mental and Physical. Enlightened characters have explored the limits of their capabilities more than their less illuminated brethren, and they are capable of higher standards than mortals can imagine.

**Chi/Turn:** Enlightened Kuei-jin have learned how to channel their Chi more quickly and efficiently. As a character rises in Dharma, she becomes capable of expending more Chi in less time than other vampires.

**Status:** The traditional title bestowed on vampires as they reach each level of Dharma.

**Age:** No matter how busy one's unlife is, true wisdom still takes time; there's no way around it. A vampire one century deceased has a wider perspective than one dead just three years, and the sight of an elder of 800 years often encompasses far more than both of them combined. Note that age does not guarantee a rise in Dharma, since some souls can spend a thousand years along the Road Back and still fail to learn much. Age merely acts as a gradation factor in advancement. Gaining high levels of Dharma requires having seen the clash of Yin and Yang, Hun and P'o, spirit and flesh countless times, in war and in peace. That level of understanding does not begin to come about until the Kuei-jin has existed long enough to attune herself to her environment over dozens or hundreds of years.



your Dharma, since the auspicious occasion has shown you the truth of your purpose in an existence typically plagued by doubt and fear.

If the P'o wins, the character reverts to shadow soul immediately as the Demon strikes, turning her eyes from enlightenment and back to mundane needs at hand. K'naa, the Hunger, wracks the character's body, and her first action is likely to be quite bloody and to the point. Screw cosmic enlightenment, you're hungry!

If neither side wins (neither side wins a test, or both win the same overall number of tests), nothing happens. For a fleeting second, it seemed like something out of the ordinary was just beyond perception, teasing you, but it passed as quickly as a summer breeze and was gone again. Oh, well. Couldn't have been anything important.

**Example of Play:** Xiang Tsang is a Resplendent Crane with permanent ratings of four Hun, three P'o and three Willpower. During the course of play, he finds himself poised to understand a new insight into the nature of honor, and the Storyteller feels that a Dharma Test is merited. He takes Xiang aside and they perform the test. Xiang's player makes four tests — one for each level of Hun, his Dharmic Virtue. The Storyteller makes three tests, one for each level of Xiang's P'o. All the tests are done against a difficulty of three (Xiang's Willpower rating). Xiang wins three of his four Hun tests, while the Storyteller wins only two of the P'o tests, and therefore Xiang experiences den, soaring on his new insight and gaining a point of Dharma. If he had won only a single test and the P'o had won two, he would have succumbed to the Demon instead, blinded by its lies. If both had won two tests, for example, or neither had won any tests, nothing out of the ordinary would've happened. Enlightenment would have passed by without Xiang or his Demon paying any particular attention.

**Note:** Characters may never spend Willpower Traits to receive an automatic success on Dharma Tests. You cannot will yourself to enlightenment, you only open your mind to it. There are also no retests or overbids allowed on any part of the Dharma Test. One shot is all you get, for better or worse.

## MOMENTS OF BLINDNESS

If auspicious occasions have the potential to be a Kuei-jin's finest hour, then *diao*, moments of blindness, are the terrifying seconds when she stands poised at the brink of utter failure and can only hope her Demon doesn't give her one final push. By acting selfishly, allowing temporal concerns to overcome the quest for enlightenment or even acting like a petty mortal, the vampire can actually threaten the progress she's made along the Road Back. As the ancestors say, if a vampire cannot rise above her base concerns, then she deserves no better than to spend eternity counting stray grains of rice!

Nobody wins all the time; even the mightiest ancestor and wisest bodhisattva can sometimes lose track of his purpose under Heaven. When a character loses sight of her Dharma and acts carelessly, the Storyteller may declare that a moment of blindness is upon her and call for a Dharma Test. This Dharma Test is performed exactly as that for an auspicious occasion, except that instead of testing to gain enlightenment, the character is trying desperately to stave off her Demon in the face of great failure, be it temporal or spiritual.

The possible results of the Dharma Test for acts of blindness are as follows:

If the Dharma Virtue wins, you hold on to your Dharmic purpose in the face of shame. For a moment you feel as if the stern gaze of Heaven is watching you, judging you, but the feeling passes quickly, leaving you shaken and sure that you just narrowly averted some great, unseen calamity. Whew.



If the P'o wins, you know Heaven is indeed judging you — and you have come up wanting. Your vision literally dissolves into blackness, the screams of the Yomi Realm howl in your ears, and you are struck to your knees, overcome by the shame of Heaven. By the time your vision clears, any sense of purpose seems like so much sand blowing in the wind, and the Demon immediately takes hold, seeking to drown your shame in a tide of blood and stolen Chi. You lose a point of Dharma and enter shadow soul immediately for the remainder of the scene.

If neither side wins, your unlif remains unchanged... barely. Storm clouds rumble on the horizon, the chill of the void tugs at your lifeless heart, and the voices of the damned whisper in your ears, but still you manage to tame the fear that stirs in your breast. Brushing aside the remembered heat of Yomi on your cold flesh, you battle the urge to hide your face, knowing you have come within a razor's width of

### ACTS OF BLINDNESS

Violating some important tenet of your Dharma\*

Attempting to follow the tenets of your path, but failing in some costly manner\*

Acting in an extraordinarily egotistical manner

Losing yourself in mortal concerns and neglecting enlightenment

Losing yourself to the P'o (even if you belong to the Devil-Tigers or similar paths)

Discovering that a Dharma teacher lied to you

Being banished by a priest or other person with True Faith

Killing an ancestor or bodhisattva

Meeting the Little Death

Receiving a bad omen\*

\* See Dharma description for details.

the abyss once more in your existence. The warring sides of your soul have both retreated for now, leaving an empty, whistling wasteland in their wake.

### DHARMA LEVEL ZERO

Struggling as they are to rise above their monstrous origins, many Running Monkeys are in danger of slipping back down into the unthinking evil of the Demon's clutches — a single *diao* could reduce a character to the horrid cannibalism of zero Dharma. There are few things considered more shameful in Kuei-jin culture than falling to zero Dharma and reverting to the mindless *chih-meï* state. It is analogous to reverting to infancy once more. (A terrible, flesh-eating infancy to be sure, but infancy nonetheless.)

If a moment of blindness reduces a character to zero Dharma, her P'o overcomes her immediately, and she becomes a mindless killing machine bent on consuming human flesh. The player must surrender control of her character to the Storyteller, removing herself from the game unless someone else makes an effort to return her to the path of Dharma. Such a teacher — typically an elder Kuei-jin, but sometimes a member of the unfortunate's *wu* or even a living holy man — must take the demented corpse into his care, purify it through some appropriate rituals and instruct it until it regains its former state. This process is exceedingly dangerous and time-consuming. The Demon will not relinquish control of its body willingly or easily, and it can be counted on to do everything in its power to destroy its benefactor and escape.



In game terms, the teacher must subdue the chih-meis, bind it, drag it to a dragon nest or appropriate holy site, purify it with water, incense and prayer, then enact the rite of *Restoring the Dharmic Balance* (found on p. 167). If successful, the vampire regains a single point of Dharma and owes a very, very large debt to the one who restored it to sanity and ended its shameful state. Chih-meis who prove especially deadly to recapture and/or retrain are summarily destroyed, even if with great sadness on the part of the court, since that state is viewed as worse than Final Death.

## MOMENTS OF FAITH AND SHADOWS: STORYTELLING DHARMIC MOMENTS

It's tempting to make Dharma Tests a regular feature in nightly gaming. After all, roleplaying seldom concerns very mundane events, which means that characters are subjected to all manner of extreme circumstances constantly — ample fuel for Dharmic change, right? Well, yes and no. Being trapped in a burning building or meditating among a garden of blood-flowers for a week is all well and good at first, but after a while, even the highest highs (or lowest lows) start becoming routine, which means that enlightenment becomes harder and harder to come by. Storytellers should remember that Dharma Tests should come under only the most extreme circumstances — *no more than one per night at the most* — and even then, only during moments of high drama and excellent roleplaying.

As characters advance, Dharma Tests should become rare. It takes more than simple coincidence to travel beyond the first footsteps of the Way. Even characters who evidence wisdom and determination in pursuit of their Dharma — and who see enough time pass to gain a proper perspective on the nature of existence — should have to undergo great ordeals in pursuit of the tiniest flashes of enlightenment. Characters who sit back and expect enlightenment to come to them should never know the divine joy of *den*. It is perfectly reasonable to increase the difficulty of a Dharma Test or even deny one outright if a character is attempting to use an identical method of advancement as before.

From a logistical standpoint, Dharmic moments would seem to present a difficulty to the Storyteller, who is seldom able to witness all the events in a game at the same time. To make things easier, instruct Narrators to keep their eyes open for auspicious occasions or acts of blindness, and reward players who report such moments honestly for Storyteller consideration. If such moments arise and the Storyteller is not around, stop the action discreetly until one becomes available, provided you don't ruin the moment by doing so. Dharmic moments are about powerful roleplaying, not a chance to stop play and pad a character's stats. Players who call false alarms constantly or who abuse the Storyteller in the name of performing a Dharma Test should have that privilege revoked. It's disruptive, for one, and obnoxious besides. Don't do it.

## METHODS OF OBTAINING CHI

Many Kin-jin are baffled by the feeding habits of the Kuei-jin. Many of them seem to subsist on blood, as do the Westerners themselves, but all of them seem capable of eating flesh as well (however abhorrent that may seem), and whispers speak of elders who subsist on the breath of their targets or even on the land itself. Western vampires view this disparity as a quirk of creation, like their clans, but the reality is far from that simple. In truth, the differing means of obtaining Chi are learned as a Kuei-jin advances along her Dharmic path. The more enlightened one is, the more ways the seeker finds of obtaining sustenance from the universe around



her. Through different postures, meditations, koans and the like learned as the Kuei-jin rises in Dharma, as well as understanding gained from the lessons learned along the way, the vampire learns how to feed on a variety of different sources over time.

### Flesh

The most base of Kuei-jin, the *chih-meい*, can subsist on nothing but human flesh. Even after rising in Dharma, though, a Kuei-jin may continue to ingest the flesh of others and gain Chi from it. Such practices are considered filthy and revolting in most courts, however, and practitioners become social outcasts quickly. Buddhist and Shintoist Kuei-jin bear a particular distaste for this practice, and they have little tolerance for those who indulge in it, although certain infamous *wu* are rumored to have raised the consumption of flesh to a high culinary art. Flesh-eating is also considered an act of blindness by several Dharmas, which means a Kuei-jin who debases herself by ingesting flesh might threaten her spiritual standing as well as her social status.

**System:** An average human being has 10 "levels" of flesh — each level converts into one Chi Trait. Kuei-jin may consume more flesh than their stomach could "logically" hold. Each Chi Trait gained in this fashion inflicts one health level of lethal damage to the victim, and a Physical Challenge is required if the victim resists (as any normal living ones would). Chi stolen from flesh is replaced only as fast as the victim heals naturally, which means that survivors typically take quite a long time to recover from such attacks. Flesh from a recently killed (four hours or less) body provides Yin and Yang in equal measure, while a cold corpse provides mostly Yin energy (assume 8 Yin to 2 Yang). Vampires who eat their prey alive (it happens, especially with *chih-meい*) gain mostly Yang energy — assume 8 Yang to 2 Yin. The body also needs to be reasonably complete for the vampire to gain the full measure of Chi. At his discretion, the Narrator may rule that bodies that have been largely destroyed provide less sustenance or even no sustenance whatsoever.

### Blood (Dharma 1+)

The majority of Kuei-jin subsist on blood, just as their Western counterparts do. Young Kuei-jin tend to feed in a utilitarian manner — efficient, if not especially interesting — while many elders have refined blood-drinking to an elaborate and artful ceremony. At base, however, the actual mechanics of the process differ little. The vampire must merely ingest blood of some kind to gain Chi from it.

**System:** Mortals are considered to have 10 Blood Traits, which the vampire converts into Yin or Yang Chi Traits on a one-for-one basis. Typically, a vampire converts blood into the Chi type of which he has the lesser amount, thereafter alternating ingestion of Yin and Yang into his body. Thus, a Kuei-jin who has a Yin Virtue 3 and a Yang Virtue 4, and who currently has three Yin Chi Traits and one Yang Chi Trait, will ingest the first two Blood Traits as Yang energy in order to balance the energies in his body. Any Traits taken after that point alternate between the two, maintaining the balance. Chi taken from mortals in this fashion is restored as soon as the victim regains blood, whether naturally or through intravenous injection.

Of course, the circumstances of the feeding also have some bearing on the Chi a vampire can receive. A mortal at the peak of awe or ecstasy provides much more Yang Chi than normal, while a mortal in the grips of extreme sadness or terror supplies little more than Yin energy. Typically, this sort of situation is best decided through roleplaying. However, if mechanics are required, the vampire's player



must at least win a Social Challenge against the vessel to provoke the desired response. If in doubt, consult a Narrator as to whether or not a vessel provides an extra amount of one type of Chi.

#### Breath (Dharma 5+)

A Kuei-jin with a Dharma of 5 or better may extract Chi directly from a victim's "breath." This breath is not actual oxygen/carbon dioxide, but rather the mystical force powering the victim. Of all the "lesser" methods of feeding, breath-drinking allows the greatest degree of flexibility in terms of whether Yin or Yang Chi is obtained. Kuei-jin who engage in sexual congress with a mortal, for example, are likely to receive Yang Chi, while one who steals the "last breath" of a dying man likely finds himself overwhelmed with Yin Chi.

**System:** The Kuei-jin must be in a rational state (Wa Soul). He must make physical contact with the victim and must have access to one of the victim's orifices. (No, not necessarily the nose and mouth. Now get your minds out of the gutter.) If the victim resists, a Physical Challenge must be won to touch the target. The Kuei-jin must then make a series of Simple Tests using the Chi Virtue appropriate to the type of Chi he wishes to take. The victim resists with a number equal to all the Stamina-related Physical Traits she possesses. The number of Simple Tests required equals the vampire's related Chi Virtue. (Note: Since the Kuei-jin is not actually attacking the target's body but the life force instead, the Kin-jin Discipline of *Fortitude* and similar powers cannot be used to resist breath-draining. Although they may certainly help repair the damage done after the fact.) For each test the vampire wins, he gains one Chi Trait and inflicts one level of damage that turn. If the vampire fails to win a single test, he may never again try to drink that target's breath, although he may still ingest her flesh or blood. Health levels lost to breath-drinking are recovered at a rate of one per day; Chi lost is regained normally.

#### Osmosis (Dharma 6+)

The ancients can siphon Chi from the essence of the world itself, drawing strength from the pillars of Heaven. They may quite literally draw strength from the wind, water and earth all around them, intimately attuned to their place in the Great Cycle as they are. Those few bodhisattvas and arhats who enjoy this method of feeding describe it as a feeling of singular connection to the universe, a fleeting glimpse of when all things were in harmony.

**System:** The vampire must spend three turns in contemplation, then the player makes a Static Challenge of either Yin or Yang against a difficulty of the region's Wall rating. The vampire must first possess a Dharma level equal to or higher than the local Wall rating (thus, only vampires of high Dharma indulge in this method of feeding with any regularity). Success enables the Kuei-jin to siphon a number of Chi Traits equal to (10 minus the Wall rating) from the natural dragon lines of the world, with few ill effects to the environment. However, no site can be fed from more than once a month unless the Kuei-jin wishes to defile it.

If such means should fail, or should additional Chi be required, the character may attempt to unleash his P'o to rip the Chi from the very world itself. A Static Challenge of his P'o versus a difficulty of the local Wall is required. Success means the vampire may take as much Chi as he likes. However, this attack disrupts local dragon lines automatically in a spectacular fashion. Hengeyokai caerns wither, freeholds fade away and Haunts turn sterile. The region's Chi (to a diameter of one mile per Chi Trait taken) is considered defiled thereafter. Kuei-jin who take from the site replenish their Demon Chi and automatically fall into shadow soul. Local



## I'LL SWALLOW YOUR SOUL; I'LL SWALLOW YOUR SOUL!

When it comes to fellow Kuei-jin and other *shen*, breath-drinking takes on a whole new dimension for especially enterprising and brave Kuei-jin. The vampire may attempt to siphon Chi not only from the *shen*'s life-force, but also directly from the *shen*'s natural reservoirs. The Kuei-jin need simply declare that he is attempting to drain from a target's reserves during the breath-drinking attack; the method for performing the attack is identical.

Once established, however, the Kuei-jin may steal one Chi Trait directly from the target's reserves per test won, adding the stolen Trait directly into his own pool. No health levels are lost during such an attack. In the case of characters from other *Mind's Eye Theatre* games, Cainites lose Blood Traits, shapeshifters lose Gnosis, wraiths lose Pathos, changelings lose Glamour, mummies lose Sekhem and so on, while the Kuei-jin gains Chi on a one-for-one basis. Again, no health levels are lost through such an attack. Stolen energies are regained through whatever normal means the character has to restore them, and they are of the Chi type most appropriate to the target in question. Faeries and shapeshifters tend to have high Yang scores, while wraiths and Cainites have high Yin, although all are subject to the usual emotional circumstances that can alter the composition of the Chi they provide. If in doubt, consult a Narrator as to what "fuel" a particular *shen* provides.

spirits and other *shen* are easily upset by such callous actions (to say the least), and more than one greedy elder has met his demise at the claws of *shen* determined to avenge such an abuse of Heaven's bounty....

## UNRAVELING HEAVEN'S WEB: VIRTUE IMBALANCE

### Chi Imbalance

Since they derive their true sustenance from Chi and not simply from blood or other sources, Kuei-jin have some advantages over their Kin-jin rivals. For instance, their Chi is more flexible in many ways, and it allows them a wider range of basic abilities than the Kin-jin know of. That's the good news. The bad news is that because their bodies are essentially alchemical distillation systems for their personal Chi reservoirs, the energies in the Kuei-jin body can become unbalanced, either permanently or temporarily, often with disastrous results. Therefore, wise Kuei-jin take pains to try to maintain a harmonious balance of Chi within themselves, if only to avoid the consequences that accompany ignoring the balance mandated by Heaven.

### TEMPORARY IMBALANCE AND BAD REACTIONS

Temporary Chi imbalance is a far less serious condition than its counterpart, but it remains a problem to unwary Kuei-jin nonetheless. Temporary imbalance can occur in any one of three ways. First, a Kuei-jin becomes imbalanced when she



possesses a greater quantity of Chi than her corresponding Virtue rating. Thus, a vampire with a Yang Virtue 4 who takes in six Traits of Yang Chi is considered to be temporarily imbalanced. The other circumstance occurs when the Kuei-jin has no Chi of one type in her body and any number of Chi Traits of the other. A vampire with two Yang Chi and no Yin Chi is considered temporarily imbalanced, no matter what his permanent ratings in either Virtue may be. Finally, vampires of Balance are particularly susceptible to bad reactions, and they are considered temporarily imbalanced any time they possess two or more points of one type of Chi than its opposite.

Temporary imbalance has no effect on play until a Chi expenditure of either type is called for (as is the case with awakening or many Disciplines). If the character's player fails any Challenge or other test associated with the Chi expenditure, he must make a Simple Test immediately. If he wins or ties, nothing happens. If he fails, the Kuei-jin suffers a bad reaction as *all* of the Chi Traits in excess to his Virtues are released. Yang Chi tends to boil and explode, while Yin Chi freezes and rots, but the end result is the same: The character suffers one health level of aggravated damage for every two Chi Traits released in a reaction (round up, minimum one health level of damage). The player must also test to resist wave soul.

### PERMANENT IMBALANCE

Not all Kuei-jin subscribe to the teachings of the bodhisattvas about maintaining harmony. Some prefer to stuff themselves with life energy until they are a near-perfect semblance of life once more, while others find the call of the shadows too sweet to resist and succumb to ever-greater coldness and detachment. When a Kuei-jin has three or more permanent Traits in one of his Chi Virtues than its opposite, the character is considered to be permanently imbalanced toward that Virtue. There are some positive side effects to this condition. The character can hold a great deal of Chi of the imbalanced type in his system, and each type offers other benefits as well, from the Yin vampire's high pain tolerance to the Yang vampire's increased resistance to sunlight.

However, these benefits come at a crippling price to the vampire in question, since imbalance is not the natural state of the Kuei-jin (if such undead can be said to have a natural state, anyway), and it always exacts a heavy toll on the Kuei-jin in question. While most vampires lean toward one Chi Virtue or another naturally, the influence of the Virtue of an imbalanced vampire is overwhelmingly pervasive. Yang-aspected vampires are normally energetic, outgoing and courageous; permanently Yang-imbalanced vampires exaggerate those traits into manic behavior and foolhardiness. Likewise, Yin vampires are thought to be quiet, refined and calm. Vampires with permanent Yin imbalance become heartless, corpselike monstrosities. All vampires with permanent imbalance gain a derangement, which cannot be cured until the imbalance is repaired. Yin vampires suffer from ailments such as *Depression*, *Intellectualization* and *Obsession* (death and the dead), while Yang vampires fall victim to insanities such as *Mania*, *Multiple Personalities* and *Obsession* (feeding).

Other effects are specific by the type of imbalance:

- **Yin Imbalance:** A vampire with permanent Yin imbalance attunes too much to the darkness within himself, neglecting the living part of his soul. His skin becomes cold and corpselike, and his pain response weakens greatly (the vampire suffers pain as if he were half as injured as he actually is, round down, until he



reaches Incapacitated). The vampire is also one Trait up on all tests to resist fire soul, due to the utter detachment in his heart. However, the vampire must always aspect himself to Yin upon awakening, and the cost rises to one Yin Trait per night — no longer does the black cycle sustain him for up to 10 nights as it once did. Yin-imbalanced vampires also grow to crave cold blood and dead flesh, which may pose a few problems for Dharmic purity. The imbalanced vampire is one Trait down on all Hun Tests, and he acquires the Negative Trait: *Callous* (which cannot be bought off until the imbalance is corrected). He must also lose one appearance-related Social Trait for each health level of damage suffered any time he suffers a bad reaction and/or takes damage from sunlight. Once all such Traits are gone, the Storyteller may declare that he has become a *ch'ing shih*, or walking rotted corpse. Once that has occurred, as long as his true face is visible the character cannot initiate any Social Challenges with mortals except those related to intimidation. This damage to the appearance cannot be healed as long as the imbalance remains, and the character also cannot purchase any further appearance- or empathy-related Social Traits during this time. At the Storyteller's discretion, characters who have become *ch'ing shih* may require additional magics to restore themselves to something resembling human once the imbalance is corrected, and such characters would do well to remember in any event that they make easy targets for mortal witch-hunters.

• **Yang Imbalance:** A vampire in Yang imbalance is very attuned to his human side. His flesh is warm and of normal hue, he appears to breathe, and he may even make his heart beat if he wishes. More than that, however, he is far less vulnerable to sunlight. A vampire with permanent Yang imbalance may tolerate indirect sunlight for up to one hour with no ill effects, and he may even withstand direct sunlight for as many minutes as he has Physical Traits before suffering any kind of damage.

However, this indulgence carries the weight of mortal weakness along with it. The character is one Trait down to resist fire soul, and a test for fire soul may be triggered by a lust for sex or even mortal food. The vampire also suffers an extra level of damage from fire — all that surplus Yang Chi is flammable! The vampire also contracts mortal diseases easily, and the player must make a Static Physical Challenge (against a difficulty determined by the amount of risky behavior he indulges in) every month to keep his character from becoming a carrier or one or more serious mortal conditions. Also, the character's hunger grows even more demanding than before. The character becomes ravenous if he has less than five Chi Traits in his body and uncontrollable if he has less than two Chi Traits in his body.

Finally, and most bizarrely, a vampire with permanent Yang imbalance is sufficiently human to impregnate (or to be impregnated by) a mortal! A pregnant vampire must aspect herself to Yang every night. Failure to do so results in the immediate death of the child. She must also spend an additional Yang Trait every night for the child. Again, failure to do so results in the death of the child. If she manages to carry the child to term, the baby is considered a dhampyr, a half-living, half-dead vampire crossbreed. A mortal pregnant with a Kuei-jin child will bear the baby unless circumstances dictate otherwise. Again, the baby will be considered a dhampyr. For more on dhampyrs, see their description in the *Kindred of the East Companion*.



## CORRECTING IMBALANCE

Temporary imbalance is easy to correct. Merely reduce the amount of Chi in the body, and the vampire rights himself.

Permanent imbalance is a bit more difficult to correct. A Kuei-jin with a permanent Chi or Soul Virtue imbalance must raise the opposing Virtue to a stabilizing level (i.e., a vampire with six P'o and three Hun must raise Hun to four). If this correction is impossible — such as with a vampire with eight Yang and two Yin whose Dharma limits the total of his Virtue pair to 10 — the vampire is trapped in imbalance until his Dharma improves enough to stabilize his Virtues again. Remember as well that *ch'ing shih* (and other grossly imbalanced vampires, at the Storyteller's discretion) may still have quite a bit of work to do to "right" themselves even after the imbalance itself is corrected. Derangements must be conquered, Negative Traits bought off and so on, all of which requires time and effort on the character's part. When one has pushed even the hardy Kuei-jin body to its limits, a certain amount of recovery time is required.

Finally, some Kuei-jin whisper that certain bodhisattvas have developed tinctures to proof oneself against the effects of imbalance. However, the ancients definitely aren't talking about it if they have.

## SOUL IMBALANCE

Chi may come and Chi may go, but one thing that always remains constant in a Kuei-jin's existence is the war of light and dark within, the eternal duel between Hun and P'o. Young Kuei-jin often champion their Hun side to the extreme, assuming (wrongly) that their P'o is simply a vile thing to be stamped out and thwarted at every turn, but their elders know better. It is the destiny of the Kuei-jin to recognize and assimilate the darkness of the P'o into the harmony of the whole once more, not to turn their face from their own worst nature. Of course, the opposite holds true as well. Devil-Tigers and other wicked Kuei-jin who indulge their P'o and scorn their Hun eventually find themselves no longer in control of their own lives, cowering at the mercy of their Demon's wishes until the inevitable night it carries them screaming back to Yomi.

Imbalance of a Kuei-jin's Soul Virtues may represent more of a moral choice on the part of the Kuei-jin than an imbalance of their Chi Virtues, but the results are no less real because of it. As with Chi Virtues, characters in the grip of permanent soul imbalance personify the extremes of their beliefs. While most Hun-oriented vampires are orderly, spiritual and honorable, those in Hun imbalance are authoritarian, dogmatic and stifling. Likewise, while most P'o-directed characters are wicked and barbaric, those in the grip of permanent P'o imbalance are seldom touched by it at all. Their Demon often spends more time in control of their bodies than they themselves do! Furthermore, characters with permanent soul imbalance also receive an appropriate derangement, which cannot be cured until the condition is repaired. Hun-imbalanced characters tend to receive such derangements as *Obsession/Compulsion*, *Megalomania* and *Intellectualization*, while those imbalanced toward the P'o tend to succumb to whatever derangement suits the extremes of their particular P'o Archetype.

Other effects are specific by the type of imbalance:



• **Hun Imbalance:** Many Running Monkeys think that there can never be too much emphasis on the Hun. They have obviously never seen the atrocities committed by those “just following orders,” or the wheels of great bureaucracy at work grinding innocents between them. Too much power in the Kuei-jin’s Hun side stifles the vampire’s spirit with the weight of order and duty. The imbalanced vampire receives a *Predictable Negative Trait*, and the player cannot spend any Willpower to succeed at Simple or Static Challenges automatically for the extent of the imbalance. While the Hun may be the font of a Kuei-jin’s Willpower, too much stress on rules and organization robs the spirit of some of its spark and power.

• **P’o Imbalance:** Giving too much strength to one’s dark side is pretty straightforward. Not only is the character much more likely to fall prey to Fire, Wave or shadow soul (since the P’o determines the strength of those instincts), but what’s worse, the Demon may call for a shadow soul test once per session, even if the normal takeover conditions do not exist. Obviously, such characters are likely to spend more of their time doing the will of their Demon than of their higher soul, a situation not even the most horrific Devil-Tiger desires.

## OTHER SYSTEMS

### TRUE FAITH

True Faith is belief in a power, entity, consciousness — sometimes even a purpose — that is greater than oneself, and as such, it is not limited to any particular religion. Unlike Kin-jin, the drive of Dharma prevents Kuei-jin from possessing such devotion — they have their own role under Heaven to pursue, and while they may still be religious folk, they cannot derive the same benefit from it that some mortals do. Only those beings of the most pure character — only the truly selfless, caring, compassionate and courageous have a chance at possessing True Faith. Most Kuei-jin will only come across True Faith when they do battle with the Shih or other hunting groups.

Characters may improve their Faith only with exceptional roleplaying and Storyteller approval. The game uses for True Faith are covered exhaustively in *Laws of the Hunt*. However, some basic rules for Faith appear here.

• By brandishing his holy symbol, the bearer gains the Social Trait: *Intimidating* when repelling undead and warding off supernatural powers. If used to strike a supernatural creature, a holy symbol grants the extra Physical Traits *Burning* and *Searing*, and it inflicts one level of aggravated damage. If a vampire has the Flaw: *Repelled by Crosses*, he takes an additional level of aggravated damage when touched on bare skin by a cross wielded by a person with True Faith.

• A player of a character with True Faith may attempt to repel vampires by brandishing his holy symbol, invoking his belief (“In the name of \_\_\_\_\_, I command you to be gone,” etc.) and employing a Social Challenge. Success means the vampire must flee the area immediately. Failure means the vampire must still back off a few feet and cower before taking action, and the vampire still may not initiate any attacks during the next turn, although she may defend herself normally. A vampire may only resist this use of Faith by attempting to overbid with Willpower. If she currently possesses at least twice as many Willpower Traits as the



Faithful character, she remains unaffected. A character may attempt to repel multiple vampires with a group challenge.

It is much easier to lose Faith than gain it. Any time a character fails a test in which True Faith was involved, he has a crisis of faith. During such a time, he is one Trait down on all Social Challenges for the remainder of the scene and unable to invoke his Faith again until that Faith Trait has been restored (Narrator's discretion).

## BETWEEN BLOOD AND SOUL: BLOOD BONDS AND DIABLERIE FOR THE KUEI-JIN

Created under vastly different circumstances and powered by a different source of nutrition, the Kuei-jin are intrinsically different from their Cainite counterparts, much to the surprise and dismay of the ignorant Kin-jin. When the two forces conflict, there are bound to be those who try to enforce the blood bond or commit diablerie. This section contains rules governing such circumstances.

### Blood Bonds

Since Kuei-jin do not exist solely on blood but on the Chi contained within it, they can neither create nor be bound by blood bonds. Drinking their Chi-rich blood may give certain benefits to the drinker, but it cannot create ghouls or blood bonds. Likewise, a Kin-jin who gives a Cathayan a taste of his vitae in hopes of binding it to his will is in for a rude surprise, as the Cathayan's body extracts the precious Chi and disregards the base fluid itself.

### Diablerie

Kuei-jin cannot commit diablerie as the Westerners know it. Draining another Kuei-jin of Chi simply renders her an inert husk, and gives no other special benefits. Soul-stealing is relegated to the domain of certain Disciplines. Likewise, Cainites cannot diablerize Kuei-jin — Yomi already has "dibs" on these souls.

## So You Want To Be An Akuma

Inevitably, no matter how much the Storyteller stresses that such characters are doomed to unlives of growing desperation and misery, and that they have actually sold their freedom to the Yama Kings in return for powers that will ultimately fail them, some players are going to want to play *akuma*. This section exists for Narrators entrusted with playing the dread enemies of the Wan Xian and players who see their character's ambitions drifting toward the lacerating winds of Hell. It's intended to give a short list of the requirements, benefits and drawbacks of joining the ranks of the legions of Hell. Don't say you haven't been warned about the consequences.

### STAGE ONE: THE BARGAIN

This part is seldom as direct as many vampires think. After all, the vampire must offer some service or other benefit the Yama Kings cannot obtain easily on their own. Souls? They've got oodles already, and most count the souls of Kuei-jin as "gone out for a bit, be back later" anyway. Powers? Don't make them laugh. No, typically service is gained in one of two ways — the vampire pleads to the lords of Hell for aid in a tight spot and is granted a favor, or he swears loyalty to their cause in return for vital services rendered. Either way, a character who accepts that first little bit of aid is just as damned as one who signs a big old contract in blood. Hell never gives away its gifts for nothing, and whether or not he knows it, the Kuei-jin has now become an *akuma* by making any kind of deal. The game benefits of



this stage vary according to the details of the bargain, but the Storyteller should uphold the word of the Yama Kings on their deals. What they promise, they deliver, be it Disciplines, Influence or other things. Of course, what the Yama Kings promise and what they *appear* to promise can be very different things. At any rate, such gifts are usually quite temporary (especially if they're powerful); just enough to get the character hooked. Thus, the vampire must come back for more, naturally, which leads to the next stage.

(Oh, and those Kuei-jin who petition the Yama Kings for aid and aren't exactly demon-slave material? Let's just say that the appetites of the Lords of Hell haven't changed much in the last six millennia or so, and a course of Kuei-jin soul-kabobs is always a nice treat for an after-evil snack.)

### **STAGE TWO: SERVITUDE**

Contrary to Kuei-jin propaganda, most *akuma* do not run around boiling babies and performing the Shinto equivalent of Black Masses until some noble warrior does them in. Would that it were that easy! No, the first service the Yama Kings almost inevitably demand is to infiltrate a Kuei-jin court and report back to them on a regular basis, a process which is designed to continue over years and even decades. After all, if the Kuei-jin and the Yama Kings have anything, it's time, and the longer the mole is in place, the worse the feelings of betrayal are when the spy is eventually discovered. That way, not only do the Yama Kings get the intelligence they need, but they also sow more seeds of suspicion and paranoia among the Kuei-jin, which makes them less capable of fighting the Yama Kings... you get the idea. During this time, most *akuma* are entrusted with the secrets of the Hellweaving Discipline, and they can no longer buy empathy- or compassion-related Social Traits, since the touch of Hell is on them and spreading like cancer. At the same time, the *akuma* loses all his previous *guanxi* ratings after becoming a servant of the Infernal, and old feelings of friendship and duty begin fading fast.

### **STAGE THREE: EXPOSURE!**

Inevitably, the *akuma* comes to light. The Yama Kings await this moment eagerly, for it shows whether the servant is worth keeping or better off sacrificed to his pursuers to draw attention away from their schemes. *Akuma* who prove themselves particularly clever and devious during the period in which they are exposed are rewarded with additional, permanent gifts and a longer period of service (say, eternity). Those who cry out for the aid of the Yama Kings instead of surviving on their own merits are typically left hanging, stripped of their dark gifts in their hour of greatest need. That way, the Yama Kings reason, the court is fooled into believing that it has ended the *akuma* threat again, they receive the soul of the servant in question and everyone's happy. (Well, almost everyone, but what's one servant when there are plenty more just a temptation away?)

As indicated, *akuma* who survive and even prosper during the period of their exposure should receive impressive gifts from their dark masters, while those that don't are fed screaming back into the winds of Yomi. At this stage, surviving *akuma* characters typically must leave the chronicle, returning only as villains in later sessions, unless some truly extraordinary events allow them to stay on (such as destroying every witness to their demonic nature, for example). Players whose characters have progressed this far should generally turn the character over to the Storyteller and make a new one, since playing the old character on a regular basis would likely be too disruptive to the game as a whole to be worthwhile.



Storytellers faced with players desiring to take the *akuma* route should remember to stress the effort required to attract the attention of the Yama Kings (as anything other than an entrée, anyway). Interested characters must often brave a journey to Yomi itself for an audience, and getting out of those realms is always a challenge. Once the infiltration has begun, make sure the *akuma* always feels the twin pressures of the Yama Kings watching over her shoulder, demanding constant progress and improvement, and the threat of being exposed too early and being destroyed. Good *akuma* characters should be a mix of heady courage and rampant paranoia — the toll their strange double life takes on their sanity after a time.

Storytellers should also remember that no matter how good an *akuma* character may be at his sworn task, the hammer will fall sooner or later, and the character will be forced to confront the truth of his evil destiny. Be it watching a former friend die due to his betrayal or even just receiving a sudden flash of the Kuei-jin's own blighted soul, the moment *will* come. The result of such confrontation should never be pleasant, even if the Kuei-jin survives, and scars should stay with the character long after incident itself. When Storytelling or playing an *akuma*, both sides must remember the eternal promise of the Infernal: You have to pay for what you take. *All of it.*

And that's a price no one can ever really pay.

## STATUS

Kuei-jin have developed many intricate rules of protocol and procedure when dealing with each other. Power-hungry vampires vie for positions of importance in the great Shadow Wars of the different courts, and a vampire's reputation can be more valuable than any Influence or Discipline. Learning to play the power-games of the elders is a long and arduous task for neonates, but in the end, it is one that either serves them well or hastens their demise.

Status is the measure of a vampire's reputation, and it is measured in Traits. Most often, it usually stems from an office held among the local Kuei-jin, from ancestor to mandarin to thunder. Such posts are never given out, and those who hold them tend to defend them zealously. However, a vampire may also gain Status by being influential in the city's business, performing extraordinary deeds or by simply catching the right eyes at the right time.

**Sample Status Traits:** Acknowledged, Admired, Adored, Cherished, Esteemed, Exalted, Famous, Faultless, Feared, Honorable, Influential, Just, Praised, Respected, Revered, Trustworthy, Well-Connected, Well-Known, Wise

Troupes should feel free to invent new Status Traits to suit their own stories and the reputations of the characters receiving the Traits.

## GAINING AND LOSING STATUS

All vampires who have ended their ré period and been officially "accepted" by the court acquire a single Status Trait: *Acknowledged*. Failure to possess this Trait means that a character cannot expect even the simplest favors from local Kuei-jin, and he may even be hunted by the thunders if the ancestor discovers his presence. Most **Laws of the East** characters start with this level of acceptance already, or at least acquire it early on in the chronicle.

Characters may gain Status by doing favors for the ancestor or other elders, upholding the Fivefold Way, saving the unlife of a prominent Kuei-jin or defeating an *akuma* menace in the city. A court official (such as the Minister of War or



Mistress of Spirits) may recommend a Kuei-jin for Status if she has been particularly useful or has assisted him in his work. On occasion, the prominent may award Status to those who hindered his enemies, but such notice may not always be a good thing.

Naturally, a character may lose Status as easily as he gains it (if not more so). Falsefully accusing another vampire of a crime, violating the Fivefold Way, acting recklessly in the eyes of the elders or refusing to recognize the Status of another Kuei-jin are but a few of the ways to earn such displeasure. Of course, if there are no witnesses to report such violations....

A character may never gain more than one Status Trait per story. There are two exceptions to this rule: if the elders reward or sanction an additional Trait, or if the Status Traits are conferred when a Kuei-jin assumes an office in Kuei-jin society. However, a character can *lose* more than one Status per story,

## USING STATUS

Status comes in two types: permanent and temporary. Permanent Status is recorded on the character sheet, as a measure of a character's actual standing in Kuei-jin society; permanent Status gains or losses are added to or removed from your character sheet. By contrast, the loss or gain of temporary Status has no effect on permanent Status, and it tends to fluctuate more. Temporary Status Traits can be represented with Status Cards (since they tend to change hands often).

You may bid a Status Trait instead of a regular Trait in any applicable Social Challenge. You may also choose to add Status Traits to your Social Traits during a Social Challenge if Traits are compared. You must tell your opponent when you wish to use your Status Traits in these ways, however, since they may choose to ignore them if they like. Such a disrespectful act typically incurs a loss of permanent Status for the offending Kuei-jin, unless the vampire ignored was far less influential than the offender. Some form of punishment should be expected, though. Elders consider those who flout the system dangerously disruptive, and they seldom tolerate such insolence for long.

Keeping tabs on Status can become quite a chore for one Storyteller to handle. It is therefore recommended that troupes assign a special Narrator, called the Whisper Keeper, to keep a written record of all important uses of Status (like loans, boons or snubs) to prevent future arguments. Players should report Status changes or activities like boons or snubs to the Whisper Keeper as soon as the game permits.

## EXAMPLES OF STATUS

The following are some examples of the uses and benefits of Status:

- Temporary Status may be used to add to your Social Traits during an applicable Social Challenge. (Note: This benefit does not include Discipline use, unless the Storyteller approves of such usage specifically.)
- Status is a measure of a character's creditability. In any situation where it is one vampire's word against another, Status can be the determining factor. The same is true in the case of accusing another of a crime in which there is no concrete evidence. In all such cases, the character with the most Status is the one whose word is accepted.
- You may loan temporary Status to another to show your favor, though the individual to which you made the loan must return it immediately on the asking. The bearer may spend this Trait as a temporary Trait, after which it is gone for the duration of the story. (This is the only way a character's temporary Status can rise



above her permanent Status rating.) Loaned Status can be used exactly as you would use your own. You can give only one Trait of Status to any one person in this fashion.

- You must possess at least one Trait of Status (other than Acknowledged) in order to petition the mandarin council or the ancestor for any reason. Those without such standing are considered beneath notice to request the attention of such potent entities.

- Anyone of higher Status may remove permanent Status from those lower than themselves at a cost of one permanent Status Trait per Trait removed. Temporary Status may be removed in the same fashion. Such is often done as punishment, including removing the Status of Acknowledged and thus, leaving the person at the mercy of the court's justice. Doing so without sufficient cause can backfire, however, if the favor of the court turns against the offending vampire.

- You may grant permanent Status to another of your own Dharma if he has less than half your permanent Status. The cost for such a boon is one temporary Status Trait, and the boon must be made publicly, such as during a meeting of the mandarins or another such gathering.

- Kuei-jin of a particular Dharma may remove one Status Trait from an elder of the Dharma by expending a group total of permanent Status Traits equal to the elder's permanent Status. The mandarins may also lower the ancestor's permanent Status in the same fashion.

- Remember, you may gain only one Status Trait per story, but you may lose more than one Trait. Again, there are two exceptions to this rule: Status granted or sanctioned by the ancestor, and Status received for assuming a station, such as Minister of War or the like.

## STATIONS

There are many different official stations that a Kuei-jin may hold, each of which grants Status within a court's territory. Territories with small Kuei-jin populations may double up certain stations, or even leave positions vacant. For example, unlike Kin-jin princes, ancestors are not adopted for every single region, as much because of the difficulty of the tests required to obtain the status as everything else. If an ancestor is absent, a council of mandarins typically rules the court, with the eldest among them acting as director. It is highly recommended that the most powerful stations should remain in the hands of Narrators and more experienced players, with newer players learning the ropes before taking a shot at attaining a station.

Stations function slightly differently from those of the Kin-jin, simply because some titles are conferred on Kuei-jin along with their rise in Dharma and are not strictly a matter of public opinion. Characters cannot assume stations they do not have sufficient Dharma to possess. For example, a character with only two Dharma Traits cannot assume the status of jina, until he gains at least one additional level of Dharma. However, enlightenment itself does not guarantee a position is retained once it is gained. A character whose Dharmic rating accords the status of mandarin may be still stripped of his official powers by the court if he displeases his betters, thus losing the Status benefits listed here. If that happens, the character suffers no actual loss of Dharma — his personal enlightenment is not affected by the opinions of others — but he has lost ground in the eyes of others. This act is especially common in very crowded courts or with Kuei-jin who choose to remain distant from court politics. There may be quite a few characters who qualify to



assume the station of jina, but only a handful who are actually invested with the Status benefits of such a position.

Certain powers and responsibilities are inherent in each of these stations, and all powers that a station confers are lost immediately if a character is removed from or relinquishes it. The following is a list of the "standard" stations:

### Arhat

- Above even the bodhisattvas in standing, arhats are beyond mere Traits. Their presence in court (should they deem entering such lesser surroundings necessary) is beyond question or reproach, and no lesser Kuei-jin have the power to stand against them in court. One word from an arhat can change entire chronicles, let alone re-draw political lines, and so their presence should never be casual or accidental.

- Due to the immense influence they wield, arhats should always be Narrator-controlled and their appearances momentous events in a chronicle. Most Kuei-jin will never see an arhat, and those that do should never be the same afterward.

### Bodhisattva

- Bodhisattvas are very nearly living gods among the Kuei-jin, and they demand according respect. A bodhisattva who deigns to entertain lesser beings is considered to possess the Status Traits *Deific*, *Awe-Inspiring*, *Exalted*, *Fearsome* and *Peerless*. These Traits cannot be lost permanently as long as the character retains the title of bodhisattva.

- Sufficient respect is required to gain the ear of a bodhisattva. Kuei-jin who wish an audience with the sacred one must abase himself properly, sacrificing at least one Status Trait for no less than a month to show humility.

- Bodhisattvas may strip lesser Kuei-jin of any amount of temporary Status with but a few words, at no Status cost to themselves. Likewise, they may grant great temporary Status with but an approving smile or knowing nod. At the Storyteller's discretion, sufficient notice from a bodhisattva may translate into permanent Status, but such an occurrence should be very rare indeed.

- Bodhisattvas are considered sacred, even those of the Devil-Tiger Dharma, and striking or otherwise harming them is deemed taboo by most courts. Kuei-jin who move against a bodhisattva in any capacity other than self-defense lose two permanent Status Traits immediately for their insolence, and they may face actual Dharmic repercussions as well for daring to harm such an example of enlightenment.

- Obviously, a single bodhisattva can wield extraordinary amounts of power in Kuei-jin society with very little effort. For this reason, it is recommended that only Narrators be entrusted with bodhisattva characters. Those who choose to abuse their powers should be removed to Storyteller control for the sake of game balance.

### The Ancestor

- The ancestor of a court gains the three additional Status Traits *Exalted*, *Well-Known* and *Famous* automatically. He can never lose these Traits permanently while remaining ancestor.

- The ancestor can remove one permanent Status Trait from someone at a cost of one temporary Status Trait per Trait removed.

- The ancestor can grant permanent Status Traits to any Kuei-jin at a cost of one temporary Trait for each Trait awarded. The ancestor (and only the ancestor) may thus break the rule of gaining only one Status Trait per story, allowing a



character to gain more than one Trait. If an ancestor wishes to confer more than three permanent Status Traits on another Kuei-jin in a single session, the fourth and subsequent Traits will cost the ancestor permanent Status instead of temporary Traits. It does not cost the ancestor temporary Status to award a Kuei-jin the first Status Trait when she is first presented to the court at the end of the *ré* period. The Trait Acknowledged is conferred automatically as long as the ancestor chooses to recognize the Running Monkey.

- Only the ancestor may pronounce a Kuei-jin *akuma*, and he may veto even the council of mandarins if he feels insufficient proof has been provided. Once the pronouncement is made, the offender is stripped of all Status immediately, and he has no say in the court. Instead, he is at the mercy of the other Kuei-jin. For more on the effects of the *akuma* pronouncement, see p. 217.

### Mandarins

• Kuei-jin receive the additional Status Traits: *Revered* and *Invested* when they join the ranks of the mandarins. As long as the character remains a mandarin, she cannot lose these Traits permanently.

• Mandarins may grant or remove permanent Status Traits to or from any member of their court at a cost of one temporary Status Trait for each Trait granted or removed. The scope of this authority includes the ancestor, although only foolish mandarins would dare to use it against one without widespread support for such an action. Any Status granted or removed in this fashion is subject to review by the court. If found to have been used improperly, the change is revoked, and the mandarin himself may face loss of Status for the dishonor.

• Only mandarins may nominate an ancestor for a court, and the nominee must be at least of mandarin status himself. Nomination is no guarantee of success — the trials are intense — but no ancestors may be chosen by Kuei-jin other than the court's mandarins. Mandarins are under no obligation to reveal their reasons for nomination to the rest of the court. Indeed, they have no obligation to even pick a popular candidate, only one they feel is up to the task. However, the nature of the selection guarantees that the ancestor is almost universally respected, if not liked.

• Most mandarins have a specific title (or titles) within the court that describes their assigned duties in addition to their mandarin status, such as Minister of War or Keeper of the Wilds. The responsibilities of such duties are typically detailed in the court policies, and the Whisper Keeper should have a written record of their powers and limitations. Within his given sphere of influence, the mandarin may grant and remove Status as per the ancestor's abilities, as well as call a Kuei-jin before the court to administer justice if the matter involves the mandarin's duties.

• If there is no ancestor for a particular court, the council of mandarins assumes all the powers thereof, provided there is a majority vote in favor of the measures taken by regarding the matter at hand. In some cases, such as those involving the *akama* pronouncement and the like, the council vote must be unanimous.

### Jina

• Jina have the same powers as mandarins, with the exception of nominating and acting in the stead of an ancestor, although they receive only the Status Trait: *Respected*, which cannot be lost permanently as long as they remain a jina. However, their official powers may also be revoked at any time by the mandarins of the court, though doing so obviously has no effect on their actual Dharma rating.



- Most jina hold at least one office, typically one related to training younger Kuei-jin or otherwise spreading enlightenment among lesser members of the court.

### Thunder

- Thunders are the warriors and lawmen of the court. They can be of any Dharmic rank, although they must be capable fighters and have somehow earned the trust of the court in the past. Usually an entire *wu* is nominated to assume the mantles of thunders, although such is not always the case. The thunder gains the additional Status Trait: *Fearful* when he attains the position. While he remains a thunder, he cannot lose this Trait permanently.

- The thunder may demand that any Kuei-jin within the city accompany him to court for questioning or judgment. Failure to do so causes the offender to lose one permanent Status Trait and possibly one or more limbs. Thunders seldom take "no" for an answer.

- The thunder can harass, detain or destroy without penalty any Kuei-jin who have not been presented formally to the court or who he deems to pose a threat to local Kuei-jin or their protectorates. What constitutes a "threat" can obviously be interpreted quite liberally, although those found to abuse this privilege are disciplined severely and seldom allowed to reclaim the mantle of thunder again. Any Kin-jin within the bounds of court are automatically fair game as well, unless they have secured official sanction from the court.

### Minister

- Like the thunders, ministers are Kuei-jin of lesser Dharma imbued with specific powers and responsibilities by a court. Ministers are typically found in smaller courts where more enlightened Kuei-jin are hard to come by, but a need still exists for officials to help run the courts. By the same token, larger courts sometimes hand out posts as rewards for court service by particularly talented or deserving younger Kuei-jin, or in order to ensure that duties that more enlightened Kuei-jin do not wish to perform are carried out.

- Ministers receive the Status Trait: *Invested* after assuming their post, and they cannot lose this Trait permanently as long as they retain their office.

- Ministers are invested to specific offices, much the same as many mandarins and jina are, but they are restricted entirely to their sphere of influence and have no greater power to control or advise the court than that singular subject. However, they may demand notice of other Kuei-jin within their sphere, question witnesses in their field, recommend justice be served on related matters, address the court and otherwise enjoy its full support in the observance of their duties.

- Some common posts that lesser Kuei-jin hold include: Keeper of the Floating Garden (overseeing mortal relations with the court), Dragon Feeder (wry term for Kuei-jin responsible for the mundane upkeep of any dragon nests the court controls) and Mistress of Unseen Eyes (controlling the local media).

## FACE

Face is the name the Kuei-jin give for the art of using Status, and while the various cultures of Asia recognize the term differently, it has evolved as the standard for the courts of the Kuei-jin over time. Face is the system of respect that drives Status and makes politics possible. Technically, it is defined as when one Kuei-jin officially becomes indebted to another vampire for services rendered. In reality, however, face is far more complicated a system than that, and its rules are enforced with lethal zeal by its participants.



Players should first make it clear who's doing the favor and who's receiving it. The receiver owes a boon to his bestower which must be categorized as a trivial, minor, major, blood or life boon. The players then agree on either an appropriate number of Status Traits which the receiver then gives the bestower, or they may make other arrangements such as loaning Influence Traits rather than Status. Status Traits given in this fashion are known as Boon Traits. The arrangement must be made amenable to all Kuei-jin involved in the deal, and any other stipulations or clauses carried on the boon must be announced then. Kuei-jin who bestow a boon typically only require one thing: "You may not take any physical action against me for the duration of this boon."

The bestower may continue to use the Boon Traits just as he would any other loaned Status Traits. However, the bestower's loss of Boon Traits is only temporary. They are restored at the beginning of the next story. The primary difference between Boon Traits and other loaned Traits is that the original owner of the Traits may not request their return as usual with such Traits. They may only be returned once the boon has been settled.

The only way for a receiver to rid herself of a boon permanently is to repay or ignore the favor. Breaking boons is a serious insult in Kuei-jin society. Ignoring a favor not only costs the receiver Status, but it also risks the ire of the bestower. Regardless of the standing of the bestower, the receiver always loses Status if the receiver ignores a major, blood or life boon. Nobody likes a vampire who brushes off someone who just went through serious hardship on his behalf.

### GIVING THE DEVIL HIS DUE: REPAYING DEBTS

Getting yourself out of debt is usually an event arranged through roleplaying. Typically, players eliminate boons by returning equivalent favors. However, if the bestower is in sufficient danger, you might pay off your debt by returning only a small favor. Indeed, you might even be able to put the original bestower in your debt! It all rests on a sense of timing and a character's skill at bartering. Other Kuei-jin may resent you for doing so, but a matter of face may seem a small price to pay in crisis. A favor is as valuable as the Traits associated with it. Thus a minor boon (two Traits) and a major boon (three Traits) are fair compensation for a life boon (five Traits).

**Trivial boons** are one-time favors, such as protecting someone for the evening, aiding someone with a Discipline or supporting another's political move.

**Minor boons** can last more than one evening, and they usually entail some sort of inconvenience, such as allowing safe passage through a hostile city, revealing crucial information or disposing of a threat.

**Major boons** usually entail a great expenditure of time or resources on the bestower's part. The effects of the favor usually last for many game sessions. An example of such a boon would be teaching the receiver a new Discipline, or purchasing a nightclub to serve as the receiver's haven.

**Blood boons** occur when the bestower places herself in a potentially life-threatening situation in order to help the receiver. Thus the name "blood boon": The bestower is willing to shed her blood for the receiver.

**Life boons** involve the bestower actively risking her unlife for the receiver's own.



## CATHAYAN JUSTICE

Justice within Kuei-jin society typically begins with the appearance of the court's thunders on the doorstep of the accused. Those who comply quietly are treated fairly and brought before the court with all due speed, while those who resist the summons of the thunders are often allowed to *linger* a bit between the time of their capture and the time they stand trial. Kuei-jin justice is typically handled by the ancestor or the council of mandarins. Cathayan trials are usually much more formal affairs and less arbitrary than the brief "ordeals" of the Kin-jin, but they are no less brutally efficient. Indeed, after the presentation of formal charges is finished and all the evidence has been considered, the court seldom has trouble levying harsh penalties on those found guilty. Since the judgment derives from all the existing facts, it is thus justified. For lesser crimes such as minor violations of court protocol or speaking back to an elder, punishments include censure, loss of post or time spent doing the Kuei-jin equivalent of "public service" for the court. This public service includes a series of the most humiliating and degrading tasks the mandarins can devise, designed to teach the offender the place of humility under Heaven.

The Kuei-jin have little patience for more serious crimes. Punishments are typically on the degree of exile, torture, Facing the Eye of Heaven (also known as watching a sunrise) or even the pronouncement of *akuma*. While the last was once reserved solely for those discovered to be in the service of the Yama Kings, the Fifth Age has seen the sentence leveled against those who simply had the temerity to disagree with the elders of the court. Thus it has become a growing threat for those subjected to Kuei-jin justice. When it comes to pronouncing sentence, the ancestor's word is final, although the mandarins may object if they like, possibly earning the sentenced party a lesser pronouncement if the objections of the mandarins are forceful (or politically strong) enough. In the end, however, the ancestor has the power to overrule any objections and enforce the full sentence if he chooses, so the mandarins typically refrain from objecting unless they feel that their objection will carry some weight. If a council of mandarins presides over a court, the punishment deemed necessary by the majority is upheld.

Characters on the wrong side of Kuei-jin law have the best chance of survival without an *akuma* label if they are polite, versed in *Etiquette* and *Law*, well-spoken and (this helps) innocent. Storytellers are encouraged to pull out all the stops for high crimes brought before a Kuei-jin court. All the *wu* of a court are invariably in attendance, as is the *wu* of the accused, and the entire ceremony — from the calling of the accused to the final pronouncement of sentence — is formal, exacting, painstakingly precise and best (or worst) of all very, very final. It might well be a character's last scene. Make it as fair and memorable as possible.

## BEYOND THE WALL

### SPIRITS AND THE SPIRIT WORLDS IN LAWS OF THE EAST

Unlike their barbaric Western counterparts, who can see only the smallest level of reality, the very circumstances of the Second Breath force Kuei-jin to acknowledge and interact with the spirit worlds regularly. From honored (or angered) ancestors to the thunderous kami of the Yang realm, spirits are a vital part



of any Kuei-jin court. A Kuei-jin can travel from the physical world to one of the many spirit realms, allowing him to interact with the otherworldly landscape. Wu that choose to serve a nushi often find themselves questing through the spirit worlds on various tasks for their patron and many especially spiritual Kuei-jin. Spirituality is an integral part of anything a Cathayan does. To the Kuei-jin, the entire world is teeming with spirits of all description, although many Kuei-jin wish they were not quite so "blessed" with the talent of seeing the condition of the spirits around them with the Sixth Age on the way.

It is the Storyteller's job to bring out the spiritual side of Kuei-jin when playing **Laws of the East**. The spiritual aspect of the Middle Kingdom is a rich and rewarding aspect of the game, but one that can be impractical to play. That aspect of the game can seriously damage the whole mood if it is not handled well — and with consideration toward character development.

## **THE UNSEEN MASTER**

If spirits play more than a minor role in your game, there should be a Narrator whose job is to adjudicate and administer all spirit-related Disciplines and rites, travel in the Mirror Lands, nushi and spirit combat. This Narrator — called the "Unseen Master" — is also in charge of all the spirit plot lines and anything having to do with the spirit worlds. The Unseen Master should prepare for any Laws of the East session by defining any pre-existing spirits in the area and by creating some spirits in advance (just in case any are summoned). The Unseen Master also needs to know what the spirit worlds are like in all of the playing areas and act as the final authority on all matters spiritual in game-play.

## **THE MANY REALMS**

There are spirit worlds outside the perceptions of normal humanity. They lie alongside this world, separated from us by a barrier of static reality called the Wall. One must pass through the Wall to reach the spirit worlds or return to Earth. The Wall is said to have arisen during the Second Age, when the Ten Thousand Things separated from the unity of the August Personage of Jade and attained their own reality apart from that universal entity. The Yin World, also known as the Dark Kingdom of Jade, is a gloomy land populated by the ghosts of the dead, who spend their afterlives forever under the heel of the merciless ghost emperor Qin Shihuang. By contrast, the Yang World is a place of vibrant colors and great vitality, where the land itself comes alive and powerful nature spirits go about their tasks. Most feared of all, however, is the Yomi World — realms that were once part of the Yin or Yang World but were corrupted into the personal havens of great demon lords. It is in Yomi that every Kuei-jin's soul goes to be tormented before the Second Breath, and the many Hells found there are all too familiar for most vampires' liking.

## **TRAVELING BETWEEN THE WORLDS**

In this cynical and materialistic age, the Wall has become ever more difficult to surmount, leading some Kuei-jin to fear that the worlds will be sundered forever, to the detriment of all. Still, the Kuei-jin have many ways to breach the Wall and travel the spirit pathways beyond.

## **XIN AND YANG PRANAS**

Masters of these Disciplines possess the power to cross into the Yin and Yang World, respectively, by transforming their bodies into pure Chi energy. See the Discipline section for details.



## ENTERING THE DRAGON NEST

The rites of Behold the Spirit's Doorway and the Rite of Supplication allow vampires to locate and pass through the Wall at weak spots known as dragon nests, where spiritual reality is still stronger than physical reality. Dragon nests are favorite crossover sites due to their excellent atmosphere for Chi expenditure and the reliability of their destination in the spirit worlds. However, they are highly prized among the different *shen* of the Fifth Age, which can make powerful ones appropriately hard to hold on to as other supernaturals come to claim the prize.

The Unseen Master should keep a record of the general Wall level of any given place in the play area, and he may wish to put up signs indicating the local Wall rating.

## FOLLOWING IN THE CRAB'S FOOTSTEPS

Any Kuei-jin has the power to enter into the spirit worlds in a manner similar to what the hengeyokai call "stepping sideways." In order to do so, the Kuei-jin must concentrate for a moment on a specially prepared jade replica of themselves, then drop it to the ground, thus symbolically holding a place for themselves in the Middle Kingdom while they venture into the ethereal. They may then cross over into the Yin, Yang or Yomi World as appropriate to their site and their destination. Only jade that has been prepared with the rite of *Imbuing the Jade* is considered suitable for this purpose. Other jade, no matter how beautiful or magical, is insufficient for this purpose. Once the trip is complete, the replica shatters and a new one must be prepared before the Kuei-jin can follow the crab's footsteps again. A second jade replica is not required, although many Kuei-jin carry one as insurance against an enemy in the Middle Kingdom destroying the one they left behind and trapping them in the spirit worlds. Trapped Kuei-jin must find a gateway or other portal through which to leave.

**System:** Five minutes of concentration are all that is required to follow the crab's footsteps and enter the spirit worlds. If the player spends a Chi Trait appropriate to the type of world he wishes to enter, this time is cut in half. Furthermore, if the player spends three Chi Traits, the travel time becomes instantaneous, although he must then win or tie a Simple Test. Failure indicates that powerful spirits of the appropriate type take notice of the character's passage (often not a good thing). However, no test is ever necessary to cross over, although any combat or other distraction during this time requires the concentration be begun again. Multiple Kuei-jin may travel in this fashion at the same time, provided they all hold hands and designate one of them as their "leader" (whose Traits and Chi are used to determine any necessary results required in crossing over). Characters thus transported cannot necessarily cross back on their own, and they had best mind the leader or find themselves stranded in the worlds beyond!

## RIDING THE DRAGON'S TONGUE

Skilled Kuei-jin can use natural dragon lines to travel great distances in the blink of an eye, emerging at a distant dragon nest by a series of spiritual pathways known as rivergates. Riding the dragon's tongue is best described as akin to traveling a body of water. Once through the rivergate, Chi lines flow and shift like water, guiding the characters to the next rivergate downstream. Subtle variations of color and intensity tell experienced travelers the type of Chi they are riding as well as different destinations along the dragon line, making for a very dreamlike and ethereal experience. During travel down a rivergate, the Kuei-jin are actually very close to the surface of reality, and especially sensitive mortals (such as



## KNOCKING AT THE GATES OF HELL: THE YOMI WORLD.

Most sane Kuei-jin have no desire to visit the horrors of Hell a second time, but some — drawn by the extremes of duty or dark curiosity — are inevitably called back into the Yomi World, seeking to resolve some past shame or even settle a score with the jailers who tormented them so. Many more Kuei-jin, those who fall prey to the lies of the Yama Kings and become true *akuma*, may travel into the Hells for an audience with their dark master or to spy on another one of the pretenders to the throne of the Sixth Age. Finally, sometimes a *wu* simply has the bad fortune to find itself surrounded by the environs of Hell when traveling the spirit worlds, having followed a defiled dragon line, earned the ire of an especially nasty spirit or any number of other unintended paths. Even fewer of these accidental tourists return, their karmic debts swallowed forever by the greedy maw of Hell.

That said, there is no short description that holds true for all the Yomi realms. Each realm is ruled by a different Yama King, and each features tortures designed to show off the King's particular area of punishment. From seas of swarming maggots to boiling oceans to razor-keen winds that strip flesh in seconds, Kuei-jin unlucky enough to find themselves in Yomi must adapt to each style of punishment as they move from realm to realm, a daunting prospect indeed. There is no *escaping* the tortures of a Yomi realm, but those who understand them and learn to work around them may earn themselves an audience with the ruler of that particular realm. Such beings are beyond the scope of all but the mightiest Kuei-jin to defeat, but particularly clever and courageous Kuei-jin can still find ways of rending costly tears into the fabric of the Demon Lords' carefully woven plans. Truly inspiring tales have been spun around those Kuei-jin who dare to challenge the Yama Kings on their home territory. Of course, how many of these accolades are earned posthumously is a matter of debate....

Players who wish to have their characters travel to Yomi may do so by any normal means, although using defiled areas naturally may make passage easier (though such foul portals typically exact other, more insidious costs from the Kuei-jin who use them). Hell seldom turns anyone away, after all. However, getting out should be another matter altogether, and a very challenging one at that. It is strongly encouraged that *wu* who dare travel to Yomi are turned over to the most sadistic and imaginative Storyteller the troupe can come up with. Indeed, once in Yomi itself, the players should be treated to as gruesome and intense a spectacle as the troupe can manage. There is literally *nothing* too horrible for a Yomi realm, and Storytellers should spare no expense in bringing the visceral terror of Yomi home. If the players are overheard commenting lightheartedly about a hail of bloody hands and a 70 percent chance of gore showers while traveling in the Hell of Severed Body Parts, then something is deeply, deeply wrong. Rather, characters who enter Yomi should understand that there's a good chance they're never getting out again, and view such adventures accordingly.

For more on the Yomi World, as well as an invaluable guide to navigating it, see *The 1000 Hells, a Kindred of the East* sourcebook



powerful psychics or old Shih masters) may even sense the Kuei-jin as they pass. Kuei-jin who become overly used to riding the dragon's tongue as a means of travel should remember that wicked spirits sometimes hide or divert paths to lure the unwary into an ambush. Even friendly spirits may require a "toll" of Chi or jewelry from time to time in return for monitoring the dragon line. Storyteller's discretion determines how such manipulations can be detected (a Mental Challenge usually works best). This worry should not be a constant threat, but if the characters are using riding the dragon's tongue as an "undead subway," perhaps their high traffic has attracted the attention of some greedy spirits in the area....

**System:** A piece of specially prepared jade (again, see the rite of *Imbuing the Jade* for details) is all that is required for this method to work. Once established, a rivergate requires nothing to locate or open. Once placed in the middle of the dragon line, the gem grows into a normal-sized sampan and carries the travelers down the flowing Chi energy to their chosen destination. Although the trip seems like a floating in a leisurely current, the journey is actually quite swift, taking roughly 1/1000th the required "real world" travel time. Kuei-jin should bear in mind that while the rivergates themselves require nothing to activate, they require some annual observances and other maintenance in order to remain operational, as outlined in the rite *Imbuing the Jade*.

### **SHADOWS BEYOND THE WALL: CHARACTERS WHO HAVE CROSSED OVER**

A Kuei-jin enters the Mirror Lands holistically, but only the clothes she is wearing and the contents in her pockets goes along with her unless she has used some ritual to bring along other objects. Regardless of whether or not her spiritual travels are "real," a Kuei-jin's body is a real, physical thing in the spirit worlds and not an astral form.

A character in the Mirror Lands may not interact with people who are not in the spirit worlds without the use of some special Discipline or artifact. The Unseen Master will probably want to be kept informed as to who is in the spirit worlds, as those characters will be available for unique plot developments such as kami intercessions, demon attacks and spirit visitations.

As a Storytelling device, the Mirror Lands are without equal. The Yin and Yang worlds are a metaphoric reflection of our world. Where there is desolation or corruption in the Middle Kingdom, demons walk openly in the Mirror Lands, daring mortals and *shen* alike to stop them. Where there are great sites of technology, such as railroads, bridges and growing cities in the real world, gossamer webs are strung over everything as great spiritual spiders weave busily to maintain them in the Mirror Lands. Beyond the gates and traps of modern "civilization," the spiritual wilderness glows with an internal light and life force above comparison, and the power of Emerald Mother (for so the hengeyokai call the Earth or Gaia) is shown in all its glory.

However, players both new and old to *Mind's Eye Theatre* and the World of Darkness should take care, for the Yin and Yang Worlds of **Laws of the East** are nothing like the spirit worlds of the West. They are exotic in the extreme to Western eyes, from the greatest kami and Yama King down to the smallest nushi spirit. The setting chapter describes the spirit worlds in more detail. However, if the Storyteller and the Unseen Master aren't conveying this radical sense of difference in even the smallest scene — if the spirit worlds of Asia come across as **Laws of the Wild** in a kimono or **Oblivion** in kabuki dress — something is wrong



## WALL RATINGS

Area	Wall	Ambient Chi
Science lab	9	Sterile
Downtown core	8	Weak
Typical urban area	7	Weak
Countryside	6	Moderate
Wilderness/graveyard	5	Moderate
Well-kept Shinto shrine	4	Moderate
Supernatural site	3	Strong
The greatest dragon nest	2	Strong

with this critical part of the game. The characters may have been raised in the culture that inspired the Mirror Lands, but there's an incredible difference in hearing folktales as a child and seeing them face to face one day (let alone as frequently as many Kuei-jin do). And the players themselves should feel all the wonder and fascination that accompanies such a dramatic change of pace and atmosphere each time they cross over into the spirit worlds, even as their characters grow accustomed to meeting with spirits more and more often.

### THE MIRROR LANDS IN PLAY

If possible, the Unseen Master should create a separate area that's set up to evoke the atmosphere of the Mirror Lands. Many dramatic and important scenes can be played in a place where it actually appears as though the players are no longer in this world. Narrators can create the appropriate ambiance for the area by using such elements as dry ice fog, special lighting, mood music and other decorations. However, this area should be kept separate from the rest of the game, and the Unseen Master should prevent anyone who is not "in the spirit worlds" from entering the area. Of course, a grim Yin vista in the Dark Kingdom of Jade should be very different to enter than a lush jungle of the Yang World, and both are far from the twisted and horrible atmosphere of a wicked Yomi realm. Therefore, it is very important that the Unseen Master know if any scenes are scheduled to occur in the Mirror Lands, so that she may prepare an appropriate setting for the scene.



abuse the Mirror Lands for purely tactical "drops" and "extractions."

It is also possible that players will try to abuse their advantage by entering the spirit worlds constantly to escape potential danger or to get the drop on unsuspecting foes. Doing so often proves inauspicious in the extreme, as the Mirror Lands contain dangers unlike anything found on the Earth (not to mention that many *shen* are wiser in the ways of the spirit worlds than most Kuei-jin are). An Unseen Master has free reign to throw Mukade, angry hengeyokai and other hazards at Kuei-jin who



To indicate that his character is in the spirit worlds, a player should bring his right hand across his chest. Making this gesture lets other players know that you are in the Mirror Lands and not really “there,” which can prevent no end of confusion during game-play.

## SPIRITS

Spirits are entities born of one of the Mirror Lands and that dwell there most of the time. There is a tremendous diversity of spirits in the different lands, as every single thing on Earth has a sleeping spirit associated with it. Some spirits aren’t sleeping any longer, and many things have awakened spirits associated with them. For example, a prized family katana might actually have a wakeful spirit of Honor or Courage residing within it.

The difference between a waking and sleeping spirit is that one has an active consciousness and the other does not. *Laws of the East* focuses on awake, active spirits only. Sleeping spirits do not come into play unless the Unseen Master deems them worthy of notice.

### TYPES OF SPIRITS

Most often, spirits appear as animals or anthropomorphic representations of abstract ideas. Spirits rarely look human, but they often appear to be humanoid (that is, a variant on the basic human form). Narrators are free to modify spirits’ appearances to fit the needs of their games.

### GAFFLINGS, JAGGLINGS AND WRAITHS

The Kuei-jin think of spirits in terms of their general level of power. The weakest and smallest spirits are called Gafflings. These beings are mere extensions of the power of larger spirits, and they have little to no independent intelligence. Jagglings — common, everyday spirits with which the Kuei-jin interact — are slightly more powerful. The lower spirits that are commonly found as servants of the Yama Kings are called devils, and they come in many forms, each usually associated with some dark emotion or act of depravity. Wraiths are the vast majority of human spirits that linger on after death. Some are quite potent in their Yin Chi arts, but most are too wrapped up in the fading afterimages of their lives to truly focus their powers.

### KAMI, YAMA KINGS AND MALFEANS

There are a number of spirits that have grown in power to the point where they command many Jagglings and have a great supply of personal energy. These spirits, called kami, tend to have their own realms in the Yang World, and they are often incarnations of ancient deities, powerful forces, archetypes and other mythic beings. Many of the kami are ancient, and they have correspondingly vast knowledge and powers. By contrast, Yama Kings and Queens are demons whose ruthless cunning and blood-thirst has elevated them above the standing of their lesser fellows, and who hold dominion over their Yomi kingdoms with an iron fist. Finally, the greatest of wicked wraiths are known as Malfeans by Western devils. The P'o taint they accumulate reeks such that Heaven banishes them to the darkest depths of the Jade Kingdom, where they fester and plot ways to further infect the Yin realms.



## RULERS OF THE CELESTIAL MINISTRY

Above the level of the kami are the ministers of Heaven itself—powerful and eternal spirits that embody fundamental forces in the universe. The August Personage of Jade, the Scarlet Queen and the Ebon Dragon are all ministers of Heaven, as is the Emerald Mother that the hengeyokai revere. These mighty beings are the least “normal” appearing of the spirits. They assume abstract forms and communicate in strange ways. These entities are so transcendent and distant that it is difficult to describe them in simple terms. It is highly unlikely that a Kuei-jin is going to interact directly with such an exalted personage during the course of a game of *Laws of the East*.

## SPIRIT CREATION

Although the Kuei-jin have not completely plumbed the depths of the mystery of spirits and spirit lore, Narrators must be prepared and know all of the Traits that make up each spirit they use.

Spirits have Rage, Willpower, Gnosis and a pool of Power Traits that they use to activate special magical abilities called Charms. (In *Laws of the East*, both Gnosis and Power can be used to empower Charms.)

In order to create a spirit for use in the game, the Unseen Master must first decide what affinity the spirit has. A spirit's affinity is the fundamental theme or mood for the spirit. It is indicative of the spirit's purpose, personality and powers. For example, a spirit of war might be particularly good at fighting, and have the Charm: *Materialize*, which allows it to affect enemies in the physical world. Virtually anything can describe a spirit affinity. Spirits that have a kami or Yama King as their affinity are considered servants of that greater spirit. For example, a spirit with Hurricane affinity is allied closely with the Hurricane kami.

A spirit's affinity can be discerned through delicate negotiations and careful examination (if outward appearances fail to suffice). If a character has the *Enigmas* Ability, the player can determine the spirit's affinity with a Static Mental Challenge (Unseen Master discretion on difficulty). Knowing what spirits side with which factions is essential in the politics of the Mirror Lands, but it is a halting skill at best, as often learned through failure as through success.

Next, the Unseen Master must decide what type of spirit his subject is. Most of the spirits a Kuei-jin is familiar with are wraiths, Gafflings, Jagglings and nushi avatars.

Unseen Masters should use the spirit creation rules to flesh out the rest of a spirit. Spirits may be assigned Negative Traits to increase the number of Traits assigned to them.

For more information, see the Spirit Creation Table. To determine the number of points available for spirit creation, see the information on spirit types on p. 227-229.

### WRAITHS

For information on wraith creation, see *Oblivion*. In a pinch, wraiths can be simulated with the systems here — just take a guess at what power level they are and pick “ghostly” Charms.

### GAFFLING

These are the smallest and weakest of all spirits.

**Creation Points:** 7

## SPIRIT CREATION TABLE

Note: The number of points each spirit type has is in the table below this one.

Cost	Power
1	Per two points to spend on Willpower, Rage, or Chi.
1	Per point of Power.
1	Per point of an Ability.
2	Per Charm possessed.
2	Spirit has one Renown among other spirits.
<b>For Nushi Spirits Only</b>	
1	Nushi can speak with all members of group.
1	Nushi can find all the members of the group.
2	Nushi is nearly always with one member of the group.
4	Nushi is with each member of a <i>wu</i> and allows them to communicate mentally.
5	Nushi can materialize in time of need without cost.

**Negative Traits:** 5 maximum

**Power Pool:** 7 maximum

**Charms:** Airt Sense only and at no cost

**Rage:** 5 maximum

**Willpower:** 5 maximum

**Chi:** 5 maximum

**Abilities:** 5 Maximum

### JACGLING

These are the most common spirits in the spirit worlds.

**Creation Points:** 25; 30 if connected to a kami

**Negative Traits:** Maximum of 5

**Power Pool:** 10 maximum

**Charms:** Any up to 5

**Rage:** 7 maximum

**Willpower:** 7 maximum

**Chi:** 7 maximum

**Abilities:** 10 maximum; maximum of 5 Traits per Ability

### NUSHI

These are the more powerful servants of the Heavenly ministry.

**Creation Points:** 40

**Negative Traits:** Maximum of five

**Power Pool:** 20 maximum

**Charms:** Any up to 7

**Rage:** 8 maximum

**Willpower:** 8 maximum

**Chi:** 8 maximum



**Abilities:** 15 maximum; maximum level 6

### KAM

All totem avatars come from these very powerful spirits, which represent and act as avatars for each animal and natural force.

**Creation Points:** 50

**Negative Traits:** maximum of 5

**Power Pool:** 30 maximum

**Charms:** 10 maximum

**Rage:** 10 maximum

**Willpower:** 10 maximum

**Chi:** 10 maximum

**Abilities:** 20 maximum; maximum level 7

### MINISTERS OF HEAVEN / HELL

These are the most powerful spirits.

**Creation Points:** Unlimited (minimum 50)

**Negative Traits:** No more than five

**Power Pool:** Unlimited

**Charms:** Any

**Rage:** No maximum

**Willpower:** No maximum

**Chi:** No maximum

**Abilities:** Whatever you think they need at whatever level.

**Storyteller Note:** Ministers are beings of deific power, and no character should be able to make these august forces even work up a sweat. If your Kuei-jin are actually taking swings at a Minister of Heaven to the point where you need to look at the spirit's Traits, there is something seriously wrong in the game.

### SPIRIT COMBAT

When a Yang-spirit attacks in the Mirror Lands, it does so by making a Willpower Challenge against the target's Physical Traits. If successful, a spirit can make a Rage Challenge against the target's Willpower and do a second level of damage (aggravated this time) if it succeeds. Spirits defend using their Willpower against Physical Challenges and Gnosis against Mental or Social Challenges. Damage is marked off against a spirit's Power Pool. Spirits do not bid with Trait disadvantages once injured.

When a spirit is reduced to zero Power, it dissipates into the Yang World for a number of hours equal to 20 minus its Gnosis (minimum of five hours), after which it reforms somewhere in the spirit worlds with one Power Trait. Optionally, a Kuei-jin who reduces a spirit's Power to zero may elect to siphon up to five Traits' worth of Gnosis from the spirit in order to recharge his own Chi. If the siphoning of Gnosis drains the spirit completely, it dies. A Kuei-jin who kills a spirit in this manner gains one Notoriety Trait automatically (see p. 234.) It doesn't matter who else you *think* saw you. The August Personage of Jade knows all, and that's more than enough.

Once again, for information on wraiths/ Yin-spirits in spirit combat, see Oblivion.



## CHARMS

Charms are spirit powers. They often require a challenge of some sort in order to be activated. Charms can be borrowed with certain Disciplines, and a vampire of the west direction can often command a spirit to use its Charms to aid a Kuei-jin. Any spirit can buy Charms during character creation. Unless stated otherwise, a Charm lasts for one scene.

### Access Dragon Nest

Power Cost: 6

Same as the Kuei-jin Rite of Supplication.

### Hundred Invisible Fingers

Power Cost: Variable

This Charm allows a spirit to take an inanimate object into the spirit lands. Once it is in the Mirror Lands, the spirit can use the item, play with it and move it around until the end of the scene, when it returns ("How did my katana wind up in a tree?") to the real world. Items up to the size of a large peach cost one Power Trait, while ones up to dagger-sized cost two, and larger items up to the size of a personal computer cost three.

### Affinity Attack

Power Cost: 2/attack

A catchall attack ability, this Charm is a one-health-level attack associated in some way with the spirit's affinity. For example, a fire-spirit will have a fire-based attack, though it's up to the Narrator to work out the details. Hurled fireballs or gouts of liquid flame are possible applications.

### Affinity Defense

Power Cost: 1

Similarly, this Charm is a catch-all defense ability. The defense must be associated with the spirit's affinity. For example, an air spirit may cause a wall of swirling wind to protect it against an incoming attack. It is up to the Unseen Master to define the type of defense for each spirit. This Charm absorbs one level of damage each turn.

### Affinity Sense

Power Cost: 2

Spirits know their own. This power enables a spirit to sense things in both the Mirror Lands and in the Middle Kingdom that are appropriate to its affinity. For example, the Affinity Sense of a Typhoon spirit might be *Storm Sense*, which would enable it to detect stormy weather patterns in a given area, or to sense any changes in those patterns.

### Affinity Ward

Power Cost: Variable, +1/challenge

Some spirits are able to designate an area of the Mirror Lands that is protected from other spirits of the ward's specific affinity. The area is usually circular in shape, and it is about the size of a single room (10' diameter). The initial Power cost of this Charm is the number of Power Traits the spirit wishes to invest in protection. These Traits are the difficulty against which a Static Rage Challenge must be made by any spirit attempting to enter the area. These invested Traits are lost when the Ward is abandoned.



### Searing Flesh of Yomi

Power Cost: 6

A searing torment that no being ever forgets (or forgives), this Charm doubles all wound penalties on a single target for one combat. If this modifier drops a character's available Traits below zero, he must spend a Willpower Trait in order to take any action but roll on the ground in agony.

### Airt Sense

Power Cost: 1

The most common of spirit powers, this Charm enables a spirit to determine the best path through the Mirror Lands to a given destination, and it can help the spirit find hidden places in the spirit realm.

### Appear

Power Cost: 3, +1/minute

This Charm allows a spirit to be seen and heard in the real world, but not touched or harmed. Furthermore, it may not touch or harm any being in the Middle Kingdom.

### Shatter the Persistent Obstruction

Power Cost: 1 (more can be added at Narrator discretion)

Static Gnosis Challenge made against a lock or other security feature opens it without causing damage to the boundary. Difficulty is Narrator's discretion.

### World Flows Like Water

Power Cost: 2-10

This potent Charm allows the spirit to play with the foundations of the spirit worlds. The spirit can disrupt the reality of a substance, and thereby modify its form in the Mirror Lands, through a Static Gnosis Challenge (difficulty is Narrator discretion). This power includes anything from putting a door in a wall (in the spirit worlds), to turning a house inside out. The extent of the attempted change and how clever the idea is determines the cost. If the Static Gnosis Challenge is lost, the spirit will lose one Gnosis, so most spirits with this Charm are restrained in its use. Some spirits have the *World Flows Like Water* Charm only for specific areas associated with their affinity. For example, a Tsunami spirit might have *World Flows Like Water*, but might only be able to affect areas related to the ocean.

### Strengthen the Spider's Web

Power Cost: 2/target

Only spirits of technology and progress possess this dreaded Charm. It allows a spirit to bind a target to the local spiritual surroundings by making a Willpower Challenge against the target's Yang. Each successful attack subtracts one Physical Trait from the target until there are none left and the target is encased in the spirit's web. To free the prisoner, others must do damage to the web equal to the number of Physical Traits lost by the target.

### Plea for Succor

Power Cost: 5

The equivalent of a Kuei-jin howling for aid, this Charm allows the spirit to call for help from other spirits of the same affinity. The spirit must succeed in a Static Gnosis Challenge (against seven Traits), and any other spirits in the vicinity must respond for at least one turn.

### Purge the Corruption



Power Cost: 10

This Charm purges spiritual corruption in the spirit's vicinity, allowing wounded areas to heal and freeing mortals of demonic taint. Note that this gift is ineffective in regards to clearing up truly advanced taint (such as a Kuei-jin or bakemono's state), although it might aid in any effort at redemption such creatures undertake.

#### **Spin the Senses**

Power Cost: 2

Only capricious spirits of nature and insanity possess this Charm. The spirit may alter how others perceive the local landscape (up to and including obscuring the four cardinal directions) with a successful Gnosis Challenge against the local Wall rating (minimum of 6). When affected by *Spin the Senses* during game-play, a player must succeed in a Mental Challenge against the spirit or head off in the direction the spirit wishes.

#### **Adrift on the Sea of Dreams**

Power Cost: 10/visit

Spirits have long come to holy men in dreams and visions, and this Charm explains it. A spirit may enter a person's dream and use Gnosis Challenges against the target's Mental Traits so as to change the nature of the dream. This Charm can be used for comforting, communicating dark portents and dream omens, or just walking through someone else's dream. The target must succeed or tie a Simple Test when she awakens in order to remember the dream.

#### **Soothe the Injured Soul**

Power Cost: variable

Not all spirits seek chaos and destruction. *Soothe the Injured Soul* grants the ability to heal beings in the Mirror Lands. Normal wounds can be healed at a rate of one wound per Power Trait. Aggravated wounds can be healed at a rate of one wound per two Power Traits. Anything living (hengeyokai, hsien, humans) can be healed with this Charm, although Kuei-jin are out of luck.

#### **Hearing Heaven's Whispers**

Power Cost: 3

The boon of many Kuei-jin of the west direction, this power enables a spirit to connect into the "cosmic switchboard" and gain information about virtually any subject. A Static Gnosis Challenge, the difficulty of which is equal to the complexity or specialty of the information sought, determines the level of detail of the information gained.

#### **Intangibility**

Power Cost: 4, +1/minute

Spirits take great offense at being threatened by impudent creatures, especially by the mortal world. This Charm protects a spirit from all attacks. A spirit can be seen and heard, but not touched or harmed when *Intangibility* is active. While intangible, a spirit cannot be affected by mental attacks, but it can be tricked by outside influences into lowering its guard. *Shintai* Disciplines would not work affect an intangible spirit, but *Obligation* would.

The spirit cannot use the Charm: Reform with *Intangibility* simultaneously.

#### **Dog's Wisdom**

Power Cost: 10



Allows the spirit to know immediate details in the physical world like area-layout, location and type of beings in the vicinity.

#### **Materialize**

Power Cost: Variable

A spirit with this Charm may materialize and affect the physical world, assuming its Gnosis equals or exceeds the Wall in the area. When it materializes, the spirit must spend Power to create a physical shape and to give itself bodily Traits. However, a spirit still uses its Gnosis for all Social and Mental Challenges. Power costs for creating a physical form are as follows:

#### **Power Cost Trait**

- 1 Per one Physical Trait.
- 1 For each level of an Ability that requires physical action.
- 1 For Basic health levels (as per human).
- 1 Per health level above that (each extra one also increases size).
- 1 For natural weaponry (teeth, claws, etc.) that will do aggravated damage.

Spirits are not limited in their potential Traits. A spirit may stay materialized as long as it desires, but it may not enter an area with a Wall higher than its Chi. Spirits may not regain Power while materialized (without the use of certain Charms). If a materialized spirit's health levels are reduced to zero, it dissipates into the spirit worlds as normal. Aggravated damage suffered by a materialized spirit is removed from both its Health and Power.

Spirits rarely escape a sojourn on Earth unscathed, and circumstances must be dire for a spirit to use this Charm.

#### **Voice of Heaven**

Power Cost: 1/scene

A spirit can speak directly with the mind of someone nearby, even if he is not in the Mirror Lands or cannot understand spirits.

#### **Veil of Nothingness**

Power Cost: 1/scene

A swirling fog or cloud surrounds a spirit, obscuring it and preventing it from being recognized or identified. This fog cannot be penetrated by eyesight alone.

#### **Showing Dragon Teeth**

Power Cost: 5

This potent Charm creates allows the spirit to grant others the ability to ride the dragon's tongue to a desired location. A dragon nest need not be present at either end for the use of this Charm. The maximum distance that can be traveled in this fashion is 1000 miles.

#### **Possess Animal**

Power Cost: Three, +1/scene

Although superficially similar to regular possession, this Charm is not the same. This power enables a spirit to possess an animal after a successful Gnosis Challenge against the Gnosis rating of the animal's spirit. The animal is then controlled by the possessing spirit until the animal is slain, the spirit runs out of Power or someone banishes it.

#### **Possession**



Power Cost: 3 +2/command

The Narrator controlling the spirit engages in a Gnosis Challenge against the target's Mental Traits. After that, a Social Challenge is required every time the spirit tries to command the target's body to move or perform specific actions. During a Possession, the spirit can use some of its Charms and Abilities through the host (Storyteller discretion). The target can spend a Willpower Trait to repel any attempt to use Possession.

#### Goblin Hands

Power Cost: 1

Often as troubling as it is useful, the spirit may control one item of technology and operate it as a human might. Of course, Gnosis Challenges may be required for the spirit to figure the item out, since very few spirits are engineers or experienced craftsmen.

#### Reform

Power Cost: 10

This Charm allows a spirit to dissipate and reform somewhere else in the spirit worlds, usually far away from its enemies.

#### Ten Thousand Faces

Power Cost: 5

Long a tool of crafty and playful spirits, this Charm enables a spirit to change its size, shape, color or appearance. A shapeshifting spirit may look like anything it desires, but does not gain the Abilities or Traits of the new shape.

#### Building the Wall

Power Cost: 10

Often used to bar intruders or trap prey, this Charm increases the strength of the Wall by one in a particular place until it is breached a number of times equal to the enhanced level. The local Wall rating then returns to normal.

#### Hunting Talons of the Firebird

Power Cost: 1/attempt

Frightening in its implications (not to mention its uses), this Charm enables a spirit to attempt to drain Gnosis (which can be converted to Power on a one-for-one basis) or Willpower. The attacking spirit must win a Gnosis Challenge against the Kuei-jin (who bids Social or Mental Traits) or spirit that is the target of this Charm. If the attack is successful, the target loses a point of Gnosis or Willpower at the attacker's discretion. The spirit must announce beforehand which of the three Traits it is attempting to steal.

Kuei-jin and spirits can also submit to this Charm voluntarily in order to replenish a spirit.

#### Shake the Pillars of Heaven

Power Cost: 5/10 foot area, 10/level of damage

The spirit can shake the spirit worlds in a confined area. Those standing are thrown to the ground, and everyone in the affected area takes two health levels of damage automatically.

## NOTORIETY

Notoriety represents a Kuei-jin's reputation among spirits. For each Notoriety Trait that a Kuei-jin has, he receives a one-Trait penalty when summoning spirits. The Unseen Master assigns or takes away Notoriety Traits based on her estimation



of the way spirits perceive the character. Notoriety comes and goes depending on the character's actions. If a Kuei-jin gets enough Notoriety Traits, demons might show up to offer him power, or a kami might send avatars to see why an offending Kuei-jin is messing with her ambassadors.

A good rule of thumb about Notoriety is that a character receives a Notoriety Trait every time he damages or otherwise negatively alters a spirit, summons a spirit for no good reason, treats a spirit disrespectfully or exhibits abusive behavior. Of course, this standard is not always applicable. If a demon attacks you and you strike back, it's not likely that you'll gain Notoriety for that action unless your trade is in placating the infernal. If a Dog-spirit is set to watch over a dragon nest, however, and you intimidate it out of your way without good cause, you may receive Notoriety.

The only good thing about Notoriety is that it can be used in a Social Challenge if a Kuei-jin is attempting to intimidate a spirit into obeying him. Of course, doing so may very well earn the Kuei-jin another Notoriety Trait.

## OBLIGATIONS

Sometimes a spirit may request that a Kuei-jin take on an Obligation, that is, a restriction or requirement that serves the spirit's needs. This request can be made as part of a bargaining process to get the spirit to do something, or as a potential means to erase Notoriety (the spirit will help erase the Kuei-jin's Notoriety if the Kuei-jin in question submits to a suitable Obligation). More often, a Kuei-jin voluntarily offers an Obligation as a way of both honoring the spirit and promising to repay it for a favor. This often explains why so many vampires of the west direction adopt strange "superstitions" and customs.

If a Kuei-jin breaks an Obligation, she receives two Notoriety Traits automatically in addition to regaining any Notoriety (if any) that was removed by the offended spirit. In addition, no spirit will trust the offending Kuei-jin for weeks, possibly longer. She may also shame her sifu or even her court by her shameful treatment of the spirits, which may result in further punishment by her peers.

Minor Obligations include: never entering a door of a particular color, always wearing a specific token, never eating a particular kind of meat, never speaking a spirit's name aloud or always wearing a particular color.

Major Obligations include: performing a sacrifice of some sort (not human!), getting a tattoo or brand, swearing an oath, agreeing to a quest or sacred journey, agreeing to adopt a new name (thereby "giving up" your old name) or freeing another captive spirit.

Nushi spirits almost always require an Obligation of some sort in payment for their assistance.





# CHAPTER FIVE: STORYTELLING

This chapter is for Storytellers and, to a lesser extent, Narrators. Storytelling **Laws of the East** is very different from Storytelling **Kindred of the East**, or even any other **Mind's Eye Theatre** game. **Laws of the East** involves running a game in a time and place that's most likely at least a little exotic, if not totally alien, to all of the players involved. Both the details of running any game need to be taken care of, as well as bringing in the trappings that aid in re-creating a Middle Kingdom setting. The Kuei-jin, the other *shen* and the mortal society all need to be developed, and costuming and setting the scene can take creativity and time. Running a live roleplaying game, especially this one, is not for the lazy. With proper preparation, however, **Laws of the East** allows the re-creation of an exciting environment, allowing you to tell epic stories of contests of honor, peaceful meditations, age-old rivalries and countless other topics. In the end, your effort can create something thrilling.

## CHRONICLES

If characters are the lifeblood of **Mind's Eye Theatre**, then the chronicle is the body those characters sustain. Although **Laws of the East** can be used and enjoyed as a series of loosely connected stories, such games often lack a sense of continuity and offer little opportunity for character development. Furthermore, most characters develop around long-term goals (of power, prestige, status, revenge, knowledge — to name a few). One story is rarely enough to resolve anything satisfactorily. In a chronicle — an ongoing series of stories — characters reside not only in a familiar environment, but one that evolves as they interact with it. Developing and maintaining a chronicle is a satisfying task, but it requires continuous effort and dedication on the behalf of you and your Narrators.



## SETTING THE STAGE

The first element to consider in chronicle-construction is the atmosphere you desire. The two aspects of atmosphere are mood and theme. Each is a fundamental ingredient in the alchemy of a chronicle. Although mood and theme have already been discussed in terms of story, and some ideas presented previously apply here, mood and theme for a chronicle involves other aspects.

### Mood

Mood is the underlying emotional sentiment of a chronicle. It sustains and flows through everything you do, unobtrusive yet omnipresent. While the mood of a chronicle is intangible, your choice of mood can be one of the most important ones you make as regards plot, character and theme. After all, if you're going for a mood of contemplation, a chop-socky plot (and characters to match) won't make much sense.

### THEME

Themes are central ideas of a chronicle, ones that help define the shape of the action. They can be as visceral as the struggle for freedom or as intellectual as the age-old questions of good and evil. Themes can emerge as seemingly inconsequential encounters or as the major focus of a chronicle. Avoid overemphasizing theme, however. Overemphasis makes related events expected and predictable rather than haunting and prophetic.

### SETTING

The setting is the stage on which the drama of a chronicle plays out. Setting is composed of environment and locale. Environment describes the overall scheme of the world. The environment of **Laws of the East** involves the many levels of Kuei-jin existence, including: conflicts between and within courts and *wu*, the battle against the Demon within, the trials of Running Monkeys seeking to get a hold on their new existence, the defense of mortals dear to one's old life, the fading of ancient traditions and much more. A myriad of potential alternatives is available. It's your reality — do with it what you will.

Locale, or the physical place where you choose to set your chronicle, is the next step toward chronicle-creation. Obviously, your setting often must be a location in the East, and it is typically easiest to take a place you have some knowledge of, if possible. Alternatively, you could choose an actual location you are especially interested in, one you would like to learn more about. Bustling cities and tiny farming villages are all possible locations, but there are many more. Go to bookstores and libraries for the relevant information, watch some films for flavor and (most of all) use your imagination. For many real Eastern cities, you can find actual maps, tourist videos and other useful aids. If you choose to develop your own location, rely on books to guide you to the sorts of things that should be found there. All of this planning takes a great deal of imagination, but the more detail spent in developing a locale, the richer the chronicle will be.

### CREATING THE CITY

Most chronicles are focused around a city or a town, even if the characters might travel widely from it as time goes on. This place is the locus of your chronicle. You need to present your city in a realistic and consistent manner so the players believe in it. There has to be more than just each character's resting place and the court's palace to make a place come alive. Remember, most of the regular cast,

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including the characters, has to live there. The setting must seem to be a character in its own right to the players, and, characters cannot really come to be until it does. The city is where your stories take place — the more interesting and exotic it seems, the more your stories come to life. With each story you run, define the city a little more, but don't give away everything at once. As the chronicle progresses, add details of geography, custom and plot. Build the city bit by bit at whatever pace you choose.

The mortal half of the city is fairly easy to establish. Let the basic Eastern elements dominate, pulling from films and books to create a Eastern "feel" to the mortal world. Learn the history of a place first, and learn what types of mortals would be there. This step is especially important when playing with places you've never visited. Make sure to get at least a rough idea of where important places are in relation to each other (downtown to the slums, industrial centers to affluent suburbs, etc.) and try to put names to as many things as you can. It's much more atmospheric and involving if you can tell characters they're bound for the floating slums of Kowloon than just "you know, that place in Hong Kong where all those boat families live." As a rule of thumb, while you need not know every nook and cranny of a setting to maintain it believably, you're in trouble if the players are stumping you constantly with basic questions about the area. When you're clearly at a loss for answers, player morale is bound to take a hit. However, remember as well that the area you use isn't quite the one that exists in the modern world. It's fictional. Feel free to change a few details here and there to suit the mood of your game. Not every peasant village had a Shaolin monastery conveniently located in the hills nearby, but if adding one will enhance the mood of your game, feel free.

Only after you have finished with the mortal aspects should you want to consider the Kuei-jin half of the equation. The history of your city should help, determining what types of vampires would live there, and of what courts, *wu*, directions and Dharma they might be. You also need to decide where any local dragon nests are, what levels of power they have and which courts have authority over their use. Last but not least, you should make sure the design of both the important dragon nests and the locations of them mesh well with the motif of your overall chronicle. If the chronicle is going to be about corruption, the city ought to be corrupt as well, both in its mortal and Kuei-jin aspects.

## CASTING THE PARTS

Once you know what is in your city, it's time to think about who lives there. Both mortals and vampires should be your concern here. Neither side is terribly effective without the other. It's generally best to start at the top by asking who rules. Is there an ancestor? Who are the eldest Kuei-jin? What courts do they preside over? What *wu* do they belong to, if any? Are there any contenders for the leadership of various courts, or even for the title of ancestor itself? Mandarins and similarly elder vampires should be used sparingly, if at all. They're simply too powerful. Don't forget the minions of Hell, either. Think carefully about whether demons, bakemono, *akuma* or other enemies of the vampires have infiltrated the local society, and if so, to what extent have they done so and what have they learned because of it.

Don't overlook the human element, either. What mortal(s) hold power, at least nominally, here? Are there wealthy landowners, foreign businessmen or military forces in the area, and who are the vampires who would like to control all these men? Who leads the local church? It's especially important to consider which mortals are most likely to fight back against the Kuei-jin if provoked, even more



so if you want any actual demon-hunters in the area such as Shih wanderers or Strike Force Zero agents.

If there are other *shen* in your city, you will want to detail them as well. The Middle Kingdom often hosts overlapping (although not always peacefully coexisting) groups of *shen*. Hengeyokai, *hsien*, chi'n ta and wraith populations, and their relations to the vampires, are all important things to have mapped out in advance.

### **INTRIGUE**

Intrigue is a vital ingredient of your chronicle. For people to play out intrigue, they need to be drawn into it — there has to be a tangible reward for all the scheming. Power is often an effective lure, but if power is a reward, it needs to be immediate and real. It needs to be visible and obtainable. Most importantly, it needs to be given out only occasionally to inspire characters to pursue it, but not so often that opportunities are passed on or that the power level of the game rises to unmanageable levels.

### **AMBITION**

Many characters eventually want to assume positions of power, whether among their fellow Kuei-jin in a court or among the mortals of a city. In some games, this is just another aspect of the self-generating plots players contrive on their own. In other games, you may plan the characters' search for power from the beginning. In either case, you need to learn what long-term goals your players want to accomplish in the chronicle. You can then tailor an occasional session to these goals, but don't give the players everything they want. Some may covet powerful positions such as Minister of Warfare or Mistress of the Spirit Realm, or to advance the agendas of the *wu* they belong to. Others may try to combat the plots of the Yama Kings, or investigate the unique condition of the Kuei-jin soul. Both goals involve power in one form or another, be it over others or over one's self. More than a few players don't know or admit what they want in the long-term, or they may not desire power. Don't worry, they'll set their sights on something in time, especially if guided by the nushi they follow or other players. Practice stringing players along. Keep a carrot dangling before them. After all, you've got the whole world to play with as a Storyteller. You can certainly offer something to keep them coming back for more.

### **THE PRICE OF POWER**

In most chronicles, it's likely that one or more characters are in a position of power. If such is the case, the players need to know exactly what their responsibilities and advantages are. In general, any players in the role of ancestor, mandarin or *wu* leader should be experienced enough to assist you as a Narrator. As powerful characters can have tremendous impact on lesser characters and the story as a whole, players should know what the ramifications of their actions are and take them into consideration. Only experience in play develops this insight, but it is vital that players with characters in positions of power understand both their responsibilities and their limits. Powerful characters, if abused, can serve to discourage players with weaker characters quickly. This abuse drives off new players, and eventually the barbaric power-gamers may find themselves with no one to lord over except one another.

### **CHRONICLE DYNAMICS**

The key to a successful chronicle is a constant and uninterrupted flow of action. In the real world, events never stop occurring, and everyone gets dragged



into life's chaos in one way or another. Your chronicle should have the same ebb and flow to it. All characters should be drawn into the events around them. Every character should be doing something. Those in conflict may bide their time and pause to marshal their forces, but the tension never recedes. After all, if you give your players too much time to rest, relax and think, they may think about the fact that they're just playing a game. Too much time for reflection can shatter the most carefully crafted illusionary worlds.

## TROUBLE IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES

There are dozens of things in a story that can go wrong; even more so in a chronicle. With the added level of complexity that comes with a chronicle, problems with continuity, advancement, numerous players, constant change and background plots are inevitable. A few of the more common chronicle problems and how to deal with them include:

- **Problem Players** — This problem is probably one of the most delicate and potentially disastrous you can face. For one reason or another, one or more players are disrupting the story and ruining everyone's good time. This disruption can derive from many sources including: cheating, excessive rule quotation ("rules lawyering"), personal vendettas or improper behavior. Once you detect a problem, your first action should be to approach the players privately and explain what they are doing and why you don't like it. At that point, most people attempt to change their ways and that's that. Unfortunately, some are prone to backsliding or just don't take the problem seriously, disregarding your warning. The next step to consider is some sort of penalty. Temporary suspension from the chronicle is usually effective. If players continue to make trouble, you may have to perform the distasteful task of barring them entirely from your chronicle. Do not be afraid to remove/ destroy characters that unbalance your game. If the character's player is worthwhile, he'll understand the need for the sake of all of the other players.

- **Favoritism** — There is often a tendency to give friends special treatment. Be vigilant in watching for this habit in all those who run and play the game, including yourself. If the problem does arise, try to remember that *Mind's Eye Theatre* is just a form of entertainment. No one can reasonably hold you responsible for a character's loss. If the problem continues, try to isolate problem individuals from encounters where favoritism might occur. As a final option, remove the offender from any position in which she can dispense favors.

- **Grudge** — In this situation, an individual is treated unfairly for some reason that is not related to her character's nature or actions. Such is often the case with players who are not fond of each other in the real world. Handle it in a manner similar to favoritism problems.

- **Stagnation** — Even the most imaginative Storyteller occasionally runs out of ideas. Perhaps you're running the game too often to give yourself time to create new and original stories. If this is the case, consider spacing sessions farther apart to provide yourself more planning time. Another solution is to take on more Storytellers or Narrators to give the chronicle a greater creative base to draw on. A plot-coordination council of some sort is almost essential to running large-scale chronicles.

- **Logistics** — Problems with supplies and locations are bound to arise. When they do, be sure to communicate with everybody involved in the game. Players are often able to help procure a setting, props, incidental supplies and all manner of other vital materials.



• **Getting the News Out** — Sometimes you just don't have enough people to play the type of chronicle you've planned. This case arises more due to poor advertising than a genuine lack of bodies. Consider posting notices on electronic bulletin boards or on your local university network, in game and hobby stores, at conventions, at gaming organizations, with theater or drama groups, on school campuses and anywhere else you think imaginative people with a taste for the original might be found.

• **Staying Focused** — At times, your story may drift away from its original plot, or players may become lost. They may become too wrapped up in their own subplots or unable to unravel a puzzle that's vital to moving the plot along. When this happens, you need something to bring the story back on course. Having a few extra props available can be helpful when the story goes off on a tangent. Many of the prop ideas already suggested can be used to reorient players. For example, a sealed transcript of a call between one of the mandarins of the court and a known *akuma*, containing an important message (that just happens to be a vital plot point) can renew characters' interest in their original goal.

## Maintenance and Record-Keeping

It's a simple fact that the longer a chronicle runs, the more complex it becomes. The increased size of some chronicles only amplifies this fact. Developing a method for and the habit of keeping records is essential. The easiest part of the chronicle to keep records on is characters' statistics. Make a master copy of each character. Someone is bound to lose his character card and need a replacement. Without a good memory or a master copy, this situation can pose a problem, especially with advanced characters. Storyteller records of characters also discourage unscrupulous players from altering their characters in the field. Furthermore, you can make use of character information when designing new stories. It's also a good idea to update your master copies after each story, given changes arising from experience, rewards and penalties.

A journal of events from each session proves equally invaluable, helping you understand changes the chronicle undergoes. You can then apply these changes to new stories. Ideally, you, the Narrators and players should all file some sort of informal report after each story. Records from everyone can keep you apprised of all events and let you in on players' individual intentions. To encourage players to provide this information accurately, consider making reports mandatory or award experience only after you receive them. Make it clear that these reports are confidential, and that they will not be used to "screw players over."

## Advancement and Balance

The greatest reward for some players is the sheer joy of playing. However, many players prefer to see their characters improve in status and power. Both needs must be satisfied. Players who enjoy the story for its own sake are easy to please. In fact, they often please themselves by pursuing the goals their characters desire, which are often interpreted by the players themselves. Pleasing accomplishment-seekers is a little more difficult. Allow characters chances to improve their station in the chronicle, as long as it's within the scope of things. When characters reach tangible goals, their players are happy. However, to keep players happy without their characters achieving massive power, be prepared to take characters down a peg or two, or allow other characters to do so for you. Besides creating revenge motives, such attacks fire players' desire to achieve more. Experience Traits, which players spend to improve their characters, are one form of reward, but there are



others that are just as satisfying. Gaining the favor and support of other vampires can be more rewarding than any Discipline. Furthermore, there are numerous positions of power that Experience can't buy, but ambition and tenacity can.

Even in well-planned chronicles, players may reach a point where they are bored and discontented with their place in the story. A player in this position actually has a couple of options. Starting a new character (and playing the old one only occasionally) helps players see if they still have what it takes to see a character survive. As a Storyteller, make sure the player doesn't use this option to accumulate power for both of his characters. Bringing in an old character's "relative" and allowing interaction between the siblings can mean trouble as they "work together." The easiest way to discourage this sort of thing is to deny any direct ties between old and new characters.

Another option is to take over the "advanced" character as a Narrator or Storyteller character. The character's experience with your chronicle and game as a whole can be used as a resource by lesser characters (i.e., other characters seek help from the experienced character), and the older character can be the basis for future stories.

## SETTING

Storytelling is more than simply voice and action. The effects that create your playing environment also make your story come to life. When you're running a story, you don't want your players to just imagine they're playing in a world where vampires walk among the teeming masses and Devil-Tigers stalk the night. You want them to feel that they're actually there. Setting the stage for a convincing Middle Kingdom location can be a real challenge, unless you happen to be playing somewhere in Asia or a place that otherwise naturally exudes an Eastern flavor. With creativity, however, creating this sort of setting becomes surprisingly easy. It requires some effort and imagination, but with a minimum of difficulty you can have tea houses, monasteries, corporate boardrooms and haunting graveyards built in no time. To help you get started, we've provided some hints and ideas. Ultimately, though, creating an environment is limited only by your imagination. Take the advice we provide and run with it.

### SETTING AND ENVIRONMENT

More than any other element, the setting of a story has impact on that story's feel. Therefore, your setting should be taken into careful consideration when deciding on your story's mood. The fictional location you choose must fit the needs of your game as well as the atmosphere you have in mind.

### FINDING LOCATIONS

The first practical step in planning a game is finding a good place to play. Where you play the game is influenced by the specific needs of your story. Factors like the number of players involved, theme, mood and nature of the plot all have an influence on the type of location you should choose. The scale of the game is your first consideration. Make certain you have enough room for all the players to move about. Multiple rooms or areas are helpful. The best layout usually involves a central meeting room in which all the players can congregate, as well as and multiple smaller sites for secret meetings. Choose a site that will work well logically, and worry about decorations later. Possibilities include college cam-



puses, dorm lounges, museums, night clubs, coffee houses, conventions, parks, shopping malls, office buildings and warehouses.

Obviously, extreme care must be taken when using public sites. You must ensure that all of the players are courteous and unobtrusive when playing in a public place. No one not involved in your game should ever be disturbed in any way by a game, and players need to understand that the session is over if anyone finds out about the game and is disturbed by what you're doing. If your players arrive in costume, sometimes you will draw attention, so always be polite and careful when "mundanes" come up and ask what's going on. Consider having some business cards handy to give out to the curious, and offer to speak to them later when you have more time. Under no circumstances should you try to interact with innocent bystanders in character.

Some sites are more conducive to a certain types of stories than others. You may find that a particular location is your favorite, but even then, you should keep your mind open to change. A change of locale, even if for only one scene, can help revive a dying chronicle. Most locations (or "sets") can be decorated to convey a specific mood. You must seek out sites that cater to the style of your game and nature of its plot. For best results, the setting should have a basis in reality. In other words, if it's a high-energy social atmosphere you seek, stage your story in a nightclub (and find a place with loud music, low lighting and other trappings that lend themselves easily to the setting). If you're looking for a calm and reflective setting, perhaps a clearing by a forest pool (a sparsely decorated area, preferably with lots of natural features and some small body of water) would be best. For politics and power plays, try a corporate locale. When choosing a location, look for an area that establishes the mood and atmosphere you're after right from the beginning.

## CHANGING SCENES

Sometimes it's necessary to use one area for different settings within the same story. Actual set changes should be performed quickly and efficiently. Lengthy set changes leave players bored. When your scene is changed, give it a last once-over, making sure everything is in place. A scene change should be just that. When the players enter the room again, they should have the distinct feeling that they're entering a new place. Your new decorations don't even need to be overly complicated. A quick shift of the couch or table, switching or removing a throw rug, covering the fish tank and moving or removing chairs all help to change the feel of a room without necessitating major alterations. Changing the lighting and music can also make a big difference in a set's feel.

## AMBiance AND MOOD

**Laws of the East** offers you a chance to create a world far away from the daily lives of most players, and doing so challenges your creativity. Establishing the right feel for a scene is governed by setting and environment. However, ambiance and mood are established and maintained by effects that are imposed on the environment. Room decorations, recorded music and careful lighting are often the final touches for creating a scene.

• **Decorations** — Most modern rooms look, well, modern and a touch on the stale side. Some people are lucky enough to find a room they can use that is furnished in Eastern fashion, but most troupes will be using a modern meeting hall. All it takes is a few simple touches to spark players' imaginations, allowing them to place themselves in the Middle Kingdom. Wall and floor decorations are usually the first place to start. Cover up modern features, and decorate with Eastern



watercolor paintings, hanging paper lanterns and perhaps a Zen garden or a few small pieces of sculpture or origami. Use signs and notices appropriate to the game, such as a company logo or a sign with a monastery's symbol painted on it. For a corporate locale, use sleek modern furniture and eliminate most of the "softer" features of a room. If you can't make a setting look 100% Eastern, aim for guiding the imagination of the players in that direction, and trust their good will to do the rest.

• **Music** — Music can be an integral part of establishing the mood of a story. It lends a hand in creating drama and, when appropriate, tension. When planning your story, be certain to select music that complements your intended mood. Also make sure you have a variety of music on hand in case the mood changes. There are two types of music, in-game and out. In-game music is what the characters actually hear in the scene, whether from a pulsing Canto-pop band or the delicate sound of a lone flutist playing nearby. Thus, in-game music should generally be simple and to the point.

Allow mood to take precedence over authenticity, though. Don't worry about whether a piece of music is actually "Eastern" or not, but about how the music will affect your game. Avoid music with prominent lyrics if you can (they're distracting), and make sure the volume level is conducive to game-play. Even if characters are standing next to the band in the game world, they still should have no trouble talking to each other. You may also be lucky enough to have a player or two who's willing to perform in-game. Take advantage of this situation (assuming your player won't be embarrassing himself by opening his mouth or taking out his drum), and let his performance become part of the game. It's not unreasonable to award a little experience to someone for playing the part of the lead guitar in the nightclub band, and a live performer certainly enhances the mood better than a black plastic CD player.

You can also use music as background out-of-game noise, to enhance particular scenes. For this music, use whatever creates the mood you are seeking. Doing so is especially useful when creating scenes in the Mirror Lands or for large Kuei-jin rituals, as it allows you the freedom to choose exactly what you want to establish the mood. However, take care not to let the music get obtrusive. If the music really doesn't mesh with the scene — like heavy metal during a political debate — it may ruin the mood you're trying to establish. If your players have to shout over thundering riffs, your game will dissolve into chaos. There's no shortage of music out there for creating the many moods of *Laws of the East*, from entertainment scores like *The Chinese Box* and *Raise the Red Lantern* to any one of the hundreds of Canto-pop bands currently on the market in America as well as abroad. Furthermore, a diligent search at the local library or music store will turn up many different CDs of "traditional" music from various Eastern cultures, any of which may be exactly the thing you need to perfect the mood of authenticity for a scene.

• **Audio Effects** — Above and beyond music, certain sounds and effects can enhance an evening. Horror and sound-effect CDs, found in any music store, are a good place to start. A good FX CD can provide a variety of sound effects to simulate many different events, like dying screams, clashing blades, howling typhoons and so on. Proper timing of these sounds is critical. If you're able to pre-mix a tape of effects, you can play those sounds at appropriate moments in the story. Preparation is the key. Have your effects cued up ahead of time so that, with the mere touch of a button, angry shouts or automatic gunfire can be heard by all. Preparation makes for infinitely more drama than delaying the entire game while you search for the right sound.



• **Lighting Effects** — In the Middle Kingdom the same sun burns bright overhead day after day, but at night, the world is a sharp contrast between the glaring neon vistas of the city and the soft lantern lights of the countryside. While modern white, neon and fluorescent lights are typically easy to simulate, real fire is absolutely out of the question for most sites. However, you can still create the effect of smoke and a flickering lantern for your chronicle if you desire. Remember, a few well-placed shadows can hide a great many anomalies that might otherwise distract your players from the game, and can do wonders for atmosphere in a short amount of time.

When setting up your lights, follow these simple guidelines. Avoid high wattages and plain white light, even for city scenes, as they tend to make the scene look dull and modern. Multicolored light bulbs have the most broad effect. By arranging multicolored light bulbs in different parts of the room, you can create shadowy areas and still have well-lit "white light" areas where the colors intersect. If you have track lighting, recessed multicolored bulbs work very well. If you can't get multicolored bulbs, cloth draped over lights works just as well (but avoid putting cloth in direct contact with hot bulbs). The key is contrast from low wattage bulbs. Keeping enough low-wattage lights to contrast with one another results in plenty of light to see by and plenty of shadows to hide in. Play around with different combinations to determine what works best for your mood and scene. While actual flame may be very atmospheric, it should be used extremely sparingly and with the absolute utmost caution. It's certainly wonderfully atmospheric to have a circle of students sit in reverent awe at the feet of a bodhisattva surrounded by tiny candles, but burning down your site generally has a detrimental effect on a chronicle. Even without actual fire, though, if you keep your wattage low, avoid direct white light and experiment with your color schemes and lamp locations, you should be able to find the right combination to create the proper atmosphere for your story.

## PROPS

After you've got a story, players, a place to play, and you've selected an appropriate soundtrack to accompany the game, something else is still needed to bring the story to life. Props come in at this point. Props for a story don't need to be grandiose or expensive. Most props can be found in your own home or your grandparents' attic or simply constructed.

In *Mind's Eye Theatre*, props should be kept relatively simple and should not attract more attention than the story itself. Only a few touches are needed to help a player's imagination fill in the blanks. Since this game is a storytelling game, imagination is of the utmost importance. Not that you should be sparing with props. If you have the available materials, go wild. Just make sure that the props are not the focus of the story. The spotlight should always remain on the characters, not on what surrounds them.

### GENERAL PROPS

General props are items that help you further a story by giving players something that they can examine physically. The Storyteller should be wary of how often physical props are used and what impact they have on the story. If physical props are allowed to dominate a story, players may begin to rely on them rather than interacting with one another. Be sure to inform players when props will be used in a story. Otherwise, they are likely to disregard an important clue, considering it just another feature of the place you're playing in. Likewise, if you



wish certain items to be off-limits or out of the game, be sure to tell players ahead of time so they don't become upset when informed that the antique katana they stole off the wall didn't actually exist.

Many items can be used as general props to help enhance your story. Calligraphic scrolls, jewelry, documents and pieces of artwork are a few examples. These props can be used to give game information, or they can merely grant insight into the character of the person possessing the prop. Sometimes an item has to be represented by an item card, as in the case of weapons. Also, a card may be discreetly attached to an item, giving more information to a player who inspects that particular prop. Creative and effective usage of general props can make a story more interesting for everyone, particularly if props are used to represent important items with plot (as well as character) significance. It's important to stay focused and avoid overloading yourself with widgets and whatchamacallits If you come up with an idea for a prop, but are unable to implement it, don't panic — your story can stand on its own without every last gadget. After all, people, not things, make a story.

### PERSONAL PROPS

Personal props, like costumes, help players distinguish themselves as their characters. In a Middle Kingdom game, such props are very important to help with mood. This form of assistance can be particularly useful for Narrators, especially when they must often change from character to character. Sashes, sandals, hats, fans and jewelry are only a few of the accessories that can give a character a distinctive look. You may want to provide certain items to players to aid them in this manner, especially if players are uncertain of the identities of the characters they are playing. For example, matching jackets for a rebellious young *wu* or identical colored fans for the mandarins of a court will help to identify players as members of that group.

Also, finding costumes for the Middle Kingdom is fairly easy, although a lot of time and detail can certainly be invested if people feel the need. Many younger Kuei-jin now wear "Western" fashions such as jeans, T-shirts and other contemporary accessories in their daily lives, although finding a kimono or other culturally appropriate garb can lend great power to a player's appearance and sense of "belonging." In a pinch, however, even a regular bathrobe (if tastefully colored, anyway) can suffice to provide a quick impression of traditional dress. And if you're willing to thumb past the racks of dime-a-dozen plastic ninja outfits, many costume shops sell all manner of simple inexpensive "Eastern" outfits that can be used as a base for building a costume, as do some specialty and even vintage clothing stores. Just remember that you want a character, not a caricature, when it comes to designing the look you want for a Middle Kingdom game. Just as it might seem awfully unatmospheric to have a court of elder, traditional Kuei-jin whose players are clad in jeans and T-shirts, so too does it wreck the mood of the game to walk about bringing some old stereotype to life. More complex clothing can come with time, as skilled tailors amongst your gamers and Narrators become involved, but the combinations and ideas above work just fine to start. Remember, part of the magic of *Laws of the East* is evoking a radically different place and culture than most players are used to. Costuming in a different fashion than is worn day to day or in other games can do wonders for helping to build mood and atmosphere.

For other personal props, items such as costume jewelry work best; real jewels can be far too valuable to lend out for a game. Should all else fail, second-hand stores can be great places to pick up a few last-minute props at an affordable price.



All manner of clothing and accessories, including sashes, canes and costume jewelry, can be acquired at such emporiums. In many stories, not much is needed by way of personal props. Sometimes, only a single ribbon or distinctive piece of jewelry can make a character. The most important thing to remember is to have fun with props, avoiding dangerous ones.

### No-Nos

Weapons should never be used as props. In addition, props must be understood to be someone's property, not some character's property. If your players start taking home the props that belong to their characters, perhaps it's time to reconsider using props at all. If you choose to go this route, cards (like those used to represent weapons) are the best way to go.

## CREATING STORIES

Story creation can be as simple or as detailed as you want. The more effort you put into preparing a story, the smoother it runs when it's executed. There is no small amount of satisfaction to be gained from writing a successful and well-appreciated story, but that's easier said than done. Finding the right combination see and change it into something all your own. Inspiration can be, quite literally,

### SORRY, YOU'RE NO JACKIE CHAN

When people think of Eastern films, they often think of lightning-fast martial arts brawls, blazing shootouts, crazy stunts and wild car chases. These elements can all be a part of your chronicle, but you must never allow players to try and act out even the most basic mass combats and chases. Follow the combat rules for *Mind's Eye Theatre* strictly, never touch and always think about safety. That said, there are ways to make Eastern combat fun without actually striking a single blow. After all, half of combat is planning, positioning and scouting. As a Storyteller, try to develop certain combat scenes ahead of time, especially climactic duels or large scale *wu* versus *wu* brawls. Sculpt the setting as well as you would any other scene, and let the players work with the setting, organizing their forces, developing tactics and strategies. If the players rush blindly into things, then you and your Narrators (and perhaps other players) can take advantage of this impetuosity and wallop them good, recreating some of the disorientation of a surprise attack by positioning yourselves to come out of hiding from many directions without comprising safety.

Small combats, one-on-one or two-on-two, are relatively easy, but make sure that any large-scale conflict has several Narrators around to guide it and keep it flowing quickly. After all, combat is supposed to be exciting and quick. Remember, sitting around watching different players make retests and over-bids for half an hour over one challenge makes for very dull gaming. Let players use their character's talents as best they can, but keep things moving and keep other players interested. Describe other details of the battle around them to them as their fellows perform challenges, prepare everyone to take their actions before their turn arrives, and otherwise do your best to make sure things can move along quickly. Players can usually sense this effort, and they will often cut corners with you if it means combat is resolved quickly, as long they know everyone is being treated fairly.



any stimulus that ignites the process of creative thought. Hence, inspiration is very often as dependent on what's without as on what's within. What sends one person's mind racing may bore someone else. You must find the things that inspire you (if you don't already know) and associate with them in order to ignite your creative fires.

## PLOT

A story's plot is its progression of events. Plot not only involves the machinations of the powers that be, but the machinations of the characters as they pursue their own goals in the story. Plots are essential to the successful advancement of the story, as plot is really nothing more than a term for the series of events making up the story.

A story can have any number of plots (see "Story Style," for more details on this). These plots should all be wound together with skill and care before the actual game begins, however, so you at least know how things are supposed to turn out. The trick is to have all the pieces of a plot already written in the characters' briefings so they can read about their own respective parts of the overall plot at the game's beginning. Then piece things together once game-play starts. Together, the characters' backgrounds compose the main plot, and by pursuing their own parts of the plot, characters advance the plot as a whole.

During a story, it's often helpful to keep a schedule of events. This device is basically a pre-planned sequence of events (usually initiated by outside forces) that are going to occur regardless of the characters' actions. Typically, characters played by Narrators keep the schedule on track. It is also helpful to integrate occasional Narrator characters into the story to assist the progression of the plot (or plots). These tactics should be used sparingly, lest players grow dependent upon interaction with Narrators instead of with each other. However, occasional Narrator intervention can add a new level of unpredictability and excitement to a story.

## ELEMENTS OF A STORY

The elements of a story are best defined by its components or stages. It is often helpful to think of plot elements in terms of tense (past, present and future). In terms of story structure, these elements are addressed in the opening, climax and resolution of your chronicle. At the beginning of the story, characters reflect on events of their past that have brought them to the story. The story's climax is where the story's plot (or plots) are exposed and dealt with by some or all of the characters. Finally, there's the resolution, where the story comes to a close and you can set up story hooks for future tales.

### OPENING

The opening can be any point at which you choose to begin your story. It can be a gradual, gentle start or a shocking plunge into the world of the Kuei-jin. The latter works best if the characters start out as vampires newly recast upon the Road Back, unaware of their true nature or purpose. The former is better for extended chronicles with older Kuei-jin. At the beginning of a story, each character should have a written synopsis of recent events that "everyone" would be aware of. This back-story provides a basis for your plots, as well as helping break the ice at each session by laying down some common ground for characters to discuss. ("Have you seen the Formidable Ghost Minister since the last time the ancestor called the court together?" "No, I have not, but I heard that she was last seen by the harbor last month." "Indeed? Well, that is my *wu*'s protectorate, and we never heard such a thing. Who did you hear that from?" "One of the Raining Shadow *wu*. I can't



believe they would have lied to us!" "I don't know about that, but their leader has been acting strange lately... ever since the Formidable Ghost Minister disappeared, actually. Hmm. Perhaps we should go calling on the home of the Raining Shadows together?") With such common knowledge, you're also helping to set the tone and theme of your game right from the beginning.

The synopses of common knowledge and recent personal events should be brief explanations of the situation at hand. They should be precise and intriguing. These synopses should be the first media through which players get a feel for the story's mood. The synopses should also hint at the story's main theme. You may even wish to foreshadow the plot, but that depends on your personal style.

### **CLIMAX**

When the main plot is on the verge of conclusion, the story is considered to be at its climax. This usually happens when characters have discovered all they need to know to solve whatever problem faces them and are on the verge of resolving the story. The tension is usually at its highest point at this time. If the opening was staged carefully, and the players are cooperative and imaginative, the climax can be reached with little additional effort on the part of Narrators. However, even the best of plans can be mislaid, or perhaps the Storyteller and Narrators prefer to take a more active role in the progression of your story's plot. Either way, there are times when a Narrator's intervention is warranted.

The climax should be the high point of the story, something the players should always anticipate and work toward. However, this element should never be rushed. It's a matter of timing. Extended chronicles shouldn't have everything wrapped up in a single climax. After all, you need to have something for the vampires to do next week.

Often, a story's climax takes the form of a combat, but such doesn't always have to be the case. Quests into the spirit worlds, debates on the nature of vampirism, unmasking notorious criminals, staredowns and so on can all bear the dramatic weight of serving as a story's climax.

### **RESOLUTION**

The story's resolution is where all (or most) of the pieces come together. The resolution should be used as a means of winding the excitement down while cultivating an interest in future stories. Players should always end a story feeling as though they have accomplished something. They do not have to uncover the big picture. Merely knowing they've found another piece of the puzzle is often enough.

In *Mind's Eye Theatre*, players often enjoy gathering for a group wrap-up session after a game. Unlike players of table-top games, players of *Laws of the East* rarely see all of the action that takes place; they get wrapped up in their own plots, not the group's. During wrap-up sessions, many players look forward to learning more about "the big picture." At the wrap-up, players share their version of the story and, in so doing, give other players an opportunity to see more of the game they just took part in. Plus, it's a great chance for everyone to tell stories about their characters — and show off their accomplishments, which can be great fun as well.

### **OFF-LINE GAMING**

The game doesn't have to end when everyone puts down their character sheets. In-character e-mails, informal discussions at coffee houses and the like can all serve as both roleplaying exercises and as ways to advance plots. As long as players keep some perspective on this sort of thing (phone calls at 3:00 A.M. to



discuss minor plot points generally signal a need for help), off-line gaming can be a great way to shade in the gray areas of your game.

## STORY CONSIDERATIONS

There are several factors that must be taken into consideration before you can begin scripting a story. The scale, number of players and general character types are all important elements that must be kept in mind. Wild young *kyonshi wu* and brutal Devil-Tigers don't fit well into delicate political chronicles. Pacifistic Resplendent Cranes won't work in chop-socky games. Shih demon-hunters take a good deal of explaining to include in chronicles with many *shen*, and that goes double for Strike Force Zero agents. Make sure your players aren't out to hunt each other down from the start, unless you like the idea of your game self-destructing early on. Tailor your plots to what you have to work with in terms of group, character and setting.

### SCALE

Scale is the number of people you have playing. Games can range in size from handfuls to hundreds, and you need to ensure that no matter how many vampires are out there, there's something for everyone to do. Oftentimes, players set their own plots in motion based on roleplaying and character interaction, but there needs to be a metaplot, a grand scheme that gives everyone a starting point. Not everyone is capable of making his own fun, and as such, you need to prepare a story that, at minimum, has something for everyone.

### SCOPE

The scope of your story is a very important consideration. Whether the story involves a massive plot to defeat the centuries-old schemes of a Yama King or thwart a ruthless triad boss is a matter of scope. Scope boils down to what's won or lost. Scope can be limited by the number of players in the game. You shouldn't always have stories with huge scope. Players grow bored with always "saving the world." However, you should not keep the players from getting involved in potentially earth-shattering stories. Balance is the key. Metaplots should have bigger scopes than local plots. Obviously, the more characters involved in a plot, the higher the stakes should be. Don't forget your mortals when creating plots, either. The actions of humans have a huge effect on the Kuei-jin, in terms of food, influence and even (most importantly) emotion. On a more pragmatic note, it's no fun to sit around as a simple bodyguard, waiting patiently for some Kuei-jin or other *shen* to stroll up to you when they go looking for a snack or an easy punching bag. Make sure your humans, especially any demon-hunters, have something worthwhile to do, too.

### CAST

Another factor to take into consideration is the type of characters cast members portray. The best way to determine this is to ask them. A story usually works best if players are enacting characters they are comfortable with, although it can occasionally be interesting to cast players in roles different from what they're used to playing. This variation in casting should only be done if you think it would be enjoyable for all the players. An important consideration is whether you are giving players pre-made characters, with complete backgrounds, Attributes and Disciplines, or if players are allowed to make their own characters. Sometimes the guidelines lie somewhere in-between. Obviously, the easiest of these options is to use pre-made characters. Doing so allows you to customize your story to the



characters, tying them to one another to make for a more intriguing plot. The problem with this tactic is that players are sometimes disappointed with the characters they get, which detracts from everyone's enjoyment.

## STORY STYLE

Style is the method you use in constructing your story. It describes how the subplots tie in with the main plot and how characters interact with the environment you have chosen. Style is the thread from which your story is woven. Without style, a story has no cohesive form and might well become boring for players. You need to develop and hone your style so as to be able to craft a finely tuned story, with many layers and intricacies for players to explore.

## MAIN PLOT

The main, or metaplot is the root of a story, and any other lesser plots from the main plot. The main plot is what brings characters together, unifying their attention. The main plot of a story should be all-encompassing, in that all characters should be affected by it in at least a minor fashion. The main plot should illuminate every other aspect of the story. Not every character needs to be touched by your metaplot directly, but each character should be aware of the main plot on some peripheral level.

## SUBPLOTS

In most novels and movies, subplots are just filler material. Subplots are essential to **Mind's Eye Theatre**, however. These secondary stories keep characters busy and carry them from moment to moment. They are the stories that are woven around the characters. A story gives players ample opportunities to explore subplots, and due to the unique nature of this sort of game, subplots can be taken as far as the players want to take them. Each character should be involved in as many subplots as possible.

A subplot can be any personal goal a character is trying to accomplish. Subplots should be crafted so as to intermingle with one another, so that characters become embroiled in a web of intrigue as one subplot leads them to another. The more layers of intrigue in a story, the more players enjoy untangling them. Indeed, if your setting is intricate enough, you may find players developing subplots of their own, adding to the confusion. This wild metastasis of plot should be encouraged, because it helps the story grow and gives it a life of its own. A subplot can sometimes be almost as large in scope as the main plot, the difference being that in a subplot, it is not necessary for everyone to be involved for it to come to fruition. However, you should take care that the subplot does not override the main plot; the word is prefixed with "sub-" for a reason.

## CHARACTER RELATIONS

Character interaction is a part of every story and every chronicle. Intricate character interaction is essential to a story. Not that all characters will get along harmoniously — the Fifth Age is notoriously contentious, and character strife is usually much more interesting than One Big Happy Kuei-jin Family. However, making sure that characters relate to one another requires a bit of planning on your part. Making sure that players create backgrounds for their characters helps, as it gives you more material to work with to create common ground for Kuei-jin characters to share. Spreading rumors that provide incentive for discussion, trade and cooperation is another good way to go, as is the inclusion of a nasty villain who will force characters at least to discuss working together.



## MULTIPLE GOALS

Each of us possesses a multitude of goals and ambitions. Many of them conflict, and we have to choose between them. For instance, you might want to go to the movies on the same day you want to visit a friend. Multiple goals complicate matters, and while that can be bothersome in real life, it only adds to the excitement in this game. The more complicated you can make things, the better. Complications such as multiple goals give characters depth and keep players busy. A player with several goals is usually occupied throughout the course of a story and is rarely bored. Indeed, if players with multiple goals achieve even one of those goals, they probably leave the story with a sense of accomplishment.

## NARRATION AND STORYTELLING

Now that you have written a story, you need to make it work in a live game. Narrating a story is an art akin to juggling. You have to keep up with all story threads, play judge and make sure that none of the players get bored—you'll have quite a few eggs in the air at all times. Storytelling requires a lot of work and planning, and it usually leaves you exhausted. There is a positive side to it, however. As Storyteller, you have a ringside seat to the story and can watch it unfold in its entirety. Because your control of the story is loose (tight control denies player freedom), you may be surprised by how the story twists and changes in the hands of your players. If you do your job well, you will be rewarded with the players' thanks and a great game as well.

Of course, with the great rewards of storytelling comes a great deal of responsibility. You have to initiate and guide the story and present it in an entertaining manner. You, above all people involved, can most easily destroy the story. Even a very good story can be ruined if it's not presented well. If a few required player handouts are missing, or if players have no idea where the game is taking place, you have failed. It is very important that you prepare every aspect of that story as far ahead of time as possible. If you try to prepare an entire game at the last minute, you'll be stressed out by the time the game begins. The game will suffer heavily from your exhaustion.

Veteran Storytellers should take note that running a live game is very different from running old-style roleplaying games. You can no longer sit down an hour before play commences and dream up a quick plot. If you try to do so, your story will have lots of holes. If you change your setting in mid-story, you need to represent the change in some way so players realize where they are without having to ask. Prepare everything in advance, or suffer the folly of sloth. The main rule to remember when preparing your story is "show, don't tell." You have to present your story so players can make their own impressions of the environment without your impressions being forced on them. Live games work because players can take the lead based on information they discover themselves. If you have not fleshed out your story enough—if you have to tell players what's going on over and over again—you might as well be playing a table-top roleplaying game, because everything that's special about **Mind's Eye Theatre** will be missing. Fortunately for you, players usually cooperate in every way to help you maintain the illusion, but it's up to you to direct their attention from the gamelike aspects of roleplaying.



## How to Host a Game

Running an entire chronicle can be exhausting unless you pace yourself. Expect to spend a minimum of an hour per player writing the story and setting everything up. Expect to actually play a story bi-monthly or even monthly. Trying to run a weekly game is very taxing, and it may result in the eventual death of your chronicle (not to mention your own nervous breakdown). Make your games not frequent and tedious, but rare and spectacular.

## Storyteller Focus

As a Storyteller, your focus should always be on keeping the game running as smoothly as possible. To ensure that the game doesn't get out of hand, make sure you have enough Narrators. They'll serve to answer players' questions and resolve the majority of inter-player disputes, as your arbitration should be required in only the most extreme circumstances. More importantly, though, your Narrators will be an integral part of game action. As the arbiters of any large scale conflict, rituals, a guide to how the Demon might break free at any moment within any Kuei-jin, Narrators will be in constant interaction with players in all levels of your game. This arrangement requires a great deal of commitment from your Narrators, as they'll be on the go constantly, interacting with only a few characters at a time. On the up side, your Narrators will have a good idea of who is working with who, and they can keep you informed. They can also spread information and rumors through the many Narrator characters they animate. Rather than having to cook up a convoluted plot to let characters know that an elder Kuei-jin might be slipping along his Dharmic path, you can have a Narrator character whisper it into a player's ear. Of course, that character could be lying....

At the same time, having your Narrators on the floor constantly enables you to pinpoint trouble spots quickly if the action slows or people are getting frustrated. Concentrate on where players stand in terms of resolving the plot or solving the mystery you have given them. If they are struggling, drop a few hints and spread a few rumors, then watch your vampires scramble to discover new information. If the players are too close to solving the mystery, throw in a red herring or create a new scene on the fly. Improvisation is a potent art, and Storytellers who learn to use it are well-rewarded.

If you are playing in public, you must serve as a buffer between the authorities of the real world and the potential mayhem players can create. Discretion is the better part of valor. Educate players on responsible playing and do not hesitate to hand out rewards or punishments as the need arises. Preparation is essential to running a successful story. The greater the preparation, the less you have to worry about maintaining focus. A well-prepared game frees you to enjoy your creation and interact with players, while a poorly prepared game leaves you scrambling to maintain control. When you maintain focus on story elements, the surroundings and your players, you need not fear the results of any game session.

## Pre-Game Tasks

There are several things you need to do to set up and run a game of *Laws of the East*.

1 — Make sure you know the size and scope of your game before anything else. It's the only way to make sure there's enough staff and plot for everyone.



2 — Get all of your props and costumes lined up well in advance. These items usually require the most legwork and take the most time to round up, so you don't want to be chasing after them at the last minute.

3 — Choose a good core staff and delegate. You can't do everything yourself; don't even try. Find people you trust and turn them loose.

4 — Make sure everyone is working on the same page. A lot of work can be wasted by duplication or misunderstandings. Have everyone aware of what everyone else is doing.

5 — Keep a paper trail. Note when tasks are accomplished and where everything is. Keep track of who did well and who didn't. It'll make next time easier.

6 — Define everyone's role. Power squabbles and unfinished tasks are both unproductive.

7 — Set deadlines and keep to them for all tasks related to the game.

8 — Get your essential paperwork done. These details include arranging sites, briefing sheets and plot creation. If you save this sort of work-intensive thing for the last minute, your whole game may be left high and dry if there's a screw-up.

9 — Pace yourself. If you burn out creating the game, you'll have no fun running it.

## CHARACTER CREATION

It is your role as Storyteller (aided by Narrators) to guide players through the character-generation process. It is generally best to have character creation go on off-line, well before your actual game action starts. Doing so enables you to gauge the power level and mood of your game accurately. In addition, having access to character histories will enable you to create plot lines that force characters to interact. Knowing characters' backgrounds also allows you to bring in faces, places and items from a Kuei-jin's past; always useful if the action starts to flag.

After your players arrive for the game session, you need to introduce them to the basic premise of the game. Your main goal should be to make contributing to the story as easy as possible for players. If your players are beginners, show them the basics, but let them discover the intricacies of the game on their own. Hopefully everyone playing will have at least a basic idea of the rules, but be prepared to field questions and help out beginners. Start by laying out any briefing sheets you want to use on a table and invite players to look them over. You can pass out character sheets at the same time. Give the players time to look everything over and ask questions. If players can refer to the briefings and their character cards while they listen to your explanations, they'll understand how things work a lot better.

It's also likely that you have certain roles in the story that you need filled. Your story probably has requirements, in terms of characters and setting, that must be understood by all concerned. Even if you don't have specific requirements, you probably have a general idea of the types of characters you need. The best method is to request that certain players fill those roles beforehand. Usually, the extra "oomph" that a precreated character is likely to have (not to mention its obviously central role in upcoming plots) will be enough to make up for the disappointment a player might feel over not being able to create her own character.

If you're running an extended chronicle, odds are that most of your players will simply show up and start playing once you declare things "on line." This factor makes your job a lot easier — who wants to do briefings at the beginning of each session? — but be careful to catch new players who might get lost in the shuffle.



Bringing them into line with what the rest of the game is already doing will make everyone happier than if new players accidentally find themselves swimming upstream against established plots and characters.

## INTRODUCING YOUR STORY

When players begin to arrive, you need to give them information. You need to tell them what's happened since the last story (if anything), and you should provide goals and motivations for the upcoming evening. Prepare as much information as you can in written form for players to read as they arrive. Some handouts that you can create to facilitate your story's introduction include:

- Character cards — You need to have enough of these for all your players. It's wise to have spare cards on hand, since players, who have their own characters, may forget their cards. In addition, you'll need pencils for everyone who's forgotten their own.

- Timetable — (For Narrators only) This sheet contains a chronological list of all events that take place. Timetable sheets are useful for planning complex stories, and they help your Narrators coordinate where they have to be when. Events listed might be, "6:30 — Entrance of Court Magician, who announces ancestor will be late for the evening." Make sure each Narrator has her own copy, and go through the events on the handout during your Narrator briefing.

- Background Briefing — This handout is a one-pager that you can create to provide a short background for the important characters of your chronicle. You should include any important events that have occurred, rumors that are circulating throughout the city and important things that have happened in previous games. A new player should be able to pick up this handout and immediately have an idea of what is going on. (Lost players tend to be bored players, and bored players don't come back.) The handout can mention things like what city the chronicle takes place in and the name of the local movers and shakers. Make several copies of this document and give one to each player, or leave several out in the open for players to take.

- Character Briefing — Depending on how thorough your character-creation process is, you may need to let individual players know special tidbits that their characters know. It's best to have these written down. Even the most talented roleplayers have to resort to their notes every now and then.

## GUIDING PLAYERS

As your players begin to work out the story, it's possible that they may be unsure of themselves. New players in particular need some sort of guidance to help them learn the rules and get used to acting out their characters' actions. Step into a minor character in your story and engage a new player in a minor challenge to get her used to the rules. The challenge system works well in play, but most people do not immediately understand it until after they've actually defended themselves in a challenge and gotten to try out the system in a non-threatening situation. Try to let new players win your challenge, as it builds their confidence, and confidence is sorely needed when newcomers play in the same game as more experienced players.

Sometimes players also need help with their goals. A story that leans heavily toward investigation may frustrate players who miss one or two vital clues. Eventually, some players may come over to you asking for help. Unless the players have a rules question, or you have to clarify some point that a character should know by virtue of his history or background, you might not want to give

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information away too easily at first. If a player receives immediate assistance from a Storyteller or Narrator, he may become dependent on outside help.

Instead of giving direct answers to player questions, encourage players to figure things out for themselves. Later, if a player really does need help, have another Narrator assist the player while in the guise of a minor character. If another Narrator is not available, you can approach the player and offer aid through your own character (although having another Narrator do it involves a touch of finesse). Pull your assistance off cleanly, and the player will never know you have responded to his plea.

You also need to invent things to do for players who seem bored with the game. These players have usually either accomplished or hopelessly failed to achieve their goals, or they can't find the motivation to pursue a difficult goal. Your best options are to get a bored player involved in another plot, or to make up a customized plot on the spot that centers on the bored player's character. If your character mentions a lead to a powerful artifact that others are looking for, the player may spend time following that lead. Alternatively, giving the bored player a clue that someone else has missed allows you to kill two birds with one stone, as other players will need to talk to this character — giving him all sorts of new chances for character interaction.

It's a good idea to have a library of new plots on hand that you can drop into your chronicle as needed. Remember to be vigilant for bored players during your first few games. First-time players might not come back if they're bored all evening long. If you don't keep the players busy with plots, their characters may start gunning each other down just for something to do. At this point, the game quickly degenerates into a free-for-all. You'll probably find that players stay busy as your chronicle progresses because they spend more time involved in the plots of other players.

### **ASSUMING THE MANTLE OF HEAVEN: RUNNING DESTINY AND PROPHECY**

Contrary to the shiftless existences of the Kin-jin, most Kuei-jin live unives steeped in prophecy and serendipity, from good joss that leads to an auspicious occasion to a tragic moment of blindness. Omens, dreams and other mystical events are laced throughout the blood-soaked world of the Hungry Dead, like it or not, and the very nature of Dharma supposes some greater purpose to a Kuei-jin's existence than simple survival. Faced with such circumstances, some Storytellers may feel overwhelmed when it comes to figuring out how to allow such Traits as *Horoscope* and *Dharma* their full potential without giving away all the surprises in the game. For those feeling the pinch of karma, remember some of the following guidelines and things should generally work out all right.

**1) Inscribe the Murmurs of Heaven.** This one's simple. Assign a Narrator, called the Oracle, to keep a written record of all notable dreams, omens and the like. That way, you can not only keep your prophecies straight from night to night, but you can often pull out excellent ideas for future plots from omens given in the past, thus making good on your own "foreshadowing."

**2) The Future Is A Riddle, Not A Script.** This rule is the most important one by far. Never give a straightforward glimpse of the future, no matter who the Kuei-jin receiving it may be. Couch your omens and prophecies in elaborate riddles and metaphors, then turn the players loose on them, rewarding those who take the time to puzzle out the mysteries presented to them. It is much more atmospheric to say, "A familiar spider lurks in the garden, poised to strike. Destroy it and the web



shall reach the sky," than it is to say, "A powerful and trusted elder is ready to betray the court, but the battle will be costly." The first gives the players much more to think about and thus a lot more risk that they will act on a premature judgement than actual fact.

**3) There Is No Prophecy That Is Not Ritual.** The events surrounding a strong prophecy or omen should be as memorable and descriptive as the actual missive itself. Don't randomly toss scraps of the future to players. The more you make sure to build up the circumstances surrounding a prophecy, the more memorable the circumstance will be. A player who is told, "You have a dream that your *wu* will die in a terrible fire," will react much more calmly than one who is told that her character awakens screaming with the stench of burning flesh searing her nose and the dying moans of her friends still ringing in her ears. Likewise, if a player comes to you looking for a reading of his *I Ching* or something similar, don't turn him away. Try to create a scene that rings with the appropriate sense of ritual and tradition. Even if the player knows there is no supernatural accuracy behind such readings, his character is still likely to put some faith in the results.

**4) The Future Is Your Tool, Not Your Burden.** When you give out prophecies, write them with an eye toward the major plots and themes you have in mind for the chronicle as a whole. When you send omens, use them to sharpen the mood you want for the session at hand. That way, if either of them come to pass, they help out your story instead of feeling as though they were simply injected into the plot. Don't be afraid to take time-outs in the middle of play if it's necessary to get the wording of a prophecy just right. The game will be better for it in the long run.

**5) Always In Motion Is the Future!** Last but not least, don't be afraid to throw the players curves every now and then. If they have come to rely on fortunetellers for every move they make, tell them the stars are hidden by clouds that night, or give them a prophecy that simply fails to come to pass. This tactic is not a means of "screwing the players over," but rather a way of reminding them that destiny is something they must choose to follow for themselves, not simply steps they take at the direction of some other being. Don't feel bound to make all the prophecies you issue come true. Doing so makes you a prisoner of your own game rather than its controller.

### **INTERACTING WITH CAST MEMBERS**

Your key to interacting with players is the minor character known as an extra. An extra can be a pre-generated character already woven into the story, or a character created on the spur of the moment to fix a problem. You rarely need to create a character card for your extra; a basic concept is usually enough. (If the players' characters really want to kill or otherwise interact with the extra so that Traits are called for, improvise as the plot demands.)

Each character you introduce needs to have an easily identifiable mark so players can recognize which minor character you are playing. A wearable prop, such as a hat, coat, sash, belt or necklace is usually enough. A distinct speech pattern, like an accent, is at least as useful. Remember that the mark needs to be something that you can put on and take off quickly, since you may end up having to switch between several minor characters in an evening's story. Your extra(s) should be enjoyable to play. During the middle of a story, you may find that you and the Narrators have little to do. You then have a chance to play your bit parts just for fun. Go a little wild. Try to provide some comic relief if you feel the game is



getting too heavy, and most of all, enjoy yourself. If you're not having fun, even if the players are, something's wrong.

### PLAYER QUESTIONS

Aside from having a way to deal with players within the context of the story, you need to handle players' questions outside the story. During the first half hour of a game, it's a good idea to keep a Narrator "out of game" to answer any questions players might have. When players step out of character to ask questions, you don't want them in the main playing area. Set the "outside" Narrator up in another room.

The most important thing to remember when interacting with players is to never remind them they are playing a game. Addressing a Narrator as a Narrator does just that. You may occasionally need to impart information that a character cannot offer. You have to provide such information as discreetly as possible without distracting players from their characters. If you want to be stylish about offering game information to players, you can prepare notes for Narrators to hand to players who discover things. You can also put notes in closed envelopes where clues might be found. You can write requirements on the outside an envelope, requirements that must be met before the player may look at the clue within.

One thing you want to avoid when dealing with players is letting them overuse Narrators. Players may try to use Narrators as messengers, to summon other characters, or to try new and interesting abuses of Disciplines. If a player asks for such favors too often, Narrators can simply refuse their help. Running plots and arbitrating conflict, Narrators are simply in too short a supply to allow them to become hostages to individual characters or roles.

## WORKING WITH NARRATORS

As a Storyteller, you can't do everything yourself. It's not possible. No matter how good a Storyteller you are, you're going to need the help of Narrators (unless, perhaps, you have only five or six players). If you try to run the whole story, you will be overwhelmed. It's best to delegate tasks and let your Narrators make judgment calls. Ideally, you, as Storyteller, should not have to deal with players very much (unless you establish yourself as a Narrator as well as Storyteller). You should wander around and observe to make sure the story is proceeding well. Players should learn to go to Narrators with their questions. A player should refer to you only if a Narrator has no idea how to handle a question.

To ensure that Narrators understand what's going to happen in the story, you should meet with them early in the evening. If no one but you knows what's going on, your Narrators aren't much use, and they could even prove a hindrance if they direct events in the wrong fashion. You should assign tasks to Narrators at this time. For example, you can ask a Narrator to provide a clue to a character, but let the Narrator work out how and when that clue is delivered. Narrators need to keep you informed of their rulings and of story events. Avoid reversing a decision that a Narrator has made. Doing so makes Narrators seem indecisive and leads players to doubt them. If you want to run a large game, you are going to need assistants, and you have to learn to communicate with them effectively.

### THE TEN THOUSAND FACES

For *Laws of the East*, you will need a large cast of willing Narrators. If you underpopulate your Narrative staff, you shortchange your players by creating long lines when multiple characters need Narrator assistance. Furthermore, a shortage



of staff can make complicated scenes stagnate as Narrators try to run too much at once. Do whatever it takes to make sure that you have enough Narrators, or your story will fall apart under its own weight.

### PACING THE STORY

More often than not, a story does not run according to schedule. It either drags late into the night or players work too quickly and become bored with their accomplishments. It's during times like these that you need to reach into your bag of tricks and adjust the pace of the story. Dealing with stories that are running too long is, thankfully, relatively simple. It's easy to push on the accelerator. You can start by doling out clues and information through character contacts and the introduction of new props. One of the simplest tools you can have in your repertoire is a number of characters to throw into the adventure. Simply introduce a character who has the tools to help solve the problem, but for a price.

Prolonging play time is a little more tricky than reducing it. Prolonging play time means prolonging the story, but if the story is complete, you have to make up new events in the spot. However, instead of creating an entirely new plot, you might be able to extend the "finished" story by going on past its logical conclusion. Extending stories works very well if you have a group of Narrators who are flexible, creative and who like to work "on the run." If you foresee the story ending early, there are ways of prolonging it by distracting players. Essentially, you can introduce subplots in order to pull characters off the beaten path. If you have a chance, work out one or two subplots for every story. Try not to overuse any particular devices for prolonging a story, or people will get bored, but an ever-new batch of red herrings can prove amusing. The best way to slow players down is to present them with something new. Bring in a Big Evil Nasty Thing (B.E.N.T.), or have the local hengeyokai threaten, and you can be certain that the linear plot will be set aside in the face of the incipient threat.

One of the more unusual tricks to use while improvising is to create a set of events with no obvious explanation. Then listen to the explanations your players propose and choose one to be the case, or base your explanation on the theory you like best. While this tactic may seem cheesy, some absolutely amazing stories can be developed this way.

## RESCUE 911

In Mind's Eye Theatre, the Storyteller and Narrators have only limited control over what occurs in the story. While you can often predict human behavior to know where a story might lead, things never work out as planned. Players have a tendency to ignore old goals, creating new plot lines without a second thought for your hours of preparation and cunningly laid plans.

While such situations can be disconcerting, it's not always a bad thing for your players to improvise. Unforeseen plot turns are, in fact, what **Mind's Eye Theatre** is all about. The trick is to use what the players give you, instead of fighting with them. If players generate new plots, you can continue them in the next story, providing you with new material on which to build. If you let players run with what they come up with, your story may go in entirely unexpected — but rewarding — directions. While the story may go off on a tangent, headed toward no foreseeable conclusion, you can usually apply finesse to work things out. The hardest part is knowing when to say "no" or when to stop destructive subplots in their tracks. The



rule of thumb is, if a new direction adds depth to the story, entertains people and doesn't get in the way, let it run its course. As with all things, though, people can go too far in improvisation. The following are some signs indicating that events might be getting out of control:

- There is excessive character "death" during a game.
- A key antagonist is killed, disabled, captured or otherwise prevented from becoming a key figure in the story.
- Characters begin attacking everything that moves for no obvious reason. This phenomenon, also known as "Last Night of the Convention Syndrome," is perhaps the best sign of all.
- Important items or clues are destroyed, discarded or stolen.
- Young Kuei-jin start telling elders what to do, or ignore them altogether.
- The moral centers of the game (i.e., the struggle against the Demon and the pursuit of Dharmic enlightenment) are being casually discarded.

Try to avoid halting the story altogether. Work within the story to put things right. Once a player puts a plan into motion that would have a detrimental effect on the game, you can encourage other characters to work against it, creating more plot lines and alleviating the suspicion that you are "out to get" any particular player.

Only when things look bleak, and you have tried in vain to fix story problems, should you introduce a *deus ex machina* ending. Essentially a plot hammer, the D.E.M. should be reserved for those moments when the chronicle needs to be manhandled back into some semblance of playability. A *deus ex machina* can take forms ranging from a hengeyokai attack that unites all of the bickering court members to a visit from a legendary Kuei-jin bodhisattva. However, there are limitations on this sort of approach. Use a plot hammer too often, and players will feel that they're being controlled too tightly. Use it too seldom, and characters can run amuck.

Good uses of the plot hammer include killing off problem characters, introducing a powerful outsider who'll force characters to cease pointless internal squabbling, bringing in an overwhelming threat that dictates that everyone work together to stop it or stopping the game until you've had time to regroup. Also, the downtime will allow you to introduce plot elements via email or conversations with players that will serve to prevent recurrences of trouble situations.

## LAYING DOWN THE LAW

It's your responsibility to ensure that players are not a hazard to others, including people who are not involved in the game. It is mandatory that the normal rules of social interaction be strictly adhered to. Most players will probably work with you in this regard. However, from time to time, there are those who prove disruptive to other players and the environment where the game is being played. This disruption often occurs by accident. However, there may be instances when players get out of hand on purpose. If such a situation presents itself, it's not considered bad taste to remove the offender from your game. It is, after all, your game and your creation. The integrity of your game should be preserved for the enjoyment of other players. The integrity of the game should also be upheld in the minds of those who do not play or understand *Mind's Eye Theatre*.

## RESOLVING ARGUMENTS

As Storyteller (and to a lesser degree as a Narrator), you have final word in any dispute that may arise between players. It is your responsibility to maintain peace



between players to ensure the smooth flow of the story and its enjoyment by all. Players should be given the opportunity to speak their minds on a situation in which they disagree, but things should never be allowed to devolve into shouting or other such unpleasantness. It's a game, after all.

While it is suggested that you listen to a player's grievances, remember that your decision is final and must be adhered to by all concerned. Once you make a call, that's that—the discussion is over. Be firm, or players will always be after you to change decisions you've made. Be consistent in the way you resolve rules conflicts, or people will think you're not being fair.

It's best to combine an understanding ear and a firm hand. Keep your wits about you and your players will respect you for it. If a player's problems prove a disruption to the story, they may have to be put on hold and dealt with after the night's session. And remember, no single individual is bigger than the game. If someone becomes a distraction to the other players, you are perfectly within your rights to suspend or even to banish that player from the game.

### **BREAKING THE RULES**

The rules are yours to use and abuse as you see fit. The novelist Richard Bach once said, "Argue for your limitations, and sure enough, they're yours." Do not limit yourself to this set of rules. Your concept of the way **Laws of the East** should be played may change constantly. Bend or break the rules to your liking. The rules serve the story; the story does not serve the rules.

If you come to a situation that isn't covered by the rules, don't panic—improvise. Improvising rules involves nothing more than applying common sense to a situation. Don't be afraid of going against the grain in such cases. Just do what makes the most sense for your story and your characters, and things will work out fine. After all, if it comes down to a question of rules versus story, story should win every time.

## **STORY IDEAS**

If you've never run an Eastern story before, your first story ideas can be hard to develop. The typical action-adventure plots from many Eastern films do not quite work, but neither do many of the plots you might use in a Western vampire game. In fact, there are millions of possible Middle Kingdom plots to run for chronicles of all shapes and sizes. Here is a quick list of story ideas to spark your imagination. Start with setting, and look at what conflicts are going on in your game's setting in the area and time you've chosen for your game. Then consider how Kuei-jin might be involved in what's going on.

Or, come up with a story idea, choose a site to locate it, and then study the history of the land to decide how it might be changed by the events of your chronicle. Smaller chronicles need to be tightly focused, whereas larger ones need complex plots that allow players to interact with each other without the aid of a Narrator at every elbow. Plots can even be run with all the players as mortals, just learning of the Kuei-jin menace, and most demon-hunters demand interesting stories that a very fine balance of challenge and feasibility. Here are a few suggestions to start you thinking:

- A Kuei-jin deeply involved with a ruthless triad finds out that his favorite young cousin wishes to join the ranks of its enforcers. Can the Kuei-jin stop his



beloved relative from making a grave mistake without betraying his own loyalty to the triad?

- A Zero Team's routine reconnaissance mission uncovers a great supernatural presence in one of the city's vital industries. The characters must preserve the secrecy of their agency and the supernatural world as they work with local officials to locate and remove the *shen* taint.

- A character returns to avenge a dishonor done to his family name, only to find that his hated foe is a powerful *shen*, perhaps a vicious hengeyokai warrior or inhumanly clever chi'n ta. Will the character break the peace his court has established with the other *shen* to carry out his vengeance, and what will the consequences be if he does?

- An experienced coterie of Tremere Kin-jin arrives with the intent of establishing a chantry in a powerful local dragon nest. Will the characters try to defeat the Tremere in open combat, or can they find some more subtle means of evicting the hated *gueilo*?

- The elders of the court decide that the Running Monkeys are too lazy and decadent, and that they must therefore complete some great challenge or be extinguished. This challenge may be nearly anything the elders decide on, and it will not be easy to finish, but the survivors will earn a great deal of respect.

- A Shih demon-hunter tracks down a notorious Kuei-jin, only to find that he is now the sole means of support for a tiny farming village. Is the Kuei-jin really reformed after all? Will the Shih do her duty and destroy the undead threat, or consider past sins forgiven in light of this new lifestyle?

- A Ventre vampire approaches the court and says that he knows of some great plot against them by the other Kin-jin. For a *gaijin*, he seems to know his way around Eastern protocols, but can he really be trusted, or is this just another Kindred ploy?

- A hengeyokai sentai arrives in tatters, survivors from a battle with some dread creature. They beg the Kuei-jin's aid to finish the monster before it grows any stronger. Do the characters trust these mysterious *shen*? Will the Kuei-jin join with the shapeshifters to battle this threat, or will they try to deal with it on their own? (Can they?)

- A Kuei-jin discovers one of her *wu*-mates has become one of the *akuma*, a slave to the Yama Kings. Will she attempt to purge the dishonor herself, or turn her old friend over to the court for justice?

- A powerful cursed artifact arrives in one of the area's museums, and it immediately begins tainting the Chi in the area. The Kuei-jin must take action to remove the item before it inflicts permanent harm, but the mortal patron of the arts who brought it will not relinquish it easily.

- A story of unity — all the *shen* in the area, from mightiest Kuei-jin to common *hsien*, must band together to repulse the efforts of a massive Strike Force Zero campaign targeted at removing all the *shen* in the area for good. Overcoming ancient prejudices and battling the subtlest of mortal enemies will be no easy task.



robert wheeler (order #36511)



# APPENDIX

## THOSE WHO HUNT DEMONS

### THE SHIH

After killing  
a spider, how lonely I feel  
in the cold of night.  
— Masaoka Shiki (haiku)

### SILENT KEEPERS OF THE BALANCE

Not all mortal witch-hunters seek to destroy every single *shen* they find. Rather, some remember that all things have a place under Heaven, and they seek only to correct those that stray from their appointed path. Of course, many Kuei-jin in the Fifth Age forgot their holy mission to battle the Yama Kings and indulge their darkest whims, feeling above punishment when it comes to taking whatever they wish from the mortals around them. That means that these lonely hunters are more pressed than ever to keep the Kuei-jin in line. Fortunately, if there are any mortals up to the challenge, the Shih are just such warriors.

Founded by Yi, a Chinese warrior-mage during the Age of Legends, the Shih are solitary hunters who are drawn from the ranks of mortals touched by the hand of the supernatural at some time in their past. Many are orphans of one kind of *shen* rampage or another, although the mentors who choose new Shih are careful to temper revenge with proper discipline to avoid needless deaths in the field. Shih train for a *minimum* of 15 years, during which time they are required to master a variety of subjects ranging from martial arts and weapon combat to occult lore and courtly etiquette. They also learn special techniques to channel their personal Chi reserves and otherwise hone their bodies to levels of perfection beyond the dreams of most mortals. For their part, the Shih know that while their purpose may be



honorable under Heaven, it is seldom a welcome intrusion, and therefore, they must be ready for the worst the *shen* can throw at them. Traveling alone, as is their ancient custom, only toughens this resolve, since they know the chances of any kind of reinforcements arriving are slim at best. When they are finally released from their master's side, having studied the *shen* firsthand and trained exhaustively for nearly two decades, the Shih are more than capable opponents for even experienced supernatural creatures. More than one cocky *kyonshi* has met Final Death at the hands of one of these nomads after refusing to change his arrogant ways.

For their part, most Shih really do try to give *shen* that they see as out of line a chance to redeem themselves. While they do not bother to parlay with *chih-meis* and other mindless abominations, Shih often put themselves in a great deal of danger in order to redeem a particular *shen* before resorting to combat, if they feel there is even a slight chance of success. Of course, once sentence has been pronounced, the Shih are grimly efficient in carrying it out, no matter the cost to themselves. Shih are also typically a hardy and pragmatic lot who will go from nobly defending a peasant village from a rampaging *chih-meis* to picking the pockets of the dead monster in order to pay for their next meal. They justify their way of life by the sacred charge they uphold, but they are also worldly enough to realize that generous rewards for their work will be few and far between, and so they do what they must to survive. Considering that many communities in this day and age do their best to forget about the monsters walking among them, including the hunters who vanquish them, the Shih are seldom motivated by a desire for fame and praise anyway. Instead, the Shih live and die between the cracks of modern society in the hopes that their efforts help restore some balance to the grand expanse of Heaven.

## **QIAO - THE REWARDS OF DEDICATION**

Shih discipline offers several tangible benefits to those who choose to adhere to its strict training regimen: the Qiao (the Chinese word for "bridge"). Qiao are supernatural powers that help balance the scales between the dread powers of the *shen* and the hunters who dare stalk them.

### **QIAO OF THE J SHEN**

Using Yang Chi, the Shih may prepare special prayers on silk or paper, which then become capable of hindering and harming demons in various ways. These prayers may be prepared hours in advance of their use, and they retain their magic for up to one day. Unless otherwise noted, each prayer requires one Yang Trait and 15 minutes per level of the Qiao to create. The prayers may be thrown at any target the Shih can see (including invisible foes sensed through various Qiao powers), and once thrown, the prayers fly around obstacles — making all but complete cover useless — and otherwise defy physics to reach their target. Hitting a target with the prayers still requires a successful Melee Challenge, however.

**Note:** Most of these powers must be dodged if the target wishes to avoid their effect. In other words, some speed- or agility-related Trait (such as Quick or Agile) must be bid if the target wishes to defend against them. Traits such as Enduring or Brawny do not function as a defense against these powers, although of course the target may choose to attack in response instead of merely defending.



## CHARACTER CREATION: SHIH HUNTERS

Shih hunters are still basically mortals (if very well-trained ones), and they should use the rules for creating mortals found in *Laws of the Hunt*, with the following additions, deletions and exceptions:

- Shih use the following Attribute totals during character creation: 8/6/3. Thus they receive eight Traits in their primary category, six Traits in their secondary category and three Traits in their tertiary category. Shih may have a maximum of 10 Traits in an Attribute category.
- Shih hunters use the Virtue system of Conscience, Courage and Self-Control, as well as Humanity. (See *Laws of the Night* for details on these Virtues.)
- Shih do not get to choose Abilities during character creation; rather, they receive the following Abilities: *Martial Arts* x 2, *Melee* x 2, *Dodge* x 2, *Occult* x 2 and *Survival*. Any additional Abilities desired must be purchased with Free Traits during the Merit/ Flaw portion of character creation. (It is highly recommended that Shih intensify their combat training as much as possible. They are on their own, after all, and the *shen* are the deadliest of foes.) Shih may also begin play with more than two levels of *Martial Arts*, due to their focused training. Thus, Shih characters start with extremely honed talents, but at a cost to player flexibility.
- Shih automatically receive the Background: *Mentor* x 3.
- All Shih begin play with one level in each of the following Chi Powers: *Qiao of the Mo Kung*, *Qiao of the I Shen* and *Qiao of the Yu An*. Additional levels cost four Free Traits during character creation, and the following number of Experience Traits apply once play begins: three for Basic *Qiao*, five for Intermediate and eight for Advanced.
- As players will no doubt have noticed by now, Shih are *extremely* strong for beginning characters. That unbalance is due to two factors. First, all Shih have spent a great deal of time being trained by masters well-versed in the arts of demon-hunting, and (more importantly) Shih characters are intended to work *alone*. Even in a larger troupe, the Shih is expected to carry his own weight, tend his own wounds and otherwise avoid any needless personal entanglements. That life may seem very cool and rugged at first, but loneliness should begin to take its toll as time goes by and the Shih realizes some of the disadvantages of going solo. Of course, Shih aren't foolish. If taking down a particular *shen* requires teamwork, they'll play along, but players who always try to band together like a bunch of kung-fu Super Friends bent on kicking Kuei-jin butt are doing their characters a grave disservice. The Shih have walked their solitary roads for millennia, and they see no reason to change their ways now.

### Basic

**Celestial Punishment** — By casting these prayers at his target, the Shih may cause demons pain and even injure certain *shen*. Demons suffer extreme agony (two-Trait penalty on all challenges for five minutes), but vampires and wraiths also suffer a single aggravated wound. Vampires may attempt to soak this damage with a Physical Challenge, but they still suffer pain. Wraiths may not soak this damage, although they may repair it with appropriate Arcanoi.

**Divine Bindings** — Designed to slow down mighty foes and render weaker ones entirely helpless, these prayers shine with eerie green light and expand rapidly, entrapping the target *shen*. On a successful hit, the *shen* is incapable of any



physical action except attempting to break free, and the pain caused by the bindings makes using mental powers or Disciplines impossible without the expenditure of a Willpower Trait. Breaking free requires that the *shen* succeed at three Static Physical Challenges, each difficulty six. Only one attempt may be made per turn unless the *shen* possesses some kind of supernatural speed. This power does not affect incorporeal beings.

#### Intermediate

**Heavenly Flames** — Upon hitting their target, these prayers burst into supernatural blue flames, igniting and inflicting aggravated wounds. This power may be soaked with conventional means as well as supernatural ones, but it inflicts three levels of aggravated damage. Furthermore, the target must win or tie a Simple Test every turn to try to extinguish the flames if he is wearing anything combustible (fur counts). The flames inflict one additional aggravated wound every turn that they continue to burn.

**Celestial Fires** — This power is identical to *Heavenly Flames*, except that the fires caused may only be soaked by supernatural means.

#### Advanced

**Heaven's Thunder** — This awesome power seldom leaves a demon standing, since it vents the very wrath of Heaven in one spectacular display. A Shih who uses this power is assured of doing at least some damage to his target, but the cost is correspondingly high. Thus, this power is used most sparingly by the demon-hunters who know it. These prayers blaze from the Shih's hand like lightning once cast, seeking out the demon she has chosen, and they hit their target *automatically*. Nothing less than divine intervention can keep these prayers from their target, although certain Advanced supernatural powers might be helpful at the Storyteller's discretion. (This is the wrath of Heaven, after all.) These prayers inflict a base of four aggravated wound levels, plus an additional aggravated wound for each Simple Test the Shih wins against his target. Compare Mental Traits in the event of ties; the first test won by the target ends the challenge. These wounds cannot be soaked, but regardless of the outcome of this power, the Shih suffers one unsoakable wound. This power costs two Yang Traits. This power has been known to fail if the target is innocent of the crimes the Shih believes them guilty of, or it may even rebound on wicked Shih who attempt to destroy *shen* they know to be blameless.

### QIAO OF THE MO KUNG

The *Bridge of the Devil Fighter* is a very direct path, but one of the most useful considering how often the Shih come to blows with the *shen* they are sent to correct. It grants them a measure of physical viability as enemies of the demons, but at a great drain on their spiritual reserves.

#### Basic

**Steel Skin** — The Shih undergo many grueling exercises in training, all of them designed to toughen their bodies for brutal battles against the *shen*. By spending one Yang Trait, the Shih may gain either one additional Bruised health level or the Physical Traits: *Tough*, *Resilient*, *Enduring* for the remainder of the scene. Each different use of this power may be used only once per scene.

**Dragon's Speed** — Speed is of the essence when battling demonic entities, and this power grants the Shih steady hands and lightning reflexes. By spending one Yang Trait, the Shih may either gain a pre-emptive action (*a la* vampiric *Alacrity*) or the Physical Traits: *Dexterous*, *Quick*, *Nimble* for the remainder of the scene. Each different use of this power may be used only once per scene.



### Intermediate

**Tiger's Strength** — Through sheer force of will, the Shih is able to increase his physical strength to match that of the strongest mortal (and many *shen*). By spending one Yang Trait, the Shih gains a free retest on all strength-related challenges and the Physical Traits: *Brawny* x 2 and *Wiry* for the remainder of the scene.

**Celestial Eyes** — Clearing his mind of all distractions, the Shih may focus his senses to detect minute, even virtually nonexistent phenomena. Spending one Yang Trait, the Shih gains the Mental Traits: *Discerning*, *Observant*, *Attentive* and the *Danger Sense* Merit (as his senses catch the tiny warning signs around him). The Shih also gains a free retest on any *Investigation* or *Enigmas* Challenges related to sense perception. This power lasts for the remainder of the scene.

### Advanced

**Body of the Dragon** — Though incredibly draining, this potent power allows the Shih to boost his body's capabilities to truly superhuman levels for a time. This power costs one Willpower Trait and two Yang Traits to activate, but it doubles the Shih's Physical Traits for the remainder of the scene. (Bonus Traits due to other powers are added after the doubling is calculated, not before.) The Shih also wins all ties in Physical Challenges unless his opponent possesses a similar power, in which case, the winner is determined normally. Once the scene is over, the Shih must rest for several hours before he can do more than walk a few steps, and the benefits of this power are reversed until such rest takes place.

## QIAO OF THE YU AN

The *Bridge of Jade Harmony* allows a Shih to resist the "mind tricks" of the *shen* and to see them for what they truly are. At higher levels of mastery, it allows the demon-hunter to consult and battle the spirits on their own plane, although such methods are as dangerous as they are potentially rewarding. For uses beyond the Basic level, the Unseen Master should be present to play the role of the spirits and adjudicate any combats or other interactions. A character must carry jade in some form to use this Qiao.

### Basic

**Opened Eyes** — Elegant in its function, this power reveals supernatural beings in their true forms. The Shih can see wraiths, perceive *hsien* and *Kuei-jin* for what they are, even detect hengeyokai in their mortal forms. Simply put, any creature that tries to hide its true nature from the Shih is incapable of doing so, and the player may ask any other players out of character what type of supernatural creature they are (if they are one at all). Note, however, that this power does not work against those actively using magic to hide themselves (such as characters under the effects of *Shrouded Moon* or *Unseen Presence*) or change their shape. This power lasts for one scene, and it also renders the character immune to the Delirium during that time.

**Divine Perceptions** — This power allows the Shih to see into a target's soul, usually to determine if they are lying but also to see if they are possessed by demons or otherwise under supernatural influence. Detecting lies requires that the Shih's player defeat the target in a Static Mental Challenge (difficulty of the target's Mental Traits); success tells the character if the target was indeed lying. The Shih may also detect possession or other supernatural influence by winning an identical Static Mental Challenge. If successful, the Shih's player may expend two Mental Traits to discern exactly who/ what is responsible for the influence. This power costs one Yang Trait, and it lasts for one scene.



### Intermediate

**Wind Talk** — By attuning himself to the appropriate Chi force, the Shih gains the ability to converse with spirits of that type, although they are under no particular compunction to obey him or even hang around if they choose to do otherwise. The player must spend one Chi Trait of the type of spirits he wishes to overhear (Yin for ghosts, Yang for natural spirits) and concentrate for 30 seconds. During that time, the character hears the voices of the spirits growing louder until they reach a normal conversational level. As soon as that occurs, the character may speak freely with the spirits or simply listen to them as he sees fit. This ability lasts for one scene.

**Celestial Window** — Continuing on the path of spiritual discourse, the Shih may now attune himself to one spirit, effectively joining its plane of existence. The Shih may touch, hurt, help or fight the spirit as if both of them were in the same place, and the spirit may return such treatment in kind. This power affects only the Shih in regards to one spirit. Other spirits may not engage him in the same manner unless they possess powers of their own to do so. By the same token, the Shih cannot follow if the spirit flees the character's presence. This power costs one Chi Trait of the type appropriate to the spirit and lasts for once scene.

### Advanced

**Celestial Doorway** — This grand but often foolhardy power allows the Shih to open himself up to interaction with spirits of both the Yin and Yang Worlds. The effects are the same as those of *Celestial Window*, but now the Shih may interact with all the spirits in the area from both realms, despite the fact that he remains on the physical plane of existence. Of course, the spirits may interact with him right back, and considering the enmity many of them have toward the Shih, this power often results in a swift demise unless the demon-hunter is extremely careful. The doorway requires the expenditure of one Yin Trait and one Yang Trait, and it lasts for one scene or until the Shih chooses to close it (which is often very quickly).

## QIAO OF THE FENG

The *Bridge of the Phoenix* is a simple tool in the Shih's employ, but a powerful and useful one, for it is the way of healing. With so many foes that deliver so many kinds of devastating attacks, the Shih cannot wait for or trust modern medicine to cure their many injuries. They rely instead on this Bridge and other natural means of healing. It should be noted that by spending Chi, a character is essentially expending her life-force to rebuild her body. It is much easier and more relaxing to heal the damage done by spending several Chi Traits than it would be to heal the damage done by a bakemono's flaming breath. It should also be noted that this Bridge leaves scars in its wake, which most Shih are very proud of, considering them a mark of their ability to survive.

### Basic

**Barrier of Pain** — By spending one Yin Trait, the Shih renders herself immune to pain for the remainder of the scene. The character suffers no wound penalties, and she may continue to act normally until she is reduced below Incapacitated.

**The Closing Wound** — Channeling Yin Chi through her body, the character may repair some of the damage done to her. This power does not function on burns, severed nerves or broken bones, but it will heal all other wounds as well as poisons and minor diseases. The Shih must spend one Yin Trait, in order to heal two non-aggravated health levels.



### Intermediate

**Spiritual Healing** — Now the character is capable of healing even broken bones or severed nerves, although burns, acid wounds or damage caused by direct energy/ Chi attacks are still beyond the scope of this power. This ability takes at least five minutes of concentration and rest to use, and costs two Yin Traits. Once used, the Shih heals four non-aggravated health levels. At the Narrator's discretion, this healing may also remove Lame Negative Traits and other baneful results of crippling attacks.

**Escape from Death** — All manner of wounds may be healed through use of this power, even burns or the ravages of supernatural foes. This process is efficient but extremely time-consuming — requiring one hour per health level to be healed — but even aggravated wounds may be healed by use of this power. The Shih's player must succeed in a Static Mental Challenge against a difficulty of the number of health levels she wishes to heal and spend three Yin Traits to activate this power. Once underway, the character must eat enormous amounts of food to replace the energy used in the healing process. If the Shih is disturbed in any serious way (combat and other adventuring are straight out), the process ends, and any remaining damage remains unhealed.

### Advanced

**Flames of the Phoenix** — Shih with this ability may effectively rebuild their bodies on a cellular level, curing the effects of cancer, radiation exposure, severe trauma and even old age. Few of the Shih adept in this knowledge readily attempt it, however, for it places an enormous drain on their bodies that can easily kill those not in perfect health and possessed of perfect discipline. The Shih must spend three Yin Traits, three Yang Traits and two permanent Willpower Traits to invoke *Flames of the Phoenix*, and she must succeed at a Static Physical Challenge against a difficulty of nine Traits (this challenge may be retested with the *Occult Ability*). Failure means all the listed costs are paid, but nothing happens. Success indicates that the character is rebuilt from the ground up — cancer and other ill effects vanish, scars fade, fingerprints change, retinal structures alter, bones shift and the character may even experience a change in height. In essence, the character is reborn into a whole new body. Obviously, the player should adopt some new garb or descriptive tag to indicate the change in her character's appearance, since it is next to impossible for even those closest to her to recognize her for who she truly is. *Flames of the Phoenix* takes one session/day of uninterrupted meditation to perform.

## QIAO OF THE SHI

Many Shih delight in presenting an apparently helpless foe to their opponent, and then smashing her with a surprise attack or sudden Chi surge. In this respect, the *Bridge of the Serpent* serves them well, as it makes a Shih even deadlier with his bare hands than most foes are when armed to the teeth.

### Basic

**Thousand Fists** — Spending one Yang Trait, the character inflicts additional damage equal to his permanent *Martial Arts* rating with all successful *Martial Arts* attacks for the duration of one turn. Thus, the Shih is often able to deliver blows as devastating as those from a firearm or melee weapon with just a flurry of punches. The character may declare this power's use at any time before the outcome of a challenge is resolved.



**Spear Hand** — Using special focusing techniques, the Shih may set one hand afire with blazing Chi energy. As long as the Shih attacks with that appendage, all damage inflicted is aggravated. This power costs one Yang Trait and lasts for one scene.

#### Intermediate

**Burning Ghosts** — Summoning his Chi around him in a shining golden aura, the Shih becomes capable of striking wraiths and other spirits just as if they were Embodied or Materialized, although they must use such powers themselves if they wish to return the favor. This power costs one Yang Trait and one Physical Trait to enact, and it lasts for one scene. Note that the Shih's body does not actually strike the spirits, the aura surrounding him does.

**Steel Body** — Suffusing his essence with Yin energies, the character tightens his muscles to an inhuman degree, making his flesh like steel. He becomes tougher to harm and the blows he inflicts do amazing amounts of damage. This ability costs two Yin Traits and lasts for one scene, during which time, the Shih gains two Bruised health levels and inflicts aggravated damage with all *Brawl* or *Martial Arts* attacks.

#### Advanced

**Thousand Swords** — Channeling a surge of Chi within his body, the Shih focuses inward for a moment before unleashing a vicious flurry of strikes that split skin asunder and sound like steel striking against flesh. This ability costs two Yin Traits and two Yang Traits to activate, and while in this state, the character delivers aggravated damage with all *Martial Arts* attacks and gains two additional attacks per turn. Once the scene is over, the Shih is exhausted, and he must rest for a considerable amount of time (Storyteller's decision on how long is needed). Until such rest is attained, the Shih is reduced to no more than one Physical Trait. He also loses all ties on Physical Challenges.

### QIAO OF THE CHIEN

The *Bridge of the Mirror* is a vital part of a demon-hunter's arsenal, as it protects her Chi and allows her to manipulate the Chi of her enemies. Since no Shih wants to risk being contaminated by such energies, however, many uses of this Bridge involve a weapon of some kind. Traditionally, this weapon was an eight-sided metal mirror, but all manner of weapons or other items may be used, especially if they contain jade somewhere on them.

#### Basic

**Frozen River** — This ability allows the Shih to defend her life-force against theft by one of the shen. With the expenditure of one Yang Trait, all such attempts are three Traits down for the remainder of the scene (including attempts to feed on the character by such Chi parasites as Kuei-jin).

**Stolen Serpent** — Using this potent but dangerous technique, the Shih may attempt to redirect a ranged supernatural attack back at the enemy who cast it. The Shih must spend a Yang Trait and declare that she is redirecting the attack, then engage her foe in the appropriate challenge (the Shih uses her Physical Traits in this challenge, no matter what might normally be required). The Shih may retest this challenge with the *Occult* Ability. Success means the attack has been redirected, and the player may make a *Firearms* Challenge immediately to attempt to strike her foe with the redirected attack. Failure, however, means the Shih suffers the full damage/ effects of the attack, against which no soak possible.



### Intermediate

**Celestial Barrier** — This handy talent allows the Shih to block a *shen* from gaining Chi for a short time, and it's an ideal way to press the advantage against a tired foe. The player must spend a Yang Trait and defeat the *shen*'s player in a Willpower Challenge (no Traits risked). Success means the target is unable to gain Chi for five minutes, although he may spend any Chi he still has normally.

**Clutch of the Wan Kuei** — By executing a special strike with her chosen weapon, the Shih may attempt to steal some of the target's Chi, which is then absorbed into the weapon itself. The Shih cannot make use of this stolen Chi, but neither can the target. To use this ability, the player must spend one Yang Trait and make a number of Static Mental Challenges against six Traits; she may continue to challenge until she loses. For each successful challenge, one Chi Trait of the character's choice is stolen from the target of her next successful Melee attack.

### Advanced

**Bite of the Mu** — This rare technique allows the Shih to steal Chi from her opponent and use it in an attack against him. The Shih must first defeat her opponent in a number of Mental Challenges (no Traits risked); the Shih may continue to test until she loses. For each successful challenge, one Chi Trait is stolen from her target. With the next successful Melee attack against that target, the Shih may expend the stolen Chi to do additional levels of aggravated damage on a one-for-one basis. This power is as addictive as it is devastating, though, and demon-hunters who use it on a regular basis risk awakening their P'o. The Shih must spend two Yang Traits and sacrifice one Humanity Trait to use this power, and it lasts for the duration of the combat.

## QIAO OF THE LONG LING

The *Bridge of the Dragon Ruler* was created in response to the many "mind tricks" of the *shen*, and it allows a wily Shih to conquer enemies through intimidation and domination rather than raw physical prowess. For obvious reasons, it is very popular with older Shih whose bodies have begun to fail them, or physically slight Shih who enjoy beating the *shen* at their own game.

### Basic

**Eyes of the Dragon** — An intimidated opponent is defeated before a single blow is struck, and Shih who use this power are capable of stopping many fights before they begin. The character must stare straight at his foe, spend one Yin Trait and defeat his opponent in a Social Challenge. Lesser opponents are cowed and even superior foes are taken aback at such ferocity, but the end result is the same. Those defeated by this power must count out 15 seconds during which time they are effectively stunned and may take no offensive action (though they may defend themselves if need be). The Shih may use this power as a means of Fair Escape in some situations.

**Dark Reflection** — This ability forces one of the *shen* to realize the consequences of his actions, and it is used primarily as a means of reinforcing the justice of the Shih on errant supernaturals. The Shih must defeat his target in a Mental Challenge and spend one Yin Trait to use this power, and those so defeated are two Traits down on all aggressive actions for the remainder of the scene as the weight of their actions bears down on them. Furthermore, players of characters affected by this power should roleplay out the guilt and uncertainty associated with it to the best of their ability. This power can lead even virtuous characters to spend a tough night searching their own soul.



### Intermediate

**Haunted Eyes** — With this power, the Shih is able to torment the Hungry Dead and Restless Dead alike with memories of the time they spent in the Yomi World. The character must defeat his target with a Mental Challenge and spend one Yin Trait. Success means the target is flooded with the worst memories of her existence and cannot take any aggressive action for the remainder of the scene, although this power is immediately nullified if the target is attacked. Kuei-jin who fall victim to this ability must test immediately for wave soul as well. Needless to say, no character under the effects of this power is much fun to be around, and those with appropriate derangements (*Catatonia, Depression, etc.*) will find their derangements especially active during this time. This punishment is one of the gravest of the Shih, reserved for reminding the appropriate *shen* why they are so tormented.

**Voice of the Yama Kings** — Shih may use this ability to command a spirit to perform one task. This task must be something the spirit can do, although it need not be something the spirit would normally *like* to do. Spirits may not be commanded to destroy themselves, though they can be told to attack others. Above all, the command must be simple and direct, and most Shih are very careful in choosing how to word their commands, since most spirits will follow only the letter and not the intent of the order. The player must spend a Yin Trait and a Yang Trait and defeat the spirit in a Social Challenge versus the spirit's permanent Willpower for the command to take hold. Obviously, the Unseen Master should be present to test on behalf of the spirit and to record the letter of the arrangement, if necessary.

### Advanced

**Divine Ordinance** — By summoning the righteous wrath of Heaven itself, as well as all the rage felt by fallen Shih and past victims of supernatural exploitation, the Shih may attempt to drive the *shen* from the area through by inspiring the fear of Heaven itself in them. To invoke the *Divine Ordinance*, the Shih's player must spend two Yang Traits and a Willpower Trait. Once that is done, all those in the area, including *shen*, suffer an effect identical to the Delirium (see Laws of the Wild p. 200). For those of you without Laws of the Wild, assume that all the characters in the area flee in terror unless they are extremely strong-willed, and that even those who remain are extremely nervous and cautious when it comes to dealing with the Shih in question.

## QIAO OF THE MENG

The *Bridge of Dreams* is invaluable to the Shih, for it allows them to heal their hurting spirits and cleanse their minds of the taint and anguish that comes with hunting demons for a living. This Qiao is largely a matter of roleplaying, and since so many rich opportunities for in-depth gaming exist in this Bridge, a Storyteller should be quick to capitalize on them and make sure players realize the emotional toll this power extracts even as it helps purge a character's soul.

### Basic

**Balance of the Spirit** — With a successful Mental Challenge, the character can discern a target's internal Chi flow and detect any imbalances or other Chi afflictions. The Shih also learns how to correct such imbalances. Meditation is often the answer (one day of uninterrupted meditation corrects one point of Chi imbalance), but herbs, chants and other means may also be used.



**Focus of the Mind** — Battling the excesses of the supernatural world takes a heavy toll on a Shih's resolve, and this technique allows her to refresh her mental reserves. By reaching a relaxed state and spending one Yang Trait, the Shih may make a Static Mental Challenge with the *Meditation Ability* against six Traits. Success means one Willpower Trait is regained.

#### Intermediate

**Nightmare Exorcism** — Some Shih turn to vices in order to quell the pain of their difficult memories, but Shih using this power take a more direct approach, erasing the emotional significance of a problem memory and thus (hopefully) removing the mental scars it causes. The player must make two Static Mental Challenges with the *Meditation Ability* to use this power, the first to detect the problem memory and the second to remove its burden; both these challenges are against a difficulty of eight Traits. Successfully completing both of these challenges and expending a Yang Trait renders the memory harmless, although the character must relive it in vivid detail before it finally leaves her. Obviously, the effects of this ability are largely a matter of roleplaying, although the Storyteller may rule that this power can be used to reduce the cost of buying off a Flaw such as *Nightmares* or *Phobia*. A player may even cure a derangement attached to a memory by spending a Willpower Trait in addition to the Yang Trait required.

**Self-Exorcism** — Sometimes a demon is able to get past the strict mental defenses of a Shih and inhabit her body. By invoking a psychic contest with the invading force, this power gives the demon-hunter a second chance to throw off such a malevolent influence before it inflicts any further harm. The Shih must make a Mental Challenge (no Traits risked) against the demon's P'o or Rage rating and spend two Yang Traits. Success means the demon is cast out, while failure means the demon holds fast.

#### Advanced

**Mental Dominion** — With this potent talent, the Shih is able to fully restore her Willpower and even weaken her P'o (if it is active). The character must fast and meditate uninterrupted for a full week to use this power, during which time, she contemplates the sins she has committed and the necessity of committing those sins. Once these preparations are complete, the player must make a Static Mental Challenge against nine Traits and spend two Yang Traits and two Yin Traits. If successful, all Willpower Traits are regained, and the character's effective P'o rating is reduced by one.

### QIAO OF THE ZHU MAO

The *Bridge of the Resilient Cat* allows Shih to focus their Chi for movement and defense. Note: Many uses of these powers permit a character to travel to exotic locales or otherwise make movements that aren't quite normal. In most cases, a time-out should be called as characters move to new positions, and players should never forget the rules governing **Mind's Eye Theatre** when it comes to where they wish to stand (or how they plan on getting there).

#### Basic

**Cloud Walking** — By spending one Yang Trait and attuning himself to the winds, the Shih is able to move just slightly above the ground. This method of travel leaves no tracks or scent to mark his passing, and allows the Shih to travel in complete silence. All attempts to track him incur a three-Trait penalty at least, and his silent movement might even grant him surprise or Fair Escape in combat under the right circumstances. This power lasts for one scene.



**Water Treading** — Using this versatile power, the Shih is capable of treading easily on unstable surfaces such as water, fog or quicksand and climbing any surface, even just the leaves of a tree. After spending a Yang Trait, the character may travel at a normal rate of movement across any unstable surface, and he can climb any surface without penalty. This power lasts for one scene, although successful attacks or other blatant distractions cancel this ability.

#### Intermediate

**Wind Strike** — Combining basic martial arts techniques with an extra boost of Chi energy, the Shih can use an attacker's own momentum to throw her incredible distances. The player must declare that he is throwing his opponent with a *Martial Arts* challenge and spend a Yang Trait. Success means that he may throw his opponent up to 75 feet away, inflicting two health levels of bashing damage on top of the regular damage of the throw. A time-out should be called while the target travels to her new position.

**Mountain Stance** — Redirecting the force of incoming attacks into the ground itself, the Shih is able to avoid immense amount of punishment as long as the floor holds out. The player must make a Static Physical Challenge and spend one Yang Trait. Success means that all incoming health levels of damage from one attack are redirected into the ground at the character's feet. This tactic is normally safe, although performing this technique on wooden surfaces or loose soil can have unpleasant effects when it collapses beneath the character's feet. A Narrator should be consulted if a question as to the amount of punishment a particular area of ground can take arises.

#### Advanced

**Celestial Wind** — With this incredible ability, the Shih is able to rob one incoming object — attacker, speeding car, bullet — of its momentum and perhaps even send it back the way it came. The player must spend one Yang Trait and succeed at a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits. Success means the object is halted immediately and the Shih takes no damage (if any was to be inflicted). With the expenditure of two Mental Traits, the Shih may even send the object back at the same speed it was approaching, inflicting a minimum of two health levels of damage if it should strike something behind it. Due to the bizarre physics involved in this power, players may want a Narrator to be present to sort out what objects are flying which way and what effect that has.

### SPECIAL COMBAT TECHNIQUES

#### Mo Chi Kung Fu (Devil Judgment)

Beyond simple uses of the *Martial Arts* Ability, the Shih have developed several potent techniques in order to disarm and disable their *shen* opponents. Each beginning Shih character may select one of these techniques, and an additional one is earned for each level of *Martial Arts* beyond those they begin with. A list of these techniques and their special benefits/ drawbacks follows, along with the necessary Chi cost (if any). Also listed with each technique is the number of Traits down a character attempting the maneuver is considered to be. This penalty occurs in order to simulate the difficulty of the move in question, since the most potent techniques are also the most difficult to execute.

These are but the most common and well-known techniques. Storytellers should feel free to come up with more as they see fit, although players must still receive Storyteller permission before purchasing a particular special technique. When creating such maneuvers, remember that they stem from the experience the



Shih have accumulated fighting the *shen* over the centuries; they are not just tools to give players an unbeatable edge. The Faerie Crushing Fists technique may sound good, but if all it does is allow Shih to pound unopposed on the *hsien* in the chronicle, it's probably not a good idea to allow it. Always use game balance as the ultimate guideline. If any or all of these special techniques threaten to upset the game too much, remove them. (The Shih are quite strong enough without them, after all!)

**Snout Strike** — The shapeshifting hengeyokai all have a particular weak spot, typically in the nose area, where many nerve ganglia are focused in one spot. Targeting that spot and executing a successful strike, the Shih can place the target in a great deal of pain, thus distracting him and keeping him off-balance. The Shih must declare this technique and make a successful attack. Not only does the target suffer the normal damage, but the intense pain puts him down two Traits for the next three combat turns as well. The only downside is that excessive use of this technique may cause the target to frenzy, at which point the benefit of the technique is lost.

Traits Down: 2

**Chi Breaker** — This move, used almost exclusively against the Kuei-jin, allows the Shih to disrupt the natural Chi flow in his target. The Shih must declare that he is using the technique, spend a Yin Trait and then strike his target. He need not cause any damage (though often he chooses to); he needs only touch the vampire to be affected. If successful, the Shih's player may spend a variable number of Mental Traits. The Kuei-jin cannot spend any Chi Traits for as many turns as the number of Mental Traits spent. This technique has saved more than one demon-hunter from certain death, as their undead foe retreated to regroup or lost their winning edge at a crucial moment. This attack inflicts normal damage in addition to its disruptive benefits.

Traits Down: 2

**Jaw Hammer** — Many *shen* use their teeth as weapons, and this technique is designed to remove just such an attack from the *shen*'s arsenal. It is dangerous at best, however. By doing so, the Shih leaves himself open to retribution the next turn, so most get it right on the first try. The Shih must declare the technique and strike his foe precisely right. Not only must he score a successful hit, but he must win an additional Simple Test to actually break the jaw correctly. Failure on the Simple Test means the target may still bite normally, albeit at a one-Trait penalty due to the odd alignment of its teeth. Success means the target may not use biting attacks until the damage is fully regenerated. If the Shih fails on the initial attack, he cannot use the *Dodge* Ability the next turn — his positioning makes him too vulnerable to his opponent. This attack inflicts the standard amount of damage, whether the jaw is actually broken or not.

Traits Down: 2

**Fading Light Strike** — The Shih must use a long weapon such as a sword or staff for this technique. Simple hand-to-hand combat will not suffice, as the risk of infection by dark energy is too great. This potent technique allows the Shih to steal the energies of his target and use those forces against her — Chi is taken from Kuei-jin, while Rage is taken from hengeyokai, and so on. This attack does not inflict any physical damage, but the metaphysical effects can be devastating. The Shih essentially removes one Trait of the appropriate energy from his target for every level of damage he would inflict normally with the weapon. Thus, if the Shih strikes a Kuei-jin with this technique while using a sword that typically inflicts



three levels of damage, three Chi Traits are removed instead. Note that Shih himself cannot use the energy, but at least his foe can't either! This technique requires an exceptional knowledge of the target to be successful: The Shih must possess at least three levels each of *Medicine* and *Occult* to perform this maneuver, and each effort costs the Shih himself one Yang Trait.

Traits Down: 3

**Prone/Cripple Fighting** — Many older Shih disguise themselves as crippled, wizened beggars, and even the best of hunters occasionally finds himself knocked on his butt or otherwise fighting from a bad spot. Shih with this training can spend a Willpower Trait to ignore any penalties arising from such inauspicious circumstances for the remainder of the scene, allowing them to ignore their apparent disadvantage. While they cannot ignore wound penalties or such severe flaws as blindness or multiple missing limbs, they may fight normally from prone positions and ignore any *Lame*, *Decrepit* or similar Negative Traits they might possess. Such is the origin of legends of one-armed or one-legged Shih who still somehow manage to defeat scores of Kuei-jin in a single melee. Such tales may still be a bit exaggerated, but trained warriors can learn to overcome amazing flaws if the need is great.

**Stealing Eagle Wings** — Very few Shih are skilled enough to pull this technique off, but those that are can be counted among the most frightening and effective demon-hunters in the Middle Kingdom. Using an instinctive grasp of pressure holds and lightning-fast reflexes, the Shih may grab hold of a *shen* who is unleashing a burst of supernatural speed and essentially ride the enemy's own momentum, allowing the Shih to keep up with his opponent step for blazing step. A Shih must have at least five levels of *Martial Arts* and four levels of *Alertness* to perform this technique, and he must have scored a successful grappling strike against his opponent on the turn in question. If his opponent then chooses to use extra actions that turn (*Black Wind*, *Rage*, *Celerity*, etc.), the Shih may respond by spending a Yang Trait to activate this technique. Essentially, the Shih is then considered to gain an equal number of extra actions in response, *provided he continues to hold onto his target and doesn't attack anyone else*. In other words, the Shih may not only continue to try to injure his opponent during the course of the extra actions, but he receives a one-Trait bonus for every extra action he "steals" in this fashion. Normally, characters without extra actions can only soak the attacks — they can't dodge or harm the attacker. Thus, if a Shih with this technique grabs hold of a hengeyokai and it spends three *Rage* Traits for extra actions that turn, the Shih receives a one-Trait bonus on the first action, two Traits on the second, and so on as he turns his opponent's movements against him. Smart opponents will attempt to disentangle themselves completely from the Shih, thus negating this technique, but few are thinking that clearly at the time. They only know that the faster they move, the more control the Shih seems to have over them!

Traits Down: None. Using this technique is considered a reflexive response, not an action.

## **STRIKE FORCE ZERO - SEARCH AND DESTROY**

While the Shih try to maintain the purity of purpose that Heaven intended for the *shen*, there are others who see the supernatural as without place in this or any other world, and who do their best to ensure that the Unseen World is burned away wherever they can find it. Strike Force Zero is just such an organization, dedicated to ridding the world of the supernatural menace that has perpetrated a



campaign of terror and genocide since the beginning of recorded history. Where the Shih use long hours of training and meditation to even the odds between themselves and the *shen*, Strike Force Zero takes a speedier route. Agents are modified with cutting-edge technology, using bionic implants and other artificial enhancements to create deceptively ordinary-looking humans who can actually punch through walls, send radio transmissions with a thought or hide a plasma cannon in their forearm. While their methods are often quite brutal and their attrition rate shockingly high, Strike Force Zero never lacks for recruits in these desperate days. Once their eyes are opened to the hidden world of the *shen* and their various evils, few mortals can turn down the duty of ridding the world of such monsters.

Conceived of and headed by Geichin Okamoto, a former Japanese secret agent whose family had a long tradition of ninja warfare, Strike Force Zero is an ultra-secret agency within the Japanese government. It deals primarily with the *gaki* and other native *shen* of that nation, although its operatives are granted frequent special permission to travel abroad through backroom deals with neighboring nations (usually in exchange for ridding the host country of a "little problem" or two). In exchange for agreeing to sever all ties to their previous lives, sign on for a lengthy and intensive term of service and undergo surgery to alter their appearance and identifying marks, prospective SFO agents are offered a chance to enjoy biotechnology "upgrades" decades ahead of what is known in the public sector. In fact, at least a few such upgrades are required by the agency, in order to ensure that the operative has at least a fighting chance against the fearsome opponents the organization does battle with every day. The main problem with Strike Force Zero is that its intelligence is frequently riddled with hearsay and inaccuracy, with results ranging from slight misconceptions about a particular target to deadly gaps in the team's knowledge. While the Shih have studied the *shen* and their weaknesses for thousands of years, Strike Force Zero is only a little over half a century old and thus struggling mightily to learn more about its enemies. Agents are even encouraged to bring back targets alive for vivisection, if possible! The agency is also handicapped by the fact that it is secretly being manipulated by various factions of the Japanese *shen*, usually to silence a rival or advance some other shadowy goal.

Nevertheless, Strike Force Zero agents themselves are far from helpless. Aside from their own personal biological enhancements, they are also given a *carte blanche* when it comes to weapons, supplies and other mundane expenses, as well

## GET THAT LOOK OUT OF YOUR EYES

Non-Shih characters can never learn these special combat techniques. They are the province of the Shih alone, products of decades of training and special instruction and inherently linked to the very life-force of the Shih in question. No amount of bribery, cajoling, thought-stealing or other manipulation can ever teach a non-Shih character these techniques, nor would the Shih encourage such a spread of their secrets even if one did ever manage to get out.

And yes, we are aware that specific strikes, special moves and so forth are not permissible under the regular martial arts combat system. However, these maneuvers are part of the essence of the Shih (not to mention their only other special defense, aside from the Qiao), and given the rarity of Shih characters they should not pose a problem to game balance as a whole.



as a proverbial "license to kill" as long as they keep such "sanctions" appropriately discreet. The only thing the agency hates worse than the *shen* is the possibility of being discovered by the world at large, and the agency will not hesitate to take any measures necessary to preserve its secrecy, including cutting off its own agents if their actions become too public. Zero teams are never less than five members, each with a particular area of expertise — assassin, bombardier, cyber-rat, pilot and snoop. The teams are typically close-knit and extremely loyal, (since they know that the slightest hesitation in the field might cost one or all of them their lives), and agents train extensively together to hone their reactions to peak efficiency. Since Zero agents are taken away from their former lives, the team usually functions as a surrogate family of sorts as well, making for even closer bonds and a more personal stake in the greater cause against the *shen*. Though it may cost them their lives, Strike Force Zero agents are prepared to uncover and destroy the *shen* menace wherever it may be found. Faced with such ruthless determination, many Kuei-jin elders are growing more and more concerned about this renegade agency and its lethal combination of cold zeal and high technology.

### BIOENHANCEMENTS

The following is a list of the enhancements that can be added at a cost of one level of the *Arsenal Background* each. Remember that each SF0 agent begins play with at least two of these enhancements already, and they all may purchase more.

**Emotion Suppressors** — This enhancement releases powerful chemicals into the agent's bloodstream during moments of terror, effectively rendering the character immune to panicking and to effects such as the Delirium, the Veil, the Mists and so on. Essentially, the agent is distantly aware of the fact that he should be terrified, but he remains able to act normally. Note that the memories of these events aren't removed either. Thus, many SF0 agents suffer from chronic nightmares after their encounters with the *shen*. This device costs one Yang Chi per day.

**Gills** — Placed at strategic points throughout a character's body, these filters extract and store oxygen for use during underwater operations or in hostile environments. The agent becomes immune to most toxic gases simply by holding her breath. A Yang Trait is required every time the character must rely on her gills for an extended period of time (more than a minute).

**Night Eyes** — These mechanical eyes allow the character to function at no penalty in complete darkness. There is no cost for using night eyes, although sudden bright lights may blind the character for a turn before the eyes adjust (Storyteller's discretion).

**Video Eyes** — This device allows the character to record up to one hour of color sound and video. Retrieval of the data requires removal of the eye, which in turn requires surgery — quick and painless work, but surgery nonetheless. Video eyes cost one Yang Trait every time they're used. A character with this enhancement can ask those whose actions he's recorded to "replay" their actions for him out of character to simulate what the video eye "witnessed."

**Spy Eyes** — Essentially a detachable camera, spy eyes are equipped with six tiny legs for motion, and they can be left by an agent in a location to observe events taking place there. Thus, the character may observe any events his eye is witnessing. During the time the eye is detached, however, the character develops a nasty case of double vision if attempting other actions. He incurs a two-Trait penalty to combat and other involved activities as long as the spy eye is active. The spy eye costs one Yang Trait to use, and must be sterilized before it is replaced in the socket.



## LIMB REPLACEMENTS

Despite the title, limb replacements seldom involve entire limbs being removed. Rather, they involve a significant portion of the limb being replaced due to injury or agency need. It is important to note that while Strike Force Zero doctors are capable of placing most of these enhancements in any limb the patient desires, doing so may inhibit the proper usage of the enhancement in question in some cases. A pulse cannon in your leg may make an excellent weapon of desperation, but it's quite awkward to aim under normal circumstances (to say the least). Storytellers should feel free to impose penalties on characters whose enhancements are located in difficult or inconvenient places for the task at hand.

Furthermore, each related enhancement has several security features to ensure that the agent doesn't accidentally shoot his foot off with a plasma cannon or release his cyberclaws while picking his nose (ouch). An agent must concentrate on the enhancement as well as speak, loudly and clearly, a command phrase before the enhancement will activate. Naturally, the phrase should be something fairly exotic if one wishes to avoid accidentally discharging a taser in public. For example, phrases like "Hello" and "Fine, thank you" are notably poor choices, while "Burning Plasma Cannon!" and "Six-Stroke Slashing Claws!" are more appropriate. The doctors say these measures are all necessary for security reasons, although many agents think privately that the experts are just pulling a prank on them or even that they are overeager fans of *animé*. Needless to say, such command phrases can make for some difficulty in stealth situations. Then again, it's pretty hard to muffle the report of a pulse cannon, anyway.

**Pulse Cannons** — These weapons are reliable and lethal, storing bioenergy and delivering it in a lethal bolt of radiation designed to disrupt the bioelectrical field of anything it strikes. Firing a pulse cannon is treated the same as any other Firearms Challenge. Pulse cannons give three bonus traits, have the Negative Trait: *Loud* and deliver three levels of lethal damage on a successful hit. Pulse cannons cost two Yin Traits with each use, making them weapons of last resort indeed. Even with their high cost, however, pulse cannons are preferred over tasers by most SF0 agents. While the cannons may not do as much serious damage, tasers require an agent to get in close with their target, and all but the most green recruits know that close combat with the *shen* is a quick ticket to suicide.

**Tasers** — These microfine wire implants only work in close combat with a target. Actual contact isn't necessary, but the target can be no further away than normal melee range. They are used almost exclusively against *shen*, as the charge delivered (500 volts at 100 amps, roughly enough to quick-fry a bull elephant) will kill almost any human target. Tasers give two bonus Traits and have the Negative Trait: *Short*. A successful use of the tasers inflicts three health levels of aggravated damage on the target. In addition, the Narrator is encouraged to rule that normal mortals — not player characters or critical villains! — are simply killed outright by the intense electricity. Each use of the taser requires one Yin Trait, and characters who miss with the taser strike must immediately win or tie a Simple Test (retestable with the *Brawl* or *Martial Arts Ability*) or suffer the taser's damage themselves.

**Note:** Kuei-jin and other undead suffer only lethal damage from this weapon, since they do not require their internal organs to survive. Wraiths suffer no damage at all from tasers.

**Rejuvenators** — This brilliant piece of wetware is a small army of nanites dedicated to rebuilding a character after he has suffered grievous bodily harm. It can perform all manner of medical miracles, from reknitting nerves and bones to



draining punctured lungs and restarting wounded organs. Each health level repaired costs one Yang Trait, and the limitation on how much Yang Chi can be spent still applies. A character with four Courage Traits can heal up to four health levels, and no more.

**Note:** Using the nanites requires no conscious action on the character's part; they ready themselves automatically when the character is injured. More than one unconscious Zero agent has been saved from bleeding to death (or a similarly nasty fate) by the intervention of this wetware.

**Sheaths** — These enhancements are simply cleverly designed "pockets" built into an agent's arm or leg, which can be used to hide all manner of items that would otherwise be confiscated on sight. Many agents have sheaths installed to hide striker guns, though such sheaths must be placed in the leg due to the size of the weapon. The sheaths even shield the pocket from x-rays and metal detectors, and they are completely invisible and undetectable when closed. Opening the sheath does not count as an action, although reaching for something inside might depend on where the sheath is located. Sheaths cost nothing to use, although shielding them from electronic detection costs one Yang Trait per scene.

**Cyberclaws** — Ideal close-combat weapons, cyberclaws extend a full eight inches from the body. The ankles, wrists, elbows and knees are favorite places to install these claws. Cyberclaws give their wielder two bonus Traits during combat, cannot be disarmed and possess the Negative Trait: *Short*. Extending the claws costs one Yin Trait, and doing so enables the wielder to inflict lethal damage in hand-to-hand combat instead of the usual bashing damage.

**Psi-Band Radio** — This favorite piece of wetware allows a Zero team to communicate silently up to one mile apart. The communicator itself runs from the left ear to the left side of the jaw, and it is activated by touching a spot on the jaw. Despite the name, no psionic talent is involved, although at the Narrator's discretion certain beings with the *Telepathy* Numina or similar powers may sometimes detect the use of psi-band radios nearby. There is no Chi cost to use psi-band radio. In game terms, all team members using the radio are allowed to communicate privately any time their radio is active (even telepaths cannot actually "overhear" the conversations, only detect their presence). These messages cannot be intercepted by any known means. Players in particularly large playing areas may wish to carry actual walkie-talkies or other devices in order to facilitate game-play, rather than constantly employing Narrators or stopping play to ferry messages back and forth.

**Snake Fangs** — This term is actually something of a misnomer. Snake fangs are implants in the agent's palm which allow them to deliver poisons via tiny air guns during melee combat. To use the snake fangs, a character must strike his opponent successfully with his fists and spend one Yin Trait. The target must then make a Static Physical Challenge against a difficulty based on the intended severity and effect of the poison the agent is using. The fast-acting, nonlethal neurotoxins most agents use are difficulty six, while stronger or more lethal substances would have accordingly higher difficulties to resist. In order to smooth game-play later on, players should approach their Storytellers before the session and tell them what poison their character is using, then write down on an item card the difficulty to resist its effects and/or any damage it may cause to the target. As an added bonus, the snake fangs release an antidote into the character's bloodstream if he accidentally injects himself.



**Enhancers** — These devices are cybernetic limbs designed to mimic regular limbs, but with an added bonus or two. Such limbs have no pulse, they are a few degrees cooler than the rest of the body, and they cannot recognize the same depth of sensation they once did, but they offer great strength in exchange. Upon the use of the proper code phrase, the agent is three Traits up on all strength-related tests with that limb (including relevant combat tests) and he inflicts an extra level of lethal damage (or two levels of bashing) on attacks made with that limb. At the Narrator's discretion, the agent may also use his strength to punch or kick through walls and other obstacles, but players should remember that the tissue surrounding the limbs is not enhanced. Lifting half a ton certainly might be possible with an enhanced arm, but only at the cost of tearing every single related natural muscle with the effort! For that reason, enhancers are typically used only for attacking and battering down objects. Characters who attempt other feats with them may suffer damage and other consequences.

**Vibroblades** — These razor-sharp, microfine blades are capable of cutting through nearly anything with very little effort. They're excellent for turning foes to jerky strips in short order, but also an easy way for a careless agent to wind up missing a limb or two as well. Agents facing superior martial artists are also likely in a great deal of trouble. Vibroblades work so quickly and cut so deeply the target doesn't actually feel pain until several seconds later. That is, all wound penalties inflicted by vibroblades (excluding Incapacitated and beyond) are delayed until the turn after they should take effect. Vibroblades give two Bonus Traits, have the Negative Trait: *Awkward* (to avoid cutting oneself) and inflict two health levels of lethal damage.

**Grenade Launchers** — An agent can have a grenade launcher installed directly into his body. The type of grenade fired varies by preference, although each launcher is fitted for a single type at creation. Using other types requires the agent to make a Simple Test before firing. On a loss, the launcher jams, and it must be unjammed with the *Firearms* Ability. Otherwise, the launcher's statistics are as follows: two Bonus Traits, the Negative Trait: *Awkward* and damage/ effect according to grenade type. The limb used also must be straightened completely before firing, in order to ensure a straight launch. The grenade may be fired or thrown, according to the agent's preference. When it comes to damaging a large group (as with incendiary grenades), treat the test the same as the special weapon ability: *Spray*. (See the combat section, p. XX, on how this ability is handled.) Some grenades, particularly smokers and flash-bangs, may also require a Narrator to describe the events in the area to characters involved.

**Internal Tracking Gear** — This revolutionary bit of technology allows an agent to track a target effectively even after being blinded, deafened or dazzled, controlling the agent's reflexes and motor centers to keep the agent's hand locked onto the target. Even if not impaired, the ITG helps improve the agent's reflexes, bettering her aim. As long as the agent's body chemistry indicates a combat situation, the ITG continues to track a target. The character may ignore the penalties of blindness or deafness for the purposes of attacking her target, and if not impaired, the ITG puts the agent one Trait up on all *Firearms* and *Melee* tests against a tracked target. Activating the ITG costs one Yang Trait.

**Web Spinners** — Nozzles in the character's fingers are designed to emit a stream of fast-drying, steel-hard paste which can be used either as a short-range restraint or a long-range snare according to the agent's desires. In close range, treat the web foam the same as the effects of a steel form grenade, except only a single

## GRENADE TYPE

• **Smoke** — As named, these grenades fill roughly a large room-sized area with thick black smoke. Treat those within the cloud as blind for purposes of Trait penalties, and any characters shooting into/through it are at a one-Trait penalty. Grenades per clip: 5

• **Tear Gas** — These grenades fill a large room with caustic, irritating gas. Characters exposed to this gas must make a Static Physical Challenge against 10 Traits or be rendered incapacitated by intense discomfort and labored breathing. Those who resist are still at a two-Trait penalty on all actions for the rest of the scene due to their extreme distraction and impairment, unless they are protected or otherwise immune to the gas's effects somehow. Kuei-jin and other undead need not make the Static Challenge, but they still suffer penalties on all tests related to vision (their eyes can be affected). Grenades per clip: 5

• **Incendiary** — Phosphorous grenades cause three levels of aggravated damage to their target and any other beings within three steps of the impact point. Treat this range the same as the Spray ability. What's more, unless extinguished with a Static Physical Challenge (six-Trait difficulty), the flames continue to inflict one level of aggravated damage every turn. Grenades per clip: 3

• **Steel-Foam** — These grenades cover targets with a viscous, sticky substance that hardens quickly into something nearly as strong as their namesake. Up to three targets may be affected, provided they are within a step of each other. Characters struck by this substance must make a Static Physical Challenge against 14 Traits in order to make any movement of consequence. The foam effectively has 10 health levels that must be removed before the target is freed. The only other way to escape is to use the correct chemical solution (dispensed from the launcher). Grenades per clip: 7

• **Ice** — A small dose of explosives and 10 liquid ounces of freon gas insure that targets within two steps of impact experience the nasty sensation of reaching near absolute zero instantaneously. Ice grenades inflict three health levels of aggravated damage, plus the target may be crippled as body parts shatter and other gruesome effects occur (Narrator's discretion). Grenades per clip: 3

• **Flash-Bang** — A favorite of commando units, these devices emit a blinding flash of light and a deafening blast of sound simultaneously, leaving targets dazed and vulnerable. They do no damage, but all players in the room (including allies, bystanders and even the firing character himself if he's not careful!) must make a Static Physical Challenge against six Traits or be considered blind and deaf for the next four turns. They are then two Traits down on all Physical Challenges for the rest of the scene after that. Characters unfortunate enough to be using Sharpened Senses or similar powers at the time of the explosion fail the challenge automatically and remain blind and deaf for the rest of the scene. They are also two Traits down on all Physical Challenges for the remainder of the session. Grenades per clip: 5

• **Concussion** — These grenades deliver damage through pure kinetic force, making it unlikely that the target will suffer lasting injury. This grenade has an effective radius of up to four steps around the target, and it inflicts three levels of "temporary" bashing damage on a successful attack. This damage — even more temporary than normal bashing damage — fades at the end of the scene/hour, whichever is longer. Grenades per clip: 6



target can be affected. The foam has only six health levels and the difficulty to escape is 10 Traits. The web glue can be dissolved only by a special chemical compound contained in the agent's pinkie finger. Activation costs one Yin Chi, and the effective range is 10 paces.

**Field Armor** — The rare Series IV Portable Analysis and Assault Station (or "field armor," as agents insist on calling it) is a custom-designed suit of armor equipped with state-of-the-art sensor arrays, a communications linkup that allows for mental activation of the suit's functions and strength-enhancing gloves and boots. The sensors onboard allow an agent to analyze fingerprints, fiber samples, blood samples and genetic information discovered at the scene. A modem hookup allows for secure communication with SF0 headquarters, a wide band radio scans local communications, and the suit contains visual and auditory enhancements for discerning additional information (agents effectively gain *Sharpened Senses* while those systems are employed). The armor counts as a ballistic vest for purposes of absorbing damage. Finally, the physical enhancers in the gloves and boots add an additional level of damage in close combat. Each suit is crafted for a specific agent (including space for an agent's own bionic enhancements), and it will not function for anyone else. These suits are still being refined — damage can easily upset the suit's delicate sensors at this stage of development. Most SF0 agents don't even know these suits exist, much less have a chance of being issued one. This enhancement *cannot* be selected without Storyteller approval. The suit costs no Chi to use unless the wearer activates the enhancers in the gloves and boots — such usage costs one Yin Trait.

**Keypads** — These built-in bits of cyberware give the user access to secured systems, allowing the character to analyze and bypass both computer systems as well as physical or electronic defenses. Descramblers wired into the equipment are capable of cracking most known codes easily, as well as adding new codes as they crack the old. Keypads are implanted into a user's hands, and they are always working. Characters with this enhancement receive a free retest on all *Security* and *Computer* tests related to defeating a target's defenses. Keypads cost one Yin Chi per day, but only if in "active mode"; otherwise, power-drain is minimal.

**Kabuki Masks** — This enhancement allows a character to alter such subtle but important factors as the length and width of their nose, the shape of their eyes, the height of their cheekbones and even the length of their jawline in order to create a different appearance. Increasing or decreasing skin tension can even simulate a different age, and manipulating the vocal chords can create a different voice. The modifications are not complete enough to allow the agent to impersonate someone else (unless they just happen to look a lot like their target already), but may be used to blur the agent's identity so that they are unrecognizable to those who are looking for them. The change costs one Yang Trait, takes several (painful) minutes of adjustment and lasts until the agent decides to take on another face or resume her old appearance. Players using this advantage should adopt a posture or use a description card to show their altered appearance. Since the change is an actual physical process, this disguise cannot be seen through by *Heightened Senses* or other powers, although the agent may still give herself away in other ways if not careful.

### **ADDITIONAL GEAR: STRIKER GUNS**

**Striker Pistol** — The signature weapon of SF0, striker guns are built like normal heavy pistols, but they are lighter, stronger and specially designed to function only for the agent to whom they're issued. A small sensor in the grip responds to special sensors implanted in the agent's hands; without such confirma-



tion, the pistol locks up and will not fire. This recognition system is also a safety feature, since the gun will not activate for a possessed agent, thus alerting team members to trouble in their midst.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: Loud

Concealability: Jacket

Damage: Two health levels

Availability: Strike Force Zero agents only; no exceptions. (SFO is very prompt to reclaim any striker guns stolen or "lost" during service, no matter what the cost.)

Special Ability: *Custom-Fitted*: Each striker pistol is attuned to its owner, and it will not fire for anyone else. The same is true if the owner is possessed by spirits, but not if the character is under mind control or similar domination. *Unique Ammunition*: Striker guns can use several different types of exotic ammunition with varying special benefits. Some of the most common types used are listed here. Each agent receives four clips of standard-issue ammo and one clip of each specialty type (color-coded for ease of reference). Further rounds must be procured through the standard agency channels.

• **Standard-Issue:** These rounds are normal bullets that give the striker gun the special ability: *High-Caliber*.

• **Silver bullets:** These rounds are treated as normal rounds, but they can cause aggravated wounds on certain targets, as well as conferring the benefit: *High-Caliber*.

• **Sounders:** These rounds emit a high-pitched whine inaudible to humans, but which causes discomfort and disorientation in hengeyokai, Kuei-jin, Kin-jin with *Heightened Senses* and other sensitive types. A vulnerable target becomes two Traits down for the rest of the scene due to distraction, and other such beings within 10 steps of the target must win a Simple Test or suffer a similar disadvantage. Sounders inflict no other damage.

• **Tracker bullets:** Tracker rounds do not receive the *High-Caliber* benefit, but they not only inflict damage on a successful hit, but they inject a tiny intramuscular tracking device as well. This device allows a target to be tracked up to 100 miles away, and it is impossible to detect by normal means. It is otherwise quite harmless, and it will be ignored by the body's immune system. Kuei-jin bodies, however, reject the device after 24 hours.

• **Ectoplasmic Disrupters:** These bizarre rounds track the electromagnetic signatures given off by wraiths and explode in a pulse of energy designed to disrupt the wraith's form. A successful hit from an ectoplasmic disrupter inflicts two levels of damage to a wraith's Corpus. Living beings are unharmed by disrupter rounds.

• **Rubber bullets:** These rounds are treated exactly like normal rounds, except they inflict bashing damage instead of lethal.



## CHARACTER CREATION: STRIKE FORCE ZERO AGENTS

Strike Force Zero agents are still basically mortals, and they should use the rules for creating mortals found in *Laws of the Hunt*, with the following additions, deletions and exceptions:

- SF0 agents use the Virtue system of Conscience, Courage and Self-Control, as well as Humanity. (See *Laws of the Night* for details on these Virtues.) This distinction is important, because agents with a high number of implants face a loss of Humanity as they remove themselves from their natural condition.

- SF0 agents receive six levels of Backgrounds during creation, as well as an automatic three levels of the *Backers* Background at no cost. SF0 agents may have a maximum of 10 Traits in an Attribute category.

- SF0 agents begin play with two implants; additional enhancements can be purchased with the *Arsenal* Background. These implants can be purchased only with Free Traits during the final stage of character creation, and *Arsenal* Background costs three Traits per level. (High tech doesn't come cheap!)

- For every additional implant beyond the first two, the agent must subtract one Trait of Conscience or Humanity, and he cannot go below one Trait in either. The growing influence of technology has robbed the character of his fundamental connection to humanity. Being more machine than man has its flaws, after all.

- Each SF0 agent must meet certain Ability requirements, depending on his role in the Zero team. The player *must* purchase at least one level in any/all required Abilities. Furthermore, certain other Abilities are recommended to perform their role well, though these additional skills are not required, only encouraged.

*Cyber-rat* — Required: Computer and Security. Recommended: Science and Enigmas.

*Bombardier* — Required: Firearms and Subterfuge. Recommended: Science and Stealth.

*Assassin* — Required: Martial Arts, Melee and Stealth. Recommended: Athletics and Alertness.

*Pilot* — Required: Repair and two levels of Drive. Recommended: Firearms and Computer.

*Snoop* — Required: Investigation, Computer and Linguistics. Recommended: Occult and Enigmas.



# NEW TRAITS

## BACKGROUNDS

The following are new Background Traits available only to Shih and SF0 characters. They may be purchased normally during character creation (except where noted), and some will likely change quite a bit during play.

### **ARSENAL (STRIKE FORCE ZERO)**

Strike Force Zero agents can access wetware and other technology beyond the wildest dreams of contemporary scientists and technicians, allowing them to enhance their physical prowess, cognitive abilities and even alter their body structure in outstanding ways. Every SF0 agent begins with two such implants automatically, and many opt for at least one or two more, although few agents have more than three levels of this Background—the cost to them and their personality is just too steep after that. However, few agents debate their worth out in the field. Each level of this Background allows for the character to select an additional implant. It is rare for agents to request new implants once play begins, since surgical recovery times are high, and the Storyteller is well within her rights to ask a substantial amount of downtime be required for those characters who undergo such surgery.

#### **Backers**

All SF0 characters have this Background. It allows the character to gather resources to pay bribes, purchase weapons, extract herself from political trouble and otherwise grease the wheels of everyday life. Please note that this Background is not an instant cure-all, however. It may take quite a bit of time to get a character released from jail even if the warden is bribed, and while SF0 characters are licensed to kill, they must still explain themselves to local law enforcement. A tricky job that gets harder and harder the farther they are from home. The amount of this Background indicates how much money is usually on hand for bribes and the amount of political sway the character can muster. While uncommon among the Shih, it is not unheard of for some of them to gather this kind of influence if they remain in a region long enough, carry over contacts from their old lives, or even earn the patronage of grateful citizens with means to aid them.

1 — Allowance of 200 yen per day for bribes, minor political sway (avoid parking tickets)

2 — Allowance of 400 yen per day for bribes, can avoid almost anything less than a felony charge. Licensed to carry a firearm.

3 — Allowance of 600 yen per day for bribes, can avoid being arrested for anything less than a violent felony. Licensed to carry a concealed firearm.

4 — Allowance of 800 yen per day for bribes, can avoid being arrested for anything less than espionage. Licensed to assist local law enforcement in emergency situations.

5 — Allowance of 1000 yen per day for bribes, can call on local law enforcement for backup (watch what you tell them, though) or take command of local law enforcement in emergency situations. Has the equivalent of diplomatic immunity in most allied nations.



## CHI USAGE

Much could be said about the various ways the demon access their personal Chi reservoirs, how the years of training and concentration build the Qiao of the Shih, or how the high technology of SF0 taps into the very life energy of the agents themselves in order to function. How normal humans can seldom realize their true Chi potential, and how accessing such reservoirs makes demon-hunters that much more (or less) human than anyone else on earth. Much could be said, but space constraints being what they are, the philosophical backing behind such Chi manipulation will have to remain couched in those basic terms. (For those seeking more information, please see p. 52-54 of **Demon Hunter X**.) A brief summary on the uses and consequences of Chi for demon-hunters is as follows:

- Many Kuei-jin powers call for the ratings of a target's Chi and Soul Virtues. However, as mortals, the demon-hunter possess standard Humanity Traits, Conscience, Self-Control and the like. Should a crossover become necessary, Self-Control can be considered to be a character's Yin Virtue rating, Courage to be the Yang Virtue and Conscience to be one's Hun rating. This conversion also holds true for determining the number of Chi Traits of a given type a character can spend, and so on.
- A demon-hunter who loses his last Humanity Trait gains an immediate Trait of P'o in addition to the standard derangement. Those with three or more P'o Traits are likely to return as Kuei-jin themselves if atonement is not made.
- Mortals are considered to have 10 Chi Traits in total, but a character may spend no more Chi of a given type than his permanent rating in that type. Thus a Shih with three Courage Traits (and thus a three Yang Virtue) can spend up to three Yang Traits, no more. In order to access all 10 of his Chi, a mortal must possess five Traits in both Chi Virtues.
- For every two Chi Traits spent (either type), the hunter takes one health level of bashing damage. Short of supernatural intervention, this damage cannot be healed until the Chi is restored. For each hour spent resting, the character may regain one Chi Trait, with the first Traits going to the Virtue the character has less of before balancing out. Health levels lost through Chi expenditure (and *only* Chi expenditure) are likewise regained in this amount of time. If the character meditates, these recovery times are halved.
- A character may attempt to access Chi above and beyond his normal limits by making a Static Physical Challenge against six Traits. Success means he may spend extra Chi, though it comes at a cost of one health level of damage per Trait. Be warned, characters who deplete their bodies too much in this manner can die! If they survive, the character must make a test to avoid losing a Humanity Trait for daring to tap into that which he has not earned.
- Shih and SF0 characters are by no means immune to the Chi-draining powers of the Kuei-jin. Each Trait of Chi taken from the character is one less they can access, until restored through natural processes.



## EQUIPMENT (STRIKE FORCE ZERO)

All SF0 characters have neat toys, but your character can request truly top-of-the-line gear and expect to see it before he grows old. This Background indicates how fast a character can expect to get the special gear he requests, as well as the amount of red tape he can avoid in the process. Note that this Background is sometimes "loaned" to agents if their current case has top priority.

1 — Can get special equipment within one day, but must fill out the right forms

2 — Can get special equipment by the end of the session, but still must fill out all of the necessary forms.

3 — Can get special equipment in one day, no forms required.

4 — Can get special equipment by the end of the session (at the latest), no forms required.

5 — Can we help you, sir? Yes, yes, of course. Here you are, sir!

### Favors

Both types of demon-hunters like accumulating favors. For the Shih, it is often their only insurance against an unruly crowd or a guarantee of a hot meal, it means extra leverage while for Strike Force Zero to continue their hunting unopposed. Each level of this Background reflects a person who owes the character, and we do mean *owe*. Whatever the aid might given have been, it was considerable, and now the debtor is in the position where he must do nearly *anything* the character asks of him. Disposing of evidence (or bodies), serious theft, even murder may be possible through the use of favors, depending on the type of person the debtor is. You must work with the Storyteller to determine who owes you and why, in order to better roleplay the inevitable exchange where you call your favor in. Storytellers are encouraged to award free levels of this Background to characters who earn them during play, and likewise to have little qualms about a Narrator character calling in favors the characters owe from time to time....

## RANK (STRIKE FORCE ZERO)

Every Strike Force field agent has official rank in the military. However, having a rank and using it are two different things, especially when it comes to having the often bizarre requests of SF0 agents honored. This Background reflects how well-accepted the rank of the agent is, as well as how high in rank the agent has risen. Without this Background, the character is considered a low-ranking officer.

1 — Second lieutenant; tolerated but seldom obeyed when not actually present.

2 — First lieutenant; obeyed only when there's no immediate rush to do what must be done.

3 — Captain; obeyed immediately.

4 — Major; obeyed and respected. Few argue with you.

5 — Colonel; even absurd demands are immediately complied with.



## DO'S AND DON'TS

**Laws of the East** will put you in contact with a lot of different people, some of whom are likely to be wired on adrenaline and consumed by the danger and mystery of the story. Under such circumstances, intensity can lead to disagreement and arguments, and neither of these things is conducive to having a good time. Listed here are some important extra guidelines to help keep tempers in check and the story flowing smoothly. Do your part to make everything work.

- **Don't go wild** — The idea here is not to get carried away and hurt yourself. You should never pretend to attack anyone physically, and you should never do anything remotely dangerous. Describe and mimic any action that could be considered even slightly dangerous.

- **Be a teacher** — Achieving victory by taking advantage of someone's lack of knowledge is completely without class. Teach the poor sucker every trick and nuance beforehand, and then beat him anyway. Now that's a triumph worth bragging about.

- **Don't use weapons** — We've said it before, we'll say it again. Don't even carry representations of weapons, not even if your character needs them for his special Hundred Lashing Tails of the Angry Storm Dragon nunchaku technique.

- **Protect the Veil** — Don't perform illegal-seeming activities in public places, and make sure you use prop cards for any unusual or dangerous items that your character possesses.

- **Don't overact** — Don't act out strong emotions unless everyone present is aware of what's going on, and always be ready to simmer down if someone asks to take a breather from a particularly intense scene. It may be wonderful to be immersed in the passion of an exchange with another character, but always remember that the real person behind that character has to be comfortable for it to be really great. Unnerving them or tiring them out just doesn't do that.

- **Stay in character** — Step out of character only if you have to. Respect others' needs to step out of character, for whatever reason. Never abuse this courtesy by saying you are out of character just to avoid an encounter.

Experienced players learn to weave the system of challenges into their conversations and be rather sly about it. They can avoid alerting the "mundanes" that anything is happening. Doing so is the linchpin of **Mind's Eye Theatre**. Real people try to solve things calmly and collectively, not by kung fu strikes every five seconds. Characters should follow their example.

- **Don't debate the rules** — Nobody likes a rules lawyer. Don't start rules arguments during the game. Call for a Narrator. If you have a problem with a Narrator's call, wait until after the game to argue your case. In the meantime, don't hold up the rest of the plot.

- **Foster intrigue** — Don't ever limit yourself to the goals and motivations that a Narrator gives you at the start of a session; take control. Get involved! After all, it's your story.

- **Create your own plots** — Create your own story and work other characters into it one by one. Characters are made to act, not to react.

- **Watch out for other players** — Keep an eye out for players who look bored. A bored player is the perfect assistant Narrator. Remember that some players who get really bored tend to have their characters start killing other characters for no other reason than to have something to do.



- **Respect the Narrators** — Remember that the Narrators have gone to a huge effort to create the story. Be nice to them. Request their help only when you really need it, and thank them whenever they do come to the rescue.

- **Roleplay, roleplay, roleplay** — Not everything has to come down to a challenge. Avoid “rulesmongering”; roleplay things out instead. A challenge should be a last resort, when players cannot agree on what should happen. It’s much easier and more fun to agree and tell a story than it is to play Rock-Paper-Scissors. If you use the rules only as a contingency to fall back on, you emphasize storytelling.

- **Enjoy the surprises** — Be ready for surprises and learn to enjoy them. Don’t throw a fit because the ancestor happened to show up right when you were about to make your move. The world your character occupies is full of mysteries; you shouldn’t know how everything is going to work out. Treat each situation as a puzzle, and attempt to deduce a solution. That’s what your Narrator hopes you will do.

Don’t bring out-of-game knowledge to your character. Just because you’ve read every Year of the Lotus supplement from cover to cover doesn’t mean that your new Kuei-jin character has any idea of what’s happening to her. Bringing outside knowledge in game is called “ninja sense” or “metagaming,” which are polite names for “cheating.”

- **Be patient with changes** — Be patient when things change in midstream. Tell the Narrator about your plot ideas before the game starts, so she has time to prepare for your plot’s effects. If your ideas are good, the Narrator will probably thank you and write your plot into the next story.



GUANXI

MERITS & NF LAWS

BACKGROUNDS

DISCIPLINES

ABILITIES

HUN



P'o



YIN CHI



YANG CHI



DEMON CHI



DHARMA



WILLPOWER



NEGATIVE TRAITS

MENTAL TRAITS

SOCIAL TRAITS

PHYSICAL TRAITS

PROACTIVELY

Mind's Eye Theatre

**LAW**s  
of the  
**EAST**

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**CHARACTER** \_\_\_\_\_

**CHRONICLE** \_\_\_\_\_

**DHARMA** \_\_\_\_\_

**BALANCE** \_\_\_\_\_

**DIRECTION** \_\_\_\_\_

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