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Warning

Although the Chinese spoken in the Warring
States period was quite different from modern Mandarin
Chinese, for the purposes of Qin we have chosen, on
chinese player's advice, to use Hanyu pinyin, the nowa-
days most used system for the transcription of Chinese
characters into the Roman alphabet.

We decided not to use accents on chinese
words. It's useless here, and sometimes confusing in a
game written in english language and for english reading
people. No one needs to know an use the five tones in
chinese language to play.

Keep in mind this is a game and not a guide to
learn chinese language.

Pronunciation Guide

Here is a quick guide to the pronunciation of some particular letters :

- G is always a hard "g"
- Q is pronounced "ch"
- U is pronounced "oo"
- X is pronounced "hs"
- Z is pronounced "dz"

As a general rule, each vowel in a word is pronounced.

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Introduction

4

Heart of Jade is born

Three days she had fled through a wild, mysterious yellow forest. Three days of scraping her hands and feet on rough ground and steep inclines. Three days with only fruit and wild roots to eat, and only rainwater to drink. Three days, and still they were on her tail, following her tracks like hungry dogs, their iron blades clanking against their hard leather armor.

But her fear was gone. Anxiety had given way to exhaustion, and now all that remained in her heart was a cool determination to carry on, ever further onwards, to keep running until finally she lost them. It was her only hope.

Three days earlier, Su Yi had killed one of their number. An outrageous stroke of luck. In a straight fight there was simply no way this feeble young girl of fifteen could have had any chance against the personal guard of Fist of Bronze, the most cruel and barbaric mercenaries in the service of the king of Zhao. That great state was only a day's ride to the North, but until now, peace had reigned in the borderlands.

The mercenaries had come at first light, arriving from the East. Their dark shapes and mighty horses were silhouetted against the misty red dawn. The old village chief had run out to meet them. The small peasant community that he led had always faithfully served the king of Wei, paying its taxes every year and never making the slightest complaint. These men were not really soldiers of Zhao, but their roughness showed them as veterans of many wars, hardened and embittered, with respect for neither gods nor men. The chief was the first to die, with a spear to his chest.

In minutes, the village was ablaze, the simple houses of earth and straw burning like torches. Panic and terror spread through the

defenseless peasants. Su Yi could still recall the terrified screams of animals and people, the fear and disbelief in the eyes of all. Amid the chaos and the smoke, seeing the merciless killers in their deep red armor, she thought that Feng Du had opened up and released its hordes of lost souls on her home. The soldiers roared like demons and their sabers ran with blood as they killed every last man in the village. Within minutes their terrible work was done. Then they herded the survivors, women, children and old men to the center of the village to be consumed by the flames. When the attack took place, Su Yi had been drawing water from the well. Barely had the chief's body hit the ground when she ran to hide in the pig pen. She crawled through the dirt and slime, almost being trampled by the panicking animals, and came to their tumbledown shelter. There she saw her father and two brothers murdered. Her younger brother Ju, whom she loved so much for his easy smile and his sing-song voice, tried to resist the soldiers with a flimsy wooden rake. His head rolled, landing a few feet from her hiding-place. As one of the brutes dismounted to kick it across the yard, Su Yi had to bite down hard on her tongue to stop herself from crying out, screaming with fear and giving herself away. Hot tears ran down her filthy cheeks, dripping into the mud. Her body shook with spasms, as she saw her whole world collapse. She prayed to the Emperor of Heaven that it would all prove to be a bad dream. Then a pig came up to her, sniffed her hair, and showed its disgust at the intrusion into its home by letting out a piercing squeal. Her destiny was set.

Two of the mercenaries ran to her hiding-place. She tried to escape, but slipped in the mud and fell hard into the dirt. They took her roughly by the hair and dragged her along, forcing her to shuffle on her knees, laughing at the filth that covered her face and body, and took her to the center of the village. There, amidst the terrified villagers, Su Yi saw her mother and sister shaking in each others' arms. Overcome with rage, she leapt onto one of the soldiers and bit into his face like a cornered animal. The man was too strong for her and threw her to the floor. Then they kicked her and beat her until she thought they would kill her. At times she would wish that they had.

For the rest of the day, she was shrouded in pain and anguish. She saw only vaguely the bonfire onto which they threw male children and old men, smelt the acrid stench of burnt flesh, and heard the wails and moans of the women. There were around thirty women left, destined for the brothels of a far-off garrison town. The mercenaries pillaged every house in the village, emptying the grain stores and filling their leather pouches with any valuable items they could find. They burnt even the temple of Shen Nong. Then they took their prisoners, roughly tied at both hands and feet, and made them climb into heavy chariots with wheels ringed with bronze. Su Yi raised her head to take one last desolate look at the remains of what had been her home.

She thought that she was dead.

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As the day went on, her nightmare deepened.

She lay in the chariot with nine other women, racked with agony. Every jolt of the chariot sent stabbing pains through her body. She knew she was alive by the thirst and the ache in her muscles. All around was the bitter smell of the bonfire, in her hair, in the tears of the other women. Outside, the soldiers laughed coarsely at their cruel jokes. Time and again the girl fell unconscious, but each time she awoke to the same brutal reality. When at last the pale autumn sun fell behind the leaves of the forest to the North of her village, the convoy stopped by the side of the road.

Still tied and bound, the prisoners were fed with a thin soup. The mercenaries, who Su Yi estimated at around thirty, made a temporary shelter. Seated around the fire, they drank jug after jug of strong wine, whose acidic fumes spread as far as the prisoners' chariots. After an hour of drinking, many of the mercenaries had the red, blotchy faces of drunkards, and they began to talk of rest and relaxation : after all, the prisoners would soon be sold to a brothel, so it would be a shame not to take advantage of them while still fresh. They took three women and, in spite of their desperate pleas, dragged them into the bushes. Then Su Yi felt a hand grab at her chang pao and violently pull her backwards. As her feet were tied, she collapsed heavily onto the floor, and the shock caused a

whimper to escape from between her clenched teeth. But when the drunkard's hand came near to her face, again she felt the same savage power rise within her. She sank her teeth into the palm and the soldier let out a cry of pain and surprise. With his free hand, he punched her in the face, and her delicate cheekbone snapped. She let go and fell onto the damp grass. Her bonds were coming loose, but then she heard the man curse and unsheath his saber.

It was then that she saw the woman in black. She seemed to come out of nowhere, her pale skin and womanly form shrouded in mist. She wore a long hooded overcoat which covered the upper part of her face, revealing only a few loose strands of shiny black hair. On one side of the garment were embroidered the ceremonial arms of Fist of Bronze. As Su Yi lifted her head, she seemed to imagine rather than see the fine, dark lips and sharp features of the young woman. Her feet glided through the thick grass and gold bracelets jangled from her wrists and ankles. Su Yi noticed her long, green nails, which shone from within like jade, and the all-embracing aroma of jasmine.

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The mercenary brandished his sword above Su Yi's head, ready to strike, but an order from the woman stayed his hand. The woman's voice was gruff and authoritative, as if she was accustomed to obedience. The man stepped back, and Su Yi thought she could see fear on his wine-streaked face. The mysterious woman approached Su Yi and seemed to be inspecting her from under her shadowy hood.

"This girl bears the Sign. She must not be touched. She belongs to your master." The hooded shadow turned to the soldier. "You wouldn't want to risk the wrath of your master, would you? Or mine?"

The man mumbled a few words and trembled with fear. The other mercenaries were frozen to the spot, watching the scene with the same terror in their eyes. The woman turned and began to walk away.

"There is a clearing with a pond a hundred yards to the South. Take her there and let her wash. She stinks."

● ● ●

"I cannot remove my clothes if my hands are tied."

The man smoothed his greasy moustache and looked at her with distrust. He had driven her at saber point through the dense bushes and to a small pond nearly hidden beneath the fallen leaves that floated lazily on its surface. Su Yi had no idea who the strange woman could be, but could tell from her guard's fear that she was an important figure among the mercenaries of Fist of Bronze. Maybe a sorceress, or worse, an Emo. That would explain the savagery with which these men had laid waste her village. Yet Su Yi had no idea what the woman in black meant: what sign? And what would Fist of Bronze want with her? She had never even seen him. She knew only one thing, that she should not stay there and await a fate surely worse than death.

She held out her hands innocently, a slight smile playing on her thin lips. The guard spat on the ground and walked over to her. He drew a small dagger from a bone scabbard which hung against his thigh and cut the thick rope with a single blow. Su Yi bowed her head and began to rub her aching wrists. Her soft skin was lacerated and bloody, and she vowed that nevermore would she allow herself to be bound. Turning around, she began to undo the linen belt that fastened her filthy clothes. The guard had not moved an inch, and stood a few steps behind her, licking his lips with a lascivious glint in his eye. But Su Yi could also see that he still feared the words of the woman in black. She let her clothes fall to the floor and drew her hair onto her shoulders.

"Could you help me to untangle my hair? It's dirty and I have no comb," she said turning to face him.

He was a tall man, easily a head higher than the girl. She looked him right in the eyes, without blinking. He furrowed his brow and looked her over for a few seconds, before a superior smile passed across his wrinkled face. He sheathed his dagger and took one of Su Yi's long tresses, untying the knot which held it together. The girl smiled as if to thank him, but her smile was cold, almost bloodthirsty. Strangely, she felt no satisfaction when the mercenary's face was frozen in shock and pain. His eyes wide, yet without a sound, he slid to the floor, first falling to his

knees, then collapsing on his front, both hands clinging desperately to the gaping hole in his stomach in a vain attempt to hold in the breath of life that flowed from him. Su Yi looked at the body, her knuckles white from gripping so tightly the bloody dagger. She had just killed a man. Yet she felt nothing, neither fear, nor relief. It was as if deep within, where once was her heart, there was now a stone. Then she roused herself. She must flee, quickly, far from this place. She put on her chang pao, tied the belt and hid the slim dagger there. She struggled to drag the body into the pond, where it floated for a few seconds, before the weight of the armor dragged it down and the dead man disappeared beneath the leaves.

Su Yi had no idea where she was. She could hear sounds from the camp, but could not see the campfire through the thick bushes. It had grown very dark and the cold was getting worse. But she knew there was no way back. She began to run through the forest, away from the laughs and the screams behind her.

It was only ten minutes later that the mercenaries found out that she had disappeared. Alerted by the long absence of their comrade, they had come to the pond. One noticed the smell of blood among the fallen leaves and four men with torches set off in pursuit of the girl. Their master wanted this girl, and they would bring her back, at all costs.

Silent and still amid the confusion, the mysterious woman in black began to smile.

"Run like the wind, daughter of the Dragon. I have given you a chance ; it is for you to take it, and to fulfil your destiny. Run, and never turn back. We will meet again, but you will not be the same. Farewell Su Yi."



As the ground began to rise steeply, so the forest became less dense. Far away, gray, mossy boulders rose from the Earth, smoothed down by time and the waters, reminding Su Yi of enormous stone eggs, the frozen offspring of an ancient heavenly creature. Rocks slipped and slid underfoot, scraping the bruised and sore soles of her bare feet. The sun beat down, the heat and the exhaustion burned her throat. Leaving the shade of the last pine trees she came out suddenly onto a rocky plateau, barely any bigger than the village square. In front of her was a blank stone wall

in the shape of a semicircle. Su Yi looked up and saw that it was easily twelve yards high. There were no footholds, and no path around the wall. Further back down the slope, she could hear the voices of her pursuers, getting ever closer, cursing her and swearing. For a moment she nearly gave in. But she had not endured all this for nothing. She took the dagger from her belt and whirled around. With her back against the sheer wall, and her weapon drawn, she vowed that they would never take her alive... and that she would take at least one with her. In a few minutes, the mercenaries would be there. And it would all be over. It was at that moment that she felt herself being pulled from behind...

Su Yi slid to the stone floor in surprise. In the darkness, she could only vaguely make out her surroundings. A kind of cave, but with no opening... A dank, earthy smell filled the air, and in the distance she could hear water dripping. All of a sudden, it was cold, and she noticed wisps of breath escape from her mouth. The voices of her captors had faded away, but still she did not feel alone...

"Put your fang away, little girl, it does not impress me."

The voice was raspy yet soft, like that of an old man, but it resounded with a supernatural power.

She rose to her feet to challenge the voice.

"Show yourself ! Whether man or beast, no-one can hold me captive."

Her voice seemed louder than she had intended. She felt a quick movement to her right.

"You are quick to insist on your freedom. But I have not taken your freedom. I may even have granted you a stay of execution. Who are these thugs and what do they want with you ? And do not lie, for I will know."

Su Yi was sure that she could trust the voice that came from nowhere.

"They are mercenaries working for Fist of Bronze. They destroyed my village and massacred the people. Their master is after me because of some sign, whatever that is. I'm tired, hungry and cold. Please don't let them find me, whoever you are."

"The Sign ? Could it be ? At last..."

"What on earth are you talking about ? And who are you ?"

Out of the darkness, a gigantic maw suddenly erupted, stopping only inches from the girl's face. She jumped, and her dagger fell to the floor with a clang.

"Well ? Have you never seen a dragon before ? Apparently not. Don't worry, I'm not going to eat you. Open your eyes wide, so that I may check whether ... Yes ! The Sign !"

Su Yi felt the dragon's breath sweep across her face. His blue scales gave off a weak light, and the snake-like body disappeared into the depths of the cave. He settled his eyes on those of the girl and seemed to smile.

"But, but, I don't understand, I..."

"Never mind, young girl," interrupted the dragon, "the sign is there. You are chosen by destiny, and I have been waiting a long time for you. Are you ready ?"

Su Yi felt lost, and her tiredness soon gave way to anger, born of fleeing one danger to come face to face with a yet greater danger.

"Ready for what ? Explain yourself, dragon, or you'll get it !"

"Ha ha ! I love a bad attitude." The dragon's laugh shook the walls of the cave and Su Yi could not prevent herself from covering her head with her hands. "The flame of destiny burns in your eyes. She is a capricious mistress and has taken her time in bringing you to me. But finally here you are, at the crossroads of your life. And I am your guide."

"Can you grant me vengeance ? Can you destroy my enemies, make them suffer, lacerate their bodies and tear their souls to shreds ? Can you do that, dragon ?"

The dragon furrowed his brow.

"Charming girl. No, that is not my role, but I can give you the power to achieve all of that. I will teach you the laws of the universe and the arts of war. The secrets of the chi and the techniques of the divine masters. You will have your vengeance, and plenty besides. I will

give you the means to fulfil the destiny to which you were born. But to do that, you must turn your back on Su Yi, the peasant child."

"Su Yi is already dead," she retorted. "If you can do all that for me, dragon, then I will follow that destiny."

"I knew you would. What choice do you have ? Let us begin at once. Four exhausted and enraged men are at my front door. They are hunting you, they hate you and they fear you. It will be the same with all men that come near you, for this is your burden. But these, I would like to see them struck down by your wrath. Kill them !"

"But how ? There are four of them ! They are trained warriors, I am just... You lied to me, dragon !" she complained.

"Silence, child ! Learn ! Pick up your dagger and prepare yourself. I will guide your hand. Observe and admire the power of heroes !"

The dragon curled itself around her body and the girl felt a shiver down her spine. A new power flowed through her veins, reviving her lost strength and reviving her rage.

"Ready ? First lesson : strike with the swiftness of the wind... By the way, my name is Laughing Wisdom."

Twelve yards below her, she could now clearly make out the four soldiers. Tired from the chase, they leant against rocks, each blaming the other for losing track of their prey. Their swords lay on the ground where they had cast them aside. She felt only a cold determination, the dagger in her hand no more than an extension of her body. She heard Laughing Wisdom murmur in her ear.

"Concentrate. You know what you must do. Your mind and body must be as one, a single energy focused on a single goal. Victory. Be as swift as the wind. Believe in yourself. Are you ready ?"

She took a deep breath and readied herself. Su Yi was no more. From now on, Fist of Bronze would learn to fear Heart of Jade.

Then she realized she had been reborn.

Zin the role-playing game

Qin – the role-playing game, you can experience breathtaking adventures in a rich and fascinating historical setting, and become a legend of the Ancient China of the Warring States, a world doomed to fall victim to dictatorship and bureaucracy.

Intrigue, battles, quests, magic and mythical creatures await !

As a hero in search of adventure, glory or immortality, you will leap from roof to roof, duel against the expert swordsmen of Chu, plot against the rulers of Qin or Zhao, make pacts with the spirits or discover the fruits of the Immortal Isles, decipher oracles carved on jade bi or tortoise shells, direct your troops to capture a fortress, seek wise Taoists and follow their teachings, drive out ghosts, or draw on the power of the Chi to accomplish high deeds worthy of the immortals themselves.

Knight-errant or mercenary, robber or fleeing courtesan, exorcist or alchemist, simple footman or general, destiny calls you all to enter the legend of this forgotten China.

You're a hero. Become a legend!

What is role-playing ?

A role-playing game is a kind of board game played around a table by a number players (generally between three and six).

The object of the game is for all the players to collaborate in imagining, devising and experiencing an adventure. Much of a role-playing game will be set down in very general terms, and it will be down to the inspiration, imagination and improvisation skill of each player to adapt it, develop it and make it unpredictable and unforgettable.

Each game needs a Game Master. This is a special kind of player who is well-acquainted with the setting and the rules of the game and who designs adventures (also known as scenarios) for the other players. The GM is there to describe events, locations, and characters, and to decide on the application of the rules : in this area, the GM's word is law.

This is not to say that the other players do not have an active role to play. Quite the contrary : it is they who create their own characters and play their parts, reacting to the events described by the GM, talking with characters they meet, investigating mysteries and exploring worlds.

The players gather round a table and the Game Master starts to tell his story, while the players imagine how their characters will react...

“You are wandering idly around the marketplace of the small village of Juhan, near the border between Qin and Zhao. It's harvest festival time, and the peasants and stallholders are celebrating the end of a hard summer and their abundant crops. There's a happy buzz in the air. Traveling salesmen offer you exotic wares ; others sing the praises of their hot pies and cakes. Suddenly, this joyous scene is shattered by the arrival of a group of thugs on horseback. They force their way through the streets and across the marketplace, overturning stalls, jostling passersby, frightening young and old alike. In front of them is the village chief, visibly terrified, and the leader of the gang unsheathes his saber and draws it close to the old man's throat. What do you do ?”

The History of Heaven and Earth

10

The Birth of the World

The primordial Chaos

The void

Well, not exactly the void.

More of a feverish nothingness, devoid of order but rich with possibility, filling the void with infinite space.

But then, little by little, from this nameless chaos emerged the Tao. Occurring naturally, the Tao became the universe while transcending it, and though it created nothing, all things came from it.

From the Tao came the two primordial forces of the universe, the Yin and the Yang, and from their permanent opposition came the Chi. This raw, basic energy flowed through the cosmos creating the stars, the planets, and all things. The Elements were born and took their place at the corners of the world.

And then, little by little, the heavy matter descended and the light ascended. The borders of Heaven and Earth were drawn. The boundaries of the universe appeared as North, South, East and West.

All was divided and ordered ; Heaven and Earth were split. The hot breath became Fire and created the Sun. The cold breath became Water and so appeared the Moon. Then the eternal cycles fell into place : night followed day, and the four seasons flowed from each other in perfect harmony.

At long last, the world became the world.

The Ten thousand beings and things

In Heaven, the gods took their places in a world made in their image. The greatest and most noble of them, the God of Heaven, ruled the others and took the title of August Emperor of Jade. Wise and good, he ordered his world in accordance with principles of harmony and balance and created the Court of Heaven, home of all gods and fantastic beings. The Emperor of Jade took responsibility for all physical and spiritual life, and set up ministries to assist him in his work (such as Thunder and Wind, Resources, War, and Health).

On Earth, animals and plants appeared and began to populate the deserted land.

Man was born later, from the mud. The gods breathed into him the three heavenly souls named Hun and the seven earthly souls named Po. And man set off to conquer a new, untouched world.



The Legend of Pangu

Sometimes, around the fire, the village elders tell another story of how the world was made, one you should know...

In the beginning there was nothing, only an egg, floating in the void. After many thousands of years, the egg hatched and the being within, the giant named Pangu, awoke from a long, deep sleep.

From the shattered fragments of the eggshell came the universe, the light rising and becoming Heaven, the heavy matter falling and becoming the Earth. Pangu planted his feet on the Earth and caused it to sink yet further. He stretched, touched Heaven with his fingertips and raised it still higher. The giant stayed in this position for ten thousand years or more, and at last Heaven and Earth were divided forever.

Pangu became tired and decided to sleep. Before falling into sleep, he divided his own body. His breath rose and became the wind. His deep, powerful voice became the growl of thunder. He threw his left eye to the Heaven and made the Sun. His right eye followed, and became the Moon. His four limbs marked the four corners of the world. His torso was divided and became the five sacred mountains.

And so it was that the ten thousand beings and things all proceeded from the body of the giant Pangu. Pearl and jade came from his marrow, stone and metal from his teeth and bones. His blood became the rivers, his sweat the rain and the marshes. And man, so proud and arrogant, emerged from the countless parasites crawling on the skin of the First Being.

The Ten Suns and Yi, the Divine Archer

At the dawn of time, Xihe, goddess of the East, and her husband Jun Di, god of light, created ten suns. Each night, these ten stars would sleep suspended from the branches of a tree. Each morning, Xihe would choose one and travel with it through Heaven, on a chariot drawn by six dragons. This was the order of the world.

But then one day the ten suns decided that they would all travel through Heaven together. The terrible heatwave that followed destroyed crops and parched rivers. Men were plunged into a distress so great that the emperor of the time addressed through his high priest a plea for aid to the Emperor of Jade.

Observing that the order of the world had been disturbed by the mischief of the ten suns, the Lord of the Court of Heaven called on Yi, the finest archer in the universe, and asked him to bring the suns back to their tree. Yi set off at once to find the suns, and called on them to bring their madness to an end, but the suns would not hear him. So Yi took the magic bow granted to him by the Emperor of Jade and fired on the suns. Nine were killed, leaving but one to light the Earth.

The Three August Ones

In those distant times, man was weak and disorganized, and the world was vast and dangerous.

In order that man might follow his destiny, the gods and spirits sent him rulers with the wisdom and strength to keep humanity on the true path to civilization.

Fu Xi

With the body of a serpent, the teeth of a tortoise, the lips of a dragon, but the face of a man, Fu Xi was the first of the Three August Ones, the civilizing heroes of ancient times.

Hundreds of years old, and as wise as the gods, Fu Xi was a great and important inventor. He guided humanity by organizing it, devising an ordered society and a government modeled on the Court of Heaven. He gave his subjects the farming calendar, and taught them to fish and keep animals.

A powerful magician, well acquainted with the forces of nature, it was Fu Xi who invented trigrams and hexagrams, abstract images by which man could read the signs of Nature and tell the future with the help of the first of the Great Classics, the Yi Jing or Book of Changes. With this new science, Fu Xi ordered the world, and allowed men to understand it and thus to take possession of it. He was the first great sovereign of humanity, and his works brought to Fu Xi an honor from the gods. Taking the name of Tai Hao, he was appointed Governor God of the Things of the West.

Nü Wa

Sister of Fu Xi, and second of the Three August Ones, Nü Wa also had the body of a serpent. She was a goddess, descended from the Moon and very close to the Water. She is recognized as having fashioned humankind from the yellow clay.

Nü Wa reigned after her brother, consolidating the governmental and social structures that he had created, inventing marriage, and teaching her subjects how to work metals. Mother of the forge and the smithy, she gave men the skill to create the tools that they would use to tame Nature.

During the reign of Nü Wa, a powerful warlord named Gonggong, with the body of a serpent and hair of flame, sought to overthrow the Emperor of Jade. Defeated by the god of fire Zhu Rong and angry at his failure, he vowed to bring chaos and disorder to the universe. So with a single blow of his head he shattered Mount Buzhou, a column supporting Heaven.

At this terrible event, the corners of the world collapsed, Heaven was bent low and the Earth shook. Fire and water destroyed everything in their path, and the end of all things seemed certain.

It was then that Nü Wa chose to act. First she repaired Heaven with precious stones of all the colors of

the rainbow. Next she dammed the devastating floodwaters. Finally she confronted Gonggong, who had taken the form of a black dragon, and killed him. His arrogant soul was cast down into Hell to face a slow torture at the hands of the Ten Kings of Feng Du.

And then the Great Turtle agreed to be sacrificed so that the world might at last be stabilized. Nü Wa cut off his legs, and used them to replace Mount Buzhou in supporting Heaven and to mark the four corners of the world. His shell was used to house the World of Heaven.

And so, thanks to the swift action of Nü Wa and the sacrifice of the Great Turtle, harmony returned to the universe and the world continued on its path of evolution, even if Heaven still leaned a little.

And so it was that Nü Wa became known as the Goddess of Harmony.

Shen Nong

The last of the legendary civilizing rulers, Shen Nong is also known as the Divine Plowman. A man with the head of an ox, he created agriculture and gave men the plow. He taught men the art of sowing and reaping, and so enabled them to settle; under his reign the first towns were founded.

Shen Nong was a master of the science of nutrition, and so soon came to invent medicine. He carried out countless experiments on potions and medicines, and died testing a poison in the hope of creating an antidote.

Shen Nong was rewarded by the gods for his good works. He took the name of Yan Di, the Red Emperor, and governed the South.

The Five Sovereigns and the First Dynasty

By the end of the reign of the Three August Ones, humanity was at last ordered.

The time had come for the first human sovereigns to reign over their own kind.

The Yellow Emperor

The first great sovereign to carry on the work of the Three August Ones was Huang Di.

It was the Yellow Emperor who united the tribes scattered across the land and forged a powerful and civilized nation. As the first warrior king, and the first king to devise weapons, he expanded and organized the early Empire, confronting and defeating his rival, the ancient god of war Chiyou. By inventing laws, the calendar, and money, he provided humanity with the sense of unity they needed to be a people. It was under his reign that the first major roads were built to link towns and villages; as men learnt about each other and

organized markets, so trade developed. His wife Leizi discovered silk, and the methods by which it is made and used.

The start of the reign of Huang Di marks the starting point of recorded history, and the Yellow Emperor remains the model of the wise, prudent and well-loved sovereign. He traveled to the ends of the Earth and attained immortality after scaling the summit of Mount Hengshan Bei. His Empire he left to the man he had met on his travels who was most worthy of that honor.

The Five Sovereigns

After Huang Di came four more great sovereigns, each as wise and powerful as he.

Too humble to presume to pass on their power to their children, each chose instead to seek out the man most worthy to succeed him, so that the Empire might always be governed by just and able men.

These four sovereigns were Gaoyang, Gaoxin, Taotang and the Great Yu. They carried on the work of the Yellow Emperor, perfecting his creations, and expanding and developing the Empire into a vast and prosperous land.

Towards the end of the reign of the Great Yu, he began a search for the man most able to succeed him. After months of searching he was forced to accept the truth : only his son, Qi, was worthy of such a task. And so it was that the hereditary principle was first established and the first great dynasty founded.

The Xia Dynasty

The Great Yu was succeeded by sixteen emperors.

Their greatest contribution to the civilized world was the development and ritualization of religion. Ancestor worship and sacrificial offerings to the gods were transformed into sacred rites, uniting the people in shared beliefs. The emperors became the high priests of this new faith born of ancient tribal practices.

It is also under the Xia that began the first great projects by which man made the world his own : the building of canals, the clearing of forests, the draining of marshes, and more. It is also said that the Great Yu led the rivers to the sea and flattened the plains underfoot so that the land could be cultivated.

For a long time, the Xia enjoyed the favor of the gods. For centuries they held the Mandate of Heaven, giving them the authority over the world and its inhabitants. So it was that Emperor Kong Jia was visited during his reign by two dragons bearing the blessing of the gods.

But the last of the Xia sovereigns, Jie Gui, was a tyrant. A bloody and oppressive leader, he ordered the death of those vassals who dared criticise him, took possession of their wives, and tortured their children. The Mandate of Heaven was lost, and the world plunged into turmoil: the Earth shook, and the rivers dried up. At last two suns appeared in Heaven: one, in decline, represented Jie Gui, while the other, rising to its zenith, represented

Tang. It was this powerful vassal of the tyrannical emperor who gathered around him all the discontented lords of the empire and raised an army to overthrow the last of the Xia. A new line had gained the favor of Heaven, and the first dynasty was at an end.

The Yin Dynasty

The Xia dynasty lost the favor of the gods, and fell in ruins.

The architect of its defeat, the lord Tang, founded a new dynasty which would reign for many centuries, through no fewer than thirty emperors, and with the counsel of the immortals.

The development of the Empire

Like the Xia before them, the Yin emperors extended the boundaries of their Empire.

The Yin were a warrior nation, who raised vast armies led by mighty war chariots driven by noblemen. They drove out or conquered hordes of barbarians at the frontiers of the Empire, taking their lands and expanding ever further the territory of the Empire.

Military victories abroad were coupled with great works that shaped the interior of the country, transforming it according to the needs of its inhabitants. Knowing no limits of food or of space, the population grew.

Little by little, the Middle Empire changed from a rural civilization to an urban civilization. The first palace-cities were founded, and housed an ever-growing population. Alongside communication networks grew industry, based on mining and bronzework, and there emerged an urban class of merchants and craftsmen who provided a link between the nobility and the peasantry.

Great progress was made in art, based most notably on highly-sophisticated bronzework.

Religion

There emerged a class of priests in the service of the Emperor. These holy men became the crucial link between Heaven and the sovereign, transmitting messages from the gods to men, and prayers from men to the gods, and thereby ensuring the permanence of the dynasty.

This communication occurred through complex divination rituals, using animal bones or turtle shells thrown into the fire. The marks made on these bones by the flames were interpreted by the priests and became a sacred script.

The priests combined the ancient rites and drew on the knowledge of the immortals living at the imperial court, and so laid the foundations of what would later become Taoism.

Feudalism

A time came when the Empire was so vast that it could no longer be ruled by one man.

So the Emperor divided his country into many fiefs and entrusted their management to his closest and most loyal vassals. They in turn subdivided their fiefs and placed their own vassals in charge of the parcels of land.

A feudal pyramid fell into place. The lower aristocracy, that part closest to the peasants, collected taxes on behalf of their lords and took a share for themselves. The lords received the sums gathered by their vassals, took a share for themselves, and passed on the remainder to the Emperor. Gradually, the higher aristocracy and the Emperor came to lose contact with the people...

The End of the Yin Dynasty

As time flows in an endless cycle, so all things must be repeated. Each dynasty is destined to rise to its zenith and then to decline, and to lose the Mandate of Heaven to other dynasties. This is the way of the Middle Empire...

Di Xin was the last of the Yin. His reign saw a violent clash between those higher forces which govern Heaven and Earth.

Di Xin was a flighty emperor, with little concern for affairs of state, and a mind perverted by those members of his inner circle who followed the Sect of Leaning Heaven. His only passion was for women. Once, he fell in love with a statue of the Empress Nü Wa, and demanded of Heaven that she become his concubine. The goddess, outraged by the insolence of this mere mortal, chose to punish him by sending three she-demons.

In time, of course, Di Xin forgot this infatuation and turned his attention to another woman. He asked the lord Hu Su for the hand of his daughter Daji. But on her way to the capital, she was killed by one of the she-demons, who took both her name and her appearance and married the Emperor. Under her evil influence he became an abominable tyrant, devising ever newer methods of torture and mistreating his most loyal vassals.

In time, Wen Wang, the Duke of the West, came to the Emperor to demand explanations of his lord. The Duke was imprisoned. The she-demon disguised as Daji showed all her cruelty in ordering that his son be killed and served to him in his cell as a meal. Later she sent the Duke back to his fief.

It was then that the immortal Jiang Shang decided to intervene, descending from the mountains of Kunlun and vowing to stop the she-demon. He gathered together immortals who agreed that the gods should no longer dominate the affairs of men, while those gods who sought to maintain their grip on the Earth rallied to the side of the she-demon. The two factions joined battle, as men joined battle on Earth.

Jiang Shang took command of the army that Wen Wang had recruited among the discontented vassals, and led it into battle. This terrible clash of gods, immortals and men upset the balance of the world, but at last the Yin were routed by the army of the Duke of the West, the tyrant was overthrown, and his dynasty was replaced by the Zhou. Gods and immortals withdrew from the world of men, and from that day forth men were left in command of their own destiny.

The Western Zhou Dynasty

As one dynasty falls, so another rises, drawing from the Mandate of Heaven its complete authority over the Empire and all its people.

The blessing of Heaven

The Emperor of Jade, in all his wisdom, approved of the struggle which those immortals and the Zhou had fought for man's liberation.

The retaking of power

Emperor Wu Wang ruled wisely during his life, and passed on his throne to his son Cheng. He in turn was assisted by the Duke of Dan, who wrote a guide on how to govern wisely and keep the favor of Heaven. This guide would become one of the Great Classics of the Empire and be known as the *Zhouli*.

Little by little, the Zhou concentrated imperial power in their capital Hao, by tightly controlling political and economic life and imposing taxes and conscription on the fiefs.

The conquest of the land

Strengthened by the centralization of power, the Empire was now able to confront the bold barbarian invasions from the North, South and West.

Meanwhile, in the interior, forest clearances increased the amount of land available for crops. There emerged a system of serfdom, with the peasants being tied to the land which they cultivated for their lord.

The Empire was transformed, and Nature was rolled back. As far as the eye could see, all seemed controlled by man, and shaped by his hand.

The move to the East

In the year 350 of the dynasty, Emperor You repudiated his wife and replaced her with his concubine Baosi. It all but succeeded. Angered by such an insult and thirsty for revenge, the father of the repu-

diated wife, the powerful vassal the Marquis of Shen, formed an alliance with the Xiongnu and sacked the capital Hao. He placed on the throne the repudiated Empress' son, who took the name of Ping Wang. The new emperor, fearful that barbarians had so easily attacked the imperial capital, moved his base from Hao to Luoyang, in the Yellow River valley, in the year 399.

This move of the capital city would mark the end of the Western Zhou and the beginning of the slow decline of the dynasty.

The Spring and Autumn Period

The Eastern Zhou Dynasty based in Luoyang would see many changes to the political, economic, military and religious life of the Empire. It would be an age of great progress and terrible wars, and would see the decline of the dynasty together with the break-up of the Empire into many rival states.

The deposition of the Emperor

Despite the transfer of the capital to the East, the Zhou never managed to gain full control over their vassals. As a result, the Empire began to fragment into countless quasi-independent fiefs, whose lords acted as if kings of their lands.

The Emperor lost even his army and was obliged to seek the protection of these new states. From then on, the Zhou had no more than symbolic and religious authority, and lost all political power over their vassals.

The Hegemonies

The protection granted by the Hegemonies soon became annexation, as the larger states swallowed up the smaller and interfered with their internal politics. Some Hegemonies, including Qi and Jin, began to reform their governments to strengthen their power. This was the beginning of the decline of the nobility and the beginning of the first administrations based on bureaucracy and officialdom.

The Hegemonies of the northern plain, Jin, Qi and Qin, also faced a threat from the South, from the powerful state of Chu. It was only by constant battles that Chu was kept within its borders and the seat of imperial power protected. Finally a truce was agreed at a peace conference in the year 542.

An age of progress

The Spring and Autumn period saw great progress in many fields.

Agriculture was modernized by the use of fertilizers, pesticides and crop rotation. Bronzework was per-

fecting, preparing the way for the beginnings of ironwork. Trade flourished and towns grew.

Harmony and unity returned to the Empire. So began the period of the Hundred Schools : throughout the Empire, philosophers and scholars discussed their theories, masters such as Kong Fu Zi, Mo Zi and Guan Zhong wrote their most brilliant works, and many schools of thought emerged. Legalism, Confucianism, and Mohism were born.

The birth of Taoism

The loss of influence on the part of the emperors and their priests allowed for the emergence of many religious practices, mainly derived from ancient tribal rituals and popular superstitions.

Lao Zi combined all of the ancestral rites, beliefs and practices into one philosophy. This great sage compiled the *Dao De Jing*, a work of syncretism which drew together the many diverse strands of religious practice and wove them around a unifying philosophy, the Tao. So it was that Taoism was born. It grew thanks to the work of other philosophers such as Zhuang Zi and Lie Zi.

Religion had been returned to the people. There were important consequences for the development of the arts. Whereas before the arts had been closely linked to the rites of the imperial priestly class, now they lost their sacred nature, mixed with popular culture and spread among the people.

The End of the Empire

The unity of the Hegemonies would eventually be shattered by the wars. In the South, Chu fought the states of Yue and Wu. The North saw battles between noble families, at times even within the same Hegemony.

And so it was that in the year 640 of the Zhou Dynasty, the house of Tian massacred the house of Jiang, rulers of Qi, and usurped their powers. The Emperor was powerless to act.

Then, in the year 668, the state of Jin was rocked by a bloody civil war. The state splintered and the imperial court was forced to recognize three new lands: Zhao, Han and Wei.

This event is said to mark the end of the Empire, and the beginning of the period of the Warring States.

The Warring States

At this time, the Zhou Dynasty still held the Mandate of Heaven. But its Empire was gone. The Emperor's former vassals had declared their independence, and their fiefs had grown into states. Wars and

annexations followed until at the end of the Spring and Autumn period, there remained only seven powerful states, known as the Warring States.

The strengthening of the states

At the start of this period, there rose from the ashes of the Empire seven states : Chu, Qi, Qin, Zhao, Han, Wei and Yan, and a small territory retained by the Zhou. As the Empire was no more, these states together took the name of *Zhongguo*, the Middle Kingdoms.

Other principalities emerged, only to be absorbed into one of the states or made a satellite ruled by one of their puppets.

Seeing the decline of the imperial dynasty, each of the seven powerful lands sought to become the center of a new Empire and thus dominate the whole of the *Zhongguo*. And so it became necessary for each state to grow strong, to develop political, economic, and above all military power.

The beginnings of ironwork enabled the states to engage in great projects such as the building of irrigation channels, the maintenance of roads, the clearance of forests and the draining of marshes. This led to the modernization of agriculture and trade, the building up of food reserves and a general increase in wealth. Great walls were built to guard against raids from warlike neighbors, both barbarian tribes and the other lands of the *Zhongguo*.

The great administrative reforms

And still the rulers of these great states did not feel secure. Their greatest fear was that their vassals would revolt or secede, just as they had done under the Zhou. It was at this time that attempts were made, particularly in Qi and Wei, to distance the nobility from the halls of power by reforming the administration of the state.

But it was from Qin, then the weakest of the states, that the true solution would come. A scholar named Shang Yang became minister of Qin and undertook a series of reforms inspired by Legalist philosophy in order to modernize the state, to enable it to become as strong as the other states, and above all to sow order and discipline. Shang Yang's policies created an administration based on the centralization of power, the marginalization of the nobility, and the modernization of the army. In less than five years, Qin became the most powerful and most strictly governed of the Warring States, and the others began to imitate its reforms so that they might not be left behind.

The nobles lost their sinecures and were replaced in the administration by a professional class of salaried officials. This new bureaucracy allowed power to be centralized in the hands of the sovereign. The vassals

were distanced from the government of the state. The serfs were freed and came to own the land they tilled and to pay taxes directly to their sovereign. Privileges and favors were abolished, and all men became equal under the law of the state.

The countless battles

Soon after the Legalist reforms, the sovereigns of the seven most powerful states of the *Zhongguo* proclaimed themselves Kings, thus marking the end of their feigned subjection to the Zhou Emperors.

The Kings' attention turned to the conquest of the other states and thus to a new model of war. From now on, all battles would be expansionist, and the ultimate goal of war would be the capture of enemy territory, the overthrow of its ruler, and the building of Empire. The ranks of armies were swelled with professional soldiers and conscripts, campaigns multiplied and battles became ever bloodier and bloodier. The structure of the armies was changed, the old chariot divisions being replaced by swifter, more flexible infantry and cavalry units.

War became permanent and omnipresent. It started as military, and became political and economic. Alliances, allegiances and betrayals were the norm, and yesterday's enemy became today's ally, until things changed...

The dominance of Qin

Amidst the chaos, one truth emerged : the state of Qin remained the most powerful of all. Its military dominance was ensured by countless victories and protected it against the warlike designs of its neighbors, each too cautious to attack such a well-armed state alone. Potential alliances between the other states were broken even before they were formed, through the work of the Qin secret service. This eliminated the risk of a coalition rising to crush this insolent state.

Qin captured the barbarian territories of Shu and Ba, and used the wealth hidden beneath their lands to create a genuine military-industrial complex and further strengthen its army, already the most feared in all the *Zhongguo*.

But it was Qin's actions in the year 865 of the Zhou Dynasty that revealed its ambitions most clearly. The Qin armies overran the territory of the Zhou and brought an end to the dynasty.

From that day forth, the goal of the Qin sovereigns was clear: to achieve the Tian Xia – the union of all things under Heaven – by subjugating all the other states of the *Zhongguo*.



Wu xia, knight-errant

Whether out of choice or out of desperation, you have become a respected figure in the jiang hu, the world of martial arts. You have devoted your life to mastering the martial arts. You will without doubt have a favorite weapon and dream of wielding it perfectly. Whether following a tradition, or a personal quest for glory and discovery, you travel the roads of the Zhongguo, selling your fighting skills. But you will only fight for a just cause. For in the words of your shifu, "the strong warrior defeats his enemies with his weapon, but only the great warrior fights with his heart."

Fung Xe

"Dragon of the Five Virtues"

18

When you were a child, your father spoke to you of honor and rectitude, which he held to be the two essential virtues of any ruler. He was an embittered man, the last in a glorious line, stripped of his birthright. His hatred for the new rulers of the states knew no bounds, and he saw you merely as the instrument of his vengeance.

Your father placed you under the tutelage of a mysterious old man known as Without-Wisdom. For the first year of your studies, he treated you as no more than his servant, dragging you behind him on the roads of the Zhongguo. When finally he saw that your mind was open and ready to learn, he gave you a simple wooden sword, and began your training. He was a demanding but patient shifu. In the space of a few months, he had made a callow youth into a talented swordsman. Only then did he give you a real sword and send you out into the world in search of challenges. "Return only when this sword is broken" were his last words to you.

After several years on the edges of society, in the world known as jiang hu, you returned to your master. Your sword was chipped and worn by countless combats, and you were now an accomplished da xia. Seeing you return, Without-Wisdom handed you a wooden tablet on which was inscribed your new name, Dragon of the Five Virtues. "To honor and rectitude you have added bravery, dedication and compassion. For now, I can teach you no more." With these words, he bade you farewell.

Since that day, you have roamed the wu lin in search of perfection as a warrior and new encounters. You came to the aid of the Lady of the Silver Palace, and in her gratitude, she granted you one of the most precious treasures of her clan, the Sword That Carves the Mists. This magnificent weapon has become your most loyal companion.

Description

Of average height and frail of form, Fung Xe wears a short, close-fitting blue *chang pao*, and close-fitting pants. His clothes are worn yet clean. His hair is set in a bun held by silver pins in the shape of dragons. He holds his sword in his hand, by the hilt. The sword is of average length, with a thick blade, while the scabbard is decorated with motifs recalling the water and the waves.

Aspects

Metal 4
Wood 2

Water 4
Earth 2

Fire 2

Gift and Weakness

Gift of Nezha / Loyalty of the Dog

Chi : 8

Passive Defense : 8

Breath of Life : 17 boxes (6/5/3/2/1)

Renown : 2

Skills

Jianshu (fencing) 2, Dodging 2, Acrobatics 2, Meditation 1, History 1, Survival (forests) 1

Taos

Tao of the Six Directions (level 3) ; Tao of the Light Step (level 2)

Combat Techniques

Jianshu : Trap



State soldier

Whether you proudly volunteered to serve your ruler, or were forcibly conscripted into the army of the state, you are now a soldier. Whether knight or footsoldier, chariot driver or crossbowman, you have come to know the harsh discipline and spartan conditions of army life. In these troubled times, opportunities to gain battle experience are frequent, and the banners of your regiment have seen plenty of action, from border skirmishes to revenge attacks, from escort missions to law and order operations. The soldier's life is dangerous, but also rich with excitement for a warrior whose courage is equal to his skill. Valor and victory in battle are handsomely rewarded, and many a simple soldier has risen from the rank and file to attain the higher reaches of the military hierarchy. Some have even become generals. Or you may have tired of the constant carnage and cannot bear to see any more of your comrades-in-arms die before your eyes, and be waiting merely for a chance to desert and build a new life. At least that way you will be able to fight your own battles.

personal protection of his family. You are proud to have been entrusted with such prestigious duties, but the closer you have come to the world of state politics, the more your confidence in it has been shaken. We live in testing times, but some of the decisions taken by your political superiors you find shocking, some of their orders senseless. More and more your conscience is troubled by having to obey such men. Everything was so much easier when your life was on the battlefield, and all that mattered was to prove your valor by capturing as many enemy heads as possible. But you were born to serve, and it is not your place to question the decisions of your masters.

Description

A tall, strongly-built man, Cheng Nenfa wears a uniform made up of a tunic fastened round the waist by a belt, a pair of pants and leather boots. His armor is of light leather. A heavy curved saber hangs from his belt and he holds a long spear in his hand. His hair is braided in the style of the Xiongnu barbarians.

Aspects

Metal 3	Water 5	Fire 2
Wood 2	Earth 2	

Gift and Weakness

Courage of the Tiger / Impetuosity of the Horse

Chi : 8

Passive Defense : 9

Breath of Life : 17 boxes (6/5/3/2/1)

Renown : 2

Skills

Qiangshu (spears and lances) 2, Nushu (crossbow) 2, Heraldry 2, Meditation 1, Horsemanship 1, Art of War 1

Taos

Tao of the Strengthened Body (level 3) ; Tao of the Six Directions (level 1) ; Tao of the Light Step (level 1)

Combat Techniques

Qiangshu : Double Blow

Cheng Nenfa

Zhao army officer

You are an officer in the personal guard of the king of Zhao. You earned this rank through bravery and fighting skill. You are a veteran of many battles, driving the Xiongnu barbarians back into the steppes and confronting the bloodthirsty forces of Qin. In these terrible times, you know that war lies not far from the gates of your state.

Your father wanted to prevent you from following this path, but your heart told you that it was the only fitting one for you to follow. You believe in the traditional order of human society as symbolized by the king, who is at once the essence of the state and the essential link between the people and the gods. Your devotion to your sovereign is complete, and he places great faith in you. As a result, he has begun to entrust you with ever more dangerous missions, including the



Exorcist

As if the devastation wreaked by the endless wars were not enough, the supernatural world makes life even more difficult for the people of the Zhongguo and threatens their very survival. A valiant warrior and a well-forged blade can protect their homes from soldiers and outlaws, but what are they worth against a vengeful ghost or an evil demon? Little, if anything. This is where you come in. You have learnt the secret ways at the feet of a master of the mystical arts, and have decided to use your knowledge of the Tao for the benefit of the people and above all the balance of the universe. There are many who fear you as much as the unholy forces that are your enemies. But your popularity is of little concern to you, as your mission is far beyond the understanding of your fellow men. Without you and your brother exorcists, the creatures of hell would have taken control of this world many years ago. You are happy to leave warriors and kings to their meaningless battles. You know that the true struggle is yours.

ance of the Tao, even if your struggle is incomprehensible to common mortals. But while they sleep the sleep of the ignorant, you have found no peace since the beginning of your crusade.

Description

Kwai Chen Tai is tall and thin, with a stern, austere appearance enhanced by his heavy overcoat decorated with mystical motifs. His hands are hidden in the loose sleeves of his *chang pao*. A long wooden sword hangs from a string on his back, and from his belt hang several talismans and wooden tablets inscribed with complex pictograms. He holds in his hand a small bronze bell. Kwai Chen Tai's face is partly obscured by his long, loose hair.

Aspects

Metal 2	Water 2	Fire 2
Wood 4	Earth 4	

Gift and Weakness

Placidity of the Turtle / Curse of the Five Poisons

Chi : 24

Passive Defense : 8

Breath of Life : 19 (7/5/4/2/1)

Renown : 2

Skills

Exorcism 2, Jianshu (fencing) 2, Legends 1, Calligraphy 1, Meditation 1, Taoism 1, Investigation 1, Perception 1, Theology 1

Taos

Tao of the Serene Presence (level 3)

Combat Techniques

Jianshu : Direct Hit

Magic

Way of Exorcism : Blessing of Wood, Talisman of Control of Lost Spirits

Kwai Chen Tai

Exorcist Fangshi

Your thick, heavy overcoat of black linen is decorated with various esoteric symbols and a *taiji* on the back. Your dark, piercing eyes mean many are too scared to meet your gaze. You are feared, you are ostracized, but you care nothing for the thoughts of your fellow men. The only beings that you wish to impress are ghosts and evil spirits. You are a crusader, on a mystical and sacred mission that few men can understand. The terrified victims of returning spirits implore you to deliver them from the evil forces that plague their lives. But once your work is done, they are eager to pay you and hurry you on your way, before returning to their drab, meaningless occupations. But your war cannot be won by a single battle. You see kings enraged, armies destroyed, everywhere men betray each other, covet riches, and hunger for power. Their obsessions are absurd, for without you and your brother exorcists, their entire world would have been lost to the forces of darkness long ago. Luckily for them, you are there to keep watch over this world, and work to defend the bal-



Taoist

All the Zhongguo resounds with the clash of arms and the thunder of battle. The Qin model of the centralized absolutist state has spread to all the other states, and through ridicule at best, and persecution at worst, your kind have become more and more rare. Yet you have the wisdom of the ancestors, a mastery of supernatural forces and an understanding of a world beyond the imagination of ordinary mortals. As a practising Taoist, you preserve and further the invaluable learning of your religion through an endless quest that carries you to all parts of the Warring States. You are always ready to listen to others and provide the benefits of your art to those in need. For there are many inhabitants of the Zhongguo who continue to follow the ancestral teachings of Taoism in secret. For these people you are a light in the darkness of the modern world. For over-zealous scholars of the new class, you are a thorn in their side. But the science that you practise is eternal, and you are sure that one day your lifetime of devotion will be rewarded with the divine secret of immortality.

From your many meetings with powerful *wu* and learned *fangshi*, you have stumbled upon elements of your chosen art that you did not even know existed. On many occasions you have been forced to sully the purity of your learning by devising poisons and potions to protect yourself against assassins and soldiers who had picked up your scent... But your quest for ultimate knowledge remains of primordial importance, and to pursue that quest, you must stay alive, at any cost.

Description

Mo Nan Fei is a young and naïve man. He is dressed in a long *chang pao* which has been patched in several places and which is embroidered with esoteric symbols. His long hair is tied in a simple ponytail and he wears a small black cap. On his travel along the highways and byways of the *Zhongguo* he pulls a hand-cart laden with a jumble of ancient texts, pots and pans, plants, and tools.

Aspects

Metal 2	Water 1	Fire 2
Wood 5	Earth 4	

Gift and Weakness

Sense of the Tao (External Alchemy) / Naïve

Chi : 16

Passive Defense : 8

Breath of Life : 17 boxes (6/5/3/2/1)

Renown : 2

Skills

External Alchemy 2, Herbalism 2, Bangshu (stick) 1, Calligraphy 1, Medicine 1, Meditation 1, Taoism 1, Dodging 1, History 1

Taos

Tao of the Clear Mind (level 3)

Combat Techniques

Bangshu : Double Blow

Magic

Way of External Alchemy : Silence of the Lake, Purify the Field of Cinnabar, Repel Vermin, Purify the River

Mo Nan Fei

Apprentice alchemist

As an apprentice, everything you know you learnt from your master, who learnt it from his master, and so on until the mythical era of the Three August Ones and the Five Sovereigns. Since a very young age you have understood that the Earth has its own internal wisdom and that in order to grasp its secrets, one must come to know the world, attain a higher state of consciousness, and see the face of immortality. You were gifted, and your thirst for learning spurred you ever further on, as you devoured the ancient wisdom and experimented with new techniques.

But now you must flee. Your master has been murdered and although your studies are not complete, you have no choice but to take to the perilous roads of the Warring States. You do not know who killed your master, or why, but you imagine they are in some way connected to the witch hunt organized by Qin. But if you must follow your own path to the secrets of the alchemist's art, you are determined to take advantage of your itinerant life to perfect your skills.



Renegade

Day by day, the repression of the state, the burdens of the bureaucratic system, and the corruption of government agents become ever harder to bear for the inhabitants of the Zhongguo. The majority of the people accept the situation, either surrendering meekly to a life of compromise in exchange for the hope of a degree of security, or not questioning their lives at all. Like them, you have lived through sacrifice, suffering and humiliation, but unlike them you have chosen to escape. You will be neither slave nor servant of any man. Since the laws of the land mock your beliefs, your values and the old ways, they do not deserve your loyalty. You live according to your own code. Your decision to live as a renegade has already brought you many problems, and your position is becoming more and more difficult as state authority becomes stricter and state society becomes ever more tightly ordered. But if that is to be the price of freedom, then you will pay it with glee.

your more brutal clients. The gullible general agreed and began to initiate you in the use of twin short swords, which he thought the weapons most suited to a warrior of your stature. You soon became a master.

And then, on one moonless night, you managed to escape by killing three guards of the pleasure house which had been your prison for so many years.

Now, you are sure that you are pursued, both by the forces of justice for murder, and by your former owners seeking revenge for their humiliation. But you are ready to face them all. Several months in the world of martial arts have toughened your body and allowed you to perfect your skill with the twin swords. You are ready.

Description

Yuen Shu-Lin is a great beauty and a lady of great grace, but dresses as a man, with a short *chang pao*, pants and walking boots. Her hair is braided into a thick plait, and her face is cast into shadow by a broad conical hat. She wears twin short swords crossed on her back, their scabbards held tight by her belt.

Aspects

Metal 3	Water 3	Fire 3
Wood 3	Earth 2	

Gift and Weakness

Unsettling Beauty / Wanted

Chi : 16

Passive Defense : 8

Breath of Life : 21 boxes (7/5/4/3/2)

Renown : 2

Skills

Daoshu (daggers) 2, Acrobatics 2, Dancing 1, Music (singing) 1, Seduction 1, Stealth 1, Meditation 1, Empathy 1, Eloquence 1

Taos

Tao of the Thousand Bees (level 3) ; Tao of the Invisible Shield (level 1) ; Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands (level 1) ; Tao of the Sudden Lightning (level 1)

Combat Techniques

Daoshu : Direct Hit, Two Weapons

Yuen Shu-Lin
"Dazzling Twig"

You cannot remember your childhood. Your first real memory is of a cramped, stinking caravan into which you were crammed with dozens of other girls. Before you were even ten years old, you were sold to a common brothel in the Chu capital of Yin... But as the years passed, you grew into a woman of striking beauty, much in demand among wealthy clients. When you went on to show intelligence and wit, you were sold to a highly-renowned pleasure house.

It was there that your real education began : you studied dance, singing, calligraphy and philosophy, and were transformed into a lady, and a courtesan of distinction. You were dressed in the finest robes and shrouded by intoxicating perfumes, and the town was at your feet. But your only thought was to escape this life, a life which could no longer hold you...

Your chance came courtesy of one of your most faithful lovers, General Hao. Using all your charm, you entreated him to instruct you in martial arts, both out of pure curiosity, and to be able to defend yourself against



Spy

The constant state of tension between the proud nation of Qin and its rivals feeds countless conspiracies and disputes, generating a perfect environment for an individual such as yourself. For along with the majority of the rulers of the Zhongguo, you have seen that one of the greatest weapons of war is information. And you have devoted your life and your skills to the unsavory, perilous, but extremely challenging and profitable trade of espionage. You know well that should your identity ever be discovered, you can expect the most terrible torture and public beheading. But the game is worth the candle. Whether your ultimate loyalty lies with your ruler or your pocket, you know exactly where, when and how to gain the most information possible on all manner of subjects. Trade agreements, troop deployments, diplomatic alliances, whispers and rumors are your stock-in-trade. It is just a matter of which attentive ear will hear your secrets.

Will you accept a position in the Qin Secret Service or be tempted by the riches of Chu ? Or you may choose to hold on to your freedom and independence, and refuse to allow your destiny to be tied to that of a state which may already be doomed...

Description

Liu Shan Zhi is a tall, slender young woman of definite beauty. Her long and flowing dress is richly decorated, and its folds conceal her weapons from her victims. Her hair is tied in an intricate bun, held in place by magnificent and finely-crafted pins. At first sight, she is simple and innocent, but her eyes betray a sharp and audacious mind.

Aspects

Metal 2	Water 3	Fire 4
Wood 2	Earth 2	

Gift and Weakness

Skin of the Snake / Phobia (heights and emptiness)

Chi : 12

Passive Defense : 7

Breath of Life : 17 boxes (6/5/3/2/1)

Renown : 2

Skills

Stealth 2, Daoshu (daggers) 2, Calligraphy 1, Investigation 1, Perception 1, Acting 1, Music (flute) 1, Theft 1, Empathy 1

Taos

Tao of the Hidden Shadow (level 3) ; Tao of the Inner Eye (level 1)

Combat Techniques

Daoshu : Feint, Two Weapons

Liu Shan Zhi

Freelance spy

Your many talents, worthy of a distinguished courtesan, provide you with a plausible cover as a wandering artist. You travel far and wide throughout the Zhongguo collecting news and information which might be of interest to your clients, be they heads of clans, dissenting generals, enterprising merchants, or mystics nervous about their enemies' skills. All the information you collect is for sale, but only at the right price. You are always on the lookout for a new nugget of information, and follow potentially important events with care. Your seductive smile hides an incisive mind. Your lips are as devastating as your blade, and you are thief of hearts and of riches. You live on the edge, and you love your life. For these troubled times seem almost made for you : as the wars between the states become ever more intricate and underhand, your skills are sold ever more dearly.



Highwayman

It was not your fault : it was life that drove you to it. Some are born in palaces, surrounded by riches and fine things; you were born in the dirt, and knew nothing but grinding poverty. Your parents struggled to feed their eight children, and even tried to abandon you in the forest. You slept with the animals in a grimy shack which was the only place you could call home. Such a sad, pitiful story. Some might say an exaggerated tale. And they may be right. All that matters is that you are not evil by nature, but you have never known anything but this. And a life of hard-won plunder and simple pleasures is not such an unhappy ending. But enough of the storytelling, let's keep to the point : your money or your life !

Ho Ma Xue

"Merciless Horse"

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Ever since you were very young you loved horses. Your parents used to say that you could ride before you could walk, and it is hard to disbelieve when you think of the sheer pleasure you feel at full gallop astride a fiery stallion. Such a gift must have come from your Xiongnu roots, for your mother was once a barbarian before leaving her tribe out of love for your father, a humble but honorable craftsman of Qin.

While not yet even a man, you had gained a reputation as the finest horse trainer in the whole region, and begun to earn your living from it. But then everything changed. One year, the local tax collector demanded of the village a simply outlandish sum that the village could never hope to pay. Enraged by the paltry sum that the villagers had scraped together, he ordered that all the men of the village be deported to the great construction sites of the state. The village was razed to the ground and the people scattered to the four winds, all in the space of a few hours. While these events were taking place, you had been in Zhao negotiating with a horse merchant, and it was not until you returned that an old woman told you all that happened. Your mother had been too proud to be taken away by the soldiers, and had cut her own throat. Your father had been killed in a desperate attempt to defend his home. In your soul, something snapped, and you were consumed by a great fire of hatred. You mounted your horse and galloped in pursuit of the soldiers that

had destroyed your home and your family. Knowing that you could never defeat them all alone, you adopted the guerilla tactics of your ancestors. As the tax collector's personal escort saw its members disappear one by one, the soldiers began to fear the wrath of a local deity. In the space of a few weeks, you had cast them into such desperate anxiety that it took little to pick off the terrified survivors. And then, you tasted the sweet taste of vengeance, as you strangled the tax collector with your bare hands. That small, pathetic man, once so proud and self-important, begged for his life until his final breath.

Since that day, you have been a fugitive from justice, and that suits you fine. For the fire of your hatred has not died down, but has spread to all officials, to all the representatives of state authority... Now known as Merciless Horse, you scour the state of Qin, sometimes as head of a gang, sometimes traveling alone, and bring your bloody justice to the land.

Description

Ho Ma Xue is a tall and stoutly-built man, dressed in torn and tattered rags. His wild, filthy hair falls on broad and muscled shoulders. He rides a half-wild horse from the steppes and carries a mighty saber which bears the scars of a thousand battles. Behind his dark eyes lies a hint of madness.

Aspects

Metal 3	Water 4	Fire 2
Wood 2	Earth 3	

Gift and Weakness

Spirit of Horses / Impure Blood (Xiongnu)

Chi : 12

Passive Defense : 8

Breath of Life : 17 boxes (6/5/3/2/1)

Renown : 2

Skills

Jianshu (fencing) 2, Gongshu (longbow) 2, Horsemanship 2, Perception 1, Intimidation 1, Survival (forest) 1

Taos

Tao of the Strengthened Body (level 3) ; Tao of the Destructive Breath (level 1) ; Tao of the Six Directions (level 1)

Combat Techniques

Jianshu : Total Block, Direct Hit

Gongshu : Masterstroke





The morning breeze lifted the yellow dust of the path.

Xian lowered his head and stole a glance at Heart of Jade. Ever since he had met this girl on the road to Handan, he had been assailed by questions. Questions about her of course, but also about this strange sensation that took hold of him whenever he was around her. Since the night before, Xian had not been able to shake the impression that destiny was calling. That his life was about to take a new, unexpected, and most dangerous path.

She had appeared as if by magic just as night was falling, there in the middle of the crowded inn, just when the young wu xia was steeling himself for a challenging combat against five men. He had arrived weary from his journey, seeking no more than a place to lay his head. As he came over the threshold, the nervous giggling first surprised him, and then he saw them. An old woman clutched to her body two young children and an infant, each one filthy and miserable, screaming with hunger and anguish. She cowered on the floor as five thugs stood over her. Another man, corpulent, and his face red with wine and scornful mockery, came closer and held out a crust.

"You are hungry, you say. Does that give you the right to rob me? I could have you flogged, you know, for all this is mine. I am the master here, and if I choose to tell my men to get rid of you and your disgusting little things, not a single man here will criticize me."

He cast an evil look around the room, and while some suddenly found something interesting in the bottom of their bowls, others merely smiled.

"But I am a kind man. I had been saving this crust for the pig. Crawl to my feet, foul sow, and you shall have it. Perhaps."

All six men shook with filthy laughter and a few nervous customers joined in.

They were silenced by the clink of coins on the floor; and looked up to see Xian leaning casually against one of the stout square columns which held up the roof of the inn. He wore a sarcastic smile, but his hard stare removed any suggestion that he might be amused.

"Give this woman and her children a decent meal... although if you are unable to tell the difference between humans and beasts, then I fear for the quality of your food."

The fat man's faced turned scarlet with rage. His eyes widened and he pointed a stubby finger at the young knight with the tattered and dusty chang pao.

"Throw this beggar out of here" he screamed, "and let him know just who he is dealing with!"

The five men drew their heavy bronze swords. Their cool, assured manner was that of experienced soldiers, of army deserters. They knew death, had cheated it before, and were used to handing it out. Not a single man in the inn dared move. Xian thought to himself that maybe this time, he should have held his tongue. Too late now.

His first opponent did not even have the chance to scream : he had not even seen the sword being drawn from its scabbard, and lay on the ground with his throat cut. The second was quicker to react, and blocked the powerful blow that Xian delivered, and forced him back. Having lost the initiative, and the element of surprise, the wu xia prepared to fight. Before him stood four fierce and battle-hardened enemies, a true test for his fighting skill. The fat man looked on in delight.

It was at that moment that she appeared. Without a sound, she came from nowhere, and appeared behind the four brutes. She held a finely-crafted dagger in each hand, each blade as deadly as the ivory claws of a dragon. Attacked on both sides, the thugs lasted only seconds. They were skilled fighters, but nothing more. Xian and the mysterious young girl found themselves face to face, in the middle of the inn, the blood of their victims soaking into the floor.

"Ten tael for the heads of these ruffians!" cried the fat man. Around the inn, a dozen men exchanged eager looks and shot to their feet. The others began to disappear.

Heart of Jade flashed a mysterious smile at Xian.

"Take the woman and the children from here, brave knight. I will deal with this pig."

Her tone left him with no choice, and he cleared a route to the door with the tip of his blade. Once outside the inn, he led the family to a safe distance and ran back to the building. Great tongues of yellow flame were licking its walls, as the last customers fled for their lives. A cloud of fireflies rode on the wind through the blackness of the night. Suddenly, in front of the inferno appeared the slight form of the young girl. Still smiling, she came directly toward him. Everywhere people were screaming for water, battling the flames. She passed by Xian's side and said:

"Come, brave knight, let us find some better place to sleep."

Characters

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In this chapter, we deal with one of the fundamental steps in any role-playing game : creating the characters. In Qin, perhaps more than in any other game, the players take on the roles of heroes, whose fantastic adventures will go down in history as the defining moments of a legendary epoch. So both players and Game Master should be sure to devote sufficient time to this essential preparatory stage.

Creating a character

To start with, you will need a character sheet for writing down all the necessary information about your character. You will also need a pencil and an eraser, since you will certainly need to amend your first roll several times. Now you're ready to go step by step through the birth of a hero.

The basic concept

Start by defining the kind of character you'd like to play, what we call the basic concept. The Games Master can give you an idea about Ancient Chinese society and the general context. Then think up a general idea, just a few words to describe the basic nature of your character, such as "master swordsman", "mystic in search of vengeance", "nobleman haunted by his past", "scholar in search of learning", or "young woman in search of her freedom". With this basic concept in mind, look through the list of character types and choose the one which best suits your character. If you can come up with a fairly detailed image of your character, that will make things easier in the next stage, which is more technical, and involves building up the character number by number. This book contains seven pre-generated characters, based on typical heroes from the Warring States period, designed to enable the players to pick one and start the game straight away. They can also be used for inspiration, to help you in imagining your own hero, with his own strengths and weaknesses. But you don't have to do either : you can build up your character from scratch. More pre-generated characters will appear in supplements to this book, providing a wider choice of gaming tools and inspiration.

Aspects

Each character is defined among other things by five Aspects, symbols reflecting his essential nature by reference to the five Elements. These Aspects represent not only a character's essence, innate abilities and intrinsic attributes, but also his connection with the basic forces of the universe.

The five Aspects are Metal, Water, Fire, Wood and Earth. They are explained in detail in a separate section at p.39.

Each player has **14 points** to distribute between the five Aspects. Each Aspect can be given a value of 1 (weak) to 5 (legendary). For the purposes of comparison, bear in mind that the average mortal of the Warring States generally has 2 in each Aspect.

Gifts and Weaknesses

Each player should next look at the list of Gifts and Weaknesses (p.40), and choose one of each for his character.

Here as in many other areas, the forces of Yin and Yang at work in the universe tend to balance each other out. So an innate Gift is balanced by an innate Weakness. This adds to the individuality of each character and sets him apart from average mortals.

Skills

Next, each player should decide what his character can do, his areas of expertise, the Skills he has gained through education or apprenticeship.

Each player has **15 points** with which to buy Skills for his character, each at a specific Skill Level. The process by which Skills are acquired is explained in detail in the section at p.44.

Secondary Aspects

You will also need to establish values for your character's Secondary Aspects ; these generally derive from the Aspects and are important in the application of various rules.

A character's Chi is calculated on the basis of his Aspects and his Skills ; see the relevant section at p.48.

The Passive Defense score is equal to :

Water + Wood + 2.

Breath of Life is calculated on the basis of the Aspects (p.49), but note that the more a character's elements are in balance, the more he is in harmony with the universe and the higher his life force.

To conclude this stage, work out the character's Renown (see the chapter on Experience and Renown at p.243). His initial Renown value is equal to his highest Skill Level.

Taos, Combat Techniques and Magic

Your character may master a specific weapon, or be wise in the ways of the Tao : note on your character sheet the Combat Techniques (p.88), Taos (p.77) and Magic (p.96) that he has acquired during his education.

Even more than his Aspects or Skills, it is these factors which make a character a genuine hero, for these are the extraordinary powers that mark him out from ordinary men. Each player has **15 points** to buy these for his character.

Background

Finally, without doubt the most important stage from the point of view of your personal engagement, find a name for your character, give him a past, make him more than a set of numbers and bring him to life.

The Game Master may wish to guide your choices in these matters to ensure they fit with the adventures that lie in wait for the characters, particularly the adventure suggested in this book, and will use the characters' backgrounds as a basis to decide what equipment to give them.

Although this is the last step in the creation of a character, take some care over it, since when it comes to playing the game, there is a world of difference between a blank, soulless character and a vivid, living being.

Character types

The heroes of Qin are above ordinary mortals, and use the world of the Warring States as the setting to inscribe their own legends into history. Whether classic figures from popular tales, or extraordinary individuals, they personify the spirit and virtues of the great warriors, the great thinkers and the great mystics. The epic tales

and official histories of the period provide a great many models for character creation.

To guide you through this step in creating your character, there follows a list of character types based on the various common trades, crafts and professions of the time of the Warring States. We have also provided you with seven pre-generated characters. You can either use the character types to guide you in creating your own hero, or if you cannot wait, step right into the shoes of one of the pre-generated characters.

Through this free character creation system, you should be able to bring almost any type of hero to life in a matter of minutes.

The character types

Below is an inexhaustive list of typical trades and professions in the Warring States. For simplicity's sake we have divided them into several categories. This artificial division is only really important when it comes to the rules on Renown (p.243).

Each type is briefly described, along with a short list of the Skills, Taos and Magic techniques generally associated with it. This information should not restrict your decisions, merely serve as a guide to get you started. For example, although it would be unusual, there is no logical reason why a merchant should not have a degree of skill in Internal Alchemy. Each player is free to set his character's abilities according to his own taste. This section is intended mainly to define the basic characteristics of characters falling within each type.

Warriors

Wu xia

A *wu xia* is a martial arts practitioner whose goal in life is to improve his mastery of his chosen weapon. He will frequently live on the margins of the society of the *Zhongguo*, in the *jiang hu*. He may pursue a noble cause, or sell his fighting skills, but will always remain true to his dream of becoming the perfect warrior.

Skills : One fighting Skill of your choice, Meditation, Hand-to-Hand

Taos : Tao of the Six Directions, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands, Tao of the Invisible Sword

Magic : Some *wu xia* practise exorcism

Soldier

Whether a humble footsoldier or promising officer, each soldier will belong to the army of one of the seven

Warring States. He may be attached to a local garrison, or have received his training in a prestigious unit. He is loyal to his king, but has occasional doubts about the wisdom of certain decisions taken by those who rule his state.

Skills : One fighting Skill of your choice, Art of War, Heraldry

Taos : Tao of the Destructive Breath, Tao of the Strengthened Body

Bodyguard

A skilled fighter, blessed with a suspicious mind able to imagine all kinds of potential threat, a bodyguard owes complete loyalty to the one he has promised to protect. He would give his life to keep his word. He might be responsible for the protection of an important member of his own clan, or be employed by an important or wealthy individual.

Skills : One fighting Skill of your choice, Perception, Intimidation

Taos : Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of the Sudden Lightning, Tao of the Breath of Power

Mercenary

Ex-soldier, exiled Xiongnu, or disillusioned *wu xia*, a mercenary sells his fighting skills to the highest bidder. His loyalty can be measured by his wage. But he generally keeps to his commitments, since his best guarantee of finding work is to maintain his reputation.

Skills : One fighting Skill of your choice, Games, Horsemanship

Taos : Tao of the Strengthened Body, Tao of the Sudden Lightning, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands

Scholars and professionals

Scholar

Urbane and sophisticated, the scholar spends more time with his head in a book than developing a social life. He is a lover of learning, and often specializes in a specific area such as history, literature or astrology. His extensive knowledge enables him to gain employment with princes or ministers of the states.

Skills : Calligraphy, Bureaucracy, Science or Law, History or Literature

Taos : Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of Yin and Yang, Tao of the Inner Eye

Physician

Heir to the natural medical traditions of the ancestors or follower of the modern theories of energy, each physician devotes his life to preventing and curing

the ills of others. He is profoundly generous of spirit and is utterly dedicated to his chosen vocation.

Skills : Medicine, Empathy, Herbalism

Taos : Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of the Serene Presence, Tao of Yin and Yang

Magic : Many physicians practise Internal or External Alchemy

Courtier

Whether the scion of a noble line clinging desperately to the scraps of power left by the states, or an ambitious climber on the rungs of state power, a courtier is above all a person of remarkable social skills. He moves with ease through the corridors of power, always looking for a chance to improve his position, or to eliminate a troublesome rival, but ready to withdraw when the situation demands it.

Skills : Etiquette, Diplomacy, Bureaucracy

Taos : Tao of the Serene Presence, Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of the Breath of Power

Official

Since he rose from being a humble citizen to occupying a place in the hierarchy of his state, the official has dedicated his whole life to it. Whether mayor or scribe, adviser or chief of staff, he knows the administration well and knows how to make his mark on it.

Skills : Bureaucracy, Law, Diplomacy

Taos : Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of the Serene Presence, Tao of Yin and Yang

Tradesmen and educators

Craftsman

The craftsmen create the thousand and one objects that surround us every day, from tools to machinery, from furniture to jewelry. Whether a simple mender and fixer or a genuine artist in his field, the craftsman gives his community a certain independence, and produces merchandise for the merchants to sell in other parts of the *Zhongguo*.

Skills : Craft, Trade, Hand-to-Hand

Taos : Tao of Inspired Creation, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands, Tao of the Clear Mind

Merchant

Whether he owns a single store in the merchants' district or a chain of stores across town, the merchant has significant economic power which he can use to gain all manner of advantages from local officials.

Skills : Trade, Diplomacy, Law

Taos : Tao of the Serene Presence, Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of Yin and Yang

Shifu

By training the villagers to defend themselves against outlaws and highwaymen, the martial arts master is frequently the key to the survival of a small community. In large towns, he may assist the state authorities by providing instruction to urban defense forces.

Skills : A fighting Skill of your choice, Trade, Meditation

Taos : Tao of the Destructive Breath, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands, Tao of the Invisible Shield

Teacher

Teachers range from private tutors to university professors, and all are highly respected for their learning and culture. They instruct would-be state officials and the great thinkers of the future, and their reputation for erudition is unrivalled.

Skills : Calligraphy, History, Science

Taos : Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of Inspired Creation, Tao of the Serene Presence

Wise men

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Taoist

Each Taoist is a repository of mysterious wisdom and expert in the ways of the Tao, and follows his own mystical path by expanding his knowledge of the universe and studying the philosophy of Lao Zi. Taoists are both feared and worshipped; they are both fascinating and unsettling. They are at once a beacon of the old ways and a thorn in the side of modernizers and Legalist reformers.

Skills : Taoism, Meditation, Theology

Taos : Tao of Yin and Yang, Tao of Inspired Creation, Tao of the Serene Presence

Fangshi

Each *fangshi* specializes in one or more of the mysterious ways of the Tao. To the common people he is a magician. But while his mastery of the mysterious spells and practices of the Tao intimidates those who are not wise in its ways, he is mocked by sceptics and rational men.

Skills : One mystical Skill of your choice, Taoism, Meditation

Taos : Tao of the Strengthened Body, Tao of Yin and Yang, Tao of the Clear Mind

Magic : Each *fangshi* is acquainted with one or two of the four mystical ways of the Tao

Village elder

As intermediary between a community and the spirits who protect it, the village elder uses his modest magical powers to help his neighbors and to attract the blessings of the gods to them.

Skills : Craft, Taoism, Theology

Taos : Tao of the Breath of Power, Tao of Yin and Yang, Tao of the Serene Presence

Magic : Village elders often know several spells from Exorcism or Divination

Village healer

The village healer has learnt a few medical techniques and can prepare some medicines and ointments. The role of healer is played usually by a herbalist or a witch.

Skills : Medicine, Herbalism, Science

Taos : Tao of Inspired Creation, Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of the Inner Eye

Magic : Village healers know some basics of External or Internal Alchemy

Travelers

Messenger

The messenger travels far and wide across the *Zhongguo* carrying important messages and valuable objects. He takes pride in his work, and has learnt to fight and to extract himself from tricky situations. His work is fraught with danger, but he lives for the challenge and the excitement that it brings.

Skills : Horsemanship, one fighting Skill of your choice, Survival

Taos : Tao of the Six Directions, Tao of the Light Step, Tao of the Serene Presence

Traveling salesman

The traveling salesman moves from town to town, buying low, selling high, always on the lookout for his next profit. He may specialize in a particular type of merchandise, or take any opportunity that comes his way, and his network of contacts and business acquaintances come in extremely handy.

Skills : Trade, Bureaucracy, Games

Taos : Tao of the Strengthened Body, Tao of the Serene Presence, Tao of Yin and Yang

Wandering artist

Whether actor, dancer, musician or story-teller, or even a bit of all those things, the artist wanders from village to village plying his trade and entertaining the people. Most artists earn just enough to keep a roof over their head and food in their stomachs, and many hope to attract the attention of a rich patron who might give them a more comfortable life. Others, however, feel it their duty to bring their art to all the citizens of the *Zhongguo*.

Skills : Music or Acting or Dance, Seduction, Languages

Taos : Tao of the Serene Presence, Tao of Inspired Creation, Tao of the Hidden Shadow

Vagabond

Roaming the highways of the Warring States, the vagabond visits hundreds of towns and villages, sees all the wonders of the world, and loves his life above all for the great feeling of freedom that the settled people will never have.

Skills : Eloquence, Languages, fighting Skill of your choice

Taos : Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of the Six Directions, Tao of the Hidden Shadow

Artists

Armorer

The armorer is master of the forge, and works with bronze and iron to make all of the weapons and armor needed by the ever-growing armies of the Warring States. The artist in him yearns to create a weapon of legend, the sword or halberd that will make his name known throughout the *Zhongguo* and be wielded by the greatest of heroes.

Skills : Forge, Craft, Learning (metallurgy)

Taos : Tao of Inspired Creation, Tao of Yin and Yang, Tao of the Strengthened Body

Sculptor, painter, etc

Whatever his discipline, the professional artist uses his work to give voice to his feelings and to the aspirations of his clients. His dream is to create an immortal work, which will leave his mark on history and bring him one step closer to immortality.

Skills : Arts, Legends, Meditation

Taos : Tao of Inspired Creation, Tao of the Clear Mind, Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands

Horse trainer

The horse trainer is passionate about his work, breeding and training the most noble steeds to feed the insatiable demand from merchants, princes and armies. Some trainers follow the ways of the Xiongnu, a nomadic

race made famous through their riding skill, and are more comfortable around their horses than their fellow men.

Skills : Horsemanship, Trade, Herbalism

Taos : Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of the Light Step, Tao of the Invisible Shield

In the shadows

Outlaw

Most outlaws do not become that way by choice, but by the cruel workings of fate. Driven from their homes, they become highwaymen and attack the very rich men who cheated them out of what little they had. They prey mainly on merchants and officials, both for personal profit and the sweet taste of revenge.

Skills : A fighting Skill of your choice, Horsemanship, Survival

Taos : Tao of the Strengthened Body, Tao of the Destructive Breath, Tao of the Six Directions

Spy

Whether working for a prince or for a state, for a secret order, or on his own account, a spy makes it his business to be in the right place at the right time. He gathers all manner of information and lives in constant fear of being unmasked.

Skills : Perception, Stealth, Theft

Taos : Tao of the Hidden Shadow, Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of the Six Directions

Assassin

Assassins work in many ways, from the silent art of poison to the mighty clash of swords. In these troubled times, they are guaranteed to find customers willing to pay a handsome price for the removal of a troublesome rival. In performing such a useful and valuable service, the assassin has little difficulty dealing with his conscience.

Skills : Stealth, a fighting Skill of your choice, Herbalism

Taos : Tao of the Hidden Shadow, Tao of the Destructive Breath, Tao of Yin and Yang

Thief

The prevailing distribution of wealth leaves a lot to be desired : some have far more than they can ever use, while the thief never has enough. State justice, although swift to act and brutal in its punishments, is insufficient to dissuade him from his chosen path.

Skills : Theft, Stealth, Climbing

Taos : Tao of the Inner Eye, Tao of the Hidden Shadow, Tao of the Six Directions

Aspects

What they are

In Qin, each character is defined by five Aspects, which represent his essential and innate qualities as a hero. The five Aspects correspond to the five Elements of the Tao, the building-blocks of the universe, matter, and life.

The five Aspects, Metal, Water, Fire, Wood and Earth, define the innate abilities and the basic structure of the character, but also indicate his affinity with the universe and its Elements.

A character's body is defined by Metal and Water, while his Mind is defined by Fire and Wood.

The important point from a rules perspective is that each time a player performs a Test, he must rely on one of his Aspects. Each is described below :

Metal (Yin)

Description of the Element : Metal is cold and dry, a hard, slender and cutting element. It is also strong and solid.

Temperament : Metal corresponds to an active and open-minded temperament which is also sure of its own clearly-defined ideas.

Characteristic : Metal is the **martial attribute**, a measure of a character's readiness to fight, including his strength, his resilience and his warlike spirit.

Water (Yin)

Description of the Element : Water is cold and wet, representing the liquid state, the free flow of matter, and the primordial environment of all life. It is a stable but changeable element, able to take on all forms.

Temperament : Water is the reflection of a calm, inward-looking temperament, marked by great sensitivity, dreams and imagination.

Characteristic : Water is the **physical attribute**, the measure of a character's agility, speed and suppleness.

Fire (Yang)

Description of the Element : Fire is hot and dry, representing the combustion of matter, the point at which it is destroyed or transformed. It changes everything, and raises it to another level.

Temperament : Fire corresponds to a dynamic, ambitious and aggressive temperament, which is expressed through physical domination and spiritual elevation.

Characteristic : Fire is the **social attribute**, the flame that burns deep within a character, his charisma, intuition and artistic inspiration.

Wood (Yang)

Description of the Element : Wood is hot and wet, a living and unstable element. It is resourceful, and flexible, but can also be broken.

Temperament : Wood corresponds to a flexible and adaptable temperament, but one which is prone to anxiety and instability in times of insecurity.

Characteristic : Wood is the **mental attribute**, representing the intelligence, ingenuity, memory and perceptiveness of a character, as well as his ability to concentrate and think deeply.

Earth (Balance)

Description of the Element : Earth is cold and dry, representing the solid state, where matter condenses and settles.

Personality : Earth corresponds to a nervous temperament, where a fragile physical form conceals profound and complex mental activity.

Characteristic : Earth is the **mystical attribute**, equivalent to the sixth sense, will and inner strength, the link between the character and the metaphysical forces of the universe, and the Tao itself.

Setting values for a character's Aspects

Each player has **14 points** to distribute between the five Aspects. Humans can have a value of between 1 and 5 for any given Aspect, according to the table below.

Each point devoted to a specific Aspect increases the value of the Aspect by 1, up to a maximum of 5.

NB : Remember that each of your characters is a hero, and that this is reflected in the exceptional nature of his attributes. An average human, that one might meet in any street of any town of the Warring States, will have a value of 2 in each of the Aspects, or a basis of 10 points.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Weak Aspect</i> |
| 2 | <i>Average Aspect</i> |
| 3 | <i>Strong Aspect</i> |
| 4 | <i>Heroic Aspect</i> |
| 5 | <i>Legendary Aspect</i> |

Gifts and Weaknesses

As you know now, all the characters in Qin are heroes, chosen to fulfill an extraordinary destiny. Their exceptional abilities and understanding of the ways of the Tao alone suffice to set them apart from the mortals of the *Zhongguo*.

However, the system of Gifts and Weaknesses provides an extra dimension by which a character can be given an added touch of individuality. Each character can be given a Gift, a favor of the gods that marks him out for great things. But since all things in the universe must be in balance, each character will also suffer from a Weakness, a physical or mental defect which will hamper him in his quest but also make him more human.

But the characters are not the only ones to be endowed with Gifts. The principal NPCs of the world of Qin, together with certain exceptional beings, will also have received a blessing of the gods. But in every case, a Gift will be balanced by a Weakness.

The Gifts

A character's Gift should be chosen with care, since it will not only give the character a clearly-defined advantage over other characters, but also provide added definition to his personality and assist you in deciding how to play him. For example, a *da xia* blessed with the Gift of the Presence of the Phoenix will be sociable and at ease in negotiations, while one who is Beloved of Nature is likely to become a loner, uncomfortable in company and urban environments.

The Gifts represent blessings from Heaven. Each player should choose **one Gift** for his character from the list below.

Agility of the Monkey : The character loves to climb and has no fear of heights. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Climbing Test, and choose between the two results.

Beloved of Nature : The character has a natural affinity with one of the natural environments of the *Zhongguo* (choose one from forest, steppes, high plains, mountains, etc). Once in every session he can immediately redo a Survival Test connected to that environment, and choose between the two results.



Ease of the Courtier : The character is at his ease in the upper echelons of state society. Once in every session he can immediately redo an Etiquette Test, and choose between the two results.

Blessed by the Dragon-Kings : The character is at home upon large expanses of water. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Navigation Test, and choose between the two results.

Unsettling Beauty : The character has a perfect physique, according to the prevailing standards of beauty in the Warring States. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Seduction Test, and choose between the two results.

Luck of the Hare : The character has outrageous good luck and fate often smiles on him. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Game Test, and choose between the two results.

Courage of the Tiger : Little frightens this character. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Test to overcome fear (eg. of a supernatural creature) or to withstand intimidation, and choose between the two results.

Breastplate of Bronze : The character has a tough, muscular body. Once in every session he can deduct his Metal value from damage caused by an attack, as if the blow had slightly missed its target.

Acuity of the Kilin : The character notices details and spots connections between events and the physical elements associated with them. Once in every session he

can immediately redo an Investigation Test, and choose between the two results.

Gift of Nezha : The character is almost ambidextrous, being almost at ease using his left hand as his right for everyday purposes. When handling an object with his weaker hand, his penalty is -1 instead of -3.

Child of the Shadows : The character is an expert at finding a hiding place in his immediate environment. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Stealth Test, and choose between the two results.

Favorite of Wen Chang : The character is widely-read, and a quick learner. The player chooses one area of expertise from Law, Taoism, Bureaucracy and Literature. Once in every session the character can immediately redo a Test relating to this Skill, and choose between the two results.

Strength of the Ox : The character has immense physical strength. Once in every session he can immediately redo any Test relating to an action requiring great strength, such as lifting a harrow, carrying a boulder, tearing a nailed-down lid from a wooden crate, or breaking down a door, and choose between the two results.

Claws of the Tiger : The character was born with a blade in his hand. Once in every session he can add his Fire value to the damage he has caused with a blade.

Heir of Sun Zi : The character has the strategic brilliance of the great generals of old. Once in every session he can immediately redo an Art of War Test, and choose between the two results.

Inspiration of the Gods : The character has the soul of the artist. The player chooses which Skill this Gift applies to (Music, Singing, Painting, etc). Once in every session the character can immediately redo any relevant Test, and choose between the two results.

Inspiration of the Tao : The character is a master in every aspect of his chosen craft. The player chooses which field this Gift applies to. Once in every session the character can immediately redo a relevant Craft Test, and choose between the two results.

Tongue of Tsai Chen : The character is a skilled wordsmith and chooses his words with precision. Once in every session he can immediately redo an Eloquence Test, and choose between the two results.

Linguist : The character is quick to learn the various languages and dialects of the *Zhongguo*. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Language Test, and choose between the two results.

Hand of the Monkey : The character is blessed with dexterity and sleight of hand. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Theft Test, and choose between the two results.

Mask of the Demon : The character can take on a threatening appearance and find the weak point of his opposite number. Once in every session he can immediately redo an Intimidation Test, and choose between the two results.

Memory of the Zhongguo : The character is well-versed in the history of the Warring States and the ancient dynasties. The player chooses which Skill this Gift applies to, from History, Legends and Heraldry. Once in every session he can immediately redo any relevant Test, and choose between the two results.

Spirit of Horses : The character is loved by horses, and has a unique feel for them. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Horsemanship Test, and choose between the two results.

Paw of the Bear : The character possesses great skill in wielding heavy weapons. Once in every session he can add his Earth value to the damage he causes with such a weapon.

On The Shell of the Turtle : The character loves water, and feels at home in any watery environment. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Swimming Test, and choose between the two results.

Placidity of the Turtle : The character is in complete control of his emotions. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Meditation Test, and choose between the two results.

Presence of the Phoenix : The character is deft in argument and grasps the issues at stake in any negotiations. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Diplomacy Test, and choose between the two results.

Eye of the Snake : The character is a born actor. Once in every session he can immediately redo an Acting Test, and choose between the two results.

Health of the Rat : The character has a strong constitution. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Resistance Test against either an illness or a poison, and choose between the two results.

Sharp Senses : The character's five senses are sharper than those of the common man. Once in every session he can immediately redo a Perception Test, and choose between the two results.

Sense of the Tao : The character feels vividly the essence of the Tao. The player chooses which Skill this Gift applies to, from Internal Alchemy, External Alchemy, Divination and Exorcism. Once in every session he can immediately redo a relevant Test, and choose between the two results.

Feline Grace : The character is remarkably flexible, and in complete control of his body. Once in every session he can immediately redo an Acrobatics Test, and choose between the two results.

Audacity of the Phoenix : The character has exceptional self-confidence. Once in every session he can immediately redo any Test whose ST is at least "Very Difficult" (11). He is bound by the second result.

The Weaknesses

Weaknesses can be even more important than Gifts in influencing how you will play your character. Certain Weaknesses merely reflect a particular way in which the character tends to behave, and involve no practical limitation from the point of view of the rules. But others, for example, allow the Games Master to oblige a player to redo a Test. In this way, a character's Weakness can cause a success to be turned instantly into a failure.

The Weaknesses exist to counterbalance the Gifts, and represent mischievous twists of fate. Each player chooses **one Weakness** from the list below.

Alcoholic : The character needs to drink alcohol on a regular basis. He is so dependent on it that for each day that he fails to drink enough, his ST for all actions is increased by +1. An inebriated character suffers the same penalty until he sobers up.

Amnesiac : The character cannot remember anything about his past. Whether through psychological shock or a serious injury, he has no idea who he is or where he comes from.

Ascetic : The character follows strict teachings which place significant limits on his life. His personal code is extreme : he may reject all material possessions, have an unusual diet, follow his principles to the letter, or have taken a vow of chastity.

Blessed by Chang-E : The character is unusually attracted to persons of the opposite sex. He falls in love easily, and loves deeply, but his heart is soon won by another and he never manages to maintain a serious relationship.

Loudmouth : The character is an inveterate talker and loves to tell stories, often just for the pleasure of hearing his own voice. Often his mouth runs away with him. Once in every session, the GM may ask him to redo an Eloquence or Diplomacy Test.

Code of Honor : The character follows a personal and rigorous code of conduct, which he applies to all aspects of his life. He will not hear of anything that would require him to act against his convictions. He may for example refuse to take an enemy by surprise, or to lie. And he will tend to be intolerant of those whose lives are not as disciplined as his.

Curiosity of the Rat : The character cannot control his curiosity, and feels obliged to see what is happening, to interfere in others' business, or to listen at keyholes, even when it means danger.

Disgrace of Fu Xing : When a tile falls from a roof, and the players want to know who was underneath it at the time, this character saves them the effort of drawing lots. He is a disaster at games of chance. Once in every session, the GM may ask him to redo a Games Test. The GM may also arrange matters so that the character is regularly assaulted by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

Mind of the Hare : The character is in another world, and easily surprised. Once in every session, the GM may ask him to redo a Perception Test.

Pride of the Rooster : The character irritates everyone he meets with accounts of his real or imagined qualities. He is excessively proud and self-confident, and never refuses a challenge. He tends to be patronizing towards those he considers his inferiors, namely just about everybody.

Air of the Snake : The character exudes a chilling aura which earns him the distrust of others. Animals feel ill at ease in his presence : dogs bark, and horses snort. Once in every session, the GM may ask him to redo any Test relating to an animal (Horsemanship, Training etc).

Haunted Soul : The character's nights are tormented by the visitations of a ghost, who murmurs opaque advice and deprives him of sleep. The ghost may be driven away by an exorcist, but will usually return after a week or two. The character regains energy at half the normal rate, receiving one Chi point for every two hours' sleep, and one Breath of Life point for every two nights.

Impetuosity of the Horse : The character is hot-blooded, quick to overreact to the slightest insult or provocation, and prone to violence. Once in every session, the GM may ask him to redo a Meditation Test.

Loyalty of the Dog : In friendship and in love, the character is loyal to a fault. He will do all in his power to come to the aid of his companions, and would never betray them. He is quick to excuse those who take advantage of him, and slow to reconsider his commitment to them.

Curse of the Five Poisons : The character suffers from a rare disease that requires him to sleep at least ten hours a day. If he fails to do so, the STs for all of his actions are increased by +1 until he gets a proper night's rest.

Curse of Zhu Rong : The character is engaged in a personal quest for vengeance and will allow no-one to come between him and the object of his hatred. He is ready to abandon or betray any of his companions if he thinks it will bring him closer to his goal.

Sickly : The character has a weak constitution and falls ill easily. Once in every session, the GM may ask him to redo a Resistance Test against a disease or a poison.

Misogynist/Misandrist : The character is extremely intolerant of the opposite sex, demeaning them at every opportunity and never missing a chance to show his or her superiority over them. Once in every session, the GM may ask the character to redo a Test relating to a Skill in the social domain and involving an encounter with a member of the opposite sex.

Naïve : The character is gullible and finds it difficult to tell when people are lying. Once in every session, the GM may ask him to re-roll an Empathy Test.

Obsessive-compulsive : The majority of the character's time is spent in the pursuit of a personal and rather peculiar quest. He may be obsessed with tasting local delicacies, keeping himself clean, or finding a missing loved one. Once in every session, when he is engaged in an activity unconnected with the object of his obsession, the GM may ask him to redo any Skill Test.

Phobia : The character is terrified by an everyday object, being or phenomenon, such as blood, snakes, crowds, storms or the dark. Whenever the object of his phobia is around, the STs for all of his Tests are increased by +2.

Clown : Whatever he does, people find it difficult to take the character seriously. Once in every session, the GM may ask him to re-roll a Bureaucracy or Diplomacy Test.

Wanted : One or more of the states have put a price on the character's head : state authorities and bounty hunters are on his trail, and his freedom is under constant threat.

Impure Blood : The character is visibly of barbarian or foreign stock. Many of the inhabitants of the *Zhongguo* will treat him with intolerance, mistrust or even hatred. Whether half-blood, Xiongnu, or from even further afield, he will find acceptance hard to come by.

Lookalike : The character closely resembles a well-known figure of the *Zhongguo*, which may bring him all kinds of difficulties.

Hard of hearing : The character cannot hear very well. The GM can ask the player to redo any Perception Test involving hearing.

Timidity of the Kilin : The character is shy, uneasy in company, and will never make the first move to get to know someone. Once in every session the GM may ask him to redo a Seduction or Intimidation Test.

Short-sighted : The character has problems with his sight, and can only vaguely make out the details of his the world around him. The GM can ask him to redo any Perception Test involving his sight.

Skills

The Skills are simply what the character can do, his areas of expertise and ability. Most Skills derive from the education and training that the character received in his home state before coming of age, and his experience in his chosen occupation. Others are related to the character's personal attributes or his activities outside his occupation.

Below is a list of the General Skills, being those which are the most commonly available to the inhabitants of the *Zhongguo*. These already create a wide range of possibilities for your characters, but you might feel the need to create other Skills. So it is by no means an exhaustive list.

Skill Levels

A character's ability in respect of each of his Skills is defined according to a hierarchy of Skill Levels.

There are seven such Levels : Beginner, Apprentice, Competent, Expert, Master, Legendary and Godlike. The Skill Level value is used to adjust the result of a Yin/Yang Die roll during a Test involving the relevant Skill.

Beginner : The character has not yet acquired the basic principles of the Skill. Those Skills marked with an asterisk are complex areas of learning which require a significant period of study. In such cases, if a character does not have at least Apprentice Level, then he simply cannot succeed in the relevant action and there is no point in him doing the Test. For all the other Skills, a character can rely on his instincts or what he may have picked up along the way and do a Test. But in doing such a Test, he can only use his value in the relevant Aspect and can in no circumstances obtain a Yin/Yang effect. If the Test produces a double then the result is 0, although that may be enough for a success.

Beginner Level has a value of 0.

Apprentice : The character knows the rudiments of the Skill and has received some basic training. He performs each Test in the normal way, as described in the section on how the game works (p.56).

Apprentice Level has a value of 1.

Competent : The character regularly uses the Skill, maybe even in the context of his occupation.

Competent Level has a value of 2.

Expert : The character is recognized as one of the leading practitioners in his region. He may even teach the basic principles of the Skill and train Apprentices.

Expert Level has a value of 3.

Master : The character's name is known throughout his state, where he is considered one of the highest authorities in his field.

Master Level has a value of 4.

Legendary : A character who has this Skill Level is ready to become a living legend in his field. Only the most celebrated heroes of the history of the *Zhongguo* have ever reached this level.

Legendary Level has a value of 5.

Godlike : The character's Skill Level is such that he can rival even the gods and immortals of the World of Heaven.

Godlike Level has a value of 6.

Giving your character Skills

Each player has **15 points** to buy Skills at the Levels of his choice.

How to spend your 15 points : Each Skill Level costs a certain number of points set out in the table below. For any particular Skill, each Level must be purchased separately, and the individual cost of acquiring each Level added up. So for example, to reach Expert Level in a particular Skill, a player must spend 10 of his 15 points (1 + 3 + 6). No character can have a Skill Level higher than that of Expert on creation.

Skill Level	Apprentice	Competent	Expert
Cost	1	3	6

The Skills

There follows a list of Skills divided into five categories, being the five domains of ability corresponding to the five Elements of the Tao (Metal, Water, Fire, Wood, and Earth).

Don't forget that Beginner Level doesn't necessarily mean that the character is completely incapable of carrying out the action. Except in cases where the Skill is marked by an asterisk, the character at Beginner Level can still try to do a Test based solely on his luck and instinct (and only using the relevant Aspect).

Some Skills, such as Craft and Survival, require the character to specialize in a specific area. A player can of course buy such a Skill several times and give his character abilities in different facets of the Skill.

Martial domain (Metal)

Art of War : The character has studied the great battles of history and knows what strategies and maneuvers will bring the best out of his troops in the context of a pitched battle.

Bangshu (stick) : This Skill enables a character to use a long or short stick as a weapon.

Hand-to-Hand : This Skill covers a mix of boxing and wrestling, and the following principle applies : "When at distance, strike with the foot and the fist ; when in close combat, grip and throw".

Chuishu (mace) : This Skill involves the use of heavy blunt weapons such as hammers, mallets and maces.

Daoshu (dagger) : All weapons which resemble daggers in size and shape, including short swords and hatchets, fall under this Skill.

Dunshu (shield) : This Skill covers the use of the various types of shield.

Gongshu (archery) : This Skill enables a character to use any type of longbow.

Improvisation : A character can rely on this Skill to use everyday objects, such as a strip of cloth, a pair of chopsticks, or a fan, as effective weapons.

Jianshu (fencing) : This covers ability with all types of swords and sabers.

Throwing : This Skill enables a character to throw weapons such as daggers, darts, or spears, and even to use everyday objects as missiles.

Qiangshu (spears, etc) : This Skill covers not only spears, but also halberds and long axes.

Nushu (crossbow) : The crossbow is an peculiarly complex weapon : for it to be used effectively requires this Skill.

Physical domain (Water)

Acrobatics : This Skill is a measure of the person's ability to perform complex and challenging physical maneuvers, such as dangerous jumps and balancing on tightropes. A character with this Skill can reduce by half the damage he suffers in a fall by doing an Acrobatics Test whose ST is equal to the distance fallen in yards.

Craft (specialization) : Choose which specific craft your character has learnt, from a wide range including pottery, rope-making, leatherwork, carpentry, weaving, bow-making, cooking, farming, animal-breeding, and many more.

Stealth : This is how we describe the ability to move without making a sound, to pass by without being seen, to conceal objects or to hide.

Horsemanship : The character can ride horses and indeed any other animal that has been trained to carry people, such as camels and mules. He also knows how to take care of such animals, and to train them.

Climbing : This Skill enables a character to climb walls and to shin up trees and ropes. The Success Threshold of the action will depend on the gradient, the presence of footholds, and any equipment the character might have to hand.

Dodging : This Skill is often used in combat where it is essential to avoid being hit by a blow or a missile. But it is also vital when a character wishes to get out of the way of an avalanche or the charge of a knight. Whether he was successful in dodging the threat or not, the character always ends up on the ground a few steps away from his original position.



Forge * : This exceptionally important craft includes not only the ability to forge swords and spearheads, but also to create the specific metals needed to make weapons, armor and other objects. But before the Skill can be used, the character will need a workshop and the right tools.

Theft : This Skill covers, in particular, pickpocketing, counterfeiting, and picking locks.

Swimming : Includes the ability to stay afloat, tread water, move quickly across the surface of the water and to swim underwater.

Survival (specialization) : The character is comfortable in the wild and can survive there for long periods. He is skilled in tracking and hunting. Choose a particular environment, such as jungle, forests, deserts, oceans, or the steppes.

Social domain (Fire)

Arts (specialization) : A character may have a specific type of artistic Skill, be it painting, sculpture, poetry, theater, or a type of your choice.

Acting : An actor can play roles not only on the stage but also in everyday life. A character with this Skill can use it to lie convincingly or to disguise himself as another.

Trade : This is a broad Skill, involving both an understanding of the habits and ways of the merchant class and the ability to set up, manage and run a commercial concern. But it may also be useful in assessing the value of objects and haggling. Such situations operate as follows : each character performs an Opposition Test of Fire + Trade. The winner gains a price adjustment of 5% for every point in his margin of victory, up to a maximum of 30%.

Dance : The character knows the steps and moves involved in most of the popular and courtly dances of the Warring States.

Diplomacy : This Skill reflects the character's ability to broker compromises between parties in conflict situations, to deal with disagreements in the most peaceful manner possible by finding mutually acceptable solutions, and sometimes to escape from dangerous situations without resorting to violence.

Eloquence : The character is persuasive in argument, and knows how to present and develop the right arguments in order to impose his point of view.

Etiquette : Thanks to this Skill, a character will be comfortable in society, and know how to behave at court, at official ceremonies, and indeed in most social situations.

Heraldry : This Skill involves knowledge of the emblems and symbols of the different states, army regiments and guilds.

Intimidation : This Skill can be used to terrify others into action, whether through impressive physical strength or a threatening way with words. An attempt to intimidate another character may be countered with an Opposition Test, where the object of the attempt tries to resist through a simple Earth Test.

Games : The character knows the rules and techniques of most popular games, whether card games, dice games, games of chance or games of skill, as well as the noble games of go and chess. He may also try to cheat, but if so the ST of his Test is increased by +1. If his opponents suspect something, they may perform an Opposition Test of Wood + Games to uncover his ruse.

Languages * : All characters speak their mother tongue fluently, and each new language acquired by a character represents a specific Skill. It may be the language of another state, a local dialect, a barbarian tongue or even a secret language.

Music (specialization) : The character plays an instrument, has an impressive command of the repertoire associated with that instrument, and even composes and performs his own pieces. Singing can be chosen as a specialty.

Seduction : This Skill refers to the art of attracting the attention of others and of winning their love and desire. A character may use his physical, artistic or intellectual charms for the purposes of seduction.

Mental domain (Wood)

Architecture * : This Skill enables a character to plan and design different types of building in harmony with their environment and according to prevailing standards. It also enables a character to devise and draw up plans, and to construct fortifications.

Bureaucracy * : The character knows how and where to find official information and documents, and knows how to work the administrative machinery of the states in order to attain his objectives. He understands the functions of the various ministries and royal authorities and the structure of the administrative hierarchies, knows the correct form of address for governors and mayors, and so on.

Calligraphy * : The character can read and write, and understands not just the meaning but also the delicate aesthetic of the complex written language of the states. His Skill is not just a medium for the communication and preservation of information, but also a means of artistic expression. It is also useful in deciphering ancient texts from the time of the old dynasties. And while most officials can read and write, such knowledge is extremely rare in other sectors of society.

Herbalism : This Skill refers to the knowledge of plants, herbs and other natural products used by alchemists, physicians and pharmacists to create all manner of medicines, dyes and poisons. A character with this Skill can also recognize and identify plants in the wild, and analyze their properties.

History : This Skill involves knowledge of the history of the *Zhongguo*, from its key events, to its reigning dynasties, to its founding myths.

Investigation : Much sought-after among judges and police authorities, this Skill involves deciphering clues, making connections between different facts, and interrogating and torturing suspects. Any activity involving a search or an inquiry will rely heavily on this Skill.

Literature * : This Skill has two components : the ability to dream up vivid stories and commit them to text in clear and appealing language, and the knowledge of the classic works of the Warring States.

Law * : A character with this Skill understands both the laws and the legal systems of the different states, and can draft legal texts and grasp the basic principles of Legalism.

Medicine * : Knowledge of prevailing medical principles and techniques can enable a character to establish diagnoses, treat illnesses, heal wounds, and understand what caused a death. This Skill includes first aid, acupuncture and massage.

Navigation * : The character understands the procedures and methods associated with the maintenance and running of a ship or boat, and can drive one.

Perception : This Skill covers the normal use of a character's five senses, including any action involving listening, observing, or identifying flavors.

Learning (specialization) : The player must indicate in which field his character is an expert. It must be a specific and clearly-defined area, such as "fashion", "local history", "names and achievements of the great heroes of old", "forestry", "philosophy", "geography", or "Xiongnu tribes".

Science * : This Skill involves expertise in areas as diverse as mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry and astrology.

Mystical domain (Earth)

External Alchemy * : This refers to the science of transformation of matter and the search for immortality.

Internal Alchemy * : This is that branch of Taoist practice through which immortality can be attained by meditation and fusion with the forces of nature.

Divination * : This includes the various methods through which mortal men can see the future and communicate with spirits and earthly deities. It also involves knowledge of *feng shui*, the science of harmony between human constructions and the forces of nature.

Empathy : This Skill is one part psychology to one part intuition, and can be explained as the ability to understand the emotional situation of others, to feel what they are feeling, and to tell whether they are lying.

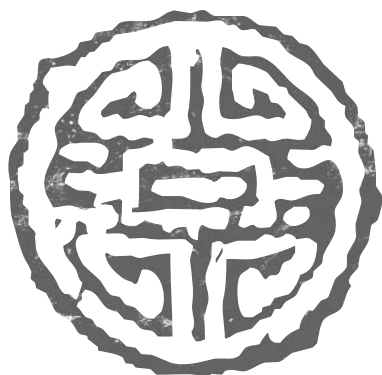
Exorcism * : The Skill of Exorcism provides a way into the world of evil spirits, including ghosts, *jiang shi* and demons, and an understanding of the means necessary to fight them.

Legends : The character knows the mythology and popular tales of the Warring States, and can use his knowledge to relate a particular legend to particular places, names or objects that he may come across. And many legends have more than a grain of truth.

Meditation : With this Skill, a character can clear his mind of all things, or unite his soul with nature, and thereby regenerate his inner power.

Taoism * : This Skill involves a global understanding of the tenets of Taoist philosophy and the basic principles of Taoist religious belief.

Theology : This refers to knowledge of the theoretical bases of the main religions, their holy books and sacred rituals. It includes knowledge of the many gods and immortals of the World of Heaven, not just their names but their personalities, their powers and their domains of influence.



The Secondary Aspects

Despite their name, these Aspects are just as important in gaming terms as the main Aspects, since they are central to the resolution of certain issues in the rules. The four Secondary Aspects are Chi, Passive Defense, Breath of Life and the character's Renown.

Chi

Chi is the essential, universal and eternal force. It is the breath of creation that emerged from the Tao and flows through the universe and each of the ten thousand beings and things.

Each character has a particular quantity of Chi, which orders and energizes the microcosm of the universe that is his body and which he can actively use.

A character's stock of Chi is represented by a points total. The higher the total, the bigger the character's stock of Chi, and the greater his aura of power and control. Certain fantastical creatures, and a few legendary humans, have an almost limitless stock of Chi.

A player can use his Chi points to perform actions within the scope of his Taos or Combat Techniques, or to master the mysterious ways of the Tao. But should a character's stock of Chi become negative, the consequences are very serious.

Calculating your character's Chi

This is done as follows :

1 – Use the values for the character's different Aspects to work out his Balance, and then find his corresponding Basic Chi figure in the table below.

2 – Multiply this Basic Chi figure by the character's Earth value.

3 – Multiply the result by the character's Skill Level in his best Skill.

Finding the Basic Chi

Add up the character's values in Metal and Water (which represent his Body). Then add up his values in Wood and Fire (representing his Mind). Subtract the lower figure from the higher figure. The result is the character's Balance.

Body (Metal + Water) – Mind (Fire + Wood) = Balance

OR

Mind (Fire + Wood) – Body (Metal + Water) = Balance

Within each Level there are several Breath of Life boxes, which are basically equivalent to a character's life points.

Each time a character is damaged, from whatever cause and in whatever way, the player must cross off one of the boxes for every damage point he suffers, starting with the boxes in the Normal Level. Once all the boxes in a particular level have been crossed off, the character moves down to the next Breath of Life Level.

Calculating your character's Breath of Life

Just as the Tao is made up of the combination of two complementary and interdependent forces, Yin and Yang, so the health of a man depends on harmony and unity between his Body and Mind.

To calculate a character's Breath of Life, and how many boxes to place in each Level, first do the following sums :

- Add up the character's values for Metal and Water (which represent his Body) and then his values for Fire and Wood (representing his Mind). Subtract the smaller total from the larger total to find the character's Balance.

Body (Metal + Water) – Mind (Fire + Wood) = Balance

OR

Mind (Fire + Wood) - Body (Metal + Water) = Balance

- Next, add up the character's values for Metal and Earth to find his Resistance, an characteristic which will be important when it comes to the character trying to fight off illness or resist the effects of poison. See the section on injuries and treatment at p.71 for more details.

Metal + Earth = Resistance

Finally, see the table on the next page. It is the combination of the two values found above (Balance and Resistance) which will determine the character's total number of Breath of Life boxes.

As you can see, the more a character's physical and mental Aspects are in balance, the greater his life force.

The second table shows the number of boxes to be placed in each Breath of Life Level on the basis of the maximum Breath of Life total as calculated above.

Balance Basic Chi

0	4
1-2	3
3-5	2
6-8	1

Passive defense

According to Taoist philosophy, to not act is a form of action. Thus the warrior who is not consciously defending himself will still instinctively dodge and block blows, sometimes without even noticing.

Each character has a value for Passive Defense, which represents how difficult it is to hit him. It is equivalent to a Success Threshold to be met or surpassed by the opponent's Attack Test.

A character's Passive Defense value is equal to the sum of his Water value and his Wood value plus 2. (**Water+Wood+2**). See the section on combat rules at p.64 for more details on how Passive Defense works.

Breath of Life

The Breath of Life is the basic life force of any character, the inner breath that protects his health and enables him to endure pain and injury throughout his life.

There are five **Breath of Life Levels**, which reflect the current state of health and general physical condition of a character. They are as follows : Normal, Bruised, Slightly Injured, Seriously Injured and Fatally Injured.

Breath of Life

<i>Resistance</i>	<i>Balance</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1 – 2</i>	<i>3 – 5</i>	<i>6 – 8</i>
<i>2</i>		<i>17</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>3 – 4</i>		<i>19</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>5 – 7</i>		<i>21</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>8 – 9</i>		<i>23</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>10</i>		<i>25</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>19</i>

Distribution of the Breath of Life

<i>Breath of Life</i>	<i>Normal</i>	<i>Bruised</i>	<i>Slightly Inj.</i>	<i>Seriously Inj.</i>	<i>Fatally Inj.</i>
<i>11</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>13</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>15</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>17</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>19</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>21</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>23</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>25</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>

The Breath of Life adjustment

If a character is injured, he becomes less effective and loses some of his abilities.

As a result, each Breath of Life Level has a corresponding adjustment, ranging from 0 to +5. This adjustment is added to the Success Threshold of any actions that the character attempts, as a penalty that lasts until the character has been healed or recovered naturally.

Renown

Our characters are heroes; their quest is to become legends.

A character's Renown is a measure of his fame throughout the territory of the Warring States. The higher the figure, the more widely recognized the character.

A character is little-known when he is created, and his initial Renown value is equal to his highest Skill Level.

Breath of Life adjustment

<i>Normal</i>	<i>ST + 0</i>
<i>Bruised</i>	<i>ST + 0</i>
<i>Slightly Injured</i>	<i>ST + 1</i>
<i>Seriously Injured</i>	<i>ST + 3</i>
<i>Fatally Injured</i>	<i>ST + 5</i>

The Taos

The Taos are nothing less than the laws of the universe, the very foundations of all things.

As heroes, our characters can harness the forces of creation to their own will by channeling their Chi through the Taos in order to perform great deeds that will go down in legend.

Brief overview of the Taos

The Taos are organized in a similar way to the Skills, according to different Ability Levels. Each Level brings with it certain effects, that characters can use to improve their actions and perform wonders.

To use a Tao, a character must use a number of Chi points equal to the relevant Ability Level for the effect he wishes to add to his action.

The Taos are explained in detail in their own chapter at p.77.

Giving your character Taos

The system by which characters obtain Taos is the same as that for Skills.

During stage 5 of a character's creation, the player has **15 points** to spend on Taos, Combat Techniques and Magical Powers. A player may, if he wishes, spend all his points on Taos. But if the character is to be any kind of warrior or Taoist expert, he would be well-advised to keep some points by to purchase Combat Techniques and Magical Powers.

For the moment, the player can use his points to buy Ability Levels in one or more Taos. As with Skills, each Ability Level needs to be purchased separately and the cost is cumulative. Then the character may use any of the effects that correspond to his Ability Levels.

Ability Level	Apprentice	Competent	Expert
Cost	1	3	6

Combat Techniques

Using a weapon is not just a matter of striking blows and fending off attacks. A skilled warrior will be able to use a wide variety of thrusts and techniques appropriate to his weapon.

Brief overview of the Techniques

Each basic martial Skill enables a character to attack and block with a particular weapon. The Techniques provide the ability to perform more sophisticated moves based on the specific characteristics of the weapon, such as its size and shape.

So each Skill, and often each weapon, corresponds to a number of Techniques which can be used according to a character's Skill Level.

When a character decides to use a particular Technique in the context of a combat, the ST of his Test is increased by +1. For details on how to use the Techniques, see the section on combat rules at p.68.

The various Techniques are explained in detail in their own chapter at p.88.

Giving your character Techniques

Each character has a total of **15 points** with which to acquire Taos, Combat Techniques and Magic. We saw above how to spend points in acquiring Taos.

The rules are basically the same for Combat Techniques, only with the following differences :

- Each Technique is related to a particular Skill Level, and this Skill Level will determine how much it will cost to acquire the Technique. A character can of course only acquire those Techniques whose corresponding Skill Level is equal to or lower than his own Skill Level in that Skill.
- A character only pays the cost of the individual Skill Level associated with the Technique he wishes to acquire. In this context, costs are not cumulative, so purchasing a Technique that corresponds to a Skill Level of Competent only costs 3 points rather than 4.

The cost of Techniques is shown in the table below :

Skill Level	Apprentice	Competent	Expert
Cost	1	3	6

The fact that a character has one or more Combat Techniques that correspond to a particular Skill Level does not necessarily mean that he knows the Techniques from the lower Levels. Similarly, it is not necessary to know all of the Techniques in a particular Level in order to obtain one or more from a higher Level.

Magic

The Taoist religion has its roots in the age-old rituals of the priests of the ancient dynasties. In their traditional religion, gods and ancestors were worshipped through respect for the order of nature, the interpretation of symbols, and the performance of rites.

Taoism was developed by unifying the various mysterious rituals of the old around a formal structure devised in the writings of Lao Zi and other great scholars.

In the Warring States period, most of those with spells or magical powers are Taoist *fangshi*, or practitioners. They do not see the Magic of the Tao as supernatural; on the contrary, since their powers derive from their superior understanding of the relationships between the Forces and Elements of the universe, they see them as utterly natural. A view that is rarely shared by the more superstitious among the common people...

There are also numerous shamans and sorcerers, from traditional village healers to wise hermits. The Taoist *fangshi* differs from these other magicians by his formal training in the Taoist system of belief. While Taoism is far from being a formal structured religion, its practitioners all share a philosophy and objectives, perform a standard set of rituals, and practise the same magic. Sorcerers and shamans receive their training outside this system and their practices rely less on the power of ritual.

Types of Magic

In Qin, Magic is organized into four categories, being the four mystical ways of the Tao. Each way includes various mystical powers, alchemical recipes and meditation techniques, all of which can be used both by learned Taoist practitioners and humble village shamans.

The four ways are External Alchemy, Internal Alchemy, Divination and Exorcism. They are explained in detail in the chapter on Magic Techniques at p.99.

Giving your character Magic techniques

Each character starts with **15 points** with which to buy Taos, Combat Techniques and Magic.

We saw above how to spend points to acquire Taos and Combat Techniques.

The system is basically the same for acquiring powers from the four mysterious ways, only with the following differences :

- There are certain formal requirements that must be fulfilled before a character can pursue a way of the Tao. Generally, this involves possessing specific Skills at the requisite Skill Level. For example, any character wishing to become a proficient alchemist must first have a certain understanding of both Herbalism and Calligraphy. Obviously, a character must have acquired at least Apprentice Level in the mystical Skill that corresponds to his chosen way...
- Each Magical Technique is related to a particular Skill Level in the mystical Skill that corresponds to the relevant way of the Tao. The cost of purchasing the Power will depend on this Skill Level. A character can of course only acquire those Techniques whose corresponding Skill Level is equal to or lower than his own Skill Level in the relevant mystical Skill. Some Techniques also have pre-requisites in terms of Skills or Techniques to be obtained first.
- A character only pays the cost of the individual Skill Level associated with the Technique he wishes to acquire. Costs are not cumulative, so purchasing a Power that corresponds to a Skill Level of Competent only costs 3 points rather than 4.

The cost of Magic Technique is shown in the table below :

Skill Level	Apprentice	Competent	Expert
Cost	1	3	6

Birth of a character

John wants to create a character through whom to discover his own legendary destiny. He takes a character sheet and sits down with the Game Master.

While the GM explains the basic framework of the world of the Warring States, John starts thinking about what kind of hero he would like to play. The story of a noble race stripped of its birthright by state officials and bureaucrats, and condemned to bare survival through its warrior tradition, strikes a chord with him. So he begins to imagine a young swordsman, a master duellist, the latest in a long line of noble warriors. Now he has his basic concept, and sees that it fits right into the *wu xia* template.

The Game Master approves the choice, and both move on to the technical side of creating the character.

Since John wants his character to be an exceptionally gifted swordsman, he divides his **14 points** between the Aspects as follows : Metal 4 ; Water 3 ; Fire 2 ; Wood 2 ; Earth 3. The even distribution should ensure that his character can adapt to various types of situation.

Next, John complains that **15 points** isn't very much, but goes on to choose the following Skills for his character :

- Competent in *Jianshu* (Level 2 / Cost = 4 points) : the character has acquired the fencing skills of his father.
- Competent in Horsemanship (Level 2 / Cost = 4 points) : the family kept a few horses and the character has become a good rider.
- Competent in Perception (Level 2 / Cost = 4 points) : the character is sharp-eyed and vigilant, and few things escape his notice.
- Apprentice in Acrobatics (Level 1 / Cost = 1 point) : this Skill can be used in combination with Taos to carry out great deeds.
- Apprentice in Meditation (Level 1 / Cost = 1 point) : this Skill will enable the character to regenerate his Chi more easily.
- Apprentice in Calligraphy (Level 1 / Cost = 1 point) : the character learnt to read and write from the family's private tutor.

John has now spent his 15 Skills points.

He turns to the list of Gifts and Weaknesses, and chooses the following :

- Claws of the Tiger : the character is a fearsome adversary, and each blow of his sword can prove fatal.
- Disgrace of Fu Xing : in spite of all his skill and expertise, luck does not smile on him. The fates must have decided to test him.

Next comes the calculation of the character's Secondary Talents on the basis of his Aspects and Skills.

- **Chi** : the sum of the character's Body Aspects is 7 and the sum of his Mind Aspects is 4. The Balance of 3 is equivalent to a Basic Chi of 2. When this figure is multiplied by his Earth value (3), and then by his highest Skill Level (2), it gives a total Chi of 12.
- **Passive Defense** : the character's Water value is 3 and his Wood value is 2, giving a result of 7.
- **Breath of Life** : as seen above, the character's Balance is 3. Since his Metal value is 4 and his Earth value 3, his Resistance is 7. Using the first table on p.50, these two figures produce a total of 17 Breath of Life boxes. The second table shows that these are distributed as 6 in Normal, 5 in Bruised, 3 in Slightly Injured, 2 in Seriously Injured and 1 in Fatally Injured.
- **Renown** : John's highest Skill Level is Competent, which has a value of 2. At the start of his adventures, therefore, his character will have a Renown of 2.

The next step is to explore the character's knowledge of the ways of the Tao. Since John does not need his character to be a *fangshi*, and has not purchased a single Skill from the mystical domain, he devotes 12 of his **15 points** to purchasing the following Taos :

- Tao of the Six Directions (Level 3 / Cost = 10 points) : John would like his character to be able to surprise his enemies with unbelievable acrobatic feats.
- Tao of the Light Step (Level 1 / Cost = 1 point) : not only can the character move with great skill, but he can also do so on all surfaces.
- Tao of Yin and Yang (Level 1 / Cost = 1 point) : in light of his bad luck, John would prefer his character to be able to turn the tables on destiny now and again.

The character's Skill Level in *Jianshu* allows him to purchase Combat Techniques in that Skill at Apprentice and Competent Levels.

- John decides to give his character the following Techniques : Direct Hit, Complete Block, and Trap. This costs 3 points, the first 12 having been spent on the Taos.

Finally, John gives some thought to his character's background. He decides to call him Xian.

Xian was born of a noble family, deprived of its power and privileges and reduced to eking out a meager existence on its few remaining lands in the North of Chu. His father had once been a renowned swordsman who led great armies into battle for his king. But then he lost the favor of the state, and withdrew to his land to reflect on past glories, before finally deciding to instruct his son in the swordsman's art. As the years went by, Xian came to resent the constant bitterness of his father and the stifling atmosphere of the family home. He saw that that place held no future for him, and resolved to leave. Ever since that day, he has wandered the roads of the *Zhongguo*, refining his fighting skills and hiring them out to the highest bidder. Xian is a joyous and optimistic soul, who savors every moment of his life of adventure. Recently, on the road to Handan, he met a mysterious young woman. She goes by the name of Heart of Jade, but her name appears to conceal just as many secrets as her silences. But she is a fellow wanderer of the world of martial arts, and Xian appreciates such intriguing company, particularly in such an attractive form...

On the basis of this little story, John and the GM will decide what equipment Xian will have. As a knight-errant, it is unlikely he will have anything of great value beyond his precious sword.

Heart of Jade had not said a word since the incident at the inn the night before. Xian was usually extremely talkative, but for the moment he felt at ease in the silence.

And yet she intrigued him, and she yearned to get to know this unexpected traveling companion. He thought back to that strange evening. The fat man had deserved his punishment, but the customers of the inn would be certain to inform the authorities, and they would be unlikely to listen to his version of the story. He had acted justly, and had no regrets. But he feared that the incident could make his life very difficult. Xian sighed and laid another branch on the campfire. He felt tired. They had walked for most of the night, sleeping briefly in a field before setting off again at first light. The next night, with no village in sight, they had finally decided to camp at the edge of a dark forest.

Heart of Jade was sat some distance away, on a large mossy boulder in the long grass. She stared straight ahead, but her bright green eyes seemed to see nothing. Under her breath she intoned ancient words to a hypnotic rhythm. The young wu xia strained to hear. She was repeating strange phrases, incantations, as if reciting a poem or a prayer.

Heart of Jade felt blood beating in her eyes, in her breast. She listened with her soul. For the dragon was speaking with her and she was repeating his words. Xian could only understand the odd word here and there. He took her words to be an ancient, long-forgotten language, which made him still more curious. "Force... Tao... Energy... Vengeance."

The fire had gone out during the night. A cool morning breeze stroked Xian's cheek. He sighed, and opened his eyes. A light mist drifted among the trees surrounding the tiny clearing where they had slept. The young man heard Heart of Jade moving behind him. She too had just woken up. He heard someone blowing on the embers to

rekindle the fire. Who ? Xian closed his hand around his scabbard, threw off his rough woolen blankets, and leapt to his feet. Heart of Jade must have heard the same sound, and reacted the same way, for now she stood by his side, her long loose hair cascading about her face. With a dagger in her hand.

Kneeling before the fire, from which he had coaxed a thin plume of gray smoke, was a man dressed in a loose-fitting black cloak and a broad straw hat pushed back from his head. He took three bowls out of a worn cloth bag, decorated with bones. His smooth complexion made it difficult to estimate his age. His dark, laughing eyes contrasted with his austere appearance. Next to him lay a short wooden sword. Xian and Heart of Jade remained on their guard, but exchanged quizzical looks. The man smiled and spoke in a deep and soft voice.

"Good morning. It is a cold morning, I felt the need for some heat and some company. The roads of Zhao can be so tedious at times."

He flopped down on his behind and plunged a wrinkled hand into his bag. The two warriors stiffened their guard, but the man drew out two hunks of bread and began to crumble them into a bowl. He was missing his left index finger.

"Who are you, sorcerer ?" asked Xian.

Heart of Jade continued to scrutinize the stranger, seeming to see things which were invisible to the wu xia. He noticed that she had relaxed imperceptibly, although she stayed vigilant and kept up her guard.

"My name is Three Truths. Sit down and share my meal. While we eat, I shall satisfy your justifiable curiosity. In fact, I am... in answer to your question, young man, and to begin with, I am not a sorcerer. I am in fact a fangshi, an exorcist to be precise. Are you hungry ?"

The Rules

55

Just as the universe is ordered by the decrees of Heaven, so Qin, the role playing game, is organized according to its own body of rules which define what the characters can and cannot do. This body of rules is known as the Yin/Yang System. This chapter provides explanations and illustrations of how the rules work.

It should not be forgotten that the gaming system set out below is no more than a tool for the GM and the players, and should not take precedence over having fun or improvising. The rules should only really be used when absolutely necessary, when a situation cannot be resolved between the GM and the players, and an impartial decision is needed.

How the game works

When a character attempts an action in which he cannot fail, he will succeed.

When a character attempts an impossible action, he will fail.

Between these two extremes, there is an infinite range of possibilities. Whenever a character attempts an action in which he can either succeed or fail, he performs a dice roll known as a Test.

For such Tests, Qin uses a special die called the **Yin/Yang Die or YyD**, to be rolled by either the Games Master or the players as necessary.

The Yin/Yang Die

The Yin/Yang System is one of the simplest, but it still has its own peculiarities which set it apart from the rules systems in other role playing games.

The System uses only one type of die, the Yin/Yang Die. This rather unusual die is in fact a combination of two ten-sided dice : one black Yin Die and one white Yang Die. The Yin/Yang Die is used in all situations involving recourse to the rules. Each roll of the die represents the essential element of chance, destiny and luck inherent in every action.

How to use the Yin/Yang Die :

Roll the two ten-sided dice and subtract the lower result from the higher to get the final result of the roll, which can of course never be a negative number.

<i>Success Threshold</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Example</i>
3	<i>Child's Play</i>	<i>Doing up shoelaces</i>
5	<i>Easy</i>	<i>Climbing a knotted rope</i>
6	<i>Average</i>	<i>Hitting a target with a knife from three yards away</i>
9	<i>Difficult</i>	<i>Hitting a flying bird with an arrow</i>
11	<i>Very difficult</i>	<i>Finding a hiding-place in a warehouse in daylight</i>
13	<i>Heroic</i>	<i>Crossing a river of lava by jumping from stone to stone</i>
15	<i>Legendary</i>	<i>Winning ten games of go against the ten greatest masters of the Warring States simultaneously</i>

A zero is a real zero, and not a ten, as in many role playing games. The final result will be a number between 0 and 9.

Example : A series of Yin/Yang Die rolls produces the following results :

Yin Die 4 / Yang Die 2 : YyD result = 2

Yin Die 1 / Yang Die 8 : YyD result = 7

Yin Die 3 / Yang Die 3 : YyD result = 0

Simple Tests

The term Simple Test refers to the situation where a character attempts an action which is not opposed by anyone.

In such cases, the GM sets a minimum level of difficulty called the Success Threshold (ST) of the action.

If the character's Test result is higher than or equal to the ST, he succeeds in the action. If not, he fails.

The difference between a successful Test result and the ST is known as the Success Margin. In many cases, this figure allows the players to gauge the degree of success obtained, for the higher the margin, the more brilliantly the character has performed the action.

Aspect + Skill + YyD higher than or equal to the ST = Successful action

Successful Test result – ST = Success Margin

The table above is intended to give you an idea of the more common Success Thresholds. The Games Master should use it as a guide, and adapt these STs according to the way in which the characters approach a situation or challenge.

Example : Xian has walked for several days. He decides to stop for the night, and needs to find a clearing in which to set up camp. But since the woods are dense and the night is dark, the Game Master asks him to do a Test of Wood + Survival (forest) with an ST of 7.

Tests involving no Skill

Most Tests rely on specific Skills. But a character may need to attempt an action which is not covered by

Tests

Before a character can complete an action, the Game Master may require the player to perform a successful Test. He should only do so when he thinks there is a chance that the action will fail or if the action meets with opposition. In such cases, the player needs to do a Test to decide the outcome of his attempted action.

Tests are based on the characters' inherent characteristics, which we call Aspects, and in most cases also on their abilities, or Skills. A player usually does a Test by adding up his Aspect value, his Skill Level where appropriate, and the result on the Yin/Yang Die.

For every action that is attempted, the player and the GM should decide together which Aspect and possibly which Skill are most relevant. The possible combinations of Aspects and Skills that can apply to actions are virtually infinite.

A Test generally works as follows :

Test = Aspect (+ Skill) + YyD



any Skill and requires him only to use an Aspect (relying on his memory, or his strength, etc.).

In such cases, simply decide which Aspect applies, set an ST, and do a Test. This is what is referred to in the rules as a Pure Aspect Test.

Success Margins are calculated in the same way as for normal Tests involving the use of a Skill.

Example : Xian had some difficulty, but finally succeeded in finding the perfect clearing in which to spend the night. But in order to be able to stretch out fully, he needs to move a heavy boulder. Since no Skill applies, the Game Master asks him to do a Test using just his Metal value.

Tests involving several Skills

Some actions may require a character to use more than one Skill. For example, fighting on horseback involves both the Skill of horseriding and a relevant martial Skill.

In this sort of case, the character chooses from all those which could apply to the action the Skill in which he has the lowest Skill Level, and does the Test using that Skill. For a chain is only as strong as its weakest link...

Example : Xian begins to get hungry and fancies some game. He decides to take a quick look in the nearby woods to spot animals for his dinner, but needs to be as quiet as possible in order not to scare off his prey. This action will involve at least two Skills : Perception, to spot an animal, and Stealth, to make as little noise as possible. Xian is Competent in Perception, but only a Beginner in Stealth, so will have to do the Test using the latter...

Opposition Tests

At times, two or more characters might have different or opposing objectives, and the actions that they attempt will conflict.

Example Continuous Tests

Bureaucracy	Obtaining a meeting with a minister		
	ST 7	DT 30	Interval : Three hours
Calligraphy	Copying out a classic text of average length		
	ST 5	DT 20	Interval : Three hours
Herbalism	Preparing an ointment for insect bites (where the character already has the necessary ingredients)		
	ST 7	DT 25	Interval : Five minutes
Diplomacy	Achieving a successful negotiation between two neutral ambassadors		
	ST 7	DT 35	Interval : One day
Craft	Creating a ceramic object of average size		
	ST 5	DT 20	Interval : One hour
	Braiding thirty yards of thick rope		
	ST 5	DT 15	Interval : Ten minutes
	Making good quality leather boots		
	ST 7	DT 25	Interval : Two hours
	Assembling a large wooden crate		
	ST 7	DT 30	Interval : One hour
	Weaving a one-piece chang pao		
	ST 7	DT 30	Interval : Three hours
	Carving twenty arrows		
	ST 7	DT 25	Interval : Thirty minutes
	Making a shield for an footsoldier		
	ST 9	DT 30	Interval : One hour
Forge	Forging a blade for a sword or a pole for a halberd		
	ST 9	DT 30	Interval : Three hours
	Forging a ploughshare		
	ST 7	DT 20	Interval : Three hours
Horsemanship	Breaking a wild colt		
	ST 9	DT 40	Interval : One day

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In these situations, the ST is not set by the Game Master but by the person opposing the action, and the Test becomes an Opposition Test. It might be an armwrestle between two burly bodyguards or a spy attempting to evade the attentions of a sentry.

When two characters act in opposition to each other, the procedure is as follows :

Each protagonist involved in the Opposition Test performs a Test whose ST is equal to the result obtained by his opponent(s).

Whoever gets the highest result wins, and his margin of victory can be assessed by the difference between the Test results.

If all of the opponents obtain the same result, there is no clear winner and the confrontation must continue into the next round.

Example : Xian is resting after a long day's journey. He sees a shadowy form approach him, and hears a cracking behind a bush. The Game Master asks Xian to do a Test of Wood + Perception, and performs his own Test of Water + Stealth.

Xian obtains 5 and 3, so his Yin/Yang Die result is 2 and his overall result is 6 (2 (Wood) + 2 (Perception) + 2 (Yin/Yang Die)).

The GM obtains 8 and 3, so his Yin/Yang Die result is 5 and his overall result is 9 (3 (Water) + 1 (Stealth) + 5 (Yin/Yang Die)). So the GM wins.

Xian cannot make out what is behind the dense bushes. Probably an animal attracted by the crackling of the fire. Or let's hope so...

NB : This Opposition Test system is used in combat. However, the rules on combat also involve many other elements, so a combat cannot be reduced to a simple opposition roll.

Continuous Tests

Some actions may require a character to devote a considerable amount of time and effort to their completion. Examples include forging a sword, preparing a poison, or deciphering a long coded text.

In such cases, the Games Master may decide that a Continuous Test is more appropriate than a Simple Test. He will have to set not only an ST, but also a Difficulty Threshold (DT) and an Interval.

The **Difficulty Threshold** represents the time and energy needed to complete the action.

The **Interval** is the time gap between two Tests.

First, the player does a normal Test against the ST and, if successful, notes down his Success Margin. Next, after the Interval has elapsed, he does a second Test and, if he is successful again, adds his new Margin to the first one. He carries on in this manner until he reaches the DT fixed by the Game Master, at which time the action is complete.

If the player is unfortunate enough to obtain a critical failure at any stage of the process, he makes a serious mistake and has to start from scratch.

If on the other hand, the player obtains a Yin/Yang Balance, he can double the total of his Margins so far and add on the result on the dice.

The table on the opposite page gives examples of Difficulty Thresholds and Intervals for various common actions. The Game Master should use it as a guide, and adapt the DTs and Intervals according to the way in which the characters approach an action requiring a Continuous Test.

Example : Xian's feet are swollen and aching, and he decides to make up a simple balm using various herbs he has with him. The GM decides that this requires a Continuous Test and sets the ST at 5 (not a particularly difficult task), the DT at 15 (since it will require a certain amount of time to make up five batches of the ointment), and an Interval of five minutes.

The young warrior sets to work and rolls his dice. He is a Beginner in Herbalism and his Wood value is 2. His first dice roll brings an 8 and a 3, for a result of 5, and together with his Wood value his overall result is 7. A success, with a Success Margin of 2. Five minutes later, Xian does another Test. He rolls an 8 and a 1, giving 7, achieving an overall result of 9 and a Success Margin of 4. His progress is good, since he already has 6 points. A little while later, while he is working on the potion, he manages a Yin/Yang Balance, thus doubling his total so far and getting a new total of 12. He will obviously finish the brew after the next Interval, and so will have completed the whole job in just fifteen minutes.

Specific Results

There are two special results on the Yin/Yang Die that produce unusual results, either a pathetic failure or a brilliant success.

Yin/Yang Balance

If the result on the Yin/Yang Die is a double of any number other than zero, the character obtains a critical success, one that surpasses all his hopes. The harmonious balance of his Yin and Yang wins the favor of the gods, and the action is an automatic and extraordinary success.

In addition, the character immediately recovers a number of Chi points equal to the number on the dice (between 1 and 9), without of course going beyond his maximum.

If the action is the kind to which a Success Margin is relevant, the character's Margin will be equal to the number on the dice.

Example : Xian decides to leave the clearing and hunt for his dinner. He spies a nice plump rabbit and decides to kill it by throwing a stone. The Game Master sets him a Test of Metal + Throwing with a ST of 7. The result on the Yin/Yang Die is a 6 on both dice, which means a Yin/Yang Balance and a critical success. The stone hits the rabbit right between the eyes, and the rabbit dies instantly. Xian can enjoy his meal all the more having regained 6 Chi points.

Critical failure

If the result on the Yin/Yang Die is a double zero, the character's Yin and Yang forces are so weak that he loses the assistance of the laws of the universe and his action is an automatic and catastrophic failure.

Not fatal, but catastrophic. Should the character obtain such a terrible result in the middle of a combat, his weapon may break or get stuck in a tree trunk, or he may suffer a heavy fall. If the character is trying to evade the attentions of a guard, he may trip and knock over a bronze gong. The result is unfortunate and the consequences must be equally so.

In any case, any character who obtains a critical failure immediately loses five Chi points, without going into the negative.

Example : Xian has cut up his rabbit and decides to make a fire to cook it. But the heavy rains have made all the wood damp, and the Game Master sets him a Test of

Summary

This table summarizes the various possible results that can occur in oppositions, and the corresponding practical outcomes for the characters.

First character	Second character	Outcome of the opposition
Normal success	Normal success	Higher result wins
Normal success	Critical failure	First character wins easily
Yin/Yang Balance	Normal success	First character wins
Yin/Yang Balance	Yin/Yang Balance	Higher result wins
Yin/Yang Balance	Critical failure	First character wins easily

Wood + Survival (forest) with a ST of 9. The result on the Yin/Yang Die is a double zero, a staggering failure. Not only can Xian not light a fire, but while he is collecting the wood, a fox steals his rabbit ! And of course he loses five Chi points.

Automatic success

To reduce the number of dice rolls, the Game Master may decide to apply the following rule :

If the sum of a character's Aspect and Skill applicable to a particular situation is equal to or greater than the ST, the action is an automatic success, but the player may elect to roll in order to get a higher Success Margin.

NB : This rule can never be used in the context of a combat.

Using Chi

Chi is the universal force, the mystical energy, the foundation of the world and the breath of the elements of creation. It exists in every object and every living being. It is both the source of life and an emanation of life. While it cannot be seen or touched, the citizens of the Warring States believe firmly in its existence. For the mighty deeds of the great heroes of old and the magical powers of the *fangshi* are proof enough that a mysterious energy is at work in the world.

But it is one thing to believe in the Chi, and quite another to master it. The characters must seek to do so by understanding the true nature of the world, comprehending its inner laws, and finally learning to use those laws in order to become a legend.

The different uses of Chi

Chi points are used above all in activating the effects of Taos, performing Combat Techniques, and using Magic.

In order to use his Chi for one of these purposes, a character must channel this basic energy and use his superior understanding and vision of the structure of the universe to form it to his will. Individuals capable of achieving this are still rare, and their mastery of the Chi places them above the other inhabitants of the Warring States and gives them that special touch of legend.

Using the Taos

Each time a character uses a Tao in order to obtain a specific effect, he must spend a number of Chi points equal to the level of the desired effect. If he uses several Taos together, the Chi costs of the different effects are cumulative.

Using Combat Techniques

If a character wishes to use a secret thrust, one of the ancient combat techniques by which divine warriors distinguish themselves from mortal swordsmen, he must spend a certain number of Chi points. The number will be given in the description of the relevant Technique, but note that secret thrusts will only appear in the Qin screen.

Using Magics

The practice of Exorcism, Divination and both External and Internal Alchemy also require the use of Chi. Each Magic Techniques has a corresponding cost in terms of Chi points, which a character must spend before using it.

Using inner strength

Finally, a character may use his Chi to improve his chances of success in an action, by finding his own unique connection with the universe and drawing from the well of his inner strength.

Before a character starts a Test, he must state that he will be using Chi points to improve his chances of success. He can add a bonus to the final result of his Test up to a maximum of his Earth value. In exchange, he must spend a number of Chi points equal to twice the value of the bonus. This use of Chi enables a character either to carry out an action that otherwise he might find very difficult, or to improve his Success Margin. Note that this use of Chi can be combined with one or more of the others.

What happens when Chi runs out

When a character draws on his inner force he gains the ability to perform heroic deeds. But after a time, he may find himself in the awkward situation of having run out of Chi, or even of having dropped into the negative.

Zero Chi

The Chi is a reserve of internal energy controlled by the character. If out of obligation, or mere carelessness, or by some mysterious magic, a character loses his last Chi point, he loses an essential part of his life force.

The practical effect is that since the character can no longer rely on his Chi points to perform superhuman exploits, he loses his heroic status and becomes once again a mere mortal.

Negative Chi

This is a character's last chance for glory, to use his final breath in a noble attempt to transform a desperate situation into a famous victory.

Even when a character has zero Chi points, he may still use them and drop into the negative. But to do so immediately converts each point of negative Chi into a damage point and an equivalent reduction in the Breath of Life. For to draw on one's deepest inner reserves, to find strength and mystical power from out of nowhere, and so perform a great exploit, must have a price. Some may even give their life to accomplish one final tragic deed that will go down in history.

Chi and the Yin/Yang Die

The stock of Chi can be affected by particular results on the Yin/Yang Die.

Chi and Yin/Yang Balance

A character who obtains a Yin/Yang Balance during any Test immediately regains a number of Chi points equal to the figure on the dice. But he cannot go beyond his maximum.

Chi and critical failure

Where a Test results in a critical failure, not only does the character fail in his attempted action, but he also immediately suffers the loss of five Chi points, together with the terrible consequences that may follow. But his Chi cannot go into the negative by this means.

Using Taos

When a character undertakes an action, he may decide to apply one or more Taos to the action in order to improve it, make it more spectacular, or indeed just to be guaranteed success, since certain Taos are able to transform a failure into a success.

Whenever a character decides to incorporate a Tao into an action, he must state that he is doing so, spend the required number of Chi points, and then apply the relevant effect to the result of his action.

Remember that in using a Tao, a character must spend a number of Chi points equal to the level of the relevant effect, and that if several effects are used, the cost is cumulative.

Example : After a good night's rest on an empty stomach, Xian takes to the road. But after just a few minutes, he is lost. To find his way again, the Game Master sets him a Test of Wood + Survival (forest) with an ST of 9. The dice produce 8 and 2, giving a final result of 8 (2 (Wood) + 0 (Survival) + 6 (Yin/Yang Die)). Xian is keen not to lose himself even deeper in the forest, so decides to use the first effect of the Tao of Yin and Yang, allowing him to adjust the result on one of the dice by 1 upward or downward. He uses this effect at level 1, and so spends 1 Chi point transforming the 2 into a 1, which brings his final result to 9. Xian meets the ST and finds his way back onto the right track.

The Taos are listed in their own chapter at p.77.

The combat system

The almost permanent state of war between the states, the hordes of outlaws and highwaymen roaming the land, and the dominance of the martial arts in the culture of the *jiang hu* all ensure that the world of the Warring States is one where physical combat is extremely common. A combat may take the form of a friendly challenge between two fencing masters, a raid by a thieving party on innocent travellers, or a bitter fight to the death between soldiers on a battlefield.

Combats are the most intense part of a game, where characters stake their pride and their life on victory, and so need very precise and fair rules.

This section deals with the rules on combat. The basic system is relatively straightforward, being based on Simple Tests and Opposition Tests. There are a few extra features, which exist either to add more realism and detail to the exercise, or to simulate the outlandish exploits of the greatest heroes of the time of legends. We recommend that you read through this chapter a few times and then test out the system in order to check that you have understood the rules fully. With a little practice, you'll soon know them by heart.

NB : Combats deserve particular attention on the part of the players. Don't allow them to get bogged down in a routine of basic attacks and blocks. Spend some time on the descriptions, draw the players in, and inspire them to dream up all kinds of unforgettable scenes and moves. The Combat Techniques and Taos should provide a good source of inspiration for this process of creating phenomenal combats. But look also to the imaginative settings of popular tales of Ancient China and the devices used in the better martial arts movies from Hong Kong.

Time

From the moment a combat begins between one or more characters and their opponents, the Game Master must supervise each side's movements with care and control their actions with precision. Combats are divided into rounds and exchanges.

Rounds

We define a round as the time needed for an average character to complete a single action, generally two or three seconds.

However, most characters can use their mastery of the martial arts to accomplish several actions in a round. The number of actions a character can complete in a single round depends on his Skill Level in the main martial Skill that he intends to use in that round, according to the following table :

Skill Level	Number of actions per round
Beginner	1
Apprentice	2
Competent	3
Expert	4
Master	5
Legendary	6
Godlike	7

Whenever at least one character has more than action per round, the round is divided into several exchanges.

Exchanges

Each combat round is divided into exchanges. The number of exchanges depends on who is taking part, there being the same number of exchanges as the maximum number of actions for the most active participant. An exchange can be defined as the time that elapses between the action of the character with the most initiative and the action of the character with the least.

In any given exchange, a character can undertake a single action of his choice. Examples of actions include moving, drawing a weapon, thrusting with a sword, and aiming and firing an arrow.

In this context, an action is any movement or complex activity attempted by a character.

The **only exception** to the single action rule is for defense. It is possible for a character to attempt a defensive action even when he has already completed an action in that exchange, or intends to do so later in the exchange. However, such Active Defense requires the character to give up an action in a later exchange.

Distance

Combat distances

Whatever weapons are being used, all combats take place within one of two arbitrarily defined areas, namely the close combat zone and the distance combat zone.

The close combat zone is the space within which all parties involved in a combat can attack each other effectively. This zone's size is defined by the movement of the characters and the range of their weapons and in the zone, each can strike the other and be struck by his blows. "Close combat" refers to a situation where all those involved in a combat are in this zone.

Whenever an attacking party is too far from his opponent to engage him in close combat, both parties are said to be in the distance combat zone. In such a situation, the combat is reduced to an exchange of missiles and shots until one party manages to move sufficiently close to their opponent to enter the close combat zone.

Moving during combat

The parties do not stop moving once they have begun a close combat. They change their position, alter their stance, shift their guard, attack, block, and dodge in each and every exchange,

But so long as none decide to end the combat, they remain within the close combat zone.

The following movements are allowed during a combat round :

Move : The character decides to move a distance equal to or less than his Water value in yards. This movement is his action for the current exchange. He can use the effects of a Tao to increase this basic distance or to obtain a particular type of movement (a leap or unseen movement). The character does not attempt to touch an opponent.

Engage opponent : This movement is specifically designed for when a character intends to get closer to an opponent and engage him in hand-to-hand combat. The basic distance that can be moved is determined in the same way as above, and can be increased by using certain Taos. But the movement, which constitutes one action, must stop once the character comes inside his opponent's close combat zone, at which time the parties are engaged in hand-to-hand combat.

Escape close combat : A character uses this movement to break away from an opponent, leave his close combat zone and move into the distance combat zone. He ends up at a distance from his opponent equal to the distance travelled in the movement, and his opponent must travel that distance in order to re-engage the fleeing party in close combat.

Move round opponent : Once two parties are engaged in hand-to-hand combat, each is considered to react immediately to the movements of the other. As a result, it is not normally possible to move round an opponent in order to attack him from behind or from the side. This can only be done in one way : where a character can combine the Skill of Acrobatics with the Tao of the Six Directions, he can leap over another character. This movement constitutes a whole action, and if the character wishes to take advantage of his advantageous position in order to attack his opponent, he must use another Tao in order to have a second action. If he fails to do so, his opponent will have time to react to his spectacular movement and will turn to face him for the next exchange.

Attack from behind or from the side : It follows from the above that this sort of attack can generally only occur in one of two situations :

- Where the target of an attack is caught by surprise and has failed to notice an opponent entering his close combat zone.
- A character is fighting several opponents and some of them are positioned either behind him or to his side. These opponents can take advantage of the bonus that goes with their advantageous position.

What happens in a combat round

A combat round starts with each player telling the Game Master what his objective for that round is.

If a player's objective involves performing an action that requires a Skill other than a martial Skill, such as picking a lock, climbing a wall, or hiding, then the player uses the round to attempt that action. This will be the only action he can perform during the round, and indeed it may last longer than one round. He simply performs a Skill Test with an ST fixed by the GM.

If, on the other hand, the player's objective involves taking a step that does not require a Test, then that step will constitute only one of the several actions he can perform during the round. He may take the step during any exchange where he is allowed to act, according to his initiative status.

If the player's objective involves fighting, then he must state which martial Skill he intends to use and then work out how many actions he is allowed for the round.

Example : Xian is at an inn, peacefully occupied with his drink, when out of the corner of his eye he sees four Qin soldiers harassing a young unaccompanied lady. What begins as an ill-mannered attempt to seduce the woman soon turns into nothing more than an assault. Xian cannot let this happen and decides to intervene. Drawing his sword, he announces his intention to use his Skill of *Jianshu* : his Level is Competent, so he has three actions for this round.

Initiative

Next, each party involved in a combat round must determine his initiative score for the round. Whoever obtains the highest result has the initiative in that round and in each exchange within it.

A character's initiative score is calculated by an Initiative Test using his Water value.

$$\text{Initiative Test} = \text{Water} + \text{YyD}$$

Next, the characters perform their first actions in decreasing order of initiative. After all of the characters have had the opportunity to perform an action, the first exchange concludes and the round continues to the next exchange, during which the players act in the same order of initiative. This process is repeated until all of the characters involved in the round have used up all of their available actions.

This marks the end of the round, and a new round begins with the participants calculating a new order of initiative.

Any character who obtains a Yin/Yang Balance in his Initiative Test is considered to have an initiative score one point higher than the highest score among all the other participants.

NB : If two characters obtain the same initiative score, the character with the highest Water value wins. If they have the same Water value, their actions occur exactly simultaneously.

Example : The Qin soldiers are confident of dealing easily with the impudent Xian and returning to their prey. The combat begins and each protagonist does an Initiative Test. Xian's Yin/Yang Die result is a 3, which added to his Water value of 3 gives him an initiative for that round of 6. The Qin soldiers are slower, and obtain initiative scores of 5, 4, 3 and 3.

Actions

Once it has been determined how many actions the characters have and in what order they can act during the round, they can start to perform their actions.

Move

A character can use one action to move up to a maximum distance in yards equal to his Water value. He must, however, follow the rules set out above on moving during combat.

Catch a flying arrow or throwing weapon

A character can use an action to catch a number of arrows or throwing weapons (knives, daggers etc) equal to his Skill Level in the relevant martial Skill. So long as he has at least one weapon in his hands, he does not need to spend an action on reloading before being able to attack. He can therefore use his next action for an Attack Test.

For example, a character who is Expert in *Gongshu* can catch three arrows in one action, and use his next three actions to fire arrows before having to use an action to reach into his quiver.

Note that some Combat Techniques require a character to have more than one weapon or piece of ammunition in his hand before they can be used.

Attack in close combat

In order to hit an opponent, a character must use one action and perform an Attack Test.

$$\text{Attack Test} = \text{Metal} + \text{Martial Skill} + \text{YyD}$$

The ST for this Test will be equal to the Passive Defense score of the target. If the Test produces a success, the attack hits home, but the target can still defend himself actively.

Any offensive action may be combined with a Combat Technique, a martial Skill, or one or more Tao effects.

Example : Xian decides to take immediate advantage of his speed and attack one of his opponents straightaway. He thrusts at him with his sword, performing a Test of Metal + *Jianshu*. His final result of 10 is considerably higher than the Passive Defense total of his victim, and his attack is a success.

Attack from distance

Any missile attack, whether using any kind of bow, throwing weapon, or projectile, follows the same basic principle.

The attacker makes his attack by using an action and succeeding in an Attack Test against the Passive Defense score of his target. This basic Success Threshold may be adjusted according to various factors, notably the distance between the two parties.



Throwing weapons and bows are divided into four categories according to their range : short range, medium range, long range and extreme range. Another relevant factor is the target's cover.

If a character chooses to spend one action on taking aim, in order better to find his target in the next action, then his Attack Test will benefit from a bonus of +1. He may spend as many consecutive actions improving his aim as his Wood value, and his bonus will be equal to the number of actions spent in this way.

Active Defense

When a character is faced with an attack on target, namely when the result of an Attack Test is equal to or higher than his Passive Defense score, he may still perform an Active Defense. He will need to have at least one action left in the relevant combat round, and use that action immediately to defend himself either by dodging or blocking the blow. If the character has already taken an action during the exchange, since his initiative was higher than that of his opponent, he may still attempt an Active Defense, so long as he has an action left in the round. Similarly, performing an Active Defense does not prevent a character from acting later in an exchange if he has not yet used his action for that exchange.

As a result, so long as a character still has actions left in the round, he can attempt Active Defense against any and all attacks on him. A player must wait to see whether a blow makes it past his Passive Defense before deciding whether to turn to his Active Defense. Apart from certain Taos and Combat Techniques, this is the only means by which a character can perform several actions in one exchange (namely, one normal action and one or more Active Defenses). And the character's behavior in later exchanges is unaffected so long as he still has actions left.

An Active Defense may be either a block or a dodge. A block means that the character places his weapon or a part of his body between his opponent's blow and its target. A player will need to rely on common sense in deciding how to block : while deflecting a spear with a sword is standard practice, trying to hold back a blow from a halberd with bare hands is more than a little risky...

A dodge means simply that the character dives out of the way of his opponent's blow.

An attack from distance can only be blocked by a character using a martial Skill in which he is at least Expert. But such an attack can be dodged even by a character who is a Beginner in Dodging.

- A block is performed by a **Test of Water + relevant martial Skill + YyD**, the ST being equal to the result of the Attack Test.

- A dodge is executed by doing a **Test of Water + Dodging + YyD**, the ST being equal to the result of the Attack Test.

Example : The soldier who Xian has just successfully attacked decides to use his saber to block the blow. He performs a Test of Water + Jianshu with an ST of 10, which was the result of Xian's Attack Test. The soldier obtains a result of 8, failing to block the young man's thrust, and is hit.

Other actions

Apart from those set out above, a character can carry out other types of action during an exchange, none of which take more than a few seconds. Examples include :

- Pick up an object
- Draw a weapon
- Recover from immobilization
- Get up

Particular results in combat

Certain results on the Yin/Yang Die have particularly important effects on the outcome of combat Tests, be they offensive or defensive.

Yin/Yang Balance

A character who obtains a Yin/Yang Balance on his Attack Test makes a particularly devastating assault on his opponent, penetrating his defense easily. The attack is considered to exceed the opponent's Passive Defense score by a wide margin.

The only way for the victim to defend himself against such a blow is to obtain a Yin/Yang Balance himself on an Active Defense Test. If he does so, the two Test results are compared and the higher result wins.

When a normal attack is countered by an Active Defense Test which produces a Yin/Yang Balance, the character fends off the blow with ridiculous ease. Not only does he defend himself completely, but he gains one initiative point over that opponent in the next exchange.

Critical failure

Obtaining a critical failure in an Attack Test generally has disastrous consequences for a character, the nature of which the Games Master will undoubtedly enjoy devising. The unfortunate warrior may embed his sword in a wall, drop his weapon, or break it.

Similarly, he who suffers a critical failure in an Active Defense Test exposes himself to serious problems. Not only does he fail to block the blow but he will have to deal with other consequences such as a fall, or a dropped or broken weapon.

The hierarchy of actions

The possibility of combining Tao effects, Combat Techniques and Magi can give rise to a series of Tests representing the various attempted actions. As a result, in any given exchange, a player may end up doing a number of dice rolls in order to determine the outcome of his character's actions. In such a situation, it is worth keeping in mind the following principles :

- The various actions involved in a single exchange occur and are completed in chronological order according to their application.

- Each action is completed by means of the relevant Test.

Example : Xian wishes to leap onto a wall in order to take out an archer taking aim at Three Truths. But another opponent in his combat zone tries to attack him and obtains the initiative for the current exchange. Xian immediately uses one of his remaining actions in order to block a blow. He then uses the Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands at level 2 in order to obtain a free movement, and leaps onto the wall. With this done, he can use his main action to attack the archer. The order is as follows : Active Defense (first Test), movement (no Test needed) and attack (second Test).

- Generally, each Test is independent of all others and does not cancel out the others.

Example : Even if Xian fails in his Active Defense, he can still jump onto the wall, unless of course he is unable to do so due to having been knocked out of the combat.

- Since actions are completed immediately, any injuries suffered take effect immediately.

Example : Xian fails in his Active Defense and suffers a Slight Injury. The ST for his next Tests are all increased by +1.

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Completing actions

As soon as an action is performed, it is completed straightaway. This continues until all of the actions in a combat round have been performed and completed.

Going on to the next round

After each character has carried out his first action according to the order of initiative, the first exchange is over. Next, all those able and willing to perform a second action move on to the second exchange, and act in the same order. Then, if necessary, the players move on to the third exchange, and so on until all of the characters have used up all of their actions.

At this point, the first round is at an end, and a new round can commence with a new Initiative Test.

Damage and penalties

Damage

When a character hits an opponent, he must hit with sufficient force and accuracy to inflict damage.

Damage is calculated immediately following a successful attack, and the opponent suffers the consequences immediately, which may reduce his chances of acting for the rest of the round if he does not have the initiative.

The basic damage points caused by an attack are equal to the sum of the attacker's Metal value plus the damage associated with the weapon used.

Damage = Metal + damage by weapon

Attacking is a Yang action, so if in the Attack Test the white Yang Die gives a higher figure than the black Yin Die, the character may also add the difference between the two figures to the damage inflicted on his opponent.

Damage = Metal + damage by weapon + difference between dice where Yang Die > Yin Die

If the Attack Test produces a Yin/Yang Balance, the damage is increased by the result on the dice (from 1 to 9).

Damage = Metal + damage by weapon + result on Yin/Yang Dice

The damage caused by each type of weapon is set out in the chapter on Equipment (p.212).

Fighting with bare hands, feet and the rest of the body carries no damage bonus, since a character's natural strength is already included in his Metal value.

Once damage has been calculated, the total is subtracted from the victim's Breath of Life. For each damage point, the player must cross off one Breath of Life box, starting with those in Normal Level.

Example : Xian's attack on the first Qin soldier hit home, so he calculates what damage he has caused. In the Attack Test, the Yang Die gave a 9 and the Yin Die a 5. Total damage is therefore 4 (Metal) + 3 (damage by sword) + 4 (difference between Yin and Yang) = 11. If the dice had given the opposite result, the damage would only be 7 points (Metal + damage by sword).

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Penalties

Each Breath of Life Level corresponds to a specific penalty applicable to all of a character's future actions. This figure is subtracted from the result of any Test performed by the character while he is still at this Level.

In addition, certain Tao effects, Combat Techniques, martial Skills and Magic may be used in order to inflict a penalty on an opponent. Any such penalty is in addition to any penalty deriving from the character's Breath of Life Level.

Using Taos in combat

Just as in a normal action, a character involved in a combat who performs an combat action may choose to apply a Tao effect to his action in order to improve it, increase its effects, turn a common lunge into an incomprehensible and unstoppable strike, or transform an everyday block into an impenetrable shroud of steel.

Indeed, certain Taos are expressly designed for combat situations, such as those which allow a character to perform several actions during a single exchange, to strengthen his defense, or to use any object as a weapon. Players should be creative and inventive in the way that they use Taos during combat, and make their combats as spectacular and amusing as possible, reproducing the impossibly dynamic duels of Chinese martial arts movies and making their characters into real heroes, whose physical feats are unbelievable and whose combats are unrepeatable.

A character may use a Tao to assist him in any combat action, be it offensive or defensive, a movement or any other type of action, simply by stating his intention to use it, spending the necessary number of Chi points, and applying the appropriate effect to the result of his action.

Remember that using a Tao requires a character to spend a number of points equal to the level of the effect applied, and that where several effects are used, their costs are cumulative.

Example : Xian has just knocked his first opponent out of the combat. Keen to bring matters to a close, he decides to pick off another but the other soldiers are wise enough to stay out of the range of his sword. Fortunately, Xian's mastery of the Tao of Six Directions allows him to combine his attack with a movement of up to nine yards (his Water value times three), more than enough to catch up easily with the cowardly trio. While performing his Attack Test he uses the Tao to launch himself at his next victim, spending the necessary number of Chi points in the process.

A full list of Taos is given in the chapter at p.77.

Using Combat Techniques

The fact that a character has a martial Skill means that he knows how to use a particular weapon to attack and defend himself, but little more.

When a character reaches at least Apprentice Level in a martial Skill, he has begun to understand the subtleties of his weapon, and his blows become more efficient, more accurate, and more deadly. He can strike with more panache and block with more force.

In gaming terms, the character's increased command of his weapon is expressed through his ability to use special Combat Techniques. Each Skill Level carries with it various Techniques that a character at that Level can acquire and use. Techniques can be acquired on creation or by experience.

Once a character has learnt a Technique, he uses it by performing his Test (either an Attack Test or an Active Defense Test according to the nature of the Technique) with an ST increased by +1. This is a minimum increase ; you will see from the descriptions that certain Techniques involve a greater increase to the ST.

Combat adjustments

The ST of an Attack Test may be altered by a wide variety of factors. Where they apply, their value is added to or subtracted from the victim's Passive Defense score. These bonuses and penalties are cumulative. Some of these adjustments may be cancelled out by certain Gifts, Weaknesses or Tao effects.

Close combat

The attacker is...

ST adjustment

In an elevated position	-1
To the side of the defender	-1
Behind the defender	-2
Injured	Apply relevant penalty according to Breath of Life Level
On difficult terrain	+1 to +3 depending on the nature of the terrain
On the ground	+3
Unsighted or in darkness	+3
Using his weaker hand	+3

The defender is...

ST adjustment

Taken by surprise	-1
Immobilized	-1
Unsighted	-1
On the ground	-3
To the side of the attacker	+1
Behind the attacker	+3

Distance combat

Situation

ST adjustment

Short range	-1
Fixed or immobilized target	-1
Medium range	0
Target in cover	+1 to +4 depending on the nature of the cover
Long range	+1
Fast-moving target	+1
Extreme range	+3
Shot in the dark or blind shot	+3

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The increase to the ST can be explained by the fact that using advanced Techniques in the heat of battle requires unusual levels of concentration and focus.

Combat Techniques can be used in tandem with one or more Taos, but it is only possible to use one Technique in any given action (except when using the Combination Technique).

Example : Through his years of study and experience as a swordsman, Xian has learnt several Combat Techniques. Since his opponents are all wearing leather armor, he decides to attack them with the Direct Hit Technique, which reduces the protective properties of armor. He performs an Attack Test of Metal + *Jianshu* with an ST of his target's Passive Defense value increased by +1.

A full list of the Techniques appears in the chapter on martial arts starting at p.88.

Controlling NPCs

Non-Player Characters, or NPCs, are characters controlled by the Game Master who play a part in the game and interact with the players' characters.

From a rules point of view, not all NPCs are created or controlled in the same way, depending on how important the Game Master considers them to be in the context of his scenario. For example, the NPC who waits tables in an inn, whom the characters will only need to talk to for so long as it takes to order a meal, will not be as important for the purposes of the plot as the evil head of clan who they discover at the end of a long and breath-taking journey to be their ultimate enemy. Similarly, in combat, henchmen and hired hands will not be as strong as the characters' main opponent.

Henchmen

These are minor, unimportant NPCs that the characters will meet by chance during the course of their adventures. Examples include innkeepers, guards, soldiers, and common criminals in the pay of the criminal guilds. Their only role is to provide the GM with a handy interlocutor or opponent for the characters, and a device by which to develop the current chapter of their story. They may have strength in numbers, but generally they will present little real threat to the characters.

The purpose of Henchmen is to allow the GM to make up NPCs on the spot and control them easily, even in great numbers.

Aspects

Henchmen start with 10 points to distribute between their Aspects, with an average of 2 in each.

Gifts and Weaknesses

Henchmen have neither Gifts nor Weaknesses.

Skills

Each Henchman will have a main Skill at Competent Level and three minor Skills at Apprentice Level.

Secondary Aspects

Henchmen do not have Chi.

Their Passive Defense is calculated in the normal way (Water + Wood + 2).

They have no Breath of Life.

They have no Renown.

Taos, Combat Techniques and Magic

Henchmen cannot use Taos.

Each Henchman with a martial Skill will have one, and only one, Combat Technique at the relevant Skill Level. Most Henchmen will not have Magic, but if the Game Master needs to make up a shaman or village healer, he may grant him one or two Techniques at the relevant Level in his mystical Skill.

How Henchmen fight

Most of the cannon fodder that the characters will meet along the way will be gangs of five or six Henchmen created according to the principles set out above. Here's how the GM should control Henchmen during a combat :

- **Group Initiative** : When several Henchmen attack a character, the GM performs a single Initiative Test for the whole group. For that Test he uses the highest Water value from among the Drones, and adds to the Test result a bonus of +1 for each additional Henchman after the first attacker. This is an optional rule ; the GM may prefer to perform an Initiative Test for each Drone.

- **All together now !** : When several Henchmen join together in attacking a character, the Game Master should choose a main attacker, and use his Aspects as the basis for a single Attack Test for all the Drones. The result of this Test gets a bonus of +1 for every additional Henchman after the first attacker. If a character chooses to fight back, he may attack one or more of his opponents without incurring a penalty by reason of their number. Above all, where a character is faced with an accurate attack and wants to use Active Defense, he need only use one action to defend himself against the whole gang. This is an optional rule ; the GM may decide to perform an Attack Test for each Drone.

- **Out of action** : A Henchman does not have Breath of Life. He is considered to be out of a combat (either killed or knocked unconscious, at the character's option) when the damage he suffers from a blow exceeds his Resistance (ie the sum of his Metal and Earth values).

Example : Our hero, Xian, now faces three Qin soldiers, who are Drones. Each of them has 2 in each Aspect, apart from a 3 in Metal and a 1 in Earth. Each is Competent in his main Skill of *Jianshu*, and has Apprentice Level in his minor Skills of Heraldry, Dodging and Intimidation. They have a Passive Defense of 6 and the Feint Technique. And their Resistance is 4, so Xian has to inflict at least 4 damage points in order to take them out of action. The Games Master elects to treat the soldiers as Henchmen and control them according to the basic rules set out above. He performs a single Initiative Test and adds a bonus of +2 to the result. He then performs a single Attack Test and adds another bonus of +2 to that result. In each case, the bonus reflects the fact that the lead attacker has two men supporting him.

VIPs

VIPs are NPCs who are important to the development of the story. They may be high-ranking officials, heads of clan whose hunger for power involves them in a plan to destroy the characters, or valiant heroes who join the characters in their fight against injustice in the state.

During the creation of such NPCs, the Game Master has a completely free hand. He may give them whatever Aspect values and Skill Levels he wishes, together with any combination of Gifts and Weaknesses, Chi, Breath of Life, Taos, Combat Techniques and Magic. They may have whatever weapons and equipment they may need to fulfil their role.

Optional Rules

The following rules are all optional. While they may increase the realism of the game, the Game Master may choose not to apply them if he feels they could make matters unnecessarily slow, or if they are unlikely to be relevant to the storyline he intends to develop.

Long-term injury

The basic rule is that where a character is injured several times, the cumulative effect will prove debilitating, and he will get weaker and weaker if he fails to find a way to escape from the attack. Put simply, several Slight Injuries will eventually drag a character down to Seriously Injured level.

However, it is also possible for a character to suffer so much damage on a single occasion that he is obliged to cross off a whole row of Breath of Life, or more, and drop immediately to the next Level. If in such a case the character survives, but only at Fatally Injured Level, he will suffer a long-term injury. If he manages to recover his former strength, he may wear his scar proudly as a badge of honor. If not, he will drag his disability around like a lame mule.

To calculate the nature of a long-term injury, roll 2D10 and add up the result.

0 - 9 : *A superficial injury ; the character will have an impressive scar to keep as a souvenir.*

10 - 15 : *One part of the character's body has been slightly damaged. He may have broken a limb or joint, torn a muscle or ligament, or lost an ear. Alternatively, he may have received a blow to the head affecting his mental abilities. The ST for any physical or mental Test involving the damaged part of the body is increased by +1.*

16 - 17 : *As above, only the ST is increased by +2.*

18 : *The character has lost a crucial part of his body. He may have lost his arms, his legs, or have been blinded.*

Pulling your punches

Many combats will be nothing more than friendly challenges, or occur during martial arts tournaments where fights to the death are forbidden.

In such cases, the characters may wish to hold back their full strength, and reduce the impact of their blows.

A character may choose how much damage to inflict, being a number of points anywhere between the maximum he may inflict and half his Metal value (rounded up to the nearest whole number).

Injuries and healing

The characters have chosen a life of adventure which will expose them to many dangers. The risks they run will be as great as their exploits, and they can expect to be beset by injury and suffering from all manner of sources.

Losing Breath of Life

When a character loses Breath of Life, his body is weakened, and he suffers a penalty that applies to all his actions. The amount of the penalty depends on the relevant Breath of Life Level.

When a character crosses off his final box in Fatally Injured Level, he falls into a coma from which he can only emerge if he receives swift and effective medical attention. If he receives no medical attention for a number of minutes equal to his Metal value, he dies.

A character who has crossed off his final box in Fatally Injured Level and then suffers more damage dies instantly.

In combat

Most injuries will occur during combat. See above for an explanation of how an attack causes damage points and a loss of Breath of Life.

In a fall

No matter what acrobatic skills he has, a character who falls from great height will still risk injuring himself.

A character suffers three damage points for every block of three yards that he falls. This includes part of a block, so a fall of five yards means crossing off six Breath of Life boxes.

However, for falls up to and equal to six yards, the Game Master may allow the player to perform a Test of Water + Acrobatics, with an ST of 3 plus the height of the fall in yards (for example, a fall of three yards will have an ST of 6). If he succeeds in the Test, the character falls safely. If not, he suffers the normal amount of damage.

By suffocation

Even a hero risks dying when deprived of oxygen by being smothered, trapped in an airless place, or drowned.

A character can hold his breath for one minute for each Metal point. Beyond that time, he starts to lose Breath of Life at a rate of (10 – Metal) boxes for every thirty seconds that he is unable to take a breath. So if a character cannot escape from the cause of his suffocation, and no-one comes to his aid, death will come quickly.

By strangulation

A character is strangled when an attacker applies pressure to his throat. In this situation, the character loses two Breath of Life boxes per round, and suffers damage points equal to his attacker's Metal value for each action that his attacker spends strangling him.

By drowning

When a character is in water and has no foothold, he risks drowning as soon as he fails a Swimming Test. His first step should be to immediately repeat the Test with the same ST. If he succeeds in the second Test he floats. If not, he starts to drown and the suffocation rules apply.

The roughness of the water and the presence of a current determine both the Success Threshold of a Swimming Test and the time between two Tests to identify whether the character succeeds in keeping his head above water. This is summarized in the table below :

Conditions	ST	Interval between Tests
Still water	5	One Test only
Moderate current	7	2 minutes
Strong current, choppy waters	9	1 minute
Rapids, rough waters	11	Five rounds
Storm	13	One round

Burns

A character who suffers a burn loses a quantity of Breath of Life according to the size of the fire and the length of time spent in contact with it.

The damage caused by a flame depends mainly on its size : a candle flame is not the same as a bonfire. Burns can of course prove very painful and scars are slow to heal.

The scale below is intended to assist the Game Master in assessing the effects of a burn in terms of the damage caused per round to a character who remains in contact with the flame.

Torch	1
Brazier	2
Open fire	3
Burning coals	4
The heart of a fire	5

Disease

Many diseases prevalent in the Warring States can pose a risk to the health of the characters.

To avoid catching diseases and to fight against them, a character will frequently have recourse to Resistance Tests. A character's Resistance is equal to the sum of his Metal and Earth values.

$$\text{Resistance Test} = \text{Metal} + \text{Earth} + \text{YyD}$$

The characteristics of various diseases are described below, using the following terms.

Name : This is just the name by which the disease is most commonly known.

Contagiousness : This figure, which is equivalent to a Success Threshold, indicates how difficult it is for a character to avoid catching the disease once exposed to it. When a character comes into contact with a carrier, he must perform a Resistance Test. If he succeeds, he does not catch the disease. If not, he becomes infected. A character who obtains a Yin/Yang Balance on such a Resistance Test becomes immune to that disease for the rest of his life.

Virulence : This figure reflects the ST of the Resistance Test that a character who has already caught the disease must successfully perform in order to fight the infection.

Interval : Once a character is sick, he must perform regular Resistance Tests against the Virulence of his disease in order to determine his progress. A failure in

such a Test means his condition has worsened, and he suffers the relevant effects immediately. A success in such a Test means that his condition has improved, and the disease's Virulence is reduced by 2, or 4 in case of a Yin/Yang Balance. Once the Virulence has been reduced to 0, the character has recovered and he can start to regain any lost Breath of Life boxes.

Effects : This paragraph sets out the main symptoms of the disease and its effects in terms of loss of Breath of Life.

Some diseases

Gangrene : When serious injuries are allowed to become dirty or do not receive proper medical attention, wounds can become infected.

Contagiousness : 9

Virulence : 11

Interval : 12 hours

Effects : The character loses three Breath of Life boxes for every failed Resistance Test. The infected part of the body becomes stiff and painful, turns purple and swells up. Pus oozes from the wound. The STs for all of the victim's actions are increased by +1 (in addition to any penalty caused by the injury itself) and he may die in two days. As a general rule, the victim's only hope for survival is amputation. Even if he survives, he will be seriously scarred and permanently lose two boxes from Normal Level.

Cholera : A disease of the digestive tract usually transmitted by contaminated water. It appears in environments where little attention is paid to basic hygiene, and can spread extremely quickly to decimate populations. It has been known to strike down whole army regiments on maneuvers.

Contagiousness : 9

Virulence : 11

Interval : One day

Effects : Four Breath of Life boxes lost for every failed Resistance Test. Vomiting, diarrhea and serious, occasionally fatal, dehydration. The victim suffers a fever that causes the STs for all his actions to be increased by +1 (in addition to the penalty caused by the injury itself)

Flu : An infectious disease which spreads through the air. It is generally only a serious threat to the weaker members of society, including children and the old. Others may catch it, but usually recover after a few days in bed. But if the flu is not caught and treated in time, it can develop into pneumonia.

Contagiousness : 9

Virulence : 7

Interval : One day

Effects : The victim loses two Breath of Life boxes for every failed Resistance Test. Fever, aches and pains, sore throat, cough, general physical weakness. The STs for all of the victim's actions are increased by +1 (in addition to the penalty caused by the injury itself) due to the fever and muscle pains.

By poisoning

While the characters may occasionally be faced with disease, they will undoubtedly be exposed regularly to a range of poisons, both as poisoners and victims. Poison is a fearsome weapon in all kinds of conflict in the Warring States, and popular in all sectors of society for its silent effectiveness. As a result, the characters should come across poison on a daily basis.

The characteristics of various poisons are described below, using the following terms.

Name : This is simply the name by which the poison is known.

Virulence : Whenever a character is exposed to a poison, he must perform a Resistance Test to discover whether he can resist its effects. The Virulence figure is equivalent to the ST of that Test. If no figure is given for Virulence, the character cannot do a Resistance Test.

Mode of administration : There are four : contact (ie physical contact with the skin), ingestion (swallowing), inhalation (breathing in), and injection (direct contact with the blood).

Effects : This paragraph sets out the effects of the toxic substance on the body, and more particularly the attendant loss of Breath of Life.

Some poisons and venoms

Sleeping pills : Many plant-based sleeping pills exist, but all have essentially the same effect. The victim becomes drowsy, his vigilance is reduced, and beyond a certain dose he falls into a deep sleep.

Virulence : 9

Mode of administration : Usually ingestion, sometimes injection

Effects : Drowsiness. To recover from an average dose, a character must succeed in a second Resistance Test with an ST of 8 or sleep for around four hours.

Cinnabar : Cinnabar is a mercury compound widely used to obtain deep red dyes, and by pharmacists and alchemists. The legendary immortality pill contains, among other things, a minute dose of cinnabar. But beyond such infinitesimal proportions, it becomes a deadly poison.

Virulence : Between 7 and 13 depending on the quantity
Mode of administration : Ingestion

Effects : Nausea, stomach pains, leading to shaking and vomiting. The skin becomes pale and muscles become stiff. Death follows in a matter of minutes.

Arsenic : This favorite among poisoners appears in several forms, but is always deadly. Since the symptoms resemble those of cholera, a death can be made to appear

of natural causes. It is possible to build a resistance against arsenic by taking very small quantities on a daily basis, but it is usually only paranoid kings that feel the need to do so.

Virulence : 11 (9 in case of acquired resistance)

Mode of administration : Ingestion

Effects : Symptoms similar to those of acute gastric diseases : vomiting, diarrhea, dehydration, crippling stomach pains. Death follows in a matter of hours.

Venom : Snakes, scorpions and certain fish secrete extremely toxic substances. Certain alchemists can either use the raw substance or isolate the toxin in order to produce a poison. The characteristics set out below are those of an average venom-based poison, but there are many variations.

Virulence : 9

Mode of administration : Injection or ingestion

Effects : Fever, swelling of the affected part of the body, cramps. Paralysis spreads from the affected part to the rest of the body. Death can follow in a few hours.

The Black Veil : This contact poison is derived from a substance secreted by the skins of toads in the swamps of the South. Not only is it difficult to obtain, but it also degrades after a few hours' exposure to the air and loses its poisonous properties. As a result, it is reasonably rare.

Virulence : 9

Mode of administration : Contact

Effects : The victim feels nauseous. The affected part of the body becomes red and itchy. The heart accelerates and the victim finds it difficult to perform any physical activity. After a few minutes the victim reports a dark veil falling over his eyes, and loses his sight. If the character succeeds a second Resistance Test with an ST of 6 the loss of sight lasts only two or three days.

The Breath of Fire : This poison exists in the form of a powder derived from the dried and ground petals of a rare flower. It is particularly popular among women, who sprinkle it on a fan or handkerchief, before shaking it or blowing it under the nose of their victims.

Virulence : 9 (7 if the victim had the presence of mind to hold his breath)

Mode of administration : Inhalation or contact

Effects : The acrid powder burns the mouth, throat, eyes and nose. The victim coughs and feels a sharp pain in his sinuses. Any affected area must be rinsed well with clean water. In case of inhalation, the victim must be given plenty of fresh air and instructed to breathe slowly. The powder's effects are short-lived, but for a few minutes the STs of any actions attempted by the victim are increased by +4.

Regaining Breath of Life

Fortunately, there are several ways to recover from the debilitating effects of an injury, disease or poison. A character may rely on his body's own restorative abilities or the skills of a physician or other medical practitioner.

Natural recovery

Each character's body has a limited ability to recover naturally from an injury or a disease.

If a character gets some proper rest (including a hot meal, a bed, and sleep) he can recover one Breath of Life box per night. If he chooses to spend part of his convalescence engaged in some light physical activity, such as study or travel, this drops to one box regained for every two nights' sleep. If he fails to take any precautions, and continues with normal levels of physical activity in work, martial arts training or more arduous forms of travel, he recovers only one box per week.

Note that a character who has crossed off the final box in Fatally Injured Level cannot recover without some medical attention.

First aid

Where a character has crossed off his final box in Fatally Injured Level, he is at death's door and it becomes a matter of the utmost urgency to give him first aid in order to save his life and stabilize his condition.

Normally, only a character with at least Apprentice Level in Medicine can provide first aid. But there is an exception to the rule about asterisked Skills, namely that anyone can attempt first aid on a character who has suffered an injury.

First aid involves a Test of Wood + Medicine, with an ST determined by the seriousness of the injury. A Beginner in Medicine must perform the Test using only his Wood value.

If the Test is successful, the injured character immediately regains one Breath of Life box. In a Fatal Injury context this could be enough to save his life. A Yin/Yang Balance on the Test gives the injured character two boxes, while a critical failure aggravates the injury and causes an extra damage point, which might be enough to put him out of his suffering.

Patient's condition	ST
Normal	3
Bruised	5
Slightly Injured	7
Seriously Injured	9
Fatally Injured	11

Once a character has received first aid, the Test cannot be repeated unless he suffers more damage.

First aid can never be used to recover all Breath of Life boxes : there will always be at least one box crossed off which will require either natural recovery or the intervention of a physician before it can be recovered.

Medicine and injuries

A character with the Skill of Medicine can heal another character's wounds.

The physician performs a Test of Wood + Medicine whose ST is determined by the seriousness of the injury (see table above). If he succeeds, the patient immediately recovers a number of Breath of Life boxes equal to the physician's Success Margin plus one.

If the physician obtains a Yin/Yang Balance, the patient recovers a number of Breath of Life boxes equal to double the physician's Success Margin plus two.

If the physician obtains a critical failure, the patient's condition worsens, and he loses a Breath of Life box.

A physician can only perform one Medicine Test per patient per day.

Medicine, diseases and poisons

When a character is suffering from a disease or has been poisoned, a physician may examine him, and by performing a Test of Wood + Medicine, with an ST equal to the Virulence of the disease or poison, establish a diagnosis as to what his patient is suffering from.

The physician may use his diagnosis to prescribe an appropriate treatment, such as massage, acupuncture or pressure point therapy. For so long as the physician tends to his patient, whatever Success Margin he obtained on his Test becomes a bonus for the patient's Resistance Tests to recover from his affliction.

The physician completes his work by prescribing medicine to assist the patient in his fight against the disease or poison.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is an age-old technique, whose origins are lost in the mists of time, and which involves pricking carefully-chosen parts of the body with metal needles in order to stimulate or facilitate the flow of the patient's life force through his body. Many people rely on regular acupuncture treatments for chronic pain.

When a character has recourse to this type of treatment, the acupuncturist performs a Test of Wood + Medicine with an ST of 9 (which can be adjusted by the GM according to the situation). If he succeeds, his Success Margin is automatically added to the natural recovery rate of the patient, who therefore recovers a number of Breath of Life boxes equal to the Success Margin plus one, for as many days as the acupuncturist has Levels in Medicine.

Pharmaceuticals

The wide range of plants and other substances used for pharmaceutical purposes in the *Zhongguo* are described in many books and plant guides. Both physicians and pharmacists are qualified to manufacture pills, potions, ointments and other tried and tested remedies.

Whenever a character suffering from a disease or the effects of a poison takes an appropriate substance, he gains a bonus on his Resistance Test which can range from +1 to +4 depending on the effectiveness of the remedy. This bonus may be combined with any bonus obtained as a result of treatment by a physician or acupuncturist.

Some medicines work in a different way. They may relieve the symptoms of a particular medical condition, such as headaches, stomach pains or fever, reduce the Virulence of a disease or poison, work as a direct antidote to a poison, or even enable a character to recover Breath of Life points without a Test.

Regaining Chi

The characters' adventures will require them to draw deeply and frequently on their inner force, thereby depleting their stock of Chi, the one magic breath that enables them to perform the most heroic deeds.

A character may lose Chi in many ways : by using Magic, performing the wonders of the Tao, or simply by acting beyond the limits of his own strength.

Fortunately, there are also several ways to regain the inner force.

Natural recovery

When a person sleeps, he not only recovers from physical and mental tiredness, but also his wounds heal and his stock of Chi is gradually replenished.

A character gains one Chi point for every hour of sleep he manages.

Meditation

By entering a deep meditative trance, a character unifies his mind with the universe and goes to the very well of the Tao to recover his Chi.

The character performs a Test of Earth + Meditation, with an ST of 7. If he succeeds, he regains a number of Chi points equal to his Success Margin.

If the character obtains a Yin/Yang Balance on this Test, he regains all the Chi points he has spent, and returns to his maximum level.

Meditation generally takes about an hour.

Yin/Yang Balance

Finally, remember that if any character obtains a Yin/Yang Balance on any Test, he automatically regains a number of Chi points equal to the result on the dice, without going over his maximum.

"Do you never stop babbling, Three Truths ?" asked Xian with an exasperated sigh.

Heart of Jade, who was walking a few steps ahead of them, allowed herself a smile. This was another sign that, although she never spoke, she was always aware of things that occurred around her.

The three travelers had taken to the road at the hour of the dragon, and were making good progress. They had already traveled a good distance, and were far enough from the forest and close enough to Handan to have a hope of reaching it by nightfall. As they came closer to the Zhao capital, the road became wider, and by now they were traveling among a crowd of merchants, surrounded by chariots piled high with all manner of goods and produce from across the seven states. The road was well-maintained, but crowded, as it crossed a broad plain of cereal fields, where peasants used to the passing trade did not even bother to raise their heads from their work.

The feet, the hooves and the wheels of the chariots lifted clouds of gray smoke from the road and the travelers began to feel the heat of the mid-day sun. Heart of Jade shielded her head with a large conical hat. Xian went bareheaded, and felt a thirst rise within him. Three Truths strolled by his side, his hat still pushed back, seemingly oblivious to the heat. Since the morning he had given forth, talking of this and that, dealing with a wide range of seemingly unconnected topics. His deep voice with a sharp, metallic edge resounded like the gong of a sacred temple and attracted the attention of many. Which was something the young man could easily have done without. He still wondered why he had pleaded with Heart of Jade to allow the fangshi to join them on their trip to Handan. Although, now he thought on it, she had not raised any objection to his suggestion. Nor had she objected when they first met. It was as if she could see the hand of destiny that Xian could not see, a link between the three that he could only sense vaguely without really being able to understand. Xian was shaken from his thoughts by a new tirade from his companion.

"I may talk a lot, my son, but can you listen ? While many phrases may be soaked in betrayal, many others may conceal great wisdom. As I was saying, young philistine, the world is made up of five Elements : Metal, Water, Fire, Wood, and Earth. From their interaction is born the essence of all beings and things..."

Xian wondered whether a judge would really punish him if he were to strangle Three Truths...

Heart of Jade stopped suddenly in the middle of the road. The constant flow of vehicles and people slowed, but continued to move. Some chariot drivers were forced to move round her, muttering curses under their breath at this antisocial conduct. Xian and Three Truths went quickly to her side and saw what had stopped her in her tracks. A hundred yards ahead of them was a military checkpoint, where soldiers bearing the colors of Zhao checked the identities of all those heading for Handan. Meanwhile, four riders moved through the queues and crowds of travelers. To leave the road without being spotted would be impossible. Xian turned to the young woman. Her bright eyes had become black with rage, burning with the same fire he had seen two nights before. Trouble ahead, he said to himself.

While the three travelers stayed still, the riders came closer and closer. Heart of Jade moved her hands slowly to her back, to the two scabbards attached to her belt which held her twin daggers. Xian sighed, realizing at once that word had got out, the alert had been raised and they were wanted for the fire at the inn. He stiffened his stance and rested his hand on the hilt of his sword.

Then Three Truths took a step forward, and to their surprise, began to walk straight towards the four soldiers. He smiled broadly and spoke without fear to one who wore the badges of an officer, launching into a long, spirited speech accompanied by expansive gestures and sounds, some comic, others menacing. His two young companions did not move, and waited to see what might happen. Amid the chaotic din of the crowds they could not make out a single word of the Taoist's speech. At the end of his monologue, he drew out of his bag a small bamboo box engraved with pictograms. The soldier examined it briefly and returned it to Three Truths. He saluted the exorcist and turned his horse around. Three Truths walked back to his companions with a satisfied smile.

"Let's go ; this charming officer will order one of his men to escort us to Handan." He winked to his astonished young companions. "Sometimes, the path through the most treacherous terrain can be found merely by asking."

The Taos

This chapter deals with a part of the rules which gives Qin its unique flavor : the Taos.

Understanding and applying the rules on Taos may seem a little challenging at first, especially for less experienced role players. But fitting the Taos into the flow of the game soon becomes a matter of instinct and intuition, and brings that touch of the unexpected and spectacular that is the essence of the legends of Ancient China.

The Taos, laws of the universe

The Taos may be defined as the decrees of Heaven that govern the operation of the universe, and particularly the world of men. They cover all aspects of space and time, together with the energy, spirit and inspiration that flows through the universe as Chi. These decrees are the very pillars of creation, and only a truly exceptional human can understand them, apply them and bend the laws of the world to his will.

To say a character has command of a Tao means nothing less than that he possesses the rare ability to act on the laws of creation and use them to his own advantage. By drawing on his inner force or Chi, he can impose his will on the world and perform great feats beyond the reach of common mortals.

Tao Levels

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Just as Skills are arranged in Skill Levels, so Taos are arranged in six Tao Levels, of which only four are accessible to characters in this book. The various effects that can be produced with the aid of a Tao are organized into different Levels. As a general rule, Taos can be combined.

By deepening his understanding of the Taos and the universe, and learning how to influence them using his Chi, a character can develop his ability and gain access to more and more powerful effects. It is this dedication and commitment to inner growth in the way of the Tao that determines which superhuman gifts are within a character's command. After that, it is his capacity to use his knowledge, to apply the right effect at the right time, and to spend his stock of Chi wisely that will win him fame as a true hero.

The further a character travels along the way of the Tao, the more he becomes able to perform extraordinary feats and noble deeds worthy of a legend among men. In the world of the Warring States, there are many fine warriors, learned scholars and master craftsmen, men and women who through years of study, training and experience have developed remarkable levels of skill in their chosen occupation. But as they do not understand the laws of the universe, they are destined forever to remain trapped by the limitations of their mortal existence. History will not remember them.

But your character is blessed with this secret gift, this essential link with the universe, the ability to see the true nature of the world and grasp its ruling principles. It is this which distinguishes an expert from a hero, a master from a legend.

Using the Taos

In practice, a Tao is used in the context of an action and incorporated into it ; the effects of the Tao improve or increase the impact of the action. The player need only perform the Test required for the action, generally using an Aspect and a Skill, if indeed a Test is necessary at all.

There are two main methods of incorporating a Tao into an action.

The simplest method is for a player to design his action on the basis of the effects he can achieve with his Taos. The other way, better for the storyline but requiring a little more work for the Game Master, is for a player to describe what his character would like to achieve, and then work together with the GM on how that might work, and which Taos are applicable. In most cases, you will find that players switch between the two methods, and even mix them up.

Where a character knows several Taos, he may choose to combine several effects in a single action. This will generally happen where a player decides to attempt a particularly complex and spectacular action such as leaping up the side of a house to attack three opponents simultaneously and land perfectly on the rooftop. It is even possible to combine several effects from the same Tao. But since each Tao Level can only be used once in an action, an individual effect cannot be used several times in an action.

Once the Tao effects applicable to an action have been agreed, the character attempts the action, performing a Test if necessary, and the Tao effects transform an otherwise unexceptional action into a unique feat.

Tao effects either change the circumstances in which an action can be undertaken or allow a character to go beyond the normal limitations of an action. They are therefore linked to a specific action. Where a character has several actions in a round, for example by possessing a high Skill Level in his chosen weapon, he may use his various Taos to attempt a sequence of dazzling actions. His use of his Taos is limited only by his imagination and his stock of Chi.

The use of Taos in combat and other situations is dealt with in the section on how the game works at p.61.

The Taos and Chi

To find the strength to influence the operation of the laws of the universe and impose his will on them, a character needs to draw on his inner force.

It is only through his understanding of the structure of the universe and his control of the energy that flows through it that a character possesses the ability to carry out great feats. As such, every Tao effect that is used requires a character to spend a certain number of Chi points.

The Chi cost of an action improved by a Tao depends on the level of the Tao effect which is applied. Where an action incorporates several Tao effects, the Chi cost is cumulative.

The Taos

The Taos are the decrees of Heaven which regulate the operation of the universe. They are many, and they cover many different aspects of reality.

There follows an explanation of the best-known Taos.

Tao of the Six Directions

This Tao relates to skill in movement, not only on the horizontal plane, but also on the vertical plane, including jumping and diving. Remember that in any given round, a character can move a distance in yards equal to his Water value by using one action. This Tao not only increases the speed of his movement, but enables the character to move while carrying out another action such as fighting. In short, the Tao of the Six Directions allows a character to combine a movement with another action.

With this Tao, a character can run quickly, jump high, or leap impressive distances, but only on solid, flat and stable surfaces, and generally only when he can see the end point of his movement. Where a character is on more difficult terrain, such as a muddy field or a sloping roof, or balancing on a rope, he will need to add an effect from the Tao of the Light Step.

In a combat situation, while this Tao enables a character to engage in or escape from close combat more easily, these two effects cannot be combined in a single action. So while a character may move and strike an opponent in one action, he will need another action to escape from close combat again.

Where a character has the right Tao Level and spends sufficient Chi points to execute a movement permitted by this Tao, the movement is an automatic success.



For example, where a character uses the Tao of the Six Directions to move quickly to engage an opponent in close combat and launch an attack, he spends the necessary number of Chi points for the movement and need only perform his Attack Test. Or say a character wants to jump onto the roof of a house without being seen or heard. If the roof is six yards off the ground, and the character has Tao Level 3 and a Water value of 4, he can use one action to jump onto a windowsill and a second action to jump onto the roof. Since both movements are automatic successes, the Game Master need only ask the player to perform a Stealth Test for each action.

The Game Master may allow a character to go beyond his maximum distance and move an extra distance in yards equal to his Tao Level, in any direction. But if so, the character will have to succeed in a Test involving the various Skills needed for the action, and use his weakest Skill Level for that Test.

Taking the same example of the roof-jumper, if the character has Tao Level 3 and a Water value of 4, he can jump seven yards in a single action. But in order not to be seen or heard, the character must perform a Test combining Stealth and Acrobatics, using whichever Skill in which he has the lowest Skill Level.

It is not possible to combine several effects of the Tao of the Six Directions in a single action.

Level 1

Run / long jump : The character can add to his action (even if this is already a movement) a horizontal movement of a distance in yards less than or equal to his Water value.

Level 2

Run / long jump : As above only the horizontal movement may be up to (Water x 2) yards per action.

Defy gravity : The character can add to his action a vertical movement along a wall of a distance in yards less than or equal to his Water value.

Level 3

Run / long jump : The character can make a horizontal movement of up to (Water x 3) yards per action.

Defy gravity : The character can add to his action a movement along a vertical surface of a distance in yards of up to twice his Water value.

Jump up / Drop down : Similarly, the character can in the course of his action use a vertical movement of (Water) yards, up or down. He does not need a run-up, but he must have a place to land on or hang onto at the end point of his movement. He may also fall the same distance without being injured.

Level 4

Run / long jump : As above only the horizontal movement may be up to (Water x 4) yards per action.

Defy gravity : As above only the maximum vertical movement is (Water x 3) yards.

Jump up / Drop down : The character's vertical movement in the course of his action may be up to twice his Water value. He may also fall this distance without being hurt.

Tao of the Light Step

The character understands the heavenly forces that control stability and gravity, and use his understanding to defy the normal principles of balance. This allows him to remain upright, and indeed to remain in all sorts of positions, in the most unlikely and apparently impossible situations. His balance, stability and poise is unaffected by difficult conditions. For so long as a character applies an effect of the Tao of the Light Step, he acts as if he were standing with both feet on solid ground.

However, this Tao cannot in itself be used for movement. If a character wishes to pursue an opponent to the top of a bamboo forest in order to engage him in combat, he will need to combine this Tao with a normal movement action or the Tao of the Six Directions.

Level 1

Sure-footed : This Level permits a character to cancel out the penalty caused by difficult terrain for a period in minutes equal to his Water value. This applies to slippery surfaces, such as ones affected by oil or ice, steep sloping surfaces such as temple roofs, and treacherous surfaces such as the deck of a boat during a storm.

In addition, a character with any Level of this Tao may use it to obtain a bonus in any Test to avoid falling. The bonus will be equal to his Tao Level, and the character must spend a corresponding number of Chi points to obtain it.

Level 2

Rock steady : The character has no difficulty in standing on a narrow surface (4 inches wide), such as a rock or a beam, provided that it is solid and stable. He can fight or carry out other actions without any penalty. He may also use such a narrow, solid surface as a support to hold himself in any position.

Level 3

Tip toe : The character can stand on surfaces that are as narrow, weak and unstable as ropes or rolls of cloth 1 to 2 inches wide, and suffer no penalty. He may also use such surfaces as support to hold himself in any position.

Level 4

Perfect balance : At this Level, the character can find a perfectly-balanced position on a single point, such as the point of a spear, the tip of a stalk of bamboo or the top of a military standard, and continue to act without any penalty. He may use such a position to stand, or to adopt any other position.

Tao of the Strengthened Body

The character is in touch with the divine energy flowing through his body, and while he cannot harness it for the magic of Internal Alchemy, he has learnt to use it to enhance his innate physical abilities. This Tao allows a character to increase his natural resistance by means of a mysterious and intangible natural body armor. A hero who masters this Tao can survive highly challenging conditions, and is extremely resistant to injury. A fearsome opponent indeed.

Level 1

The cloak of Chi : The character channels his Chi in such a way as to be able to withstand heat up to 70° C and cold down to -40° C. Such conditions cause him neither damage nor penalty for a period in hours equal to his Tao Level.

The character adds two boxes to his Normal Breath of Life Level.

Level 2

Feel no pain : By spending the requisite number of Chi points, the character may ignore any penalties caused by loss of Breath of Life and the seriousness of his injuries for a number of rounds equal to his Tao Level.

The character adds two boxes to his Normal Breath of Life Level.

Level 3

Cleanse the blood : The character can use his Chi to fight against sickness, and gains a bonus equal to his Earth value in any Resistance Test against a disease or a poison. As soon as he needs to perform such a Test, he becomes immediately aware of the risk to his health and can use the Tao to fight the infection. He will not necessarily be able to identify the precise cause of his sickness, but will know whether it is a disease or a poison.

The character adds two boxes to his Bruised Breath of Life Level.

Level 4

Hard hide : The character can draw on his inner force and convert it into natural armor. He subtracts a number of damage points equal to his Metal value from the effects of any successful attack for a number of rounds equal to his Tao Level.

The character adds two boxes to his Slightly Injured Breath of Life Level.

Tao of the Destructive Breath

A character who has mastered this Tao has learnt to channel the flow of his Chi, draw it out of his body and use it to weaken the inner resistance of any object or structure in his immediate environment.

When a warrior understands the elements used in creating an object or structure, and the forces that ensure its solidity, he may know the weakest point in the structure and direct his energy toward that point through the most direct and powerful strike possible. He may use this Tao to focus his blow, to transmit the power of the Chi through his body or his weapon, and destroy inanimate objects. In combat, the Tao is mainly used to shatter weapons, armor, or obstacles that protect an opponent. It may also be used to increase the strength of a blow.

Where a Tao effect enables a character to destroy a structure automatically, this means that he need inflict no damage on it. It also means that he can destroy a fixed structure without the need for a Test. A Test is only necessary where the target is moving (eg. being carried by an opponent), far away (eg. when firing an arrow) or very small (eg. a ring).

The Tao of the Destructive Breath may be used to break an opponent's weapon more easily. The character must first use the Trap Technique, and should he then decide to break his opponent's weapon, he gains a bonus equal to his Tao Level on his Metal Test.

Level 1

Gentle breeze : The character may automatically destroy a wooden structure about the size of a chair, by a perfect strike which finds the weak point of the structure and upsets its internal balance.

In addition, a character with any Level of this Tao may use it to obtain a bonus to any damage he inflicts. The bonus will be equal to his Tao Level, and the character must spend a corresponding number of Chi points to obtain it.

Level 2

Sudden gust : The character may automatically destroy large wooden structures such as scaffolding, doors, and supporting beams. His perfect strike finds the point which destroys the target from within. Where the target has a significant volume, as with scaffolding, it collapses in the exchange directly after the strike.

Level 3

Sudden quake : The character may automatically destroy large stone objects such as funerary steles. In addition, a character with this Level may obtain the effects included in the lower Levels against stone targets.

Level 4

Scourge of steel : The character may automatically destroy a metal object the size of an anvil. In addition, a character with this Level may obtain the effects included in the lower Levels against metal targets.

Tao of Inspired Creation

A character who has command of this Tao understands the elements and forces of the universe sufficiently to be able to create objects of great practical utility or aesthetic charm. The most highly-skilled and renowned craftsmen and artists possess this Tao at a high level. It is used in creative contexts, usually Continuous Tests involving craft or artistic Skills, but note that a character need only invest his Chi and obtain the relevant effect once during the creative process.

Level 1

The hand that mends : The character knows how to find and reconstruct the inner balance of a damaged object or work of art. In any Test involving repair or restoration, such as fixing a chariot wheel, sharpening a blade, or restoring a decayed painting, he receives a bonus equal to his Earth value.

Level 2

The hand that creates : The character knows how to combine disparate elements into complex objects. In any Test involving the creation of an object or work of art, such as making a tool, forging a blade, or producing a fine sculpture, he receives a bonus equal to his Tao Level.

Level 3

The hand that acts : The character knows the secrets of the deep structure of matter, and overcomes all manner of apparent obstacles to the creative process. In any Continuous Test of this kind, both the Interval between two Tests and the Difficulty Threshold are halved.

Level 4

The hand of inspiration : The character's command of his Chi is such that he is able to use it not just as a tool but a material in the creative process. He can breathe his Chi into any object or work of art he creates, giving it exceptional qualities, resulting in a bonus to be agreed with the GM. If the bonus is quantifiable, it will rarely exceed +2. The result may be a sword which inflicts greater damage, a more resilient weapon, a more robust piece of furniture, a captivating sculpture, or calligraphy guaranteed to soothe the mind of any that sees it.

Tao of the Sudden Lightning

Through his ability in this Tao, a character is able to anticipate and predict the movements of an opponent. He becomes keenly aware of danger and risks to his safety. His ability to guess his opponents' intentions in combat improves his ability to counter their attacks. Even if he loses the initiative at the start of a combat round, he is able to retake the lead, turn an apparently poor situation to his advantage, and snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Level 1

Vigilance : The character cannot be taken by surprise in an ambush or any other type of surprise attack. While he cannot say where his opponents are or what their objectives might be, he reacts immediately on being attacked. When using this Tao, the character is free of any surprise penalty for a period in hours equal to his Wood value.

Level 2

Speed : The character may apply to the result of his Initiative Test a bonus equal to his Tao Level, by spending a corresponding number of Chi points.

Level 3

Jump start : Where the character wins the Initiative Test at the beginning of a combat round, he may perform two actions in the first exchange. He does not gain an extra action, but can use two of his actions in a single exchange. Where appropriate, the character may even add to these two actions another Active Defense action. The second action takes place immediately after the first, before any opponents have the chance to act.

Level 4

First move : Even where the character does not win the Initiative Test at the beginning of an exchange, he may nonetheless choose to act first. His initiative level for that exchange is considered to be one point higher than that of the party who normally has the initiative for that round.

Tao of the Invisible Shield

This Tao denotes an appreciation of the geometric and rhythmic aspects of combat, an ability to follow the trajectory of an opponent's strikes, and the corresponding ability to dodge or block them. The greater a character's command of this Tao, the harder he is to hit and injure. His constant movement, his swift actions and the power of his blocks are sufficient to frustrate most attacks.

Level 1

Strong defense : The character may adopt a special defensive stance enabling him to dissipate some of the damage caused by a blow, using his Chi to provide a temporary boost to his suppleness and resistance to injury. The reduction in damage will be equal to his Tao Level, but he must spend a corresponding number of Chi points to obtain it.

Level 2

Chi defense : By focussing his mind and his inner energy on his guard, the character may increase his Passive Defense total for the duration of the current exchange. The increase will be equal to his Tao Level, but he must spend a corresponding number of Chi points to obtain it.

Level 3

Strong block : The character can float like a butterfly and sway like the breeze. He obtains a bonus equal to his Wood value in any Active Defense Test.

Level 4

Chi block : By choosing to channel his Chi through the Tao of the Invisible Shield, the character may obtain an immediate opportunity for an Active Defense action. This enables him to defend himself from a blow even where he has no actions left in the current combat round, or to do so while still holding onto actions for the next exchange. This Active Defense may be combined with another Tao or Combat Technique.

Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands

This Tao represents understanding of the essence of movement, a superior level of control over one's own movements, and an extraordinary degree of measure in each movement. Each movement by a character with this Tao has a definite purpose, and none of his movements are wasted. The character has such control over his body that he is able to perform a sequence of actions, each flowing easily and naturally from each other, in a single fluid movement. His deftness, poise and grace make him an unpredictable and dangerous opponent.

Level 1

The second hand : Just after performing one action, the character may perform a second action, which may not be an attack or a movement, and which may not be enhanced by the effects of a Tao. This second action takes effect immediately after the first, occurring in the same exchange and before anyone else has the chance to act. Examples of possible second actions include drawing a sword, taking aim with a bow, or any other appropriate use of a Skill.

Level 2

The second breath : The character's second action may be a movement and, if so, may be enhanced by one of the effects of the Tao of the Six Directions or the Tao of the Light Step.

Level 3

The second strike : At this Level, the character's second action may be an attack. However, he may only attack with part of his body, and may not use a weapon. He might for example follow up a blow with a sword with a powerful uppercut. The second action may not be enhanced by the effects of a Tao or a Combat Technique.

Level 4

The second blade : The character may use his second action to fight with two weapons or one weapon and a

shield. He may brandish both a sword and a dagger, or combine his sharp saber with a stout shield. The character's second action can be used to strike with his second weapon or block with his shield, and corresponds to a free attack or a free Active Defense. But the second action may not be enhanced by the effects of a Tao or a Combat Technique.

Tao of the Hidden Shadow

Many use this Tao to become skilled spies or formidable assassins. For it enables them to cover not just their tracks, but their very presence, and act in complete impunity. A true master of the Tao of the Hidden Shadow can deceive the senses of others and evade the gaze of all, even in clear, well-lit environments.

Level 1

The dark veil : The character can blur his appearance, and by staying still and at least partly hidden, obtain a bonus equal to his Fire value on any Stealth Test.

Level 2

The secret veil : The character can hide about his person a number of relatively small objects (daggers, chopsticks, bolts of silk) equal to his Tao Level. Even a thorough search will not reveal what he is carrying. This effect lasts until the character uses his hidden objects, changes his clothes, or is unmasked.

Level 3

The path of shadows : The character can move with the stealth of a shadow, using every piece of darkness and cover available to him. He obtains a bonus equal to his Fire value on a Stealth Test whenever he attempts to move without being noticed. Where such a movement requires a Test involving Stealth and another Skill (eg. Climbing or Acrobatics), he always uses his Stealth Skill, even if he has a lower Skill Level in the other Skill.

Level 4

The path of ghosts : The character is as silent as a ghost. He obtains a bonus equal to his Fire value on a Stealth Test whenever he attempts any type of action involving subtlety and stealth (eg. attacking an opponent, searching a room, or stealing a horse). Where such an action involves Stealth and another Skill, he always uses his Stealth Skill, even if he has a lower Skill Level in the other Skill. However the character chooses to carry out his action, he remains completely silent and extremely difficult to spot. He may, for example, cut the throat of a sentry while avoiding the attentions of another sentry just a few yards away.

Tao of the Thousand Bees

The mark of an accomplished warrior is his ability to use his surroundings to gain an advantage in combat. Everyday objects, together with the basic components of buildings and natural environments, become powerful weapons in his hands. A master of this Tao needs only a fraction of a second to scan the objects within his reach, evaluate their potential, and choose how

Tao of the Inner Eye

Most warriors rely mainly on their vision to take in their surroundings and anticipate the intentions of their opponents. But he who commands the Tao of the Inner Eye perceives the world in a quite different way, seeing far beyond his normal field of vision. By noticing every last physical and material detail, and connecting it instantly to his inner understanding of the world, such a hero can deploy the information relayed by his senses in flushing out his enemies and fending off their attacks.

In a non-combat situation, this Tao enables a character to perceive things invisible to the mortal eye.

Level 1

The keen eye : In any Test involving perception in a general sense, such as looking for clues, searching a room or an individual, or tracking an escaped convict, the character receives a bonus equal to his Earth value. The player decides whether to use this effect while performing his Test and immediately spends one Chi point. The bonus only applies for the duration of that Test.

Level 2

The sharp sense : The character can focus his powers by homing in on information supplied by one of his five senses, nominated by the player. In any Test involving that sense, the character may obtain a bonus equal to his Tao Level, but must spend a corresponding number of Chi points.

Level 3

The outer eye : At this Level, the character appears to have a mysterious sixth sense which makes up for any weakness in another. He may cancel out any penalty caused by blindness, deafness or other temporary loss of a sense, for a period in minutes equal to his Tao Level.

Level 4

The heavenly eye : Any character who has lost one of his senses either temporarily or permanently may effectively replace it by using his remaining four senses to the full. For example, a deaf person may "hear" sounds by "reading" vibrations caused by the sound on his skin. Similarly, a blind man will hear sound so well as to be able to create an accurate image of his immediate environment. This effect lasts for a number of hours equal to the character's Tao Level.

best to use them. Once he holds an object in his hands, he can throw or propel it with formidable power and accuracy. A character may use this Tao to convert a simple everyday object into a deadly missile, particularly by combining several Levels in a single throw. Where a character chooses to use his action in an exchange to throw an object, and uses this Tao to assist him, he performs a Test of Metal + Throwing against the Passive Defense score of his target. If the Test is successful, the target may still use an action to attempt an Active Defense.

An attack using this Tao will have a range of (Metal x 3) yards.

Level 1

Throw : The character may throw any object he has in his hands as if it were an improvised weapon, even if it was not designed for that purpose. The object may not be heavier than (Metal) pounds. If it hits its target, it inflicts 1 damage point.

Level 2

Propel : The character may propel an object even when he does not hold it in his hands. Provided that it is within reach, he can use his hand, foot, or weapon to launch it at great speed towards an opponent. Again the object is treated as an improvised weapon from a rules point of view. The object may not be heavier than (Metal x 3) pounds. If it hits its target, it inflicts 2 damage points.

Moreover, the character may catch an everyday object thrown towards him, such as a stool, a bowl, or chopsticks. To do so he must perform a successful Test of Water + Dodging.

Level 3

The wall of missiles : The character may throw or propel a number of objects equal to his Water value in a single action. Only one Attack Test is required for all the missiles. He may only attack one opponent, who must be within his field of vision, and the objects in question must be no larger than a small ball. Damage is equal to the number of objects used.

Moreover, the character may catch a weapon thrown towards him, such as a dart, a knife or an arrow. To do so he must perform a successful Test of Water + Dodging.

Level 4

The whirlwind of missiles : The character may throw or propel a number of objects equal to twice his Water value in a single action. By spinning on the spot and flinging objects as he spins, he is able to aim his missiles at a number of opponents situated anywhere around him, and therefore chooses how to divide up the missiles between his several targets. Only one Attack Test is needed to attack all of the targets, and the ST is equal to the highest Passive Defense score among his targets plus 1 for each target after the first. Where an attack succeeds, the first missile that hits a

target causes no damage, but each additional missile that hits the same target causes one damage point. Note that the whirlwind only lifts small objects, such as bowls, pitchers and coins.

Moreover, the character may catch a number of objects or weapons thrown towards him equal to his Water value. To do so he must perform a successful Test of Water + Dodging in respect of each object to be caught.

Tao of Yin and Yang

Each and every being and thing in the universe possesses Yin and Yang. A hero that commands the Tao of this name is able to visualize the flow of these primordial forces, and control their flow in order to turn action into non-action, passivity into attack. One who has understood the deepest implications of the interconnectedness of all things learns how to turn this to his own advantage ; the elements appear to bend to his every desire.

This Tao does not allow you to get a critical success or cancel a critical failure (double zero).

A player need not state his intention to use this Tao before performing a Test. He may wait until after the Test and then decide whether to adjust its result.

Level 1

Stroke of luck : The character may adjust the result on **EITHER** his Yin die **OR** his Yang die by one point in either direction. This adjustment may lead to a double : the character may not benefit from the effect of a Yin/Yang Balance, since the balance is artificial, but the result on the dice is still taken as the result of the roll.

Level 2

Controller of energy : The character may reverse the result on the dice, by turning the Yin result into the Yang result or vice versa. This may be used among other things to alter the power of blows and influence the levels of damage they cause.

Level 3

Controller of flow : The character may adjust the result of **BOTH** his Yin die **AND** his Yang die by one point in either direction. Again, where this adjustment leads to a double the character may not benefit from the effect of a Yin/Yang Balance, since the balance is artificial, but the result on the dice is still taken as the result of the roll.

Level 4

Master of energy : After rolling the two dice, the character may re-roll either one of them, and choose between the two results.



Tao of the Breath of Power

A hero with this Tao has the ability to breathe his own Chi into inanimate objects to make them stronger or change their properties. He can turn a simple tool into a potent weapon or humble rags into sturdy armor. This uncanny and unpredictable power makes a character armed with this Tao a mysterious and dangerous enemy. The Tao of the Breath of Power is particularly popular among spies, who must work under cover, and women, who must cultivate the appearance of weakness.

An object that has been transformed by applying this Tao must be used with the Skill of Improvisation. When wielding his improvised weapon, the character may not normally use a Combat Technique or any other Tao.

Unless stated otherwise, the effects of this Tao last only as long as the current combat round.

Level 1

The improvised shield : The character may take any everyday object which does not inflict damage, such as a sheet, a fan, a cloak or a piece of silk, and use it to block an attack. Whether the attack is with bare hands or a weapon, the character obtains a bonus of +2 in his Active Defense Test. But he must use an action for the block.

Level 2

The hidden blade : The character may now use a harmless everyday object to launch an attack. The character transforms the object into a dangerous weapon capable of inflicting 2 basic damage points.

Level 3

The invisible armor : The character has learnt to breathe the part of his inner force into any clothing that he wears next to the skin. Such clothing is thus transformed from mere cloth into stout armor, and its protection passes from zero to 3.

Level 4

Martial Skill of the improvised weapon : At this Level, the character can use a Combat Technique with his improvised weapon. He must possess the relevant Combat Technique, and the improvised weapon must resemble the relevant real weapon sufficiently in order to permit use of the Technique. The character may also use other Tao effects in the action he undertakes with his new weapon.

Tao of the Clear Mind

This Tao is far more widespread in the world of universities and libraries than that of arms and armor. It enables scholars and wise men to focus their attention on mental and intellectual challenges and attain a high level of concentration. By shielding them from the troubles and tumult of the outside world, it frees them to concentrate on the task at hand.

Level 1

The sharp mind : The character has an impressive capacity for concentration on intellectual tasks. The energy of the Tao gives him a bonus of +2 in any Test involving a Skill from the mental domain.

Level 2

The tranquil mind : The character is able to clear his mind of any distractions in order to focus completely on a task. Whatever the levels of noise or however uncomfortable the environment, the character suffers no penalty caused by external circumstances. This effect lasts for a period in minutes equal to his Tao Level.

Level 3

The library of the mind : The character has trained his memory to such a degree that he is able to store and retrieve large quantities of information with extreme accuracy. By concentrating on a book, a speech of a few minutes, an image, or a scene, he can fix every detail in his mind. Thereafter, he can remember the matter perfectly for a period in months equal to his Wood Level.

Level 4

The visionary mind : The character's mind is open, and his thoughts flow like a river. In any Test involving reasoning (eg. connecting facts, solving a puzzle, or analyzing scientific data), the character obtains a bonus equal to his Water Level.

Tao of the Serene Presence

This Tao governs social interactions and non-verbal communication in the world of men, from the reading of facial expressions to the correct interpretation of mental signals.

A character who possesses this Tao distinguishes himself from ordinary mortals by the degree to which he can influence the reactions of those around him. He can give his mortal form an attractive or threatening appearance, and see through the motives of others. Such skills are of great value for diplomats.

Level 1

Behind the mask : To fully understand a person, one must first discover his feelings and his motivations. The character obtains a bonus equal to his Tao Level in any Empathy Test, or any other Test involving finding out information about someone or assessing them, such as judging their mood, guessing at their feelings, or spotting psychological problems.

Level 2

The mask of serenity : The character has a confident and reassuring air that attracts the attention of all those around him. For a period in hours equal to his Fire value, he becomes the center of attention, his opinion is solicited in meetings, his advice sought in private. Throughout this period, he obtains a bonus equal to his Tao Level in all social Tests involving pleasing someone or winning their confidence. This includes Eloquence, Seduction and Diplomacy.

Level 3

The mask of terror : The character can generate a terrifying aura which obliges people to keep their distance. For a period in hours equal to his Fire value he will be treated as an outsider, the one whom everyone suspects but whom no-one dares to challenge openly. Throughout this period, the character obtains a bonus equal to his Tao Level in all social Tests involving impressing someone or making them feel uneasy. This includes not only Eloquence and Intimidation, but also Diplomacy and more.

Level 4

The mirror : The character is a master of the games people play. He obtains a bonus equal to his Earth value in any Test involving identifying an attempt to manipulate him psychologically, such as spotting a liar or working out whether he is being seduced for ulterior motives. He obtains the same bonus in any Test needed to fight such an attempt, such as resisting intimidation.

It was only after they had crossed a whole village of tents, stores and animal enclosures that they finally saw the tall gate in the southern wall of Handan. There, with the help of the soldier who had accompanied them from the military checkpoint, they passed without hindrance through the entry controls where each visitor to the town was checked and questioned. The guards stood to attention and lifted their heavy bronze halberds to allow them a clear passage. Three Truths continued to gabble, without ever explaining why they were suddenly being treated with such respect. When asked, he had simply smiled mysteriously and remarked mischievously that some had criticized him for talking too much. Heart of Jade had put a stop to the discussion, to Xian's displeasure, saying that the fangshi would be able to explain himself in due course.

As they walked through the districts of the Zhao capital, Heart of Jade and Xian both realized that they had never seen such a vast city. Locals rushed in all directions, and they found it difficult not to lose their guide. Three Truths laughed gently.

"Here's the countryfolk just landed in the big city. Close your mouths and don't stare that way, that sort of thing attracts the crooks like bees to honey."

Annoyed, the two companions tried to contain their curiosity for the high, grand buildings, the colorful stores, all the sights, sounds and smells which teased and dazzled their senses.

"If you think Handan is impressive," added the fangshi, "wait until you see Xianyang. The Qin capital is the grandest in all the world."

While Three Truths spoke, the soldier guided them silently on. Eventually they came to a district of narrow, winding streets, with the cobbled streets giving way to sand and earthen tracks. Here, the air was more humid, and a damp, muddy smell hung on the breeze. Suddenly, Three Truths fell silent, so

that his companions would be on their guard. They could hear the river running beneath the street. A white face appeared briefly at a window with painted wooden shutters. The soldier pointed toward a tall, tumbledown building.

"This would seem to be the end of our journey. I am expected here, I must meet an old friend and deal with an important matter. Although, if you have no urgent business to attend to, maybe you would like to accompany me? If that which has brought me here comes to pass, then I do not think three will be a crowd." Despite the fangshi's enigmatic air, both Xian and Heart of Jade felt themselves drawn to this strange building and what might lie within. There could be no danger there. They agreed, and were rewarded with a sharp smile from the smooth face of Three Truths. The guard nodded to them and headed toward the center of the city.

Three Truths rapped at the door with the point of his stick. The sound echoed gloomily within. At that moment, a dozen figures emerged from the shadowy corners of the street. Powerful men with black armor and mighty bronze sabers. The door opened without a sound. Heart of Jade and Xian saw from the exorcist's troubled expression that it was not the man he had come to see. The colossus who filled the doorway was heavily-armed, and had the smile of a wolf and a gritty face.

"Regrettably, there is no-one left here to meet you. Only death..."

The three companions stood back to back in the middle of the street, surrounded by a dozen assailants closing in on them. Xian drew his sword calmly. Then he saw the face of Heart of Jade consumed with hatred, and felt her shake with pure rage. She stared coldly at an emblem painted on the armor of their attackers. A fist of bronze.

Martial Arts

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Many years ago, with the rise of the states and the advent of modern techniques of war, the ancient martial arts fell into decline. Centuries have now passed since the golden age, but that rich culture has been kept alive through the generations by the great noble families. And from the highest officer of the state armies to the humble knight-errant of the *jiang hu*, still there are many who continue to honor the old learning and study the ancient science of combat.

Combat Techniques

Each martial Skill corresponds to a particular style of combat. Nearly all warriors in the Warring States use weapons, and most specialize in the use of one weapon in particular. While several styles of hand-to-hand combat remain in use, few warriors would use them out of choice. Fighting with one's bare hands is rightly considered a last resort, the last hope of a disarmed and cornered warrior.

What the Techniques are

Having a martial Skill means knowing the basic moves that can be executed with a particular weapon. This rudimentary expertise with a weapon includes high and low thrusts, high and low blocks, simple stances, guards and sequences. But a warrior with greater expertise with his weapon will have acquired a variety of more advanced, more spectacular moves. These are what we call Combat Techniques.

Not all Combat Techniques are equal : some cannot be used with certain weapons, while some are easier to use with certain weapons than with others. Below we list for each martial Skill those Combat Techniques which are allowed at each Skill Level.

Whenever a character tries to use a Combat Technique, the ST of his Test receives a standard increase of +1. Some Combat Techniques involve a higher increase in the ST. For details on how to use Techniques in combat situations, see the section on combat rules at p.68.

The Techniques

There are two types of Technique : those used in close combat, and those used in distance combat. The following lists of martial Skills indicate the Combat Techniques that are available at each Skill Level.

Close combat weapons

Bangshu (stick)

Level 1 : Double Blow, Charge, Hold At Bay
Level 2 : Knock-out, Total Block, Whirlwind Block
Level 3 : Double Block, Combination, Mystification
Level 4 : Disarm, Strangle

Hand-to-Hand

Level 1 : Throw
Level 2 : Trap, Strangle
Level 3 : Direct Hit, Charge
Level 4 : Disarm, Combination, Whirlwind Block

Chuishu (mace)

Level 1 : Knock-out
Level 2 : Hold At Bay
Level 3 : Total Block, Charge
Level 4 : Repel, Combination

Daoshu (dagger)

Level 1 : Direct Hit, Two Weapons
Level 2 : Feint, Double Block, Mystification
Level 3 : Total Block, Combination
Level 4 : Disarm, Charge

Dunshu (shield)

Combat Techniques may only be used with the small round shield, since the larger type of shield is too large and unwieldy.

Level 1 : Total Block, Trap
Level 2 : Repel, Charge
Level 3 : Disarm, Double Block
Level 4 : Two Weapons

Jianshu (fencing)

Level 1 : Direct Hit, Total Block, Trap
Level 2 : Double Block, Feint, Charge
Level 3 : Double Blow, Disarm, Whirlwind Block
Level 4 : Two Weapons, Combination, Hold At Bay, Mystification

Qiangshu (spears and lances)

Level 1 : Repel, Charge, Hold At Bay
Level 2 : Double Blow, Double Block
Level 3 : Direct Hit, Total Block, Whirlwind Block
Level 4 : Strangle, Combination, Mystification

Close combat Techniques

Knock-out (the bear strike)

The character's attack is designed to strike the opponent with such force that he falls unconscious.

The character must aim his blow at the head, or another crucial point such as the sternum or the liver, and strike with particular force. The ST is increased by +2 rather than the usual +1. The attacker calculates damage in the normal way and the victim performs a Metal Test. If the victim's Test result is equal to or higher than the damage figure, he stays on his feet. If not, he is knocked out for (6 – Earth) minutes.

Trap (the snared blade)

The character can trap his opponent's weapon either with his own weapon or against a piece of furniture, such as a table or a statue. This Technique may also be executed without a weapon, using Hand-to-Hand Skill.

The opponent has three options :

- escape from the trap by using an action to let go of his weapon
- escape from the trap by performing a successful Opposition Test of Water
- attempt another action whose ST is increased by the Success Margin of the trapping Test.

If the trap is held, then starting from the next exchange the victim cannot have a higher initiative than the character using the Technique. If he obtains a lower initiative score then he uses that score, but if he obtains a higher score then he acts immediately after the character.

The character using the Technique has four choices :

- use an action to hold his victim in the trap ;
- use an action to release his victim from the trap ;
- use an action to try to break his victim's weapon by performing a successful Metal Test against a ST equal to the solidity of the weapon. Should he fail in such a Test, his victim escapes immediately ; or
- attempt another action whose ST is increased by the Success Margin of the trapping Test.

Charge (ox charge)

The character launches himself at his opponent to strike him with his full weight and momentum. He may do this either by running or by falling onto his opponent.

Whenever a character covers a distance in yards equal to his Water value before launching an attack, the damages caused by his attack are increased by +1. However, since time spent charging is time that a target can spend steeling himself for the collision, the target of a charge obtains a bonus of +1 on his Active Defense Test for each action that the character spends charging.



Combination (the way of all possibility)

This special Technique enables a character to combine two other Techniques provided that they can both be executed with his weapon. It does not allow a character to use the same Technique twice in one attack.

Use of this Technique increases the ST of the Test by +2 rather than the usual +1. This is additional to any increase imposed by the relevant Techniques.

Double Blow (the dragon's claw and tail)

This Technique involves the character using a long weapon at great speed to inflict a double blow. With it, a character uses just one action to inflict two rapid blows on a single opponent, by striking with the tip and the handle of a spear, or the blade and the hilt of a sword. The ST for the first blow is increased by +1 and the ST for the second blow by +2 instead of the standard +1. The damage caused by the first blow is reduced by one point and the damage caused by the second blow is reduced by two points, down to a minimum of one damage point.

Direct Hit (the sharp thorn)

The object of this Technique is to strike the opponent at his weakest point.

It is most often used to find chinks in the armor of men, in which case the protection given by the armor is reduced by two points, and can fall to zero. It may also be used against the natural armor of earthly and unearthly creatures, by aiming at the eyes or the joints.

Disarm (the way of peace)

The object of this Technique is to force one's opponent to let go of his weapon.

A character who succeeds in his Attack Test may either throw his opponent's weapon a distance in yards equal to the character's Water value, or capture the weapon, providing that he has a free hand. No damage is inflicted on the opponent, who may nonetheless attempt an Active Defense in order to frustrate the use of the Technique.

The downside of this Technique is that where it fails, the opponent may immediately and without using an action attempt a simple counter-attack (without using any Taos or Combat Techniques).

Two Weapons (the whirlwind of blades)

The character wields two identical weapons, one in each hand, which give him a superior defense against attack.

When using this Technique, the character's Passive Defense score is increased by +1 for the duration of the exchange. Similarly, he receives a bonus of +1 in any Active Defense Tests he may perform in that exchange. However, the STs for his Attack Tests during the exchange receive the standard adjustment of +1.

Double Block (halt the rain of blades)

The character uses his weapon with such rapidity that he is able to block two attacks in the same exchange.

This Technique enables a character to block two blows in one Active Defense. So long as the two blows occur in the same exchange, they may come from different opponents. The ST of the first Active Defense is increased by +1 and the ST for the second is increased by +2 instead of the usual +1.

Strangle (the boa constrictor)

The character uses either his weapon or his bare hands to exert pressure on his opponent's throat. For damages caused by this Technique, see the rules on strangulation at p. 71.

An opponent who is being strangled has two options :

- try to escape by using an action to perform a successful Opposition Test of Water
- attempt another action whose ST is increased by the Success Margin of the strangling Test.

If the hold is maintained, then starting from the next exchange the victim cannot have a higher initiative than the character using the Technique. If he obtains a lower initiative score then he uses that score, but if he obtains a higher score then he acts immediately after the character.

The character using the Technique has three choices :

- use an action to maintain the stranglehold
- use an action to release his victim from the stranglehold
- attempt another action whose ST is increased by the Success Margin of the strangling Test.

Feint (false carelessness)

The character adopts a misleading guard in order to lull his opponent into a false sense of security and take advantage of the slightest error.

The ST for any Active Defense Test by the character against this particular opponent is increased by +2 instead of the usual +1. Where he succeeds in such a Test he may subtract his Success Margin from his opponent's Passive Defense score when he next attacks that opponent.

Mystification (the torrent of blades)

The character executes a complex sequence of moves and thrusts which confuses his opponent and makes it easier to get past his guard.

Before using this Technique, the character must announce how many actions he is going to use. Then, during his Attack Test, he rolls not one but several Yin/Yang Dice, one for each action devoted to the Mystification. The Test is as follows : Metal + martial Skill + sum of results of Yin/Yang Dice.

In calculating damage, no account is taken of the fact that the sum of the Yang dice may be a higher figure than the sum of the Yin dice. But account is taken of extra damage caused by a Yin/Yang Balance.

Hold At Bay (the hedge of thorns)

The character uses the length and full range of his weapon in order to maintain control of his personal space.

Provided that his weapon is about the same size or longer than those of his opponents, the character may prevent them from getting close to him for the duration of an exchange. To use the Technique, the character must perform a successful Test of Metal + martial Skill, with an ST of 5 plus 1 for each additional opponent after the first. Where he succeeds, and any opponent tries to attack him, his Success Margin is added to the ST of the Attack Test. If the opponent's attack fails, the opponent automatically receives damage points equal to the damage value of the character's weapon.

The character cannot do anything else while executing this Technique. As soon as he performs another action, such as an attack, an Active Defense, or a movement, the Technique ceases to have effect.

Total Block (the citadel)

The character adopts a special guard enabling him to concentrate all his power and energy on his defense.

The character must state at the very beginning of a combat round, even before the Initiative Test, that he wishes to adopt this guard. He then performs a Test of Metal + relevant martial Skill, with a Success Threshold of 7. If he succeeds, then he adds his Success Margin to his result in any Active Defense Test for the rest of the combat or until he decides to drop the guard.

However, for so long as the character maintains his Total Block, the same Success Margin is added to the ST of all of his attacks.

Whirlwind Block (the cyclone of blood)

The character's defense is so focused and secure that he is able to defend and launch a surprise counter-attack all in one movement.

The character performs an Active Defense Test with an ST increased by +2 instead of the usual +1. If he fails in the block, then he cannot counter-attack. If he succeeds in the block, he can continue the same movement to perform an Attack Test with an ST increased by +2 instead of the usual +1. If the attack is successful, the damage is reduced by 2.

Only one action is required for the block and counter-attack. But the Technique cannot be combined with another attack in the same exchange. This means that if the character has already carried out an attack, he cannot use the Technique in this exchange. And once he has used the Technique, he cannot carry out any attacks until the next exchange. He may of course use Active Defense, but without using this Technique.

Throw (the way of the tornado)

The character uses his opponent's weight and momentum in order to throw him off his balance and gain the upper hand.

Where this Technique is used successfully, the victim falls to the ground but suffers no damage. But once on the ground, he cannot use Active Defense until he has got up again. And getting up requires an action.

Repel (the advancing storm)

By advancing on his opponent, striking relentlessly and mercilessly, the character can force his opponent to retreat.

Where the character's Attack Test is a success, the opponent must immediately retreat a distance in yards equal to half the damage points inflicted. The distance is rounded up to the nearest yard, and there is a minimum retreat of one yard. If the opponent meets an obstacle preventing him from retreating the full distance, he suffers additional damage points equal to the number of yards he failed to retreat.

Distance combat weapons

Gongshu (longbow)

Level 1 : Snapshot

Level 2 : Long Shot, Double Shot

Level 3 : Double Target, Masterstroke, Indirect Shot

Level 4 : Strike Through, Ricochet, Combination

Nushu (crossbow)

Level 1 : Long Shot, Snapshot

Level 2 : Combination

Level 3 : Strike Through, Masterstroke

Level 4 : Ricochet

Short throwing weapons (dagger, short sword, hatchet, dart)

Level 1 : Snapshot, Indirect Shot

Level 2 : Ricochet, Masterstroke

Level 3 : Long Shot, Combination

Level 4 : Double Target, Double Shot

Long throwing weapons (lance, spears, javelins)

Level 1 : Masterstroke, Snapshot

Level 2 : Combination, Indirect Shot

Level 3 : Strike Through, Long Shot

Level 4 : Ricochet

Distance combat Techniques

Combination (the way of all possibility)

This special Technique enables a character to combine two other Techniques provided that they can both be executed with his weapon. It does not allow a character to use the same Technique twice in one attack.

Use of this Technique increases the ST of the Test by +2 rather than the usual +1. This is additional to any increase imposed by the relevant Techniques.

Masterstroke (the eye of the master)

The character has a sharp eye and an unerring aim.

At any distance up to the average range of his weapon, the character can pick out a particular element of his surroundings. He can then fire at it without spending time on concentrating or taking aim. If he aims at the chink in a piece of armor, and hits his target, the armor's protection is reduced by two points and can fall to zero. The Technique can also be used against the natural armor of earthly and unearthly creatures, by aiming at the eyes or the joints.

Double Target (the deadly breeze)

The character can fire or throw at two distinct targets in the same action.

After choosing two targets within his field of vision, he performs an Attack Test for each. The ST of each Test is increased by +2 instead of the usual +1, and any damages are reduced by 1.

Double Shot (teeth of the snake)

The character can fire his weapon twice or throw two missiles in rapid succession at the same target in the same action. The ST for the first attack is increased by +1 and the second by +3 instead of the usual +1, and any damages are reduced by 1.

Strike Through (eye of the needle)

The character can use one shot to hit two targets, one of which is less than (Metal) yards behind the other. A single Attack Test is performed, with an ST increased by +2 rather than the usual +1. The first target suffers normal damage. Damages for the second target are reduced by 3 and can fall to zero.

Both targets can attempt an Active Defense. If the first target blocks the shot, then the whole attack is defeated and the second target is safe. If the first fails to block the shot, or chooses to dodge it, then the second is exposed and can attempt an Active Defense, with an ST increased by +2.

Ricochet (the blind assassin)

The character can sense the presence of an opponent outside his field of vision, or either partially or completely protected by cover. He can then identify his target's location and hit him by bouncing his shot off a hard, smooth surface.

The ST for the Attack Test is increased by +2 rather than the usual +1. Any cover bonus that his target might have is reduced by 2.

Indirect Shot (the curve of death)

The character can fire a curved shot, whose trajectory is difficult to predict.

This Technique can be used to bend a shot round one or more obstacles between the attacker and the target. Obstacles include people, trees, market stalls and so on. The ST of the Attack Test is increased by +1 for each obstacle (in addition to the usual +1).

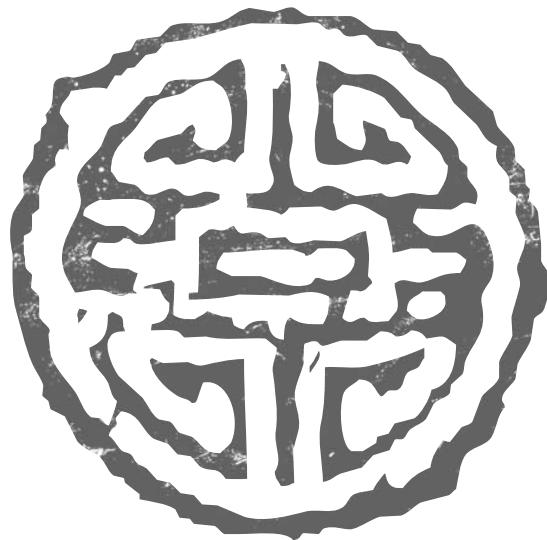
The target's Passive Defense score is reduced by 2. The same is true for his result in any Active Defense Test.

Long Shot (the cry of the falcon)

The character's command of his weapon is so great that he suffers no penalty when firing or throwing from long range or extreme range.

Snapshot (the lightning of Heaven)

Provided that his weapon is ready, the character can attempt to fire off a round before his opponents have a chance to move. He obtains a bonus of +3 in the Initiative Test for the relevant exchange.



Breathless and perspiring, Heart of Jade looked down on the street, six yards beneath her feet. Perched on the roof to which she had chased the last of their assailants, she savored the silence and the feeling of completeness that washed over her at the end of each combat. The blood fell, drop by drop, from the rotting tiles to the mud beneath. Eleven bodies lay in the middle of the road. She had killed over half of them herself. Still too few to still the flame that burned her from within... In her head, the voice of the dragon had fallen silent. He too was enjoying this vision of eternity, the ethereal calm that falls over a devastated battlefield. Heart of Jade suspected the dragon of taking advantage of her anger, and feeding on this rage that tormented her body. But so long as he gave her the power to wreak vengeance, she did not care.

With feline grace, she leapt into the void and landed effortlessly in the street, where the metallic odor of blood had swept away the bitter smell of mud. No-one. For the few seconds that the combat had lasted, the shutters on the houses had stayed closed. And now that the fight was over, still no face appeared at a window. Amid the carnage, she looked down at one of the mercenaries of Fist of Bronze who lay at her feet. He was young, almost a child, his youthful features already hidden by the encrusted blood all over his face. She remembered her oath and spat on the corpse.

The door to the old building opened with a creak, and Xian and Three Truths emerged. The young wu xia had found a length of white silk which he used to clean his sword. Long red lines spread along the fabric, rivers of blood running across a virgin land. He wore a joyless smile.

"Nice fight. But I would have liked to know why these men wanted to ambush us. What do you say, Three Truths?"

Xian and Heart of Jade turned to the fangshi. He rubbed his chin absently, his gaze fixed on the muddy ground. It was as if he hadn't heard the question. As seconds went by slowly, none of the three moved. Oddly, the noise of the battle did not seem to have attracted any attention, whether from the military, the authorities, or the curious. The silence began to close in on them, and a cold wind swept through the street. Xian could not hold on anymore, and cleared his throat.

"Three Truths?"

The exorcist came back to reality.

"We cannot stay!" And he began to walk away, followed closely by his two companions.

"My master's body is inside. It was him that asked me to come. He was a brave and learned

Taoist. Now he is dead. But it was not those men who killed him, for they would not have known how. It was a much greater power... much greater."

Again he seemed lost in his thoughts.

"So who are they? Why do they want to kill us?" asked Xian, without really expecting any clear answer to his questions.

"Mercenaries working for a monster, Fist of Bronze, a demon become a man." Heart of Jade's voice shook with hatred.

"Not a demon, just a man. But they were mercenaries, and I fear that they may have made a most terrible alliance. Has anyone ever spoken to you of the Sect of Leaning Heaven?"



"She is here. She is coming."

Fist of Bronze turned toward the woman in black. His one eye stared out from his scarred and disfigured face, lingering on the perfect body of the sorceress. He snorted loudly: the wisps of incense smoke in the weak light of the torches made him want to vomit. Seated on the ground, small silver bells tinkling from her wrists, she stroked the yarrow stalks that lay between her long bare legs. The upper part of her face was hidden by the long black veil of her richly-embroidered cloak. She breathed the perfumed air with obvious pleasure. Fist of Bronze hated this place, this esoteric stillness, these incantations and these secrets. But above all he hated this woman. On many occasions, as now, he imagined himself plunging his dagger into her soft side, tearing at the tender flesh and spreading blood all over her marble skin. Without lifting her head, she smiled faintly.

"You do not like me, Fist of Bronze."

It was not a question. A shiver ran down the spine of the old mercenary. He often felt that she could read his thoughts.

"What I think of you is irrelevant, sorceress. I need your powers. And the Master wishes me to watch over you. So I do."

"Watch over me? Do you really think I need your protection, mercenary?"

Clearly not. He needed her; but the feeling was not mutual. Fist of Bronze had seen many things over the course of his troubled life, but he had never got used to the powers of fangshi and other sorcerers.

He turned his face from the mocking smile which played on her pale and strangely beautiful face. Seeking to take control of the situation, he returned to the purpose of his visit.

"Tell me, sorceress, tell me what you want!"

The woman took a deep breath, and the incense smoke drifted upward to her delicate nose. She raised her head and faced the vaulted ceiling far above. In the deathly silence, the only sound was of water dripping in the shadows far away.

"The Dragon's daughter is coming. She is already in Handan. And on your trail. She knows that you are here and suspects the terrible alliance that you have made. She will soon find you."

"But I sent men to guard the house of the old fool ! They should be able to stop her !" cried Fist of Bronze.

His teeth were bared and his jaw was set so hard that he ached.

She replied with a small laugh.

"Be serious, Fist of Bronze. She is accompanied by two men. One is young and innocent. He thinks the world is a simple place and cannot yet see his place in the Great Truth. The other..." a trace of worry appeared at the edges of her green lips. "Well, the other, I have decided to deal with him."

The old soldier fidgeted, consumed with rage and another feeling that he thought he had forgotten. Fear.

"I should have had her killed when I had the chance," he barked.

He did not notice that the woman was smiling again.

"Yes, you should..."



The damp tunnel became narrower the further it went underground. They walked ankle-deep in brackish, foul-smelling water, disturbing clumps of dirt and hundreds of rats. Xian held the torch ahead of him, crouching beneath the slimy vaulted roof. Behind him, Heart of Jade moved with the stealth of a cat. She had already drawn her weapons, and held them in her characteristic guard, their blades turned back and parallel to her arms. Even Three Truths was silent, and Xian almost missed his lengthy speeches which had accompanied their journey to Handan.

After the combat, the fangshi had led them through a labyrinth of narrow streets and alleyways to a brothel on the outskirts of the willow district. A voluptuous and vivacious woman had welcomed them and led them to a small private room at the rear of the building. She seemed to know the exorcist well, and brought them a small meal before disappearing behind a heavy curtain. It was only then that Three Truths had explained that this was a meeting point for the disciples of his master; a brotherhood of fangshi devoted to fighting the influen-

ces of Feng Du throughout the seven states. Xian and Heart of Jade had exchanged a knowing look, and giggled at the choice of such a place for such a worthy objective. Soon they had been joined by two men dressed as common laborers. The exorcist had spoken with them alone for a while before rejoining his traveling companions.

"Fist of Bronze is in Handan. A little over an hour ago, our informers saw him enter a building in the temple district alone. We think the building might house members of the Sect of Leaning Heaven. It is worth checking."

They had crossed town under cover of a moonless night. Arriving at the house, they had been surprised to find it completely empty. It held not a single item of furniture, no indication that anyone might have lived in it recently. Mystified, they had searched the building again, until Xian called out to his companions. In the rear courtyard a stone slab had been placed over a narrow well where a rope ladder hung. Taking their courage in both hands, they descended into the gloom. Eleven yards below, they had found a roughly-cut tunnel which sloped down into the bowels of the Earth. They had been following it for nearly ten minutes now, chasing the squealing rats before them.

Suddenly, a set of steps appeared before them. The steps led to a heavy metal door, rusted by the damp. Xian pushed at it and it opened without a sound. They entered a chamber so vast they could not even see where it ended. The sound of their steps on the black stone floor was muffled by the heavy woollen wall hangings. Thirty feet into the chamber was an earthenware urn filled with glowing embers. A powerful aroma of incense masked the putrid smells wafting from the tunnel behind them. On the floor lay sticks of yarrow arranged in a intricate and cryptic design. Three Truths looked closely at the Yi Jing pattern in order to study its signs. Still holding the torch, Xian walked around the vaulted chamber.

"Fist of Bronze was here not long ago," murmured Heart of Jade, "I can feel it."

"And he was not alone, as I doubt he would know how to use this," added the fangshi, pointing to the careful arrangement of stalks.

The voice of Xian came from the other end of the cave.

"Well, whoever it was, he's already gone. But he forgot something."

He was standing in the opening of a thick oak door, which led to a straight staircase leading directly to the surface. He pointed to a necklace hanging from a nail in the wood. A simple silver chain, with a single carved stone : a heart of jade.

Magic

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To the common people, it is an unfathomable and unnatural power, accessible only to the most accomplished of Taoist practitioners. But Magic is really no more than a branch of applied science, based on the study of the forces of the universe and of how those forces can be controlled. Any man with both the ability to acquire such learning and the will to apply it can aspire to become a skilled practitioner of the Magic of the Tao.

Magic in the Warring States

Magic is often believed to be an unnatural practice, a simple matter of invoking mystical forces and unleashing them on the world. The reality is far more complex.

The nature of Magic

In fact, the Magic of the Tao has nothing of the unnatural. It can be defined as the performance of rites and protocols derived from the fundamental interactions between the building-blocks of the universe, with the intention of producing predictable and controlled results.

In this sense, Magic is completely natural, a branch of science. It remains, however, a more exclusive discipline than others, one that can only be meaningfully pursued by those who have devoted their lives to understanding the secrets of the universe.

Any mortal wishing to learn Magic must first study the complex vision of the universe contained in Taoist doctrine, familiarize himself with the notions of Yin and Yang, understand the intricate relationships between the Five Elements, and take control of his Chi. This essential learning will guide the student along the mysterious ways of the Tao.

Those who practise Magic

Since Magic is an advanced form of science, it requires many years of study. Few have the time and dedication needed to attain a high level of expertise.

Most of those who practise Magic are Taoists, followers of the works of Lao Zi and holy men who travel the roads of the *Zhongguo* in search of learning and experience. Not all Taoists necessarily practise Magic, but most know at least the basic principles and a few techniques or spells. Those Taoists who have devoted their lives to the study of one or more ways of the Tao are known as *fangshi*, or practitioners. They include diviners, geomancers, exorcists and alchemists. Some even seek to combine knowledge of all of the ways in their search for union with the Tao, but they are rare. Most *fangshi* remain loyal to one or two ways.

In the villages and the countryside, Magic is practised by village healers, shamans and sorcerers. These wise men and women are heirs to the ancient religious practices of their tribes and apply their great learning for the benefit of their community. Their approach to Magic is less ritualized than that of Taoist practitioners, but they too follow specific, clearly-defined rites, and they have the same powers as the *fangshi*. Most shamans are well-versed in Divination and Exorcism ; others also practise Internal Alchemy.

Since Magic is not an innate gift, but rather a set of scientific disciplines that anyone can practise, it is open to any inhabitant of the *Zhongguo* to learn and use the mysterious powers associated with it. There are many who, despite their limited understanding of Magic, have learnt enough from local sorcerers or renowned *fangshi* to practise on an occasional basis. For example, a physician may rely on Internal Alchemy to complement the knowledge of the human body that he acquired during his medical training. Or a knight-errant deep in the darkest regions of the *jiang hu* may need to know a few exorcist techniques. Any manner of man may decide to take up the way of the Tao...

Acquiring and using Magic

From a gaming point of view, any character can practise Magic and learn spells and magical techniques, provided that he satisfies the basic requirements of the relevant way.

To begin with, any character wishing to use any Magic must possess at least Apprentice Level in Taoism.

Next, he must also have the Skill that corresponds to his chosen way, together with any other Skills listed as requirements in the description of each way.

Finally, he will need to satisfy the specific requirements of each technique before acquiring it.

In addition, a character needs to have a sound justification for his study and practice of Magic. While this justification goes without saying for a Taoist, a craftsman, soldier or scholar needs to show good cause. As usual, the Games Master has the last word on what constitutes good cause.

Whenever a character decides to use a technique within his knowledge, he need only perform the appropriate Test, if any (see the description of each technique), and spend the Chi cost, and he can benefit from the effects of the technique.

Using Magic in a combat situation may take one or more actions, or be considered a free action. Each technique's description indicates how long it takes to prepare, which should assist the GM and the players in fitting it into a combat situation or other time-critical situation.

Whenever the description of a technique appears to conflict with the general rules, the description prevails.

Magic and the Taos

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At first sight, Magic and the Taos might appear to be the same thing, since both are based on the proper understanding and the correct application of the laws of the universe.

In reality, the two are subtly but significantly different. The Taos are indeed the earthly form of those universal laws, and command of the Taos does involve the characters in influencing the operation of those laws. But Magic is more precisely the study and manipulation of the constituent parts of those laws, namely the multifarious connections and interactions between the basic constituents of creation, like Yin and Yang, the Chi, and the Five Elements.

From a gaming point of view, it is perfectly possible to combine the use of Taos with the use of Magic. In the right context, it is even possible to add in a Combat Technique or a martial Skill (see the screen for more on this).

Example : Xian knows a little Exorcism. He comes upon a village whose people are being terrorized by a demon, and decides to help them. First he uses the Exorcism technique Blessing of Wood to grant his willow sword the power to wound spirits. Then he confronts the demon and charges to attack it, using the Tao of the Six Directions and the Trap Technique in order to prevent the demon from launching an attack.

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The four esoteric ways

The Magic of the Tao is structured according to four mystical ways. Each way involves a different approach to the practice of Magic and includes a variety of different spells, potions, rites and techniques. The four ways are External Alchemy, Internal Alchemy, Divination and Exorcism.

The description of each way set out below contains :

- a brief explanation of its nature, its objectives, and the main practices associated with it
- a list of the requirements, generally Skills, that a character must have before starting to study the way
- a list of the spells, recipes, techniques, and magical powers available to a character who studies the way.

The description of each spell or technique contains several elements :

- The **name** given for the spell or technique will be the name by which it is most widely known. Note that the same spell may have different names according to the region or depending on whether it is used by a Taoist practitioner or a village shaman.
- The **Skill** entry indicates which mystical Skill must be possessed by a character, and at which minimum Skill Level, before he can learn the technique.
- **Preparation time** is the time that a character needs to activate the spell or use the technique.
- **Duration** is the amount of time that the spell continues to take effect.
- **Preparation ST** is the ST that a character must meet or surpass in order to perform the technique successfully.
- **Effective area** is the area over which the spell or technique takes effect.
- **Chi cost** is the minimum number of Chi points that a character must spend when using the spell or technique.
- **Improvements** refer to the possibility for a character to spend more than the minimum Chi cost in order to enhance the effects of the technique, in terms of duration, effective area or damage.
- Finally, the **effects** are described in detail.

External Alchemy

What it is

One of the central objectives of the Taoist faith is the attainment of immortality.

One way of fulfilling that objective is to devise and create a pill or elixir of immortality, able to prolong the life of any that consumes it by ten thousand years. The goal of Alchemy is to discover and develop such a pill or elixir.

The science of External Alchemy, or *Wai Dan*, focuses on synthesizing the vital principle artificially. It relies mainly on non-decaying compounds such as cinnabar, and noble materials like gold and jade, but also a wide variety of plants and minerals.

In order to carry out his experiments, an alchemist needs not only a well-equipped laboratory, but also a regular supply of such rare raw materials. He will be reluctant to leave his work, but will occasionally be obliged to do so in order to find the right materials.

The art of the alchemist lies in his awareness of how elemental energy is distributed through the natural environment. By collecting the right materials, such as jade, cinnabar, pearls, and hemlock, and blending them according to extremely detailed recipes, he can concoct a substance able to act on the elemental balance of others.

To prepare a potion, an alchemist must spend a great deal of time in his laboratory. The process by which a potion is prepared bears a greater resemblance to the observance of a religious ritual than it does to following a recipe. It must follow a strict calendar, using highly-sophisticated equipment arranged according to the principles of *feng shui*. This makes it impossible to prepare two potions simultaneously in the one laboratory.

An experienced alchemist should always know whether his potion is effective, since he can test it in his laboratory. The layman, on the other hand, has no way of identifying a defective potion. Some more worldly alchemists have learnt that it can be useful to carry a few fake potions with them ; other less scrupulous individuals sell such fake potions and make up all manner of stories to explain their failure to take effect.

Requirements

To practise External Alchemy, the character must of course possess the Skills of Taoism and External Alchemy. He must also have at least Apprentice Level in Calligraphy and Herbalism.

In order to make a specific substance (potion, elixir, or ointment), the character must first spend the necessary time working on it. At the end of the preparation time, he spends the Chi cost and performs a Test of Earth + External Alchemy against the Preparation ST. If he fails, the substance is worthless and the alchemist will have wasted his Chi on nothing. If succeeds, the substance is ready to be used immediately.

Potions

Potions may take the form of liquid or powder. They are carried in terracotta jars, sachets of fabric sealed with wax, and bamboo tubes. They take effect when consumed or breathed in by a person, or on contact with the skin.

In a combat situation, an alchemist may throw a flask of potion at an opponent by a Test of Water + Throwing. This is treated as an attack, and requires an action. If the throw gets past the opponent's Passive and Active Defense, then the flask shatters on the body of the opponent and takes immediate effect on him. If the throw fails, then the flask falls to the ground, breaks and the potion runs into the ground. If the attack is on target but is blocked, the flask breaks immediately : this problem can only be avoided by dodging or using certain effects of the Tao of the Thousand Bees.

Purify the Field of Cinnabar

Skill : External Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : Three double hours

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 7

Chi cost : 2

Improvements : N/A

Stagnant water and rotten fruit and meat have a significant Yin imbalance. By blending them with Yang substances, the alchemist can develop a potion capable of resolving any health problems linked to the consumption of food and drink.

This potion can also be added directly to a questionable foodstuff or drink in order to protect the consumer against any possible ill-effects.

The Silence of the Lake

Skill : External Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : Six double hours

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 7

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : For each extra Chi point used, the ST for the victim's Resistance Test is increased by 1, up to a maximum equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level.

This extremely potent potion acts on the senses, weighing them down and plunging the target into a deep sleep.

It can be administered to a person either by adding it to his food or drink, or throwing it at him to make him breathe the fumes. The victim must perform a Resistance Test with an ST of 5 plus any increase due to an extra Chi investment. If he fails the Test, he loses consciousness immediately. For every hour that he remains unconscious, the ST for the Resistance Test falls by 1. When it reaches 0, the victim comes to. If anyone tries to help the victim by trying to wake him up, the victim can attempt another Resistance Test against the current ST. If he succeeds, he wakes up.

The Meeting of Tiger and Dragon

Skill : External Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : Six double hours

Duration : Until the disease is cured

Preparation ST : 7

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points used, the alchemist increases the bonus on the patient's Resistance Tests by 1.

When a person is ill, there is a disturbance in his inner harmony and an imbalance between his Yin and Yang. This potion accelerates the flow of energies through the body and is thus conducive to the re-establishment of a harmonious balance.

As soon as a sick character consumes the potion, the Interval between his Resistance Tests against the Virulence of the disease is halved. In addition, the character adds to the results of his Resistance Tests the Success Margin of the alchemist's potion preparation Test, together with any increase due to an extra investment of Chi.

From Bud to Flower

Skill : External Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : Two days

Duration : One hour per Skill Level in External Alchemy

Preparation ST : 9

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : Duration can be extended by one hour for every 3 Chi extra points used.

The alchemist concocts a potion into which he concentrates all the energy of one Element. By taking the potion, a character adds that elemental energy to his own for the duration of the potion's effects, until it disperses into the atmosphere.

The practical effect is that the character taking the potion increases one of his Aspect values by 1. The Aspect value is chosen by the alchemist. This increase affects the character's use of Taos and Magic, as well as the damage he inflicts and suffers. But it does not directly affect his Chi and Breath of Life totals.

The potion carries with it the risk of a serious imbalance of vital energy, so must be consumed with great care. A character cannot combine the effects of two potions designed to increase the same Aspect. And while it is possible to take two potions acting on different Aspects at the same time, drinking several may prove dangerous. Any character that consumes the potion must perform a Resistance Test whose ST is set out in the table below :

1 Potion	ST 7
2 Potions	ST 11
3 Potions	ST 15
4 Potions	ST 19

Should the character fail in his Resistance Test, his relevant Aspect value falls by 1 for the duration of the potion's effects. If he drinks several potions, and fails a Resistance Test, then all his relevant Aspect values are reduced, even if his earlier Resistance Tests were successful. If any of the character's Aspect values fall to zero, then he falls into a coma for the duration of the potion's effects.

Feed the Clay Warrior

Skill : External Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One day

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 7

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : The potion regenerates one box of Breath of Life for each extra Chi point used.

This potion stimulates the flow of Chi through the vital organs and facilitates the recovery of lost Breath of Life.

Any character who consumes the potion recovers a number of Breath of Life boxes equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level plus any extra boxes due to any additional investment of Chi.

It is impossible for a character to use this potion to go beyond his maximum Breath of Life.

Arouse the Winds of Heaven and Earth

Skill : External Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One day

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 7

Chi cost : 1 for every Chi point transferred

Improvements : N/A

The alchemist creates a potion into which he concentrates the energy of the Elements, together with a quantity of Chi, the universal source of life.

Any character who consumes the potion immediately recovers Chi. He can even double his maximum Chi (but not go beyond), but once he uses these extra points, he cannot get them back again.

Freeze the River

Skill : External Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : Three days

Duration : A number of rounds equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level

Preparation ST : 9

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : The ST of the Resistance Test imposed by the potion is increased by 1, or the potion's effects prolonged by 1 round, for every 2 extra Chi points used.

This formidable potion has the devastating effect of completely freezing the flow of Chi through the victim's body for a defined period of time. This happens whether the victim drinks the potion or merely breathes its fumes. The victim is paralyzed, his body becomes rigid and he suffers crippling cramps. He is unable to breathe properly or to move. It is said that if

the Chi is frozen for too long, the victim will die, but no alchemist has yet achieved this.

Any character who comes into contact with the potion must perform a Resistance Test with an ST of 7. If he succeeds, he suffers no ill-effects. If he fails, he becomes unable to do anything or spend any Chi for the duration of the effects of the potion.

Torture of the Thousand Needles

Skill : External Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One week

Duration : A number of rounds equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level

Preparation ST : 9

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : The potion's effects are prolonged by one round for every 2 extra Chi points used.

This potion must be spread on the victim's skin. Once in place, it reacts with air to burn like an acid. The more the victim moves, the more he refreshes the potion's supply of air and the more corrosive it becomes. Those that know the offensive stench of the potion know also that the best way to deal with it is to stay still until its effects cease.

In a combat situation, a character daubed with this potion loses one Breath of Life box at the start of each round during the Initiative Test. He also loses one Breath of Life box for each sudden movement he makes, even if the movement does not require an action. A box is lost for every attack, Active Defense, movement or free action produced by a Tao or Combat Technique. This continues until the potion's effects are exhausted.

In a non-combat situation, the potion causes a character to automatically lose a number of Breath of Life boxes equal to the number of rounds during which the potion takes effect. Many are too weak to control their body while their flesh is being burnt by a mysterious acid, but a victim who twitches, convulses or makes any movement suffers damage points equal to his Water value for each round that the potion takes effect. He will need to perform a Resistance Test with an ST of 9 to regain focus and control over his movements.

Disperse Venom

Skill : External Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : Three days

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 9

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : The poison's Virulence is reduced by 1 for each extra Chi point used.

Where a person has taken poison, this potion reinforces his natural flow of Chi and assists the body's natural defenses in fighting the toxins.

The poison's Virulence is reduced by a number of points equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level, plus any extra points due to an additional investment of Chi. The victim of the poison gets to perform an extra Resistance Test against the reduced Virulence.

Revive the Dead Branch

Skill : External Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One month

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 11

Chi cost : 10

Improvements : N/A

An alchemist may use this potion to stimulate and re-energize the flow of Chi to such an extent as to revive a dead limb, organ, or sense.

In order to benefit from this potion, the limb, organ, or sense must not have been physically destroyed : an alchemist can give a man back his sight or his hearing, and heal the paralyzed, but cannot replace a severed arm or a lost eye.

The character who consumes the potion feels life gradually return to the affected area : after a day, he will be able to use it once more.

The Destructive Tide

Skill : External Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : Three days

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 10

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : The damage caused by the potion is increased by 1 for every 2 extra Chi points used, up to a maximum equal to twice the alchemist's External Alchemy Level.

The Destructive Tide corrodes everything that it comes into contact with. It is carried in specially-designed ceramic gourds, and used as an offensive weapon.

An opponent hit by the Devastating Water immediately loses a number of Breath of Life boxes equal to the alchemist's (Wood + External Alchemy), plus any additional damage from an extra investment of Chi points. Armor offers no protection, and indeed is destroyed by the Water along with any clothing the character may be wearing. The Water tears through the skin, causing a hideous scar and, if the Games Master so wishes, a reduction in the victim's Fire Level.

Evil on the Air

Skill : External Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : Double the Preparation time of the potion to be vaporized

Duration : Same as the potion to be vaporized

Preparation ST : ST of the potion to be vaporized + 2

Chi cost : Double that of the potion to be vaporized

Improvements : Same as those of the potion to be vaporized

At this advanced Skill Level, the alchemist has mastered the ability of manufacturing a potion in gaseous form. His potions have the same effects, but take the form of a cloud of vapor which bursts forth from a broken flask to fill the air and affect anyone in the vicinity who inhales it.

Where a vapor is used in an enclosed space, it affects all the people in that space. If used in an open-air environment sheltered from the wind, such as an alleyway,

a deep valley or a dense forest, it takes effect within a three-yard radius of the point of impact. In a wide open space, the winds take it and it disperses harmlessly into the air.

Since the vapor affects any and all within its reach, the alchemist must take careful precautions in order to protect himself from it. A simple damp cloth across the face will be sufficient to protect him in many cases, but not in all. The safest course is to arrange to be far away when the gas is released.

From Flower to Seed

Skill : External Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : One week

Duration : A number of small hours equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level

Preparation ST : 11

Chi cost : 8

Improvements : The effects of the potion are prolonged by one hour for every 4 extra Chi points used.

Through this potion, the alchemist can breathe a phenomenal quantity of elemental energy into a person, while still avoiding a serious imbalance in that person's inner energy.

A character who consumes the potion gains 2 in one of his Aspect values. This increase affects the character's use of Taos and Magic, as well as the damage he inflicts and suffers. But it does not directly affect his Chi and Breath of Life totals. A character may not combine two potions designed to increase the same Aspect. While he may take several potions acting on different Aspects at the same time, this can prove dangerous. Any character that consumes the potion must perform a Resistance Test whose ST is set out in the table below :

1 Potion	ST 7
2 Potions	ST 11
3 Potions	ST 15
4 Potions	ST 19

Should the character fail in his Resistance Test, his relevant Aspect value falls by 2 for the duration of the potion's effects. If he drinks several potions and fails a Resistance Test, then all the relevant Aspect values are reduced, even if he succeeded in an earlier Resistance Test. If any of the character's Aspect values fall to zero, he falls into a coma for the duration of the potion's effects.

The Breath of Renewal

Skill : External Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : One week

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 11

Chi cost : 15

Improvements : N/A

With this potion, a character may expel that part of his vital principle which has been corrupted and replace it with a pure form.

The potion eliminates any trace of disease, side-effect or long-term injury, no matter how serious, from any person who consumes it. But the regenerative power of the potion does not extend to curing the plague, leprosy or any other incurable disease.

The Powder of Thunder

Skill : External Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : Three days

Duration : Instantaneous

Preparation ST : 13

Chi cost : 6



Improvements : The damage caused by the powder is increased by 1 point for every extra Chi point used.

The Powder of Thunder is a unique formula both feared and respected by alchemists. While extremely dangerous to concoct, it is a priceless ally in combat.

Even a Master Alchemist runs a very real risk of instant death when preparing the powder. If he fails the Test of Earth + External Alchemy, the powder explodes in his face, he suffers normal damage, and his laboratory may well be ruined.

But if the alchemist succeeds, he gains a mighty weapon, with the power to destroy both opponents and objects alike. The Powder of Thunder generates a sudden explosion affecting anyone and anything within three yards. Anyone hit by such an explosion loses a number of Breath of Life boxes equal to the alchemist's (Wood + External Alchemy), plus any additional damage from any extra Chi investment. Damage can be reduced by armor.

The downside to the Powder of Thunder is that it needs to be set alight in order to take effect. This increases the risk that the alchemist will be caught in the explosion, and makes it very difficult to use the Powder in a combat situation.

Elixirs

The Elixir is the ultimate goal of External Alchemy, the ideal formula that contains the secret of immortality. The perfect formula remains in the realm of myth and legend, but some modern alchemists claim to have come close.

Elixirs vary considerably according to who prepares them. Each alchemist has his own recipe and his own vision of how best to combine the elements. They take many forms : some are liquids, others powders, oils, infusions, gases, hot baths or cold baths.

In all cases, the preparation of an Elixir requires complete command of the science of External Alchemy, the finest equipment, and such divine levels of inspiration and concentration that only the most powerful mortals can have any hope of success.

Elixir

Skill : External Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One month

Duration : One year

Preparation ST : 13

Chi cost : 20

Improvements : N/A

The Elixir channels the internal energy flows of a person who takes it in such a way that his energy flows in a perfect circuit, and none is dissipated. This protects the person from the effects of aging for a whole year. At the end of the year, the Elixir ceases to take effect and the process of aging recommences. The character may then use another Elixir.

Elixir Absolute

Skill : External Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : Three months

Duration : Ten years

Preparation ST : 15

Chi cost : 40

Improvements : N/A

Elixir Absolute is a concentrated essence of the Elixir, able to regulate a person's flow of Chi with a precision of an internal energy clock.

A person who takes the Absolute does not age for ten years. Moreover, in theory he does not need to eat or drink, unless he spends his Chi and wishes to replenish it. At the end of the ten-year period, the process of aging recommences and the person once again needs to eat and drink. He may of course take another Absolute.

Ointments

Ointments are creams and balms applied to the skin. Most need to be spread all over the body in order to be effective. This requires a character to find a quiet space and a small hour, and rules out their use in combat situations and crowded environments.

Other ointments need only be applied to part of the body, such as the face, the neck or the hands. These can be applied in a matter of minutes and in any environment.

Generally speaking, the effects of an ointment will last a day, after which contact with the air causes the ointment to degrade and lose its special properties. But an ointment will also cease to take effect when a person washes it off.

Remember that an oily cream will attract dust and smells, and that cleanliness is of utmost importance in Warring States society. It is therefore worth considering washing regularly when using an ointment.

Fur of the Hare

Skill : External Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : Three double hours

Preparation ST : 5

Chi cost : 1

Improvements : The user receives a bonus of 1 on his Resistance Tests for each extra Chi point used.

This ointment protects the user from the weather by maintaining his body at a constant temperature. The user becomes far more resistant to extremes of temperature.

Whenever the user find himself in an environment involving extreme temperatures, such as the desert or the mountains, he obtains a bonus on his Resistance Tests equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level plus any extra bonus from an extra Chi investment.

Repel Vermin

Skill : External Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : Three double hours

Preparation ST : 5

Chi cost : 2

Improvements : The effects of the ointment are prolonged by one day for every 2 extra Chi points used.

This thick paste, rich in plant and vegetable matter, exudes a strong aroma that is offensive to insects and small animals : ants, spiders, mosquitoes, even rats and snakes. Such beasts are literally repelled by the smell and will not approach any person covered in it. To humans, the smell is strong, certainly recognizable, but not inherently unpleasant.

The paste can also be burnt in an enclosed space such as a house or barn to prevent vermin from entering the space. This is often the best way to protect grain stocks from bugs and weevils.

Purify the River

Skill : External Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One day

Preparation ST : 7

Chi cost : 3

Improvements : The effect of the ointment is prolonged by a week for every 3 extra Chi points used.

This tried-and-tested pharmaceutical lotion has long been known as one of the most effective of modern times. A person whose body is covered with it becomes impervious to external impurities and therefore completely resistant to disease. The lotion cannot cure an established disease, but should prevent the user catching a disease in the first place.

One of the specificities of the lotion is that it works by penetrating deep into the skin. This means that it does not wash off, and normally lasts a week. Those who can afford regular applications can therefore be well-protected against illness.

For the duration of the location's effects, the user obtains a bonus equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level on his Resistance Tests against the Contagiousness of a disease.

Hide of the Ox

Skill : External Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : Three days

Preparation ST : 9

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : N/A

This is a smooth cream with an acrid odor. When applied to the skin, it takes on the appearance and texture of tanned leather, protecting the body of the user from attack.

The user obtains two protection points against all sharp weapons, including daggers, swords and spears. This protection may be combined with armor. The user is not protected from heavy weapons such as sticks and maces.

Tame the Beast

Skill : External Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One day

Preparation ST : 7

Chi cost : 3

Improvements : The effects of the ointment are prolonged by one day for each extra Chi point used.

This ointment is used in a similar way to Repel Vermin, and has similar effects. But it generates a different odor, and affects different animals. The meaty, poisonous odor repels large animals including dogs, wolves and bears. But it is also offensive to the human nose, increasing by +2 the ST of any social Test requiring the character to make a good impression (eg. Eloquence or Trade). Needless to say, any attempt at Seduction is out of the question.

Mend the Bucket at the Well

Skill : External Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One day

Preparation ST : 7

Chi cost : 2

Improvements : The user recovers one extra Breath of Life box for every 2 extra Chi points used, up to a maximum equal to the alchemist's External Alchemy Level.

This thick paste is applied to a scratch or bruise in order to seal it, disinfect it and stimulate the flow of vital energy. In so doing, it can heal an affected area in a matter of hours.

The user recovers 2 Breath of Life boxes plus any extra boxes due to an extra investment of Chi. However, the ointment is only effective at Normal and Bruised Levels of Breath of Life, and has no effect once a character is Injured.

Scent of the Lotus

Skill : External Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : Three days

Preparation ST : 9

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : N/A

This delicate cream has a subtle, delectable perfume which makes the user attractive and charismatic.

Whenever the user tries to have a positive effect on a person, the STs of his Tests are reduced by 1 point. This only happens if the person can smell the perfume ; so it will work when having a discussion around a table, but not when delivering a speech to a crowd.

The cream does not need to be spread over the entire body. A localized application on the throat or face should be enough.

Eye of the Beloved

Skill : External Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One week

Preparation ST : 11

Chi cost : 5 / 10 / 15

Improvements : N/A

This delightfully-scented cream rarely fails to arouse sexual desire in any receptive person (whether of the opposite or the same sex) who comes close enough to the user to be affected by the perfume. A person who falls under the spell of the Eye of the Beloved does not lose all independent thought and judgment, but will do all in his power to obtain the object of his desire. This ointment is extremely popular among courtesans.

In its most basic form, the ointment only works when the user comes very close to his target, whether by whispering something in his ear, styling his hair, or entering the close combat zone. If the alchemist spends 10 Chi points, however, it will affect anyone within two yards. At 15 Chi points the area of impact is extended to five yards. Anyone within the gaze of the Eye of the Beloved acts exactly as if the user had obtained a Yin/Yang Balance in a Seduction Test.

Hide of the Stone

Skill : External Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : One week

Preparation ST : 11

Chi cost : 6

Improvements : N/A

This ointment thickens and toughens the skin of the user, making it less sensitive to pain and attack.

For so long as the ointment takes effect, the user gains 3 protection points. It guards against all kinds of physical attack, including arrows, swords and hammers, but not poison or fire.

Soothe the Rage of the World

Skill : External Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : One week

Preparation ST : 11

Chi cost : 6

Improvements : The Success Margin of the Earth + External Alchemy Test is increased by 1 for each extra Chi point used.

This protective balm enables the user to confront the Elements when they are at their most dangerous, and to pass through them without suffering any harm. A user can walk through fire without feeling pain, across a fast-flowing river without being swept away by the current, and into the howl of a tornado without being carried off by the wind.

In practice, the Success Margin of the Earth + External Alchemy Test is added to the result of any suitable Test involving fighting against an Element. If another character relies on Internal Alchemy or any other Magic to turn the power of the Elements against the user, the Success Margin of the Earth + External Alchemy Test is added to the ST of that character's Test.

Breathe the Breath of the Dragon

Skill : External Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : One week

Preparation ST : 13

Chi cost : 10

Improvements : N/A



This legendary cream is used to resist and repel the energy of fire. A person using the cream is impervious to fire and burns, and suffers no damage from them.

The cream only protects those areas of the body to which it is applied. So if a person uses it on his hand, he may take hold of a burning object, but not walk through fire. Note also that a character's hair, weapons and clothes may still be affected by the flames. And since it is impossible to apply cream to the inside of the mouth and nose, the ears or the eyes, a character who places his head in the grate risks ending up deaf, blind and suffocated. So while the ointment is powerful, it must be used with great care.

Talismans

Talismans are everyday objects into which alchemists breathe their Chi in order to give them magical properties. They are used for creating spells in advance, storing them, and releasing them later without having to spend Chi.

In theory, any object can serve as a talisman. Objects as common as fans, items of clothing, and children's toys are more than sufficient.

A talisman can be prepared very quickly. The alchemist spends the Chi needed for the spell to be stored in the talisman. He then performs a Test of Earth + relevant mystical Skill (limited by his External Alchemy Level) against an ST of 9. If he succeeds, his Chi passes into the talisman.

In combat, releasing the power within a talisman requires an action. A talisman can be used by a person other than the alchemist who created it, provided that he knows its properties.

A talisman cannot be used to store the effects of a potion or any other product that takes a specific physical form, whether derived from External Alchemy or any other kind of Magic. The Game Master is the final arbiter of what spells and techniques may and may not be stored in a talisman.

Talismans can only be prepared by characters who are at least Competent in External Alchemy. At this Level, they may only be used once.

Characters who attain Expert Level or higher may prepare talismans which can be used several times. To do so they simply spend the relevant number of Chi points the desired number of times.

When a spell stored in a talisman is released, the result on the spell Test is taken to be equal to the result obtained by the alchemist when he prepared the talisman. If no spell Test is required, the spell's properties and effects are calculated on the basis of its creator's characteristics.

Example : A young *wu xia* by the name of Qui Jin-fa travels with an old wise man known as Ma Te-Kuan. All along the dusty road, the old man fans himself with a broad leaf. The time comes for the two men to go their separate ways, but the path that the young man must take leads through a forest known to be haunted by evil spirits. Ma Te-Kuan decides to help his young friend by transforming his leaf into a talisman and imbuing it with the Exorcism technique Sense of the Yin.

Ma Te-Kuan has an Earth value of 3, and is a Master in Exorcism and an Expert in External Alchemy. He must perform a Test of Earth + Exorcism, but since his External Alchemy Level is lower than his Exorcism Level, he must use the former value. The ST is 9, and he obtains a 10. Sense of the Yin usually costs 4 Chi points, but he decides to prepare a talisman which can be used three times, so he spends $4 \times 3 = 12$ Chi points.

Next, he offers the leaf to his young companion, explaining that it should enable him to evade the evils of the darkest corners of the forest. Qui Jin-fa is sceptical, but accepts the gift and sets off along the path. After a few hours he comes to a dank, dark clearing. He remembers the words of the old man and releases the spell preserved in the talisman. His ability to sense Yin energy is the same as Ma Te-Kuan's Earth value, and the result of his spell Test is the same as the old Taoist's Earth + Exorcism Test, a 10. The ST of the Test to identify whether the clearing was cursed was only 7, so Qui Jin-fa hears the evil breath on the air and decides to avoid that place. Thanks to the foresight of the old *fangshi*, he will be able to use the talisman on two further occasions.

Internal Alchemy *Techniques*

What it is

Another method of attaining immortality is to use the laboratory of the human body itself to generate the vital principle.

Internal Alchemy basically consists of controlling and regulating the flow of Chi within the body by breathing exercises with a view to prolonging life. Special breathing exercises are used to transform the Chi and reinforce the Elements within the body. The power of the Chi and the internal Elements can then be harnessed to influence the Elements of the outside world. At higher levels, this process can be extended in order to adjust and manipulate the internal construction of the Elements themselves.

The theory of Internal Alchemy holds that by exercising his Chi, a person can regenerate his vital principle and redistribute the energy within his body. This regeneration and redistribution can be used to return the breath of health to one's own body and others. The practice of Internal Alchemy depends on a detailed understanding of the human body, its life points and energy meridians, and exercises for the Chi ranging from breath control to sexual harmony and revitalization techniques.

A key difference between a practitioner of Internal Alchemy and other Taoist practitioners is that he needs no equipment or raw materials to follow his chosen path. His body and mind are the only tools he needs in order to increase his command of his Chi, and thereby move closer to immortality.

For *Nei Dan*, another name for Internal Alchemy, is a way that can be pursued alone, far from the tumult of the world. For this reason, many of its practitioners live as hermits on the slopes of the sacred mountains or deep in secret valleys. They generally follow a strict diet, denying themselves meat, grain and alcohol, so as not to exhaust their vital principle prematurely.

Requirements

The character must possess the Skills of Taoism and Internal Alchemy, as well as at least Apprentice Level in both Meditation and Medicine.

The Sleep of the Woken

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : One night

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 5

Improvements : N/A

The practitioner is able to go without sleep by drawing on his inner energy to overcome tiredness.

To achieve this, he must meditate for a small hour in order to relax his mind, and spend 5 Chi points to breathe stamina into his body. This enables him to spend the whole of the next night wide awake as if he had just awoken from a good night's sleep.

The technique has two important limitations. First, the practitioner may only use it for a maximum number of consecutive nights equal to his Internal Alchemy Level. After this time, he must again get a whole night's sleep. Second, since the practitioner is not asleep, he cannot recover Chi or Breath of Life for so long as he stays awake.

Chi is the Breath of Life

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 2 for each Breath of Life box to be regenerated

Improvements : N/A

The apprentice practitioner has learnt enough about his own internal energy flows to understand that Chi and life are one and the same, the one breath of the body.

Whenever the practitioner is ill or injured, he can use his Chi to regenerate his Breath of Life. This requires him to enter a deep meditative trance and to spend 2 Chi points for every 1 box of Breath of Life to be regenerated. He can only regenerate up to a maximum number of boxes equal to his (Earth + Internal Alchemy).

The Elixir of Healing

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One small hour's meditation to identify the problem, one double hour's meditation to heal it

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : Equal to the Virulence of the disease or poison

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points that the practitioner spends during his meditation, he reduces by 1 any increase in Virulence resulting from a failed Test.

A character who has fallen ill or taken poison can use his Chi both to identify the nature of his affliction and to generate within himself a natural and completely effective cure that eliminates all the effects of the disease or poison.

First, the practitioner meditates in order to diagnose the cause of the imbalance in his internal harmony. This involves a Test of Wood + Internal Alchemy against an ST which will depend on the rarity of his affliction. He may, with the consent of the Games Master, add to his result a bonus based on any Skill Levels he might have in Medicine or Herbalism. If he passes the Test, he identifies at least partly the cause of his suffering.

Next, using his own diagnosis or that provided by a physician, the practitioner meditates a second time to heal himself. This involves a Test of the relevant Aspect + Internal Alchemy, against an ST equal to the Virulence of the disease or poison, and spending a number of Chi points equal to the same Virulence value. The relevant Aspect is determined by the nature of the disease or poison. It will be Fire for "hot" diseases, Water for "cold" diseases, Wood for plant-based poisons, and Earth or Metal for mineral-based poisons.

If the practitioner passes the Test, the disease or poison is driven out of his body. If not, the effects could get worse, since the Virulence increases by the difference between his result and the ST.

Food for the Soul

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : One day

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 5

Improvements : N/A

The practitioner can feed his body using his own Chi and so go without food and water.

All he need do is meditate for a small hour and spend 5 Chi points. He will then be able to go a whole day without food and water without feeling hunger or thirst and without his body suffering in any way.

He may only do this up to a maximum number of consecutive days equal to his Internal Alchemy Level. After this time, he must eat at least one square meal.

The Union of Yin and Yang

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : For so long as intercourse lasts

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : None

Improvements : N/A

Just as the union of Yin and Yang leads to the Tao, so the union between man and woman may lead to the source of the vital principle. Provided that it is not wasted, sexual pleasure can be a source of vitality.

Whenever the practitioner has sexual relations, he may hold back the flow of the vital principle at the moment of climax and instead of releasing it, allow it to circulate through his body. He performs a Test of Earth + Internal Alchemy. The ST will depend on the circumstances : it will be 5 if the practitioner was prepared for the coupling and able to concentrate his mind on it beforehand, 7 for an unexpected and unprepa-

red coupling, 9 if his concentration is broken by inappropriate feelings, and so on. Where he succeeds in the Test, he recovers a number of Chi points equal to his Success Margin (without going over his maximum). If he fails, however, he loses a number of Chi points equal to the difference between his result and the ST. A practitioner may also have sexual relations without invoking the Union of Yin and Yang. In this case, he does not gain any Chi but does not risk losing any.

Take the Breath Away

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One action

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : One person, touched

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : The victim loses 1 extra Chi point for every 2 extra Chi points used.

A *Nei Dan* practitioner can use his skills to dissipate the internal energy of another. He must first touch his target by succeeding in a Test of Water + Hand-to-Hand against the target's Passive Defense score. In a combat situation, this is treated as an attack and so can be countered by an Active Defense.

Should the practitioner manage to touch his target, he must then perform an Opposition Test of Earth + Internal Alchemy against the target's Resistance. If he wins this Test, he deprives his victim of a number of Chi points equal to his Fire value, plus any extra points due to an extra investment of Chi in the action.

The practitioner merely touches the victim, and does not cause him any damage. But if the attack causes the victim's Chi to fall into the negative, then the victim will suffer damage according to the normal rules set out at p. 61. The maximum number of Chi points that the practitioner can use is equal to his (Earth + Internal Alchemy).

The Inner Breath

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : Instantaneous

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 3 per minute

Improvements : N/A

A normal person can hold his breath for a number of minutes equal to his Metal value before he starts to suffocate.

The student of *Nei Dan* learns that Chi is as important to the body as air, and indeed can replace it. As a result, by spending 3 Chi points he can hold his breath for a minute longer than the standard time. At the end of that minute, he can spend another 3 points and obtain another minute. He can repeat this process for so long as he still has Chi points to spend.

The Shared Breath

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One action

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : One person, touched

Chi cost : 2 for every Chi point to be transferred

Improvements : N/A

For this technique, the practitioner must place his hands on the bare skin of the person to whom he wishes to transfer his Chi. For every 2 Chi points he spends, he gives 1 to the recipient, up to the recipient's maximum.

The maximum number of Chi points that the practitioner can use is equal to his (Earth + Internal Alchemy).

Fan the Flames of Life

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Competent (2)

Extra Condition : Knowing Chi is the Breath of Life

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : One person, touched

Chi cost : 4 for every Breath of Life box to be regenerated

Improvements : N/A

The practitioner is able both to transform his Chi into life force and to transfer that force to another.

The practitioner places his hands on the bare skin of the person to whom he wishes to give Breath of Life. For every 4 Chi points he spends, he regenerates 1 of his patient's Breath of Life boxes, up to a maximum of (Earth + Internal Alchemy) boxes per day.

The Healing Breath

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Competent (2)

Extra Condition : Knowing Elixir of Healing

Preparation time : One small hour's meditation to identify the problem, one double hour's meditation to heal it

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : One person, touched

Chi cost : Equal to double the Virulence of the disease or poison

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points that the practitioner spends during his meditation, he reduces by 1 any increase in Virulence resulting from a failed Test.

By physically examining a person suffering from a disease or poison, the practitioner can identify the nature of his affliction and use the patient's own Chi to generate a natural and completely effective cure for all the effects of the disease or poison.

First, the practitioner examines the patient by touching his skin with his hands, and meditating to isolate the cause of the internal imbalance. This involves a Test of Wood + Internal Alchemy against an ST which will depend on the rarity of the condition. He may, with the consent of the Games Master, add to his result a bonus based on any Skill Levels he might have in Medicine or Herbalism. If he passes the Test, he identifies at least partly the cause of his patient's suffering.

Next, the practitioner can use his own diagnosis or that provided by a physician as a basis for treatment. He must place his hands on the patient's skin, meditate, perform a Test of the relevant Aspect + Internal Alchemy (against an ST equal to the Virulence of the disease or poison), and spend a number of Chi points equal to double the Virulence value. The relevant Aspect is determined by the nature of the disease or poison. It will be Fire for "hot" diseases, Water for "cold" diseases, Wood for plant-based poisons, and Earth or Metal for mineral-based poisons.

If the practitioner succeeds in his Test, the disease or poison is driven out of his patient's body. If not, the effects may well get worse, since the Virulence increases by twice the difference between his result and the ST.

Bend Like The Reeds

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : A number of double hours equal to the practitioner's Wood value, plus any small hours earned by extra investment of Chi

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 6

Improvements : The technique's effects are prolonged by one small hour for every 3 extra Chi points spent during meditation.

The practitioner can harmonize the flow of Chi through his body with the Element of Wood in order to take on its defining properties of flexibility and suppleness.

He must spend 6 Chi points, meditate for a small hour, and perform a Test of Wood + Internal Alchemy with an ST of 7. The Success Margin in this Test becomes a bonus in any Test involving physical flexibility, such as untying himself, sliding between bars, and performing certain acrobatic feats. This lasts for the duration of the technique.

Solid As Steel

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : A number of double hours equal to the practitioner's Metal value, plus any small hours earned by an extra investment of Chi

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 6

Improvements : The technique's effects are prolonged by one small hour for every 3 extra Chi points spent during meditation.

The practitioner can harmonize the flow of Chi through his body with the Element of Metal in order to take on its solid and immobile nature.

He must spend 6 Chi points, meditate for a small hour, and perform a Test of Metal + Internal Alchemy with an ST of 7. The Success Margin in this Test becomes a bonus in any Test involving maintaining balance, or a penalty in any attempt by another to make him fall. This lasts for the duration of the technique.

Imprison the Inner Force

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One action

Duration : A number of rounds equal to the difference between the two results in the Opposition Test

Effective area : One person, touched

Chi cost : 6 +

Improvements : The target's Chi is trapped for one extra round for every 4 extra Chi points spent during the Opposition Test.

The practitioner is able to disturb the flow of internal energy within any person that he touches, and so prevent that person from accessing and using his Chi.

To imprison his target from within, the practitioner must first touch his target. In a combat situation, or any situation where the target does not consent, this means succeeding in a Test of Water + Hand-to-Hand against the target's Passive Defense. If he manages to touch his target, he must then spend 6 Chi points and perform a Test of Earth + Internal Alchemy against the target's Resistance. If the practitioner wins, then the victim will not be able to access his Chi (to use Taos, Magic etc) for a number of rounds equal to the difference between the results in the Opposition Test, plus any additional rounds due to any additional investment of Chi.

Explore the Inner Worlds

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : The duration of the connection

Effective area : An acquaintance located less than 100 x (Earth + Internal Alchemy) miles away

Chi cost : 8

Improvements : The practitioner can read one level deeper into the mind of his target for every 4 extra Chi points spent during the mental connection.

The practitioner is able to focus the power of his Chi in his mind and use it to connect with other minds and communicate with them.

First, the practitioner must meditate for a double hour, to find inner peace and clear his mind of all things. This will permit him to connect with the mind of any person of his acquaintance within a radius of 100 x (Earth x Internal Alchemy) miles. In order to identify a specific mind among the many thousands across the *Zhongguo*, and establish a sufficient connection to read the thoughts in that mind, the practitioner must have seen or spoken to the person at least once. Next, he must spend 8 Chi points. Finally, he must succeed in a Test of Earth + Internal Alchemy, whose ST will be twice the target's Earth value.

Even where he succeeds in connecting to the mind of his target, the practitioner will only be able to read conscious, clear and easily accessible thoughts. It is only by spending more Chi that he will gain access to the deeper levels of the target's mind, such as those that hold hidden thoughts, memories, unconscious thoughts, and so on. But at any level, he will be able to project his own thoughts and messages to the target's mind, in the form of short phrases, sounds or images.

Generally, people do not realize that their minds are being read, and assume that any thoughts that come into their head are their own, taking them to be the fruit of unconscious reflection or sudden intuition. However, there are some extraordinary individuals who are able to sense a mental connection, mainly Taoists highly skilled in Divination or Internal Alchemy, but occasionally others blessed with particularly sharp minds. To find out whether such a person senses the mental connection, the Games Master can make him perform a Test of Earth (+ Divination

or Internal Alchemy) with an ST equal to the result of the practitioner's Earth + Internal Alchemy Test. If the target wins, he senses that another mind is attempting to connect with his own and can try to close his mind to the interference and deny the connection by performing an Opposition Test of Earth against the practitioner.

Journey Beyond the Body

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : A number of small hours equal to the practitioner's Earth value

Effective area : A radius of 10 x (Earth + Internal Alchemy) miles around the practitioner

Chi cost : 10

Improvements : The practitioner's mind can travel 10 miles further from his body for every 4 extra Chi points spent during meditation.

The practitioner's mind is so finely balanced and harmonious that it is able to emerge from its bodily shell and journey alone through the world.

The practitioner must first spend 10 Chi points and spend a double hour in deep meditation. Once freed of its dependence on the body, the mind moves without assistance, flying at the speed of thought and passing through all physical obstacles. It may not travel further than a distance in miles of ten times its body's (Earth + Internal Alchemy), plus any additional distance resulting from an additional investment of Chi. The mind may return to its body at any time, but cannot remain out of the body for more than (Earth) small hours, at the end of which it automatically returns to the body.

For the duration of his flight outside his body, the practitioner is able to see and hear normally, but cannot touch anything, nor communicate with anyone. He is invisible to all except those using the Exorcism technique Beyond the Veil. He moves virtually instantaneously within the limits of his distance from his body, and can move through obstacles such as doors, walls, and roofs unless they are protected against such intrusions.

While the mind is in flight, the practitioner's body appears as if in a deep sleep from which it is impossible to wake it. Should the body be killed, the mind instantly becomes a ghost, trapped at the spot where the body died.

The Stream That Flows Unseen

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : A number of double hours equal to the practitioner's Water value, plus any small hours earned by extra investment of Chi

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 7

Improvements : The technique's effects are prolonged by one small hour for every 3 extra Chi points spent during meditation.

The practitioner can harmonize the flow of Chi through his body with the Element of Water in order to share in its invisibility and transparency.

He must spend 7 Chi points, meditate for a small hour, and perform a Test of Water + Internal Alchemy with an ST of 9. The Success Margin in this Test becomes a bonus in any Test involving subtlety or stealth, or a penalty in any attempt by another to spot him. This lasts for the duration of the technique.

Elemental Harmony

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : A number of hours equal to the practitioner's relevant Aspect value, plus any small hours earned from an additional investment of Chi.

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 6

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points used during meditation, the time during which the practitioner is in harmony with the Element is extended by one small hour, or his chosen Aspect value increased by 1.

An Expert in Internal Alchemy can combine his own Chi with the force of an external Element, and use the resultant power to assist him in his work.

First the practitioner must spend 6 Chi points and meditate for a small hour. Then he performs a Test of relevant Aspect + Internal Alchemy with an ST of 9. If he succeeds, he captures the power of his chosen Element. For a number of hours equal to his original value in the relevant Aspect, plus any small hours earned by extra investment of Chi, his Aspect value increases by 1, plus any additional increase earned by extra investment of Chi. This modified Aspect value should be used both in any Test involving the Aspect, and in calculating effects for which the Aspect value is relevant. This includes the use of Taos and Magic and the calculation of damage. Secondary Aspects are unaffected.

The Lightness of Fire

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : A number of double hours equal to the practitioner's Fire value, plus any small hours resulting from an additional investment of Chi.

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 8

Improvements : The effects of the technique are prolonged for one small hour for every 4 extra Chi points used during meditation.

The practitioner can harmonize the flow of Chi through his body with the Element of Fire in order to take on its lightness and rapidity.

He must spend 8 Chi points, meditate for a small hour, and perform a Test of Fire + Internal Alchemy with an ST of 9. If he succeeds, he becomes able to fly at the same speed as he can run for the duration of the technique. In combat, he is able to move a number of yards equal to his Fire value in one action. His body becomes shrouded in a fiery glow which the practitioner can give any form he chooses.

If the practitioner is still flying when the technique ceases to have effect, he comes back to earth with a bump.

At One with the Earth

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : A number of double hours equal to the practitioner's Earth value, plus any small hours resulting from an additional investment of Chi.

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 8

Improvements : The effects of the technique are prolonged for one small hour for every 4 extra Chi points used during meditation.

The practitioner can harmonize the flow of Chi through his body with the Element of Earth in such a way as to be able to hide within Earth and move through it.

He must spend 8 Chi points, meditate for a small hour, and perform a Test of Earth + Internal Alchemy with an ST of 9. If he succeeds, then for the duration of the technique he becomes able to bury himself and move underground. While underground, he continues to have some idea of events above ground. In order to use the technique, the practitioner must have both feet in contact with the ground (not on a wooden or stone floor). The act of burying his body takes an action, the body appearing to melt into the ground and leaving no trace except for a small mound. His body can move around underground at the same speed as it can run above ground. In combat, the practitioner is able to move a number of yards equal to his Earth value in one action. A character that has become One with the Earth cannot act on the surface of the ground, nor can those on the surface act on him.

If the practitioner is still underground when the technique's effects cease, he emerges suddenly from the ground.

Harness the Rage of the Elements

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : In combat, one action counts as an attack

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : Practitioner's field of vision

Chi cost : 7

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent by the practitioner during his attack, damage is increased by 1, up to a maximum equal to his relevant Aspect value.

A Master of Internal Alchemy has the ability to transform part of his Chi into an Element of his choice, and project that Element from his body with such force as to strike an opponent.

The practitioner spends 7 Chi points, chooses the Element that he wishes to use, then performs a Test of relevant Aspect + Internal Alchemy against the Passive Defense score of his target. In combat, this action counts as an attack, so the target can attempt an Active Defense. Where the practitioner succeeds, the rage of his elemental Chi strikes his victim, causing damage points equal to the practitioner's Aspect value plus any additional damage due to an additional investment of Chi.

The Rage of the Elements can take many forms. Here are just a few examples :

Fire : tongue of flame, lightning bolt, heat cloud, fireball
Water : high-pressure water jet, hailstones, ice daggers, water bubbles
Wood : jagged leaves, corrosive sap, stakes
Metal : razor blades, molten steel, needles
Earth : stones, localized earthquake, lava

Shield of the Elements

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : Instantaneous

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 7

Improvements : For every extra 3 Chi points that the practitioner spends when protecting himself, damage suffered is reduced by 1, up to a maximum protection equal to his relevant Aspect value.

A *Nei Dan* Master can harmonize his Chi with an Element of his choice and use it to protect himself from attack.

The practitioner spends 7 Chi points, chooses an Element, and performs a Test of relevant Aspect + Internal Alchemy, whose ST is equal to the damage to be suffered. In a combat situation, this does not count as an action, and so the technique can even be performed after an Active Defense. If he is successful, the practitioner receives the protection of the Elements and reduces his damage by his relevant Aspect value, plus any extra reductions caused by an extra investment of Chi.

The Shield of the Elements can take many forms. Here are just a few examples :

Fire : body surrounded by a whirlwind of fire, body takes on the transparency of a flame
Water : a watery ball surrounds the practitioner's body, his flesh gains a second skin of ice
Wood : the practitioner's skin is covered by bark, his body bends like the reeds
Metal : the practitioner's body becomes hard as bronze, his flesh is protected by a skin of iron
Earth : the practitioner's flesh turns to rock, his body takes on the uncertain consistency of mud

The Vital Principle

Skill : Internal Alchemy – Master (4)

Preparation time : One day

Duration : A number of decades equal to the Success Margin

Effective area : The practitioner

Chi cost : 12 +

Improvements : The aging process is halted for an extra year for every 6 extra Chi points spent during meditation.

A highly-experienced *fangshi* may come so close to the secret of immortality as to be able to synthesize in his own body an embryo of pure life, enabling him to slow and even halt the aging process.

The practitioner must enter a deep meditative trance and not emerge for a whole day. He must also spend 12 Chi points and perform a Test of Earth + Internal Alchemy with an ST of 13. If he succeeds, he manages to generate the vital principle within his body, and does not age for as many decades as points in his Success Margin, plus as many years as he has earned by an extra investment of Chi.

When he has exhausted this stock of Vital Principle, he may of course attempt once again to formulate the embryo of immortality by his own magical means.

Divination

What it is

Divination began in the ancient times, when turtle shells and flat animal bones were cast into the fire, and the cracks and marks that formed were interpreted by wise priests.

Those priests' great knowledge of earthly and heavenly signs and symbols extended also to the reading of the sky and the stars, which played as important a role in Divination in those times as it does now.

It was the Taoists that organized and codified the ancient learning and old practices, using trigrams and hexagrams made from yarrow stalks, and the methods set down in the *Yi Jing*, to see the future.

Divination also has a religious and spiritual dimension, involving communication with gods and spirits. A skilled diviner can commune with the spirits of the earth, invoke heavenly beings and forces, to ask them questions or pray for their blessings.

The third aspect of Divination is *feng shui*, the art of attaining harmony between human constructions and the natural environment in order to attract auspicious energy flows.

Requirements

A character wishing to pursue the way of Divination must of course possess Taoism and Divination. But he must also possess at least Apprentice Level in Theology, Calligraphy (only for spells and techniques requiring the reading of pictograms, such as Cracking of the Gods or Oracle of Changes), and Architecture (only for geomancy or *feng shui*).

A key difference between Divination and the other mystical ways is that it does not require the diviner to use his own inner force, but merely to perceive, understand and interpret his immediate environment and any signs emer-

ging from it. A character who uses a Divination technique has no control over what he sees or predicts, since the message is borne and expressed by the stars, the spirits or the universe itself. In other words, the Games Master.

When dealing with a character who pursues the way of Divination, the Games Master's responsibility is to explain to the character what may, or should, happen. In doing so, however, he should express himself carefully using open-ended language. For the Taoist faith is not fatalist : nothing is certain, and nothing can be promised. Divination cannot be used to predict specific events, such as "*You will kill your enemy in a duel*", but only to identify more general influences on a life, such as "*You are strong, you have trained well, if you fight on the seventh day of the next month with a sword dripping with purity, you have every chance of victory*". Many will rely on such guidance and await the most auspicious conditions before acting. The hero and the idiot alike will throw caution to the winds and seek to earn his own fortune.

The Games Master should use his role as intermediary to reveal to the players his view of their current situation and his plans for the next of their adventure. If he describes a character as "*at ease in war*" it does not mean that the character has become stronger in any way. It merely means that the GM has compared his strength with that of his opponents and concluded that he is likely to prove victorious. Characters who use Divination wisely, and interpret the GM's statements carefully, can thereby prepare themselves better for challenges ahead, change their plans according to the prevailing signs, or choose as heroes to forge ahead regardless. For nothing is fixed by destiny, and nothing must occur.

However, if the Games Master wishes, he may approach Divination in a more literal fashion, and attempt to match up his predictions with the events he creates, in order to persuade the players that the power of the diviner is as real and as practically useful as that of the other Taoist ways of Magic.

The technique gets its name from the fact that bad omens are more frequent than good ones. When a diviner is concerned about a matter, it is usually because there is ample reason to expect a negative outcome, and a bad omen is quick to appear. The absence of an omen is usually a good sign, for it means that events will flow in their normal course. A positive omen is rare, and is excellent news, for it means that the character is likely to receive an unexpected benefit.

The Cracking of the Gods

Skill : Divination – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One double hour

Chi cost : 6

The diviner lights a ritual fire and burns a blend of incense and spices. While breathing the smoke, he casts into the fire a turtle's shell or a flat bone from a sheep or a stag. The heat causes the surface of the shell or bone to crack, forming pictograms, which may often be in an ancient or obsolete form.

The diviner can interpret these symbols and reveal a message by succeeding in a Test of Wood + Divination, with an ST of 7. The higher the Success Margin, the clearer the symbols and the easier they are to decipher.

There are no limitations on the content of a message, and no specific rules as to its form. In all cases the message will be vivid, yet vague and opaque. And often the character will not fully understand the warning of the gods until it is too late.

Signs from the Stars

Skill : Divination – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One day

Chi cost : 5

Using celestial maps, calendars and ancient astrological works, the diviner can produce a detailed horoscope for an individual on the basis of his date of birth.

An Expert diviner is able to see while he sleeps, receive visions in his dreams, and so observe snatches of past, present and future events. The images that come to him in dreams will be opaque and disordered, often no more than hazy visions of the forces at work in the universe.

After considering whatever information is available on the individual, the diviner performs a Test of Earth + Divination. The ST will depend on the quantity and precision of the information available : it may be 5 where the person knows both his exact date and place of birth, but 13 where the person only knows what year he was born in. The horoscope will define in broad terms the person's defining characteristics, and provide general information about the course that his life may follow, dates and periods likely to be auspicious and inauspicious, and the influences which will guide his destiny. Many people consult astrologers before getting married, to gain guidance from the stars on the best possible date for the wedding.

Spells and Techniques

Deadly Omens

Skill : Divination – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One minute

Chi cost : 4

The character focuses on a single thought, such as a birth, a person, the building of a road, or the death of an animal, in order to open his mind to the signs that emerge from it.

By performing a successful Test of Wood + Divination, with an ST of 7, he will notice something unusual in his immediate environment, such as a tree with a particular shape, an animal behaving oddly, or an unexpected noise, that he may interpret as a good or bad omen. The higher the Success Margin, the clearer the sign and the more relevant the answer to the diviner's inner questions.

The Oracle of Changes

Skill : Divination – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One small hour

Chi cost : 8

Following the ancient methodology set down in the *Yi Jing*, the diviner draws yarrow stalks in the presence of the person for whom he seeks to obtain a message, and uses these stalks to create a hexagram of continuous and broken lines. He then studies the pattern and arrangement of the lines in order to comprehend the message that they contain.

After concentrating for a small hour, the diviner performs a Test of Earth + Divination, with an ST of 9. If successful, he understands the message and can answer the questions of the person consulting him. Provided that the procedure set out in the Book of Changes has been properly followed, and the diviner's attempt to read the message has succeeded, the message should appear as a short and reasonably concrete phrase, such as “*Do not fight this person, make him your friend*”, or “*Do not act before you are ready*”. The higher the Success Margin on the Test, the clearer the message and the more relevant it will be to the person's questions.



Voices from the World of Dreams

Skill : Divination – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One small hour

Chi cost : 6

An Expert diviner is able to see while he sleeps, receive visions in his dreams, and so observe snatches of past, present and future events. The images that come to him in dreams will be opaque and disordered, often no more than hazy visions of the forces at work in the universe.

Before going to sleep, the diviner meditates for a small hour and performs a Test of Earth + Divination, with an ST of 7. Where he succeeds, he will find in sleep the door to a world of visionary dreams. His dream will invariably concern something or somebody connected either to the diviner or to the place in which he is sleeping. He may for example sense a great threat, without knowing if the threat is yet to come or a shadow of the past. He may see a young woman commit suicide, but not know whether that in fact occurred in the spot where he sleeps, whether the fiancée of his most recent victim yearns to join him in the world beyond, or whether his own sister is destined to take her own life. The higher the Success Margin on the Test, the sharper the vision and the easier it is to interpret.

The drawback of this technique is that a night disturbed by vivid, lifelike dreams is far from a perfect night's rest. The character only regains Breath of Life and Chi at half the normal rate.

The Mirror of Water

Skill : Divination – Master (4)

Preparation time : One double hour

Chi cost : 10

The diviner fills a basin or bowl with fresh water, and fixes his gaze on the still surface of the water to meditate on its meaning.

If he succeeds in a Test of Earth + Divination, with an ST of 11, images will start to appear on the water and gradually coalesce into coherent scenes of events that may occur in the near future. For example, the diviner may see himself set upon by state soldiers or kneeling before a king. The higher the Success Margin on the Test, the clearer the scenes will be, and the easier they will be to interpret.

The Mirror of Blood

Skill : Divination – Master (4)

Preparation time : One double hour

Chi cost : 10

The diviner fills a basin or bowl with fresh water, and adds a few drops of the blood of a person whose future he would wish to see. He begins to meditate, fixing his gaze on the elaborate patterns formed by the blood in the water, and reflects on their meaning.

If he succeeds in a Test of Earth + Divination, with an ST of 11, he will start to see the blood form images and scenes of events from the future of the relevant person. These will be dark scenes, for the Mirror of Blood reflects only great misfortunes, tragic events and terrible deaths. The higher the Success Margin on the Test, the clearer and more coherent the scenes presented to the diviner will be.

Geomancy

The Book of the Stars

Skill : Divination – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One day

Chi cost : 2

Bagua is a map of the Heavens showing the major elemental influences, the arrangement of the various constellations, and the relationship between particular dates and astrological signs.

By a detailed reading of the *bagua*, the diviner may study and understand the heavenly influences affecting a particular person. After succeeding in a Test of Earth + Divination, with an ST of 7, he will be able to inform that person of his relationship with the various Elements in the near future. For example, he may say that Water is inauspicious, or that Earth will support him. Statements taken from the Book of the Stars will be extremely vague, and it will be up to the player to interpret their meaning. But the higher his Success Margin, the more copious and detailed the information obtained.

For instance, “*Water is inauspicious*” may mean a variety of matters to a character, including a risk of drowning, the likelihood of floods destroying his crops, difficulties in drawing back his army, or even that someone is planning to poison him.

Vision of the Taiji

Skill : Divination – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One minute

Chi cost : 3

By focusing his mind on any person, place or object, and performing a successful Test of Earth + Divination with an ST of 7, the diviner may perceive the distribution of Yin and Yang energies within it. If the energies are more or less in balance, then he notices nothing. But a significant imbalance always has a meaning : if a person is excessively Yang, for example, he may be violent or have a dominant personality. A house filled with Yin energy may be haunted, or its inhabitants sick.

The diviner might be able to obtain more information by using other Divination techniques, or his own powers of observation. But the Vision of the *Taiji* may give him a swift, intuitive advantage when faced with the unknown.

Feel the Energy of the World

Skill : Divination – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One minute

Chi cost : 2

One of the first things an Apprentice diviner learns is to feel the energy of the Elements around him.

By succeeding in a Test of relevant Aspect + Divination, with an ST of 7, he can for example sense whether there is a large body of water nearby, or whether a passer-by is concealing metal weapons underneath his clothes.

He also becomes able to sense the dominant energies within a person. But a mere Apprentice has not yet learnt to distinguish between the internal and external forms of the Elements, so while he may sense Metal within a person, he will be unable to say if that is because the person is a great warrior or because he is carrying iron weapons.

The range of the diviner’s elemental sense depends on his Success Margin. Each point in the Success Margin gives the diviner ten yards’ range.

Feel the Troubled Water

Skill : Divination – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One minute

Chi cost : 6

The diviner is able to sense unnatural disturbances to energy flows. Where a particular places has been witness to a violation of the laws of Heaven, whether by the dead returning to the world of the living, the action of demons, or the performance of a rite by the followers of Gonggong, that place is cursed forever, becoming a place of darkness and great misfortune for any who chance to pass through it.

By succeeding in a Test of Earth + Divination, with an ST of 7, the diviner can tell whether a particular location is cursed. But he will not be able to say what exactly occurred to create the curse.

The Wall of the Five Guardians

Skill : Divination – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One small hour

Chi cost : 8

By invoking the protection of the Five Sacred Animals, Guardians of the Cardinal Points of the Universe, the diviner may create a barrier in his mind and use it to surround an area with a radius up to (Earth + Divination) yards.

To prepare the Wall, the diviner must place various objects at the cardinal points of the area to be protected. In the center, he should place an object related to the Earth (such as a stone or a jade statue) ; to the North, an object related to Water (a bowl of water or a snowball) ; to the East, an object related to Wood (a plant or wooden tool) ; to the South, an object related to Fire (hot coals or a torch) ; and finally to the West, an object related to Metal (an iron weapon or a bronze tool).

Next, the diviner must solemnly invoke each of the Five Guardians in turn and spend 8 Chi points. The barrier is formed : when it is crossed, for example by a person passing through it, the diviner is immediately made aware of precisely where the crossing took place. If he is asleep, he is immediately awakened to receive this information.

The barrier lasts until it is crossed or the diviner leaves the area inside it.

The Eyes of Heaven and Earth

Skill : Divination – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One double hour

Chi cost : 12

An Expert diviner can use the lines and meridians along which energy flows through the world in order to locate a lost person or object. He must have a definite connection with the person or object. For a person, he must either have met him, or possess an item of his clothing, or have a member of the person's family with him. For an object, it is enough that he has held it for a short time.

The technique depends on appropriate meditation and a successful Earth + Divination Test. This enables the diviner to sense the approximate location of a person or object, to know the state, mountain range, or river mouth where they can be found. He should also be able to gain a vague sensory impression relating to their environment. If, say, a weapon is locked in a chest buried underground, the diviner will feel the crushing weight of earth on it. If a person is in a palace, the diviner will sense the rich marble of the walls, the metal of the guards' weapons, the throngs of courtiers. The diviner cannot hope for a precise address, or a clear name, but the higher his Success Margin, the clearer the indication of location and the more distinct the impressions of the target's environment.

On the Trail of the Dragon

Skill : Divination – Master (4)

Preparation time : One small hour

Chi cost : 8

Whenever beings invested with heavenly essence, such as legends, immortals, phoenix and dragons, pass through a part of this world, they leave a trail that can be read by those who master the science of Divination.

By succeeding in a Test of Earth + Divination, with an ST of 11, the diviner can analyze the energy flows in a particular location and identify whether such a being has passed through that place.

The Success Margin determines the distance (in tens of miles) within which the diviner can sense the presence of a particular being.

Command the Flow of Power

Skill : Divination – Master (4)

Preparation time : One double hour

Chi cost : 10

A Master diviner can influence and rearrange the flows of Chi in an area in order to bring either harmony or chaos to it.

To control the flows of Chi through a particular location, be it a room, a garden, or a clearing, the diviner must first reorganize the elemental structure of the location by moving furniture around, altering the position of stones, flattening mounds of earth and carefully arranging mirrors and plants. After doing this, and performing a successful Test of Earth + Divination with an ST of 11, he can choose whether to rebalance the Chi of the location or disturb its balance.

If he chooses to rebalance the Chi, the location becomes unusually attractive, harmonious, and relaxing. Anyone who chooses to meditate there obtains a bonus equal to the diviner's Success Margin in their Tests. Those who rest there are guaranteed a restorative sleep and recover a number of Chi points and Breath of Life boxes equal to the diviner's Success Margin.

If, however, the diviner chooses to disturb the balance of the location, it becomes a troubled place, with a forbidding, repellent atmosphere. It becomes impossible to regain Chi or Breath of Life by sleeping there, and strangely difficult to concentrate. Anyone who tries to meditate in such a place must apply a penalty equal to the diviner's Success Margin to his Meditation Test.

Note that once a diviner has altered the flow of Chi through a place, whether for good or ill, he himself will be affected for so long as he remains in that place.

Communion with the spirits

The Ear of Nature

Skill : Divination – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One small hour

Chi cost : 5

One of the most significant roles of the diviner is to establish a connection with nature, commune with the spirits of the world, and so find answers to the questions of man.

The diviner meditates for a small hour and performs a Test of relevant Aspect + Divination against an ST of 7. This establishes a connection and facilitates contact with an individual spirit that dwells in nature. The Aspect to be used in the Test depends on the kind of spirit to be contacted : Water for the spirit of a lake, Wood for a forest spirit, Earth for the spirit that guards the stone at the center of a village, and so on. The higher the Success Margin, the better-disposed the spirit will be to communicating with the mortal.

Note that the simple spirits of the natural world have an understanding of life that has little in common with that of men, and that their vision of the world will be defined and limited by their place within it. For a plant knows little beyond the fact that night follows day and the order of the seasons, a stone has no notion of time, and neither can tell a human from a non-human, excepting maybe those humans who have learnt to speak with them. The information obtained by conversing with this sort of spirit will be as full as possible, but necessarily limited.

On the Path of the Yellow Sources

Skill : Divination – Competent (2)

Preparation time : Ten minutes

Chi cost : 8

With this technique, a diviner can sense a person's intimate connection with death, and gain an impression of how long the person has left to live. He can tell if the person is in danger, if his life hangs by a thread, or indeed if the person is fated to lead a long and peaceful life. While he can guess at when death might come, he cannot say how.

This particular rite requires the presence of the relevant person, and a successful Test of Earth + Divination against an ST of 9. The key elements of the rite take only a matter of minutes, but many diviners like to impress laymen by adorning it with a range of arcane gestures and incantations.

Dwelling-House of the Ancestors

Skill : Divination – Competent (2)

Preparation time : Five minutes

Chi cost : 5

The diviner can feel the presence of the souls of the departed. By performing a successful Test of Earth + Divination, with an ST of 7, he can locate a nearby tomb, guess the name of the deceased, and cross the tomb without disturbing anything.

Certain less scrupulous diviners use this technique to profane the final resting places of the deceased without incurring their wrath. But a diviner can only distract the deceased's attention from his own presence, not from that of another.

Commune with the Gods of the World

Skill : Divination – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One double hour

Chi cost : 12

Through prayer and proper observance of the correct rite, the diviner can converse with an earthly deity to ask for his blessing, ask him questions, or seek his advice. This requires a successful Test of Earth + Divination against an ST of 9. The deities that are accessible by this technique include the rural god of the land, the gods of the many towns and cities of the *Zhongguo*, the patron gods of professions and occupations, domestic gods that watch over particular dwellings, the godlike beings that inhabit the wonders of the natural world (such as Duke He of the Yellow River) and even the minor deities of the world of Heaven.

All of these beings are less powerful and less visionary than the Gods of the Court of Heaven. Nonetheless, by their very nature, they are more closely involved in the world of men and therefore more capable of answering the diviner's questions or pleas for assistance.

Commune with the Gods and Beings of Heaven

Skill : Divination – Master (4)

Preparation time : One double hour

Chi cost : 15

Through prayer, offerings, purifying rites and the use of incense and consecrated substances, a Master diviner may be able to commune with a God of the Court of Heaven or a being of similar power, such as an immortal or a Dragon-King. If the celestial being so wishes, he may transmit an order or piece of advice to the diviner, or even answer one of his questions, provided that he has succeeded in a Test of Earth + Divination with an ST of 11. Each celestial deity must be addressed properly, using all of his many names and titles, and treated with the necessary deference.

Communing with the Gods is not a matter to be taken lightly. These are beings of infinite age, whose concerns are far higher than the affairs of men, and who will resent being disturbed over a trifling matter. A God cannot be tricked into revealing more information than he wishes, and the word of a God is not to be challenged. A man must be content to entreat the Gods humbly for their guidance.

Moreover, although the knowledge of the Gods is vast and their wisdom profound, few of them pay any great mind to the world of men ; as a result, it is not unknown for Gods to be ignorant or mistaken on earthly matters.

Open the Gates of the Body

Skill : Divination – Master (4)

Preparation time : Two double hours

Chi cost : Minimum of 30 ; the diviner must spend all of his Chi in order to use this technique

This rare and extremely potent technique permits a spirit or ancestor to appear in the real world and act directly in it. The diviner opens the gates of his body to a particular spirit, who enters, takes over, and inhabits his body, leaving the diviner himself in a semi-conscious state.

For so long as the technique takes effect, the spirit has complete control of the body, speaking directly through its mouth, and behaving as if it were his own. While the spirit has access to many of his own powers, the extent to which he can use them will of course be restricted by the physical limitations of the body. For however great the powers of the spirit, he must act within the confines of his earthly form.

A spirit can only inhabit a body for a period in hours equal to the diviner's (Earth + Divination). At the end of this period, the spirit leaves the body and the diviner comes to, with only very vague memories of the possession.

Exorcism

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Introduction

The first duty of an exorcist is to protect the world of men from the world of spirits. His first concern should be to hold a balance between the Yang of life and the Yin of death, by preventing the dead from returning to haunt the living.

An exorcist is therefore more than an ordinary Taoist practitioner. He is the sworn enemy of vengeful ghosts, bloodthirsty undead, and wicked demons, standing on the front line of the undeclared war waged by supernatural forces against humanity.

No self-respecting exorcist travels without the essential tools of his trade : a wooden sword, a mirror, a bell, sheets of bamboo, and ritual masks. By blessing these simple accessories, he can make them into deadly weapons in his bitter struggle against the unnatural creatures that torment the night of man.

Requirements

In order to practise Exorcism, a character must possess Taoism, Exorcism, and at least Apprentice Level in Calligraphy, Theology and Legends. An exorcist without Calligraphy can nonetheless use any techniques that do not require the reading or drawing of pictograms.

Techniques

Blessing of Wood

Skill : Exorcism – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : Until the next sunrise

Effective area : Close combat zone

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points that the exorcist invests in blessing his sword, damage caused by the sword is increased by 1, up to a maximum equal to his Metal value.

A willow sword is an exorcist's most valued possession, his weapon of last resort against supernatural creatures. By breathing his Yang energy into the wood and following the proper rite, the exorcist can transform the sword into a powerful weapon able to injure even ghosts and formless spirits.

To invest his sword with the power of the Chi, the exorcist must bless it three times, meditate holding the sword for a small hour, and spend 4 Chi points. The result will be a weapon that he can wield with *Jianshu* Skill and inflict 2 damage points.

The sacred weapon can cut through the Natural Armor of any supernatural creature, and injure even those creatures with the power of Invulnerability.

Power of the Sun

Skill : Exorcism – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : At least one double hour's exposure to the sun

Duration : One charge for each double hour's exposure to the sun, up to a maximum of twelve charges

Effective area : Field of vision

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points that the exorcist spends when using the mirror, damage caused by the mirror's rays is increased by 1, up to a maximum equal to his Fire value.

A polished bronze mirror filled with the energy of the sun and transformed by the Chi of the exorcist can be used to release rays of pure light with the power to injure ghosts, demons, and the undead.

The mirror must be left exposed to the sun for a double hour in order to absorb its energy, and the exorcist must use 4 Chi points to enable it to release this energy. The mirror will hold a number of "charges" equal to the number of double hours during which it was exposed to the sun, up to a maximum of twelve charges.

To release the light within the mirror and use it to strike a creature, the exorcist must perform a successful Test of Wood + Exorcism against his target's Passive Defense score. In combat, this counts as an action and can be countered by an Active Defense. The mirror's rays cause damage equal to the exorcist's Fire value, plus any extra damage due to an extra investment of Chi, and can burn even creatures with the power of Invulnerability or Formlessness.

The Compass of the Spirits

Skill : Exorcism – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One action

Duration : One day

Effective area : Indicates the sources of Yin energy located within a radius of (100 x Earth) yards, plus any additional distance due to an additional investment of Chi

Chi cost : 3

Improvements : For every extra 2 Chi points spent when using the compass, the active radius is increased by 10 yards.

The exorcist places an iron needle into a small circular box and transfers his Yang energy into the needle. By a process of "spiritual magnetism", the needle will point towards the most powerful source of Yin energy in the area. The source will generally be a ghost, a haunted place, or the hiding-place of a demon.

To create the compass, the exorcist must transfer his blood to an iron needle by pricking his fingertip. To make it active, he must spend 3 Chi points.

Once active, the compass indicates the sources of Yin energy located within a radius of (100 x Earth) yards, plus any additional distance earned by an additional investment of Chi. It remains active for one whole day.

The Mirror of Truth

Skill : Exorcism – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : One day

Effective area : Anything reflected in the mirror

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : N/A

A mirror that has been blessed and filled with Yang energy will reflect more than the surface of reality. It will show the true nature of objects and beings, unmask a shapeshifting creature, reveal a mirage, and show the original shape of objects.

The device is simple to prepare. The exorcist must hold the mirror in front of him, consider his own reflection for a small hour, and spend 4 Chi points.

For a whole day, anything reflected in the mirror will be shown in its true form. A demon or *Yao* with the power of Shape-Shift will be reflected in its original shape, an illusion will produce no reflection, and the reflection of a Magic weapon or other object will show its hidden powers.

Sense of the Yin

Skill : Exorcism – Apprentice (1)

Preparation time : One minute

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : A radius equal to the exorcist's Earth value in yards, plus any additional distance caused by an additional investment in Chi

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points spent during the concentration, the radius of the effective area is increased by 1 yard.

The exorcist is able to use his powers of concentration to channel his sixth sense into identifying any supernatural events that may have occurred in his immediate environment. Such events may take many forms, including the invocation of a demon, the birth of a *jiang shi*, the opening of a passage to *Feng Du*, or a murder or suicide which created a ghost. But only events which took place less than a century ago can be identified.

To use this technique, the exorcist must close his eyes and focus his mind on picking up the traces of supernatural energy in the area. He must perform a successful Test of Earth + Exorcism, whose ST will depend on the power of the supernatural event which took place in the effective area. Generally, the ST will be 5 for something as dramatic as a passage to the Ten Hells, but as high as 11 for the simple invocation of a minor spirit. If he passes the Test he succeeds in finding the precise location of the unearthly event and, through partial visions of the past, gains a general idea of what occurred and when. The higher the Success Margin, the clearer his vision of the event.

Music of the Heavens

Skill : Exorcism – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : One day

Effective area : Within earshot

Chi cost : 5

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent during the ringing of the bell, the target's penalty is increased by 1, up to a maximum equal to the exorcist's Fire value.

By ringing a bell filled with his Yang energy, the exorcist can generate a sound capable of disturbing and even paralyzing supernatural beings. To bless the bell requires an hour-long ritual ; to use it requires 5 Chi points.

Using the bell counts as an action, and in a combat situation, as an attack. In such a situation it requires an Opposition Test of Earth + Exorcism against the Resistance of any creatures who can hear the bell. If the exorcist wins, then all such creatures suffer a penalty on their next action equal to the difference between the Test results, plus any increased penalty caused by an additional investment of Chi.

Beyond the Veil

Skill : Exorcism – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One action

Duration : One double hour, plus any small hours due to an additional investment of Chi

Effective area : The exorcist

Chi cost : 4

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points, the time during which the exorcist can see the invisible is extended by one small hour.

By wiping his eyes with willow leaves soaked in fresh water, the exorcist is able to see invisible and hidden things.

To use the technique, the exorcist passes the purified leaves over his eyes and spends 4 Chi points. This gives him the ability to see any being using the power of Invisibility, and to know whether a person, place or object is

being possessed by a creature using the power of Possession. In this case, he sees the silhouette of the creature superimposed on the image of the person, place or object.

Shield the Body and the Soul

Skill : Exorcism – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : For so long as the jade powder covers the person

Effective area : One person

Chi cost : 5

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points spent during the preparation of the jade powder, the bonus on the Resistance Test of the person covered with it is increased by 1.

The exorcist can use jade powder to protect himself or another from spiritual attacks by evil spirits. The exorcist finds a finger-sized piece of jade and spends a small hour grinding it into a fine powder, which he then stores in a small bag or box. He spends 5 Chi points to give the powder the ability to shield its wearer.

A person covered with the powder gains a bonus equal to the exorcist's Exorcism Level, plus any additional bonus from an additional investment of Chi, to any Resistance Test involving fighting a vampire or resisting an attempt to possess him.

In a combat situation, the act of covering a person with jade powder is treated as an action not requiring a Test, unless the person tries to resist, in which case the exorcist must succeed in a Test of Water + Throwing against the person's Passive Defense score.

The Talisman of Control of Lost Spirits

Skill : Exorcism – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One round

Duration : For so long as the talisman remains attached to the creature

Effective area : One creature

Chi cost : 6 + to create the talisman, 5 + to control a creature

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent during the creation of the talisman, the target's penalty is increased by 1, up to a maximum equal to the exorcist's Wood value, or the time during which the creature is controlled by the exorcist is increased by 1 minute.

By writing a ritualistic formula in red ink on a sheet of bamboo, the exorcist can create a talisman which, when placed on a creature's forehead, can paralyze the creature and even bring it under the exorcist's control.

In creating the talisman, the exorcist must specify which type of creature it will be effective against : the undead (including ghouls and *jiang shi*), ghosts, demons, *Yao*, or other types of spirits. The more precise the definition, the more limited the range of the talisman, but the more effective the talisman. If the exorcist writes the precise name of a particular demon, then his talisman will cause great problems for that demon, but will not work against any others. Once the talisman has been drawn, the exorcist must breathe his will into it by spending 6 Chi points.

A talisman will only work when placed on the forehead of the target creature. To place the talisman counts as

an action. In combat it is an attack that requires a successful Test of Water + Hand-to-Hand against the target's Passive Defense score. Once the talisman has been placed on the forehead of the target, and for so long as it remains there, all of the creature's independent actions suffer a penalty equal to the exorcist's Earth value (or double that value if the talisman bears the exact name of the creature), plus any additional penalty caused by an additional investment of Chi.

In addition, the exorcist may attempt to control the creature's actions. To do so, he must spend 5 Chi points and succeed in a Test of Earth + Exorcism, whose ST is equal to double the creature's Earth value. If the exorcist succeeds, the creature is at his command for a number of minutes equal to his Success Margin, plus any additional time earned by an additional investment of Chi. At the end of this period, the exorcist must spend another 5 + Chi points and perform another Test. Of course, depending on the intelligence of the creature, it may not understand what it is asked to do.

Disperse Spirits

Skill : Exorcism – Competent (2)

Preparation time : One small hour

Duration : Until the next sunrise

Effective area : A formless creature within the range of the wind

Chi cost : 5

Improvements : For every 2 extra Chi points spent during the blessing of the fan, the time during which the creature is dispersed is extended by one small hour.

With the aid of a sacred fan, the exorcist may generate a mystical wind capable of dispersing for a time the presence of formless creatures. He must first bless the fan in an hour-long ritual and transfer his Yang energy to it by spending 5 Chi points.

Using the fan is treated as an action. In combat it is an attack, requiring a successful Test of Earth + Exorcism against the Passive Defense of the target, and which can be countered by an Active Defense. If the target creature fails to defend itself against the purifying wind, it is dispersed into the air for a period in double hours equal to the exorcist's Success Margin, plus any small hours due to an additional investment in Chi.

For the duration of the fan's effects, a creature that has been dispersed loses all of its powers. At the end of that period, the creature reforms at the exact spot where it was attacked by the exorcist. Only creatures using the power of Formlessness can be dispersed in this manner.

From Water to Fire

Skill : Exorcism – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One action

Duration : Until used

Effective area : Throwing range

Chi cost : 5

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent during the blessing of the liquid, the continuous damage inflicted by the liquid is increased by 1, up to a maximum equal to the exorcist's Fire value.

The might of Water is the greatest ally in the fight against demons, for its Yin power is in such perfect phase with the essence of such beings that it is best able to strike at their heart. To harness this power, the exorcist must bless a liquid (usually water, but some prefer to use alcohol) in a vessel the size of a bowl or bamboo tube.

The blessed liquid can then be thrown at a creature, inflicting terrible burns and damage equal to the exorcist's Water value (plus any damage deriving from an additional investment of Chi). This damage occurs during each round that the creature fails to remove the liquid from its body. The liquid runs through any Natural Armor that the creature may have, and can harm even creatures with the power of Invulnerability. Throwing the liquid is an action that counts as an attack requiring a successful Test of Water + Exorcism against the Passive Defense of the target, and which can be countered by an Active Defense.

Vengeance of the Gods

Skill : Exorcism – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : Until the next sunrise

Effective area : Field of vision

Chi cost : 5

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent during the blessing of the mask, the Terror power obtained by the exorcist is increased by 1, up to a maximum equal to the exorcist's Wood value.

By covering his face with a wooden mask bearing the image of a god hostile to demons, such as Nezha, Zhu Rong or Er Lang, the exorcist may sow panic among the creatures he is fighting.

The mask should be carved from willow and decorated with vivid colors, often enhanced by the use of the artist's blood. The exorcist grants the mask power by wearing it during an hour's meditation and breathing 5 Chi points into it.

Once this is done, every time the exorcist wears the mask, he inspires a boundless fear in any supernatural being that he confronts. For so long as he keeps the mask on, his Terror power is considered to be equal to his (Fire + Exorcism), plus any increase due to an additional investment of Chi.

Wearing the mask also completely shields the exorcist from any Terror power that is less than or equal to his own.

The Evil Curse

Skill : Exorcism – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : A number of months equal to the exorcist's (Fire + Exorcism)

Effective area : One person

Chi cost : 8

Improvements : For every 4 extra Chi points spent during the placing of the curse, the effects last an extra month.

A little-used technique, now largely the preserve of Taoists who have strayed from the true path, the Evil Curse enables a person to place a curse on another by directing negative energies toward him.



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To use the technique, the exorcist must possess some basic information about his intended victim (including, as a bare minimum, his real name), and at least one object belonging to him. He must then meditate for a double hour, filling his mind with the image of his target and all the harm he wishes to cause him. Finally, he must perform an Opposition Test of Earth + Exorcism against the Resistance of his target. If he wins, he can place his victim under a curse of his own design, which amounts in practical terms to the imposition of a Weakness (see p.40). But if the target wins the Test, he is completely protected for one year against any further attempt by the same exorcist to place him under a curse. An exorcist cannot place two or more curses on any one person ; where he has placed a person under a curse, he cannot do so again until the first curse has run its course.

The Amulet of Protection

Skill : Exorcism – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : One day

Effective area : The person wearing the amulet

Chi cost : 8

Improvements : For every 4 extra Chi points spent during the preparation of the amulet, the reduction in damage inflicted by creatures is increased by 1.

An amulet made of noble material (jade, gold, or a rare and precious wood) and blessed by an exorcist can protect its bearer against physical injuries caused by evil spirits and creatures.

To arm the amulet and draw to it the protective blessing of the gods hostile to demons, the exorcist must meditate for a double hour while wearing the amulet and spend 7 Chi points.

Once this has been done, and for one whole day, damage inflicted on any person wearing the amulet by physical attacks by supernatural creatures is reduced by a number of points equal to the exorcist's Earth value, plus any additional reduction from an additional investment of Chi.

Shield from the Souls of Sinners

Skill : Exorcism – Expert (3)

Preparation time : One round

Duration : One day

Effective area : A fair-sized building

Chi cost : 6

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent during the creation of the talisman, the ST of the Earth Test of any creature who tries to get past the talisman is increased by 1, or the damage inflicted on the creature is increased by 1.

The experienced exorcist has the ability to create talismans to protect temples and dwelling-houses against intrusions by malevolent beings of the world beyond.

To do so, he must write the appropriate ritual formula in red ink on a bamboo sheet, and so create a talisman with the power to repel supernatural creatures. When placed above the main entrance to a building, the talisman will prevent any such creature from entering.

In creating the talisman, the exorcist must specify which type of creature it will be effective against : the undead (including ghouls and *jiang shi*), ghosts, demons, *Yao*, or other types of spirits. The more precise the definition, the more limited the range of the talisman, but the more effective the talisman. If the exorcist writes the precise name of a particular demon, then his talisman will cause great problems for that demon, but will not work against any others. Once the talisman has been drawn, the exorcist must breathe his will into it by spending 6 Chi points.

A talisman will only work when placed above the main entrance to the building or property to be protected. An extremely large dwelling with several entrances will need several talismans : each pavilion in a palace complex or out-building within a manor is treated as a separate building for these purposes. Each talisman only works for one day. But the power of the sacred language embodied in the talisman works in all directions, so it is possible to enclose a creature in a building and use a talisman at the exit to prevent it leaving.

For so long as the talisman remains in place above the entrance, each creature covered by the sacred formula who attempts to pass through its shield must perform an Earth Test against an ST of the exorcist's (Earth + Exorcism), or the exorcist's (Earth x 2 + Exorcism) if the talisman refers to it by name. The ST may be increased where the exorcist has invested extra Chi. Should the creature succeed, it defeats the force of the talisman and passes through the shield. Should it fail, not only does it fail to enter the building, but it also suffers damage equal to the difference between its result and the ST. This damage cannot be reduced by Invulnerability or Natural Armor, and may be increased where the exorcist has invested extra Chi.

A creature may only try to pass through a talisman of protection once per hour.

Confine Evil Spirits

Skill : Exorcism – Master (4)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : Until used

Effective area : One formless creature

Chi cost : 7

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent during meditation, the ST of the Earth Test of any creature trying to escape from confinement is increased by 1.

An exorcist can confine formless spirits such as ghosts and some demons, provided that they have not taken possession of a person or object, in any vessel that can be closed.

To do so, the exorcist must spend 7 Chi points and meditate for a double hour, holding the vessel close to him in order to transfer his Yang energy to it. Thereafter, whenever he finds himself in the presence of a formless creature (such as one using the power of Formlessness), he need only open the vessel and it will generate such a powerful attraction for Yin energy in the atmosphere that the creature will be drawn towards it.

To escape confinement, the creature may attempt an Earth Test against an ST determined by the nature and solidity of the vessel used (see table) plus any increase due to an extra investment of Chi.

Once the creature is confined in the vessel, its powers become ineffective, and it may not attempt to escape for a period of days equal to the exorcist's (Earth + Exorcism). At the end of this period, the creature may attempt another Test against the same ST as the first Test, but may find that the wise exorcist has sealed the vessel with Shield from the Souls of Sinners.

Type of vessel

ST of the creature's Earth Test

Umbrella or parasol	3
Leather purse	5
Bamboo tube	7
Terracotta jar	9
Jade box	11

Combat Curses

Skill : Exorcism – Master (4)

Preparation time : One double hour

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : One person

Chi cost : 7

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent during the attempt to disperse the curse, the number of weeks during which the exorcist suffers its effects is reduced by 1.

An exorcist can sense negative energy directed toward a person and disperse that energy to defeat curses and evil spells.

To perform this technique, the exorcist must be in the presence of the person suffering from the curse. Facing that person and meditating for an hour, he performs a Test of Earth + Exorcism with an ST determined by the power of the spell to be defeated, often the result of the Test required to create the curse. Where the exorcist succeeds the curse is immediately lifted, but where he fails, he too suffers the effects of the curse for a number of weeks equal to the difference between his Test result and the ST.

The Trap of Heaven and Earth

Skill : Exorcism – Master (4)

Preparation time : One round

Duration : One day

Effective area : A radius of (Wood) yards around the pictogram, plus any additional distance deriving from an additional investment of Chi

Chi cost : 8 + to set the trap, 7 + to invoke the rage of Heaven

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent during the setting of the trap, EITHER the radius of its effective area is increased by 1 yard, OR the ST of the Earth Test of any creature trying to escape is increased by 1, OR the damage inflicted on the creature by the lightning bolt is increased by 1.

By sketching a pictogram depicting a trap in a precise location, and placing his own blood in it, the exorcist can create a zone in which any supernatural creature that passes through will be trapped and suffer terrible tortures.

The exorcist draws the pictogram in dust or dye while invoking the vengeance of Heaven, then places a few drops of his own blood and spends 8 Chi points. The trap thus set extends in a circle whose radius in yards is equal to his Wood value, plus any additional distance deriving from an additional investment of Chi.

Once the trap is set, any creature who sets foot within its perimeter, even one with the power of Formlessness, will be trapped. It can only escape by succeeding in an Earth Test whose ST will be equal to the exorcist's (Earth + Exorcism) plus any increase due to an extra investment of Chi. Such a Test can only be attempted once per hour. While the creature is caught in the trap, it can move freely within the perimeter, but will be faced with an invisible barrier that prevents it from leaving.

With the creature at his command, the exorcist can then call on the rage of Heaven against this impudent creature which dares to trespass on the world of men, by invoking the fire of Zhu Rong, god of vengeance. By spending 7 more Chi points, he can strike the creature with a mighty lightning bolt, inflicting damage of twice his Fire value plus any extra damage earned by an extra investment of Chi. The lightning strikes regardless of Formlessness, and slices through both Invulnerability and Natural Armor. In a combat situation, this action counts as an automatically successful attack.

Question the World Beyond

Skill : Exorcism – Master (4)

Preparation time : Instantaneous

Duration : Instantaneous

Effective area : One creature

Chi cost : 5 + per question

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent per question, the damage suffered by the exorcist after losing the Opposition Test is reduced by 1.

Once he has a creature at his command, the learned and experienced exorcist can bring his tremendous will to bear on the creature and force it to respond to his questions.

Before this technique can be used, the creature to be questioned must be under the control of the exorcist,

whether imprisoned in an object, paralyzed by a talisman, or caught in a trap. Once this is done, the exorcist focuses all his will on the creature and asks a question. He must perform a successful Opposition Test of Fire + Exorcism against the creature's Earth value. Should he succeed, the creature is obliged either to give the correct response or, where appropriate, admit its ignorance. But should he fail, the creature's mind takes over that of the exorcist, causing him to lose a number of Breath of Life boxes equal to the difference between the two Test results, less any protection provided by any additional investment of Chi.

Many exorcists use this technique to learn the true name of the demon they are fighting.

The Rite of Exorcism

Skill : Exorcism – Master (4)

Preparation time : One double hour to prepare the altar

Duration : Until the creature is destroyed or escapes

Effective area : A person, object or building possessed by a creature

Chi cost : 5 + per spiritual attack

Improvements : For every 3 extra Chi points spent per spiritual attack, EITHER the damage caused is increased by 1, OR the damage suffered by the exorcist after losing his Earth + Exorcism Test is reduced by 1.

This complex, sacred and mysterious ritual is the preserve of only the greatest exorcists. For it has the power to destroy the very essence and soul of a supernatural creature. However, it can only be performed in respect of intangible creatures that have taken possession of a person, who haunt a dwelling, or who have been made prisoner of an object.

The exorcist solemnly prepares the ritual by arranging incense, talismans, blood and eggs on an altar. If the creature to be exorcised dwells in a building, the altar must be placed in that building. If the creature is inside a person or moveable object, then it must be brought to the altar. Then the exorcist pronounces a long litany of prayers, incantations and invocations, bringing all the force of his will to bear on the evil creature in an attempt to break its spirit and dismantle its very essence.

The exorcist performs a Test of Earth + Exorcism against an ST equal to the creature's Resistance, and spends 5 Chi points. If he succeeds, the creature suffers damage equal to the Success Margin plus any additional damage caused by an additional investment of Chi. But if he fails, the exorcist feels the full force of the evil of the creature, suffering damage equal to the difference between his result and the ST, less any protection supplied by an additional investment of Chi.

Each spiritual attack, representing the desperate struggle between the soul of the exorcist and the essence of the creature, lasts a small hour.

Any damage suffered by the creature is not normal damage, for it is the essence of the creature that the exorcist is dismantling piece by piece. So even if the creature escapes during the ritual, its Breath of Life will be permanently diminished. And if it fails to escape, it will be wiped from the face of the world, its soul destroyed forever, with all hope of reincarnation lost.

The Warring States

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Government and Administration

After the great Legalist reforms and the slow decline of the feudal system, the states organized themselves according to a new conception of the state, with power centralized and responsibilities entrusted to a professional salaried class of officials.

During the Warring States period, the various lands of the Zhongguo were all governed in broadly the same manner, according to a vision of the state inherited from Legalist reformers like Guan Zhong and Shang Yang. There were of course differences between the states, some of them significant, but for the purposes of easy gaming we set out below a standard form of administration applicable to all seven states.

The deposed Emperor

For many years the Emperor had been no more than the symbol of a bygone age, a time when the ancient rulers reigned over a vast Empire and loyal vassals. Gradually, that time passed away as the Zhou dynasty lost its influence by the move to the East, and the more powerful fiefs sought their autonomy. Those fiefs became quasi-autonomous Hegemonies, and later states, whose rulers no longer recognized the political authority of the Emperor and who governed without regard for the opinions of the holder of the Mandate of Heaven.

His territory reduced to a small area of thirty-six cities, the Emperor clung to his religious authority as the one chosen by Heaven and the spiritual guide of the Zhongguo. His court came to attract more Taoists and enlightened men than statesmen.

Finally, in the year 865, the state of Qin annexed the territory of the imperial dynasty and Emperor Zhou Nanwang was the last of his line to bear that title. A resistance movement led by his son Huiwang did not survive long against the might of Qin.

Since that day, there has been no imperial dynasty, nothing to remind men that in former times each state was part of a vast Empire whose rulers were enlightened by the wisdom of Heaven... Such a power vacuum inspires the ambitions of many, and more than one King, yearns to become the next Emperor, to be the one to unite all things under Heaven and rule as absolute monarch of all the Zhongguo.

The King, symbol of the centralized state

Within his own land, the King represents ultimate power, the only power to pass according to the hereditary principle, a legacy of the times when the nobility ruled over fiefdoms and power was handed down from father to son for generations.

Much more than the ruler of his state, the King is a symbol. His power is more spiritual than temporal, for his will is given practical form by his ministers. This does not mean that the King's authority is a façade; on the contrary, he is the author of most key decisions affecting the state's internal and external policies. He will not stoop to personally drafting laws and decrees, but holds the ultimate power of approval or veto. The King speaks and ministers act on his every word, and thus is power exercised.

Through his ministers the King commands a whole class of officials. These officials are paid by the state according to their skills and can be dismissed for incompetence. They are organized in an administrative hierarchy with regional officials, judges and secretaries at the base, and the King himself at the top. The key principle is the centralization of power in the hands of the sovereign. That officials are paid by the state and answerable to their superiors for all their acts makes them entirely dependent on the state. The key difference between this class and the noble vassals of former times is the irrelevance of heredity to the acquisition of a post.

The King's final role is to represent his state in relations with the others. He communicates with the authorities of foreign lands and speaks in the name of his people. He is responsible for much of the state's foreign policy. Relations with other countries therefore depend greatly on the diplomatic skills and charisma of the King: a strong King will make his voice heard and surround himself with allies, while a characterless King can be seen as the product of a weak and unimportant state.

Ministers and advisers

The King holds the power of decision, and it is the role of ministers to give practical effect to his will by issuing laws and edicts and taking decisions on administrative matters.

Ministers are those officials closest to the seat of royal power, at the last step of the pyramid of centralized power. They are not merely servants of the King, but also his closest advisers. They have the ear of the sovereign and so may often be the source of royal decisions and the drafters of royal edicts.

Ministers meet regularly at council meetings presided over by the King. During these meetings ministers inform the King of events taking place in his land and advise him on actions to take, and the King makes his will known. Council meetings are attended by all manner of advisers and officials, and the discussions are recorded by scribes.

The types of ministerial post vary according to the will of the King, but the following posts are most frequent :

Prime Minister : Head of the council of ministers and first among ministers, the Prime Minister is closest to the King. He may often be the true ruler of the land, particularly where a sovereign has little interest in exercising his power. His role includes the management of conflicts between ministers and deciding between opposing views within the council.

Minister of State : The role of this minister is to manage the day-to-day administration of the state. By issuing administrative regulations applicable within the governorships and districts, he has authority over the vast majority of officials in the service of the state.

Minister of Justice : Drafter of criminal codes and responsible for the people's respect for the laws, the Minister of Justice represents the legislative power within the state. While the post of Minister of State is the most prestigious after that of Prime Minister, a Minister of Justice is reputed to hold more power and influence...

Minister of the Army : The Ministry of the Army is charged with orchestrating the defense of the state and is usually led by a general whose battle experience enables him to make sound decisions. Because of his control of the armies of the state, he is closely watched by the secret service...

The Secret Service : Of ill-defined leadership, the secret service has the twin tasks of spying on neighboring states and keeping the King's own subjects under surveillance, particularly those whose proximity to the seat of power might feed their ambitions.

Ministers are assisted by various advisers, high-ranking officials whose duties are to monitor certain specific matters within the purview of the relevant ministry, to inform their minister about current events, to make suggestions and proposals, to draft administrative procedures, and so on. These high-ranking officials manage the many departments and offices that make up the ministries and so hold significant power.

Moreover, these advisers can often be a minister's worst enemy, since their natural goal will be to supplant him as swiftly as possible. It is not unknown for high-ranking officials to be party to plots, alliances and secret conspiracies in order to discredit a minister without running any personal risk, and to take for themselves the highest step of power.

In general, these posts are filled by scholars recruited according to their skills or experience. Since paradoxically, nationality is no obstacle to appointment in any given state, many statesmen operate as political mercenaries, selling their talents to the state which offers the highest rewards.

Eunuchs in the halls of power

It had been the practice in imperial times for the servants at the Emperor's palace to be castrated in order to protect the virtue of the Emperor's many concubines.

The practice spread throughout the aristocracy until all the noble families were served by eunuchs. It became so widespread that the common people began to arrange for their sons to be castrated in order that they might gain employment. The life of a servant was humble, but far preferable to the grinding poverty of the peasantry.

In the period of the Warring States, this is outlawed, for the laws of most states provide that eunuchs may only be recruited from volunteers who choose that position in order to serve their King and country. However, the practice has not ceased, and parents continue to castrate sons, thinking they are acting in their sons' interests in ensuring them a future at court.

Yet the most intriguing development in the role of eunuchs at the royal courts has been their acquisition of key positions in the halls of power. As the only men allowed to live in the King's private residence, they have come to acquire more and more influence over successive rulers, becoming unofficial advisers on various matters, and in some cases filling the role of the monarch's parents. Although the eunuchs are prohibited by an ancient law from occupying positions of power, they evade its terms by being appointed advisers, assistants, secretaries, or tutors of the King. Thanks to this gradual and shadowy capture of positions of influence, the eunuchs now live like princes and hold considerable power.

A eunuch is destined to leave no heir. In a society like that of the *Zhongguo*, with its emphasis on ancestor worship, the family, and the need to produce children, this is seen as the ultimate curse. Yet it has fostered a keen solidarity among the eunuchs at court, who consider themselves members of one family, with all the attendant duties and loyalties. This spirit of brotherhood gives the eunuchs a marked presence at court and makes them a force to be reckoned with in the power games played out in the royal palace...



Life at court

Many significant figures gravitate around the King and live at court. Ministers, eunuchs, officials, foreign diplomats, artists and honored guests compete fiercely to attract the attention of the ruler, to be noticed by him and to draw closer to the seat of power.

The royal court is therefore a most dangerous place for those not skilled in its ways. Its wars are silent, the weapons of choice are slander and rumor. Alliances are made and unmade according to prevailing political circumstances, plots hatched to discredit individuals, and cabals formed to bring other individuals to the halls of power. Only the King himself appears safe from this secret war of lies, flattery and patronage.

The eunuchs have mastered the art of living and furthering their interests at court. Their unique position makes them relatively safe from attacks and makes them a group whose support is keenly coveted. Most ministers know this, and will do all in their power to win the favor of the eunuchs and thus safeguard their own position from ambitious high officials who dream of taking their place. For the halls of power are thick with chiefs of staff, head administrators, scribes and advisers, a mass of faceless bureaucrats each dreaming of making a name for himself, of increasing his prestige and his influence in the hierarchy of the administration. Many band together through friendship or for the achievement of a common goal, and the enmity between the various alliances is expressed through the quiet furthering of interests, subtle verbal confrontations, and discreet yet merciless attacks. The royal palace is home to a thousand schemes to advance the goals of one group and counter the goals of others.

The court is the best place to discredit a political rival. Many plots result in the disgrace of a powerful individual, who when faced with losing everything must choose between exile or suicide... These elaborate power games are fraught with such great risk that the only ones who dare become involved are those with a great deal to gain, or with no other choice.

Districts and commanderies

When the nobility lost its place in the imperial system, the idea of a fief ruled by a vassal lost all meaning. Since the Legalist reforms of political thinkers like Guan Zhong of Qi and Shang Yang of Qin, the governmental functions of the aristocracy were transferred to professional administrators and the state divided into distinct territorial and administrative units.

The smallest of these units is the district. Made up of a central town and several surrounding villages, the district is run by a mayor, who combines administrative and judicial functions, and an army officer, typically the commanding officer of the nearest garrison. In principle, the civilian and

military leaders work together to ensure the respect of the laws of the state and to maintain order. So the local police is made up of soldiers under the indirect command of the mayor, while conscription and military service is managed by the army officer. The mayor is assisted by various local officials such as scribes, secretaries and law officers, to whom he delegates tasks essential for the proper administration of the district, such as meetings with the leaders of guilds, resolution of small disputes, tax collection, and local government finance. The army officer is assisted by his lieutenants.

The commandery is the administrative unit between the district and the state. It too is run by two people: a civilian governor and a military governor of at least the rank of commandant. The duty of these two men is to keep informed about the affairs in the districts within their commandery and to take appropriate decisions. They are called upon, for example, to resolve disputes between districts, to decide levels of military deployment at external borders, or to control mayors and officers under their command. Their most important task is to send regular reports to the royal court and to account to their ministers for the operation of their territories.

Justice

Justice in the Warring States is harsh and repressive. When a crime is committed or a person suspected of dishonesty, an investigation is launched, generally managed by secretaries of the mayor, supported by a squad of soldiers. Suspects and witnesses are arrested and questioned to shed light on the affair. Admissions are frequently obtained by torture, thereby making the judge's work easier. The conviction of innocent people is of course extremely common, but the priority is that justice be seen to be done.

The law of the land is applied by the mayor or one of his law officers in a courthouse in the capital of the district had a court. After the reading of the charges, the suspect is given a chance to defend himself, or give an explanation for his actions. The judge considers the matter and issues a verdict, to be carried out immediately.

Scholars learned in the laws of the land offer their services as defense lawyers to any suspect with the means to pay (generally merchants or nobles), and speak for them during the trial.

Punishments are made to fit the crime. They range from fines, through beatings, imprisonment, forced labor and exile, to the death penalty. Sentences are typically harsh, and intended to act as a deterrent, and it is not unknown for a simple theft to be punished by several years' forced labor. Convicts are branded on their faces so that they can be recognized by all.

Some crimes, including treason, murder of an official, and crimes against the state, cannot be judged within the district, since by their nature they are outside the jurisdiction of the mayor. Such crimes can only be judged by special courts at the level of the commandery, or even of the state, where the accused appears directly before the

Minister of Justice or the secret police... A man convicted of such a crime will almost always be sentenced to death, either by quartering, boiling or by slow, painful mutilation.

Taxes

Taxes are collected directly, at district level, by tax collectors with military escorts. A proportion of the sum collected is paid to the governorship, which pays a proportion of its receipts to the state. Ensuring the collection of the correct amount of tax is a significant concern at all stages of the process, resulting in occasionally over-zealous practices such as extortion and false accounting...

Tax burdens vary between regions. In particular, border regions spend enormous sums on strengthening their defenses against neighboring states and therefore impose a far heavier burden on their populations.

Taxes can be paid either in kind (which is the norm among the peasantry), in cash, or even at times by service to the state (an option often chosen by craftsmen). Corruption is rife in the districts, mayors and tax collectors receiving handsome bribes to close their eyes to certain sources of income. Bribery is usually the preserve of the guilds of merchants and craftsmen, but is also used by the heads of clan of the *jiang hu* to protect their own power and to keep the King's men from sticking their nose into their affairs...

Armies and Wars

In an environment of almost permanent war like the *Zhongguo*, the military strength of a state is a crucial factor in both its influence over its neighbors and the respect they have for it.

A state's military strength is measured not only in terms of numbers of soldiers, but also in terms of hardware, natural resources, and its officers' skill and strategic knowhow.

Although there were differences between the military organizations of the different states, for the purposes of gaming simplicity we set out below a single model describing the structure and operation of the armies of all of the states of the Zhongguo.

In ancient times...

In the time of the ancient dynasties only nobles were permitted to bear arms and to learn martial arts. Armies were made up mainly of aristocrats, along with a few footsoldiers of humble birth and minimal strategic importance.

The military strength of a fief could be measured by the number of the chariots it possessed. These were considered the height of military technology, and chariot regiments were elite forces. Rival armies joined battle on flat, open ground, without involving the civilian population. Siege warfare was extremely rare in a time when wars were a matter of honor rather than territorial ambition, and served principally to provide the nobles with a theatre where they might prove their valor and distinguish themselves in battle.

But the Legalist reforms laid low the ancient nobility, in order that it would not seek to usurp power. Armies came to be made up of professional soldiers recruited in part from the lower aristocracy and principally from the peasantry. Promotions were granted on the basis of the merit of each soldier rather than birth, and in time the army became one more body of paid officials under the command of the reigning monarch. And so it lost its mythical aura, on which had been built great legends, and became a faceless mass of common people, devoid of brilliance, devoid of glory.

Relations between states

The relationships between the various states are complex. On the one hand, through their shared history and beliefs, all of the states have a strong sense of belonging to a single culture, setting them apart from the barbarian tribes. But on the other, each state considers itself the sole repository of the legitimate authority of the ancient dynasties, and thus the only one worthy of ruling over the whole of the *Zhongguo*. This is particularly true of more expansionist states such as Qin.

The states endeavor to maintain a balance of power by two means. First, each state maintains embassies in the neighboring states and entrusts its finest statesmen and diplomats with defending its national interests and negotiating military alliances and trade agreements. Second, there exists a system of hostage exchanges, with each state sending to the others various individuals as a guarantee of non-aggression. These prisoners are generally chosen from among children sired by the King on one of his concubines, ensuring that while of royal blood, the individuals are of greater symbolic value than political importance. At times, however, the hostage may actually be a figure of some real importance and recognized diplomatic skills. He may use his position at the court of a foreign state to buy off its ministers, provide assistance to spies from his own land, and serve his country as best he can.

The Ministry of the Army

"He who has no objectives has no hope of attaining them."
Lao Zi

Army divisions

*"Know your enemy,
and know yourself,
and you will be invincible."*
Sun Zi

Called either the Ministry of the Army, Ministry of Defense or Ministry of War, this institution is the central command of the state army.

The highest figure in the military hierarchy is the King, commander-in-chief of all the armies of his land. In practice, the military power of the state is managed by his second-in-command, the Minister of War. Frequently a former general with vast battle experience, the Minister will be assisted by various advisers, officers and diplomats in charge of the various army divisions (infantry, cavalry, engineers, etc.)

Due to his unusual position of power, the Minister of War is constantly under suspicion of plotting and assisting coups d'état, and often closely watched by the King's secret service. His uniquely difficult position is coveted and feared by many...

Conscription

To involve the people in the running of the country and its defense, all of the states have introduced conscription.

Every civilian above the age of twenty-two is therefore required to serve as a soldier for two years, one to be spent in the capital and one at the borders of the state. Thereafter he must join the regiment of his district for one month's training every year and remain available for active service for the rest of his life.

Conscripts make up the bulk of every army division. Those who distinguish themselves by talent or courage in battle are asked to join the army on a permanent basis as NCOs, their progress through the ranks then depending on the number of enemy heads cut off in the wars.

Naturally, there are means by which those not wishing to serve in the army can be exempted. For example, those already in the service of the state, such as officials and contracted craftsmen, those with a serious medical condition, and those with the means to pay a special tax, are not obliged to join the army.

Officers and NCOs are all professional soldiers who have chosen to serve in the army on a permanent and full-time basis.

Each state's army is divided into various divisions, each having its own function and commanded by a high-ranking officer of the royal court.

Infantry

This is the most important division, with the most men, mainly footsoldiers divided into heavy and light infantry units.

These units are the key strike force of the state, and are placed in the front line during battle. Their size and maneuverability is crucial to victory on the battlefield.

Footsoldiers are armed with a sword and either a lance or a halberd, and protected by light leather armor.

Cavalry

The cavalry is used relatively little on the battlefield.

Riders are used mainly for scouting missions or to launch targeted raids, but have little role to play in a large battle.

The exception to this rule is the cavalry of Zhao, which plays an active role in all battles, and is divided into several units including heavy cavalry, mounted archers, and messengers.

Riders are armed with a sword, a lance or halberd, and occasionally a bow. Their leather armor is effective, while not overly interfering with their freedom of movement.

Chariots

Although their technology is now decades out of date, chariots are still used occasionally by officers.

Chariots are drawn by two horses and carry three men (driver, archer and lancer). They are a valuable weapon during battles on flat, open ground, striking terror into the hearts of enemy troops, but their weaknesses are soon revealed on less favorable terrain.

Artillery

This essential division is made up of two types of archers: those armed with longbows, and those armed with crossbows.

The former group accompanies the infantry onto the battlefield, covering advances by the footsoldiers under a torrent of arrows, while the latter use the power and range of their weapons to strike enemy regiments from distance, decimating advance parties and retreating forces.

Each archer is equipped with several quivers and a sword. His armor is of light leather.



Engineers

This division of craftsmen and engineers is entrusted with the task of designing, manufacturing and operating various types of war machinery, including the machinery needed during a siege to capture or defend a city.

Although soldiers, these men stay behind the lines and tend not to be called on to fight. They are nonetheless armed with swords and wear leather armor.

The Navy

Only the coastal states such as Qi and Yan have a navy.

It is used mainly to protect merchant ships and the coast from the pirates which infest the seas. However, it could also be used to attack ports or coastal cities in a rival state.

Mercenaries

The states frequently bolster their armies with mercenary troops. This is particularly necessary for militarily weak states like Han.

Mercenaries are generally barbarians like the Xiongnu or ex-convicts trying to make a new life while earning some money.

Officers

The high-ranking officers of each regiment combine to discuss strategy, plan battles, resolve logistical issues and so on.

Officers rarely fight alongside their soldiers, but some of the more principled and courageous officers would not think twice before leading their troops from the front.

Officers carry whatever weapons they wish and wear heavy leather armor reinforced with bronze plates.

The Art of War

"The art of war lies in subjugating the enemy without engaging him in battle."
Sun Zi

At one time, war was a simple matter of pitched battles between honorable aristocrats, sparing the civilian population. That time is gone. In these times, wars spring from the territorial ambitions of the states. Now, the purpose of war is the capture of land and settlements, and in the pursuit of that goal none shall be spared. Armies can be hundreds of thousands strong, and it is common for tens of thousands to die in a single battle.

Moreover, war frequently affects the civilian population. The only way to capture land is first to take key locations like bridges, mines and watchtowers; and where that

means clearing those locations of civilians, that is no obstacle to the officers or soldiers of the great armies. In consequence, whenever rumors spread throughout the countryside that war is coming, they are inevitably followed by panic and a flight to the better-defended cities. Siege warfare is very common, with towns protected by fortifications and specially-trained regiments. Such battles can last months without one or other side gaining an advantage, each week being marked by bloody skirmishes and temporary truces to bury the dead. When a city falls, the men are massacred or sent to forced labor camps, the women raped and the children decimated.

However, due to the immense plains that make up the majority of the landscape of the *Zhongguo*, many battles still take place on flat ground, where two armies collide in a deafening chaos punctuated by screams of agony, the clatter of arms and the thunder of hooves.

The Philosophers of War

"It is precisely when one is surrounded by all dangers that one must fear none."

Sun Zi

Throughout the ages, numerous generals and strategists have committed to writing their vision of the art of war. Some have been forgotten, while others have become legendary.

Sun Zi was a celebrated general of Qi. Toward the end of his life, he wrote a book containing his views on strategy, the role of war in society, and the best way to maintain peace. Initially, despite its immense value, the work known as Sun Zi's Art of War was little used.

That neglect came to an end thanks to Sun Bin, thought to be a direct descendant of the great strategist. He applied the principles of the Art of War and obtained great victories for Qi, notably over the armies of Wei. Ever since then, Sun Zi's work has been a key reference work and is closely studied in the military academies of the states. Sun Bin wrote his own treatise on strategy, which he named simply Sun Bin's Art of War.

Wu Qi, general of Wei and later reforming prime minister of Chu, also wrote various texts on military strategy. Although less well-known than the works of Sun Zi and Sun Bin, they contain many highly useful observations and have provided valuable inspiration for many a prudent officer.

Finally, the renowned pacifist philosopher Mo Zi devoted a whole section of his eponymous work to the art of strategy, specifically in the context of siege warfare. While little studied in a military context, the Mo Zi is nonetheless a brilliant work, and extremely useful in a period when laying siege to large settlements can be a decisive element in war.

These works, and others written on the same subject by generals and strategists, are not just military manuals. When correctly interpreted by the reader, they can also serve as guides to good governance, for their advice applies not only to the battlefield but also to the delicate art of politics.

Qin

In the space of a few centuries, Qin has risen from semi-barbarous origins to become a major power among the Warring States. Its rise to power has been so swift and so complete that it is now ready to achieve the great project of *Tian Xia*, the union of all things under Heaven, by the annexation of all the lands of the *Zhongguo*.

History

During the early part of the Zhou Dynasty, Qin was an undefined area to the West of the Empire, a vassal state considered barbarous by the civilized peoples of the central plains.

At the beginning of the Spring and Autumn period, when the Emperor chose to move his seat of power to the East to distance himself from the dangerous tribes of the steppes, the ruler of Qin offered his own troops as escort for the Emperor's move to his new capital. The voyage proved eventful, and in facing the many dangers that they encountered, the soldiers of Qin were able to demonstrate both their skill in war and their loyalty to the Zhou. Emperor Ping Wang, impressed by their devotion to him, accepted Qin as a fief of his vast Empire and granted a dukedom to its ruler Xiangong.

In time, Qin was granted more land and entrusted with the mission of protecting the Empire from its enemies to the West. At first, this prevented the development of the fief, whose people continued to be seen as uncivilized barbarians. Yet time and time again its soldiers showed their valor by repelling the Xiongnu tribes and ensuring the safety of the westernmost fiefs. Qin grew in terms of military strength, if in none other.

By the time of the break-up of the Empire and the proclamation of the Hegemonies, Qin had become one of the more influential states, although its power could never rival that of Jin or Qi. But thanks to the mountain range at its eastern border, and its importance in protecting the Empire from the barbarians of the West, Qin was rarely the object of the territorial aspirations of the other Hegemonies. Its rulers took advantage of this to carry out great public works, to irrigate and fertilize vast plains, and so to ensure sufficient food for a constantly growing population.

Qin was without doubt the northern Hegemony which led the most battles against Chu, including those at Bi and Yanling. With the help of the coalition of the northern states against the powerful Southern State, Qin successfully defended itself until the truce brokered by Qi which brought to the states of the *Zhongguo* nearly a hundred years of peace.



At the beginning of the Warring States period, Qin was still a very backward state in nearly all fields. Whereas the other states had carried out bold reforms, Qin remained laden down with anachronisms and apparently unable to progress. All this changed with Duke Xiao, who appointed as his prime minister Shang Yang, a native of Wei, and ordered him to make Qin into a state able to rival, or even surpass, any other. The reforms which followed shook the land to its foundations and went beyond those adopted in any other state of the *Zhongguo*. The nobility was uncereemoniously stripped of its power and replaced by a meritocracy based on the real talents of individuals rather than the circumstances of their birth. The centralization of the administration was swift, and the new class of state officials accelerated the modernization of Qin. The tax system was overhauled, and movements of population led to the cultivation of lands formerly left idle. The peasantry gained in status, and lands confiscated from the nobles were distributed among peasants and landowners. Agriculture and trade were encouraged through financial rewards for farmers and merchants who met their production quotas; this encouraged significant immigration from the other states to Qin, easing the labor shortage caused by the increases in cultivated land and the professionalization of the army. The ranks of the army were swelled by recruitment from among the common people, and the ambitions of soldiers fired by the possibility of gaining promotion to officer rank according to the number of enemy heads cut off on the battlefield.

Yet the greatest achievement of Shang Yang was the forging of a close link between the administration of Qin and Legalist philosophy. That doctrine required that all citizens be equal before the law, and so the prime minister moved the capital in order to distance it from the still marked influence of the noble families, and devised a legal code to which all would be subject.

And so in less than ten years Qin rose from its position as a backward and barbarous state to that of major power which the other states would learn to fear. Now able to make

its voice heard in the battleground of the *Zhongguo*, Qin embarked on a policy of slow but inexorable territorial expansion. Its first victims were Wei, Zhao and Han, who tried repeatedly to form an alliance that might halt the relentless Qin war machine. Their efforts came to nothing. The powerful state of Qin also annexed the barbarian states of Shu and Ba, and with them their vast lands rich in mineral wealth.

The ambition of Qin became clear to all the other states when the powerful Western State marched on the Zhou, captured their remaining land, and brought down the last imperial dynasty. Then the unquestioned might of Qin was brought to bear against two neighboring states: first by incursions deep into Chu territory and the destruction of the capital Yingdu, and then by the massacre of the Zhao army in the bloody battle of Changping, where the powerful and cruel general Bai Qi ordered the execution of four hundred thousand prisoners of war.

More recently, Qin has become even more powerful under the iron rule of Lü Buwei, whose political astuteness prevented the royal line from dying out. The most severely governed of all the states, with a vast and disciplined army, Qin is ready to undertake the great project made possible by Shang Yang: the creation of a new Empire uniting all things under Heaven, or *Tian Xia*.

Geography

Qin is a vast land to the West of the *Zhongguo* and extending far to the South, with a rational landscape entirely shaped by man. It has a continental, dry climate in the North and a subtropical climate in the South, in the former territories of the Shu and the Ba.

The northern and western borders of the country, separating it from the barbarian steppes, are fortified by an immense network of walls and forts to protect the local

villages from raids and pillaging. The land is somewhat arid, yet the settlements are well-populated due to the exploitation of underground mineral resources and the presence of several army barracks.

The center of the country is made up of large, well-cultivated plains. The land is fertile thanks to irrigation channels drawing water from the Wei and the Yellow River. As far as the eye can see, the landscape appears man-made. More than in any other state, here nature has been mastered by man, and trained to serve his ends. The signs are everywhere, starting with the geometric division of fields according to a land occupation plan devised for the optimization of the amount of cultivated land. The plains are crisscrossed by straight canals interrupted only by colossal dams and locks that regulate the flow of water. Here and there the drab uniformity of the landscape is broken by man-made lakes, and scattered throughout the land are the countless towns and villages which house Qin's significant population.

To the south of the Wei River the country is divided in two by an impressive mountain range. To the far east of this range, almost at the border with Han and Wei, lies Huashan, the Sacred Mountain of the West. This holy mountain of the Taoist religion used to attract crowds of pilgrims, but since Qin has become a harsh and repressive state, the villages of the region have become ghost towns, inhabited only by exiles and hermits.

The south of Qin, formerly the lands of the Shu and Ba, became the breadbasket of the state once a new irrigation network was established to redirect the Min River and fertilize the vast and wild terrain. A massive migration plan provided the labor needed to cultivate the new arable land. As a result, the south of Qin is largely composed of cultivated fields and irrigation canals.

But the southern regions possess another key asset: the subsoil and the western mountain region are extremely rich in all manner of minerals, including iron, precious metals, jade, and coal. Entire towns have been built to draw on this mineral wealth and to house large state-run foundries supplying tools and machinery to the whole state.

Xianyang

On the banks of the Wei, to the east of Qin, Xianyang is along with Handan and Linzi one of the most impressive cities of all the Warring States. Home to over two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, it is almost legendary among the peoples of the *Zhongguo* for its magnificence and order. Xianyang is a supremely ordered city, constructed according to the recommendations of the great reformer Shang Yang and detailed plans born of the marriage of Legalist philosophy with architecture and civil engineering.

The city is divided by wide, straight streets and avenues, enabling not only the easy flow of traffic but also effective surveillance. The dimensions of the roads prevent thieves from relying on the confusion and disorder of crowds to commit crimes and disappear. The people are watched by soldiers posted at sentry-boxes placed along the main thoroughfares of the city.

Each neighborhood is clearly defined and divided from the rest of the city by a wall whose gates are closed at nightfall. In the center of each neighborhood is a small square used for official proclamations and public executions. A noticeboard is provided so that all might be aware of announcements, wanted notices, and new laws: in Qin, ignorance of the law is no excuse.

The large market squares are closely watched and while many merchants are attracted by the opportunities for trade that Xianyang offers, each one knows that the first rule of Qin is order, and that the riotous hustle and bustle to be found in Handan is matched here by a faint hum of activity.

There are no bad neighborhoods in Xianyang: criminals and vagabonds are simply arrested and either conscripted or sent to forced labor camps. The Qin capital therefore has the lowest crime rate in all the *Zhongguo*.

Xianyang is dotted with impressive palaces and grand houses, which serve both as the private residences of the notables of the state and as offices for its sprawling bureaucracy. These miniature cities are closed to all except officials and those citizens required to attend by the administration.

To the newly-arrived traveler, Xianyang is an impossibly beautiful and unusually tranquil city, but one with a slightly unsettling feel. In time, the too-perfect order that prevails becomes vaguely threatening, and eventually even the most serene soul will fall prey to feelings of paranoia...

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The powerful Legalist state

An unstoppable war machine

Ever since the military reforms of minister Shang Yang, the Qin army has been the best-organized and most disciplined in all the *Zhongguo*.

Several factors explain the unmatched strength of the army.

Above all, it is the largest army of all in terms of sheer numbers of troops. Such an immense force, of over a million full-time soldiers, requires phenomenal logistical support, which Qin is comfortably able to provide.

Land reform, in particular great projects for the irrigation and cultivation of unused land, has enabled the state to feed both its population and its great army. A good supply of fish is ensured by the digging of ponds and intensive fishing techniques, while meat comes from farms at the borders of the steppes. One of the few luxuries of being a Qin soldier is to be well fed.

A genuine military-industrial complex in the southern lands provides the army with weapons and equipment. Minerals are extracted from huge mines and quarries and sent to nearby foundries, where laborers work day and night to produce thousands of swords, lances, tools and pieces of armor for the soldiers. Countless

craftsmen are employed by the state on production lines manufacturing equipment such as saddles, crossbows, banners, and chariots. All the equipment must pass strict quality control tests, and those in charge of foundries and workshops know that in case of failure, heads will roll. Long convoys of vehicles make regular deliveries to the barracks and the Qin army is never short of equipment.

The training of a Qin soldier is renowned for its harshness and brutality. The barracks and military training centers are in the north-west, where the summers are scorching and dry and the winters bleak, and in the south, where heat, humidity and fog are virtually constant. Qin soldiers are subjected to such severe weather conditions in order to build their resistance, to forge warriors able to march dozens of miles each day without complaint, and to go into battle as soon as they reach their destination. Moreover, an extremely strict body of military law instils absolute discipline and an unquestioning obedience to superiors. The slightest error, or the most insignificant breach of regulations, is punished by death by beheading. Soldiers receive full training in the use of weapons, carry out countless maneuvers, and learn the basics of military strategy. At the end of their training, Qin soldiers are unfeeling, unscrupulous war machines.

The officers of Qin do not rely merely on superiority of numbers and equipment to gain victories. Quite the contrary: each general is a sophisticated strategist who has studied the ancient philosophers' works on the art of war at the finest military academies. All expert in siege warfare, mobile warfare, enemy harassment and death raids, they plan each battle in advance, devising strategy on the basis of factors such as the terrain, the make-up of the enemy army, and the character of its officers.

For all these reasons the Qin army is the most feared in all the *Zhongguo*, and enemy generals have been known to surrender at the mere sight of its black banners, before a single blow has been struck...

An effective secret service

Yet the fear that Qin strikes into the hearts of its rivals cannot be attributed to military strength alone.

Its other great asset is the effectiveness of its secret service. Beyond the borders of the state, it carries out various missions intended to sow unrest and disorder within rival states.

The secret service's main methods are the corruption and assassination of important individuals. High-ranking officials, ministers and generals are approached by Qin agents and offered large sums of money to betray their land, either by transmitting sensitive information or simply by defecting to the Western State. Where through loyalty or scruples the target fails to take the bait, he is swiftly eliminated.

Other agents infiltrate all levels of the administration and army of a rival state to gain information, steal plans or other sensitive documents, spy on secret consultations and pass on discoveries to their head office, whose role it is to pass it on to the secret service.

And when all the work of corruption, espionage and misinformation comes to fruition, when a country is bewildered, betrayed and helpless, then the Qin military machine springs into action and sets about its work of invasion and conquest.

The other role of the secret service is counter-espionage. Agents spread throughout the land track down enemy spies, or those whose allegiance has been bought by foreign powers. Once found, the latter's only chance to stay alive is to become double agents. Through these agents, the secret service spreads false rumors and sells misinformation, sometimes accompanied by a genuine secret, to generate confusion in enemy secret services and to deny them any chance of knowing the true intentions of Qin.

A Legalist state

Of all the states, Qin applies Legalist philosophy most comprehensively, in all sectors of life, including politics, society, the economy and the army.

All aspects of life in Qin are governed by law. The same law applies to all, and each citizen is deemed to be aware of it through public proclamations of edicts and the publication of new official rules. Respect for the law is ensured by the application of strict punishments for breach : Qin justice is blind, and rules are enforced to the letter.

In its role as secret police, the secret service sees to it that the people stay on the straight and narrow, notably by placing under surveillance rich or important people who display too much independence of spirit. Denunciations are encouraged, but a citizen who gives false testimony is punished by the appropriate sentence for the alleged crime. Secret service agents are everywhere: in the streets, at inns, and at markets, listening for the slightest rumor of treason, the faintest voice of dissent, or the tiniest beginnings of a plot against the power of Qin.

The inhuman nature of the dictatorship is mirrored in the physical design of Qin. Artificial landscapes and soulless towns make it a state without spirit. The effects of the régime on the people can be seen at once: the inhabitants of Qin are highly disciplined and discreet, talking little among themselves and never to strangers. They seem in a constant state of alert, as if each of their actions and words is being analyzed by the men in the shadows. This environment of permanent distrust and insidious fear soon makes a visitor uneasy and dissuades him from staying too long.

Relations with other states

Qin's sole ambition is to conquer all of the *Zhongguo* and unite it beneath its banners as an Empire. The result is combative relations with the other states.

Qin's long-standing enemies Chu and Zhao have forgotten past defeats, but still dearly seek the destruction of their arrogant enemy.

Yan is the only state which can be considered a definite ally, thanks to the friendship between its heir and the future King of Qin.

Key figures

Lü Buwei

As regent of Qin, Lü Buwei is the most important man in the state. He received this honor in recompense for saving the royal dynasty from extinction.

In former times, Lü Buwei was a wealthy merchant who travelled throughout the *Zhongguo* keeping a close eye on his numerous business interests in the various states.



He came once to Handan, the capital of Zhao, where by chance he met the young Zichu, royal hostage sent by Qin to the Horse State. At that time the crown prince of Qin, An Guo, had produced many illegitimate sons but his wife Hua Yang had been unable to bear him an heir. Zichu was a son of An Guo by a low-ranking concubine and had been sent as a hostage to Zhao at a very young age.

Due to the poor relations between the two states, the young man was treated worse than a serf, living in a filthy hovel with neither servants nor retinue.

Lü Buwei was aware of the problem of succession in Qin, and saw Zichu as a risky but potentially very profitable investment. He took the young man under his wing, housed him in a fine palace and used all of his wealth and his influence to draw the attention of the ruler of Qin to this illegitimate son of his line who had won the favor of the wealthiest merchant of the *Zhongguo*.

Lü Buwei adopted the role of go-between, making regular journeys between Handan and Xianyang to bear fine gifts from Zichu to the prince and his wife. On each of his visits to the royal palace of Qin, he would praise the intelligence and filial piety of Zichu. His efforts finally bore fruit.

One day, during a reception held in Handan in honor of his protégé, Lü Buwei entertained his guests with the dancing of his most recent concubine, a young woman of extraordinary beauty named Wuji. Zichu's heart was won and he asked his benefactor for her hand. Lü Buwei hesitated, suspecting that the young woman might already be expecting his own child, but finally granted the young man's wish. Wuji became Zichu's wife and nine months later bore him a son named Zheng.

But sad events would disturb the careful plans of Lü Buwei. Seven years after the birth of the young Zheng, war broke out between Qin and Zhao. The Horse State decided to punish the invader by putting the royal hostage to death. Lü Buwei saved Zichu by buying off officials and organizing his escape from Handan. The young man joined the Qin army and was brought to Xianyang, where he was welcomed with open arms. Zhao responded by trying to eliminate Wuji and her son, but the young woman went into hiding to escape her fate.

The old King of Qin died and An Guo ascended the throne. Zichu was officially adopted by Hua Yang and so became the heir of Qin. He organized the handover of his wife and son, and that of prince Dan of Yan. The reign of An Guo was cut short by his death in a hunting accident. Taking the name of Zhangxiang, Zichu ascended the throne and appointed Lü Buwei as his prime minister. Qin's already considerable strength

was increased yet further thanks to the intelligence, wealth and contacts of the merchant.

But the reign of Zhangxiang was also destined to be cut short; he died barely three years after his accession. The throne passed to the young Ying Zheng, but since he was too young to rule alone, Lü Buwei took the title of regent and has ruled the state of Qin ever since.

Recently, Lü Buwei has begun a great project for the collection and compilation of the works of the great philosophers of the Spring and Autumn period. Under his direction, hundreds of scholars are engaged in the writing of a text summarizing the great historical schools of thought and thus preserving them for posterity. Supervising the writing of the Annals of Lü Buwei occupies a great deal of his time, and so in the governing of the state the regent has come to rely more and more on his minister of justice, a political prodigy named Li Si.

Lü Buwei is around fifty years old, and blessed with great presence. His calm voice and confident gestures impress those around him. He has a keen intelligence and strong personal skills, and he can grasp the character of an individual in the space of a mere look. Through ambition and guile, he has become the most powerful man in all the states; his next step is to make his mark on history.

Renown: 300

Ying Zheng

Although the recognized King of Qin, Yin Zheng is still too young to rule and relies on his prime minister Lü Buwei to govern his state.

Son of the royal hostage Zichu and the former concubine Wuji, Ying Zheng spent his childhood years in Zhao. He received little care from his father and mother, both busily engaged with orchestrating a return to Qin, and only Lü Buwei appeared to care for him, through concern for his well-being and regular gifts of toys. Ying Zheng came to think of the merchant as a kind of second father. The boy's only friend was prince Dan, a child his own age sent by Yan as another hostage of Zhao. The two boys became close as a result of the mistreatment they both suffered at the hands of the Zhao people, and each promised to aid the other if he managed to escape such a miserable life.

During the war between Qin and the Horse State which almost cost the lives of Zichu and his wife, Ying Zheng went into hiding with his mother to escape the wrath of the King of Zhao. But at last, both were handed over to Qin and Ying Zheng arranged for prince Dan to accompany them.

Having seen the face of death with his own eyes, Ying Zheng became obsessed with it. He was haunted by the

idea of his own death and gripped by fear. The deaths of his grandfather and father, and the short time between them, only served to deepen his terror, and once King he sought to exorcize his ghosts by ordering the building of his tomb. While this work was being carried out, he began a quest for the secret of immortality, reading every work written on the topic and recalling the mystics and Taoists from their banishment in the hope of learning the secrets of eternal life.

Ying Zheng is an ordinary-looking young man, devoid of charm. His fear of death makes him easy prey to depression. Compared with the energetic, jovial prince Dan, the morose young King of Qin can appear characterless and insignificant. But the company of his childhood friend is the only thing able to make him forget his torments and laugh like a normal young man.

Renown: 185



Zi

Land of scholars, home to the most prestigious universities of the *Zhongguo*, and with a favorable geographical position, Qi is one of the most powerful and influential of the Warring States.

History

After the Zhou Dynasty moved its capital to the East and lost much of its authority during the Spring and Autumn period, many fiefs became independent of the Empire.

Qi soon established itself as the most powerful of these new states, and was the first to take the name of Hegemony as a mark of its new independence. On the pretext of protecting the Empire against barbarian tribes, Qi began a policy of territorial expansion and annexed several smaller fiefs.

In order to consolidate his power, the ruler of Qi Duke Huan appointed as his prime minister the scholar Guan Zhong. The prime minister carried out significant and wide-ranging reforms: power was centralized, the nobility were partially excluded from government, taxes were harmonized, and the production of salt and iron placed under the control of state monopolies. These political and economic reforms enabled Qi to become a major power in military, diplomatic and trade terms. The only Hegemonies that could hope to measure up to it were Qin and Jin.

Qi frequently formed alliances with other Hegemonies in order to counter invasions from Chu, the Southern State that had formerly been a vassal of the Zhou. The wars with Chu culminated in the Battles of Chengpu, Bi and Yanling, legendary for their terrible destruction and violence. At last Qi brokered a peace between the Hegemonies of the North and the powerful Southern State.

After the peace conference between the great powers of the *Zhongguo*, there was over a century of relative peace. During this time, a façade of peace obscured a reality of numerous internal conflicts within the states between noble families thirsty for power. Qi was not spared this strife and after a long period of unrest, the throne was wrested from the reigning Jiang dynasty by the Tian. Jin was torn apart by civil war and broke up into three new states. The period of the Warring States had begun...

The first of the Tian dynasty, Duke Hangong, was a scholar with a complete devotion to learning. He ordered the first great universities to be built and opened his borders to students and scholars from throughout the *Zhongguo*. His successor King Weiwang instructed his adviser Zou Ji to make further economic and military reforms in order that Qi might maintain its status as one of the leading states.

Qi did not have to wait long for an opportunity to show its strength. Wei, a small state born of the break-up of Jin, launched a wide-ranging attack on Zhao and gained a famous victory. Qi was concerned at the growing strength of such a near neighbor and decided to intervene. While the greater part of the Wei army laid siege to Handan, the generals of the Qi army Tian Ji and Sun Bin invaded the defenseless Wei. Forced to retreat, the Wei armies were intercepted and defeated at the Battle of Guiling. The strategy applied by the Qi generals became so famous as to give rise to a proverb : "*Attack Wei to save Zhao*", meaning that the time to defeat an enemy is when his attention is diverted and his guard dropped. And when Wei went on to attack Han, Qi once again intervened, finally breaking the military strength of its western neighbor at the Battle of Maling.

These events confirmed the reputation of Qi and established it as one of the two major powers of the *Zhongguo*, the other being Qin. Having sufficiently proved its military strength, Qi devoted itself to developing its other advantages: a booming economy and an incomparable cultural influence throughout the *Zhongguo*.

Since then, Qi has perhaps rested on its laurels. It is certainly renowned as the land of learning and the arts, but Qin's military strength has developed to such a point that its former rival no longer appears worthy of comparison... Yet the rulers of Qi believe that the era of great wars is drawing to a close, and that from now on, cultural riches will be more important than military might.

Geography

Qi occupies an immense peninsula in the East of the *Zhongguo* which juts out to the Yellow Sea. It enjoys a temperate climate, with humid summers and dry, cold winters.

The western regions of Qi are made up of plains irrigated by the Yellow River. The plains are well-used for agriculture and the raising of animals, especially horses.

In the center of the territory are mountain ranges whose great mineral wealth is exploited by the state. The most sacred Taoist mountain, Taishan or the Eastern Mountain, attracts many pilgrims throughout the year to the many villages of this region.

The East of Qi is a coastal region dotted with bays, coves and islands. The Yellow Sea coast contains countless small fishing villages, as well as large bustling commercial ports and naval bases.

In the North of the country the Yellow River makes its way to the sea. At the river mouth and in the delta formed between the river and a canal are well-used salt marshes. Despite the inevitable epidemics caused by such an inherently unhealthy environment, the area is densely populated with villages and market towns.



Linzi

On the banks of the Yellow River is Linzi, the largest city in all of the Warring States, home to nearly three hundred thousand people. Its reputation for intellectual endeavor has made it the cultural capital of the *Zhongguo*.

Linzi has a large student population and is extremely cosmopolitan, due to the practice in the other states of sending their finest students there to benefit from the finest education that can be found. People of all nationalities can be found in Linzi. Near the universities are the student neighborhoods, made up of blocks divided into simple rooms affordable even by students of modest means. Students in search of a good time are served by the nearby gaming houses and pleasure houses, ready to satisfy the need for relaxation and entertainment of young minds fatigued by long days of study.

The most respected university in Qi is the Jixia Academy. In the most beautiful part of the capital, it admits only the most talented and promising students. It houses schools of politics, economics, medicine and sciences, and benefits from the presence of eminent professors, each a recognized authority in his field.

The town is also renowned for its many libraries. In Linzi one can find nearly any classic or recent work, but access to the libraries is severely restricted. Books, and the knowledge that they hold, are so valuable to the Qi authorities that the most important libraries are protected by a dedicated fire service, specially trained and prepared to intervene swiftly to save them from fire.

Taishan

Not far from the border between Qi and Chu stands the most important sacred mountain of the Tao religion: Taishan, the Mountain of the East.

According to legend, it was at the summit of this mountain that the Emperors made their pact with Heaven and received in return the Mandate of Heaven.

Taishan is surrounded by towns prepared to welcome the constant flow of pilgrims who come to pay homage to the wisdom of Heaven. The pilgrims are lodged in the countless inns of the region, while local merchants take advantage of the believers' credulity to sell them all manner of false relics.

Worshippers from all corners of the *Zhongguo* attend the temples around Taishan and frequently make donations. In exchange for contributions, monks will pray to various divinities to bring the blessing of Heaven to the believers.

Caves and hermitages in the mountains around Taishan are home to a great number of hermits and mystics in search of harmony, as well as scholars seeking wisdom far from the world of men.

A state of military strength and cultural influence

A powerful army

Ever since its elevation to the rank of Hegemony during the Spring and Autumn period Qi has been one of the major military powers of the *Zhongguo*.

Not only was it the first state to carry out administrative reforms, but it was also quick to reform its army, transforming it from an elite force commanded by the warrior branch of the nobility into an immense professional force relying on conscription and promotion on merit. The new army soon proved its worth by annexing various principalities and countering the Chu invasions.

The state also benefitted from the guidance of legendary generals like Tian Ji and Sun Bin, heir to the great strategist Sun Zi. As generals in the field, these

men led Qi to glorious victories. As teachers in the country's military colleges, they trained several generations of officers.

The Qi army is still feared for its efficiency and aggression. Horses bred on the immense plains to the West of the country provide mounts for its cavalry, after that of Zhao the best in all the land. Mighty ships built in its naval bases protect the coast from pirates and Yan and Chu attacks. Its generals are the best-trained in all the *Zhongguo*, building on the work of the great strategists of old. For all these reasons, Qi is feared and respected by its neighbors, and the leading power in the East.

A booming economy

Qi's great economic strength is rooted in the wealth of its land.

The western plains are intensively cultivated thanks to the fertility of the Yellow River and a vast network of irrigation schemes. Its varied pasture land is home to horses, cattle, pigs and other animals. Qi's agricultural production is so abundant that it exports considerable quantities of food to the other states.

Fishing off the eastern coast feeds a large part of the local population and generates a surplus sold at markets further inland. The salt marshes at the mouth of the Yellow River produce great quantities of salt, now sold through a state monopoly.

The central mountains are intensively exploited for their reserves of metals and minerals, including iron, gold, jade and other precious stones. The holy mountains, in particular Taishan, attract crowds of pilgrims that enable the local people to earn a living from trade and innkeeping.

And the great reputation of the universities brings both students and scholars to live in the large urban centers of the country which are home to the schools and libraries which contribute to the cultural power of Qi.

Cultural influence beyond compare

Since the very beginning of the Warring States period, Qi has chosen to brandish both the pen and the sword and to combine military strength with hitherto unprecedented intellectual strength. For although the Spring and Autumn period gave rise to numerous schools of thought, the Hegemonies' obsession with territorial expansion was such that they paid attention only to theories such as Legalism which could bring them more power.

For this reason, the new approach to learning in Qi led to the centralization of the whole of the acquired wisdom of the *Zhongguo* in the schools, universities and libraries of that state. All fields of learning have their home in Qi: philosophy, science, military studies, agronomy, arts and economics. Qi maintains a university in each of its densely-populated cities so that any student with a desire to learn may do so and that any man of learning willing to bring his expertise to the state will be welcomed.

The symbol of the cultural power of Qi is the Jixia Academy, the largest, most renowned and most influential university of all the states. Hundreds of students are taught by teachers of unparalleled experience in all fields. The majority of great leaders, those whose decisions shape the

world, went to the Academy, and their reputation contributes to its incomparable cultural influence.

The libraries of Qi are among the best-stocked in the world. The largest boast of holding at least one copy of every book written since the creation of the world. Countless scribes spend their days bent over their writing desks, copying works so that they may be sent to other libraries and so not be lost in case of an accident.

By educating the elites of the Warring States and housing all the learning of the *Zhongguo*, Qi has become a symbol of intellectual wealth in the eyes of the other states.

Relations with other states

The relationship between Qi and Qin is fiercely antagonistic. The rivalry between the two most powerful states is both symbolic, due to their diametrically opposite locations, and real, due to their widely-differing policies.

The respect that the other states have for Qi is tinged with fear, although some like Chu and Yan have few qualms about confronting it in battle.

Factions and organizations

The Scribes of Wen Chang

After Duke Huangong decided to transform Qi into the cultural center of the *Zhongguo*, he founded the organization known as the Scribes of Wen Chang and charged it with the work of centralizing and protecting learning within the state.

Initially the Scribes were mere librarians who did little more than translate and copy books received from other states. But soon they concluded that the best way to fulfil the mission set by their ruler would be to seek out knowledge themselves rather than to depend on others for it.

This change of outlook caused the Scribes to divide into two separate orders with very different functions and methods.

A small number remain in Qi, where as heads of universities and libraries they work at centralizing and compiling knowledge, and protecting it by arranging for rare and precious works to be copied several times and the originals held in secure locations.

But the majority of the Scribes are to be found in small groups scattered throughout the *Zhongguo*. With a base in nearly every important town in the seven states, the Scribes on foreign missions seek out knowledge by working as archaeologists, explorers and historians. They can be found far from the world of men seeking to gain the wisdom of hermits, hacking through the jungles of Chu to find remnants of lost civilizations, or studying the ruins of abandoned cities from the time of the ancient dynasties. They are adventurers and scholars, accustomed to the dangers of the explorer's life, extremely fit, and trained in martial arts.

Each foreign discovery by the Scribes is immediately sent to Qi so that experts within the organization can study it and assess its importance. To allow him to move without undue hindrance, each Scribe is given a seal which confirms his status and is recognized in all the states thanks to Qi's reputation in cultural matters.

Key figures

Tian Jian

King of Qi for fifteen years, Tian Jian is at the height of his powers and blessed with one of the keenest minds in the world.

Following the policy which has been that of his state for generations, Tian Jian is utterly convinced that the cold war between the states of the *Zhongguo* will not be won by the state with the most impressive armed forces, but by the one most able to follow in the footsteps of the old dynasties. And for him, that means cultural dominance, since the greatest Emperors were celebrated above all for their intellectual contributions rather than their military prowess.

But this great follower of the theories of Kong Fu Zi wants to go further. He believes that learning should not be left to molder in libraries, but should be brought alive through its dissemination among the people. He believes education should be a right and not a privilege, and that the people are better governed if they have sufficient education to understand the depth of vision of their ruler. Since the beginning of his reign Tian Jian has ordered the building of schools in nearly every village in the state, sent officials to give basic education to all children irrespective of their social background, and established scholarships for the most promising pupils to study in nearby towns and therefore be able to rise above their condition. For the time being, the people are happy with this great project, for it shows their ruler is concerned with their lives and taking concrete action to improve them.

For a man of his status, Tian Jian is unusually honest and open-minded. He is always ready to listen to someone who may be able to teach him something. His sparkling conversation shows him as the most refined leader of all the states, while his relaxed tone places visitors at their ease and gives them the impression of talking with an old friend.

Renown: 250

Po Jin-che, *Wisdom Descended from Heaven*

If one thought only of his advanced years, one might expect Po Jin-che to spend his time studying old bamboo scrolls. Instead one finds a man of an astonishing build and impressive physical fitness. For the last twenty years he has been the Dean of the Jixia Academy and head of the Scribes of Wen Chang.

He began at the bottom of the organization's hierarchy, and gained the nickname of Wisdom Descended from Heaven after spending his youth traveling throughout the seven states, scaling the highest mountains, adventuring in the perilous steppes of the North West and taking every kind of risk to carry out his mission.

Po Jin-che was one of the most talented Scribes, and his greatest talent was survival. Often the only survivor of his group, he would always return to his land, often injured or exhausted, but always carrying dozens of scrolls on which he had carefully transcribed all his discoveries.

After several years of missions to the four corners of the *Zhongguo*, his superiors came to understand that the life of such a valuable man should no longer be risked so lightly. He was promoted and given important responsibilities in the Qi capital. Although the young Scribe missed his life as an adventurer, from his new position in Linzi his intelligence enabled him to rise through the ranks of the organization and finally become head of the Scribes of Wen Chang and of the most prestigious university in all the land.

As he grows old, Po Jin-che has grown used to his quiet life and has learnt to enjoy his work. He still remembers with fondness the crazy expeditions of his youth, but seeks no more than to serve his country until his final breath. Still strong and energetic at over sixty, he hopes to carry on his work for many years.

Po Jin-che is an old man of colossal build. Although the years have softened a few of his muscles and bent his back a little, few younger men are his equal in size and strength. His eyes shine with a keen intelligence, and rather than his power, it is the calmness of his voice that reminds the listener of how well he deserves his nickname.

Renown: 136



Zhao

Sometimes known as the Horse State, Zhao was for many years one of the most influential states of the *Zhongguo*, thanks to an army strengthened by barbarians from the steppes. It fell into decline after the great defeat at Changping, but its strong economy gives it the upper hand over its rivals.

History

Like Han and Wei, Zhao was born of the break-up of the Jin Hegemony. The territory it inherited was initially not the most advantageous for economic and military progress.

The state's early years were difficult, as it faced both the territorial ambitions of its neighbors and frequent raids by barbarians from the steppes. Its first chance to prove its strength came when Han proposed an alliance to conquer their brother state of Wei. Domestic unrest in Wei allowed the Zhao and Han armies to invade and gain several victories, but disagreements between the allies caused the military campaign to stutter and allowed Wei to survive and rebuild.

After a period of bold and sweeping reforms, it was the turn of Wei to attack Zhao. The Zhao army was powerless to stop the invader and one by one, its cities fell. Help came from an unexpected quarter, the powerful eastern state of Qi, whose attacks on Wei's rearguard forced it to draw troops back to defend its border. Some years later, when Wei launched a new assault on Han, another intervention by Qi finally broke the military strength of Wei.

Now that it no longer had cause to fear its neighbor to the South, and enjoying continued good relations with Yan, Zhao was at last able to devote itself to domestic affairs. Fortifications were built in the North and Northwest to contain the barbarian tribes and secure the land. Agriculture was diversified and improved by enormous irrigation schemes, while plateau land were used for the intensive farming of animals, notably horses. The economic growth that began at this time would in time make the Horse State the richest state of all.

King Wuling wished to build on his country's new-found riches and his adviser Fei Yi set in train administrative, economic and military reforms similar to those undertaken in the other states. A modernized administration helped Zhao to manage its economic growth more effectively, but it was in the military that Fei Yi's reforms were most striking. Having noticed that the barbarian tribes' superiority in mobile war was mainly due to their judicious use of cavalry, the Zhao army was the first to incorporate cavalry divisions, a move which would profoundly change the face of the

battlefield. The barbarian influence was also behind an improvement in Zhao uniforms, which were redesigned to enhance the soldiers' freedom of movement. These reforms made the Zhao army one of the most feared in the *Zhongguo*.

Zhao used its new-found strength to embark on a policy of territorial expansion. The small neighboring state of Zhongshan was the first to pay the price, swiftly annexed by the armies of the Horse State. Zhao also seized huge tracts of land from its larger neighbors, including Wei and Qi.

Clashes with Qin soon became commonplace. Unable to defeat the Western State alone, Zhao formed an alliance with Wei to contain it. But the alliance was broken by the implacable might of Qin at the Battle of Huayang. Not content with that, Qin continued its war against Zhao and finally crushed its arrogant rival at the Battle of Changping, renowned as the bloodiest and most terrible of all the history of the *Zhongguo*. Zhao lost nearly four hundred thousand men, and departed weakened and humiliated.

Ever since that occasion, although its economic strength has remained, Zhao has known that its voice will never be heard in the *Zhongguo* unless it can raise an army equal to those of Qin and Qi. Its armed forces are currently engaged in recruiting mercenaries and planning an invasion of Yan in order to rebuild the confidence of the people and make Zhao once again a true military power.

Geography

Most of Zhao is made up of high plains and plateaus. It is bordered to the North and West by arid steppes inhabited by the Xiongnu barbarians. It has a continental climate, with harsh winters, and in spite of the summer rains the land is dry.

The northwestern region of Zhao is made up of dry steppes whipped by the sandy desert winds and prone each spring to fierce sandstorms which penetrate deep into the country. The rare villages in this region are inhabited both by local people and by Xiongnu traders. Only walls and minor forts provide protection against raids and pillaging by the barbarian tribes.

The center of Zhao is a land of high plateaus broken by deep river valleys, bordered to the North and West by mountain ranges. The fields are fertile and crops abundant due to irrigation from the Fen and Hai and also from the Yellow River, which runs along the borders of the state. Many types of animal are grazed on the vast expanses of pasture-land, but it is horses who are most prized for their economic and military importance.

The mountains of the North and West have little economic function, and serve mainly as natural fortifications against neighboring states. In the Northeast of the country stands Hengshan Nan, the



Sacred Mountain of the North revered in the Taoist religion. But most pilgrims are dissuaded from visiting the mountain by the great dangers involved. For it is a harsh and inhospitable region, at the edges of the civilized world, and according to tradition home to the cruellest of monsters.

The Horse State

The rebuilding of the army

Despite its significant losses during the wars with Qin, the Zhao army remains a force to be reckoned with on the military stage of the *Zhongguo*, especially since the state has decided to build up the army in preparation for an invasion of Yan.

The Zhao army's greatest asset lies in its cavalry divisions. These are divided into different units, each with its own specific role on the battlefield. The heavy cavalry charges deep into the ranks of enemy troops, causing heavy losses and sapping the morale of those that survive. The light cavalry is mainly used as in the barbarian tribes for reconnaissance missions and scouting raids into enemy bases. Mounted archers use their speed and mobility to eliminate enemy troops at range and without any risk to themselves. Messenger riders carry information or orders from one battle zone to another with the greatest of speed. The cavalry divisions are so important that the whole of the Zhao army is structured around them. Its generals are skilled in strategies that exploit the speed and strength of the cavalry to the full, and their tactics on the battlefield can prove extremely unsettling for the enemy.

The Zhao army also relies heavily on mercenaries. These divisions of soldiers for hire are principally made up of Xiongnu who come to the army hoping for wealth and end up as cannon fodder sent to the front line to test the strength of the enemy.

A powerful economy

Horses are not only the key to Zhao's military strength: they are also its main source of wealth.

Handan

Before Handan, Zhao had two capitals. The decision to move the seat of royal power to a city so close to the borders with warlike neighbors was bold, and dangerous, but necessary if Handan was to become a major economic center of the *Zhongguo*. And in that sense, the choice of location proved a great success.

In the space of a few decades, Handan has become a densely-populated city of two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, and the economic and trade capital of the Warring States. Its wide open spaces and covered squares house enormous markets, where hundreds of merchants from all corners of the *Zhongguo* run stalls offering all manner of goods to curious onlookers whose unquenchable desire for novelty is satisfied by the endless variety of goods that can only be found in Handan. Markets take place day and night, all year round, and attract a diverse and cosmopolitan population.

As the commercial hub for every merchant and businessman in the *Zhongguo*, Handan contains several districts of hotels catering for all budgets, and offers every type of entertainment a man could desire. Each of its shops and stalls is more lavishly decorated than the next, in order to draw in the customer and persuade him to spend every last coin.

Outside the city walls of Handan are stud farms owned either by the state or by rich farmers. The sight of thousands of horses galloping around their immense enclosures never fails to impress the visitor.

The immense stud farms of Zhao produce millions of horses every year and provide employment for thousands, from expert horse trainers and experienced traders to humble hostlers and stable boys. Zhao horses are renowned throughout the *Zhongguo* for their spirit, their beauty and their intelligence. The most attractive specimens are sold for princely sums to the barbarians, even more skilled in the art of horse breeding than the Zhao people, who use them to refine the bloodstock of their own stud farms.

The best horses are reserved for the army, which complements horses from its own stud farms with frequent purchases from private breeders to supply its great cavalry divisions. Other, state-run stud farms produce horses for farmwork, beasts of burden for workshops, and mounts for high-ranking officials.

Private horse-breeders sell to both the state and foreign merchants. The sale of horses is big business, and while businessmen grow rich on the profits, the state grows rich on the high taxes levied on all sales.

But horses are not the only source of Zhao's great wealth. All manner of traders and merchants come from far and wide to do business and make their fortunes in Handan, the commercial capital of all the seven states. Here the most important trade agreements are made, from simple contracts between individuals to major treaties between states. Zhao benefits more or less directly from its burgeoning internal market, through transaction taxes which ensure a constant flow of money into the coffers of the state.

Relations with other states

Zhao has been the sworn enemy of Qin for many years. Although relations became more relaxed in the years following the Battle of Changping, Zhao is always on the lookout for a chance to revenge itself on its greatest rival.

Zhao is also ready to invade Yan, and the Northeastern State is far from happy at the massing of troops at its border.

Otherwise, Zhao's relations with the other states are warm and cordial, generally supported by mutually beneficial trade co-operation.

Factions and organizations

The Knights of the Tempest

Of the countless bands of mercenaries who roam the Zhao lands in search of employment, the Knights of the Tempest are undoubtedly the most famous.

This troop of Xiongnu and mongrel warriors was founded several years ago by Raging Saber, the illegitimate son of a powerful barbarian warrior born of a

prostitute in a distant northern outpost of the state. All that Raging Saber gained from either of his parents was a desire to fight, to crush the enemy, and to rise above the dirt that he came from. He was barely twelve years old when he took charge of a group of children his own age and made them into a band of warriors feared throughout the region. They began as simple highwaymen, but became mercenaries when forced to choose between death at the hands of the Zhao army and joining its ranks as an autonomous unit.

Ever since then, the Knights have succeeded in every mission entrusted to them, with Raging Saber and his men defeating Qin and Yan troops in skirmishes and driving back pillaging raids from the North. Whenever the Zhao army has a dangerous but essential mission to assign to a band of mercenaries, the Knights of the Tempest is their first port of call. Their banner, depicting a horse's head on a stormy background, has come to be known and feared by the border guards of Qin, Yan and Wei.

The Xiongnu

The barbarians who live in the vast steppes to the North of the *Zhongguo* are divided into various tribes each ruled by a *chanyu*. Each tribe is independent of the others, but tribes may be linked by trade or marriage. Generally relations between tribes are good, and conflicts are rare if not unknown.

The Xiongnu are a nomadic people. They live in large villages of imposing circular tents, and rely on their animals, mainly horses and goats, and occasional pillaging to obtain the means for survival in their harsh environment.

They are expert riders and fierce warriors, hardened by a life of struggle lived out in the open. Their weapons of choice are the curved saber and the bow, which they can use just as well on foot and on horseback.

Theirs is an animist belief system, involving a multitude of spirits who they communicate with through sorcerers, shamans and sacrificial offerings.

Relations between the Warring States and the Xiongnu range from open war with those tribes who practise pillage to trade with those clans with more civilized habits. Zhao and Yan were the first to understand the benefits to be gained from winning the favor of the more powerful tribes, and mutually advantageous alliances between those states and the Xiongnu have been sealed by marriages between barbarian princesses and high-ranking administrators.

The Guild of Merchants

Although the merchant class lacks the status and prestige of the administrator class, in Zhao its power is unequalled.

Many Zhao merchants possess great fortunes, and wield the power that such fortunes bring. As feudal lords of their land, they rule the lives of thousands of inhabitants of the state; through their influence at court

they exert considerable pressure on the royal authorities. Since it is their business acumen that has enabled Zhao to boast the richest economy of all the seven states, the merchants seek a greater voice in the affairs of the state. The Guild of Merchants lobbies actively for its senior members to be appointed as ministers, or at least advisers, so as to play a greater role in the management of the wealth they generate. One of the most important demands is a reduction in transaction taxes, which are very high but necessary to finance the state's ongoing military and civilian investment programs.

The ambition of the merchants and the demands of their powerful guild conflict directly with the principle of centralized state power, and Zhao officials are firmly opposed to the idea of common merchants being admitted to the halls of power. This conflict is a great source of weakness for Zhao, which needs to be as strong as possible to succeed in its ambitious plans.

Key figures

Zhao Daoxiangwang

Although he has been King for less than five years, the pressures of power have already taken their toll on Daoxiangwang.

A man of fragile health, lacking the energy and vigor necessary to play his role, the ruler of Zhao feels trapped. On the one side, each day the merchants place more pressure on him to grant them more power, to lower taxes and to admit them to his court. On the other, his ministers urge him not to give an inch, not to compromise his power by becoming involved with mere merchants.

Confused, and with no one to turn to for help, Daoxiangwang does not know what to do. He knows that the economic power of the state goes hand in hand with the wealth of the merchants, and understands their desire for greater involvement in decisions that concern them. But he also knows that to compromise would be seen as weakness, which could be disastrous at this time of reconstruction of the armed forces.

And so the King is alone. And day by day, as the conflict between merchants and officials becomes ever more entrenched, so too his health worsens.

Daoxiangwang is a man old before his time. Pale and drawn, he tries to appear strong but is powerless to stop the terrible coughing fits that grip his frail body all too frequently. His weak voice lacks the authority of a ruler and it pains the King to give such a feeble image of his country.

Renown: 195

Sung Cho-kuan

The head of the Zhao Guild of Merchants lives in a palace not far from Handan. He is easily the richest man in the state, if not in all of the Warring States.

Cho-kuan was born the son of a humble merchant of Handan. He began with a stall in one of the busiest markets of the capital, and through his smooth talking and keen business sense he was soon earning good profits. He saved carefully,

and invested wisely, using his capital to buy a small stud farm. He traveled often to the steppes to negotiate personally the sale of his finest horses, and from small beginnings his farm grew to be one of the most prestigious in Zhao. When he was chosen as the main supplier of horses to the army, his fortune grew to unimaginable proportions. At the height of his success he was asked to become head of the Guild of Merchants.

The merchants of Zhao rely on the experience and judgment of Sung Cho-kuan to defend and further their interests at court. Speaking in the name of a whole class of influential men, Cho-kuan hopes that the King will soon give way to his pressure and grant him a key ministerial post. In case his attempts to persuade the King and his officials fail, however, he has the means to make them think again. Using his great influence and immense riches, he should be able, if necessary, to bring the whole country to its knees. He has already begun subtly to make his enemies at court aware of the threat he poses, so as to bring them round to his way of thinking...

Sung Cho-kuan is a short, fat man, always dressed in the finest silk. His most powerful assets in negotiations are a deep, convincing voice and a skill in leading conversations precisely where he wants them to go. His well-developed taste for the fairer sex is well-known in Handan.

Renown: 130



Chu

The powerful and exotic southern state of Chu has a long and complex history. To its northern neighbors, it is a land of mystery whose natural advantages inspire both fear and respect.

History

Ever since its foundation, the vast state of Chu was not only independent of the Zhou Empire but a significant rival for it. As the Empire of the North expanded to the South and the Southern State grew to the North, a clash of civilizations was inevitable. The long and terrible wars between these two great powers initially brought advantage for neither. But gradually, the Zhou Empire gained the upper hand and in time Chu was obliged to become a vassal-state, pledging allegiance to the imperial dynasty but retaining its own King.

Well before the Zhou's move to the East and the collapse of the Emperor's power which followed, the Emperor had chosen one of his most loyal vassals Xiong Yi to rule the distant southern fief. Under the governance of Xiong Yi, Chu gained in strength and territory and became one of the most important fiefs in the Empire. Barbarian tribes were defeated and small states annexed.

So it was that during the break-up of the Empire, Chu was one of the first states to gain autonomy and to take the title of Hegemony, along with the more powerful northern states of Jin, Qi and Qin.

As a result of its origins, Chu always considered itself quite different from its northern neighbors. Since they were all that remained of the Zhou Empire, it visited its anger for its ignominious defeat at the hands of the Empire on them, becoming their sworn enemy and launching several invasions of their lands. There followed countless battles between the Southern State and the Northern Hegemonies, who were forced to form an alliance to counter the threat from the South. Soundly beaten by Jin at the Battle of Chengping, Chu did not abandon its ambitions, and launched a new series of attacks, gaining a major victory over Qin at the Battle of Bi. But it once again suffered a resounding defeat at the Battle of Yanling.

The Northern Hegemonies grew tired of the incessant wars against such a strong and stubborn enemy, and under the leadership of Qi organized a peace conference between the most powerful states of the *Zhongguo*. A truce was agreed, and for nearly a hundred years, relative peace reigned and the states were able to concern themselves with their domestic affairs.

But then Chu faced problems from its eastern neighbors Wu and Yue. The small state of Wu had

taken advantage of the battles between Chu and the northern states to build up its strength to such a point that it was now a genuine rival for the Southern State. War broke out, and Wu soon gained the upper hand, invading great swathes of territory and capturing the Chu capital. Heartened by its success, and considering that it no longer had anything to fear from a weakened Chu, Wu turned its attention to a great campaign against Qi.

The strategists and diplomats of Chu saw that they could use this carelessness for their own ends, and set off a chain of events that would hasten the fall of Wu. Chu provided financial and military assistance to Yue, building it up into a strong state hungry for conquest, and exhorting it to wage war on Wu. The early battles went badly for Yue, but Wu was unable to convert its advantage into complete victory, and while it got bogged down in wars to the North it lost ground in the South. In the end, Yue defeated Wu and annexed its territory.

While the northern states were entangled in the domestic conflicts that would bring the fall of the Jin Hegemony and the change of ruling dynasty in Qi, Chu expanded its territory by annexing various principalities at its borders. As it became the largest state of all, the sense grew that its system of government was becoming over-stretched. King Daowang appointed as his prime minister a brilliant politician from Wei named Wu Qi, and gave him a free hand to carry out any and all reforms that might prove necessary for the effective governance of such a large state. Wu Qi chose policies that had been tried and tested in the northern states, centralizing power and modernizing the administration, and earned the eternal antipathy of the Chu nobility by removing them from power in favor of a new administrator class. The reforms were a success, and Chu grew yet stronger.

Then Yue decided to invade Qi, and the rulers of Qi countered with an elaborate double strategy. An emissary was sent to the court of the King of Yue to persuade him to attack Chu instead in exchange for military and economic help. At the same time, and in secret, another emissary was sent to Chu to warn it of an imminent attack by Yue and to propose an alliance. Yue agreed to invade Chu, thinking it had both the advantage of surprise and the support of Qi, and Chu agreed to join with Qi to crush the insolent invader. The cause of Yue was hopeless: its armies were swiftly destroyed and its land divided between the allies. After this victory, Chu no longer had a hostile neighbor on either flank or to the South, and could concentrate its efforts on gaining territory to the North.

Recently, Chu has on many occasions found itself confronted with the might of Qin, and has suffered many defeats. When its capital Yingdu was sacked by the famous general Bai Qi, it was forced to move its base to Shoucun. But although weakened by these defeats, the state of Chu remains a fearsome adversary and its northern neighbors do not dismiss it lightly.



Geography

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Chu is an enormously vast state containing every type of landscape. The North has a continental climate, with a rainy summer, while the South is subtropical and prone to devastating monsoons.

The North of the country is cut off from the rest of the *Zhongguo* by various mountain ranges.

The Northwest region of Chu has mountains to the West, but is mainly made up of great plains irrigated by the Han and Blue Rivers. The fertility of these plains supports intensive agriculture and a dense population. Most of the state's large towns are concentrated here.

The Northeast region is also mainly composed of cultivated plains. It is crossed by the Huai River, bordered to the South by the Blue River, and dotted with lakes, of which the most famous are Lakes Gaoyou and Taihu. The great lakes are surrounded by countless fishing villages and a good number of large towns. The coast is also inhabited by fishermen, and fortified ports protect the land from pirates and the military fleets of Yan and Qi. The salt marshes at the mouths of the Huai and Blue Rivers are well-exploited.

The Blue River separates the North of the country from the South, a region which is more sparsely populated and regarded as exotic by the peoples of the northern states.

The South of Chu is predominantly mountainous, and covered by great forests. The few plains are mainly situated in the Gan and Xiang River valleys and by the sea. These plains are unique in the *Zhongguo* in being used for the cultivation of rice, which is favored by both the soil and the climate. Just as in the North of Chu, the majority of the population of the region live around great expanses of water such as Lakes Dongting and Poyang.

In the South of Chu stands Hengshan Bei, the Sacred Mountain of the South, on whose summit the

Yellow Emperor gained immortality in ancient times. Most of the pilgrims who visit the Mountain are natives of Chu, as the other peoples of the *Zhongguo* are only rarely able to travel to such a distant land.

Shoucun

The new capital of Chu is located in the Northeast of the country, not far from the mouth of the Blue River. It is still relatively small, having around a hundred thousand inhabitants, but since becoming the seat of royal power it has attracted more and more people to it.

The former capital Yingdu was a powerful city, well protected by its location far from the country's borders and renowned for its opulence. But then a Qin invasion led by the bloody general Bai Qi broke the defenses of Chu and reached its capital. After a long siege, Yingdu was sacked and the King forced to flee.

The city chosen as the new seat of power was Shoucun, not far from the northeastern borders with Han and Qi. As the established home of embassies and diplomatic missions from the northern states, Shoucun appeared the ideal choice for a King whose only goal since the humiliation of Yingdu was to exact revenge on Qin, if necessary by forming alliances with all the other states of the *Zhongguo*. The King's obsession was passed to his successor, who developed the new capital into a genuine seat of power in order to attract as many states as possible that might rally to his side in a future war against Qin.

Shoucun is a pleasant town with wide streets and lively neighborhoods. It has been expanded by years of public works, and the influx of population has been a boon to shopkeepers and innkeepers, for whom business has never been better. Wealthy diplomatic missions from northern states such as Qi, Han and Zhao contribute to the atmosphere of the town, making it a cosmopolitan place where residents and visitors from North and South meet and do business in spite of their sometimes widely varying dialects.

Outside the city walls, Shoucun's shantytowns are home to the thousands who cannot afford to live in the city. The tumbledown shacks and improvised tents that surround the city give it an air of a nomad city, and remind the visitor of the relative fragility of the new seat of power.

The exotic Southern State

A vast and well-equipped army

The undoubted military strength of Chu can be attributed to several causes.

First, Chu is one of the largest and therefore most populous states of the *Zhongguo*. This is reflected in the size of its army, which numbers several hundred thousand. When necessary, the state conscripts not only peasants but also warriors from the southern tribes who have pledged allegiance to it. And far from treating these barbarian mercenaries as mere cannon fodder, Chu officers consider their chiefs as equals and readily apply their battle strategies, which through their originality and daring can prove unsettling to the more traditional strategists of the northern states.

Second, Chu has inherited from Yue a superiority in metalwork. The small state had led the field in the science and technology of bronze and ironwork, and when Chu took over the land, its rulers were careful to protect and harness this knowhow. Since then, the great mineral wealth of the mountains of the South have been exploited through mines and foundries to provide weapons and equipment to the army. These weapons and equipment are of consistently good quality and produced in huge quantities. As a result, a Chu soldier will usually carry several weapons so as not to become disarmed in battle. The Chu army's chariots and machines for siege warfare are also the best designed and most feared in all the Warring States.

Chu's main assets against the northern armies are therefore superior numbers, inventive tactics and formidable logistical support.

A large and rich territory

The territory of Chu is not only one of the most extensive of all the states, but also contains a wider variety of landscape than can be found anywhere else.

The northern region is the breadbasket of the country. Its vast plains are fed by the waters of several rivers and support several different crops. They produce enough food for the whole population, and the surplus generates a profitable trade with less-productive states.

The great lakes of the Northeast are abundant in fish, which are sent throughout the state and sold in the markets of Qi and Han. The cities of the plains have become trade centers, where merchants from all the northern states come to buy rare and exotic foodstuffs.

In the South, the mountains contain rich seams of all manner of minerals. Hundreds of mines extract jade, iron, gold and other metals. The foundries around which the main towns of the South are built supply the country with weapons, building equipment, and agricultural machinery.

The main crop in the South is rice. This nutritious and versatile grain has the added advantage that it can be harvested twice a year. The crop is almost exclusively for domestic consumption; Chu is reluctant to export rice for fear that its northern rivals might find a means to grow it on their colder plains.

Finally, the coasts of Chu are home to fishing ports which buzz with activity day and night, and the salt marshes at the mouths of the main rivers are well-exploited. Salt is one of the rarest and most sought-after goods in the Warring States.

Factions and organizations

The Twelve Heavenly Ones

Yue was a small state, but its advanced techniques in metalwork allowed it to equip its army with equipment of the finest quality, and in great quantity. It had a long tradition in the art of fencing, and its swords were the sharpest and the sturdiest of the time.

When Chu and Qi destroyed Yue, it was the rulers of the Southern State which adopted and drew most benefit from these two traditions. The warrior class of the Chu nobility honed their skills through the teaching of the master swordsmen of Yue. The twelve men whose skill with the foil was most outstanding were awarded the title of Heavenly Ones, each taking as his name one of the signs of the Zodiac. Thus was formed an order of the finest swordsmen in the state.

Despite the decline of the nobility following the reforms of minister Wu Qi, the order of the Twelve Heavenly Ones survived due to its military and cultural importance. This tradition has lasted through the centuries, and is still alive today.

The members of the order can never number more than twelve, each member symbolizing by his technique or personality one of the signs of the Zodiac. Each takes around ten disciples and when the time comes to retire, chooses his successor from among them. The Twelve Heavenly Ones occupy some of the most important positions in the state, whether as army officers, high-ranking officials or rich landowners, and their rank in society reflects their noble origins. Their palace, which also houses the school for their disciples, is located in Juyang, a town on the northern plain, on the banks of the Huai River.

The disciples of the Twelve Heavenly Ones have the reputation for being, aside from their masters, the finest swordsmen in all the *Zhongguo*. Their skills earn them positions as diverse as army instructors, tutors to children of the most important individuals in the state, and bodyguards to ministers or foreign dignitaries. But some of them, eager to be the equal of the legendary knights-errant of the North, embark on military pilgrimages, traveling by road and challenging every warrior they meet to a duel in order to prove their skill. Each disciple of the Twelve Heavenly Ones is bound by a vow of absolute loyalty to his homeland, and he who dares betray it must face his comrades, who will not rest until the honor of Chu is restored by blood.

Chu Kaoliewang

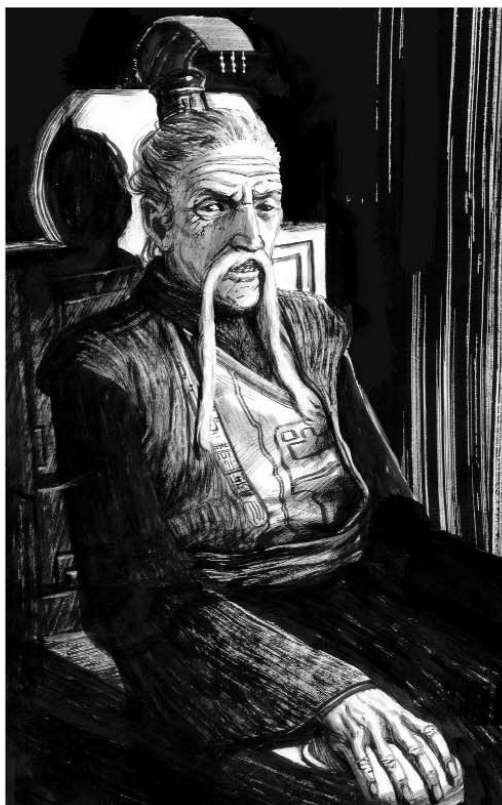
Chu Kaoliewang has been King for more than twenty years, and still towards the end of his reign his companions are anger and grief. As a child he saw the fall of Yingdu, the massacre of the palace servants, and the shameful flight of his family from the brutal soldiers of Qin. The memories of those events have haunted him throughout his life ; each night he relives that nightmare, and a voice urges him again and again to win vengeance for his state.

After taking the reins of power when Shoucun was elevated to the status of capital, Chu Kaoliewang took steps to consolidate his power base and to build up the strength of Chu. To that end he was obliged to stoop to various agreements with Han and Qi, some extremely unfavorable to his state. But Chu's image of weakness and servility would be worth it to gain the favor of the other states if it led to an alliance against the object of his hatred. And in any case, once the arrogant Western State was swept away, he would soon be able to turn his armies against his former allies.

But Kaoliewang's patience is wearing thin. As he grows old, he fears that vengeance will not come in his lifetime. So he does all in his power to accelerate the flow of history, despite the protestations of his supposed allies, who say that a war cannot be prepared in just a few months.

Kaoliewang is an old man exhausted by decades of constant bitterness and rage. His skeletal frame and raspy voice are those of a vengeful ghost rather than the noble ruler of one of the most prestigious states of the *Zhongguo*.

Renown: 205



Yan

Located in the far Northeast of the *Zhongguo*, the state of Yan is hampered by an outdated administration and an inefficient army. But it has a proud people, made strong by centuries spent defending their borders from barbarians and other states.

History

During the Zhou dynasty, Yan was a great fief whose first ruler was Ji Shi, a powerful duke of the imperial line.

Yan's location gave it a clear role within the Zhou Empire : to defend the Zhou lands from incursions by the barbarians of the North. For many centuries, the people of Yan shouldered the burden of ensuring the security of the Empire, and the fief became stronger as its soldiers gained battle experience and toughness from year after year of clashes with tribes from the steppes.

When during the Spring and Autumn period the Empire broke up due to the weakening of the Zhou dynasty and the ambitions of the Hegemons, Yan became completely independent. Its strategic importance as a buffer zone against invasions from the North spared it from being the target of its neighbors' expansionist designs, save for occasional territorial raids by the forces of Qi. Reforms carried out by the duke of the time on the advice of the wise Le Yi enabled Yan to strengthen its army and to continue to repel invaders.

However, during the Warring States period, Yan has proved incapable of responding to the new political, economic and military context. Its administrative reforms did not go far enough and the nobility has been allowed to retain a significant hold on power. Despite its great size and recognized military strength, Yan never succeeded in rising to the level of the most powerful states such as Qin and Chu. In consequence, Yan now finds itself a target for the territorial ambitions of states like Qi and Zhao, who seek to consume its territory piece by piece.

Geography

Yan is a country of plains and plateaus, conducive to intensive agriculture and the raising of animals. It has a continental climate, with summer being the only rainy season. In spring, sandstorms from the steppes sweep across the land.

The entire northwestern region is made up of high plains, culminating in a small mountain range dividing it from the northern steppes. The region is home not only to farming villages and great expanses of pasture-land, but also garrisons charged with patrolling the border, which is otherwise protected by an imposing but poorly-maintained wall.

The West has a few mountains but many more fertile plains, irrigated by a canal linking the Yellow River to the Yellow Sea, and by the Hai and Luan Rivers. This region of Yan is well fortified against the aggression of Zhao, which tries to capture one or two cities every year. A wall and several fortified towns provide the state's first line of defense against invasions from the South and West.

The East also has great plains, irrigated by small streams and rivers as well as the Liao River, which leads to the Yellow Sea. This region of endless plains dotted with farming villages and forests is the heart of the country's agricultural production.

The far East of the country is a green and hilly region of woods and forests, apart from the mountainous peninsula extending to the South which contains the highest peaks in the state. This area is sparsely populated, save for mining villages built to exploit the mineral reserves of the mountains.

The South of Yan contains the many towns and villages along the Yellow Sea coast. Trading and fishing ports alike are heavily defended against raids by pirates and the Qi navy. The Liaodong Gulf, whose waters stretch far to the North, is renowned for its bountiful waters and the abundant catches of the local fishermen.

Ji

Located in the Northwest of the country, Yan's capital is only of moderate size compared to the grandeur of Linzi or Handan, but its sixty thousand inhabitants make it the largest town in the land.

Within its walls, Ji can appear rather coarse at first sight. For the town is made up largely of poor neighborhoods, which have evolved into a refuge for criminals that even the authorities are obliged to respect. The insular and closed nature of Yan makes it a natural home for pariahs, outlaws and exiles from other states, who seek refuge here safe in the knowledge that none will come to look for them in this backwater town so near to the barbarian steppes.

However, despite or perhaps because of this, Ji is a warm-hearted town, whose diverse population earn their livings at local markets where even barbarians come to sell their exotic wares.

A declining state

An outdated administration

When compared with the other states, Yan's main problem lies in the failings of its system of administration. The system is broadly Legalist in spirit, but was created in the middle of the Spring and Autumn period and is unable to function effectively in the new political environment.

The root of the problem lies in the objective pursued by every ruler of Yan since its creation: the protection of the Empire through the defense of its northern borders. The military strength that Yan developed to pursue this goal was almost entirely geared to defense, and since the nobility were key to this, it became impossible to

break their hold over political power as had been done in Qin and other lands.

Limited reforms undertaken to correct the structural defects in the system applied no more than a veneer of modernity to an outdated administration still largely dominated by the nobility. Aristocrats continued to take all the key positions for themselves and to place their vassals in other important roles. The famous Legalist efficiency never fully took hold in Yan, which held it back and limited its rise to power during the Warring States period.

Now, King Yan Jinwang wants to change all that. He has sent advisers to all corners of the *Zhongguo* with orders to study other administrations and to return with a detailed project for the reform of Yan which will permit it to match its rivals in all fields. But he fears that it may already be too late for his state...

A strong but inefficient army

Several centuries of bitter struggles against the barbarians of the North, the pirates of the Yellow Sea and the invading forces of Qi and Zhao have marked the inhabitants of Yan and forged them into a resilient and combative people.

The soldiers of Yan are proud warriors, battle-hardened in the campaigns on the northern borders and the southern coasts. The Yan army is formidably strong, and well-versed in the art of defending its land. Fortifications, from the great walls of the Northwest to the fortified towns and naval bases dotted throughout the state, enable Yan to frustrate and repel advances by any armed force foolish enough to attempt an invasion. He who would take Yan by force would do well to proceed with caution.

But such military strength, almost entirely geared to defense and with no offensive capacity, is ill-suited to modern warfare. Each of the other states has reorganized its army to make it more efficient and able to launch wave after wave of invasions. Yan's defense is stout, but were it to be faced with an army strong and well-organized enough to sustain a long campaign, the state must fall. And in the absence of serious reforms, its military resources will continue to be insufficient for it to counter-attack.

Relations with other states

Of all the states in the *Zhongguo*, Yan's sworn enemies are Zhao, which tries repeatedly to capture territory in the West of the country, and Qi, whose navy frequently raids the coasts.

Now, thanks to the friendship between Prince Dan and Ying Zheng, Qin thinks of itself as an ally of Yan and maintains pressure on its border with Zhao to prevent that state from massing its forces at its border with Yan.

Yan's relations with the barbarian tribes of the North are complex. It is ready to fight to the death when a tribe pillages its villages. But when merchants from the steppes come to trade, they are welcomed in Yan.



Factions and organizations

Bounty hunters

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Yan has become a refuge for convicts and murderers from throughout the *Zhongguo*, who come here to escape justice in their own land. It is not surprising therefore that the state is also home to the largest number of bounty hunters, so many in fact that they have an influential guild of their own, located in Ji itself.

Through its regular contacts with the authorities of all of the states, the guild is the sole repository for wanted notices issued by districts of neighboring and far-off lands, which are placed on a public noticeboard in the main hall of its head office, an imposing building in the artisan quarter of the capital. Bounty hunters consult these notices before setting off on the trail of convicts thought to be in Yan. In exchange for a small fee for membership of the guild, bounty hunters gain the right to consult the noticeboard, and receive a seal serving as their safe-conduct in the state. For the guild has connections at court who look benevolently on its activities.

A bounty hunter who captures his target may place him in the custody of the officers of the guild, who will inform the authorities of the district which issued the relevant wanted notice. The bounty hunter will receive the reward, less an administration fee charged by the guild. Some have been known to take the risk of personally returning a convict to his district, but the effort and danger inherent in such a journey is rarely worth the small benefit to be gained from cutting out the middle man...

The Order of the Silent Bell

The members of this organization are the most renowned contract killers of all the states, and are feared even by the most famous guilds of assassins like the Sect of Five Poisons.

Any individual can be accepted into the order pro-

vided he can successfully complete its unique training program. Each apprentice receives basic training in the use of weapons, the preparation of poisons, and disguise. But the final stage of the training is an unusual test of stealth. The apprentice must braid into his hair a number of small bronze bells and be able to move in all situations without causing any of them to ring. For the order, this element of the program acts as a guarantee of the outstanding skill of its recruits, but for many apprentices, it is a guarantee of their failure. The reward for success is admission to the order; the reward for failure is death, as the Silent Bells prefer their idiosyncratic training methods to remain secret...

Like all the guilds of assassins, the Silent Bells have a well-developed network of potential and current clients. Since the goals of the order are financial rather than political, each mission is treated with the same level of respect so long as the client is able to pay, and national pride does not stand in the way of a mission being accepted from a state other than Yan. Once a mission has been accepted, an assassin is assigned to it on the basis of his experience and special skills. If he should be captured or eliminated before completing his mission, another assassin will be dispatched at once: since the guild takes payment in advance, its clients expect results.

Members of the order are often anonymous citizens who work at a normal trade or employment until they are called upon to serve. Once assigned to a mission, they braid their hair with small bronze bells to recall their training and to deny themselves even the slightest error. By tradition, an assassin adds one bell for every successful mission, which is one means to distinguish between a beginner assassin and a veteran...

Key figures

Prince Dan

The son of King Jinwang and heir to the throne of Yan, Prince Dan was sent to Zhao at an early age as a royal hos-



tage. He soon became friends with the young Ying Zheng, son of the Qin hostage, Zichu. Abandoned in this backward country and treated lower than servants, the two boys drew great strength from their friendship and each promised to help the other if he was fortunate enough to escape such shameful captivity. And so it was : Prince Zichu returned to Qin after being named heir, and Ying Zheng followed soon after. Ying Zheng used his new-found influence to arrange for the Prince of Yan to be brought to Qin by means of an exchange of hostages between Qin and Zhao.

Since that day, Prince Dan has lived with his friend Ying Zheng in the royal palace of Qin. Although Ying Zheng is nominally King, he is too young to ascend the throne and his prime minister Lü Buwei governs in his stead. While they wait for Ying Zheng to come of age, the two young men dream of the future, and plan a life full of battles and victories won side by side for the unification of the *Zhongguo*...

Prince Dan is a handsome young man whose joyous nature stands in stark contrast with the black moods of his friend Ying Zheng. His noble appearance and jovial spirit, combined with a taste for exquisite clothing, make him a great success with the fairer sex and an honored guest at dinner parties and hunting parties of the nobility.

Renown: 170

Jing Ke

A native of Wei, Jing Ke fled his state at a young age after killing a rival for the attentions of a woman. Like many criminals he found refuge in Yan, where he spent his days drinking and joking with his friends among the local hooligans.

But justice would not let him be and soon several bounty hunters were on his trail. His fighting skills saved him many times and he remained at liberty until he fell into an ambush set by several bounty hunters. Attacked on all sides, he fought like a lion and finally defeated his enemies, at the cost of terrible wounds that should have brought his death... But a shadowy observer had followed the struggle with interest and brought the unconscious Jing Ke to a safe house where the young criminal was healed.

When he awoke, his benefactor congratulated him on the skill and courage he had shown and invited him to join his organization. Jing Ke sensed that a refusal

would not be well received, and accepted the invitation. And so Jing Ke entered the Order of the Silent Bell.

During his training, he revealed his outstanding potential as a professional assassin and passed the test of the bells without the slightest error. Soon the order sent him on his first missions, each of which he accomplished without difficulty. As the years went by, Jing Ke grew to enjoy his role, taking an unhealthy pleasure in work for which he was clearly gifted. He became one of the most feared assassins in the land, and was granted the title of Thousand Bells in recognition of his talent and experience.

But during his last mission, everything changed. Sent to murder a well-known blacksmith and his family, Jing Ke carried out his mission with his customary efficiency. The sole survivor was the blacksmith's daughter, a young blind girl who bade him kill her in order that she might not live in shame. Seeing that the girl's blindness would prevent her from recognizing or identifying him, Jing Ke refused. But the girl plunged a dagger into her own heart, and when Jing Ke rushed to her side, she thrust at him with a blade hidden in her left hand. She missed her target and breathed her last in the arms of Jing Ke. The assassin was profoundly moved by the unique courage of the child.

Since then, Jing Ke has lost the will to live. He has left the Order of the Silent Bell and has chosen to escape its assassins in the most unlikely location: among the beggars and vagabonds of Ji. There he lives as an outcast, dressed in rags and with his hair matted and wild. Life has lost all meaning.

Jing Ke is an old man with a blank stare. He speaks to no-one and taking him for a madman, people tend to avoid him.

Renown: 30



Wei

Wei is an insignificant state in the center of the *Zhongguo*, whose sole importance lies in its long religious tradition and its role as a sanctuary for Taoists fleeing persecution in their own lands.

History

Born together with Zhao and Han of the breakup of the Jin Hegemony, Wei barely survived the tempestuous years following its creation.

The first rulers of Wei found it very difficult to establish control over their vassals, and the early years of the state saw great domestic unrest. When Marquess Wu died without leaving an heir, the noble families fought for control of the state and Wei collapsed into civil war. Zhao and Han sought to profit by forming an alliance to invade Wei, but fortunately for the small state the alliance never overcame the natural rivalry between the two states and the invasion failed.

Marquess Hui took the throne. Having learnt the lessons of the terrible early years, he began a series of administrative, economic and agricultural reforms to modernize his land and defend it against future invasions.

Once Wei had become a major power, King Hui decided to avenge the affront of a few years earlier by invading Zhao. Under the command of the great general Pang Juan, the Wei armies met with little resistance and drove deep into the Zhao lands before laying siege to Handan. But then Qi grew concerned at the rise to power of its small neighbor and intervened in the war to break its spirit. At the Battle of Guiling, the Qi armies inflicted a terrible defeat on Wei, its generals Tian Ji and Sun Bin reducing the strategies of Pang Juan to dust.

Wei was not disheartened, and went on to invade Han. Again unknown forces drove Qi to intervene. Again the military genius of Sun Bin was too great for Pang Juan, and at the Battle of Maling he took his own life on the battlefield to save his honor. This defeat sparked a dramatic decline in the strength and influence of Wei, which Qin was quick to turn to its own advantage by capturing huge tracts of land and forcing King Hui to move his capital from Anyi to Daliang.

Once more a weak and insignificant state, Wei tried to form an alliance first with Han and then with Zhao to stem the eastward advances of Qin, but both alliances were crushed by the mighty army of the Western State.

The enfeebled condition of Wei made it easy prey for all manner of religious sects. After the annexation of the remaining Zhou territory, the imperial priests sought refuge in Wei, became advisers to the King, and used their influence to spread their fanatical views. Modern Wei is a schizophrenic state, with a creaking administration crippled by antiquated beliefs and riven by conflict between ministers and religious sects.

Geography

Wei is made up of fertile plains crossed by the Yellow River and surrounded by mountains. For much of the year, it enjoys a temperate continental climate. Spring brings sandstorms from the North, and summer brings occasional rains.

The East and West of the country are made up of great fertile plains irrigated by the Yellow River and tributaries like the Fen River and dotted with farming villages. Due to the scarcity of rain and the water-control works carried out in the time of King Hui, the rivers are rarely very high.

The mountain range in the center of Wei shields the state's most important towns from Qin. Farmers and miners live side by side in these mountains, along with temples and hermitages which are home to Taoists, sorcerers and enlightened ones.

The South is also quite mountainous, and on the border with Han lies Songshan, one of the five sacred mountains and a destination for pilgrimages by many inhabitants of Wei.

Daliang

Without doubt the smallest capital of all the states, Daliang became the second capital of Wei after the first capital Anyi proved too close to the Qin border. Its modest size and its population of under fifty thousand inhabitants can be attributed to the decline of the state following its military misfortunes at the hands of Qi.

The main feature of Daliang is the great number of temples within its walls. Religion is well-established here, and there is barely a neighborhood, barely a street without its own temple dedicated to one of the many gods of the Court of Heaven, a local divinity or a famous saint of old. The temples are run by Taoists selling incense, sacred talismans and prayers to those willing to pay to gain the favor of Heaven.

Each year many Taoist pilgrims make their way to Wei, confident of receiving a warm welcome and desperate to escape persecution in their homeland. The growing population of penniless immigrants has obliged the town to expand, for better or for worse, as poor and often insalubrious neighborhoods spring up around the city walls. These neighborhoods are hotbeds of crime, with countless underground gaming houses and sordid brothels run by a criminal fraternity whose terrible cruelty is matched only by its astonishing religious fervor.

A state at war with itself

A declining power

Wei has been in decline for over a hundred years. Its army, whose might once struck fear into the hearts of its enemies, has lost all its pride since the terrible defeats at Guiling and Maling. The territory of the state shrinks year on year as it is gnawed away by Qi to the East and Qin to the West. Its economy can no longer compete with the wealth of Zhao. Its diplomats cannot



measure up to those of Han. In short, Wei is a feeble state, whose voice is no longer heard in the *Zhongguo*.

But the state survives. This appears to be due to a series of extremely fortunate chance events and coincidences, which the King's religious advisers present as gifts from Heaven. For successive invasions by Qin and Zhao have met with unexpected obstacles forcing their generals to turn back: unseasonable snowstorms, landslides, earthquakes, and even epidemics. Wei's neighbors have noted these unusual events and have chosen to avoid the risks by leaving the state alone. The high-ranking Taoists of the state are convinced that this is their doing, and use this argument to gain ever more influence over the King.

A clash of cultures

Ever since the Taoists succeeded in clambering to the higher reaches of power, the power of the officials has eroded with every passing day. As a result, Wei's essentially Legalist system of administration cohabits with new religious laws and priests occupy key positions in the administrative hierarchy. Even the prime minister has lost the confidence of the King, who now listens mainly to his personal adviser San Fei-hu, also known as the Servant of the Thirty-Six Thousand.

This situation grows unbearable to an administrator class desperate to regain its former pre-eminence by any means necessary. This results in numerous power struggles at the level of the districts and commanderies, where local mayors and governors vie with priests for the respect and obedience of the people. It also affects the royal court, where ministers and senior advisers strive to regain the favor of the King from the Taoists. Even the life of the people has been affected, as the distance grows between believers and unbelievers, between those who follow dogma and those who follow law. Quarrels lead to fights, and fights lead to pitched battles, and the peace of Wei appears shattered forever by the bitter war between priests and officials.

Relations with other states

Wei has many enemies among the Warring States. Its main enemies are Qin and Qi, each of which launches annual military campaigns to capture towns or land.

The trade war between Wei and Zhao is greatly harmful to the former's economy.

Han is the only state to maintain good relations with Wei, as it does with all the other states.

Factions and organizations

The Pure of the Western Paradise

The most influential Taoist sect in Wei is the Pure of the Western Paradise.

Its high priests are direct descendants of the higher echelons of the imperial priestly class who fled to Wei after the downfall of the imperial dynasty. They were received by the King and won his favor by promising the assistance of the gods in remedying the problems of his state.

Ever since, the sect has continued to gain power, and its head San Fei-hu has been personal adviser to the King for several years. He uses his privileged position to transform Wei into a sort of theocracy, by constructing temples in every district in the land, enacting laws inspired by Taoist dogma and convincing the King that the immortals will assist him in his struggle against the other states.

Although the officials dare not believe it, the hidden powers of the Pure of the Western Paradise are very real. By following the mysterious ways of the Tao, its members use

their ancient wisdom to procure for the state the help of supernatural forces of Heaven or Hell. They do not flinch at calling forth the dark forces of *Feng Du* to bring curses on the enemies of Wei and visit terrible misfortunes on them. The demons of the Earth cause avalanches, the spirits of the Wind conjure up storms and the Five Poisons spread deadly diseases. The efforts of officials cannot prevent the sect from using its powerful magic to gain more and more influence. And so, with each passing day, the state of Wei becomes more religious, and more dominated by the principles of the Tao.

The Pure of the Western Paradise are aware of a hidden power trying to challenge their influence over the King. By a long-neglected rite they have succeeded in making the King deaf to any mystical influence but their own, and so the highest power in the land remains their puppet.

Key figures

Wei Jingminwang

Barely two years ago, Wei Jingminwang inherited from his father a lowly state, but one whose security was assured by the protection of Heaven.

Jingminwang was educated in the Taoist religion from a very young age, and is a fervent follower of the way of Lao Zi. On ascending the throne, the young King reappointed his father's adviser and has followed each of his suggestions in order to make Wei the most pious land in all the *Zhongguo*.

Jingminwang is unwilling to listen to his ministers, and is ready to dismiss or send into exile any who would dare to speak heresy. Having lost the battle for the King, the high-ranking officials have shifted their struggle to the local level, and studiously avoid their undeclared war reaching the royal court. Their greatest hope is for the heir to the throne to be raised far from the reach of the priests, and to this end the prime minister is engaged in negotiations with other states to arrange for the King's children to be sent there as royal hostages until their coming of age.

In the meantime, King Jingminwang looks on the other rulers of the *Zhongguo* as heretics, which leads him to commit many diplomatic errors. His ministers try to repair the damage, but in the neighboring states, resentment toward Wei grows day by day.

The young King behaves like an overconfident adolescent. He scorns people he judges unworthy of his respect, which earns him only bitterness and resentment.

Renown: 190

San Fei-hu, Servant of the Thirty-six Thousand

Nearly sixty years old, the head of the Pure of the Western Paradise may well be the most powerful Taoist of all the Warring States. His wisdom and mastery of magic is surpassed only by a few hermits and saints.

Fei-hu is the direct descendant of a high priest of the Zhou Dynasty and has been personal adviser to three generations of Wei rulers. It is under his guidance

that the state has become a land of religious devotion. Its people are legendary for their piety, and each year thousands of pilgrims flock to Huashan and Songshan to receive the blessings of Heaven. Each day more exiled monks swell the ranks of the Taoist faithful in Wei. Thanks to his powers and those of his followers, Fei-hu is able to keep the other states at a distance by visiting the displeasure of the gods on those who would attack Wei or interfere with its plans.

For the Servant of the Thirty-Six Thousand has a vision. A vision of an Empire finally reunited under the banner of Wei, an Empire under a ruler enlightened by the Tao, wise in the ancient ways, and holding the Mandate of Heaven. And this austere priest labors day and night in the pursuit of this vision, to consolidate the strength of Wei and to prepare for the future – a future enlightened by the grace of the August Emperor of Jade.

San Fei-hu is solidly built for his age, with a stern gaze and a deep voice. But when he speaks of his vision, he soon becomes swept up in a religious fervor and his eyes blaze with a light close to madness.

Renown: 205



Han

Surrounded by the warlike powers of Chu, Qi and Qin, the small state of Han tries to survive by using diplomatic means to compensate for its relative military weakness.

History

Han is one of the Three Jin, the three states born after the terrible civil war that caused the break-up of the Jin Hegemony. Compared to certain others, therefore, it is a relatively young state.

Soon after it became independent, Han showed its strength by invading the small principality of Zheng and driving further westward. Then it allied with Zhao and took advantage of the war of succession in Wei to launch an invasion. But this campaign failed due to disagreements between the generals of the two armies, and once Wei's internal strife was at an end and a new King on the throne, it was able to regroup and rebuild its defenses.

Wei sought revenge on Zhao by launching a ferocious attack on the Horse State. But Qi came to the aid of Zhao and Wei was forced to retreat to protect its own borders, and was finally defeated at the Battle of Guiling. After this humiliation, Wei turned its rage on Han, but again Qi intervened and at the Battle of Maling put the invading armies to flight and saved Han.

In the decades that followed, Han's weakness became all too apparent. Confronted with the territorial ambitions of Qin, Chu and Zhao, its small army proved unable to fight on all fronts. And so under the reign of Marquess Han Zhao, the Legalist minister Shen Buai established a program of reforms designed to give the state a more efficient administration. These reforms were the beginning of Han's legendary diplomacy, through which the small state learned to survive by building alliances, signing treaties and winning the favor of the larger, more powerful states.

In these troubled times, Han continues to be hampered by its military weakness and its central location. But the skill and hard work of its emissaries makes it a major power in diplomatic terms and a key player in nearly every set of important negotiations.

Geography

Han is a country of great plains, with some mountains to the West. It has a temperate continental climate, with heavy rains in summer causing the rivers to swell dangerously.

The West is a mountainous region which divides Han from Qin. Most of the inhabitants of this part of Han are miners exploiting the mineral wealth of the mountains, or herdsmen grazing their animals on the high pasture-lands. Despite the harsh winters, it is a well-populated and relatively prosperous region.

The great plains of the East are the breadbasket of the state. The fields are cultivated by a large peasant population. Irrigation from the Yellow River, which runs along the northern border of the country, permits regular harvests and high yields. But the river has a dark side : when the summer rains cause it to rise too high, its floods can devastate crops.

Xinzheng

The present capital of Han is the country's second since the beginning of the Warring States period. When the most ruthless of all the neighboring states, Qin, invaded the remaining territory of the Zhou Dynasty, Han's first capital Yangdi was deemed too close to the Qin border, and the seat of power was moved.

The new capital Xinzheng is a city of modest size with around a hundred thousand inhabitants. Well-fortified since its elevation to the most important town in the land, it is home to many embassies and missions where emissaries from the four corners of the *Zhongguo* come to negotiate agreements and alliances, even where the issues at stake do not directly concern Han. A considerable police presence, put in place by the state authorities to reduce the risk of diplomatic incidents, makes Xinzheng an extremely safe city.

The presence of foreign delegations has also benefited trade, as the town's inns provide lodging for the servants and bodyguards of the diplomatic community, and its gaming houses and pleasure houses enjoy good custom. And while Xinzheng's markets are nothing compared to those of Handan, they are still well-known for the quality and variety of goods to be found.

Songshan

In the North of the country, near its border with Wei, lies one of the five sacred mountains of the Taoist religion: Songshan, the Sacred Mountain of the Center

As one of the holiest places in the religion revealed by Lao Zi, Songshan attracts pilgrims throughout the year. Crowds of holy men, enlightened Taoists and humble believers flock to the mountain from spring through winter.

The villages of the region have for a long time understood the profit to be gained from the pilgrims. These villages contain many huge inns whose rooms are rarely left empty, and when the inns are full, local inhabitants rent out beds in their own humble homes in exchange for a few coins. Small shops sell trinkets and talismans which are professed to attract the favor of the gods or contain the wisdom of Lao Zi and the immortals. Such items have of course neither power nor monetary worth, but many a gullible pilgrim will take the sales patter of a shopkeeper at face value, and spend a considerable sum for a scale of the tail of a Kilin, a feather of Fenghuang or a tooth of Lao Zi...

Mount Songshan itself is home to Taoist hermits, who have withdrawn to the mountain to meditate and become one with the Tao. The hermits lead a life of strict asceticism, living in caves, and do all they can to avoid crossing the path of over-curious travelers who come to the mountain in the hope of meeting the immortals themselves, mounted on their white cranes...



A weak but influential state

A depleted army

While Han was a major military power at the start of the Warring States period, its army proved unable to fight on the many fronts opened up at its different borders. Its central location, surrounded by aggressive neighbors, made Han one of the most difficult states to defend.

But the diplomatic power of the state grew, and the number of border conflicts fell, and over the years the depleted Han army proved just about able to fend off attacks until the ministry of foreign affairs brought them to an end.

At present, while Han's strength and skill in negotiation protects it from invasions by Qi and Chu, its western border appears fragile. For Qin has become the strongest state in the *Zhongguo*, and its ambition is unsettling to its neighbors. So considering its border with Qin the one most needful of defense, and in case peace talks fail, Han has gathered the vast majority of its armed forces at its western border in readiness for an invasion.

A powerful diplomatic corps

Ever since its ministry of foreign affairs was set up, Han has been a major political power among the Warring States.

The cornerstone of Han foreign policy has traditionally been to remain neutral in conflicts between states. It used its neutrality, its relative weakness, and its central location to persuade the other states to accept it as the preferred intermediary for all manner of negotiations between them, and set up a ministry of foreign affairs entirely dedicated to managing the relations between nations. The secure and peaceable nature of the capital

Yingzheng made it a perfect location for embassies, and the town soon became the venue of choice for international discussions, even where Han was not directly involved. So now, whenever two states need to negotiate a treaty, sign a trade agreement, or ratify a military alliance, they do it in Han, recognized as neutral territory and the natural context for diplomatic work.

All this has made Han a key voice in international political relations, and a key player in the diplomatic field, where as many, if not more, battles are won as on the battlefield.

Relations with other states

Han has no real enemies among the other states. It has been careful to protect its borders by winning the friendship of its immediate neighbors through favorable political and trade arrangements.

The only cause for concern is Qin, which appears to be planning to invade its neighbors one by one.

Factions and organizations

The Diplomats

Han diplomats are trained in the Xinzheng Academy of Political Science, and are some of the shrewdest negotiators in all the Warring States. Their study of the evolution of the delicate relations between the major states of the *Zhongguo* since the break-up of the Zhou Empire makes them highly knowledgeable in fields as diverse as political science, economics, trade and even

military strategy. They are experts in the analysis and resolution of diplomatic crises, which are all too frequent.

Diplomats are generally officials directly employed by the ministry of foreign affairs. They work in the various embassies of Xinzheng, advising foreign delegations and helping them resolve their differences. Any agreement or treaty concluded between foreign emissaries is witnessed by a Han diplomat and a detailed report filed with the foreign ministry. The ministry adds this information to its archives, which now constitute a detailed political and diplomatic history of the Warring States. The ministry's goal is to collect as much information as possible about the relations between the other states so that when the time comes, it can use this information to play them against each other...

Other diplomats trained in the Xinzheng Academy are sent as ambassadors to other states to defend Han's interests and to ensure its voice is heard even in the most far-off lands. The work of the ambassadors is crucial in maintaining the reputation of Han in the furthest corners of the *Zhongguo*.

Some diplomats even sell their political skills to rulers of other states in the hope of becoming powerful ministers. These mercenaries are renounced by Han and can never hope to deal with their home state again...



Key figures

Ji An

Ji An is Prince of Han and heir to the throne of the aging King Huanhuiwang, who is exhausted by the pressures of nearly thirty years of power.

Ji An is a brilliant young man, both the finest student of the Xinzheng Academy and a master swordsman. He is also crucial to Han diplomacy, for the marriage of such a handsome and noble prince could enable the state to forge or consolidate an alliance with a more powerful state.

Aware of his duty to his country, Ji An has begun to make official visits to the royal courts of neighboring states and to consider the many propositions of marriage which result.

The prince has resolved not to decide on his marriage until he has visited every royal court in the *Zhongguo*, but is particularly keen to win the favor of Qin. He intends to spend several months in the Western State, both to display his respect, and to leave no stone unturned in his search for a woman of sufficient standing within Qin that by taking her as his wife he might put an end to the tension between Qin and Han.

With delicate features and a body honed by daily fencing training, Ji An is a prince of incomparable presence. He can converse brilliantly with anyone from a high-ranking minister to a lowly, uneducated peasant. His relaxed style and genuine kindness have won the admiration of all.

Renown : 185

Hui Jangsu, Word of Heaven

The Han foreign minister Hui Jangsu holds most influence at the royal court, and more power even than the prime minister himself.

Hui Jangsu began his career as an ordinary diplomat working in one of the many embassies of Xinzheng. Through keen observational skills and unusual perspicacity, he was able to gather sensitive information that was of great use to the state in attaining important territorial and trade objectives. His skill was recognized by regular promotions to positions of ever higher responsibility, while his legendary oratory earned him his nickname of Word of Heaven. Year after year Hui Jangsu rose through the hierarchy of the ministry, until at last he was appointed minister of foreign affairs, a position of supreme importance not only in Han, but in all the *Zhongguo*.

Hui Jangsu has recently concluded highly satisfactory agreements with Qi, Chu and Wei, but remains concerned by the threat from Qin and his apparent powerlessness to counter it. His only hope is that Prince Ji An's visit to the court of Xianyang will succeed, and that a royal marriage will provide the foundation for a firm alliance between the two states and an end to the threat to Han's western borders.

Hui Jangsu is advanced in years and has lost the energy and charisma of his youth. Yet his oratory is undimmed, and few are able to match his skills in negotiation or debate. But the effort necessary to bring success is more tiring to this old man than he would like to admit.

Renown : 200

Life In The Warring States

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The Family

The basic unit of Warring States society is not the individual but the family.

A family unit is generally made up of the two parents, sons and their wives, who may start their own family unit if they have the desire and the means, and unmarried daughters.

All the members of a family live in the same house and form a single unit in society. In certain states a whole family may be punished for a crime committed by one member. Similarly, where one member of the family wins glory, that glory will shine on the whole family.

Authority and hierarchy

The father is the undisputed head of the family. He has complete moral authority over his sons until their coming of age, after which they are still required to respect their father's judgment, and over his daughters until they are married. A mother has less authority than her husband but in his absence, is considered head of the family. Indeed, where a father dies before his first male heir comes of age, the title of

head of the family falls officially to the mother. Among children, younger sons must obey their elder brothers, and sisters must obey their brothers, irrespective of their age.

Until children come of age, they are not considered to be members of society and their parents are both morally and legally responsible for their actions. The age of majority is sixteen for both boys and girls.

Wives and concubines

When a child comes of age, the first issue that arises is marriage. In the families of nobles and high-ranking officials, marriages are often arranged as a means of reinforcing alliances and bringing together families in dispute. Such families often have recourse to intermediaries whose role it is to verify the virginity of the bride, set a level for the dowry, act as a go-between in negotiations over the marriage agreement, and generally to ensure that everything runs smoothly. The opinions of the two young people concerned by these negotiations are naturally not taken into account, which gives rise to many tales of romance and tragedy...

In more modest families, marriages are more a matter of maintaining good relationships between neighbors, and love can sometimes play its part.

For noble families with no formal position in the state, marriage can provide an opportunity to win the favor of a highly-respected family, to form an alliance with such a family, and so to acquire prestige and influence and regain their former status in society.

Marriages between people of different states are commonplace, and in such cases the wife naturally takes the nationality of her husband.

Once an agreement has been reached, an engagement is announced and the betrothed are forbidden from seeing each other until the wedding. Especially in aristocratic families, breaking an engagement is always a delicate matter, requiring skilful diplomacy, and frequently raising issues of financial compensation or vengeance...

Apart from a few details which vary between states, a wedding ceremony generally proceeds as follows. The bride, dressed in red and her face covered by a veil, is visited by the groom who leads her to the house of his parents. The bride bows before the altar of the ancestors of her new family. The bride and groom are bound together with a red ribbon and exchange glasses. Finally the marriage is blessed. A traditionally-minded, superstitious family will use a Taoist priest, but a scholar will scorn such common beliefs and hold a simple civil ceremony presided over by a state official. The wedding is celebrated at a dignified banquet, and during their first night as man and wife, the husband will finally see the face of his bride, often for the first time.

The respective roles of a husband and wife in Warring States society are clearly defined. A husband must honor and respect his wife, provide decently for her, and fulfil his conjugal duty. A wife must obey her husband, deal with everyday household matters such as managing money and disciplining servants, and above all bear him many children, if possible male. A wife is judged mainly on her ability to bear many boys and to look after them, and on that ability will depend her chances of remarriage in case she is divorced or widowed.

Since a man can only take as many concubines as he can afford to maintain, the practice of taking concubines is more usual among nobles and rich officials than among the common people. A rich man may have many concubines, either bought or received as part of an alliance or trade agreement, or chosen to remedy a barren marriage. A concubine's status within the family home is naturally inferior to that of the wife, to whom she owes respect and obedience. While the child of a wife has the status of family member as of right, the child of a concubine must be recognized by its father before being admitted into the family, and its status will always be lower than that of a legitimate child.

Repudiation and divorce

A man may only repudiate his wife if he can formally justify his decision. Common grounds for repudiation include the infertility of a wife, proven

adultery, an incurable disease, and conduct placing the honor of the family at risk (such as crime, madness, or a failure to respect the husband's parents). Once repudiated, a woman is considered to have lost her honor and will often not be able to remarry. There is no financial compensation, and so she will often end up as a prostitute.

However, if a man repudiates his wife on grounds of infertility, and his second marriage also proves barren, his first wife has the right to claim compensation or for the repudiation to be converted to a divorce.

Where the wife belongs to a powerful or influential family, and a husband wishes to minimize offense to her family, he may opt instead for a divorce. In this situation, the wife will return to her own family without damage to her reputation, and she may keep half of her dowry and most of her goods and servants. She may also remarry, and indeed her hand may be highly sought-after if during her first marriage she proved able to bear male children and properly manage a household.

Funerals

The death of a family member is followed by a religious ceremony intended to guide the soul of the departed along the path of the after-life.

The celebrant at such a ceremony is often a Taoist priest, but may occasionally be a significant figure in the community, such as the village elder. The body of the deceased is dressed in his finest clothes, placed in a wooden coffin, and buried in a local cemetery. Prayers are said and the celebrant commends the soul of the departed to the Kings of Hell, imploring them to make the soul's time in *Feng Du* as short and comfortable as possible.

Part of the soul of the departed is gathered in a funerary urn so that the departed can continue to watch over the family even after death. The urn is placed on the family altar dedicated to the worship of the ancestors, and receives offerings, mainly in the form of incense, whose smoke guides prayers toward the soul of the deceased. During the Feast of Pure Light the family will tend to the tombs of the ancestors and bring various offerings to guarantee their benevolence over the coming year.

Rich and distinguished men have great mausoleums built during their lives to provide a fitting home for their souls after death. These monuments are filled with everyday objects, ornaments and servants in the form of small terracotta statues known as *mingqi*. They are sadly easy targets for graverobbers, so the most important are protected by deadly mantraps to ensure that the eternal rest of the departed is not disturbed by common thieves.

Morality

The role of women

In the patriarchal society of the *Zhongguo*, a woman is considered to be entirely dependent on men from the cradle to the grave, and she is forbidden from carrying out any independent activity that is not supervised by her father or her husband.

According to tradition, a woman should have Three Lives and display Four Virtues:

*"Obedient to her parents,
and after flying the nest,
to her husband;
and after his death,
thinking only of her children."*

*"The virtue of a good wife,
she will bear heirs and
be proud in body and mind;
The virtue of silence,
She will say not a word and
Be humble in the presence of her husband;
The virtue of appearance,
She will strive for elegance and
Never display the impurity of her body;
Virtue of her task,
She will rule her house and
It will show her nature."*

According to tradition, therefore, a woman's life is dominated first by her father, then by her husband, and after widowhood, by her children.

A woman's basic duties are to ensure the continuity of her husband's line and to maintain his house. While she may give her husband advice, on no account must she criticize him. And she must always take care to present herself attractively, in order to sustain her husband's desire and to be worthy of him in society.

The social rules applicable to women might appear strict, but in practice they are not always followed. For example, a woman widowed before her first-born son comes of age will instantly be recognized as the head of the family. Moreover, within the home a woman has various roles which give her considerable authority, including managing household finances, hiring and firing domestic servants, and organizing her husband's diary.

Similarly, while in theory women are forbidden from having a trade, those who have obtained the consent of their husbands can obtain work as seamstresses, waitresses, midwives and so on.

For women who seek freedom, for those with a taste for adventure and excitement, the only solution is to live in exile in the *jiang hu*, the world of martial arts. Disguised as men, they can be judged not according to their sex but on their intellect and fighting skill. And while this parallel society is just as patriarchal as that of the Warring States, it remains the only escape route for women who reject the cage in which men would imprison them.

Love and sex

There is little place for love in the Warring States. The vast majority of marriages are arranged, and feelings are sacrificed on the altar of family or clan interests.

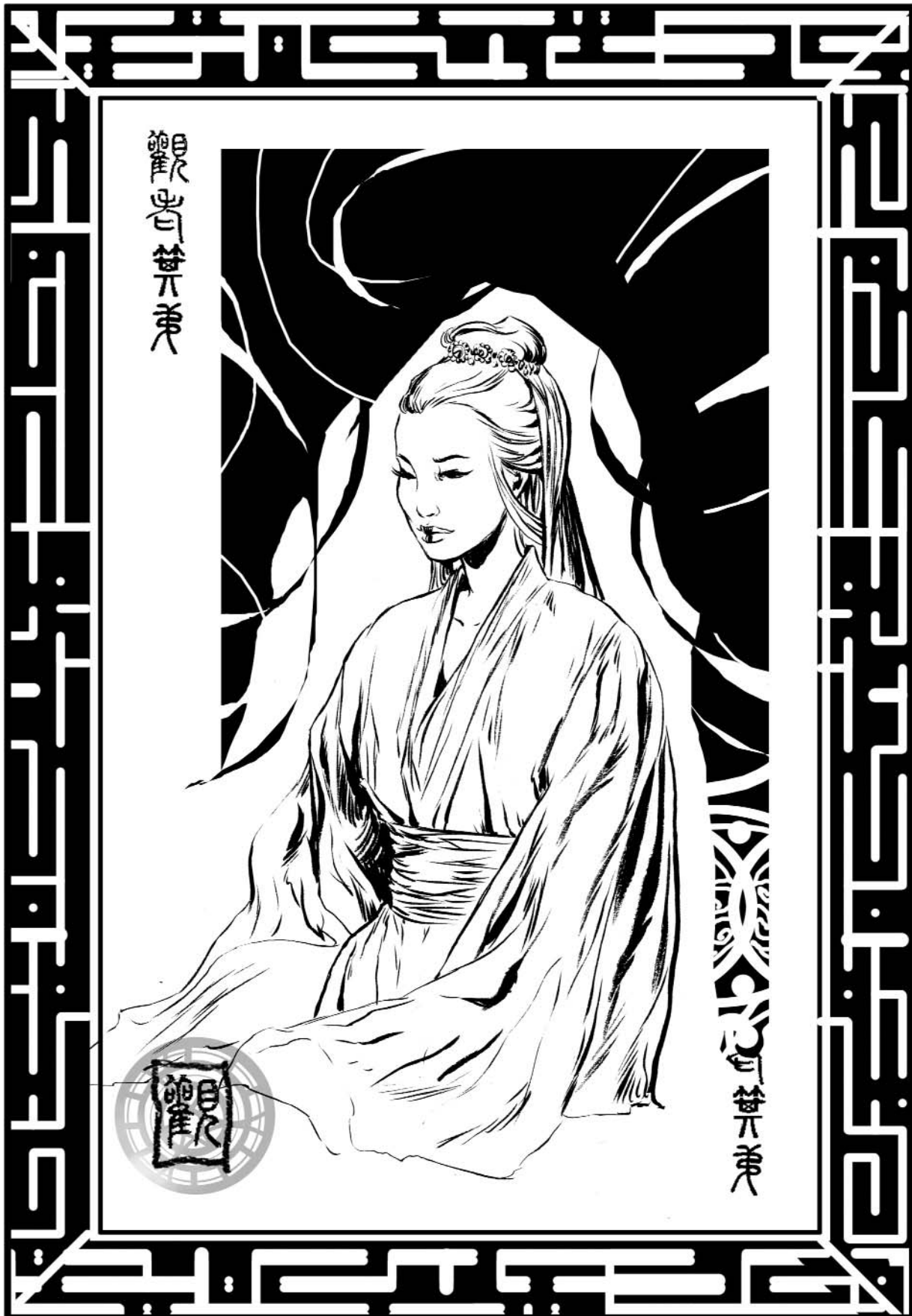
Love's only role appears to be as the material for popular stories and legends told by young people still clinging to the dream of love. These romantic tales tell of young lovers who choose to die in each others' arms in order that they might be reunited in the next life. Others tell of courageous lovers fleeing to far-off lands where their love can flourish. The artistic flourishes of poets and story-tellers cannot hide the sad truth of marriages: one cannot choose one's partner, so one must make the best of what life does out.

Even after marriage, it is still possible for a man to pursue love by taking a lover as a concubine. However, adultery is forbidden for women, and those who commit it risk not only the dishonor of their family, but punishment by death if they are discovered...

Of course, love can blossom even within an arranged marriage. Where a man and a woman have respect for each other, and fulfil their respective duties with conviction, that respect can grow into affection, love, and even passion. Many young girls dream that their future husband will be a handsome and gallant man with whom they will fall hopelessly in love.

Sexuality, or the art of the bedchamber, is by no means taboo in Warring States society. On the contrary, it is seen as an expression of the natural harmony between a man and a woman, and therefore a sacred duty to be performed without guilt or shame. In reality however, this idealized vision of sexual freedom is constrained by more pragmatic social norms.

It is expected of a young woman that she be a virgin on her wedding day, so that her husband can be confident that her first child is his. However, this rule is generally ignored in the countryside, where it is normal for young boys and girls to take their first steps to sexual maturity together.



Sexual pleasure, for both men and women, is held sacred in application of Taoist principles. A man who gives pleasure to his wife enables her to express her Yin, which he feeds on to strengthen his Yang. Through this process, the vitality of both partners is enhanced and their health protected. Many physicians advise patients complaining of chronic fatigue to lead a more vigorous sex life. It is also widely believed that children born of pleasurable couplings are naturally healthier.

Since the risk of the spread of sexually transmitted diseases is reduced by a strict approach to personal hygiene, this belief in sexual fulfilment as a guarantee of robust health has never been disproved.

Many works exist on the different approaches and positions available to sexual partners. These "sex manuals" exist to assist in maintaining a harmonious balance in a household, and give details on foreplay and caresses, describe various positions with poetic names, each devised to enhance pleasure or to increase the chances of conception. Oral and anal sex are very widespread, and such practices are mastered not only by wives eager to sustain the devotion of their husbands, but also by women of easy virtue who wish to avoid falling pregnant.

Contraception exists, using various herbs and potions, but it is little-used in a society obsessed with the need to produce children. Apart from courtesans and prostitutes, women tend to use it in secret, and share among themselves the most effective recipes.

Similarly, a society for whom the production of children is a sacred duty takes a very negative view of homosexuality. Whereas lesbianism is tolerated in harems, where the many concubines might otherwise wait for months to find physical pleasure, homosexuality among men is not treated so leniently. However, since interaction between boys and girls is frowned upon, many young people discover their sexuality by this means.

Courtesans and prostitutes

There are two sides to prostitution in the Warring States.

On the one hand, there are pleasure houses, where high-born courtesans or *yi ji* deploy their skills. These are women of great beauty and artistic talent. A man who pays for the honor of spending a night with a *yi ji* purchases above all the pleasure of the company of a sophisticated woman well-versed in conversation and the arts. A courtesan is never obliged to sleep with a client, and will grant her favors only to those she chooses, generally once she has been treated to an attentive courtship. These establishments are patronized by rich and powerful men seeking an escape from the pressures of everyday life.

On the other hand, there are brothels, teeming with women who will sleep with any man who can pay, and whose clientele is essentially made up of common workers, soldiers or craftsmen. They come merely to satisfy their needs, and the prostitutes or *ji nu* are there to meet that demand.

Legally, there is no difference between the two types of establishment. Practically, the differences are legion. Pleasure houses are located in quiet and secure neighborhoods, while brothels sit in the poorest corners and alleyways of the town. Price levels are of course very different, which means very different types of customers. And there is no comparison between the quality of the merchandise: the *yi ji* are refined and educated, while the *ji nu* are coarse and without any talents outside the bed-chamber...

Although a few courtesans and prostitutes have chosen their profession voluntarily, the majority of the residents of the pleasure districts have been sold to an establishment by their family. While in principle they need work only as long as it takes to refund their sponsor's investment, they soon become trapped in a lifestyle that is difficult to leave without any other skills, and so they continue to sell their charms out of habit or fear of the outside world...

Social conventions

Names

In Warring States society, an individual exists above all as part of a family. As a consequence, the surname, which establishes the basic social grouping to which a person belongs, comes before the given name, which defines the individual. Thus Wang Shi Yu is understood as Shi Yu, of the Wang family.

Since the choice of given name will influence a child's whole life, it is not left to chance. The choice is usually made after a long wait, generally a hundred days from the birth of a child, when the risk of early death appears to have passed. A typical given name will consist of one or two characters having strong moral or symbolic meaning intended to attract to the child the favor of Heaven. Boys typically receive names indicating strength, intelligence and authority, while female names refer to traditional female virtues such as beauty, gentleness and obedience.

When a child comes of age, its parents choose for it an adult given name to replace its childhood given name. The two names will often be linked by a common character, as a constant reminder to the young adult of his childhood and all that he owes to his parents.

Finally, often a person will choose for themselves a third name for use in his professional, artistic or criminal career. Such a name will generally be very vivid, using characters referring to animals, objects or places. The nomads of the *wu lin* use this third name almost exclusively.

Titles and naming conventions

Any inhabitant of the Warring States must know his place in the subtle social hierarchy and be able to address others politely and properly.

Among the common people, it is normal to use the terms “uncle” and “aunt” to address people of the generation of one’s parents, the terms “brother” and “sister” for people of one’s own generation, and the terms “grandfather” and “grandmother” for elderly people. However, this is merely a matter of practice in many villages, and the rules of address are completely different in the towns or between people of higher social class.

It is appropriate to address a person one does not know as “Sir”, “Miss” or “Madam”; if the person’s surname is known it may be used. The given name may only be used in respect of family and friends, and it is considered extremely rude to address any other person by their given name.

Officials and nobles must be addressed with the utmost deference; if their exact title is not known, the title “Your Excellency” should be used.

A student addressing his teacher should add the suffix “*shifu*” to the teacher’s name to mark his deep respect and his gratitude for receiving his learning. This applies whether the student be a young scholar, apprentice or soldier, and whether his teacher be a university professor, master craftsman or military instructor.

Finally, the suffix “*Zi*” is granted (usually posthumously) to those having acquired a reputation as a great sage or recognized master in their field. Examples include the philosopher Lao Zi and the theoretician of social virtue Kong Fu Zi.

Greetings

A man should greet by bowing lightly or deeply from the waist, both palms turned inward, with his left palm on the back of his right hand. The depth of the bow and the position of the hands indicate the degree of respect for the person being greeted: a deep bow with hands joined in front of the face is a fitting greeting for a person whom one accepts as one’s superior, while a light bow with hands joined in front of the chest is sufficient to greet a person of equal or inferior status.

A woman will greet in the same fashion, by bowing from the waist with hands joined, and will lower her eyes if greeting a man.

The military salute, used by soldiers and martial arts experts, is performed by placing the right fist in the left palm at chest height. A *da xia* of the world of martial arts will show his recognition of a worthy warrior by holding his sword in his right hand while saluting.

To greet a person of high status, such as an official or noble, it is appropriate to kneel, touch the ground three times with the forehead, and to wait until invited to stand up. This greeting may also be used to show gratitude to a person who has rendered a service or shown particular hospitality.

Dress customs

Clothing

Most items of clothing are made from plant-based fibers, mainly hemp and linen. Silk is considered a noble fabric and is only used by officials and the wealthy. Cotton is rare in most of the Warring States but can be found in Chu. Wool and leather are used in Zhao.

Of the wide range of dyes used to color fabric, blue, black and brown are the most widely-used. Red is generally reserved for wedding garments, while white is the color of mourning. The color yellow is reserved for the Emperor.

Traditional dress is made up of a combination of different garments. Underwear of shorts and closed shirt is worn next to the skin. The outer garment or *chang pao* is a loose gown which crosses at the front and covers some or all of the legs. Its sleeves are long, but may be loose or close-fitting according to taste. It is fastened by a belt which may be narrow or broad. The legs are clothed in trousers, which too vary in width. Footwear may be either cloth slippers with woven hemp soles, or simple straw sandals. At certain times of the year, overcoats are used, with sleeves of varying length and looseness.

Women dress in the same manner as men, but there is a tendency among rich coquettes to use several layers of brightly-colored clothing, mixing styles and occasionally creating fashions. In some regions, women wear a long floor-length skirt instead of trousers.

This basic traditional dress is modified according to the wearer’s profession or social status. Thus manual workers such as peasants, laborers and craftsmen wear short *chang pao* with close-fitting sleeves, and narrow trousers reaching to the ankles. Meanwhile, scholars and officials wear long, loose *chang pao* with loose-fitting sleeves hanging over the hands, indicating that the wearer is not involved in manual work, and heavy, richly-embroidered coats.

During cold weather, it is customary to combine several layers of clothing in order to keep warm.

The inhabitants of Zhao have adopted certain dress habits from the barbarians of the steppes, including the tunic and, for riders, leather boots. Woollen vests and hats are also common. These new types of clothing are particularly well-used by soldiers on account of the freedom of movement that they give.

Hairstyles and headgear

Hair is seen as a gift from one’s parents and it is forbidden to cut it off; in consequence, hair is worn long by men and women alike.

There are many different hairstyles in use: some leave their hair loose, others tie it in a complicated bun, yet others braid it. As with clothing, hairstyles depend to a great extent on social status. While the common people tend to leave their hair loose, officials and nobles prefer to wear it in an elaborate bun held in place by gold or jade pins.

Most hair pins are made of plain wood. Some, however, are extremely finely-carved from precious materials and richly decorated.

Facial hair is a symbol of authority and wisdom, and as a result many men wear a moustache or beard, and some allow them to grow so long as to hang down to the chest.

Headgear is worn only by men, and serves as an indication of an individual's profession or social status. For example, officials wear silk caps while ministers and advisers tend to wear complex wooden constructions held in place by silk straps. The most basic type of headgear worn by the common people is a kind of turban formed by wrapping strips of cloth around the head. Woollen hats are worn for warmth and wide-brimmed hats for protection from the sun. Protection from the rain is provided by the traditional conical bamboo hat.

Women may hide their faces behind a veil, either out of modesty or coquettishness.

Jewelry and accessories

Jewelry is extremely rare in the *Zhongguo*, and rings, brooches, and earrings are unheard of.

However, women frequently wear bracelets, which are made of various materials from wood to jade and precious metals. They may also adorn their foreheads with tiaras set with precious stones.

The main type of personal ornament is the hairpin. The value, quality, and decoration of a hairpin are indicators of the wealth and social status of the wearer. For example, an official will not wear a pin of anything less than silver. There is a flourishing market in pins made of jade, rare woods and gold, which sell for very high prices. Glass pins are sold at festivals and markets and make up the bulk of the trade of street vendors and itinerant salesmen.

A woman's jewelry is considered to be her private property. In case of widowhood or repudiation, it may be her last source of income.

In summer, people protect themselves from the sun by means of parasols made of bamboo and fabric. They are particularly used as an accessory by coquettish young ladies from good families.

Umbrellas are merely parasols whose fabric has been oiled to make it waterproof. Their purpose is more practical than decorative, and they are mainly used by travelers seeking to protect themselves from inclement weather.

Fans are used only by men. They provide not only ventilation, but are also a means of hiding the lips in

order to carry on a secret conversation... Fans are generally luxury items, made with precious materials and decorated with ornate calligraphy and designs.

The traditional clothing of the *Zhongguo* does not involve pockets of any kind; accordingly, personal objects are carried under the belt or in the sleeves and folds of the *chang pao*. These objects may include chopsticks, paintbrushes, tools, and so on.

Money is kept in a leather or cloth purse worn on the belt or around the neck.

Food and Drink

Cereals and other crops

Thanks to irrigation from rivers and canals, the great plains of the *Zhongguo* are extremely fertile and allow the cultivation of various cereals.

The most common are wheat, barley and millet, but rye is also grown. Rice is more rare, as only the state of Chu possesses the right climate and soil for its cultivation.

Cereals are used, either as grains or as flour, as a basic ingredient in all manner of foods, including soups, porridge, noodles and pancakes.

The most common dish is a grain-based soup accompanied by whatever vegetables may be available and, in richer families, meat.

Fruit and vegetables

A considerable proportion of arable land is devoted to the cultivation of a wide variety of vegetables.

White cabbage or *baicai* is the most-cultivated vegetable in the North, due to its long shelf life which allows stocks to be laid down for the winter.

Other common vegetables include onions, spinach, cucumbers, soya bean sprouts, turnips and garlic.

Water lilies and bamboo shoots, while not actually vegetables, are cooked and prepared in a similar fashion.

Vegetables are served at various stages of a meal. They may be served as a starter, as an accompaniment for meat, or in soup. Either roasted, boiled or fried, they are carefully incorporated into a dish to ensure that it is balanced and harmonious.

The people of the *Zhongguo* use soy to make soy milk (only the barbarian peoples drink animal milk) and soy sauce.

All the states have great orchards producing abundant supplies of many types of fruit.

The peach is traditionally associated with immortality, and accordingly is considered a noble fruit

and consumed almost ritualistically. Many peaches are eaten during festivals and solemn occasions.

More everyday fruits include apples, pears, pomegranates, nuts and chestnuts.

In the North, figs and jujubes are also grown, while in the South, one finds many varieties of citrus fruits such as oranges and mandarins.

Fruits are generally eaten fresh, but may also be dried and stored. They are mainly eaten over breakfast and during dessert, but are also popular as sweet snacks. In chunks or incorporated into sauces, certain fruits are used to provide sweetness to balance the flavor of salty dishes.

Meat and fish

Meat is rare and expensive, and only the upper classes have access to it.

The two types of animal most commonly bred for meat are pork and duck. Other types of poultry, and their eggs, are considered to be delicacies.

Mutton and goat are generally only eaten by the barbarian nomads, although the Zhao and Yan peoples have been known to eat them on occasion.

According to tradition, dog meat provides warmth for him that eats it. Dogs are therefore bred for their meat, which sells particularly well in winter.

Wild game is eaten both by nobles for whom hunting is a principal pastime, and by poachers, peasants and woodsmen seeking to improve their families' diet. Many types of wild animal may therefore end up as the centerpiece of a dinner table, including deer, bears, tigers and birds.

Before cooking, meat is diced or cut into fine strips in order to ensure that it cooks evenly. It may be fried with vegetables and herbs, so as to absorb their flavors and aromas, or boiled in a sauce intended to complement its own flavor. Meat is also used in soups and stews.

Although meat, where available, is always the centerpiece of a meal, it is never consumed in great quantities, for the protection of health depends on the maintenance of a proper balance between meat and vegetables.

Eggs are eaten either raw or hard-boiled.

Fish are both caught in the wild and farmed. They are obviously more abundant in coastal regions or near lakes and rivers, but they can also be found in inland regions, due to the practice of transporting live specimens in large tanks and the large number of artificial canals and ponds built as part of the great water-control projects.

The fish most commonly caught by fishermen and most readily found in markets are sturgeon, carp, eel, tuna, smelt, sardines and anchovies.

Fish are cooked with aromatic herbs which imbue their flesh with rich, vigorous flavors. They are also fried and eaten as snacks during festivals and local occasions. Seaweed is often preferred to vegetables as an accompaniment for fish dishes. Finally, fish may be preserved by drying, and either stored for winter or exported to inland areas.

White Tiger, Eternal Hunger

In the northwestern region of Chu, not far from the border with Qi, is a restaurant known as the Tao of the Full Stomach. It is run by a man of quasi-legendary renown known only by his nickname of White Tiger, Eternal Hunger. The great reputation of this restaurant is a measure of the extraordinary culinary skills of this man.

The story of the life of White Tiger, Eternal Hunger is an unusual one. The son of a noble of the court of Chu by a woman of the southern tribes, his half-barbarian origins gave him smooth skin and relatively rare height. As a child he studied swordsmanship and soon became a champion ; it is even rumored that White Tiger can only be injured by a blade if he so wishes. But in addition to his reputation as a swordsman whose skills were worthy of the best disciples of the Twelve Heavenly Ones, the legend of White Tiger is built on his unparalleled culinary gifts.

A genuine gourmet with a refined palate, White Tiger found that he was only rarely satisfied with the dishes he was served. So one day he decided that he would prepare all his own meals and thus only have himself to blame for any disappointments. He developed a genuine passion for all aspects of the art of cooking: devising dishes, combining ingredients, and creating new flavors quickly became an obsession, to the despair of his father, who had hoped for him to become an official. Wishing to perfect his skills, White Tiger undertook a pilgrimage throughout all the Warring States in order to learn as many recipes as possible, to discover local specialties and to learn from the finest chefs of the Zhongguo. When his journey came to an end, he purchased a building in the North of his native land and built it into the most renowned restaurant in the region, possibly even in all the Warring States. For word of White Tiger's extraordinary gifts, and his unequalled expertise in the art of cooking, soon spread across borders and throughout the Zhongguo. Kings and heads of noble families offered him untold riches to take charge of their private kitchens, but White Tiger has always chosen to keep his humble restaurant, which never has a spare table and attracts food lovers from the four corners of the Zhongguo.

Renown: 27

By the sea, shellfish such as crab, prawn and lobster are intensively fished and go into extremely elaborate and sought-after dishes. They are generally lightly fried and served as starters or side dishes.

Other seafood such as cockles and sea cucumbers are also eaten, usually boiled and as an accompaniment to soups and broths.

Drinks

The most common drink is of course water, whose purity and supposed beneficial effects make it the drink of choice of the people.

Tea and a range of herbal teas and plant infusions are widely drunk for their restorative properties and to provide warmth in the colder seasons.

During summer, wandering drinks-sellers earn their living by selling refreshing fruit juices.

Alcoholic drinks are produced for special occasions. Different types of wine are made by fermenting the grain of millet, barley and sorghum. Rice wine is highly popular in the South.

Other alcohol drinks are derived from fruit, mainly apples, pears and peaches. Such liqueurs are far less widely available than grain-based wines.

Alcoholic drinks are usually only consumed at celebrations, rather than as a normal accompaniment for meals.

Milk is only drunk by children, except in the barbarian tribes, where it is a key element of the diet.

Meals and banquets

Cooking is organized according to the principle of the five flavors: acidic, sweet, bitter, salty and dry. The art of preparing a good meal lies in creating the most harmonious combination of these flavors by choosing the correct ingredients, identifying which dishes will complement each other, and preparing each one by an appropriate method. A good cook must therefore know the properties of each ingredient he uses, and how it can complement others according to the chosen method of preparation.

Although taste is the most important criterion, a good meal is also judged according to aroma and visual impression. A skilled cook will therefore know how to make the fragrances of his dishes captivate the nose even before the taste has reached the palate. He will also use a keen aesthetic sense to arrange the various ingredients in dishes in such a way that they appeal to the eye and give the diner a desire to taste the food as soon as possible.

Meals are prepared in kitchens equipped with a range of different ovens and chimneys for different types of cooking. Key kitchen equipment (chopping boards, cleavers, pots, pans and dishes) is stored within easy

reach of the cook and kept in excellent condition. Both kitchen and equipment are kept spotlessly clean to ensure utmost standards of hygiene in food preparation. Most food is cooked, as cooking is considered the symbol of a civilized people just as the eating of raw food is considered a barbarian practice.

There are three meals per day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. The same foodstuffs are eaten at all three, save that porridge and fruit are preferred in the morning. Each meal is taken with the whole family around a table, and generally in silence, except when the presence of a guest makes a meal an occasion for relaxation and sharing.

This is not always possible for the common people, for whom work may impose a less comfortable approach to mealtimes. Peasants, laborers and storekeepers usually bring their lunch to their place of work or have their wives bring it, and eat at their place of work.

Plates and bowls are ceramic and drinking vessels made of wood or bronze. Most food is eaten with wooden or bone chopsticks, while soups, broths and porridge are eaten with spoons.

Banquets are great feasts held to honor specific guests or to mark special occasions such as weddings or births. Generally, they are very formal occasions with strict protocol. The organizers will establish in advance where each guest will sit, the order in which dishes will be served, and topics of conversation. However, as alcohol flows freely on such occasions, and people gradually relax, the formal nature of a banquet soon gives way to its celebratory purpose.

In royal courts, many banquets are held to honor foreign ambassadors or to celebrate the military successes of generals.

On such occasions, at least five dishes will be served, the sumptuousness of the dishes being directly related to the importance of the banquet or the status of the guests. Each guest may help himself to any of the dishes, and so choose his own meal according to his taste and appetite.

A successful banquet will generally last until dawn.

Inns and stores

Inns and restaurants are welcoming places in which food and drink can be obtained in exchange for a few coins.

A good inn will serve many types of drink and a wide variety of dishes prepared by a professional chef whose skill goes hand in hand with the reputation of the establishment. The prices in such an inn will reflect the quality of the food, and it will have a loyal clientele, while a low-price, low-grade restaurant will generally cater only to passing trade.

Inns naturally tend to concentrate on regional specialties, ensuring that the curious traveler eager to experience local cuisine will have no trouble finding a place to stop and take refreshment before continuing his journey.

In the towns, one can find street vendors who transport their produce and small ovens in hand-carts and wander from one district to another bringing food to those who do not have time to return home to eat. These street vendors are particularly popular in craftsmen's quarters and during festivals and markets. They usually sell food which is easy to carry and can be eaten without cutlery, such as hard-boiled eggs, skewers of meat and vegetables, and fish balls. Their clientele ranges from laborers and craftsmen to officials and guards at the end of a shift.

At a street vendor's stall, one can meet people of many different origins and walks of life, and strike up useful conversations with individuals one might never otherwise meet. The atmosphere tends to be relaxed and warm, and social barriers tend to blur for a time. It is not unknown for someone to buy a drink for a complete stranger, and a chance meeting at such a stall can lead to the discovery of a useful contact or a true friend.

Health

For most of the people of the *Zhongguo*, life is hard and dangerous. Disease, war and famine are the daily lot of a people who have no choice but to accept their lives and continue to wait for better days to come...

Life expectancy

Infant mortality is very high, particularly in the first year of a child's life. Babies are not weaned until they are three years old, to make them as strong as possible and to give them a better chance of surviving. But in spite of this, nearly half of all children will die before reaching maturity...

For those who reach adulthood, average life expectancy can be as high as fifty. Despite the serious risks involved in childbirth, women tend to live longer than men and there are more widows than widowers.

Should a family member reach sixty, it is an occasion for great celebrations, for the elder has completed a complete cycle of the calendar, an extremely auspicious omen for his family and descendants.

Disease and epidemics

There are many types of disease in the Warring States. During winter, chest infections are widespread, and can prove fatal in the absence of proper treatment. A chill can soon lead to pneumonia if nothing is done to treat the sufferer.

During summer, gastric diseases are prevalent, and the dehydration and loss of strength that they bring can be a serious matter during a heatwave.

These two seasons are undoubtedly the most dangerous, and death strikes swiftly and without mercy for the weak and vulnerable.

Tuberculosis and smallpox are also a problem, as they are highly contagious and an epidemic can sweep across entire regions before losing its virulence.

Leprosy is considered not just a disease but a curse, and lepers are pitilessly driven out of towns and villages and left to die alone, far from civilization.

In the hot, marshy regions south of the Blue River, the unfortunate inhabitants of the most inhospitable lands in Chu live in constant fear of malaria.

Diseases are divided into two categories, Yin and Yang. Yin diseases, such as rheumatism, are said to be "cold", while Yang diseases, whose symptoms often include fever, are said to be "hot".

Physicians also classify diseases into three groups, as follows :

- The first group contains external diseases, namely those caused by external factors such as weather conditions or air pollution.
- The second group is made up of disorders caused by the consumption of food and drink.
- The final group contains diseases of the mind, caused only by the psychological condition of the patient.

Medicine and health care

Medicine is both an art and a science, whose aim is the prevention of disease rather than cure. It is founded on a principle of harmony between the body and the universe, and diseases are seen above all as the natural consequence of a breakdown in this harmony.

Medicine sees the body as a microcosm of the universe, made up of five organs to control essential bodily processes (the heart, liver, lungs, spleen and kidneys), corresponding to the five elements recognized in the Taoist faith, and six intestines to absorb and convert foodstuffs (the stomach, upper intestine and colon, or the three "warmers", together with the gall-bladder and the bladder). These five organs and six intestines operate in harmony with each other and with the blood and the breath of chi. When an imbalance interferes with any aspect of this harmony, or any organ or intestine starts to go wrong, or the blood does not circulate as it should, then problems arise and treatment is needed.

The art of the physician lies in the careful observation of the condition of his patients in order to identify potential imbalances even before they occur. A skilled physician will be able to predict or anticipate illnesses on the basis of his experience and his knowledge of what illnesses and diseases are likely according to the season, weather conditions, the patient's general health, his medical history, and so on. But in spite of the physician's constant watchfulness, a patient may still fall ill and need treatment.

A physician will make a diagnosis after a full examination of the patient, including taking his pulse and temperature, feeling various parts of his body, examining his eyes, tongue and breath and checking the color of his skin. The physician will attempt to discover which type of imbalance is affecting his patient by asking questions on his diet, recent events or his general state of mind.

A physician has several options in relation to treatment.

First, he might prescribe an appropriate medicine to re-establish balance and harmony within the patient's body. Medicines are derived from plants or mineral compounds and taken in the form of pills, potions, infusions or poultices. Rest is of course important, and the physician will visit his patient regularly in order to check on his progress and modify the doses of medicine accordingly.

Massage and chiropractic are widely used in the treatment of rheumatism, fractures, dislocations and even certain lung and bronchial infections. By means of strong yet careful pressure to key points on the body, a physician will try to re-establish the patient's internal balance and redirect the flow of the breath of life to its proper path.

Finally, a physician may use acupuncture to channel the flow of chi through the patient's body. Heated metal needles inserted into key points on the body serve to restore or regulate energy flows through the body. The procedure is used above all for chronic pain, for which a patient typically follows a course of several treatments.

Physicians and pharmacists

Physicians are scholars trained in the understanding of the rhythms and harmonies of the body, in the recognition of diseases and imbalances, and in the different methods of treating the sick.

Most physicians learn their trade by serving an apprenticeship with established practitioners, who pass on their learning and frequently their clientele. Such an apprenticeship will often be organized within the family, and a practice handed down from father to son or from uncle to nephew.

However, for several decades now universities have offered courses in medicine taught by highly-respected professors and recognized specialists. The medical faculty of the Jixia Academy in Linzi is particularly renowned, attracting many students and training some of the finest physicians in the Warring States.

Of the many medical textbooks available, the most famous, and the one that any self-respecting physician must know by heart, is the "Internal Classic of the Yellow Emperor". Students and apprentices read this great work, together with less well-known works, and each year sees the publication of medical research papers written by physicians or university teachers wishing to make their mark on the history of medicine.

To set himself up in business, a physician must first obtain the necessary diploma either from his master or his university, and then purchase a practice in a town or vil-

lage of a sufficient size to guarantee a good number of patients. He will both receive patients at his surgery and make home visits; a good physician will check on his flock regularly in order to anticipate and prevent illnesses, rather than waiting until they fall ill. A skilful physician is one who can keep his patients healthy, and a physician whose patients regularly fall ill will soon acquire a poor reputation. All physicians keep detailed files on their patients, containing their medical history, the illnesses they have suffered from, information on their personality, notes on treatments which have proved effective, and so on. Such files are important for making quicker and more reliable diagnoses, for avoiding mistakes, and for convincing patients that their physician takes their health seriously.

There are also itinerant physicians, whose devotion to mankind inspires them to roam from village to village bringing comfort and medical care to places where no normal physician would go. The life of such physicians is hard, and sometimes dangerous, but they seek neither wealth, nor status, nor recognition, but merely the opportunity to serve others. Itinerant physicians roam the countryside, stopping in far-flung villages only long enough to examine and treat the inhabitants before beginning their journey again. The country people have such respect and gratitude for the selfless work of an itinerant physician that even the poorest villager will offer him board and lodging, and even try to pay him what little he can.

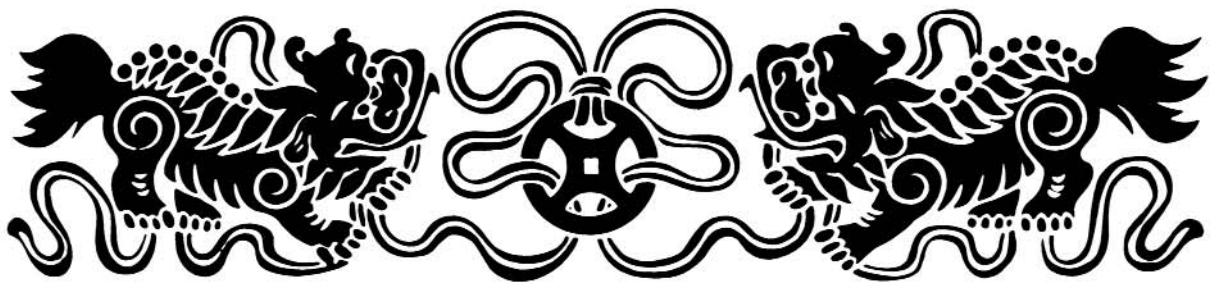
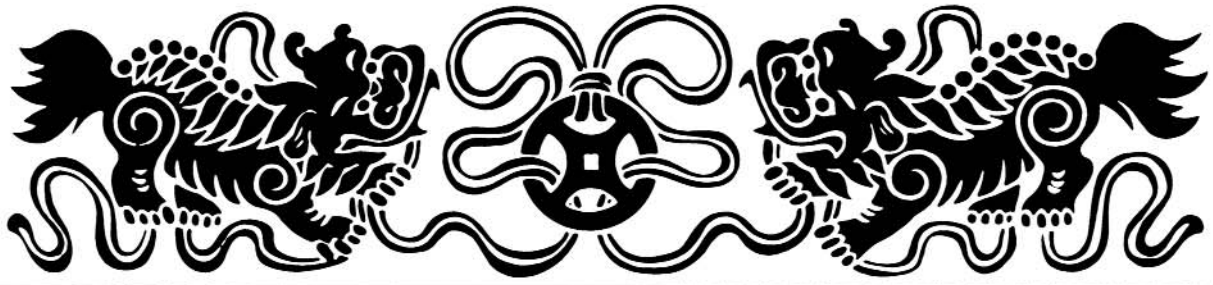
Kuan Hong-si

Once a highly-respected physician of Handan, Kuan Hong-si gave up his old life after losing his beloved wife to an epidemic. Realizing the emptiness of his life in society, he chose to abandon everything for the life of a wandering physician. Taking his daughter Mei Shi with him, he took to the highways and byways of the Zhongguo to treat the poorest of the poor.

For nearly ten years now, Kuan Hong-si has lived like a common vagrant. He blames himself for having imposed such a life on young Mei Shi, who has now almost reached adulthood, and seeks to find her a husband who might give her the life of comfort and ease which she deserves. But the girl, now an experienced and highly-skilled nurse, does not want to leave her ageing father, and rejects any suitor that he finds.

Hong-si is over fifty, but his strict health regime means he is still as fit as ever. He carries no weapons, but his detailed knowledge of anatomy makes him an expert boxer, able to dislocate limbs. He is convinced he has many more years ahead of him, and fully intends to use them to bring the benefits of medicine to the common people for so long as Heaven shall allow him to live.

Renown: 31



But the traveling life is fraught with all manner of risks. Crossing vast uninhabited regions with a handcart of instruments and medicine, a wandering physician is easy prey for wild animals, highwaymen and more mysterious creatures. Many choose to protect themselves from the many dangers of the *Zhongguo* through the practice of martial arts or by being accompanied by an idealistic *da xia*.

While physicians have the skills to make their own medicines, there are also numerous storekeepers, apothecaries, herbalists and pharmacists qualified to sell ingredients and medicines. A physician and a pharmacist may enter into an arrangement whereby the physician gives his patients written prescriptions which must be brought to the appropriate pharmacist to obtain the medicine. Many such arrangements are agreed between family members, and it is normal for a physician to send his patients to a brother or cousin who is a pharmacist.

Pharmacy, like medicine, can be studied at university. But unlike medicine, there are few regulations on the exercise of the profession and more or less anyone can open a pharmacy... Even the most basic drugstore will have a back-room with a laboratory equipped with a large workbench and shelves containing tools of the trade (cauldrons, pans, knives, and grinding mortars) and countless varieties of plants, powders, minerals and ready-made medicines.

The essential elements of the pharmacist's trade are set out in detail in specialized dictionaries, which describe and explain the preventative, curative or poisonous properties of plants, animals and minerals. Any self-respecting pharmacist will keep several such reference works in his laboratory in order always to have them to hand.

In more remote villages where no physician or pharmacist would care to live, the role of healer and herbalist is performed by a village healer with some practical experience in medicine. The role is passed down through certain families, and where it is combined with that of shaman or communicator with the spirits, the line blurs between science and belief, between medicine and magic.

lies and pay their taxes in kind. It is a hard life of constant toil from dawn to dusk, interrupted only by the midday meal brought to the fields by the women. Spring is for sowing, summer for tending and watering, and autumn for harvesting. Winter is the low season, when peasants sell their surplus or build up their stocks. Many peasants rely on additional sources of income such as animal breeding, bee-keeping, orchards, vegetable gardens, and farm crafts.

In other regions, landowners own vast properties farmed by sharecroppers and salaried agricultural laborers. Although this way of life is less vulnerable to the vagaries of weather and harvests than that of the peasants, most agricultural laborers aspire one day to own their own land.

Agricultural work is regarded as particularly important for society, and over the years state governments have taken various measures to enhance yields.

Great water-control projects over several centuries have created a huge irrigation network which has proved particularly successful in protecting the land from drought during summer. So for example, by building a canal to irrigate the northern valley of the Wei River, the state of Qin managed to double its productive capacity.

Also, significant deforestation and drainage works have expanded the amount of land available for cultivation, making it possible to feed a population that has continued to grow despite ever more frequent and more deadly wars.

The constant production of plowshares and hoes ensures that peasants never lack the tools necessary for their daily work. Foundries also manufacture other metal tools for irrigation and deforestation work, thus contributing to incessant progress in agriculture and a perpetual strengthening of those states with effective policies for agricultural modernization.

There exist learned texts on agronomy, written by officials and scholars. Once their recommendations are proven to be effective, they are published, communicated to the people and followed to the letter. This has led to the widespread use of fertilizers and pesticides, crop rotation and the practice of leaving some fields to lie fallow.

Work Mining

While the great majority of the inhabitants of the Warring States work the land, there are many other forms of employment available to those wishing to earn an honest wage.

Agriculture

Throughout the many diverse regions of the *Zhongguo*, agriculture occupies a position of unrivalled importance. It is fundamental to the economies of all the Warring States, since it provides food for their peoples and a meaningful measure of their strength.

In some regions, peasants own the land they work, and the food they produce enables them to feed their fami-

Due to its particularly unpleasant and dangerous nature, mining work is generally the preserve of convicts, but peasants and craftsmen fallen on hard times have also been known to seek their fortune or at least make a living in this risky field.

The subsoil of the *Zhongguo* is rich in all manner of minerals: large seams of gold, silver, jade, coal, cinnabar, tin, copper and iron abound, and many regions are dotted with deep and open-cast mines and quarries. These installations often belong to the state and are managed on its behalf by merchants intent on extracting as much of the earth's natural wealth as possible.

Deep underground, the mines are cut with a network of shafts and corridors, thick with miners working the seam and carrying ore to the surface in wicker bas-

kets, under the watchful eye of foremen. Accidents are frequent : falling rocks, collapsing mineshafts, and asphyxiation take dozens of lives every day.

Many villages have their own unofficial mines whose existence has not been declared to the state. Villagers work the mines in secret, sometimes for their own benefit but more often on behalf of the heads of clan who control the region. If the mines cannot be hidden from the authorities, bribery is used to ensure that they turn a blind eye.

Foundries

Once ore has been extracted from the ground, it is then transported to foundries to be smelted and made into tools or weapons.

Foundries are immense industrial installations full of furnaces, moulds and channels of molten metal, and resounding with the clatter of hammer on iron, the shouts of the foremen, and the howl of steel dipped in water. They are state-run, and provide employment for metallurgical engineers, craftsmen, furnacemen, and hundreds upon hundreds of laborers. They produce vast quantities of agricultural tools, weapons, and miscellaneous equipment needed by the state for its army, its economy and its great public works.

Working conditions are extremely tough : the heat, the noise, the speed of the work, and the inordinate dangers are out of all proportion with the miniscule levels of pay. Those who work in foundries are typically those who wish to be forgotten, such as escaped convicts or disgraced officials. Since applicants are few, foremen ask no questions of those they employ, focussing instead on the constant need for enough men to keep the furnaces at full capacity.

Construction sites

A man who is willing and able to work hard is guaranteed to find employment in nearly every part of the Warring States.

Fresh manpower is always sought at the huge construction sites responsible for the building of canals, palaces, and temples. These sites employ workers for periods of time ranging from a few days to several months. For long-term projects, the sites provide basic accommodation for the workers.

While the pay is at best modest, and at worst pathetic, the solidarity and team spirit among these temporary workers can provide vagrants and wanderers with a sense of belonging, if only for a few days. As a result, on a construction site one can expect to meet people from all types of backgrounds and to hear news from across the seven states.

Craftsmen

Everywhere in the Warring States there are craftsmen. Everywhere carpenters and blacksmiths, cabinet-makers and stonemasons, water-carriers and potters bring their essential skills to all groups in society.

From the wandering craftsman traveling from construction site to construction site with his tools in a simple handcart, to the head of a large workshop with a large team of employees and apprentices, these skilled workers can be found wherever their skills are needed, and may be employed either by individuals or by the state on great public works projects and large construction sites.

Craftsmen are organized into local guilds, at the level of the town or the district, according to their specific trade. The guilds regulate each trade by setting out the rules applicable to it, settling disputes between workshops, and providing a framework for financial co-operation between craftsmen. They also provide craftsmen with a means to exercise genuine influence over regional officials, which they use to lobby for reduced taxes or to obtain state contracts. Governors and mayors know that it is in their interest to work with the guilds rather than against them, and their co-operation is ensured by bribes and the provision of various services...

The best way to learn a trade is to become an apprentice to an established craftsman. In exchange for board and lodging, an apprentice will work in his master's workshop and provide services to his family. An apprenticeship will typically last three years, after which an apprentice can set up his own workshop.

Merchants

From the itinerant vendor selling trinkets from village to village, to the rich trader providing goods and services to the highest orders in the Warring States, merchants have come to be omnipresent in the *Zhongguo*. The profession has been booming for several decades and has created a wealthy elite which every year produces more and more scholars and officials.

Like the craftsmen, the merchants are organized into guilds, and further their interests in the same way by lobbying those in power for decisions favorable to their business. The richest merchants can even buy off governors and advisers, or the latter may be members of the same family who only attained high office thanks to years of expensive studies...

Most merchants travel a great deal, either to sell their wares, to obtain supplies, or simply to make new business contacts. They travel by road or river, exposing themselves to the risk of being robbed by the many outlaws and highwaymen who lie in wait. More prudent merchants employ bodyguards or security men to protect their goods and their lives.

The constant hubbub of the towns is due in large part to the merchants, whose stalls and storefronts add color to streets and markets, offering passersby a host of goods for sale at the right price. In the countryside, fairs attract huge crowds eager to spend their money on whatever novelties the merchants and street vendors have to offer.

Weights and measures in Ancient China

While all of the states, and indeed many regions, had their own systems of weights and measures, we have chosen for the purposes of gaming simplicity to use the units used in Qin, which were extended to the whole of the Empire after unification.

Lengths

1 chi = 1 foot
1 cun = 1 inch
1 zhang = 3.5 yards
1 bu = 1/2 zhang (1.75 yards)
1 li = 630 yards
1 league = 3.58 miles

Volumes

1 sheng = 1 quart
1 dou = 1.25 gallons
1 dan = 12.5 gallons

Weights

1 liang = 1 ounce
1 jin = 1 pound
1 dan = 159 pounds

Areas

Square chi
Square bu
1 mu = 60 square zhang (735 square yards or 0.15 of an acre)
1 qing = 100 mu (73500 square yards or 15.18 acres)

Leisure

Life in the *Zhongguo* may be hard and dangerous, but it also offers many occasions for entertainment. Games and gambling are widespread, and the year is liberally sprinkled with festivals and feast days.

Noble games

Mainly played by the educated classes, go and *xianqi* are games of strategy requiring concentration, thought and forward planning.

Go is played on a board with nineteen vertical lines and nineteen horizontal lines forming three hundred and sixty-one crossing points. The object of the game is to gain territory by placing one's own pieces, black or white, on the crossing points and to capture territory from one's opponent. The goal is not to destroy one's opponent but to obtain as much territory as possible for one's pieces. Scholars consider go to be the game of the gods, played by the Emperor of Jade and his ministers in the Court of Heaven. Each game is seen as a symbolic reenactment of the creation of the universe through the Tao.

The finest go players win great respect and admiration, and some even make their living from their skills by being invited to royal courts, teaching the rules and strategy of the game to powerful men, and earning prize money in tournaments.

Paradoxically, go is also very popular among the common people. The simplicity of the basic rules and the board and pieces make it accessible to the lower orders, who play over and over during lunch breaks and at inns during the evening.

Xianqi, a form of chess, proceeds from a more warlike concept of strategy. The object of the game is to capture the opponent's king. The board is divided into two sides separated by a river in the middle of the board. On each side is a castle containing the king and his officers. A player uses various pieces, including ministers, chariots, knights and footsoldiers, each with their own special method of moving, to try to defeat his opponent's army and capture his king. To build a position of strength and eventually defeat an opponent requires consideration of the different pieces' capabilities in the context of the terrain; for example, certain pieces cannot cross the river and therefore can only be used to defend one's own side.

The practice of chess is particularly valued in military circles as a means of refining tactical ability and perfecting one's sense of strategy.

Both go and *xianqi* have been the subject of various works which set out the rules, the possible variations and the most successful strategies that can be applied. Legends abound of mythical players who challenged and defeated the gods at go or chess and so became immortal.

Chin Do-sai

Born into a family of scholars, it was not until his teenage years that Chin Do-sai discovered the beauty of go. But the game soon became an obsession and his studies in Linzi began to suffer terribly. He failed exam after exam, and his father was forced to stop his allowance.

But by this time, his exceptional skill had already earned him a reputation as one of the finest players in the capital of Qi, and not knowing any other way to earn a living, Do-sai started to give lessons in go to rich and influential men. He earned enough from these lessons to survive, and began to enter tournaments, winning nearly every one. His fame grew and soon his services as a teacher were highly sought after throughout the Zhongguo. His life changed from one of mere survival to one of luxury and prestige in the palaces of rich and powerful officials who were his students. Yet he never allowed himself to be distracted from the path he had chosen, and he stayed true to his one goal : to become the finest player of go in all the land.

Now aged over sixty and a legend among players of go, Do-sai lives alone in a small town in Yan. He receives visits from people wishing to play against him, but does not take students or followers, waiting to find the special one, the one whose eyes will shine with a true passion for go.

Renown: 45

But when money is involved, problems begin. Some players become addicted to gambling and are unable to stop until they have lost everything. Many are the peasants and laborers who have brought ruin on themselves this way, literally losing their shirts and being forced to settle their debts by selling their wives or daughters to houses of ill repute.

Illegal gaming houses can be found in most large towns, generally in the pleasure districts, sometimes even within brothels. These gaming houses are invariably run by criminal gangs who are particularly punctilious when it comes to recovering debts owed to them by their customers...

Toys

Childhood is the age of innocence. Boys and girls alike have toys, from the most rudimentary to the most elaborate, and devise all sorts of games with them.

For boys, the most common toys are spinning-tops and balls, and parents prefer their sons to play actively in order to become strong and resilient. Boys love to play war games with mock weapons or toy soldiers made of wood or terracotta, and to dream of becoming great generals or brave heroes of their state.

Girls tend to play with dolls, from simple rag-dolls to finely-carved wooden figures dressed in fine cloth, and so get used to their future role as mothers. They are generally discouraged from playing physical games, save for jump-rope and a Taoist version of hopscotch.

Festivals and feast days

The calendar is enlivened by a number of festivals and feast days, which the people look forward to as a rare opportunity for celebration and relaxation.

The most important festival is New Year, celebrated from the first to the fifteenth day of the first month. It is a festival of renewal, of the return of spring, and an occasion for families to gather and to exchange gifts. The family home is cleaned from top to bottom and all outstanding matters are settled.

On the night before the first day of New Year, the whole family locks itself into the family home and plays games until the small hours. At sunup, the doors are thrown open to let the auspicious breath of New Year flow into the home and bless its occupants. The joyous and carefree spirit of New Year is expressed through processions and public shows. Offerings are

Games of chance and gambling

More widespread among the common people are games of chance, whose easy rules and simple charms allow the tired laborer a chance to relax after a day's work without having to think too much.

Dice games are played with wooden or bone dice whose sides are either engraved with numbers or simply painted different colors. Players bet on the number or the color which will come up, or try to obtain certain combinations.

Other common games include jacks, dominoes and various games of skill. They are played at any time of the day or night when the people are not working; at markets or on feast days, at the inn or on the village square.

made to the gods to attract their blessing, and even kings make sacrifices to the gods in honor of the rebirth and renewal of the world.

The Feast of Pure Light takes place two weeks after the spring equinox. It is an occasion for the whole family to pay homage to its ancestors by sprucing up their tombs and making offerings to them. These rituals act as a public display that even death is no obstacle to the unity of the family.

The Feast of Double Five takes place on the fifth day of the fifth month, at the summer solstice. People make offerings to the Five Poisons in order to protect themselves from summer epidemics. Dragons are celebrated and entreated to bring rains upon the Earth to save it from drought. It is also the occasion for dragon boat racing along the many rivers and canals of the states.

The Feast of the Dead takes place on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. During this period, the gates of Hell are opened and ancestors who died without children return to the world of the living. To appease the ghosts, offerings are made in the form of objects, money or entertainment; the living also enjoy the public shows that occur at this time. Taoist priests perform rituals to force the returning ghosts to repent their sins on pain of being returned to Hell.

The Autumn Feast, which occurs during the full moon of the eighth month, is particularly popular in the countryside. The feast of the harvest, the moon, the autumn equinox and of immortality, it provides an occasion to celebrate the end of the agricultural year and the start of the low season. Great banquets are held to benefit from the bounty of the land and thus to pay homage to nature.

There are many other traditional festivals specific to certain states or regions. They may be in honor of a local hero, a regional divinity or an event famous in local folklore, and will only be celebrated in their local area.

All of these festivals and feast days give rise to great celebrations. The people are joyous, and use their holidays to relax and enjoy shows and banquets which sometimes last long into the night. Towns sparkle with their decorations, stores display their finest wares, and the streets bubble with the laughter of a people enjoying their rare opportunities to forget their troubles and hardships.

The Arts

While during imperial times the arts were essentially religious in nature, they have since grown into an independent form of expression and entertainment. But in all of the states craft work remains the most important means of creative expression.

Writing and calligraphy

The characters used in writing are direct descendants of the pictograms used by the priests of the early dynasties, which were themselves derived from the symbols which appeared on bones and turtle shells thrown into the fire during ancient divination rituals. And whereas the people of each state, and indeed each province, have their own spoken language, the written language can still be read by all. For while characters may have regional variations, their basic meaning remains the same in every state, and this shared written language gives the peoples of the Warring States a cultural unity that sets them apart from the illiterate barbarians.

Most books are written with the purpose of preserving for future generations knowledge and practical experience in practical fields such as medicine, agronomy, and the art of war. Novels and collections of popular legends are rare, although entertainment can be found in the myths and legends of religious texts. Books are made from bamboo sheets tied together with string and rolled into bundles.

Calligraphy is the art of using writing for aesthetic ends. Extremely widely practised among the educated classes, it is considered the very essence of refinement. A calligrapher must combine his scholarship with his artistic instincts to generate a work whose meaning will emerge both from the characters drawn and the method by which they are drawn. Most calligraphers use bamboo sheets, but some prefer the aesthetic effect of silk.

Painting is closely linked to calligraphy by its techniques and its simple aesthetic. Still the preserve of craftsmen, it is mainly used for the decoration of temples, houses and mausoleums. Men and animals are more often depicted than landscapes or still lifes. Pottery, crockery and *mingqi* statuettes are also painted.

Painters work on a variety of surfaces including wood, terracotta and silk, using a wide range of colors.



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Bronzework

Bronzework is undoubtedly the most important and developed art form, and the pieces generated are of both historic and artistic interest.

The most crucial stage in bronzework is the construction of a mould which will shape the molten bronze into a defined object. The fine decoration, ornament and elaborate detail of the mould will enhance the beauty of the work being created.

Hundreds of the finest works of art of the *Zhongguo* are made in bronze, from statues, to tripod vases, to chalices, to boshanlu incense-burners and large bells.

Sculpture and ceramics

Most sculptors work with terracotta, and their work has a religious rather than a decorative purpose, namely the production of *mingqi* statuettes to be placed in the tombs of the deceased to serve them in the world of the dead. However, some avant-garde sculptors have started to apply their techniques to wood and stone and to produce purely decorative sculptures.

Ceramics is an artistic branch of pottery working with clay or stone. It is in the glazing and decoration of the works that certain craftsmen express their creativity and artistic nature, by applying to their work innovative or attractive forms without any direct relation to the function of the object. The finest specimens of ceramics are highly sought-after, and a potter who gains a reputation for beautiful work will soon have a full order book.

Jewelry

Many different types of object may be decorated with expensive materials and precious stones in order to enhance their artistic value. The setting of a sword handle, hair pin or clothes fastening with jade, gold or jewels gives it a whole new dimension, transforming it from an everyday object into a genuine work of art.

The most in-demand products of the jeweler's art are jade *bi*, flat dishes depicting Heaven. They are generally carved entirely from jade, set with precious stones, or sprinkled with gold or silver dust to enhance their religious and symbolic impact.

Music and song

Music is based on a simple scale containing five notes: *zhi*, *yue*, *gong*, *yu* and *shang*. It has evolved slowly from an essentially religious art form to a widely-accessible form of popular entertainment.

The commonest instruments are bronze bells and chimes, and different types of percussion. Among the common people, flutes and ocarinas are also very popular. Zithers and other stringed instruments have traditionally been the preserve of courtesans, but are now also used by troubadours and court musicians.

Music is important during festivals, together with popular and traditional songs, in entertaining the people and adding to the festive and joyous atmosphere of such occasions.

Theater

Theater originated in the ritualistic performances used by the priests of old to explain the religious myths.

Nowadays, it focuses on popular legends and tales of the great heroes of bygone days. Plays involve a great deal of music and song, becoming at times like operas. Of particular importance are combat scenes, which require actors both to be in strong physical condition and to possess a degree of fighting skill.

Theater is an essentially popular art form, performed by companies of traveling players and acrobats who roam from town to town and save their finest performances for feast days and special occasions. Some such companies are patronized by men of great wealth or high social status seeking by this means to gain in reputation or social prestige.

Settlements and dwellings

Architecture and geomancy

The basic principles of architecture in the *Zhongguo* are derived from ancient belief systems about the nature of the universe.

Since according to those beliefs the Earth is square and human constructions should mirror the larger reality in the universe, space is perceived as a succession of squares, each a separate and closed unit, from the individual house up to the town. Buildings should provide a coherent framework for social structures, and display clearly the links between the king, who holds ultimate authority over architectural matters, and the universe.

Architecture is greatly influenced by geomancy. No building can be built until a geomancer has assessed the site and applied the rules of *feng shui* in order to determine whether the nature of the ground, the character of the soil, and the positioning of trees, rocks and water are auspicious for its construction. Since the health and prosperity of all men depend on flows of energy through the universe, buildings and settlements must be fashioned in such a way as to channel this cosmic power.

The fundamental principles of the science of *feng shui* include the necessity of building along a North-South axis in order to facilitate energy flows, a definite symmetry to reflect the dual nature of the universe based on Yin and Yang, and a respect for natural cycles involving the harmonious incorporation of buildings into the environment.

Towns and villages

The location of a town depends on four types of considerations. First, practical concerns such as the presence of transport links and a source of water. Second, strategic concerns such as how easily the site can be defended against attack. Third, cultural matters such as the mythological or historical importance of the site. Fourth, mystical considerations, namely whether the location has been declared to be auspicious by geomancers.

A typical town will be built on a North-South axis and surrounded by stone or rammed-earth ramparts with entry points located at the four points of the compass. It will be crossed by broad avenues and streets, sometimes paved near important or official buildings. The roads serve both as transport routes and to divide the town into different neighborhoods. The neighborhoods themselves will be more chaotically laid out, with a complex array of narrow earthen tracks and virtually indistinguishable buildings.



The people who live and work in a particular neighborhood will generally be of a particular craft or trade; each neighborhood may well be surrounded by a wall whose gates are closed at night. Government buildings and the residences of officials will be in a specific area of town, generally in the center. The palaces of important individuals such as mayors, governors and kings will be located to the far North of the town, and their size is such that they can almost be considered as separate towns in their own right.

A town will have various squares here and there, at the intersection of its main roads, which will house markets and festivals. In certain towns, such public gatherings may be restricted to a particular district.

Parks and public gardens will be frequent, particularly toward the center of a town, and provide a breath of fresh air to a sometimes stifling urban atmosphere.

Such an atmosphere is inevitable in such busy towns, particularly larger cities like Handan and Linzi where there is virtually constant activity and noise. Merchants call out to passersby from their store-fronts, fortune-tellers offer their services, philosophers and scholars hold debates at tables outside inns, story-tellers and actors perform for a public eager for entertainment, and the streets and alleyways are full of animals carrying goods, delivery-men crossing the neighborhood, horses and mules wandering peacefully, and soldiers patrolling. The workshops add to all this noise, with their hammering of metal and sawing of wood, and the resultant din makes the city a lively, fascinating place, but also quite a tiring one.

The only respite for the senses comes at night, when most of the town is quiet. But inns and pleasure

districts remain full of people until the early hours of the morning, and some craftsmen choose to work late into the night...

A normal-sized town will be home to between a few thousand and several tens of thousands of people, while the population of a large city such as a state capital will be in excess of a hundred thousand. Linzi, said to be the most populous city in the *Zhongguo*, has over three hundred thousand inhabitants.

A village will typically be located near a natural resource that the villagers can rely on for their survival. That resource might be a lake, a forest, or merely fertile and well-irrigated fields. Village life is based on agriculture and villages are mainly inhabited by peasants and craftsmen.

Villages are less formally designed than towns, generally being structured around a large central square which provides a location for markets, village meetings, and official speeches. Houses and farms will be placed around this square more or less randomly, without regard for planning, giving the village a muddled and scattered feel. The boundaries of the village will be marked by a rammed-earth wall more important for its symbolic value than as a defense.

Since the inhabitants work all day long in the fields, on the river or in the forest, the level of activity in a village will in no way compare to that in a town. It is only at certain times of the year, such as New Year, the feast day of the local god of the earth, or local festivals, that it will liven up and the villagers will celebrate and forget for a time the harshness of the peasant life...

Most villages have a few hundred inhabitants, but some larger villages might have up to two thousand.

Houses and apartments

All houses are square, and designed in order to protect the privacy of their occupants.

Houses are built of stone or earth and supported by wooden columns and beams. Roofs, made of thatch in the countryside and tile in the towns, slope and overhang the walls of the house to enable the water to run off in the rainy season and to protect from the sun in a heatwave. Floors are of beaten earth, often covered by woven straw or reed matting. The houses of richer families will have wooden floors or marble tiles.

In the state of Chu certain houses are made entirely of wood and bamboo and balanced on stacks.

The size of a house will depend above all on the number of occupants. The entryway will lead directly to a room intended for receiving visitors. Only family and close friends will be invited to proceed further into the house. The next room will be a living room, which may also serve as an office and which will contain the altar of the ancestors. More private rooms such as bedchambers, washrooms and the dining room will be located away from the street in order to protect their occupants from the noise of the outside world. The kitchen will be set apart from the other rooms, and contain ovens and a chimney containing the god of the hearth.

Windows, which are also square, may be covered by wooden shades in order to protect from the cold or from prying eyes.

In the towns, there is frequently not enough space for houses for all the occupants. Some buildings are therefore divided into apartments, each with its own entrance. These apartments have only one or two rooms, and are too small to accommodate families, and are usually inhabited by students or people of modest means without children.

Manor houses and palaces

Manor houses are enormous dwelling-houses made up of four buildings positioned around a central courtyard.

The front building is used for receiving and housing visitors. The rear building is considered the most noble and used exclusively by the parents and grandparents of the family, while the children live in the two buildings on either side of the courtyard. Domestic servants are housed in annexes.

It is not unknown for the buildings of a manor house to have more than one story, an ostentatious display of wealth and power, and superb gardens located behind the rear building. Floors will be wooden and the roof covered with colored tiles. The courtyard will be paved, sometimes with marble, and decorated with a fountain or ornamental pond.

These great houses are generally owned by rich merchants, high-ranking officials, or by former nobles, for whom they constitute the last vestige of the glorious years of old. While some may be found in the towns, most are built either just beyond the city limits or in the countryside. Some function as holiday homes, and are only inhabited at certain times of the year.

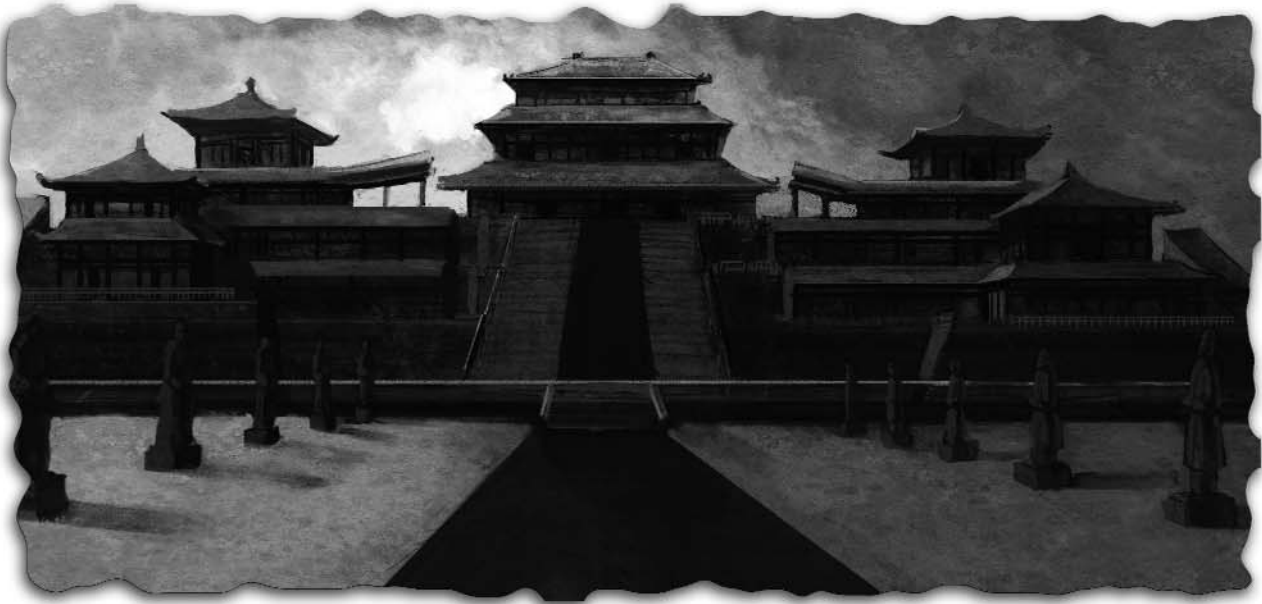
Palaces are monumental complexes of buildings where kings and royal families dwell. A palace complex may well be as large as a town, and will be designed along similar lines. Formidable ramparts surround an assortment of houses and buildings linked by shady paths and set among parks and gardens, providing accommodation not only for a king and his family, but also for countless servants, guests, ambassadors and concubines. The size and population of a palace make it a hive of activity, a seat of power, but also a place for worship, negotiation, business and palace intrigue...

Within a palace, the king's private apartments are protected by a high wall and surrounded by large gardens. The harem will be situated not too far from these apartments so that the king can gain access to his concubines easily. Around the royal dwelling are villas reserved for accommodating honored guests and holding feasts and banquets. Just inside the palace walls are the dwellings of servants and eunuchs, who can number in their hundreds. It is in these dwellings that meals are prepared and clothes laundered for the many occupants of the palace. Other buildings in the complex may contain map-rooms, conference rooms, military headquarters, the king's library, weapons training areas, and stock rooms.

All of the buildings, including servants' dwellings, are extremely luxuriously appointed with rare wood parquet floors, ornate columns and beams, solid roofs to protect against the elements, and more. The buildings are connected by paved paths and circled by richly-decorated courtyards and lush, fragrant gardens, providing an ideal location for encounters of a diplomatic or romantic nature. A palace is a kind of labyrinth, where one can willingly lose oneself and indulge the senses in a thousand and one delights.

Furniture and home decorations

Tables are found in reception rooms and dining rooms. They are either square or rectangular, and low to the ground so that people can sit or kneel around them. Beds are made of planks of bamboo or wooden slats covered by rush or woollen mattresses. Sheets are of linen or occasionally cotton. Personal belongings and clothes are placed in wardrobes and chests of drawers, while books and decorative objects are displayed on shelves. Writing-desks are gently sloped to facilitate reading and calligraphy.



Rooms are lit by candles or oil lamps carefully positioned in order to generate the most light possible, especially in living rooms and offices.

Rooms are heated by braziers or bronze tubs containing hot coals. Chimneys are used more for cooking than to heat rooms, but can be used for additional heating.

Most homes are decorated using motifs drawn from nature. Rooms are adorned with arrangements of cut flowers such as jasmine, orchids and peonies. This type of decoration is not only attractive, and in accordance with nature, but also generates a pleasant smell for both occupants and visitors, and enables the display of fine pottery and vases.

But home decoration may also involve the display of works of art, be they ceramic or bronze-work, paintings on silk scrolls, or calligraphy on wooden sheets. Touches of beauty and luxury might be added by finely-crafted furniture, ornate tapestries, or even carvings or decorations on the columns and beams of a house.

Such fine decoration is of course available only to better-off families; more humble families make do with simple flower arrangements and basic furniture.

A final factor contributing to the beauty of a house is the price and rarity of the materials with which it was built. The houses of the common people have simple thatched roofs and floors of beaten earth covered with straw.

Traveling in the Warring States

The territory of the *Zhongguo* is vast and its peoples diverse. On its roads one might meet merchants transporting their goods, protected by fierce warriors, soldiers patrolling, on the lookout for highwaymen, pilgrims making their way to one of the Sacred Mountains, or simple travelers visiting a different region.

Roads and rivers

The lands of the seven states are criss-crossed by busy roads, linking towns to other towns and leading a life all their own.

The largest of these roads are broad enough for two carriages to pass side by side. They are made of beaten earth, generally well-maintained, and lined with trees which provide some shade during the scorching summer.

Rivers, canals and valleys are crossed by vaulted bridges of stone and wood, sometimes suspended by ropes or chains in the mountains.

The roads are always extremely busy, since traveling is a way of life for many people : peasants traveling to market to sell their harvest, craftsmen traveling to a guild meeting in the nearest town, hawkers moving from village to village selling their wares and spreading the news from the outside world, *wu xia* selling their art to whoever will pay them, and more. Many travel in groups, both to discourage highwaymen and to have company and conversation on their

journey. Traveling performers put on impromptu shows to earn a few coins, pilgrims band together on the path to the sacred homes of gods and immortals, and officials are accompanied on their journey by staff and servants. As a result, the main arterial routes linking large towns and important sites are perpetually thronged with travelers from all social backgrounds, and the traveler can be guaranteed entertainment and varied and interesting encounters.

Away from the main roads, in the countryside, villages and hamlets are linked by dirt tracks, often muddy and poorly-maintained. These tracks are built on nothing more solid than years of habit, and when a storm makes them impassable, the people who live in these backwaters are cut off even more from the outside world...

In the old times, the rivers were obstacles of nature. They were soon transformed into natural assets and used as the backbone of an impressive transport and communication network.

The Yellow River in the North, the Blue River in the South and the many other smaller rivers like the Huai and the Wei permit goods and travelers to be transported quicker and more securely than by road.

The canal system, initially built for irrigation purposes, was later used to extend the transport network and to connect far-off regions which would be difficult to reach by any other means.

The waterways of the seven states are as heavily-used as the roads, by junks transporting both people and goods. Waterway travel is popular among travelers, as it is more relaxing than road travel, often less dangerous, and provides a chance to enjoy the landscape. Wherever a river or canal passes through a village, small boats can be hired for reasonable sums. For longer journeys, there are regular routes run by merchants willing to take passengers along with their freight cargo.

Often the best way to make a long journey will be by a combination of road and waterways.

Means of transport

Walking remains the most common means of transport for the inhabitants of the Warring States. Even when heavily laden with luggage, most travelers are used to making their way over hill and valley on their own two feet. Personal belongings or goods for sale are carried by means of a long piece of wood balanced across the shoulders, in a pack made of wood and bamboo and tied to the back, or sometimes in a kind of wheelbarrow which is pushed along. Handcarts are well-used, as they allow large weights to be moved easily without the need for an animal. A man with an average load can walk between fifty and seventy *li* per day.

Although a man can manage to carry his own load over short distances, for longer distances he will need to use a pack animal. The most common are oxen, donkeys and mules. The weight is either distributed

evenly on the two sides of the animal or placed in a cart or wagon. These carts can also be used to transport people in relative comfort, enabling them to travel up to a hundred *li* per day without getting tired.

Horses are only rarely used for transport. Only state messengers or military couriers use them, relying on their great speed to deliver messages in the shortest time possible.

On rivers and canals, junks of all shapes and sizes transport people and merchandise. They are steered by sails or oars, and sometimes drawn from the bank by beasts of burden, generally oxen. Depending on conditions, one can travel over one hundred and twenty *li* by waterway per day.

Hostels and inns

At the roadside, the weary traveler will find various hostels and inns in which to eat and rest.

The level of comfort and the quality of service will vary tremendously from region to region, but at times choice may be very limited.

In a typical hostel, travelers take their meals in a common room and sleep in communal dorms with basic beds. There may also be more comfortable private rooms, but these are normally reserved for rich merchants or powerful officials.

When a hostel begins to attract a good number of travelers, it will also tend to attract local people who open stalls and stores selling local specialties or handicrafts. Whole marketplaces can grow up outside the walls of the more popular hostels.

Borders and customs posts

Each state applies its own standard for the size of chariot axles, and each road in the state is cut with two grooves at the correct distance apart to receive chariot wheels. Whenever a road crosses a state border, the distance between the grooves changes, and chariot drivers must fit a new axle so that their wheels will fit into the grooves of the roads in the new state.

For this reason, customs posts have been placed along every state border, particularly on the larger routes. At these posts, each chariot driver must obtain a new axle from the border guards, in exchange for a tax whose amount will depend on the nature and amount of goods being transported. Since a merchant or haulier is obliged to pass a customs post every time he crosses a state border, the states reap great financial reward from this system.

A border guard's other duties include checking that no illegal goods are brought into the state and that none of the travelers are wanted convicts, and generally ensuring security to avoid the kind of border incident that might fan the flames of the warlike spirits of the Warring States.

Security companies

In certain towns there are special companies who protect travelers or goods while in transit from one place to another. For a fee, these companies provide an escort of experienced security guards whose presence and fighting skill are intended to keep highwaymen at bay for the duration of the journey.

Most of the men employed by such companies are *wu xia* seeking either to earn a living or an opportunity to test their skills against whomever they might chance to meet. Others are former enlisted soldiers unwilling to go back to a peasant life. The work is well-paid but dangerous. Recruitment procedures are strict, since the reputation of a company depends wholly on the skill and probity of its employees.

The number and seniority of the members of an escort depend on the amount that a client is willing to pay and the inherent danger of the journey. If an attack occurs, the guards take great care to keep the heads of any outlaws they kill, just in case those heads have a price on them. Part of the payment for the escort goes directly to the company, which provides and maintains its employees' weapons and equipment.

Crime

In a troubled and restive world like that of the Warring States, it can be easy for a dishonest man to take advantage of the reigning chaos in order to swindle, thief, murder, and so make his fortune.

Urban criminal societies

In the towns, criminals are faced with an efficient and swift justice system, as well as interest groups whose power and influence protect them against their devious schemes. The criminals have adapted to this hostile environment, and found a way to survive.

Different types of criminal have chosen to band together into secret societies, copying the organizational structures craftsmen's and merchants' guilds and combi-

ning to obtain the strength they need to protect their interests, pursue their activities, and infiltrate all sectors of society. From the guild of beggars to the guild of gaming house proprietors, these organizations occasionally compete but more frequently display impressive solidarity in fighting side by side against the forces of justice or attacks by other groups, such as the official guilds and urban militia. For they know that if one guild is broken up, the others will surely follow.

The heads of these criminal cartels are dangerous men who have risen to their position through sheer cruelty and deviousness. Crime has made them wealthy and influential, and they do not shrink from using their connections, from buying off those in power, from blackmail or murder to defend their own position. They sit at the top of a hierarchy and delegate different sectors of activity to their lieutenants, whose henchmen carry out their dirty work. From the humble beggar to the brothel manager, many are the footsoldiers of the criminal societies, and crime is solidly established, at least in certain less salubrious neighborhoods...

In the towns, crime is generally of a commercial nature, the better to melt into the urban landscape. The criminal societies' main activities include unofficial gaming houses, unlicensed brothels, theft and handling of stolen goods, racketeering, and begging. The societies are careful not to use too much violence, as that might attract the wrong kind of attention. Beatings and murders are therefore rare, and those who over-indulge in them will soon be pursued not just by the forces of order but also by the societies themselves.

Outlaws and highwaymen

In the wide open spaces of the *Zhongguo*, every type of robber and marauder has his own secret den and uses it as a base for raids on villages and travelers alike.

Each year, each day, the endless wars leave behind more pathetic creatures with no means of survival and no choice but to take to highway robbery, whether out of necessity or out of spite. Old soldiers, deserters, and even dishonorable *wu xia* come together to form bands of outlaws, who sometimes grow into entire clans able to keep an army at bay and to live a life of luxury on their plunder.

These outlaws are not honorable men, robbing from the rich to give to the poor, as one might hear or read in popular stories and legends. Above all, they are criminals who fear neither gods nor men, who thirst for riches, and who will stop at nothing to gain them. Vandalism, beatings, rape and murder are their weapons, and terror is their standard.

Pursued by the army, bounty hunters and courageous *da xia*, each knows that his life will be a short one, and fully intends to taste every earthly pleasure before facing the judgment of Hell. Attacking and robbing travel-

lers, pillaging villages at harvest time, and challenging every warrior sent to stop them, they are the scourge of the countryside and a constant danger for all those who travel the roads of the Warring States.

The outlaws' worst enemies, whom they fear even more than the armies of the states, are the ancient noble houses and clans of the world of martial arts, who continue to protect what they still see as "their" land and "their" people. Many are the clashes between martial arts masters employed by the clans and outlaws, but this war against crime is a war carried on mainly in secret...

Pirates

Coastal states such as Qi and Yan are faced with the added threat of piracy, and must devote a considerable proportion of their naval resources to protecting trading routes used by merchant ships along their coasts.

The methods used by pirates are similar to those used by the outlaws of the countryside. They attack every ship they see, killing the crew and plundering the cargo. They pillage coastal villages, stealing everything in their path and raping or killing any who dare resist.

Pirates launch their attacks from light junks, which are frequently far faster than merchant or naval ships. They have their hideouts in deserted coves, with steep cliffs dotted with caves for storing their booty and hiding themselves.

Many pirates are paid by the states to create havoc for the coastal states and to force them to focus their attention and resources on their coasts rather than on their external borders...

Assassins and contract killers

Anyone wishing to remove a rival or an enemy may avail himself of the services of a contract killer or a secret order of assassins.

Assassins generally work alone, roaming the highways and byways of the Warring States in search of profitable business and meaningful challenges. Some have a particularly dark reputation in the *wu lin* and may themselves be pursued by bounty hunters or other killers employed by the families of their victims. The most effective contract killers are of course those known by no-one, who can melt unnoticed into a crowd, and who can only be contacted by very specific means which protect their anonymity.

There are also organizations of professional assassins and invisible orders whom no-one can contact, but who appear spontaneously to whoever might be in need of their deadly services... No-one can say how these orders find out who to reveal themselves to, whether through supernatural powers or well-placed sources, and this only serves to enhance their terrifying reputation...

The Calendar

In a predominantly agricultural society such as that of the Warring States, time is principally measured in relation to nature.

But whereas the agricultural calendar is the most important and most widely-used, there exist other calendars used by scholars, historians, astrologers and fortune-tellers.

Dates and cycles

According to legend, it was the Yellow Emperor who first invented a method of measuring the passing of time and the turning of the years. Since he devised the first calendar in the sixty-first year of his reign, the start of that year is taken as year 0 of history by the inhabitants of the *Zhongguo*.

But that method of calculating dates has fallen into disuse and is now mainly of historic interest. Nowadays, the most widespread method takes as its starting point the beginning of the reigning imperial dynasty. So although the Zhou Emperor no longer possesses either power or land, it is still the beginning of his dynasty that marks the point from which years are counted...

Qin, the role-playing game, takes place in the year 240 BC of the Gregorian calendar used in the West.

The mythical year 0 of history has been situated around the year 2698 BC, so according to this measure the action takes place in the year 2458.

Most sources agree that the Zhou dynasty was founded in 1121 BC, which makes 240 BC year 881 of the Zhou dynasty.

For the inhabitants of the Warring States, however, time also passes in cycles. As such, it is much more common to refer to a year by its position in a sixty-year cycle, and it will be that position which will give it its name and certain characteristics for astrological purposes. These astrological characteristics will be used to determine whether particular months or days of the year will be auspicious, to define the personality and destiny of a new-born child, and to predict various events.

The sixty-year cycle is based on the combination of a cycle of ten heavenly tree-trunks (*tia gan*) and twelve earthly branches (*dizhu*). Only scholars actually use the

<i>Earthly branches (dizhu)</i>	<i>Animals</i>	<i>Heavenly branches (tian gan)</i>	<i>Elements</i>
Zi	Rat	Jia	Yang wood
Chou	Buffalo	Yi	Yin wood
Yin	Tiger	Bing	Yang fire
Mao	Hare	Ding	Yin fire
Chen	Dragon	Wu	Yang earth
Si	Snake	Ji	Yin earth
Wu	Horse	Geng	Yang metal
Wei	Goat	Xin	Yin metal
Shen	Monkey	Ren	Yang water
You	Rooster	Gui	Yin water
Xu	Dog		
Hai	Pig		

names of the trunks and branches, as the people associate the earthly branches with animals and the heavenly tree-trunks with the five elements under their Yin or Yang aspect, according to the following table:

A year takes its name either from the relevant combination of trunk and branch, or from the combination of animal and element.

The first year in a cycle is therefore the *Jia-Zi* year, which can also be referred to as the year of the yang wood rat (occasionally the name of the element is replaced by the color associated with it, which would give the year of the yang green rat). Thereafter, each of the components of the cycle is used in order :

- year two is the *Yi-Chou* year, or the year of the yin wood buffalo,
- year ten is the *Gui-You* year, or the year of the yin water rooster,
- year eleven is the *Jia-Xu* year, or the year of the yin wood dog,
- year twelve is the *Yi-Hai* year, or the year of the yin wood pig,
- year thirteen is the *Bing-Zi* year, or the year of the yang fire rat.

The sixtieth and final year in a cycle is therefore the *Gui-Hai* year, or the year of the yin water pig.

The year 240 BC of the Gregorian calendar is the fifty-eighth year of a cycle, namely the Xi-You year or the year of the yin metal rooster. The next sixty-year cycle will start in 237 BC with another Jia-Zi year, or year of the yang wood rat.

The lunar calendar

The lunar calendar is used throughout the Warring States.

According to this calendar, there are three hundred and fifty-four days in a year, divided into twelve months and four months. Each year begins in the spring, and New Year is celebrated during the second month following the winter solstice.

Lunar months have twenty-nine or thirty days. They do not have names; instead, they are referred to by their position in the year. For example, one would speak of the third month, or sometimes the third moon. In order for the lunar calendar to stay in sync with the movement of the sun, a thirteenth month is added every two or three years on the basis of complex calculations. In order not to disturb the harmony of the number twelve, this extra month is accorded the same position as the month preceding it; one might speak for example of the "second seventh month".

Each lunar month is divided into three ten-day periods, within which each day takes its name from its position in month or period. So for example, one might refer equally to the seventh day of the second period or to the seventeenth day of the month.

A crucial element of the calendar from an agricultural point of view is the division of the lunar year into twenty-four stages, each lasting about fifteen or sixteen days, each with its own specific name relating to natural events, as in the following table:

This division is used particularly in the countryside, by peasants or other laborers whose lives are governed by the rhythms of nature.

*Name**Meaning*

<i>Lichun</i>	<i>The beginning of spring</i>
<i>Yushui</i>	<i>Rains</i>
<i>Jingzhe</i>	<i>The awakening of the insects</i>
<i>Chunfen</i>	<i>Spring equinox</i>
<i>Qingming</i>	<i>Soft light</i>
<i>Guyu</i>	<i>Benevolent rains</i>
<i>Lixia</i>	<i>The beginning of summer</i>
<i>Xiaman</i>	<i>Grain fills</i>
<i>Mangzhong</i>	<i>Grain in ear</i>
<i>Xiazhi</i>	<i>Summer solstice</i>
<i>Xiaoshu</i>	<i>Slight heat</i>
<i>Dashu</i>	<i>Great heat</i>
<i>Liqiu</i>	<i>The beginning of autumn</i>
<i>Chushu</i>	<i>The end of the heat</i>
<i>Bailu</i>	<i>White dew</i>
<i>Qiufen</i>	<i>Autumn equinox</i>
<i>Hanlu</i>	<i>Cold dew</i>
<i>Shungjiang</i>	<i>White frost</i>
<i>Lidong</i>	<i>The beginning of winter</i>
<i>Wiaoxue</i>	<i>Light snow</i>
<i>Daxue</i>	<i>Heavy snow</i>
<i>Dongzhi</i>	<i>Winter solstice</i>
<i>Xiaohan</i>	<i>Slight cold</i>
<i>Dahan</i>	<i>Great cold</i>

Hours

Each day is made up of twelve double hours, each of which is divided into two small hours.

The hours are named after the same animals as are used in the calendar. So the first hour of the day is the hour of the rat, as well as being the third "eve" of a night.

Seven double hours, from the hour of the hare to the hour of the rooster, make up a day, and the five remaining double hours, from the hour of the dog to the hour of the tiger, also known as "eves", make up a night.

The passing of time is measured by means of candles or incense sticks specially designed to burn in a defined period of time (such as a double hour or a small hour). Sundials are also used, as are hourglasses for more precise measurements of time.

When people speak of a length of time, they generally speak in metaphor: from the blink of an eye, through the taking of ten steps, to the eating of a bowl of soup.

Hours of the day

Hour of the rat (third eve)	11:00pm – 1:00am
Hour of the buffalo (fourth eve)	1:00am – 3:00am
Hour of the tiger (last eve)	3:00am – 5:00am
Hour of the hare	5:00am – 7:00am
Hour of the dragon	7:00am – 9:00am
Hour of the snake	9:00am – 11:00am
Hour of the horse	11:00am – 1:00pm
Hour of the goat	1:00pm – 3:00pm
Hour of the monkey	3:00pm – 5:00pm
Hour of the rooster	5:00pm – 7:00pm
Hour of the dog (first eve)	7:00pm – 9:00pm
Hour of the pig (second eve)	9:00pm – 11:00pm

Jiang Hu The World of Martial Arts

Origins of the world of martial arts

At the borders of the Warring States, in the depths of the land, where law and state authority do not exist, where even the supernatural has no power, a society has emerged. Sometimes known as the world of martial arts, sometimes as the world of forests and lakes, it is a land where the last survivors among the noble houses of old hold on to the last vestiges of their former power, where the outcasts of society are given a second chance, and above all where martial arts enjoy an endless golden age...

The golden age of martial arts

Huang Di, the mythical Yellow Emperor and first of the great sovereigns of old, was recognized in his lifetime as an extraordinary warrior. In those times, when monsters and demons still walked the earth, he and his army confronted the barbarian hordes to protect the Empire. Among the many inventions which he granted to men were weapons : the sword, the spear, the bow, and the halberd were the tools used to defend and expand the Empire.

During the reign of the Three Emperors and the Xia Dynasty, it was the nobles that shouldered the burden of protecting the people from the many dangers they faced. The first professional armies were made up of members of the noble warrior caste, bearing arms bequeathed by the Yellow Emperor and devising the first formal fighting techniques, the early styles of martial arts.

All through the time of the great dynasties and until the emergence of the centralized states, the nobles were able to concentrate on their military and religious duties, and on perfecting their fighting skills. They created countless different styles of combat and so invented the martial arts. It was in the time of the Yin that martial arts slowly changed from being a mere collection of combat techniques to being the basis of a culture, a heritage worthy of protection and preservation. In those mythical times, worthy men were taught by the immortals, and master swordsmen roamed throughout the Empire seeking the essence of the perfect warrior that remains to this day the ultimate goal of many *wu xia*. Tournaments were organized by the noble houses and provided an opportunity for the finest warriors to prove their skills and to win fiefs and glory by their great fighting skills. Fearsome techniques were developed in secret and passed down from master to disciple, legendary weapons were forged by the gods for those knights who showed themselves to be worthy, and the exploits of great swordsmen rang up to the heavens and down to present times.

It was a blessed time for martial arts, both the precious heritage of an Empire fascinated with all manner of art, and the ultimate weapon in the war for the protection of the Emperor and his line. The most valiant *da xia* received high honors, including noble ranks and military appointments. The noble families swelled with pride to have such celebrated swordsmen at their service. The blacksmith was king among craftsmen. And everywhere fighting skill was passed on by teachers, shared in combats, and celebrated in tournaments.

That was a time when honor and loyalty still meant something. An oath was a precious thing, which when broken brought the wrath of Heaven and terrible misfortune on the betrayer. It was a time when gods sat in judgment on men...

The birth of the world of martial arts

Now, that time is long gone.

The golden age lasted well into the time of the Zhou Dynasty. The frontiers of the Empire were threatened by barbarian tribes, and the Empire shattered into a multitude of Hegemonies who feigned submission to the Emperor but were quick to act independently and whose rulers dared to conduct themselves as kings in their lands. Despite being direct descendants of the great noble houses of old, these rulers flouted their oath of allegiance, cast aside the moral heritage of their ancestors.

But no sooner had these rulers declared themselves kings than they were afraid. They were afraid that their own vassals would behave toward them as they had toward the Zhou Emperor, breaking their oaths of allegiance and demanding their autonomy. This fear deepened and the rulers began to reform the structures of power in their states in order to end the delegation of power to their vassals. In the year 762 of the reigning dynasty, the old ways were finally discarded : Shang Yang, minister of Qin enacted a series of reforms including replacing the hereditary principle with the principle that noble rank was to be awarded on the basis of merit on the battlefield. This new idea soon gained wide acceptance and was swiftly applied in all the other states in order to reduce the power of the nobles and thus avoid any risk of sedition or separatism. Then each state created a class of salaried officials, who could be removed at will, drawing on the emerging scholar class and the less powerful members of the nobility, such as younger sons and those who had lost their fiefs. The states drew power away from the vassals and centralized it within an administration which depended solely on the state.

In just a few years, the great noble families were stripped of their privileges. Unable to react to such swift change, many lost their titles and their fiefs, which were divided among deserving officials. Some nobles adapted to the new situation by obtaining posts as ministers and advisers and therefore staying close to the seat of power, but they were few. Many families were too old and too wedded to the old ways to adapt to the new state structures, and simply died out. The age of the nobility was at an end, replaced by an administration, far superior in the eyes of the new rulers of a broken Empire...

But some noble families managed to survive those troubled times. Having lost the favor of their state, but having held on to some of their strength, they raised their countenances and sought to capture power wherever they could find it. They soon came to understand that a centralized state, by definition, could not control the whole of its territory and that there were still some isolated regions where the law did not apply.

And it was there, in those lost regions, that the surviving families decided to settle and become clans. Using the remains of their fortunes, they built up their fiefs by purchasing land, investing in industry and trade, establishing themselves as part of the daily lives of the inhabitants of those lands. They lived in great manor houses, re-created courtly life and reigned over peoples who had been forgotten by the states. In so doing, they created a society on the margins of society, far from the great centers of power. They enacted their own laws, fought wars and formed alliances to gain influence, re-established the old moral codes and created what is still known today as the world of martial arts.

Wu lin and jiang hu

The parallel world that those clans created still exists today, and in these terrible times of endless wars and unbridled tyranny, it is more populous than ever. A final refuge for all those marginalized or rejected by society, it is often the last place on earth where an outcast can escape the growing injustice of the states and live an honest life.

Known as the *jiang hu*, world of forests and lakes, due to its isolation from the great urban centers of the *Zhongguo*, it remains a land of freedom, but one rife with dangers, different indeed from the idealized utopia portrayed in popular stories.

Within the *jiang hu*, the clans and their servants have established a mini-society known as the *wu lin*, world of martial arts, because of the central place of the warrior's art in the ancient nobles' vision of the world. It is home also to the *wu xia*, whose only reason to live is to pursue their dream of becoming the perfect warrior.



Life on the margins

The world of martial arts is a society on the margins, with its own ways and its own laws. Its people are a mixture of outcasts banished from the states, those who chose exile from the states to live in a world reputed to be freer, and those born in this world apart.

The clans

The clans are the heirs of the ancient noble houses which ruled over the fiefs of the early Empire. Whereas some of those houses succeeded in adapting to the centralization of power by finding roles as ministers, courtesans or advisers at the royal courts, thus guaranteeing themselves a place in the new aristocracy of high-ranking officials, many nobles were unable to react to this sudden turning of the tables and the creation of new and unfathomable power structures. Denied

their privileges and stripped of their powers within their own lands, they retreated to their old manor houses, clinging desperately to the tatters of their former glory, and slowly faded from view.

But a few families came to understand that if they were to regain power and prestige it would have to be by subtle, even invisible, means. They invested the remnants of their great fortunes in land, businesses and industrial installations, and employed scholars, merchants and craftsmen to assist them in managing their new acquisitions. And so it was that in the outlying regions of the Warring States, where the states struggled to impose their authority, there grew a new society with its own lords and vassals, and its own laws and rules.

For the former nobles, now wealthy landowners and merchants, had understood that by settling in the peripheral regions of the states, they could once again become lords over their lands, and impose whatever laws they saw fit. And so long as taxes continued to be paid and these new “fiefs” remained free of unrest, the new lords had nothing to fear from the state authorities.

Thus were born the clans of the world of martial arts, new structures replacing the power of the kings in the outlying regions of the *Zhongguo*, ruling vast isolated fiefs and fighting ever more bitterly to increase their zones of influence...

A typical clan is organized like a noble house of old. The head of clan reigns as feudal lord of the region under his control and passes his power on to his children on death. He will live in a great manor made up of several separate houses and be served by the many servants necessary to earn the respect of other clans. He will have a court of learned men, artists, enlightened Taoists, scholars of many disciplines, and above all great warriors, masters in martial arts and renowned *da xia*. For the clans revere those martial arts whose golden age coincided with the reign of their noble ancestors. Many heads of clan are themselves skilled swordsmen with legendary weapons, and knights come from far and wide to serve such experts or to become their followers. And while a clan's power is essentially dependent on its wealth, its strength in battle remains a key factor in its relations with allies and enemies alike.

The clans' wealth comes from several sources. The primary source is usually land: the heads of clan own great tracts of land worked by sharecroppers and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Some have mines, salt-mines, shares in foundries or mills, or run trading concerns. In addition, each clan demands an unofficial tax from those living on its land in exchange for protection against outlaws. Since the outlying regions of the states swarm with outlaws, and state authorities are frequently unable to stop them all, the "vassals" of the local heads of clan are only too happy to pay. Out here, state borders mean little: if two villages within a particular clan's zone of influence happen to be in two different states, both will pay taxes to the clan and receive protection from it, irrespective of the relations between the two states in question.

Relations between clans tend to be prickly at best. Occasionally, alliances are formed, either on the basis of family relationships or a strategic advantage to be gained from a marriage, but most of the time the clans are locked into an endless but secret war for more power and influence in the *jiang hu*. Duels between clan champions, murders, raids and pitched battles are everyday occurrences, but it is rare for civilians to be involved, for the clans have inherited from their ancestors a principled and honorable vision of war. But conflicts between the clans are also carried on by peaceful means, such as whispering campaigns and propaganda intended to tarnish the reputation of a clan and to turn its allies and vassals against it.

Da xia, knights in search of perfection

The *da xia* are the warriors of the *wu lin*, those romantic figures idealized and idolized in popular myth. Everywhere fables depict them as high-minded righters of wrongs and peerless swordsmen, tirelessly defending the orphan and the widow, courageously defying those who would use power for evil ends...

The reality is less poetic. Most *da xia* are humble servants of the clans of the world of martial arts, soldiers at the beck and call of their lords, an elite strike force in the constant struggle for power between the clans. Among their number are far more calculating assassins than honorable duellists, and more mindless cannon fodder than noble soldiers of justice...

There are also many *da xia* who work alone, solitary warriors wandering the paths of the world. They dream of becoming the perfect warrior, and roam endlessly the highways of the *Zhongguo* in the hope of crossing swords with a worthy opponent or receiving the teachings of a master warrior. It is a harsh life, where combat is frequent and death can strike at any time. It is a poor life, where many *da xia* must work as mercenaries or bodyguards in order to earn enough to eat and to maintain their most valued possession, their weapon... And it is a lonely life, where friendship is rare and love unthinkable. After several years, many knights tire of this meager existence and either put themselves in the service of a clan or take to a peasant life. But others rejoice in the life they lead, despite its drawbacks. A life of close friendships, excitement and adventure, a life of unexpected discoveries and unusual encounters, is one which they would never leave behind.

Outlaws

Many wanted criminals, on the run from the authorities of different states, choose to escape their fate by disappearing into the lost and isolated regions where the agents of justice dare not venture. So it is that all manner of outlaws end up seeking refuge in the *jiang hu* and the zones of influence of the clans.

Relations between clans and outlaws vary widely. There are those who seek merely to escape from the justice of the states, and are tolerated so long as they keep themselves to themselves. Some are even employed by a clan, depending on their talents. But there are also those who carry on their nefarious

Jiang hu and the Warring States

While the world of martial arts exists in all the states, the degree to which it is accepted varies according to the views of the king, the nature of the land, and its resources, traditions, and military history.

In Qin, the jiang hu is almost non-existent. The application of strict Legalist doctrine means that the Western State will not tolerate even the slightest opposition. Those clans who remain scattered around its territory are therefore extremely discreet and do their utmost to evade the attention of the state authorities. Any wu xia discovered on the roads of Qin are swiftly arrested and either sent to work camps or forcibly conscripted into the army.

In Qi, age-old noble traditions live on in the world of martial arts. The territory of the state is favorable, and several clans live in the mountains, on the plains and along the coasts. The heads of clan are strongly influenced by the state's policy of promoting culture, and seek to prove their refinement and sophistication by filling their courts with scholars and poets rather than warriors and swordsmen.

Zhao is also home to many clans, whose zones of influence are principally at the borders with the steppes. The state authorities are happy to leave them in peace for so long as they protect the border towns from Xiongnu raids. But the countryside of the Horse State is also crawling with bands of outlaws and highwaymen.

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Chu is the state in which the world of martial arts is most developed and most closely integrated into society. This is due mainly to the state's great warrior tradition passed down from ancient times. The vastness of its territory is a blessing to the countless clans dotted throughout the state. In Chu, fighting skill is still highly prized, and a skilled swordsman will always find employers.

Since the noble houses of Yan still hold significant sway in the state, the jiang hu that exists there is both less secretive and more self-assured than in other states. As in Zhao, many border towns are entrusted to the protection of a lord with the blessing of the king.

There are few clans and da xia in Wei. When the religious sects gained the upper hand in the state, many noble lords recognized in them a power greater than their own, and fled. So the ancient warrior tradition was swept aside by religious tradition.

The few clans left in Han have all been infiltrated by the state authorities who see them as a useful source of political expertise. The authorities see the relations between the clans as a microcosm of the relations between the states, and secretly manipulate the heads of clan as a means of conducting interesting experiments in diplomacy and state action.

Laws and traditions in the world of martial arts

activities, disturbing the order of the world of martial arts and risking attracting the attention of the state authorities. These are hunted down mercilessly. Often two rival clans will join forces to wipe out a band of outlaws who pose a threat to their villages and their people. But certain unscrupulous clans have been known to form alliances with bands of outlaws in the hope of using them to weaken a rival clan. Such alliances are generally closely-guarded secrets, for if they were to be discovered the clan's reputation would be lost...

At times, a band of outlaws proves strong enough in battle to destroy an entire clan, or even several, loses its fear of the other clans and establishes a firm hold across part of a region. Aping the ways of the nobles, the outlaws create a reign of terror over local villages, holding them to ransom and stealing their wealth. Once the whole area has been squeezed to its limit, the band of outlaws will move on to another area, in defiance of both clan and state authorities.

Others who live on the margins

The *jiang hu* is home to a wide variety of people, some who come voluntarily, others obliged to live there by reason of their status or calling.

Groups as disparate as wandering physicians, traveling salesmen, philosophers banished from the states for the audacity of their writings, unemployed scholars, deserters, convicts, disgraced officials and Taoist hermits wander the roads of the parallel society of the *jiang hu* in order to pursue their own destinies or merely to disappear for a time while they wait for better days ahead.

For women, the world of martial arts can be a refuge, a means of escaping the chains of the patriarchal society of the *Zhongguo*. While the society of the *jiang hu* is steeped in ancient tradition, in many ways it can be genuinely progressive. This usually proceeds from eminently practical considerations : for example, should a woman prove to be a finer warrior than a man, why should her talent be wasted by confining her to life as an obedient wife ? Tales are told of great clans where power is held by women, enticing all manner of marginalized women to the *jiang hu*. Courtesans and prostitutes fleeing their old lives, repudiated wives without any means of support, rape victims deprived of any worth as a wife, normal women in search of freedom, all hope to find in the world of martial arts the role that is denied them in the Warring States.

Although it is not subject to the laws of the states, the *jiang hu* is far from being a lawless land. It has its own ways, mostly based on ancient traditions and centuries-old customs. Each inhabitant of the *jiang hu* must live according to these ways, for on this depends the very existence of this world apart.

Hospitality

The *wu lin* is a dangerous world, located at the ends of the earth, full of wide open spaces, dark, mysterious forests, precipitous mountains and tortuous paths. Only rarely is the landscape broken by a village or manor house.

The territory of the *wu lin* is so inhospitable that travelers are utterly dependent on being able to stop, rest and eat whenever they can. As a result, one of the foundations of the society of the world of martial arts, one which no clan dare ignore, is the law of hospitality.

A traveler roaming the world of forests and lakes can always count on the hospitality of the local clan. He must of course visit the head of clan, to pay his respects and place himself at his service, for it is common practice for a clan to ask guests to perform a service in exchange for the hospitality they receive. Such services are typically mere trifles, whose main function is to ensure that the guest is a man of honor, worthy of being received by the clan.

The rules of hospitality are taken very seriously. If a guest breaks them, his host is entitled to punish him according to the rules in force in his house. Punishments range from imprisonment, to flogging, to execution, according to the gravity of the offence. If, however, it is the host who is guilty of offending against the rules of hospitality, word will soon spread and the reputation of the clan will be ruined : it will be shunned by neighbors and servants alike, *da xia* of honor will avoid its lands, and other clans may be inspired to attack.

Loyalty

In a world as dangerous as the *wu lin*, friendship is a rare and precious gift, to be cherished and preserved. To win the loyalty of a valiant knight, a respected head of clan or a Taoist holy man is to gain riches greater than gold.

The men of the world of martial arts are outsiders, individuals who have rejected the rules of the normal world and escaped the cage of mainstream society, loners who rely only on themselves. But only men such as these can know the value of true friendship. In the *jiang hu*, friends are brothers in arms, as close as family members and treated with the same respect. A master is to be treated as a father, and a head of clan as a lord. Loyalty, and a proper respect for these social links which replace the traditional family structures, are essential for those that would live a decent life and avoid becoming an outcast in a world of outcasts.

Oaths

Under the old laws, he who swore an oath was bound by his word until the day he fulfilled his promise.

As descendants of the noble families of old, the current heads of clan set great store by oaths. For each head of clan is himself bound by an oath of allegiance binding him to his people and imposing on both lord and vassal a series of duties that each one is bound to fulfil. This oath of allegiance is central to the system whereby the clans give protection and aid to their subjects in exchange for the unofficial taxes they collect from them.

Among the inhabitants of the *wu lin*, it is widely thought that the gods have lost all interest in the destiny of men, except for their own. Those who live on the margins of society know that since they follow the old ways, they are blessed by the favor of the gods and that the immortals are watching over them from Heaven and the Mountains of Kunlun. It is this link to the divine that explains the power of an oath, for a promise witnessed by the gods themselves cannot be dismissed lightly; he that would dare break an oath of allegiance or a formal vow incurs not just the displeasure of men, but the wrath of Heaven itself.

Normally, an oath obtained by threats or blackmail is worthless. But those with an over-developed sense of honor occasionally feel obliged to fulfil whatever oaths they make.

Vengeance

An old proverb says that a son may not live under the same sky as his father's murderer.

In the silent wars waged throughout the world of martial arts, betrayals, poisonings and murders are far from rare. Entire clans may be undone by the treachery of a single member who has fallen under the spell of a rival clans. Everywhere in the *wu lin*, wandering assassins sell their dark arts to whomever will pay for a rival to be removed once and for all.

In such circumstances, vengeance is a basic right which can be denied by none. A man who has been wronged or betrayed, whose family has been murdered, or whose whole clan has been wiped out is completely within his rights in hunting down and killing those responsible for such injustices.

The collective memory of the *jiang hu* is rich with tales of vengeance passed down from generation to generation, of the young *da xia* pursuing his master's murderers, or of servants vowing not to rest until they destroy those who robbed them of their beneficent lord. But vengeance begets anger, and anger begets murder, and the vicious circle is eternal. Behind the poetry and embellishment of popular myth hides a less romantic truth: death is certain for one party or another, and the cycle of vengeance and murder will never cease.

Duels

The *wu lin* is a world where large numbers of martial arts experts roam from place to place hoping to attain perfection through combat. For these knights-errant the only way of honing their skills is by measuring them against their peers, engaging in ever more demanding combats and growing through ever fiercer struggle.

Whenever two *da xia* meet, it is customary for them to engage in a presentational combat in order for each to evaluate the other's skill. At times, between grand masters, this combat may be of a purely spiritual nature. Such duels are not fought to the death, for the objective is not to defeat one's opponent but merely to measure oneself against him and one's own skill against his.

In any case, it is an accepted rule that the objective of a duel is not to kill. Where two knights meet in a duel, each will know exactly when the combat is over and which has been victorious. There is no need for one to be killed. Any *wu xia* who would break this rule would be branded a killer and hunted down as a common criminal. For the martial arts are inherently noble, and should not be sullied by the presence of such men.

There is an exception to this rule in cases of vengeance. Challenging a man to a duel in order to exact vengeance is considered perfectly honorable, and it remains the only circumstance in which a duel may be fought to the death. In principle, such a duel will settle all scores and put an end to a quest for vengeance, whichever party is victorious.

When one *da xia* challenges another to a duel, both warriors formally salute each other and begin the combat, which continues until one party has accepted defeat. It is well known for two *da xia* to engage in a fierce and intense duel, and then to become friends closer than brothers. For when a lone warrior finds another who shares his vision of life, martial arts can bring men together.



Martial arts tournaments

Tournaments are popular occasions, usually organized by heads of clan on special occasions such as New Year, a feast day, or the birthday of a family member. Their main purpose is to mark such occasions, but they can also serve to gauge the talents and skills of the warriors of an invited clan, or for the recruitment of valiant knights.

Such occasions attract many spectators, hungry for the visual delight offered by the clash of great warriors. Masters, knights and martial arts experts journey from the four corners of the *Zhongguo* to take part, or just to attend. For them tournaments are rare occasions to pit themselves against worthy opponents and to learn novel techniques. But above all, they provide a stage where the victors can build their reputation and win glory, honors and often a high-ranking position in a clan.

As with duels, the combats that take place at these tournaments are not intended to bring the death of one party. Accidents do happen, but are rare given that participants are expected to be masters of their art. But rumors persist of secret tournaments organized by obscure clans, where serious injury, woundings and death play a real part...

The transmission of learning

The many different types of individual who inhabit the *wu lin* consider the accumulated learning in martial arts an essential part of their heritage, and attach great importance to its being passed down to future generations.

It is believed that the countless different styles and techniques of the old times must not be forgotten or allowed to die out, and it is expected of all recognized experts that they devote part of their lives to teaching others. Certain masters take a single disciple, others open whole schools, and yet others take up positions as fencing masters to particular clans, passing on their skills to their warriors. Some write works resuming the essence of their art through a blend of descriptions of techniques and philosophical reflections. But by whatever means a man contributes to the development and propagation of martial arts, he automatically earns the undying respect of his followers, who will praise his name at every turn and fiercely defend his honor.

Similarly, a master who takes no apprentice, and so allows his learning to fade away, runs the risk of criticism, reproach and the loss of his reputation.

The martial arts tradition of the perpetual passing down of learning has come to be imitated in other fields. Taoist priests roam the *jiang hu* teaching the fundamentals of their religion to their followers, wandering physicians take on apprentices, and scholars become private tutors to rich families. The transmission of learning has thus become a fundamental law of the world of martial arts, one that is vital to its future as a dynamic and living society.

The warrior and his weapon

Only peasants and common laborers fight with their bare hands. A true martial arts expert carries a weapon as a true symbol of his power and prestige.

Be it a spear, a sword, a bow or a mace, the weapon is often a *da xia*'s most prized possession, his link to the quest for perfection in combat, and the only tangible proof of his status as a warrior. A knight without his weapon is like a tiger without his claws, a small and harmless creature. So for any *wu xia* the loss of his weapon is a terrible spiritual and mental ordeal. It is not the loss of the object itself that causes such turmoil, but the symbolism of that loss. It is often said that it is the sword that is broken that shows its master's lack of valor. The weapon itself means nothing, but to bear it is to demonstrate one's devotion to the way of martial arts.

As soon as a knight loses his weapon, he must use all possible haste to find a replacement and so regain his status within the *wu lin*. Some are content to buy a new weapon or commission one from a master blacksmith, but more committed knights are prepared to undertake great quests or undergo extraordinary trials in order once more to be worthy to bear a sword.

Of course, where a weapon is legendary, or where it has particular value because it was inherited from ancestors, presented by the bearer's master, or the gift of his beloved, then the object itself will be as precious as that which it symbolizes. Such weapons are revered by their owners and cannot simply be replaced. But they are also the object of admiration and envy on the part of many who would stop at nothing to obtain such a fine weapon...

Honor

It is said that he who obeys all the laws of the world of martial arts proves his honor and is worthy of the respect of all. But the respect that such a man attracts will be matched by the hatred and jealousy that he inspires. Honor is a quality not without its drawbacks and difficulties. Many are those who would seek to take advantage of an honorable man; yet more would try to destroy his reputation. But he who is guided by honor knows that the gods are watching, and he will not be quick to disappoint them.

Clans and factions

The world of martial arts is run by a large number of clans, but also by various factions, religious sects and other groups of individuals with shared ideals. At times even a single man can gain a degree of reputation or power equal to that of an entire clan. Such great and valiant men are rare, but when they are found, their talents usually bear out their reputation.

The Glorious Blades

At one time, Chu had a great tradition of highly-skilled swordsmiths. These celebrated craftsmen worked for kings and lords and made many legendary weapons. But then advances in metalwork created the possibility of manufacturing standardized swords on an industrial scale, just like any other tool. The tradition of the legendary swordsmiths faded, and their work was forgotten.

The only remaining heir to this tradition is the Clan of the Glorious Blades. From its fief in the Northeast of Chu, it protects and passes on the learning of its ancestors who were masters of the forge. For many years it has been a refuge for the descendants of those ancient blacksmiths and craftsmen whose special skills have become useless in this age of industrial war. The clan's renown is so great that master blacksmiths and expert swordsmen come from far and wide to pay homage to its achievements in preserving the ancient art of the forge. The clan's library is said to hold the world's largest collection of works on the subject, and the manor of the head of clan has several workshops where blacksmiths and metallurgists practise their art just as their ancestors did.

The head of the Clan of the Glorious Blades is Chung Ho Liu, also known as the Phoenix of Ten Thousand Feathers. He is a fencing master of great renown, and a passionate collector of famous foils and blades. Within his manor stands a building named the Blade House, containing dozens of great and historic weapons, and honored guests visit these exhibits as if in a museum. Chung Ho Liu will pay vast sums to obtain a glorious blade, and it is rumored that he is ready to go to great lengths to force a *da xia* to surrender his weapon... His personal guard is made up of four renowned swordsmen known as the Four Swords Who Carve The Gods. Two are personal bodyguards, while the other two guard the Blade House with their lives. Each has the great honor of bearing one of their master's legendary swords. Chung Ho Liu himself bears the sword known as Soul of the Five Sacred Mountains, once the property of the legendary *wu xia* Silent Lion.

The Nine Moons

Unusually in a patriarchal society such as the rest of the *jiang hu*, the Clan of the Nine Moons has been ruled over by women for several decades. It began when the lord of a small fief died without leaving a male heir. Many foresaw the extinction of his line, but his eldest daughter had other ideas. Through intelligence and force of will, she succeeded in rallying powerful vassals to her side and enhancing the prestige of her clan. When the time came for her to pass on the reins of power, she again passed them to a girl. And ever since, it has been tradition for the Clan of the Nine Moons to be ruled by women.

The clan is based in a fertile valley in the Southwest of Yan. Its current head is Mother Moon, a powerful

woman of some fifty years, who has eleven daughters, aged between thirteen and twenty-five. Each one is of striking beauty and possesses prowess in martial arts surpassing that of many men. For beauty and fighting skill are their twin weapons, and their bodies have the power both to seduce and to kill. Mother Moon will only agree to the marriage of one of her daughters to a man who is capable of defeating his chosen bride in combat. By this means, the head of clan obtains skilled and powerful allies, and ensures that strong blood is added to her line. Despite the small moons' reputation as fierce warriors, suitors flock from all parts of the *Zhongguo* hopeful of winning their hand.

The opulence and luxury of the Palace of the New Moon is testament to the great wealth of the clan. This enormous complex is constructed around a lake which reflects the light of the night-time moon, and is home to a constant flow of guests, allies, vassals and suitors who come to enjoy the famous hospitality of Mother Moon. It contains a small temple to Chang-E, goddess of the moon, who watches over the clan. Legend has it that the clan is directly descended from the goddess herself.

The Order of the Five Poisons

Just a myth, a popular legend of a group of elite assassins who have never failed to carry out a contract. An order of killers who, for the right price, can eliminate any target, anywhere, anytime. An organization able to supply spies, thieves and assassins. But this is no myth, for the legend is true : the Order of the Five Poisons is very real.

The Order's origins are lost in the mists of time. It is ruled by five masters holding the masks of the Five Poisons. Its base, known as the Temple, is located on the coast of Qi, its exact location known only to the members of the Order. It is from the Temple that the Order sends its assassins to all corners of the *Zhongguo* to carry out their dark deeds. Its most frequent customers are the heads of clan of the *wu lin* wishing to remove a rival or opponent. And although the states each have their own secret service which normally takes care of such work, it is not unknown for them to have recourse to the Five Poisons for missions requiring the utmost secrecy. It is also common for a high-ranking state official such as a minister or chancellor to engage the services of an assassin to eliminate a political opponent and so reinforce his own position...

But one does not seek out the Order, one waits for it to offer assistance. Through its network of informers in the states and the *jiang hu*, the Order is always able to know who will need its services and when. When the time is right, it sends an emissary to its target client to discuss the terms of the contract. The reputation of the Order is built in large part on its uncanny ability to predict demand... The members of the Order are the most efficient assassins in the world. Each one is an expert in poisons, experienced in martial arts, and well-versed in the arts of camouflage and disguise. It is said that they never fail, and that once they have set their sights on a man, he is as good as dead...

The Order of the Five Poisons has few sworn enemies in the *jiang hu*, for they inspire such terror that even the most honorable clans are dissuaded from seeking to bring them to justice. However, many *da xia* take great pride in killing any member of the Order that they happen to meet. And each day brings more and more individuals who thirst for vengeance after one of their kind has perished at the hands of the Order...

The Gai Bang

For centuries, Qin has been the state with the harshest, most repressive laws. It is renowned for complete intolerance of beggars and vagrants, and most of the outcasts of society end up as forced labor on the great construction sites of the state. It was this situation that led to the birth of the Gai Bang.

One day, there was a great meeting of all the guilds of beggars from several towns in Qin. The beggars had realized that their only hope of survival and of attaining strength was to band together. They formed a kind of clan, which all the beggars and vagrants of Qin would join, an organization with its own laws and rules : the Gai Bang.

Over time, the Gai Bang spread to the other states, and even became an important faction in to the *jiang hu*, making it a crucial link between the society of the Warring States and that of the world of martial arts. It is a formally-structured organization with four leaders, each with a specific role: one is charged with ensuring respect for the laws of the Gai Bang, another is the *shifu*, responsible for the teaching of martial arts, and the other two are ambassadors who represent the Gai Bang to the various clans.

The Gai Bang was originally designed only to protect beggars, but its role has progressively widened to include the protection of all the weak and the oppressed. This has earned it a reputation as an organization of noble goals and altruistic conduct, and the sympathy of many in the *jiang hu*. Those who support and help the Gai Bang without adopting the beggars' way of life are known as "clean clothes", while the actual members of the organization, or the "dirty clothes", live as beggars, with neither money nor home.

The symbol of the Gai Bang's strength is a legendary weapon borne by the *shifu* : the Stick to Beat the Dog, a massive wooden club which is perfectly balanced and tougher than steel. Most of the members of the Gai bang are of course too poor to own a weapon, and so have developed a range of special boxing techniques which are beginning to spread from the organization out into the wider world of martial arts.

Sing Jie-li, Limping Spear

Sing Jie-li is a lonely man, without family or friends, who travels the roads of the *jiang hu*. He appears a cripple, and his pronounced limp attracts both pity and

cruel jokes. But behind this feeble appearance lies one of the most gifted warriors of the world of martial arts.

Sing Jie-li was born the son of a *da xia* in the service of a clan of Han. He spent his childhood learning martial arts, and soon became a master in wielding spears and pikes. His outstanding talent was instrumental in his swift rise to ever higher positions of responsibility in the clan. But on the day of his twentieth birthday his clan went to war with another lord of the *jiang hu*. The war went badly for Jie-li's clan: the enemy clan appeared to have the support of the state authorities, and he was forced to watch as one after another of his comrades-in-arms fell in battle and his clan was decimated. When at last the head of clan was killed, Jie-li found himself without a master and began his years of wandering.

He soon became renowned as a knight-errant and warrior of justice. His spear was the torment of outlaws and all those who abused their power to oppress the common people. The virtuous praised him as a hero; tyrants cursed him as a troublemaker. One day a group of *wu xia* from a dishonorable clan challenged him to a combat, and laid the terrain with deadly traps. During the combat, Jie-li drove his many opponents further and further back, and they lured him ever closer to his downfall. Suddenly, his right leg was crushed in a hidden bear-trap. His craven opponents fell on him and tore at his defenseless body with their swords.

But the young knight did not die. In their cruelty, his opponents had left him ensnared in the trap to die a slow and agonizing death from his wounds. But he was discovered and rescued by an old man who took him in and tended to him. The old man could not repair Jie-li's leg and it became clear that the great warrior would forever be afflicted by a limp. Unable to practise martial arts, Jie-li fell into a deep depression and seeing no other use for his life, settled as a peasant farmer.

The region in which he had settled was soon prey to a band of outlaws, more deserters from another defeated army. Their raids came closer and closer to his village, until finally, when the women and girls of the village were kidnapped to be sold as prostitutes, the former *wu xia*'s instinct for justice would not allow him to stand idly by. Unhooking his spear from its place on the wall of his humble home, he forced his limp to carry him to confront the outlaws. Their mocking laughter was soon silenced when a single blow from the cripple removed the heads of two of their number. To his great surprise Jie-li found that he had lost none of his former skill with the spear, and that his long hours of work in the fields had made his body strong and enabled him to overcome his limp. In the space of a few exchanges he had put the outlaws to flight and earned the acclaim of the villagers.

Jie-li spent the next two years in training, developing special techniques with the spear that would permit him to engage in combat, and to keep his opponents at a safe distance, without moving. And then he took once again to the roads of the *jiang hu*, fighting injustice wherever he went, and whose handicap has earned him fame as Limping Spear.

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The Hundred Schools of Thought

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Confucianism

Confucianism is the name given to the philosophy of social harmony devised by the sage Kong Fu Zi on the basis of the customs and practices in use during the reign of the Yellow Emperor. It was ignored for practically all of the Warring States period, a time more propitious to strong, authoritarian doctrines such as Legalism.

Origins and development

Confucian ideas and practices can be traced back to early antiquity, to the birth of culture in the early Empire under the guidance of Huang Di.

In those days, the smooth running of human society was achieved by ancestor worship and respect for the order created on Earth by Heaven. Successive dynasties derived legitimate authority from the Mandate of Heaven, granted to them in recognition of their virtue. The Zhou received the blessing of Heaven in the invisible, yet quite real, form of a dragon sent to protect their dynasty.

But then the Zhou fell into decline, the Empire broke up and the ancient values were cast aside. The Hegemons could not claim to rule by the will of Heaven,

and their visible contempt for the weakened dynasty was living proof that the wisdom of old had been lost, replaced only by base ambition and a thirst for power who plunged the *Zhongguo* into an era of relentless war.

It was then that, in the small state of Lu, the wise man Kong Fu Zi developed his ideas about order in society. His theories were based in large part upon the principle of a return to the old order. Kong Fu Zi journeyed from state to state teaching his philosophy to various followers, but sadly not a single ruler would agree to put it into practice. The great scholar returned to his home state and began the task of writing what would later become known as the Five Classics.

Although in those troubled times, Confucianism was no more than a minor school of thought, it had a degree of success among scholars and thinkers. Indeed, it contributed indirectly to the birth of both theoretical Legalism, in many ways the illegitimate son of the thought of Kong Fu Zi, and Mohism. And while it was never applied in practice, certain states drew inspiration from it and incorporated certain elements into their systems of government.

Doctrine

The ultimate goal of Confucianism is the establishment of a harmonious society ruled over by a wise and virtuous sovereign. The philosophy holds that if the

very foundation of society, namely the parent-child relationship, is made of respect, and all other social relationships follow the same model, then all relationships in society will operate harmoniously.

*"If you plant a seed once, you
will reap a harvest.
If you educate people, you will
reap a hundred."*

Kong Fu Zi

One of the basic precepts of Confucianism is that every man, irrespective of his birth, may attain a state of moral perfection, notably through education, the practice of an art and the performance of rituals, and that this state of moral perfection is key to the harmonious operation of society.

The word *li* means propriety, the ideal moral condition that a man may attain by constantly striving to better himself. The word *ren* refers to the basic consideration for others, including generosity, love and kindness, that a man must show in his everyday dealings in society.

Li and *ren* form the basis of ethical conduct, a combination of betterment through education and the practical application of morality in human relationships. All other virtues, including respect, sincerity and compassion, derive from *li* and *ren*.

*"If you command me in order to
make me greater, I will follow you.
If you command me in order to
control me, I will hate you."*

Kong Fu Zi

The ideal Confucian society is also based on a clear and natural hierarchy which is essential for the attainment and maintenance of harmony. There are Five Relationships : between parent and child, between elder and younger brother, between husband and wife, between friends, and between sovereign and subject. Each of these relationships requires a specific type of conduct, but the core relationship is that which exists between parent and child, which is marked by *xiao*, or filial piety. A parent has a duty to his child to provide him with care and education; a child has a duty to obey and respect his parents. If applied to all types of social relationships, the notion of filial piety creates a harmony based on reciprocity of duty : so for example, a sovereign must rule wisely and kindly, while his subject must be obedient and loyal. And should the balance be disturbed, and the sovereign act improperly, it becomes the duty of his subjects to protest, or even to overthrow him.

The Confucian concept of the divine recognizes the existence of gods and spirits and sees the order of Heaven as a model to be followed on Earth. Even more important is the principle of ancestor worship, a natural extension of the notion of filial piety. The living have a duty to pray to their ancestors and pay homage to them and so attract their blessing. The rites

of ancestor worship are not specific to Confucianism, since they derive from ancient practices and have also been incorporated into Taoism, but the philosophy of Kong Fu Zi accords them particular importance by associating them with the notion of *xiao* and making them fundamental rituals to be performed by each and every man.

Kong Fu Zi's ideas were scorned by every ruler he addressed. While Confucianism never became a major school of thought in terms of practical political implementation, its survival is now guaranteed within the educated classes of the *Zhongguo*.

Key figures and works

*"Experience is a lantern hung
from the back"*

Kong Fu Zi

Born of an impoverished noble family of the state of Lu, Kong Fu Zi was a young man with an extraordinary intellect. He entered the state administration and rose to the position of minister of justice. After several years as minister, he resigned, finding that his ideas were the exact opposite of those being applied by his ruler. He began to develop his thoughts into a coherent theory of society and the state, and for twelve years traveled through the *Zhongguo* visiting various royal courts and trying to persuade kings and rulers to apply his theory. However, he went from one rejection to another and finally returned to his home state, where he spent his declining years teaching his followers and compiling the Five Classics.

Those works were the following : the *Yi Jing* or Book of Changes, which stressed the close relationship between man and nature and explained the ancient method of divination by trigrams and hexagrams; the *Shu Jing* or Book of Documents, which contained a chronology of historical events from earliest antiquity and drew moral lessons from those events; the *Chunqui* or Spring and Autumn Annals, which recounted and commented on events from the time of the Zhou Dynasty; the *Shi Jing* or Book of Odes, a collection of over three hundred poems and parables concerning the exercise of power; and the *Li Ji* or Book of Rites, which detailed the correct protocol for different ceremonies and explained the concept of *li*.

The Analects of Kong Fu Zi is a work compiled by his followers, setting out in the form of dialogues the master's recommendations for the creation of an ideal society.

*"When the wise man points out the
moon, the fool looks at his finger"*

Kong Fu Zi

Men Zi, an ardent follower of Kong Fu Zi, wrote a self-titled work building on the theories of his master. That work developed the fundamental idea that men are essentially good and improvable, an idea that Legalism would flatly contradict.

Legalism

One of the Hundred Schools which appeared during the Spring and Autumn period was Legalism, a doctrine based on the supremacy of law and the rejection of the traditionalist humanism advocated by Confucianist thought, and whose ultimate political goal was the creation of an ideal state ruled by a sovereign with absolute power to make law and to control through law every detail of the lives of his subjects.

Origins and development

During the time of the Hegemonies, Legalism was not a philosophy but a political doctrine applied in the context of the military and economic strengthening of the states.

So in the year 436 of the Zhou Dynasty the prime minister of Qi, Guan Zhong, undertook a series of reforms affecting trade, the organization of the army, and criminal law. Through these reforms, and by transferring the power of the nobility to a new class of professional officials, Qi became the most powerful Hegemony of the time. The reforms were soon imitated, notably in Jin and then in the small principality of Zheng, where the statesman Zi Chan carried out the first codification of the laws of the land.

At the beginning of the Warring States period, in Wei, one of Jin's successor states, minister Li Ke took the reforming process one step further by writing the Canon of Laws, or *Fa Jing*. One of his followers, the famous strategist Wu Qi, went on to undertake similar reforms in the state of Chu. And in Han, the Machiavellian statesman Shen Buai carried out the reforming policies set out in his treatise known as the *Shen Zi*.

But it was Shang Yang, prime minister of Qin, who in the year 760 took the reformist logic of Legalism further than ever before. Shang Yang abolished the feudal system, stripped the nobility of their privileges, passed a body of laws applicable to all without distinction, and thoroughly revised all aspects of the organization of the state, including agriculture, trade, and the army. In so doing he made Qin the most powerful state in the *Zhongguo*.

It was time for Legalism to be converted from a purely political theory to a genuine philosophy. It gained an ideological foundation through the works of the thinker Xun Zi. Originally a committed follower of Confucianist thought, Xun Zi saw the theories of Kong Fu Zi and the humanist Men Zi continually contradicted by everything that he saw around him, from fiefs in a perpetual state of war, to local rulers obsessed with the quest

for power, and an Emperor whose power and authority declined by the day. Xun Zi was a disillusioned idealist. He had come to understand that man is by his nature selfish and evil, and that the natural state of any human society is therefore anarchy and chaos. He reasoned that morality was something that had to be imposed on men, and that the only way that men could be disciplined was through education and absolute respect for the law.

One of the followers of Xun Zi, the scholar Han Fei Zi, went even further and argued that law could be used by a sovereign ruler to regulate each aspect of the lives of his people and to ensure complete obedience to his law through a range of terrible punishments.

Since then, Han Fei Zi has become a close friend of the prime minister and regent Lü Buwei, and another follower of Xun Zi, Li Si, has been appointed minister of justice. In consequence, the strict Legalism advocated by Han Fei Zi is particularly in vogue at the court of Qin, and while each of the other states operate some form of Legalism, none apply it as strictly as Qin.

Legalist doctrine

Legalism proceeds from the assumption that man is by nature a wild animal, to be tamed by learning respect for laws, which are to be supreme over all other forms of custom, code or rite. It holds that man is only moved by fear and self-interest, and that all should be equal in the eyes of the law, rejecting any notions of individualism or special treatment. The Legalist doctrine that is currently applied in the Warring States, and notably in Qin, is based on three pillars.

Law (fa)

The laws of a country must be clearly-worded and well-publicized. All must familiarize themselves with the laws, for all are equally bound by them. Those who obey the laws are to be rewarded, those who offend against them punished. Law is as a force of nature : to be obeyed rather than questioned.

The penal system is central to the running of the country, so even a weak sovereign can rely on it for strength.

Control (shu)

A sovereign must use various means to maintain control of his land and to ensure that no minister plots against him. None must understand the motivations of the sovereign, lest any learn how to manipulate him. The only way to win the favor of the sovereign must be by strict adherence to the law.

Legitimacy (shi)

Power resides not in the person of the sovereign but in the office of sovereign. In a Legalist state, these three pillars form the basis of a system of government defined by totalitarian rationality. The system permits the sovereign to rule without having to take any action other than the enact-

ment of laws and edicts. The people are kept in a constant state of fear thanks to an extremely harsh penal system, in which even the most minor misdemeanor is severely punished in order to set an example to others.

Key figures and works

Although the reforming ministers of the Spring and Autumn period saw Legalist doctrine more as a matter of practical policy than a philosophy about the relationship between man and law, they are still recognized as being the founders of Legalism.

Guan Zhong, who single-handedly built Qi into the dominant Hegemony of the time, is universally regarded as the father of Legalism. His views on politics are recorded in the *Guan Zi*.

The *Li Zi* records the theories of minister Wei Li Ke on the use of laws to replace the codes and rites of the ancient dynasties. With his Canon of Laws, or *Fa Jing*, Li Ke was the first to stress the importance of a formal, written code of criminal law.

Other celebrated statesmen wrote great works on the correct way to reform and rule a state. For instance, Shen Buai wrote the *Shen Zi* and Shang Yang himself wrote a work known as the *Shang Jun Shu*.

Although more in the nature of handbooks for good governance than theoretical treatises, these works are nonetheless thought of as classic Legalist texts.

The first text to present a truly philosophical account of Legalism was the eponymous work of Xun Zi. But it was the self-titled work of Han Fei Zi that presented a compelling synthesis of the Legalist school drawn from several older texts and commentaries.

Han Fei Zi

Born in Han of a line of scholars, Han Fei Zi was a highly intelligent man who obtained a teaching post in one of the most prestigious universities of his state. He developed a passion for the philosophies of the great thinkers of old, and became a fervent admirer of his former master Xun Zi and his doctrine.

Han Fei Zi sought to take the logic of Legalism one step further, and drew inspiration from Taoist theory, notably its idea of the omnipotence of nature, to develop an extreme form of Legalism. He recorded his theory in a self-titled work and began to teach it to his students. But his extreme views and acerbic criticism of a government he held to be too liberal earned him many enemies in the state authorities and among his superiors at the university.

Fleeing Han to avoid the anger of the government, he became a wandering scholar, living for a time in poverty before chancing to cross the path of Lü Buwei. The two men immediately struck up a friendship, and the merchant asked the philosopher to join his staff. At that time, Lü Buwei's star was in the ascendant in Qin, and when he became prime minister, he appointed Han Fei Zi as his adviser. The exiled scholar urged Lü Buwei to strengthen the laws of Qin ever fur-

ther and to embrace strict Legalism, with the assistance of the minister of justice Li Si, also a former pupil of Xun Zi.

Han Fei Zi is still adviser to Lü Buwei, and lives at the court of Qin. Yet he feels that his position is under threat from his ambitious rival Li Si, who takes a dim view of another Legalist having the ear of the regent. The bitter rivalry between the two men grows day by day...

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Mohism

Mohism was developed toward the end of the Spring and Autumn period. Essentially pacifist in its conception and practical implications, it attained unexpected levels of popularity during the Warring States period.

Origins and development

Mo Zi was a former member of the Confucian school, and one of the first, even before the Legalists, to question the thinking of Kong Fu Zi. He drew on both abstract thought and practical experience to devise a radical social doctrine.

Few philosophers and theoreticians argued for a return to the old ways and advocated unity between the people of the shattered Empire.

The essence of Mohism was its founder's instinctive revulsion to war and his belief in the need for universal kindness in order to bring an end to wars.. But since he advocated peace, universal love and the renunciation of unnecessary luxuries, he had no more success than his former master Kong Fu Zi in obtaining a post as adviser to the rulers of the time. The Legalist project of the strengthening of the state had by that time gained too much control over the minds of men more concerned with their own power and prestige than with the happiness of their people.

But the philosophy of Mo Zi was extremely popular among the people, the common folk who suffered in the wars and whose only hope of survival was co-operation. They saw Mo Zi as a guide, and in his theories they saw a glimmer of hope and an ideal to pursue. Mo Zi attracted many followers and created his own military order whose objective was to fight for peace by defending any who might need their help. So Mohism changed from a purely theoretical doctrine to a philosophy of direct action, which had no shortage of practical applications in a land beset by unending wars.

Doctrine

Mohist philosophy is based on the idea that the origin of war and all other evils lies in the hostility felt by

man when he is isolated and self-interested, and his tendency when in that situation to see his fellow man as a stranger and an enemy. On that basis, Mo Zi taught that humanity should be made into a single community united by a principle of solidarity, where all men would treat each other as neighbors.

To attain that end, Mohists advocate *bo-ai*, total kindness or a form of universal love to be shared between men without distinction of social class or lineage. This is backed by the theory that from such a common discipline great advantages flow naturally for all : it is only when men attain peace and unity that they can work together to pursue their own happiness rather than trying to feed the hunger for glory of a powerful elite.

Such lofty goals cannot of course be achieved within the confines of traditional administrative and social structures. They demand the dismantling of the family structures and the abolition of the hereditary transmission of position and privileges in favor of a new kind of society, based on a meritocratic hierarchy and functioning on the basis of a contract between the people and its rulers.

Mo Zi also rejected unnecessary luxury. All that does not directly contribute to the satisfaction of the basic needs of the people, including the arts, and all manner of rites and ceremonies, must be ignored. For the time and energy devoted to such matters could be more profitably used in feeding, housing and protecting the people.

There is a religious element to Mohism, which holds that men are watched by Heaven and the gods, who judge their actions, reward the good and punish the bad. However, according to Mo Zi, no costly ceremony is needed to honor Heaven, for the gods want nothing more from men than that they conduct themselves in a just and moral fashion.

Finally, Mohism believes firmly in technical and scientific research in order to find new means of satisfying the needs of the people and improving the general quality of life of all.

Mo Zi and his work

Mo Zi was of low birth, and in his early life he saw too many wars and too many massacres to believe that a bright future was possible. Intelligent and keen to learn, he studied many different schools of thought and was for a time a follower of Kong Fu Zi. But he soon found that his master's theories ran counter to his own ideas, which owed their existence to his own terrible experiences.

The word of Mo Zi attracted more and more followers, from the common people to the scholars, and that the Mohist ideal was spread far and wide throughout the *Zhongguo*. The philosopher's theories were collated by his students in a work under his name, Mo Zi was called upon to advise several rulers in search of fresh ideas.

Sadly, his words fell on deaf ears, as the spirit of the times was of war. So Mo Zi returned to the people and founded a military order that could impose his vision of society by force of arms.

The collection of Mohist writings known as the *Mo Zi* contains long chapters expounding the foundations of Mohist philosophy and setting out the various social changes to be made in order to create the utopian society in which all men could live decently and in peace. A whole section of the work is devoted to the art of siege warfare, in particular the methods by which a town can be defended against attack.

The Disciples of Mo

The military order founded by the great philosopher has grown to become a force to be reckoned with in the *Zhongguo*. Its thousands of members are ready to come to the aid of any that might need their help, and are particularly skilled in the defense of besieged cities.

The order of the Disciples of Mo is based in a hidden valley in Qi. It is governed by a council made up of five leaders, repositories of the wisdom of Mo Zi and guardians of the originals of the master's writings. It is organized on military lines, with its own officers and footsoldiers, its divisions and units. Each recruit is subjected to an exacting program of intellectual and physical training. Each Disciple must become an accomplished warrior and demonstrate skill with all weapons, as well as a refined strategist able to apply Mo Zi's theories of siege warfare in practice. The order's considerable financial strength enables it to devote great attention to training its men. The Disciples of Mo are feared by many armies, and legend has it that they have never seen a city under their protection fall to its attackers. Often the mere rumor that a town is guarded by these elite warriors is enough to discourage attacks.

The order has several sources of finance. First, it is sponsored by merchants, statesmen and generals who admire the work of Mo Zi but who are unwilling or unable to serve personally in his order. Such men pay large sums to the order each year so that it can feed and equip its men, who live according to the ascetic principles advocated by Mo Zi. Second, selected Disciples are dispatched as military advisers to the states, and their salary is paid directly to the order. Finally, any town which asks for the protection of the Disciples of Mo must of course pay a fee, often small but of great symbolic importance.

The sect's many informers, placed at all levels of society and throughout the different states, mean it usually knows a great deal about planned troop movements or battles. This enables it to send an emissary to offer its services to towns that are about to be attacked and to deploy soldiers swiftly. It is also through its network of informers that the order recruits men and identifies sponsors.

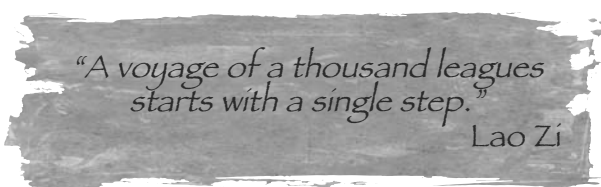
At the moment, there is conflict between the leaders of the order. Some think that the ideal of harmony will only become possible when one state has unified the others by force of arms, while others continue to hope that the states of the *Zhongguo* will one day live in peace. The first group believe that the order should place itself at the service of that state most able to unify the Empire, namely Qin, while the second group feel that this would be in direct contradiction of the ideals of Mo Zi.

Religions and Superstitions

Taoism

Taoism is both a belief system and a philosophy. It is a syncretic religion created by the drawing together of different strands of ancient religion into a single and universal belief. From obscure and mysterious origins, it was first given meaningful form by Lao Zi in his great work *Dao De Jing*. He was followed by other wise men who created Taoism by reflecting on and combining different elements into a single faith centered on a set of beliefs about the nature of the universe, with the Tao as the beginning, the end and the essence of all things.

Origins and development



*"A voyage of a thousand leagues
starts with a single step."*

Lao Zi

The origins of Taoism can be traced back to all of the ancient religions since the dawn of time. But it was born in the Spring and Autumn period.

It was in that period that many thinkers developed and promoted a unified philosophy, a unified vision of the universe which synthesized all the old beliefs around the concept of the Tao and related notions. This occurred with the hidden support of Zhou Long, who wished to bring an end to the chaos caused by the reigning dynasty's loss of power by promoting a unified religion that could bring men together around a core of shared beliefs and make them aware of their shared identity as a people and of the senselessness of the wars that tore at the fabric of a broken Empire.

The writings of Lao Zi, Zhuang Zi and Lie Zi defined the form of Taoism that is currently practised by the *fangshi*, the holy men who hold the secrets of the universe and practise the old magic. While these Taoist holy men have inherited the wisdom of the old priestly class, they are not priests in the strict sense of the term. They are philosophers, wise men and magicians, more intermediaries than priests, whose duty it is to spread and apply the precepts of the Tao among the people. They are both teachers and students, and devote their whole lives to teaching and learning.

For Taoism does not have a clergy. Some Taoists receive training, others are self-taught, all pursue their own path. Some withdraw from the world of men to live as hermits, others roam the land in search of learning and experience, yet others settle in order to serve particular communities or to train disciples. It is this lack of formal structure as much as the religious openness of Taoism that is responsible for its growth throughout the *Zhongguo* and its popularity among the common people.

At the heart of Taoist belief is the notion of the essential unity between man and the Tao, known as the Great Whole.

The foundation of the universe

Lao Zi taught us that all things flow from the Tao. While often seen as a path, or a Way (towards, for example, immortality or unity with the universe), the Tao is far more: it is at once the source, the origin, and the essence of the Whole.

Indefinable and eternal, the Tao cannot be expressed through words, for it is beyond all definition. It is not a god that creates things, but represents the fundamental interconnectedness of all things in the universe, and breathes life into the physical and spiritual worlds. The Tao is only a creating force in that it forms the essence of all things: it has no will to create, and creates nothing, but all things flow or emerge from it.

At the beginning of time, the Tao gave rise to the two opposing and complementary forces, Yin and Yang. From the eternal opposition of these two forces was born the chi, the basic energy of the universe. It was from the chi that came the ten thousand beings and things, all built from the Five Elements, metal, water, fire, wood and earth.

In Taoist belief, there is a connection between all things, that the infinitely large and the infinitesimally small are one and the same, that the macrocosm of the universe can be found in the microcosm of each living thing. This fundamental unity of the Whole is at the heart of Taoism.

*"The Tao that can be expressed
through words is not the Tao.
The name that can be named
is not the name."*

Lao Zi

Wu wei

The concept of *wu wei* finds its origin in the image of the Tao giving life to all things without will or intention. So it is that the wise man should act, in submission to natural processes, and adapting to natural changes.

In practice, *wu wei* means not acting contrary to the laws of the universe. When man acts in accordance with nature and does not seek to dominate it, he is in harmony with the Tao, and the Tao is expressed through his actions. The key to *wu wei* is spontaneity.

In order to attain this goal, many Taoists choose exile, far from the world of men, living as hermits and surrounding themselves with the natural world in order to avoid the temptations and distractions of a material life and attain the ultimate serenity that can only be found in non-desire.

*"The Tao is empty. If you use it, it
is inexhaustible".*

Lao Zi

The quest for immortality

It is also believed that if the body of a man can become an unchangeable physical form, and serve as a vehicle for the eternal soul, that is another means by which a man can achieve union with the Tao.

There are many different ways in which a man can attain immortality. They include becoming the disciple of an immortal, finding the places where the immortals dwell, transforming the body from within, and creating an elixir of eternal life.

The concept of immortality is based on the belief that the universe is built on Three Pillars, namely Heaven, Earth and Man. Certain wise men saw that of these three pillars, two were eternal, and only man was destined to die, and understood that if the universe were to attain perfection, then it would be necessary for man too to become eternal. Of the many ways by which a man might become immortal, the two which are most used are the two forms of alchemy: external alchemy, which seeks to create an elixir of immortality, and internal alchemy, which seeks to transform the body from within through asceticism and control of the breath.

*"Heaven and Earth are eternal,
because they do not live for them-
selves. So it is with the holy man: he
places others before himself, and
so becomes the first."*

Lao Zi

Rites and magic

Through the observance of the proper religious rites, and through the use of magic, the Taoist can become an instrument of the Tao, a means by which the balance of the world is maintained by allowing the essence of creation to flow through it.

This is the basis for the various rites and practices that every Taoist must know and perform. When he blesses a marriage, he facilitates the union of Yin and Yang; when he presides at a funeral, he helps the soul of the departed to find the true path to the afterlife; and when he celebrates a feast, he is the bearer of harmony between gods and men.

Taoism is also characterized by specific practices, known as the mysterious ways of the Tao, which the common people call magic. The diviner provides a means for Heaven and men to communicate, the exorcist struggles against the forces of evil and imbalances in the uni-

verse, and the geomancer constructs harmony on Earth. These practitioners of the Tao are known as *fangshi*, and for them, such practices are neither magical nor supernatural. They flow naturally from the practitioner's immense knowledge of the laws of the universe and his ability to use them by harnessing the primordial powers of the Tao, namely Yin, Yang, the chi and the Five Elements.

The ethical dimension

Another means by which man can achieve union with the Tao is to lead a virtuous life.

The Tao is pure. A man may become pure by acting with generosity, justice, loyalty and kindness. It is only through virtue, therefore, that a Taoist may master the forces of the universe and attain long life.

In alchemy, for example, it is known that only a man whose soul is pure may aspire to the immortality of his body. The elixir of life may work in the propitious conditions of a virtuous man, or turn to poison in the body of a sinner.

Similarly, after death, while the virtuous man may join Lao Zi in the Paradise of the West, he who has led a life of sin will suffer a thousand torments in Hell before his soul is reincarnated.

"Give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish, and he will eat every day."

Lao Zi

Key figures and sacred texts

Lao Zi was a scholar and a wise man, an imperial archivist in the service of the Zhou Dynasty, who grew tired of his meaningless life at court. Seeking to withdraw from the world of men, he saddled his ox and rode to the West.

Lao Zi is without doubt the most revered figure in the history of Taoism, the one who brought to men the gift of knowledge of the Tao. He has been considered as an immortal, sometimes even as an incarnation of one aspect of the Tao itself, his life has become legendary and his sayings treated as the word of Heaven. It was Zhou Long, however, who compiled his famous work and contributed to its dissemination, ensuring that the revealed wisdom of Taoism spread to all sectors of the population.

The *Dao De Jing* is both a religious and a philosophical text. Its first part focuses on the definition of the Tao, its second part concentrates on Virtue, but there is a genuine conceptual unity between the two parts. The book is rich with aphorisms and symbols, and can be interpreted in many different ways: as a manual of good government, a guide to morality, or as a revelatory text. Ever since its creation, it has been the subject of many learned commentaries by scholars and wise men.

Two other highly-respected figures in Taoism are Zhuang Zi and Lie Zi. Their eponymous works contain many valuable lessons for students and wise men alike.

The *Zhuang Zi* is a humorous work which relies on the paradoxes inherent in Taoist belief, and uses a light-hearted yet polemical style which is at once more human and more intuitive than that of the *Dao De Jing*. It is a controversial work, particularly in its treatment of Kong Fu Zi, and sets out the essentials of the quest for immortality before dealing in detail with the Perfect Beings, or immortals, which for the author represent an ideal rather than a goal.

Lie Zi was said to be a wise man, and sometimes even an immortal. His work is a collection of texts, anecdotes, jokes, popular tales and legends punctuated by commentaries and references to the wonders of nature which illustrate the transformations of the Tao.

These three works, and a few other texts and commentaries, are the basic sacred texts of Taoism. They possess great spiritual power, and it is said that when copied by the hand of a man whose soul is pure, they have the power to repel demons and awaken the wisdom of the soul.

Sacred places

According to Taoist belief, nature is renewed and perpetuated through a perpetual evolution within each individual entity. The land itself, and all natural entities, including rocks, rivers and forests, are emanations of the harmony engendered by the Tao.

Taoist holy places are those places which harbor a powerful concentration of the chi. Mountains are particularly revered, both as deities in their own right, and as places where the world of gods meets the world of men. They are known as the dwelling-places of the immortals, and contain all the plants and minerals needed to make the pill of immortality, and they are worshipped accordingly. The Five Sacred Mountains of Taoism are Huashan in the West, Huangshan in the South, Songshan in the Center, Taishan in the East and Hengshan in the North. These mountains are favored both by pilgrims and by hermits in search of unity with the Tao.

Rivers, caves and other natural phenomena are also important in the eyes of Taoists, whether as the dwelling-places of deities, altars to the glory of Heaven, or symbols of the essence of the Tao. It is common to place offerings at these locations in order to attract the good will of the forces of nature.

Gods, immortals and men

For Taoists, the gods of the Court of Heaven are beings who are infinitely closer to the Tao than mere mortals, as can be seen by their immortality and their great

powers derived from the vital forces of the universe. The gods of the Earth, such as the god of the land or the gods of the home, are seen as conscious manifestations of the Tao on Earth, less individual and distinct than the gods of Heaven. Yet all higher beings are worthy of veneration as emanations of the Tao, and prayers and gifts must be offered to them by any who would wish to attract their favor and so draw closer to the union with the Tao.

The immortals, those beings who have succeeded in attaining an eternal physical form, are not gods but share many of their characteristics, such as control over nature or the domination of a particular aspect of life. They can be seen riding on giant cranes and walking on clouds. They do not live with the gods of the Court of Heaven but have their own dwellings in the Kunlun Mountains in the West, or on the Isles of the Blessed that so many emperors have sought in vain.

There also exist a number of divine beings little-known among the people and only worshipped by learned Taoists. In that number are the Three Pure Ones, not incarnations of the Tao but personifications of its different aspects and abstract representations of its power. Their names are the Heavenly Worthy of the Primordial Beginning, the Heavenly Worthy of the Numinous Treasure, and the Heavenly Worthy of the Tao. Between them, they represent the past, the present and the future.

The mystical ways of the Tao

Under the influence of Lao Zi and the great sages of the Spring and Autumn period, the various different religious rites and practices used in the various parts of the Empire were unified around a single philosophy, the way of the Tao.

But although these magical techniques and methods were now incorporated into the Taoist faith, their many practitioners continued to perform them just as they had always been performed.

External alchemy

The achievement of immortality is one of the basic objectives of Taoism. One of the many means by which immortality can be achieved, and undoubtedly the best-known, is external alchemy or *Wai Dan*.

Originally closely linked to the art of the forge, alchemy was the means by which the first priests and sorcerers thought immortality could be obtained. These early alchemists started from the principle that in order to become immortal a man would need to possess a permanent and unchangeable physical form, and searched for

the elixir or potion that would bring that about. From that basis, the mysterious science of *Wai Dan* developed through the centuries.

Alchemists point to the existence in nature of metals and minerals which are impervious to decay, such as gold, mercury and jade, and reason that if a body can absorb these substances or an elixir derived from them, then it can take on their characteristics and become eternal. The ultimate goal of external alchemy is therefore the development of an elixir of eternal life using substances such as gold, silver, lead, cinnabar and even certain plants.

Over the centuries, alchemists have carried out many experiments, leading to many discoveries. While not reaching the heights of the pill of immortality, these discoveries have proved that this mysterious science is one means by which man can understand and manipulate the laws of the universe. For example, alchemy can be used to manufacture extremely powerful medicines and devastating poisons. It has also improved understanding of the process by which matter is transformed and so contributed to the development of new, tougher metallic compounds, and the belief that base metals can be transformed into precious metals like gold or silver.

Alchemy is practised in a laboratory known as the House of Elixirs. He who would become a master in the art of devising potions will need various tools and implements, including a clay crucible, a pestle and mortar, a fireplace, bamboo tubes and tripod vases. With these basics, the alchemist can distil, sublimate, boil and melt raw materials and transform them into an elixir of immortality.

Internal alchemy

Internal alchemy, or *Nei Dan*, is the second means by which man is reputed to attain the physical permanence that is essential for immortality. It is a science based on the principle that the body itself is a laboratory in which the elixir of immortality can be created and the body rendered unchangeable and impervious to decay.

Internal alchemy depends on the proper understanding and control of the energy within each body, the chi. Through meditation and breathing exercises, the chi can be harnessed and channeled in order to create an embryo of immortality. The practitioner of *Nei Dan* undertakes various physical exercises in order to balance his Yin and Yang and thus enable his being to attain the original purity of the Tao.

Another aspect of internal alchemy is its characterization of the male seed as a life-giving force at least as important as the chi. Sexual control is a key element of *Nei Dan*, since it is essential not to waste the seed but to retain it within the body. He who succeeds in retaining his seed and combining it with the body's own chi will create a new and perfect body within the old body, and thus be guaranteed immortality. Many books build on the belief that carnal pleasure, both given and received, is a source of health and long life, and set out the sexual positions most conducive to this means of attaining immortality.

Many of those who practise *Nei Dan* are ascetics, hermits who live far from the stresses of the world of men in order to pursue their search in peace. They eat neither meat nor grain, both thought to accelerate the escape of the life force from the body, and occasionally arrive at such an advanced state of harmony with the universe that even the elements obey them and the forces of nature anticipate their will.

Divination

More than merely a technique for reading future events, divination is a science whose practitioners can obtain and interpret signs from Heaven, ask questions of the spirits, converse with the gods and so tell the future.

The science of divination originated with the tribal rites in use before the reign of the Three August Ones, and was later formalized by the imperial priestly class, whose members acted as intermediaries between Heaven and the Emperor. Using ancient learning drawn from texts like the *Yi Jing*, or Book of Changes, these diviners modernized ancient rituals and created new ones in order better to fulfil their role as interpreters of heavenly signs.

Divination in the narrow sense involves the reading of trigrams and hexagrams whose interpretation is given in the *Yi Jing*, as well as other signs such as the cracks that appear on bones and turtle shells when thrown into the fire. Different regions rely on various different methods to divine the possible paths of destiny, including the reading of signs from nature, the hearing of breaths and winds, palmistry, and the interpretation of the stars and constellations.

Yet divination also includes an important spiritual dimension, for it is the diviner who is the only man able to communicate with the spirits and deities of the Earth, and the only one who dares to converse with the gods. A diviner will have a deep understanding of Taoist theology, knowing all the names, titles and domains of all of the immortals and deities. By chanting the sacred formulas and performing the sacred rites, he will be able to enter a trance permitting him to communicate with spiritual and divine beings, to ask them questions, to address prayers to them, or to ask for their blessing. Among all Taoists, the diviners are those most appropriate to officiate at a funeral or to perform the appropriate rite for the renewal of the pact between a god of the land and a village under his protection. It is rumored that the most powerful diviners can call forth and command the manifold beings of the world of spirits.

The final key dimension of divination is *feng shui*, the science devoted to the achievement of harmony between the dwelling-places of the living and the dead and the flow of chi through the universe. This harmony is achieved through the correct location, orientation and design of all buildings, and their proper incorporation into the balance of the universe. The principles are applied to royal palaces, the different districts of towns, and even tombstones and cemeteries.

Feng shui was originally the preserve of the imperial priestly class, but during the Spring and Autumn period

it was incorporated into Taoism and its principles became more widely understood. Since that time, geomancers have offered their services to all. Some have become officials, providing their expertise to administrative offices in charge of great construction and land development projects, while most work in different regions of the *Zhongguo* bringing the benefits of *feng shui* to the common people.

The basic principle of *feng shui* is that harmony depends on a proper balance between the different emanations of the Tao : Yin and Yang, the chi, and the Five Elements. Each of these emanations has a real existence, in the landscape, the seasons, materials and the weather, and the geomancer can influence them, by re-orienting a building, re-designing a plot of land, indicating the correct time for the construction of a building, re-routing a path, and so on. By such means, the geomancer seeks to create an auspicious environment, one able to attract good fortune and health and to deflect damaging breaths and evil spirits. A geomancer is astronomer, landscaper, oracle and sage, and never travels without the tools of his trade, which will include a compass, a mirror, calendars, and astronomy manuals.

Because of its importance in rural and urban planning in the Warring States, *feng shui* is considered to be one of the most useful sciences, and scholars and officials alike spare it the scorn that they reserve for the many other beliefs and superstitions of the Taoist faith. Indeed, despite the fact that *feng shui* is based on the essential principles of Taoism, most people do not associate the two.

Exorcism

In choosing to become a practising Taoist, a man becomes the instrument of the Tao, responsible for preserving the balance of the world and fighting the forces of evil.

For of the many supernatural beings and creatures who roam the Earth, not all are well-disposed towards men. Demons, ghosts, and the undead are unnatural beings whose very presence in the world of men is an affront to the laws of the universe. It is the role of the exorcist to act to ensure that those laws are respected and the harmony of the universe is protected.

An exorcist is a warrior. His mission is to confront those beings who break the laws of the universe, and to neutralize them either by destroying them or returning them to the true path. He lives on the fringes of the world of men. Armed with weapons and skills, he must face countless evil creatures, study and observe their special characteristics, their strengths and weaknesses, and fight them. Whatever he learns, he must pass on to other exorcists, for the sharing of knowledge is frequently the only guarantee of survival for the *fangshi*. An exorcist is both respected and feared, as the only man able to invoke the terrible wrath of the forces of evil and bring a curse on the insolent. He is employed above all in ridding houses of ghosts, banishing malevolent spirits, and rescuing people from the possession of wicked demons.

Most exorcists travel from place to place offering their services wherever they might be needed, but others, generally older exorcists, settle down in a particular region renowned for supernatural activity in order to train disciples and commit to writing the lessons learned in their long years of experience.

Gods and other heavenly beings

The Kingdom of Heaven is home to more than thirty-six thousand gods and spirits, all of whom serve the Emperor of Jade and through him, the harmony and order of the universe.

A distinction is drawn between the gods of the Court of Heaven, being the ministers and high servants of the God of Heaven, and lesser gods such as the Dragon-Gods, the Guardians of the Corners of the Universe, and the Five Poisons, who have a more minor role in the running of the universe.

The gods of the Court of Heaven

These most powerful gods have all existed since the beginning of creation, although some are mortals who were elevated to divine rank after their death. Each has great powers and reigns over an important domain, assisting the Emperor of Jade in organizing the laws of the universe.

In this way, the Court of Heaven is a reflection of the Court of the Emperor on Earth, with gods playing the roles of ministers, officials and advisers.

Chang-E

Goddess of the Moon and of lovers, Chang-E holds the recipe for the elixir of immortality, which she prepares on the face of the moon in the company of her court of rabbits. She is the wife of Yi, the Divine Archer.

Er Lang

Nephew of the Emperor of Jade, Er Lang is the enemy of demons and evil spirits, whom he fights with his powerful magic and his seventy-two disguises.

Lei Gong

God of Thunder, with blue skin and the head of a bird, Lei Gong travels on a chariot drawn by six children. His mighty hammer creates the rumble of thunder.

Nezha

Nezha is a warrior god who slays demons with various magical weapons, including the Rings of Heaven. He is sometimes worshipped as the God of Chance.

Tian Mu

Tian Mu is Goddess of Lightning and wife of Lei Gong. She creates lightning by means of a magical mirror.

Tsai Chen

God of Wealth and Treasurer of Heaven, Tsai Chen is a magnificent being with exquisite robes, riding a black tiger and holding an iron wand.

Wen Chang

God of Literature and of Books, Wen Chang is scribe and personal assistant to the Emperor of Jade. He can predict the future and is master of the magic art of transformation.

Xi Wangmu

The Goddess of Immortality, Xi Wangmu, reigns over the Mountains of Kunlun and guards the Sacred Peaches which contain the gift of immortality. She is also Queen Mother of the West.

Yu Huang Shang Di

The Court of Heaven is presided over by the God of Heaven and August Emperor of Jade. It is by his will that the Mandate of Heaven is granted to mortal dynasties, and taken from them. He is the very incarnation of order and harmony in the universe.

Zhu Rong

The God of Fire, Zhu Rong, is responsible for enforcing the laws of Heaven and punishing those who offend against them. He is also seen as the god of justice and vengeance.

The Three Gods of Happiness

These minor deities are nonetheless greatly revered by the inhabitants of the *Zhongguo*, as they are said to be capable of bringing happiness to all those who pay fitting homage to them. They are Fu Xing, god of chance, Lu Xing, god of plenty, and Shu Xing, god of long life.

The Four Dragon-Gods

The four Dragon-Gods are the gods of water, in all its forms : rivers, lakes, rain and the seas. They reign over the four oceans of the world.

Their names are Ao Chin (King of the Southern Ocean), Ao Jun (King of the Western Ocean), Ao Shun (King of the Northern Ocean) and Ao Kuang (King of the Eastern Ocean). The peoples of the *Zhongguo* offer up prayers to them to ward off drought and sailors honor them with gifts before setting sail.

Chang-E



The Five Sacred Animals, Guardians of the Corners of Heaven

The Emperor of Jade has entrusted the protection of the edges of the universe to five deities, each associated with a direction, and also with a season, a color, and an element, according to the principles of the ancient art of *feng shui*.

The Black Turtle known as Gui Xian symbolizes Water and protects the North.

To the South stands Feng Huang, the Red Bird associated with Fire and also known as the Phoenix.

To the East, the Green Dragon of the East is named Long Wang and symbolizes Wood.

In the West, the White Tiger Bai Hu stands with all the strength of Metal.

Finally, the Yellow Kirin which rules the Earth is responsible for protecting the Center, and thus the whole of the *Zhongguo*.



Yu Huang Shang Di

The Five Poisons

These deities do not dwell in Heaven, and few men worship them. Their areas of influence are diseases, epidemics and poisons, and in consequence, the only men who venerate them are physicians and assassins, and then for quite different reasons. Otherwise, the Five Poisons are rarely invoked, except during the Feast of the Double Five, when offerings are made to them so that they might protect the *Zhongguo* from epidemics during the summer.

The Five Poisons are the Lizard, the Scorpion, the Snake, the Toad and the Centipede.

Other gods

The Kingdom of Heaven is home to literally thousands and thousands of lesser gods. Some, such as Xi Shi, the goddess of perfumes, rule over a very narrow domain, and are only worshipped by specific professions or groups of people.

The heroes of old, celebrated in the mythology of the birth of the Empire, are also considered as gods. They include the Three August Ones and the Five Sovereigns, but without any doubt it is the Yellow Emperor, magician, diviner and warrior, who is best-loved and most-respected of all the gods among the people of the *Zhongguo*. Shen Nong is treated as a god of agriculture and medicine, Nü Wa has become the goddess of harmony and marriage, and the Great Yu, the god who holds back the floods, provides his protection to the great water-control schemes.

Popular religion

The Taoist faith focuses above all on the gods of Heaven, ruled over by the Emperor of Jade, and who demand respect and veneration. But the common people have little concern for the affairs of Heaven. Their devotion is more usually directed toward the innumerable gods and spirits of the Earth, whose influence on the lives of men can be more direct.

Origins

Popular religion, the worship of the gods of the home and the folk wisdom of spirits and natural phenomena, originated in the distant days when the *Zhongguo* was not yet an Empire, not even a collection of states, but a mere scattering of barely-settled tribes. In those times, men worshipped

many different spirits, and religion served to bring communities together and create a sense of shared identity. Sorcerers and shamans performed rituals to obtain the blessing of the land, the river, the forest or the rock near which the village had been built. These elements of the landscape, sacred personifications of nature, came to be treated as gods and spirits, close to men and capable of answering their prayers or visiting terrible punishments on them. It was also at this time that mortal heroes were deified and became guardian gods, protecting the people and ruling over specific areas of life, and ancestor worship became well-established.

Time passed, and gradually the many diverse beliefs and mysterious practices were drawn together into a single religion and philosophy, Taoism. That belief system explained the creation and ordering of the universe, and revealed the names of the gods of the Court of Heaven, but did not deny the popular beliefs, choosing instead to re-interpret and assimilate them. The Taoists saw no conflict between the heavenly vision of the universe and the earthly folk wisdom, seeing both elements as complementary. Just as the Court of Heaven reflected the Imperial Court, so the gods of the home mirrored the local officials, reporting to Heaven on the actions of men, so that the gods of Heaven might decide whether men are deserving of their divine protection.

This skilful syncretism gave the people of the *Zhongguo* a sense of their unique place in the universe, and permitted each man to use the Taoist system as a base on which to build his own personal system of gods and spirits, without following the heathen ways of the barbarian tribes.

The god of the land

Each village and community has its own god of the land. Be it a deified hero of old, or a tree or rock elevated to the status of spirit, the *Bendi Shen* watches over the land inhabited by those who worship it. It is responsible for the fertility of the soil, the health of the river, and for guarding its people from disasters and misfortune.

Each *Bendi Shen* will reside in either a small temple or at least an altar. It will be honored on the anniversary of important events in local history, including, in the case of a deified ancestor, the date of his death, and during the various annual festivals. For example, at New Year, the god of the land will be asked to protect the village over the coming year, and during the Autumn Feast, he will be thanked for a bounteous harvest. On such occasions offerings are made to the god of the land, and the village chief will perform the traditional rituals that maintain the link between the land, the community and the *Bendi Shen*.

The god of the town

Brother of the god of the land, the god of the town has the same quality of omnipresence that ensures

that each town has such a god. Each town and city will therefore have a temple where the local *Cheng Shen* lives and is worshipped.

Initially, the role of the god of the town was to watch over the walls and moats of the town and prevent demons from entering. But little by little his role grew, and eventually he came to occupy every street and avenue, every square and public building.

As a result, the *Cheng Shen* protects the town not only from its enemies but also from natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes. He is worshipped both by Taoists and by local officials responsible for the running of the town, and when rumors of invasion spread, offerings are made to him.

Each district also possesses a guardian deity, known as the *Tu Di*, or the god of the neighborhood. The various *Tu Di* of a particular town answer to the local *Cheng Shen*.

The gods of the home

The gods of the home have two roles : to protect the family, but also to assess its conduct and report it to Heaven in order that Heaven can decide whether its actions are in accordance with the laws of Heaven.

The *Men Shen*, god of the door, wards off demons and evil spirits and blocks their entry to the house.

The *Zao Jun* is god of the hearth, and lives either in the chimney or in the oven. Each New Year, it is his duty to report to Heaven on the actions of the family with which he lives. He accordingly receives vast quantities of offerings at this time.

There are many other gods of the home, lowly spirits with whom people have learnt to live, and whom people have learnt to treat with the proper respect, by giving prayers and offerings for a happy life free from harm. Notable among these gods is Chang Mu, goddess of the bedchamber, who ensures the smooth running of everything that takes place in her domain, from sleep, to sexual relations, to births.

Gods of professions and work

There is not a single craft or profession that does not have its own god. The gods of professions are typically heroes of old, or legendary craftsmen whose defining influence on their line of work turned them gradually from exemplary mortals to guardian gods. Each workshop, store and factory will have an altar, where workers and craftsmen pray to their own god for prosperity.

Examples of such gods include Chang Fei, god of butchers, Lei Tsu, god of inn-keepers, and Pan Chin Lien, goddess of prostitutes.



Feng Du

In the underworld of the Ten Hells, also known as the Yellow Source, all the souls of the deceased are judged, and either immediately reincarnated or punished for their sins.

The Ten Hells are ruled over by ten kings, to whom the Emperor of Jade has entrusted the smooth running of the kingdom of the dead.

The arrival of the soul

On death, the soul of the deceased is drawn towards a vast and shadowy mountain located at the other end of the world. Deep within this mountain lies *Feng Du*, where the soul must be judged.

The soul is welcomed by a demon, who checks its identity against the appropriate entry in a large book. This is the only administrative formality : after this, the soul is sent to the first of the Ten Hells.

The House of Mirrors

The first Hell is ruled over by Qin Guang Wang, who has the first opportunity to judge a soul recently arrived in *Feng Du*. In this Hell the soul is placed before the Mirror of Retribution where every detail of its past life appears, and its every sin and evil thought is revealed to all.

When presented with a soul that is virtuous and pure, the mirror will stay opaque. If this happens, the soul will be released and will take the Golden Bridge that leads to the Paradise of the West. But the vast majority of souls must first purge their sins in the other Hells of *Feng Du*...

The Bath of Filth and the Hell of Ice

This Hell is ruled over by King Qu Jiang Wang.

In this Hell, the souls of the depraved and perverted are immersed in a bath of stinking excrement, while the souls of evil doctors, dishonest arrangers of marriages, and kidnappers are plunged into a lake of freezing water before being imprisoned in blocks of ice.

The Upturned Prison

The king of the Upturned Prison, Song Di Wang, punishes drug abusers, escaped convicts, blasphemers and murderers by hanging them upside down from their feet, breaking their knees and flaying them, before demons tear out their eyes.

It is also here that the desecrators of tombs are punished by being flame-grilled over a thick copper grill.

The Torturer Bees and the Lake of Blood

In the Hell of King Wu Guan Wang, the souls of crooks, swindlers and cheats are devoured by swarms of bees before being hurled into a lake of dark blood. Demons beat them mercilessly with hammers and maces, until the souls are reduced to a bloody and formless pulp.

The Sixteen Portions of the Screaming Heart

This Hell is ruled over by the God of Death Yen Lo

Wang. Each sinner is held here and forced to watch as the consequences of his sins are visited on his loved ones who are still alive. Following this terrible vision, the sinner is punished still further, as his heart is torn out by cackling demons.

The Hell of Wailing and Suffering

Those who allowed their souls to be consumed by lust and committed sins of the flesh are cast into the Hell of Wailing and Suffering, where King Bian Chang Wang administers the ultimate punishment, and their most private parts are devoured by rats.

Meanwhile, liars, tell-tales, slanderers and fantasists suffer the punishment of the Iron Spike, which is driven firmly through their mouths.

In his role as head of the Office of Administrative Errors, Bian Chang Wang is also responsible for redirecting souls which have arrived in Hell by mistake.

The Hell of Grinding Flesh

King Tai Shan Wang rules over the Hell reserved for traitors, arsonists, terrorists and slave dealers. Those who fall into his hands are driven into a giant meatgrinder that reduces each one to a bloody mass of torn flesh.

The Hell of Suffocation

Those who have wronged the gods, or refused to obey their laws, are cast into the Hell of Du Shi Wang, where their lungs are filled with an acrid, scorching smoke that starves them of air and asphyxiates them.

The Net of Piercing Steel

Only the most terrible criminals of History, those whose sins are so grave that no act of penitence could ever hope to purge them, are sent to the Hell of King Ping Deng Wang, where their souls are held prisoner for eternity, trapped in a net of jagged steel.

These souls are condemned to languish forever in *Feng Du*. One of the souls trapped in the Net of Piercing Steel is Gonggong, whose every limb is impaled on a rusty spike and whose mouth is sewn shut with a fine steel thread. But gradually, the grip of his prison begins to loosen, and Gonggong knows that somewhere on Earth there is a body through which he can return once again to sow chaos in the world of men.

The Wheel of Reincarnation

The final Hell of *Feng Du* is the destination for souls that have served their time in the kingdom of the dead and whose sins have been forgiven. Its King Zhuang Lun Wang judges each soul one last time before deciding how it will be reincarnated.

After this decision has been made, the soul must consume the Tea of Amnesia prepared by the goddess Meng Po, in order to forget both its previous life and the countless tortures of Hell, and so begin its new life clean of all memory, all experience and all sin.

In this way, each soul is given the chance of a new life, a chance to remain pure and to find Paradise. But in most cases, the soul will soon allow itself to fall back into sin.



Living in the Warring States

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Those adventurous souls who take on the challenge of Qin will find every sort of adventure as they criss-cross the *Zhongguo*, discovering exotic lands and facing unprecedented challenges. While they live out their destinies as heroes, they will have recourse to all manner of arms and armor, and have occasion to purchase and use a wide range of everyday objects.

Equipment

Below is a list of all the standard equipment (including weapons and armor) that the characters may obtain in the game.

The price of each item is given as a number of coins needed to purchase it, assuming that all the currencies of the various states have the same value.

Weapons

In as perilous an environment as that of the Warring States, a character's most loyal and valuable companion will often be his weapon.

While common assassins see their weapons as nothing more than the tools of their trade, the knights of the world of martial arts will show deep respect and devotion to their noble blades.

- A weapon's **damage** value is the figure to be added to a character's Metal value to calculate the damage inflicted by a blow.

- A weapon's **resilience** represents its toughness and resistance to attempts to break it, by the Trap Technique or the Tao of the Destructive Breath, for example.

On the legality of weapons

In most of the Warring States, the law accepts that the people have a right to bear arms. In such a dangerous world, many feel the need to carry a sword or dagger for self-defense. In addition, many of those who work as security guards or as convoy escorts will carry a weapon in the line of their duties.

But the right to bear arms has its limits. Civilians are prohibited from owning or using armor, or any weapon traditionally associated with the military, such as a crossbow. Any civilian caught in possession of such military equipment risks arrest and summary conviction. However, some say that it is still possible to find such equipment on the black market, in the poorer neighborhoods of the towns of the *Zhongguo*.

A more extreme rule applies in Qin : in the Legalist state, all civilians are prohibited from possessing any weapons, on pain of death.

Bangshu Skill

Bang

The combat stick or *bang* is generally made of wood and is anywhere between five feet and six feet long. It is popular among travelers, as it serves both as a walking-stick and as

an instrument of defense. Its length and the possibility of striking with both ends makes it a very useful weapon.

Damage : 2 Resilience : 7

Xiao bang

The short combat stick usually measures between two and three feet. It can be used on its own, as a club, or in pairs. Thanks to its small size, it is easy to carry and conceal.

Damage : 1 Resilience : 5

Chinshu Skill

Ba chui

This weapon closely resembles the basic mace or *chui*, but its five-foot handle makes it a fearsome weapon in distance combat. In the right hands, its combination of range and power is deadly.

Damage : 3 Resilience : 9

Chui

The mace is made up of a heavy cylinder of metal stuck onto a two-foot handle. It is used to shock opponents, but few have the strength to wield it. Some mighty warriors fight with one *chui* in each hand.

Damage : 2 Resilience : 7

Daoshu Skill

Bishou

The *bishou* dagger is a subtle yet deadly weapon, usable both in close combat and distance combat. Its popularity among outlaws and assassins in the rougher neighborhoods of the towns has earned it a reputation as a dishonorable weapon.

Damage : 1 Resilience : 5

Lurong

The short sword or *lurong* has a straight blade with one sharp edge which curves backwards. Its hilt enables it to be wielded with ease and rapidity. It is usually used in pairs, and mainly by the female adventurers of the *jiang hu*.

Damage : 2 Resilience : 7

Qianshu Skill

Jian

The sword, or *jian*, has a straight and flexible blade, with two sharp edges. It is light and easy to use, since either of its edges, and indeed its point, can be used in combat. It is considered a noble weapon, and thus frequently carried by scholars who study martial arts and by officers.

Damage : 3 Resilience : 9

Dao

The saber, or *dao*, has a thick curved blade with one sharp edge used for attack. It is heavier than a sword. Originally used only by the Xiongnu barbarians, it was popularized by the riders of Zhao.

Damage : 3 Resilience : 11

Qiangshu Skill

Ji

The lance, or *ji*, has a long handle with one or two blades running alongside it, whose edges are used to strike opponents.

Damage : 3 Resilience : 9

Fu

The halberd, or *fu*, is made of a curved, single-edged blade fixed to a pole over five feet long. Opponents are struck with the edge of the blade. It is mainly used by soldiers on horseback and lancers on war chariots.

Damage : 4 Resilience : 9

Qiang

The spear, or *qiang*, is a six-foot pole topped with a sharp metal spike. It is extremely common, used mainly in the military, but also by certain knights of the *jiang hu*.

Damage : 3 Resilience : 9

Yue

The axe, or *yue*, is another weapon requiring the use of both hands, being an axehead mounted on a six-foot handle with a sharp point.

Damage : 4 Resilience : 9

Gongshu Skill

Gong

The *gong* is the traditional longbow, used both in hunting and in war. It is an everyday item in all states of the *Zhongguo*.

Damage : 3	Resilience : 7		
Range	C	M	L
	25	50	75
			100

Xiao Gong

A shorter version of the *gong*, this weapon is mainly used over shorter distances and in cramped conditions where the longbow cannot be used.

Damage : 2	Resilience : 5		
Range	C	M	L
	10	25	40
			60

Nushu Skill

Nu

The crossbow, or *nu*, is a complex machine involving a small, high-tension bow attached to a wooden cross. It is a fearsome and utterly deadly weapon, but reloading can be tricky and time-consuming. Use of the crossbow is strictly regulated : only soldiers are permitted to possess and use one.

Damage : 5	Resilience : 9		
Range	C	M	L
	30	75	125
			200

Distance combat weapons

	Damage	C	Range M	L	E	Resilience	Price
Gongshu							
Gong	3	25	50	75	100	7	35
Xiao Gong	2	10	25	40	60	5	20
Arrows, ten							5
Nushu							
Nu	5	30	75	125	200	9	700
Rounds, ten							15
Throwing							
Bishou	1	5	10	15	20	5	15
Lurong	2	6	12	18	25	7	40

Close combat weapons

	Damage	Resilience	Price
Bangshu			
Bang	2	7	9
Xiao bang	1	5	6
Chuishu			
Ba chui	3	9	35
Chui	2	7	25
Daoshu			
Bishou	1	5	15
Lurong	2	7	40
Jianshu			
Jian	3	9	100
Dao	3	11	120
Qiangshu			
Ji	3	9	50
Fu	4	9	70
Qiang	3	9	60
Yue	4	9	65

Small Shield

The small shield is generally round and made either of wicker or of wood. It is rarely used outside light infantry units.

Damage : 1 Resilience : 9

Special : Whenever a character attempts an Active Defense using a shield and *Dunshu* Skill, he obtains a bonus of +1 on his Test.

Shields	Damage	Resilience	Price
Dunshu			
Large shield	N/A	13	80
Small shield	1	9	45

Armor

Due to the strict legal position, armor is most common among professional soldiers of the state armies, but it is not unknown for characters to wear various types of armor over the course of their adventures.

Shields (Dunshu Skill)

Shields are rarely used in the everyday brawls and combats of the world of the Warring States, although some warriors make them their specialty.

It is generally only professional soldiers and armed police that use a shield.

Large Shield

The large shield is as long and broad as a man, and made of wood reinforced with bronze. It is only used in infantry divisions as protection against enemy archers. It is simply too heavy and cumbersome to be used for anything else.

Damage : N/A Resilience : 13

Special : The large shield is used to protect the user against missiles. It creates an obstacle which gives the user almost complete protection, increasing the attacker's ST by +3. But while carrying the shield, the user's capacity for movement is halved and he cannot attempt any other action since he needs both his hands to lift it.

- An armor's **protection** value represents the degree to which it reduces the force of a blow, and therefore the number of damage points to be subtracted from the damage caused by a blow.

- An armor's **Resilience** value represents the armor's resistance to an attempt to break it (eg. by using the Tao of the Destructive Breath).

- The **movement penalty** is the increase to be applied to the ST of any actions undertaken by a character which require considerable freedom of movement (eg. combat, dodging, climbing, swimming, and acrobatics). This penalty is equal to the difference between the armor's protection value and the character's Metal value. So for example, a character whose Metal value is 3 wearing full leather armor (protection 4) will have a movement penalty of 1.

Thick clothing

Wearing several layers of thick clothing (at least a *chang pao* covered by a thick overcoat) may in itself slightly reduce the impact of a blow.

Protection : 1 Resilience : N/A



Fur and wool

The heavy clothing of the barbarians of the steppes provides a rudimentary form of armor.

Protection : 2 Resilience : N/A

Leather breastplate

The basic armor of a state soldier is a thick leather breastplate, which protects only the front of the body and thus encourages the soldier always to advance, and never to expose his back by attempting to flee.

Protection : 3 Resilience : 9

Full leather armor

Officers and mounted soldiers wear a full armor of thick leather, sometimes with some bronze reinforcement. It covers the whole of the torso, and sometimes even the arms and legs.

Protection : 4 Resilience : 11

Reinforced leather armor

This armor is reinforced by thick bronze plates, ensuring its user the best protection available. It is the preserve of the highest-ranking generals.

Protection : 5 Resilience : 13

Everyday objects

Crockery

Everyday crockery is made up of ceramic plates, bowls and cups. The rich may use metal crockery, the poor may have to use wood. Everyone eats with chopsticks but knives and spoons also exist.

Crockery and kitchen equipment

	Price		Price
Plate	1	Cauldron	4
Metal cup	10	Knife	3
Dish	2	Bow	11
Wooden cup	2	Cleaver	5
Pan	2	Ceramic cup	10
Spoon	2	Pair of chopsticks	1

Clothing

The classic garment of the Warring States is the *chang pao*. But the wardrobe of a citizen of one of the states will contain much more.

Armor	Protection	Resilience	Price
Thick clothing	1	N/A	N/A
Fur and wool	2	N/A	N/A
Leather breastplate	3	9	100
Full leather armor	4	11	500
Reinforced leather armor	5	13	1000

Items of clothing

	Price (low / average / high quality)	
Chang pao	8 / 18 / 60 or more	
Dress	4 / 10 / 25 or more	
Overcoat	7 / 16 / 45 or more	
Belt	3 / 7 / 15 or more	
Cloak	4 / 10 / 25 or more	
Boots	5 / 12 / 30 or more	
Sandals	1 / 5 / 15 or more	
Kerchief	2 / 8 / 20 or more	
Underclothes	4 / 10 / 25 or more	
Tunic	3 / 9 / 20 or more	

Fabric and material

	Price		
Hemp, per yard	3	Wool curtain	32
Hemp mattress	12	Cotton, per yard	12
Wool, per yard	9	Silk curtain	100
Woolen mattress	32	Cushion	14
Silk, per yard	28	Cotton curtain	75
Cotton mattress	50	Linen sheet	10
Linen, per yard	4	Small rug	25
Hemp curtain	5	Silk sheet	60
Leather, per yard	16	Large rug	80
		Cotton sheet	45

Accessories

Besides his clothes, a person often needs various practical and decorative accessories to wear about his person.

Accessories

	Price		
Purse	3	Umbrella / parasol	3 to 40
Wicker bag	2	Basket	2
		Fan	2 to 30

Jewelry

Hairpins, bracelets, trinkets and jewels are used by young ladies to complement and enhance their natural beauty and attract the attention of men.

Jewelry

	Price		
PriceHairpin	1 to 1000	Tiara	20 to 1500
Bracelet	2 to 1500	Necklace	2 to 3000
		Pendant	2 to 2000

Musical instruments

Just as a true craftsman never travels without his tools, so a true artist is never separated from his instrument of choice.

Musical instruments

	Price		
Bronze bell	15	Zither	20
Drum	7	Flute	5
Set of chimes	10	Lute	25
		Ocarina	5

Writing equipment

Many scholars will carry with them an inkwell, several brushes and a few sheets of bamboo or rolls of silk.

Writing equipment

	Price		
Inkwell	6	Brushes	4
Bamboo sheet	2	Roll of silk	20

Games

Late in the evening, after a hard day's adventuring, the characters may like to relax with a friendly game or two. Or they might fancy their chances at winning their fortune at a game of bones.

Games and toys

	Price		
Go board	6	Kite	3
Ball	2	Dominoes	3
Chess pieces	7	Doll	5 to 100
Toy figure	1	Bones	1
Dice	1	Jump rope	1
		Spinning top	2

Travel accessories

In dealing with the many challenges faced in unfamiliar lands, the traveler will find use for all manner of equipment and gadgets.

Travel accessories

	Price		
One-man tent	15	Gourd	2
Lantern	4	Small bag	2
Two to four-man tent	45	Rope, ten yards	3
Fire-lighting stone	2	Large bag	5

Medical equipment

Not only professional physicians but also occasional healers and well-prepared travelers carry some basic medical supplies.

Medical equipment

	Price		
First aid kit	75	Bandages	10
Medicines	5 to 100	Ointments	5 to 100

Animals

From sheep dogs to cart-horses, animals are a key part of everyday life and work in the Warring States. They are sold in markets across the seven states, and their value depends on their training and abilities.

Animals

	Price		
Horse	350	Bull	250
Hawk	50	Fighting dog	100
Cart-horse	150	Duck	5
Eagle	75	Pedigree dog	100 to 1000
Thoroughbred	400 to 5000	Chicken	3
Bullock	100	Cat	5
Guard dog	20	Pig	40
Cow	120	Pedigree cat	50 to 10000
Hunting dog	50	Sheep	60

Real estate and furniture

Whether to set oneself up for a few days, or settle down for a few years, everyone needs somewhere to call home.

Lodging

	Price
Room for rent	1 per week
Room to buy	100 to 200
Apartment for rent	5 per week
Apartment to buy	500 to 1000
House	700 to 3000
Farm	1500 to 5000
Manor	2500 to 10000
Palace	150000 to 500000

Furniture

	Price		
Tin bath	60	Chair	6
Large chest	55	Screen	20
Bathtub	85	Bench	16
Small trunk	20	Rack	40
Barrel	3	Single bed	35
Large trunk	35	Small table	10
Brazier	15	Double bed	65
Unit	30	Large table	35
Armchair	35	Wardrobe	45
Chest of drawers	45	Writing desk	65
Sofa	90	Small chest	30
Set of shelves	15	Stool4	

Coins

Coins are generally made of bronze. Nearly every state makes its own, and there are four different types in use across the seven states.

- The bu, shaped like a shovel blade, used in the three Yin, namely Han, Wei and Zhao,
- The dao, shaped like a short knife, used in Qi, Yan and Zhao,
- The yibi, shaped like a kauri shell, used mainly in Chu,
- The banliang, round with a hole in the middle, the coin of Qin.

One-ounce silver ingots, known as taels, are also used as money. Each is worth 1000 coins. For the purposes of easy gaming, all these coins will be treated as having the same value and as legal tender across the *Zhongguo*.

A new character's equipment

Once a character has been created, the player and Game Master should discuss on the basis of his background which items he will have to start his adventures. A character's equipment should always fit logically with his background.

Example : Xian is a young knight with connections in the world of martial arts. Since his family were deprived of their rank and their fortune, he does not possess a great deal, but he has nonetheless a good sword and the means to keep it in good condition (a sharpening stone and some oil). He wears the traditional dress of *chang pao*, undergarments, walking boots and a conical hat, and carries the bare minimum that a traveler needs (tent, bag, firelighting stone). Since he has learnt to read and write, he has writing materials (inkwell, a brush and two bamboo sheets). But although he is skilled in Horseriding, he is too poor to own his own horse.

Services

The economies of the Warring States offer a wide range of services, from food and lodging to public scribes, and from escort and security companies to private tutors.

Inns and rooming-houses

Numerous establishments, offering all levels of comfort and security, are available to the weary traveler to rest his head for the night.

Dormitory

This basic option, popular among budget travelers and others without any choice, consists of a large room with simple mattresses.

Private room

A private room offers a degree of comfort and privacy for couples.

Suite

Larger, more prestigious inns offer whole apartments for important and wealthy individuals.

<i>Inn – nightly rates</i>	Price (low / average / high quality)
Dormitory	1 / 3 / -
Room with five beds	2 / 6 / -
Twin room	5 / 20 / 50
Single room	10 / 30 / 70
Suite	25 / 50 / 100

Restaurants and taverns

These establishments are patronized by those unable or unwilling to prepare their own food, as well as those in search of new culinary experiences or a quiet spot for a drink. They are usually well-frequented by travelers and busy workers.

Having a drink

The better taverns have a wide range of hard and soft drinks, and offer various snacks and sweets to enhance the experience.

Having a meal

A restaurant meal will contain a proper balance of meat and vegetables and feed both body and soul.

Banquets

Wealthy and noble families hire out whole establishments to celebrate weddings and birthdays with sumptuous banquets.

Food and drink

Price		Honey, per pound	6
Fruit		Vinegar, per pint	1
Apricots, half-dozen	5	Garlic, per pound	2 1/2
Plums, half-dozen	6	Onions, per pound	3
Peach	1	Vegetables and cereals	
Apples, half-dozen	2	Cabbage	1
Pear	1	Soya, per pound	1/2
Pomegranate	2	Bamboo, per pound	1
Nuts, dozen	1	Ginger, per pound	2 1/2
Chestnuts, dozen	1	Rice, per pound	1 1/2
Kaki, dozen	3	Millet, per pound	1/2
Jujubes, half-dozen	2	Barley, per pound	1
Figs, half-dozen	2	Sorghum, per pound	1
Guavas, half-dozen	2	Wheat, per pound	1/2
Citrus fruit	2	Cucumber	1
Melon	1	Spinach, per pound	1 1/2
Watermelon	2	Beans, per pound	1/2
Meat and fish		Turnip	1
Beef, per pound	10	Mushrooms, per pound	2 1/2
Chicken	10	Chilli peppers, per pound	3
Duck	15	Carrot	1
Pork, per pound	12	Drinks	
Mutton, per pound	18	Sorghum liquor, per pint	10
Dog, per pound	25	Millet liquor, per pint	7 1/2
Game, per pound	15	Barley liquor, per pint	10
Eggs, half-dozen	2	Rice liquor, per pint	15
Fish from the river	5	Fruit liquor, per pint	20
Fish from the sea	8	Tea, per pint	10
Shellfish	10	Herbal tea, per pint	7 1/2
Seafood, per pound	20	Cow's milk, per pint	5
Condiments		Goat's milk, per pint	6
Salt, per pound	4	Soy milk, per pint	4
Sugar, per pound	5		

Restaurant prices

Price		A feast	5 / 10 / 40
(low / average / high quality)		A glass of liquor	2 / 5 / 10
A basic meal	1 / 2 / 10	A bottle of liquor	10 / 20 / 40
A square meal	3 / 5 / 25	A cup of tea	1 / 3 / 7

Scribes and scholars

Knowledge, culture and professional skills are the preserve of an educated elite. But that does not mean that they cannot be bought and sold.

Public scribe

Some educated men earn their living by writing letters and filling in administrative documents for illiterate people.

Private tutor

After many years of study, the student becomes a teacher and gives individual classes in his area of expertise.

Lawyer

A lawyer uses his advanced understanding of the laws and legal procedures of a particular state to defend any who can pay his fees.

Physician

Physicians are some of the most highly-respected members of society, and have an important role not only in curing the sick but in protecting their patients from disease.

Intermediary

This unique professional is employed to assist with the negotiation of marriage contracts in order to arrive at an outcome of maximum benefit to both families. An intermediary is a sophisticated and diplomatic individual, whose key tools are his keen sense of etiquette and his voluminous address book.

	Prices
Public scribe	5
Private tutor (per lesson)	10
Lawyer	50
Physician (per consultation)	10 to 100
Intermediary	10% of the dowry

Warriors and security guards

Practitioners of the art of combat are everywhere in the Warring States. Many have grown accustomed to the clink of coins, and are happy to act as swords for hire.

Bodyguard

Many rich and important men take the wise precaution of employing a trained bodyguard.

Armed escort

Security companies provide specialized armed guards to protect merchants' wares from attacks by outlaws and highwaymen.

Contract killer

Expert assassins and desperate convicts alike are employed to eliminate people ; many take an unhealthy degree of pride in honoring their contracts.

Traveling in the Zhongguo

	<i>Prices</i>
Bodyguard (per day)	15
Armed escort (per journey)	50 to 1000
Contract killer (per contract)	500

Artists and craftsmen

Artists and craftsmen earn their living either by selling their wares or by working to specific commissions.

Artist

Painters and sculptors will sell most of their work ; in any case, most will accept commissions.

Traveling player

Dancers, musicians and actors travel either alone or in troupes, and either organize their own performances or take bookings.

Craftsmen

The blacksmith, cabinet-maker, and foundryman may sell either their handiwork or their skills.

	<i>Prices</i>
Artist (per commission)	50 to 1000
Performance	20 to 1000
Craftsman	10 to 500

Working girls

Those who prefer the company of the gentler sex need only head for the pleasure quarters of the cities of the *Zhongguo*, where expert courtesans and common prostitutes await their business.

Courtesan

Her learning and skill in the arts ensure that she is more highly prized for her company than for her other charms. But she may deign to share her bed with her most faithful and attentive clients.

Prostitute

Whether a soldier's daughter without a family to support her, or a fallen woman with no hope of marriage, the common prostitute may not have the education or refinement of the courtesan, but will be considerably cheaper.

	<i>Prices</i>
Courtesan (per night)	100 to 5000
Prostitute (per engagement)	10 to 90

Traveling is just another part of everyday life for the inhabitants of the states. A network of well-maintained roads makes many journeys easy, but there remain many unexplored and wild regions where a simple trip to the next village can turn into an epic adventure.

Means of transport

The various means of transport used in the Warring States are summarized in the table below, which indicates their speed at a normal pace and at a hurried pace.

Means of transport	Normal pace	Hurried pace
Walking	20 miles /day	40 miles /day
Horseback	40 miles /day	80 miles /day
Caravan	17 miles /day	35 miles /day
Junk	35 miles /day	70 miles /day

Adjustments

Of course the above speeds apply only in normal conditions, where the road is wide and flat and the weather is fair.

Both the nature of the terrain and prevailing weather conditions will affect how long a journey will take. The table below shows the adjustments to apply.

Conditions	Adjustment
State highway	+ 25%
Thick forest	- 30%
Hills	- 25%
Mountains	- 60%
Marshes	- 50%
Storm	- 35%
Snow	- 75%
Where appropriate, these adjustments are cumulative.	

Example : Xian wants to travel from Daliang to Linzi. He wants to avoid the Yellow River, so heads for the well-maintained roads between Wei and Qi. But he will need to pass through the mountain range which cuts through Qi. While on the roads he makes good progress, 20 miles a day without rushing. But when he reaches the mountains his speed is reduced by 60%, so he only manages 8 miles a day. The weather adds to his problems, with a storm reducing his speed by another 35%. For the duration of the storm his speed is a paltry 5.2 miles a day.

Chronology

Western dates The mythical times	Chinese dates /	Events
		Creation of the universe, settlement of Heaven and Earth
3000 to 2698 BC	/	Reign of the Three August Ones
2698 to 2597 BC	0 to 101	Reign of the Yellow Emperor
2597 to 2205 BC	101 to 493	Reign of the Sovereigns
2205 to 1765 BC	493 to 933	Xia dynasty
1765 to 1121 BC	933 to 1577	Yin dynasty
1121 to 771 BC	1577 to 1927	Western Zhou period
	0 to 350	
771 BC	1927 / 350	Barbarians sack the capital
722 BC	1976 / 399	Capital moved to the East
722 to 481 BC	1976 to 2217	Spring and Autumn period
	399 to 640	
743 BC	1955 / 378	Proclamation of the Hegemonies
685 BC	2013 / 436	Guan Zhong becomes prime minister of Qi
600 to 500 BC	2098 to 2198	Approximate dates of the lives of Lao Zi and Sun Zi
	521 to 621	
551 to 479 BC	2147 to 2219	Life of Kong Fu Zi
	570 to 642	
579 BC	2119 / 542	Peace conference between the Hegemonies
470 to 390 BC	2228 to 2308	Life of Mo Zi
	651 to 731	
584 to 333 BC	2114 to 2365	Battles between Chu and its neighbors in Wu and Yue
	537 to 788	
481 to 221 BC	2217 to 2477	Warring States period
	640 to 900	
481 BC	2217 / 640	Extermination of the Jiang by the Tian in Qi
453 BC	2245 / 668	Jin splits into three states
371 BC	2327 / 750	Zhao and Han attack Wei
360 BC	2338 / 761	Shang Yang appointed prime minister of Qin
354 BC	2344 / 767	Battle of Guiling : Wei attacks Zhao and is defeated by Qi
341 BC	2357 / 780	Battle of Maling : Wei attacks Han and is defeated by Qi
278 BC	2420 / 843	Qin captures the Chu capital Yingdu
273 BC	2425 / 848	Battle of Huayang : Qin defeats Zhao and Wei
260 BC	2438 / 861	Battle of Changping : Qin defeats Zhao
258 BC	2440 / 863	Birth of Ying Zheng
256 BC	2442 / 865	Qin annexes the remaining territory of the Zhou dynasty
251 BC	2447 / 870	An Guo ascends the throne of Qin, Zichu becomes heir
250 BC	2448 / 871	Zichu ascends the throne of Qin and appoints Lü as prime minister
Buwei		
246 BC	2452 / 875	Ying Zheng becomes king of Qin; Lü Buwei rules as regent
240 BC	2458 / 881	Beginning of Qin, the role playing game

Dates according to the calendar of the Yellow Emperor.

Dates according to the calendar of the Zhou dynasty.

Game Master only

The Bestiary

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Animals of the Zhongguo

The plains, forests, jungles and steppes of the *Zhongguo* are inhabited by many kinds of animal.

The following is a selection of the most common animals. The Game Master can use these descriptions as a starting-point to invent other species.

Eagle

Aspects : Metal 3, Water 6, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 1

Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 10

Skills : Flight 4, Claws 4, Perception 4

Breath of Life : 13 (5 / 0, 3 / 0, 2 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Special : Natural Weapon 3 (claws and beak)

Ox / Water Buffalo

Aspects : Metal 6, Water 2, Wood 1, Fire 1, Earth 1

Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 5

Skills : Hard Work 3, Charging 3

Breath of Life : 30 (10 / 0, 8 / 0, 6 / -1, 4 / -3, 2 / -5)

Special : Natural Weapon 2 (horns, unless cut)

Stag

Aspects : Metal 4, Water 4, Wood 1, Fire 2, Earth 1

Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 7

Skills : Survival (forest) 3, Dodging 2, Stealth 2, Charging 3

Breath of Life : 20 (8 / 0, 6 / 0, 3 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Special : Natural Weapon 3 (horns)

Horse

Aspects : Metal 3, Water 5, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 1

Secondary Aspects : Chi 6, Passive Defense 9

Skills : Galloping 3, Kicking 2, Dodging 3

Breath of Life : 22 (8 / 0, 6 / 0, 4 / -1, 3 / -3, 1 / -5)

Special : Natural Weapon 2 (hoof)

Workhorse

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 4, Wood 2, Fire 1, Earth 1

Secondary Aspects : Chi 6, Passive Defense 8

Skills : Galloping 2, Kicking 1, Dodging 2, Hard Work 3

Breath of Life : 20 (8 / 0, 5 / 0, 3 / -1, 3 / -3, 1 / -5)

Special : Natural Weapon 2 (hoof)

Dog / Wolf

Aspects : Metal 3, Water 3, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 1

Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 7

Skills : Survival (forest) 4, Stealth 2, Biting 3, Dodging 2, Perception 4

Breath of Life : 18 (8 / 0, 5 / 0, 2 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Special : Natural Weapon 3 (teeth and claws)

Crow

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 5, Wood 3, Fire 1, Earth 1

Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 10

Skills : Flight 4, Claws 3, Perception 2

Breath of Life : 10 (4 / 0, 2 / 0, 2 / -1, 1 / -3, 1 / -5)

Special : Natural Weapon 2 (claws and beak)

Stallion of the steppes

Aspects : Metal 4, Water 6, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 1
Secondary Aspects : Chi 6, Passive Defense 10
Skills : Galloping 5, Kicking 3, Dodging 3
Breath of Life : 25 (9 / 0, 7 / 0, 4 / -1, 3 / -3, 2 / -5)
Special : Natural Weapon 2 (hoof)

Falcon

Aspects : Metal 4, Water 6, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 1
Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 10
Skills : Flight 4, Claws 4, Perception 3
Breath of Life : 12 (5 / 0, 3 / 0, 2 / -1, 1 / -3, 1 / -5)
Special : Natural Weapon 3 (claws and beak)

Bear

Aspects : Metal 5, Water 3, Wood 1, Fire 2, Earth 2
Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 6
Skills : Survival (forest) 3, Teeth and Claws 3, Dodging 2
Breath of Life : 26 (10 / 0, 8 / 0, 4 / -1, 2 / -3, 2 / -5)
Special : Natural Weapon 4 (teeth and claws)

Small game

Aspects : Metal 1, Water 4, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 1
Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 8
Skills : Survival (appropriate environment) 3, Stealth 4, Dodging 2, Perception 1
Breath of Life : 10 (4 / 0, 2 / 0, 2 / -1, 1 / -3, 1 / -5)

Fox

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 3, Wood 3, Fire 2, Earth 2
Secondary Aspects : Chi 8, Passive Defense 8
Skills : Survival (forest) 3, Stealth 3, Biting 2, Dodging 3, Perception 4
Breath of Life : 16 (7 / 0, 4 / 0, 2 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)
Special : Natural Weapon 2 (teeth and claws)

Wild boar

Aspects : Metal 5, Water 3, Wood 2, Fire 1, Earth 1
Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 7
Skills : Survival (forest) 3, Dodging 3, Charging 3
Breath of Life : 24 (10 / 0, 7 / 0, 4 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)
Special : Natural Weapon 3 (tusks)

Boa constrictor

Aspects : Metal 3, Water 3, Wood 1, Fire 1, Earth 1
Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 6
Skills : Stealth 2, Squeezing 3, Dodging 1
Breath of Life : 15 (6 / 0, 4 / 0, 2 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Venomous snake

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 5, Wood 1, Fire 1, Earth 1
Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 9
Skills : Stealth 4, Dodging 3, Biting 3
Breath of Life : 8 (3 / 0, 2 / 0, 1 / -1, 1 / -3, 1 / -5)
Special : Venom with Virulence 5 to 11 depending on species

Monkey

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 5, Wood 3, Fire 2, Earth 1
Secondary Aspects : Chi 5, Passive Defense 10
Skills : Survival (jungle) 3, Acrobatics 4, Climbing 4,

Dodging 3, Throwing 3, Theft 1, Improvisation 2
Breath of Life : 15 (6 / 0, 4 / 0, 2 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Tiger

Aspects : Metal 5, Water 4, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 1
Secondary Aspects : Chi N/A, Passive Defense 8
Skills : Survival (jungle) 3, Teeth and Claws 4, Dodging 3, Perception 3
Breath of Life : 25 (10 / 0, 8 / 0, 4 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)
Special : Natural Weapon 3 (teeth and claws)

Supernatural creatures

The ancient legends abound with all manner of monsters, ghosts and demons. For generations, those old tales have been told around the village fire, terrifying children and adults alike.

Some of those tales are true. Evil spirits continue to haunt the darkness, terrorizing the night of man and hungry for prey.

Demons and spirits

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Emo



Some have escaped from *Feng Du*, some are depraved souls beyond all hope of redemption. Some merely spread the breath of evil and torment the fragile lives of men ; others devour mortals whole. But whatever their origins, whatever their power, all demons are creatures of infinite evil.

Demons can appear in many forms, but all share the ability to metamorphose from one form to another, so as to deceive their human victims. Their true appearance can only be revealed with a sacred mirror.

Different demons have different powers, and different levels of strength, which affects their ability to wreak evil on Earth. The weakest among them will haunt a single dwelling and torment its inhabitants, while the strongest may terrorize a whole region.

Demon Ogre

The demon ogre is a powerfully-built monster motivated solely by the joy of killing and dismembering its victims.

Aspects : Metal 4, Water 4, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 3
Secondary Aspects : Chi 15, Passive Defense 9
Skills : Chuishu 3, Qiangshu 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Intimidation 3, Survival 2

Breath of Life : 30 (15 / 0, 7 / 0, 4 / -1, 3 / -3, 1 / -5)
Powers : Natural Weapon (horns, claws, teeth) 3, Natural Armor 2, Terror 11

Lost Soul

This demon is a lost soul escaped from the Ten Hells who has regained enough strength to act in the world of the living.

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 3, Wood 4, Fire 4, Earth 3

Secondary Aspects : Chi 18, Passive Defense 8

Skills : Eloquence 3, Intimidation 1, Learning (Hell) 2, Jianshu 2, Seduction 3

Breath of Life : 17 (6 / 0, 5 / 0, 3 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Powers : Shape-Shift (able to take on the appearance of an attractive human), Formlessness, Invisibility 3, Possession 6

Ghosts

Ghosts are souls which have either been trapped on Earth or sent back to Earth by the Kings of the Ten Hells to complete a task left undone.

Some are consumed by rage and haunt a particular location to torment the humans that dwell in it. Others try to influence the conduct of mortals and obtain their assistance in reaching Heaven. There are even some ghosts who do not know they are dead.



Fallen Woman

He stole her heart, then he stole her virtue. There was nothing left for her but to take her own life. But even the grave did not give her rest and ever since that day, she avenges her short and tragic life by drawing men to her and stealing their life force.

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 3, Wood 3, Fire 5, Earth 3

Secondary Aspects : Chi 0 (ghosts do not have Chi), Passive Defense 8

Skills : Seduction 3, Eloquence 3, Doashu 2, Empathy 2, Literature 1

Breath of Life : 15 / 0 (ghosts do not feel pain)

Powers : Formlessness, Invisibility 3, Vampirism 2, Natural Weapon (hair) 2

Unknown Soldier

One of the many thousands that fell in battle and whose body were never properly returned to the Earth. Deprived of an eternal resting-place, the soul of the Unknown Soldier hides his anguish by terrorizing every mortal he meets.

Aspects : Metal 4, Water 3, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 2

Secondary Aspects : Chi 0 (ghosts do not have Chi), Passive Defense 8

Skills : Jianshu 3, Qiangshu 2, Intimidation 2, Heraldry 2, Dodging 1

Breath of Life : 20 / 0 (ghosts do not feel pain)

Powers : Formlessness, Terror 9, Possession 5

Jiang shi

The *jiang shi* are the most fearsome of all undead. Sometimes, when a person dies, the *Po* soul does not dissolve into the ground, but retains possession of the body, transforming it into a terrible zombie fired only by an insatiable hunger for human flesh. The bodily shell of a *jiang shi* is extremely strong and tough, but its stiffness means it can only move by jumping. And for fear that the sun will decay their bodies, the undead only hunt by night.

A *jiang shi* is blind, and locates prey by sensing the direction of its breath. A character can avoid being attacked by holding his breath. The bite of a *jiang shi* transmits the poison of the undead into the victim, and in the absence of appropriate treatment (usually a Taoist ritual), the poison will gradually capture his body and transform him into an undead. Some evil *fangshi* misuse their sacred skills by injecting the *Po* soul into dead bodies in order to create their own *jiang shi* and control them for their own unspeakable ends.

Average jiang shi

Aspects : Metal 5, Water 2, Wood 1, Fire 1, Earth 3

Secondary Aspects : Chi 0 (the undead do not have Chi), Passive Defense 7

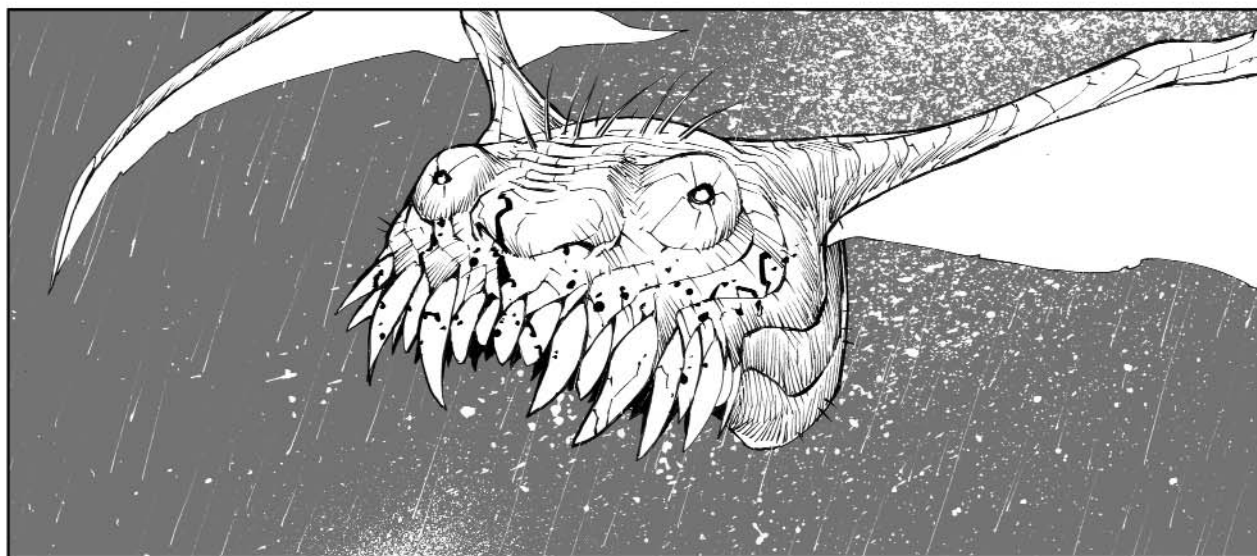
Skills : Scratching or Biting 4, Dodging 2

Breath of Life : 50 / 0 (the undead do not feel pain)

Powers : Natural Weapon (claws) 3, Natural Armor 4, Terror 9

Special : *Jiang shi* are blind, and sense life only through their perception of breath. The only way to avoid attracting their attention is therefore to hold one's breath. A character bitten by a *jiang shi* will himself become undead after a number of days equal to his Earth value, unless he is healed by a Taoist ritual.





Taotie

The *taotie* are former servants of Chiyou, the ancient god of war and rival of the Yellow Emperor. During the final duel between the two great warriors, Huang Di removed his enemy's head, slicing it clean through at the jaw.

The *taotie* had taken a solemn oath to follow their master wherever he would lead them, and their loyalty brought nearly all of them the same fate. The punishment of the gods was to destroy their bodies, leaving them only as flying heads, with no jaw, and with great ears like bats' wings. Some escaped that punishment, and kept their bodies. Centuries later, they have become human-like beings whose fangs and claws drip with bitter poison.

Whichever form they take, these demons are desperate yet cunning: tormented by their constant need to kill and maim any humans they meet, yet shrewd in their hunting and combat strategies. They are to be avoided at all costs.

Most of the inhabitants of the Warring States are blissfully ignorant of the bloody origins of the *taotie*, and see them as no more than ornamental gargoyles, part of the elaborate bronzework adorning the dwellings of the old dynasties. It is only learned exorcists who know the terrible truth.

Flying Head

Aspects : Metal 3, Water 4, Wood 2, Fire 1, Earth 3
Secondary Aspects : Chi 10, Passive Defense 9
Skills : Biting 3, Dodging 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2
Breath of Life : 12 (6 / 0, 3 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)
Powers : Natural Weapon (teeth) 3, Terror 11

Full-body Taotie

Aspects : Metal 3, Water 3, Wood 2, Fire 1, Earth 3
Secondary Aspects : Chi 13, Passive Defense 8

Skills : Scratching and Biting 3, Dodging 3, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Breath of Life : 20 (8 / 0, 6 / 0, 3 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Powers : Natural Weapon (teeth and claws) 3, Terror 9

Suishou

Many evil spirits lack the unearthly power necessary to possess human beings. Such spirits choose to inhabit simpler beasts in order to satisfy their evil longing for terror and human flesh. Beasts possessed by evil spirits are known as *suishou*, and through the malevolent workings of their spirit masters they acquire physical strength and mystical power out of all proportion with their original characteristics.

Wolf suishou

Aspects : Metal 3, Water 4, Wood 3, Fire 1, Earth 2

Secondary Aspects : Chi 10, Passive Defense 9

Skills : Biting and Scratching 3, Dodging 2, Stealth 3, Survival 4

Breath of Life : 18 (7 / 0, 5 / 0, 3 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Powers : Natural Weapon (teeth and claws) 3, Natural Armor (fur) 2

Horse suishou

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 5, Wood 2, Fire 2, Earth 3

Secondary Aspects : Chi 12, Passive Defense 9

Skills : Galloping 4, Dodging 3, Trampling 3

Breath of Life : 30 (12 / 0, 8 / 0, 5 / -1, 3 / -3, 2 / -5)

Powers : Natural Weapon (hooves) 3

Yao

According to legend, if any being remains in the light of the stars for ten thousand years, it attains all the

wisdom of man. *Yao* are animals who have reached this stage of development and can therefore take on human form at will. They are more mischievous than evil, and enjoy playing tricks on humans more than causing them real harm. Many of the old tales involve such creatures falling in love with and marrying humans.

The animals most likely to become *yao* are foxes, monkeys and snakes, but it has also been known for spiders and crows to attain this stage.

Fox Yao

Aspects : Metal 2, Water 3, Wood 3, Fire 4, Earth 3

Secondary Aspects : Chi 20, Passive Defense 8

Skills : Herbalism 2, Eloquence 3, Legends 2, Dodging 2, Stealth 2, Survival 3

Breath of Life : 20 (8 / 0, 6 / 0, 3 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Powers : Natural Weapon (claws) 2, Shape-Shift (the *yao* can shift between fox form and human form at will)

Snake yao

Aspects : Metal 3, Water 3, Wood 2, Fire 4, Earth 3

Secondary Aspects : Chi 18, Passive Defense 8

Skills : Medicine 2, Seduction 3, Empathy 2, Jianshu 2, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Breath of Life : 22 (9 / 0, 6 / 0, 4 / -1, 2 / -3, 1 / -5)

Powers : Natural Weapon (teeth) 2, Natural Armor (scales) 1, Shape-Shift (the *yao* can shift between snake form and human form at will)

Powers

The various supernatural creatures which haunt the Warring States have a number of special abilities which set them apart from mortal men.

Natural Weapons

Creatures such as demons, *yao* and the undead possess natural weapons which can inflict deadly wounds. Such weapons include not just horns, claws, teeth and other sharp protrusions, but also breath of acid, fire and scalding vapors.

Where the creature uses teeth, claws or horns in close combat, the damage caused by the Natural Weapon is added to the normal damage inflicted in the attack. Where the creature breathes fire, spits acid, or uses something of that kind, damage is calculated in the normal way.

Natural Armor

Many creatures are protected from physical attack by some form of natural armor, be it superhuman muscle bulk, a shell from the world beyond, or a semi-intangible physical form.

Any protection provided by Natural Armor is subtracted from any damage inflicted on the creature.

Invulnerability

Certain more advanced creatures are simply impervious to whatever blows mortal men might land on them. They can only be injured with the aid of specific Exorcism techniques and legendary weapons.

However, not all "invulnerable" creatures are necessarily protected from all attacks ; in some cases, it is specified in the description which types of attack can harm them.

Terror

Some monsters are so terrifying by their physical presence and spiritual aura that they can paralyze humans with fear.



A creature's Terror value is the ST of the Resistance Test that a character must succeed in order to act normally in the presence of the creature. If the character fails, the difference between his result and the Terror value becomes a penalty on all his actions while confronted with the creature.



Shape-Shift

The ability to shift between different physical forms allows creatures like the *yao* to change into an animal or human form, or to take on a false identity.

Usually a creature can only take on the specific forms listed in the description.

Formlessness

Some creatures, mainly ghosts, have the uncanny ability to transcend their bodily form and make their body indeterminate and intangible. This enables them to move freely and escape the blows of attackers.

A creature using the power of Formlessness does not feel any normal blows to his body, since they pass through his shadowy form. He can only be struck by certain magical weapons or with the aid of certain Exorcist techniques. The creature can also pass through physical obstacles such as walls, unless those obstacles have been granted magical protection.

Invisibility

The ability to disappear is widespread among ghosts, and not unknown among demons.

An invisible creature cannot be seen with the naked eye, but its presence can still be detected by sound or smell. The creature's Invisibility value becomes a penalty for any characters attempting to locate it or act against it; in combat, it should be added to the creature's Passive Defense score.

Possession

Those supernatural creatures who are frustrated with the limits of their physical form may be able to possess the body of a mortal human and use it to act in the world of the living.

A creature attempts to possess a character by performing an Opposition Test between its Possession value and its target's Resistance (Metal + Earth). If the creature wins, it overcomes the will of its victim and can act through his body. It uses the victim's Metal, Water and Fire values, but continues to use its own Wood and Earth values. It has all the normal abilities of its victim, including Gifts, Weaknesses, Skills, and Taos. The Opposition Test must be repeated once a day, and when the victim finally wins a Test, he expels the creature from his body and cannot be possessed by that creature for a whole year.

Vampirism

Some creatures have the capacity to steal the life force of their victims, sucking the life out of them to feed their own hunger, and slowly but surely killing their prey.

A creature's Vampirism value is the number of Chi points that the creature can steal from its victim by winning an Opposition Test between its own Earth value and the victim's Resistance. This usually requires the creature to touch its victim. In combat, this action counts as an attack. A character whose Chi falls to zero after being drained by this power dies instantly.

The Powers behind the Thrones

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The Guo Long

The Guo Long are dragons, heavenly beings with the baseness of the human soul. They were born at that time in the history of the world when men decided no longer to follow the will of Heaven.

They are the power behind the thrones of the Warring States. For centuries they have been locked in a terrible struggle for the ultimate prize - complete domination of the whole of the *Zhongguo*.

Zhou Long

Many centuries ago, the decadent dynasty of the Yin was manipulated by immortals, and began a slow but inexorable decline, dragging the Empire and all its peoples toward the same fate. Heavenly forces stirred, and the world of men was the theater of a mighty struggle of gods and immortals, who clashed over whether the world should be ruled by the gods or left in the hands of men. After blood-drenched battles and unrelenting slaughter, destiny chose to favor men, and gods and immortals withdrew to their respective domains.

From his palace atop the World of Heaven, the Emperor of Jade saw that the world had evolved, that it

was time for humanity to find its own path through history. To ensure that the new Zhou Dynasty would not be made the puppet of the forces of Heaven or Hell, the wise lord of Heaven granted the new Emperor the Mandate of Heaven in the form of a dragon whose role it was to defend the independence and freedom of men.

That dragon, Zhou Long, dwelt among courtesans and servants at the imperial court. Using his many disguises, he prowled the corridors of power to guard the Emperor from the hidden influences of supernatural powers. Through omens and dreams, he guided the minds of priests, shielding them from the evil designs of those immortals who bitterly remembered their humiliating defeat. Then he eliminated those members of the Sect of Leaning Heaven who had infiltrated the court of the Emperor posing as priests or courtesans. At this, the master of all the followers of Gonggong, Cheng Huan, knowing that he could not defeat the dragon in his own domain, changed strategy and began to send his agents to influence statesmen, generals and powerful vassals throughout the Empire. In the palace of the Zhou, Zhou Long would go to his death thinking he had defeated the Sect.

But Cheng Huan's scheme would in time reap its rewards. For Zhou Long's only duty was to protect the Empire against supernatural forces, and he was convinced that he had achieved that by driving the Sect from the seat of imperial power. But he proved powerless to prevent the break-up of the Empire itself, for which the Sect was largely responsible. The sacking of the Zhou capital and the move to the East proved a serious blow to

The Seven Guo Long

the authority of the Emperor and from that day forth, the power and influence of the Zhou dynasty went into a permanent decline.

In time, the Empire was broken. Powerful vassals and princes began to rule over their lands without the merest consideration for the authority of the Emperor. For the first time in the history of the universe, men openly defied the natural order sent down from Heaven, and Zhou Long was devastated. The Dragon Protector of the Zhou lost nearly all of his strength, and his heavenly essence was scattered throughout the divided Empire. Finding himself trapped in the body of a mere mortal, a humble adviser to the Emperor, he was powerless to act, and was forced to watch the beginning of the chaotic and murderous era that would lead to the birth of the Warring States.

Zhou Long watched with horror as his "sons", the Guo Long, were born of the fusion of his essence and the boundless ambition of the Hegemons.

During the Spring and Autumn period, the Guo Long carried out various reforms to strengthen their states. At last Zhou Long chose to act. His goal was a simple one : he would arrange for the Empire to be reunited, and for men to understand that they were all one people, which was the only means to ensure a return to peace, harmony, and the glories of the Zhou dynasty. Yet since he had lost nearly all of his own power, the dragon saw that the solution could only come from men themselves. And so he began to roam the lands of the *Zhongguo*, searching for scholars and wise men, and spreading their learning and wisdom. With the sparse influence that he still held, as a lowly adviser to an Emperor whose time had past, he promoted the theories of various philosophers who advocated the ideals of peace, unity, and good government. Taking the form of a border guard named Yin Xi, it was Zhou Long himself who compiled the great text of Lao Zi and distributed it throughout the *Zhongguo*. He likewise encouraged the spread of the ideas of men such as Kong Fu Zi, Men Zi and Mo Zi, in the hope that those ideas would inspire the Hegemons to rebuild the Empire of the Zhou.

It was, however, a hopeless task. While those philosophers developed a definite following, their theories had no effect on the Guo Long. Each dragon had only one goal in mind : to conquer the other states, to devour all his brothers, and so to appropriate the whole of his father's heavenly essence for himself alone. And the chaos that reigned under their domination was greatly encouraged by the Sect of Leaning Heaven.

As his efforts met with failure after failure, Zhou Long grew ever more bitter, and spent the final years of his life wandering disconsolately through the deserted corridors of the palace of the Zhou. When the Qin armies finally conquered the last few towns under the control of the last Zhou Emperor, the dragon did not even struggle as the soldiers tore through his earthly form with their swords. His soul was devoured by Qin Long, whose already considerable power now grew to fearsome proportions...

When the base human emotions of hate, mistrust, ambition and the thirst for power were combined with a heavenly force, there came into the world the beings known as the Guo Long, the Dragon Protectors of the States.

The Guo Long were born of both Heaven and Earth. Each was linked to a particular Hegemony, whose ruler had harnessed its essence through the force of his beliefs. And so each Guo Long became patron of a state, taking its name and sharing its values. But the dragons soon realized that they were nothing more than man-made creatures, trapped between the world of men and the World of Heaven. Each saw that the only means for him to feel whole, to become completely divine, was to devour his brothers and so capture their essence.

So it was that all of the Guo Long sought to weaken the others by exploiting the power of the Hegemonies, controlling their rulers, reforming them from within and building up their military strength. Countless battles marked the beginning of a terrible but secret war between these hidden forces of darkness.

The Guo Long grew so obsessed with their quest for power that they did not even notice the renewed activity of the Sect of Leaning Heaven, whose agents plotted chaos and whose interests were perfectly served by the contagion of war between all the states and fiefs of the old Empire.

These troubled times finally came to an end when the Jin Hegemony was plunged into a civil war stirred up by the Sect of Leaning Heaven, and broke into three states. Jin Long was gripped by terrible convulsions, and his essence flowed out and formed three new Guo Long.

These events made the Guo Long more distrustful, and inspired them to act with more care. The seven dragons who ruled over the seven most powerful states of the *Zhongguo* withdrew to their lairs, occasionally urging their states to launch attacks on their neighbors, but also searching for the inner truth that would help them prepare for the final war to come.

It was during this time that Qin Long discovered the existence and the goals of the Sect of Leaning Heaven. He chose to fight against the Sect with the best means at his disposal, imposing sweeping reforms on his state and launching his plan for *Tian Xia*, the union of all the states under a single perfectly-ordered and perfectly-disciplined Empire. As the state of Qin grew in strength, and particularly when the bitter and exhausted Zhou Long was finally defeated and his essence absorbed, the power of Qin Long came to surpass that of all of the other dragons.

Ever since, Qin Long has seemed well-placed to conquer the other states and to become the one dragon that will rule over a single, reunified Empire.

The methods of the Guo Long

Qin Long

At the height of his powers, Zhou Long was a being of such godlike powers that he knew no rival on Earth. Able to take on any earthly form, and with the intelligence to access all the learning of the world, he moved effortlessly through the world of men carrying out his mission with complete discretion.

To guide the actions of mortals, he was able to bring forth signs that appeared as if omens sent directly from Heaven, and to create vivid dreams in the minds of men.

But when he lost his heavenly essence, he was reduced to a mere mortal, and the only traces that remained of his heavenly origins were his immortality and his ability to visit the minds of men in dreams.

Unlike their “father”, the Dragon of the Zhou, the Guo Long live neither in the world of men, nor that of the gods. They live somewhere between, trapped in a gloomy limbo from where they can do no more than observe the world of men, and try to alter its future, each having influence only over the state whose name it bears.

The method used most often by the dragons to manipulate their pawns on Earth is to appear in dreams, pretending to be the Gods of Heaven indicating their will. Sometimes, they will reveal their true identity to certain hand-picked servants, in order to obtain the willing assistance of agents fully informed of the interests they serve. Such men are chosen from a king’s inner circle, from among the most influential and high-ranking officials at court, but also on occasion from among the common people, merchants, craftsmen or vagrants, who serve their masters in their respective domains.

The most valuable and loyal servants of the Guo Long are rewarded by receiving a part of their power. For the Guo Long, it is a dangerous step, for if a dragon goes too far, he might take years to recover. But the agent who is blessed with such a heavenly essence thereby obtains almost supernatural powers. With a stronger body, a sharper mind, and the mastery of all manner of magic, he becomes yet more effective in serving the needs and whims of his patron.

The final means that a dragon may use to exert his influence on the world is the ability to enter and inhabit a human body. The soul of the chosen victim is utterly destroyed, and replaced by the soul of the Guo Long, who becomes able to travel the Earth in a vehicle of flesh and blood armed with most of his heavenly powers. But the human form is too fragile to survive for long when inhabited by a semi-godlike force, and the Guo Long’s human incarnation can last no more than a few days, a week at the most, before the body begins to die and the soul of the dragon returns to limbo. Such a grave breach of the laws of the universe also proves debilitating for the dragon, who will need to rest for a long time to regain his full power.

When Qin Long came into the world, he took as his own a Hegemony which gave him significant advantages in his quest to consolidate his position and acquire more power.

Protected by mountains on one side and deserted steppes on the other, Qin could easily defend itself against attacks from Jin and Chu while driving the western tribes further back into their lands. Qin Long understood the benefits for him of a state that was secure but had ample opportunity to hone its battle skills. For at that time military strength was the crucial tool for the Dragon of Qin, the means by which it could bring the other lands to their knees and devour his brothers.

So it was that Qin, already a great military power, was urged by the dragon to wage wars against Jin and Chu to improve its military techniques. Qin Long was also behind great public works to increase the amount of cultivated land and so feed the mighty army he sought to raise. His warlike fervor led to a series of battles between Qin and Chu, but was calmed by the intervention of the most-respected dragon, Qi Long. Along with Qi and Jin, Qin agreed to sign a truce with the Southern State and bring a degree of peace to the *Zhongguo*.

It was during this period of peace that Qin Long would make a crucial discovery. While spying on the other states he observed the civil war which destroyed Jin and the coup d’état which took place in Qi. Qin Long assembled various clues, drew parallels with the break-up of the Zhou Empire, and finally fitted together the pieces of a terrible picture and concluded that all this was the work of a secret faction, working in the shadows to destroy the states. He suspected each of his brothers in turn, and even his “father” Zhou Long, but soon excluded them. He resolved to find out who was working to sow war and death in the *Zhongguo*.

At the beginning of the Warring States period, Qin Long had virtually abandoned the rule of his land. Having gathered under his rule men whose unquestioned talents had been increased through his power, he sent them throughout the states to gather information that might unmask those responsible for the serious unrest which had brought the Spring and Autumn period to a close. The more reports he received, the more he was gripped by a terrible fear, as he uncovered the existence and the goals of the Sect of Leaning Heaven. He realized that there was a group so powerful and secret that it could bring down an Empire and destroy entire states while evading the sight of semi-celestial beings such as the Guo Long, and using their warlike fervor to destroy the balance of the world. The seriousness of these discoveries sent the dragon into deep meditation.

When Qin Long returned from limbo to take command of his land and make it into a strike force in the struggle against the Sect of Leaning Heaven, he found a backward state on the point of being swamped by its neighbors. Left to its own devices, Qin had failed to modernize like other states, each of which had the guidance of its dragon. Qin Long then put in place a plan to make his state a haven

of stability and order and so to deny the chaotic designs of the followers of Gonggong. He poached the politician Shang Yang from Wei, appointed him prime minister and inspired him to pass Legalist reforms more far-reaching than those in any other state. The great reformer completely transformed the state into a modern state with a disciplined army, productive agriculture, a booming economy and an efficient administration. In the space of a few years, Qin became the greatest power in the *Zhongguo* in nearly every field. As the finishing touch to his great work, Qin Long created within the secret service a secret group of agents whose duty it was to track down and eliminate every member of the Sect of Leaning Heaven. This organization was named the Black Shell, in reference to the heavenly turtle whose legs had been used to stabilize Heaven after Gonggong had disturbed its balance.

With Qin now entirely subject to law and policed like no other, Qin Long sought to extend this state of order to the whole of the Warring States. He devised the project of *Tian Xia* with the goal of unifying all the lands of the *Zhongguo* under one Empire subject to one law, and thereby to end once and for all the disturbances of the Sect of Leaning Heaven and to bring peace and harmony to the world under his control. The territorial expansion of Qin became unstoppable, initially at the expense of its nearest neighbors. Once his armies had destroyed those cities still held by the imperial dynasty, Qin Long devoured Zhou Long and captured his energy, and it became clear to the other dragons that their ambitious brother presented a greater threat than ever before.

Alliances were formed against Qin Long, only for him to crush them. Qin destroyed its closest rivals, Chu and Zhao, and its rise to power was such that Qin Long seemed no longer to fear any of his brothers.

But recently, the royal line of Qin almost came to an end without a clear heir. Qin Long suspected interference by his enemies and worked to counter it by using his most influential agent Lü Buwei to ensure the King's succession by placing on the throne a distant relative. As the new King Ying Zheng was too young to rule, Lü Buwei became regent, and continues to build up the strength of the state and to assist the Black Shell in carrying out its mission.

The Black Shell

The Black Shell is a top-secret agency of the secret service with the mission of hunting down and eliminating followers of Gonggong in Qin or any other state.

That agency originated at the end of the Spring and Autumn period, when Qin Long discovered that the unrest in the Hegemonies was caused by a secret and powerful organization. To unmask and defeat that organization, he selected various humans on the basis of their extraordinary talents and breathed into them his heavenly power, thus weakening himself such that he was unable to rule Qin for many centuries. He sent his recruits to all corners of the *Zhongguo* to find the hidden enemy who seemed bent on the destruction of the states. For many years, these men and women hunted the agents of the Sect of Leaning Heaven and learnt of its origins. Many gave their lives to bring these secrets back to Qin Long.

Then the dragon decided to broaden his attack on the Sect. He transformed his state into a fortress against the designs of the followers of Gonggong, and created a secret agency, initially drawn from the survivors of the first chosen group, charged with the physical destruction of the Sect. The Black Shell was associated with the secret service but its existence revealed only to the head of the secret service and to the prime minister.

Through the strict application of Legalist policies, Qin not only greatly increased its strength but also became a state of absolute order. The dominance of the law, the severity of the justice system, the rational organization of the land; all of these principles were implemented partly to drive the influence of the Sect of Leaning Heaven out of Qin.

The plan met with great success. Since the members of the Sect mainly worked to sow unrest by manipulating ambition or discontent within the people, they soon found themselves without any outlet in the state. Their influence withered and died, and they were eliminated one by one by agents of the Black Shell. Qin was at last free of the followers of Gonggong.

And so the role of the Black Shell changed. Their traditional mission of ensuring the security of Qin became one of total struggle against the Sect throughout the whole of the Warring States. Agents nicknamed "Turtles" now operate cells in all the major towns of the *Zhongguo*. They watch, gather information and act swiftly and discreetly. Their main tasks are to unmask the members of the Sect of Leaning Heaven and to uncover and counter their plans, even if that means assisting a state targeted by one of the Sect's plots. The preferred method of dealing with the members of the Sect is elimination but at times the followers of Gonggong prove so powerful and well-organized that the Black Shell must be content with defeating their plans discreetly so as not to risk the lives of Turtles. The ultimate goal of the Black Shell is to discover the head of the Sect and his hiding-place, to launch the armies of Qin and eliminate this threat once and for all. So far they have failed utterly, and even the cruellest, most vicious torturers of the state cannot terrorize the members of the Sect as much as their master...

The Black Shell recruits agents throughout the states irrespective of nationality. Once a promising candidate is identified, he is kidnapped by agents and taken before the head of the secret service. There he learns the true story of the Sect of Leaning Heaven and its dark designs, although not the existence of the Guo Long and their earthly struggle, and given a choice. He may choose either to become a Turtle, and join the Black Shell in protecting both Qin and the human race from the return of Gonggong, or to die. Recruitment is rarely unsuccessful.

Qi Long

When the Dragon of Qi was born, he was very like his brothers: powerful, ambitious, but tortured by an insatiable thirst for power. His thirst was quenched for a time as he

inspired his land to conquer the satellite states at its borders, but would soon return. He urged the rulers of Qi to carry out reforms needed for the Hegemony to continue gaining strength. As the first state to create a modern administration free of the stranglehold of the nobility, Qi came to dominate the *Zhongguo* alongside the other Hegemonies.

Qi Long became the dragon with most influence over Jin Long and Qin Long, and directed their alliance against the ambitions of the mysterious Chu Long. It was also Qi Long who was able to reason with Chu Long and so bring a time of peace.

But his feeling of emptiness would not die down. While swallowing up smaller principalities had assuaged his hunger for a short time, he knew he needed something more satisfying: the energy of his brother dragons. But though his Hegemony was at that time the strongest, the others did not lack strength and were able to form alliances against it. At that time, none of the Guo Long dared attack any of the others for fear that they might combine against him. And so Qi Long withdrew into limbo to meditate on an alternative solution.

During his absence, the Sect of Leaning Heaven began a new campaign of destruction to follow their dismantling of the Zhou Empire. Its agents ignited a civil war between the noble families of Jin. In Qi, its followers succeeded in sowing confusion and discord between the great families, and the survival of the Hegemony was threatened. Fortunately Qi Long returned in time to take matters in hand, and noticing the powerlessness of the Jiang line, he favored the takeover of power by the Tian and placed his chosen King on the throne.

For during his meditation Qi Long had discovered that the solution to his insatiable thirst could be found through learning. If he could gather together all the learning of the world and make his state the temple of culture, then amidst all this wisdom he would undoubtedly one day find the answer to his problem, or even remove it altogether by replacing the thirst for power with a thirst for knowledge. Duke Huangong was a man of letters, with a love of learning and a commitment to Qi's cultural development, and so became the favorite of the Dragon of Qi. Once on the throne Huangong set about establishing great universities in each of the main cities, and scholars of all nationalities began to make their way to Qi. The libraries were soon filled with all manner of works, students began their courses, celebrated wise men offered their services, and the cultural reputation of the state began to outshine even its reputation for military strength.

Yet strength it continued to have. When the Three Jin came into the world, Qi Long did not concern himself with these three small states occupied with squabbling among themselves. But when Wei began to dominate, he saw that he needed to act to prevent the emergence of a neighbor able to rival Qi. Assisted by Wei's wars with its two brother states, Qi Long inflicted heavy defeats on the young state, halted its rise in power and maintained his own dominance of the East of the *Zhongguo*.

Having thus consolidated his position by destroying a potential rival, Qi Long can now concentrate on his project of making Qi the state of learning and know-

ledge, and so one day discovering the cure for his painful emptiness. His obsession with this quest has blinded the Dragon of Qi to the remarkable increases in strength by Qin Long and his land, which although situated to the far West, has come to pose a threat to all the Guo Long.

Zhao Long

The Dragon of Zhao was born later than many of his brother dragons, and soon became aware that he had none of the advantages he would need to fight them. His state was peripheral yet surrounded by enemies, its land was poor, and its people were divided and disorganized. He spent the early years of his life tending to one emergency after another: repelling barbarian tribes, fortifying his borders, and fending off greedy neighbors.

Zhao Long's chance finally came when Han Long proposed an alliance to destroy the state of Wei and carve up its land. The military campaign was initially a success, but since the two dragons could not agree, the invasion failed and the two armies withdrew. Zhao Long's position was as poor as ever, and would worsen further when Wei decided to exact its revenge by attacking Zhao. Luckily Qi Long, knowing he had nothing to fear from the feeble Dragon of Zhao, sent his armies to break the spirit of Wei. And when Wei launched a new attack, this time on Han, Qi Long again blocked its path and put an end to the rise to power of the Dragon of Wei.

With one less threat to face, Zhao Long was at last able to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of his land, and to find a means to strengthen it. He studied the ways of the Xiongnu barbarians, and was impressed by their ability to survive in the inhospitable steppes and by the effectiveness of their cavalry against the heavy and unwieldy chariots of the Warring States. Following the example of the other states, he arranged for Zhao to undertake a series of reforms that would enable it to exploit its natural assets. Animal breeding, the barbarian tribes' main means of survival, was adopted and made into a key source of wealth. Agriculture was developed with large-scale irrigation projects. But above all, the structure of the army was revolutionized by the incorporation of cavalry divisions whose mobility and speed would give the Zhao forces a definite advantage on the battlefield. In the space of a few years, the Horse State was born and rose to become a major economic and military power in the *Zhongguo*.

Zhao Long had at long last acquired the means to assuage the hunger which tormented him. He caused his army to invade the small state of Zhongshan and to capture territories from neighboring states, thus consolidating Zhao's dominant position in the North of the Warring States. Qin Long was enraged, and began a war of attrition in which border skirmishes between Qin and Zhao became ever more frequent. The Dragon of Zhao, aware that he could never hope to match the might of his brother, chose the path of prudence and formed an alliance against the armies of the Western State with Qin's other enemy, Wei Long. But even that was not

enough, as Qin Long defeated the alliance and used his military advantage to crush the forces of Zhao at the Battle of Changping. Zhao Long was beaten and withdrew to tend to the wounds of his state...

In recent years, the dragon has worked to consolidate Zhao's economic dominance, and has used the wealth of his land to strengthen its army, notably by incorporating divisions of mercenaries. His attention has now turned to his neighbor to the East, and his goal is to devour the Dragon of Yan and to annex his land in order to regain his former might and once again take center stage.

Chu Long

From the time of his birth, it was clear to Chu Long that his land's unique history made him quite different from his brothers. Chu had not originally been a part of the Zhou Empire, and even when it had finally been brought within the Empire after a long war between the two powers, it had retained a degree of autonomy that set it apart from other fiefs. The most important symbol of this was the fact that the rulers of Chu had never relinquished the title of King.

When the Guo Long were born, therefore, Chu became not only a Hegemony but a fully-fledged Kingdom, a title the other lands did not dare use until well into the Warring States period. As a result, Chu Long never thought of the other dragons as his brothers, but at most as troublesome relations to be disposed of when the time came. The only dragon that Chu Long considered a rival was the weakened Zhou Long. Chu Long held in his memory every event in the history of his state, and its subjugation by the Zhou burned in his mind like an age-old humiliation to be avenged by reducing the remains of the Empire to dust.

But in his arrogance, the Dragon of the South gravely underestimated the strength of his northern enemies. His frequent attempts to conquer the remains of the Empire by invading Qi, Qin and Jin were frustrated by the alliance between the dragons of the three Hegemonies. Countless battles followed, some won by Chu, others by its enemies. At last Qi Long, with the support of his brothers, managed to convince Chu Long to agree to a truce, and the great powers of the *Zhongguo* met at a peace conference which led to a time of peace. For Chu Long had realized that in his haste he had underestimated how powerful an alliance between several Guo Long could be.

While he reflected on new tactics for the conquest of the North, Chu Long was suddenly faced with new challenges. The wars against the Hegemonies had dominated his attention to such an extent that he had not noticed the small state of Wu build up its military strength (with discreet but significant assistance from Jin Long) and threaten its eastern border. With its armies massed at its northern borders, the Southern State could not prevent the Wu invasion from reaching its capital. But then the wily Chu Long used his pawns at the court of Wu to persuade it to turn its attention to Qi. The long war between Wu and the northeastern Hegemony provided Chu Long with the time he needed to devise a plan to

destroy the insolent little state that had dared to attack him. He built the state of Yue into a force able to match that of Wu by feeding it with his knowledge and the wealth of his land. Wu was unable to cope with a war on two fronts, and was defeated and annexed by Yue. From then on, Chu Long was careful to maintain good relations with Yue.

While the Guo Long of the northern Hegemonies were embroiled in domestic conflicts that would threaten their very survival, Chu Long took advantage of the time of peace to increase his strength. He expanded the territory and population of his state by annexing neighboring states and subjugating barbarian tribes, and used his influence to bring the great statesman Wu Qi whose reforms would modernize the state of Chu.

The final problem faced by Chu Long was the growing arrogance of the rulers of Yue. The solution came from an unexpected quarter, as the crafty Qi Long suggested an alliance to trap Yue and crush it. The plan was a success, as the two mighty armies made short work of Yue and the two states carved up its territory. Now free of any rivals to the South, Chu Long could once again look to the North.

What he saw came as a great surprise. Those Guo Long that he had once dismissed as worthless had grown strong, in some cases just as strong as he. Qin Long appeared to pose the most serious obstacle, and Chu Long sought to destroy him before dealing with the others. Chu and Qin waged a long series of battles which culminated in Yingdu falling into the hands of general Bai Qi. It was a terrible blow, and Chu Long became both less powerful and less feared among his northern brothers.

Now, Chu Long is plagued by one obsession: to destroy Qin Long, the rival who robbed him of his chance of destroying Zhou Long and brought humiliation on him by capturing the seat of his power. To achieve his goal, Chu Long is prepared to make any alliance and to sink to the lowest treachery. For in his eyes Qin Long has become far too great a threat to the balance of power in the *Zhongguo*...

Yan Long

Yan Long was born when the heavenly essence lost by Zhou Long was transformed into several dragons, each linked to a particular Hegemony.

For although Yan was never really considered a Hegemony, the break-up of the Empire gave it real autonomy. Moreover, in Duke Yan Muhou it had a ruler of great ambition. But while the other hegemonies sought to conquer other lands in order to enhance their own power, the Duke had a nobler aim: to support the Empire through what he saw as a temporary crisis. When the energy lost by Zhou Long mixed with the passion and belief of the ruler of Yan, the dragon that was born could not fail to be different from all of his brothers.

Yan Long began life with the same hunger as the other Guo Long, but was by nature far more protective than they, both toward his own land and the whole of the *Zhongguo*. For what benefit was there in ruling over an Empire today, if tomorrow it might fall under the blows of a

barbarian invasion from the North ? Aware that his country's strategic location would shield it for a time from his rapacious brothers, Yan Long undertook to bring progress to his fief and strengthen it. Through scholars such as Le Yi and with the help of the many rulers of the land, the dragon caused the army to be reformed and expanded, giving Yan a powerful force well-adapted to the fight against the tribes of the steppes.

But these reforms proved ill-suited to the new type of war that was beginning to develop in the Warring States. While it could defend its borders, Yan was utterly unable to match the other states in the race for land...

Now, Yan Long finds himself in a difficult position. To modernize his land would be against his nature, but he knows that if he fails to act, sooner or later one of his brothers will devour him. While he waits for that fateful day, he searches for a way to both save his state from its neighbors and protect the whole of the *Zhongguo* by defending its northern borders.

Wei Long

Of the three states born of the break-up of Jin, Wei Long inherited the most central territory and was quick to see the advantage he could draw from it.

Bordered on all sides by other states, Wei Long initially hoped that by building up his state he might discourage invasions and gain economic power over his neighbors. But things did not turn out as he expected...

For the noble families of Wei began to fight for power, and Wei was soon plunged into a war of succession. The dragon did not understand that his state was succumbing to the same fate as Jin before it, and that the same evil force lay behind these events. For the Sect of Leaning Heaven had decided to continue its work within the *Zhongguo* by destroying as many states as possible and dividing their lands in order to create a constant state of war between countless principalities and bring chaos to the world.

Blind to the machinations of the followers of Gonggong, Wei Long watched with horror as his brothers in Zhao and Han went into league against him and marched on his state. Fortunately, the alliance was undone by the innate rivalry of the Guo Long, and Wei Long used the temporary respite to take control of his state. Through the manipulation of various important figures, Wei Long managed to place his favorite on the throne : Marquess Hui became King and under the influence of the dragon, began the modernization of Wei. The small state soon grew in strength and wealth, and Wei Long chose to act.

When the armies of Wei marched on Zhao, they met with little resistance and Wei Long hoped for a swift and easy victory. But Qi Long became concerned at the possibility of a new rival emerging, and decided to halt its rise to power. Qi came to the aid of Zhao and inflicted a crushing defeat on Wei. The same happened when Wei Long tried to punish Han: the intervention of Qi was decisive, destroying once and for all the military strength of Wei. The final humiliation came when great swathes of its territory were annexed by the armies of Qin Long.

So much defeat and humiliation drove Wei Long into a deep depression, and for a few years he slept, meditating on a new solution to the problems of his land. But his vulnerable state was soon overrun with priests fleeing the destruction of Zhou by Qin. The former imperial priests soon gained considerable power, rivalling even the ministers for influence over the King. For the ruler of Wei was ready to listen to any and all whose advice might help him make Wei strong once again, and the Taoists promised that if the state were true to Heaven, then it would gain the assistance of Heaven. The following years saw the construction of many temples in the capital and other large towns, and the people of Wei came to be ruled by both the law of the land and the principles of Tao. More and more Taoists came to live in Wei, and more and more sects came to prosper from the hopes and fears of the people and their rulers.

When Wei Long awoke, he saw that great damage had been done to his state. His influence over the King had been supplanted by that of the priests, whose power flowed directly from Zhou Long. The dragon was forced to wage a bitter war to regain control of his state. This supernatural war continues to this day, as Wei Long has succeeded in turning the most important ministers and advisers against the King's spiritual advisers, and the country once again finds itself on the brink of civil war...

The Pure of the Western Paradise are ignorant of the existence of Wei Long but are aware of a hidden power trying to challenge their influence over the King.

Han Long

The Dragon of Han came into the world, along with his two brothers Wei and Zhao, when the Jin Hegemony split into three states and from one Guo Long came three.

Understanding that the land he had inherited was in a difficult location and that its recent creation made it easy prey to invaders, Han Long chose to send a warning to the other dragons by a display of his people's military strength. The invasion of the principality of Zheng enabled Han to extend its territory westward and reinforce its borders. Then Han Long proposed to Zhao Long an alliance to destroy the Dragon of Wei and to annex his lands ; but the two brothers could not agree on how the lands would be divided up and the invasion failed.

When Qi Long mobilized his forces to prevent Wei from destroying Zhao, Han Long learnt that true power lay not only in military strength but also in the ability to combine with the right ally at the right time. So when it was Han's turn to be threatened by Wei, the young dragon applied what he had learnt and formed a pact to ensure that Qi Long would assist him as he had assisted Zhao. The experiment was a great success, as Wei was once again defeated, and Han Long began to reflect on how he might apply the method more widely.

The great reformer Shen Buai brought to Han an efficient administration capable of managing effectively the domestic affairs of the state. This enabled the esta-

blishment of a specialized ministry of foreign affairs completely devoted to developing and maintaining relations with the other states. The diplomats' network of contacts grew, and their influence became greater, until soon the security of Han came to rest completely on their careful and efficient work in negotiating truces and non-aggression pacts with its neighbors.

For now, Han Long is satisfied that he has overcome the weaknesses of his state and found the best means for it to survive. In the long-term, he plans to use the subtle influence of his foreign ministry to sow discord between the other states and watch them destroy each other, and then to eliminate those that survive and so become the one dragon ruling over the one Empire.

The Sect of Leaning Heaven

Heir to the malevolent designs of the ancient demon Gonggong, the Sect of Leaning Heaven work to spread chaos, death and destruction through the world in order to free their master from *Feng Du* and allow him to wreak his vengeance on the gods and men.

Gonggong

It was at the dawn of time, when the Three August Ones gathered the first human peoples under their wise and benevolent rule, that the one known as Gonggong first appeared.

Some see him as a demon, others as a powerful and deadly warlord. All agree that his power could rival even that of the gods. Able to take on many forms, notably those of dragons or great serpents, and with titanic strength and a voice that could shatter the stars, Gonggong was a being of profound evil whose sole ambition was the destruction of all things. In his audacity, he demanded a seat at the Court of Heaven and sought to overthrow the August Emperor of Jade. But Zhu Rong, warrior of the gods, confronted him, defeated him, and banished him to the Earth.

In a blind rage, Gonggong threw himself at the very column of Heaven, Mount Buzhou, and with mighty blows of his head, rent it to its foundations. Heaven began to collapse, and chaos raged on Earth: volcanoes erupted, rivers broke their banks, and earthquakes tore at the fabric of the land. Gonggong led his fanatical army of followers on a campaign of destruction and murder throughout the known world.

Only the August One Nü Wa was able to stop him. By repairing the sky and Heaven, she calmed the

rage of nature. Then she took the legs of the Heavenly Turtle and used them to separate Heaven and Earth once again. And finally, she took up arms and went to face the demon. The battle was long, and the devastation was tremendous, but for all his power, Gonggong was unable to defeat the Goddess of Harmony. Defeated, decapitated and torn limb from limb, he was cast down into the Hell of Piercing Steel to be tortured forever by the guardians of *Feng Du*. The only trace that remained of the havoc he had wrought on Earth was that the pole star lay slightly off-center, and Heaven leaned a little.

But a being of such immense power could not so easily be separated from the destiny of the world. His imprisonment deep within *Feng Du* served only to enrage the dark soul of Gonggong even further, and his thirst for vengeance grew and grew through the centuries, until finally he found a human mind that would receive him and enable him once again to gain a hold in the world of men...

Origins and history

During the Yin dynasty, religion became organized around a class of priests in the service of the Emperor. As the only men able to interpret the signs sent to the Emperor by Heaven, these priests enjoyed considerable influence at court.

It was said of Cheng Huan that he was the most learned and most holy of all the priests. His exceptionally sharp mind saw heavenly omens with great clarity, and could divine their meaning as no other. Under his guidance, the Empire prospered, and proved that it was worthy of the Mandate of Heaven. But as time went on, Cheng Huan was beset more and more by dreams and premonitions of the Empire in ruins, and the world plunged into barbarism. Reading these dreams as warnings from the gods, Cheng Huan advised the Emperor to launch wave upon wave of military assaults on the barbarian tribes at the borders of the Empire, and so prevent the arrival of the terrible events that plagued his sleep. But still the nightmares came, and each day he would instruct the Emperor to crush yet more of the border peoples.

The other priests were alarmed and confused. For none of them had received any kind of alarming sign from Heaven, and indeed many believed that the omens were that to pursue such warlike ways would mean disaster for the Empire. With the support of the more powerful vassals, the priests insisted that the Emperor remove Cheng Huan from his functions and banish him far from the capital. Fearful of losing the favor of Heaven, the Emperor agreed, and Cheng Huan found himself disgraced, banished and treated as an outcast.

For long months he wandered alone, watching and waiting for a sign from the gods, an explanation, but none came. And so he withdrew to a cave where he began a cleansing fast in order to open his body and soul to the wisdom of the Heavens. But during his meditation, it was the enraged, vengeful soul of Gonggong which entered

him and took hold. His spirit was broken, and madness took him, as the thirst for vengeance of Gonggong was forever burnt into his soul. When Cheng Huan ended his exile, he had changed forever : he saw now that the way was clear, that the world must be plunged into chaos so that his master could be reincarnated and wreak his revenge on the agents of destiny.

At that time, the Yin dynasty was in decline, and the people were suffering at the hands of the imperial authorities. The *Zhongguo* was a land of discontent, and Cheng Huan had no difficulty recruiting followers among those rejected and abandoned by the Empire. He trained his men and placed them in various influential positions with the more powerful vassals, at the imperial court, and even within the imperial priestly class.

Gradually, the Sect of Leaning Heaven, so-named in honor of Gonggong's finest hour, began its work. It turned the wordless anger of the people to its own advantage, sowing the seeds of dissent and unrest. And while the subversive schemes of the Sect were not solely responsible for the final collapse of the Yin dynasty, they certainly contributed to it.

The early years of the Zhou dynasty were difficult years for the Sect. The Emperor of Jade had sent a dragon to Earth to protect the independence of the imperial line, and this heavenly being used his great powers to unmask those priests controlled by Cheng Huan and purge the imperial court of their malignant influence.

At this, the wicked servant of Gonggong changed strategy, placing his pawns with the most powerful vassals and statesmen. He made all appear as if Zhou Long had finally destroyed the Sect, and worked in the shadows so as to avoid having to face the Dragon of the Zhou again.

And once more the chaos wreaked by the Sect caused the fall of a dynasty. The Zhou were obliged to move to the East, losing much of their authority, while several fiefs took the name of Hegemonies and began an age of interminable wars. And the chains that held Gonggong began to weaken...

The sharp mind of Cheng Huan was quick to notice the birth of the Guo Long, and quick to calculate that their ambition and thirst for heavenly power could be turned to his advantage and used to spread discord through the world. His agents used all of their influence to feed the destructive obsessions of the Guo Long, and to incite the states to fight among themselves. Again the Sect was instrumental in the destruction of a thousand-year Empire, and soon the Hegemonies themselves began to fall prey to the chaos that infected the land. The state of Jin was broken in three, and the mighty Eastern Hegemony of Qi was nearly undone by a bitter war of succession.

But in spite of all its stealth, the Sect of Leaning Heaven was at last unmasked. At the beginning of the Warring States period, the Dragon of Qin saw that there was a connection between the decline of the Zhou dynasty and the destruction of the Hegemonies, and understood that an evil force lay behind both processes. His response was to use his minister Shang Yang to reform his state, making it a model of a perfectly-ordered state where the Sect could never prosper. It was a cruel

blow for Cheng Huan, who saw his influence simply evaporate in the state which was rapidly becoming the most powerful of all the *Zhongguo*. When the other states saw the effectiveness of the Qin reforms, and followed along similar lines, the Sect was forced to withdraw, at the risk of disappearing completely...

Since then, the followers of Gonggong have begun to claw back a little of their former influence, playing on the mistrust and the hate harbored by some states toward Qin. Cheng Huan sees that history is nearing a watershed, and has every intention of prevailing in his momentous trial of strength against Qin Long, and preventing the dragon from finally achieving the *Tian Xia*.

Organization and methods

The Sect's base is hidden deep in the mountains of the South of Chu, in an immense palace whose exact location is known only to a select few. From there, Cheng Huan, now over a thousand years old, continues to move the pawns of his organization, to sow discord between states, and spread more and more chaos throughout the world of men.

Cheng Huan's most senior and loyal lieutenants are lost souls whose devotion to his cause is complete and whose understanding of his objectives is unmatched. Most of these lieutenants are responsible for cells placed in various regions of the *Zhongguo*, living a secret life in the towns and villages, and directly commanding the lower-ranking agents of the Sect. They co-ordinate and plan the implementation of actions decided by Cheng Huan, and are careful to arrange matters so that in case of failure or discovery, the trail will never lead back to them.

Some of the more able and dedicated lieutenants occupy positions of importance within the states. Whether high-ranking officials, eunuchs, wealthy notables, or even ministers, they use the influence of their rank to take direct action on behalf of the Sect, while still remaining incognito.

Agents lower than the rank of lieutenant know nothing of Gonggong, nor of the secret purposes of Cheng Huan. They believe they are working for a powerful organization in the process of taking control of the *Zhongguo*, and hope that their faithful service will earn them a place in the Empire that they are helping to build. Such low-ranking agents are charged with specific missions involving theft, spying or assassination. Such missions are usually carried out with the assistance of recruits from the criminal classes, who work in complete ignorance of the ultimate purposes of their specific tasks.

The Sect also has a network of informers present in all the states. These agents supplement their earnings by keeping their eyes open and passing on anything they might see to their superiors. As a rule, they know nothing of the Sect, and believe they are working for the secret service of one or other state.

The basic methodology of the Sect is to use its countless agents and its considerable influence to deepen

the rivalries between the states in order to trigger wars and bring chaos to the world. A simple assassination, or merely a few well-placed rumors, are frequently enough to light the fire of anger that can transform a mundane border dispute into open warfare. Through its lieutenants in high places, and its footsoldiers among the lower orders, the Sect is well-placed to act at any time and in any place.

In addition to this slow, careful anti-diplomacy, the Sect uses a small army of fanatics that it periodically sets on a small isolated town or peripheral region. When its army lays waste to its target, leaving not the merest trace of its presence, the Sect can be confident either that that relevant state will point the finger of blame at one of its neighbors, or that the rumblings of popular unrest will commence as the common people come to realize that their king has failed to protect them...

The ultimate objective of the Sect of Leaning Heaven is a simple one. On the day when the world is plunged into anarchy, when the states have collapsed, when war has no end and when men live once more as wild beasts, only then will Gonggong be freed from the chains of Hell and return to live on Earth. Only then will he be able to exact his revenge on the gods, overthrow the Court of Heaven and forever destroy the balance of the universe. And on that day, he will reign supreme, in a world made in his image, a limitless hell of blood and endless war.

In the Warring States

In Qin, the Sect has lost all influence. The strict form of Legalism established by Shang Yang and rendered yet harsher by Han Fei Zi provides Qin Long with the means to exert complete control over his state, and to regulate every detail of the lives of his subjects. Qin Long is aware of the existence of the Sect, and wages constant war against it through his secret service, and particularly the Black Shell. His grand scheme of unifying all that exists under Heaven in a single and perfectly-ordered Empire, is expressly designed to achieve the final destruction of the Sect.

Meanwhile, Qi has been heavily infiltrated by the Sect. Its military strength interests Cheng Huan, but its policy of cultural progress leaves him cold. But in case any of the knowledge gathered by the Eastern State should ever prove useful, a few agents have been placed in universities and libraries.

Zhao is one of the Sect's key targets. The rivalry between merchants and officials is fed by the agents of the Sect and the state's desire to be recognized as a military power has been harnessed to construct a plan for the invasion of Yan, and an ultimate war of revenge on Qin.

Chu is another state which has been heavily infiltrated by the Sect, whose base is hidden deep in its southern lands. Agents of the Sect encourage the king of Chu in his hatred for Qin and his eagerness to crush the Legalist state, in the hope that faced with two enemies as dedicated and powerful as Zhao and Chu, Qin must fall.

The Sect has a token presence in Yan, but has few plans for such an isolated, far-off state.

In Wei, Cheng Huan is confident that the fanaticism of the Taoist sects, greatly fed by his own agents, will be sufficient to drive the state into war with its heretical neighbors.

The Sect is mainly interested in Han for its political archives, which are copied out by agents of the Sect and sent to Cheng Huan to keep him fully up to date with all geopolitical and diplomatic developments in the *Zhongguo*. To this end, the Xinzheng university of political science is crawling with the most loyal lieutenants of Cheng Huan.

Key figures

Cheng Huan

Founder of the Sect of Leaning Heaven and herald of Gonggong, Cheng Huan has lived for over a thousand years, thanks to some ancient and long-forgotten alchemy. But even so, those years have taken their toll, and Cheng Huan is now little more than a shadowy apparition of a man, whose ancient emaciated limbs are hidden beneath loose robes of black and red. His voice has died to a whisper, but his eyes still blaze with the twin fires of genius and madness.



For centuries now, Cheng Huan has been behind many of the battles that have shook the *Zhongguo*. Using the deadly rivalry of the Guo Long and the thirst for power of the rulers of men, he has positioned his pawns in such a way that he is now able to act in complete secrecy, and set off a long and terrible war between two states by the merest adjustment. Cheng Huan revels in this power : the knowledge that he holds millions of innocent lives in his hands is his only joy. He has been known to order the destruction of whole villages, not to further the objectives of the Sect, but simply to enjoy the sight of so much death. The unspeakable cruelty of this man terrifies even his closest lieutenants.

In his youth, Cheng Huan had hoped to be the one who would carry the soul of Gonggong, the one whose body would be chosen to house the vengeful spirit of the powerful demon. But with the passing centuries, he has come to understand that his worn and weakened body is no longer worthy of the honor of receiving such a powerful being. At times his disappointment turns to bitterness, but he knows that as a loyal servant of Gonggong his duty is now to find a human body fitting for a master warlord who would defy even the gods. And Cheng Huan thinks he has found such a body, in the form of the blood-thirsty general Bai Qi...

Cheng Huan is now over a thousand years old. His body is now little stronger than a twig, but he has lost none of his great powers. As the vessel of part of the vengeful fury of Gonggong, he can harness unimaginable forces, and he is a truly fearsome enemy, even for the Guo Long.

Renown: 5

Bai Qi

Once, Bai Qi was the most feared general in history, the strategist who forged the armies of Qin into a merciless war machine, and the commander who led his armies to victory after victory during the Chu invasion and at the Battle of Changping. He broke the alliances of enemy states and captured vast tracts of land for his state.

At that time, his ruthlessness knew no bounds. He captured the Chu capital, sacked it and massacred half its inhabitants. After the Battle of Changping, he callously ordered the execution of four hundred thousand prisoners of war, a decision that is even now remembered with rancor in Zhao. He became the most decorated general in Qin, the most despised enemy of the other states, and his terrible reputation was known throughout the land.

But his many successes in the field, and his growing influence over the ruler of Qin, eventually won him the envy and hostility of officials in the state capital. An intrigue devised by the prime minister Fan Ju brought him disgrace, and he was forced to save his honor by suicide.

But while his body was still warm, it was stolen by agents of the Sect of Leaning Heaven. For Cheng Huan had watched Bai Qi for several years, seeing in his cold rage and calculated savagery a reflection of his master Gonggong. He planned to recruit the general to the Sect and use his body to receive the soul of his master.

By the strange alchemy of Cheng Huan, Bai Qi was returned to life, and he was offered a key position in the Sect, as right-hand man to his new leader, and commander of the armies of Gonggong. With nothing left to lose, and gripped by a desire for vengeance on Qin, Bai Qi agreed to join the Sect and took its dark designs into his heart.

Ever since, Bai Qi's body has been kept alive by the same forces that maintain the body of Cheng Huan. Far from losing any of his former strength, it appears that he has even gained in power. He takes obscene pleasure in planning military assaults and in leading his army of fanatics through the isolated regions of the states, raping, pillaging and murdering everything in their path, just as in his glorious campaigns in the service of Qin. But although Bai Qi knows of the objectives of the Sect, he is unaware of Cheng Huan's plans for his body, and would be surprised to learn that he is destined to become the reincarnation of Gonggong on Earth...

Bai Qi is an exceptionally tall man with a colossal build. His piercing stare hides a heartlessness and impassivity that is known only to soldiers accustomed to the horrors of war. Bai Qi is never seen out of his armor, and is always ready to march to war.

Renown: 189



Experience and Renown

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Experience

In order to grow and develop, while following his chosen path, each character will need to strengthen his body, sharpen his mind, learn new skills, and broaden his horizons. Over the course of his adventures a character will gain experience. It is this experience which will make him more able and more impressive.

This process is expressed in gaming terms by characters gaining Experience Points at the end of each scenario, which they can then spend on increasing their Aspect values, developing new Skills, learning advanced Taos, or acquiring new Combat Techniques and Magic.

The GM should be careful to ensure that any personal development involving the use of Experience Points is coherent and logical in terms of the character's background and lifestyle.

Gaining experience

The colorful world of the Warring States will provide a character with many opportunities for personal development.

Facing the challenges of the adventurer's life, confronting mysteries and dangers, surviving bloody combats and triumphing over adversity are all ways in which a character can grow. By honing his body through grueling ordeals, sharpening his skills through repeated practice, or merely drawing lessons from random encounters, a character gains experience.

But a character may also choose to gain experience in more secure surroundings, by studying carefully, training long and hard, or receiving the learning of a master.

Adventure

The most common way for a character to obtain Experience Points (EP) to spend on improving his characteristics will be through adventure, and completing the scenarios presented by the Game Master.

At the end of each session, the Game Master hands out as many Experience Points to each character as he thinks that character deserves. The table on the next page should give him some guidance.

A character should typically earn between one and six Experience Points per session, the average being four. But it is open to the Game Master to hand out more than this depending on his plans for the campaign, the complexity of upcoming scenarios and the difficulty of the adventures he has planned.

Accomplishments EP earned

Taking part	1
Playing a role in a convincing fashion, contributing to a good gaming atmosphere	2
Suggesting ideas to take the scenario forward, resolving a puzzle, uncovering secrets within the game	1
Heroism, including attempting actions impossible for common mortals and sacrificing oneself for others	2
Confronting a powerful opponent, overcoming obstacles, defeating numerous enemies	1

Example : During his encounter with the soldiers at the inn, Xian displayed heroic bravery and defeated several opponents (even if the thugs were clearly no match for him). At the end of the session, therefore, Xian should receive at least three Experience Points for this encounter.

Studying, training, and learning

A character can learn new Skills, improve his Aspect values, or develop his Taos, Combat Techniques and Magic by studying, either alone or with the guidance of a master.

This method of earning Experience Points takes a certain amount of time, and a character cannot interrupt his training to set off on a new adventure without losing all the benefit of the time spent so far and having to start again from scratch.

The table on the next page gives a broad idea of the number of Experience Points that can be earned depending on how long is spent studying or training.

Only a person with at least Expert Level in a Skill can teach that Skill or any Combat Technique or Magic that depends on it. A person can only teach a Skill up to his own Skill Level.

The times indicated in the table can be reduced if the student uses a manual or is taken on by a particularly renowned teacher.

It goes without saying that Experience Points gained during study or training can only be used to improve the Skill learnt, or to purchase the Combat Technique or Magic technique studied.

Example : Xian is keen to develop his physical flexibility and his control of his body. After attending a performance by a troupe of traveling players, he asks a young acrobat to teach him some techniques. Since the acrobat is an Expert in Acrobatics, she can take a student and agrees to take Xian under her wing. To go from Apprentice to Competent Level, Xian needs 8 Experience Points. He therefore needs to train with his teacher for 15 months (18 – his teacher's Level (3)).

Using experience

A character can use his Experience Points to improve his basic characteristics, learn new Skills or develop existing ones, or to obtain new Taos and techniques.

Improving Aspects

To increase an Aspect value, a character needs to spend a number of Experience Points equal to five times the value he wishes to reach. He must develop gradually, and increase his value by 1 point at a time.

Example : Xian wishes to increase his Water value from 3 to 4 to improve his defenses in combat situations. He needs to spend 20 Experience Points (value to be reached (4) multiplied by 5).

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Learning and improving Skills

To acquire a new Skill, or to gain a higher Skill Level in an existing Skill, a character must spend the requisite number of Experience Points set out in the table below. As happens when a character is created, each Skill Level must be purchased separately and costs are cumulative.

Skill Level

	Apprentice	Competent	Expert	Master
Cost	4	8	12	16

Example : Xian wants to sharpen his senses by going from Competent to Expert in Perception. He needs to spend 12 Experience Points. He then decides to acquire Survival (forest) at Competent Level. He needs to spend 12 Experience Points (4 to obtain the Talent at Apprentice Level, plus 8 for Competent Level).

Studying, training, and learning

<i>Time alone</i>	<i>Time with a master</i>	<i>EP gained</i>
1 week	(8 – master's Skill Level) days	1
2 weeks	(13 – master's Skill Level) days	3
3 months	(7 – master's Skill Level) months	6
2 years	(18 – master's Skill Level) months	10
10 years	(8 – master's Skill Level) years	15
30 years	20 years	21

Learning and improving Taos

As with Skills, a character wishing to acquire a new Tao or improve his existing Tao Levels must spend the requisite number of Experience Points set out in the table below. As happens when a character is created, each Tao Level must be purchased separately and costs are cumulative.

<i>Tao Level</i>	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>	<i>Level 4</i>
<i>Cost</i>	4	8	12	16

Example : Xian's combat experience has taught him the secret of striking opponents at their weakest point. He decides to consolidate his learning by acquiring the Tao of the Destructive Breath at Level 1. This costs 4 Experience Points. Then he decides to improve his Tao of the Light Step from Level 2 to Level 3, which costs him another 12 Experience Points.

Learning Combat Techniques

Buying a new martial Skill, or moving to a higher Level in such a Skill, does not automatically mean that a character can use the Techniques associated with his new Skill Level. Such Techniques must be purchased separately ; which are available to a character depends on his Skill Level in the relevant martial Skill.

To acquire a Combat Technique a character must spend the requisite number of Experience Points as set out in the table below.

<i>Skill Level</i>	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>	<i>Level 4</i>
<i>Cost</i>	4	8	12	16

Example : Xian is a swordsman of some recognized ability : he is Competent in *Jianshu* Skill. He knows some of the subtleties of that art, having already acquired three specific fencing Techniques, and wishes to acquire another. He checks in the list of Techniques at p.89 which of those Techniques his Skill Level gives him access to, and considers that Charge would be most appropriate for a warrior of his untamed spirit. Since Charge is associated with Competent Level in *Jianshu*, Xian must spend 8 Experience Points.

Buying Magic

To learn a new spell, potion or magical technique, a character must first satisfy the requirements of the relevant way of the Tao and of the technique itself, then spend the requisite number of Experience Points set out in the table below.

<i>Skill Level</i>	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>	<i>Level 4</i>
<i>Cost</i>	4	8	12	16

Example : During many of his adventures, Xian has had the benefit of traveling with an old Taoist, an Expert in Exorcism. After acquiring the Skill at Apprentice Level to learn the basics, Xian wishes to learn how to defend himself against the spirits of the night. Since he is already a skilled swordsman, he chooses to acquire Blessing of Wood, enabling him to transform a simple wooden sword into a weapon with power to wound even the undead. This technique is associated with Apprentice Level in Exorcism, so he need only spend 4 points to acquire it.

Recalculating Secondary Aspects

Once a character has spent his Experience Points on increasing his Aspect values, acquiring new Skills and techniques, and improving his existing Skills, he will need to recalculate his Secondary Aspects, since these often depend on the values and Levels that he has just changed.

The formula for calculating Passive Defense is simple : (Water + Wood + 2). A character need only recalculate this score if he has increased his Water or his Wood value.

A character's total stock of Chi needs to be recalculated whenever a character has developed his Skills and increased his highest Skill Level. See the relevant section at p.48.

Breath of Life depends on Aspects, so needs to be recalculated whenever they are increased. See the relevant section at p.49 for an explanation of how to calculate Breath of Life.

One of the unique features of the Yin/Yang System used in Qin is that it favors balance between a character's various Aspects. For only he whose body and mind are in perfect harmony can hope to command his inner force and enjoy robust health and long life.

This means it is possible for a character who has increased one of his Aspects to suffer a reduction in his Chi or Breath of Life. This is perfectly normal, since the power and weight added to one element of his nature may overpower other elements, and thereby cause an imbalance in the microcosm of the universe within his being. To replenish his Chi or Breath of Life, he will need to restore the correct balance and develop all sides of his inner nature evenly, without favoring any individual element.

Example : Xian has increased his Water value from 3 to 4. His Passive Defense therefore becomes 8 (4 + 2 + 2). His Chi stays at 12, and his Breath of Life is also unaffected, the imbalance caused by the increased Water value being too slight to disturb the inner harmony of his being.



Renown

A character and his Renown

What it is

Renown is a measure of a character's reputation throughout the Warring States.

The higher a character's Renown, the more he is known for his past deeds and the more chance he has of being recognized wherever he goes.

Renown does not depend on the justice or morality of a character's deeds : a high Renown may be earned both through selfless, heroic deeds and merciless, blood-thirsty brutality.

Using Renown

Renown is used by the Game Master to identify whether a character is recognized in the various locations to which his adventures bring him. The consequences of a character being recognized may be positive (the traditional hero's welcome) or negative (a criminal being denounced to the authorities and arrested), depending on the source of the character's Renown.

Renown can also be used by the characters to assess the reputation of NPCs, learn how they earned that reputation, and so obtain valuable information on the key individuals they might chance to meet on the roads of the *Zhongguo*.

The types

Here again is the list of character types of the various trades and occupations of the inhabitants of the *Zhongguo*.

- **Warriors** : *Wu xia*, soldier, bodyguard, mercenary etc.
- **Scholars and professionals** : scholar, physician, courtier, official etc.
- **Tradesmen and educators** : craftsman, merchant, *shifu*, teacher etc.
- **Wise men** : Taoist, *fangshi*, village elder, village healer etc.
- **Travelers** : Messenger, traveling salesman, wandering artist, vagabond etc.
- **Artists** : Armorer, painter, horse trainer etc.
- **In the shadows** : Outlaw, spy, assassin, thief etc.

Deeds

The acts of each hero in the game will initially be defined according to a system of worth, ranging from 1 point to 8 points.

The worth attributed to a Deed will depend on various factors, notably the following.

- ***Its significance***, namely whether it affects a small or large community, and to what extent. To be affected by a Deed, people must feel personally concerned by the Deed or its consequences. For example, an everyday bar brawl will only affect a few people, those present in the inn, while the death of a general will affect a whole army. If an outlaw waylays a single traveler, he will affect only his victim and his family and friends, but if he blocks a supply route to a village, he will affect all its inhabitants.

- ***Its extraordinary nature***, namely whether the Deed by its nature or means of accomplishment is beyond the reach of ordinary mortals. A Deed may be adjudged extraordinary either because it was previously considered impossible, or at least extremely difficult to achieve, or because it required the use of special powers such as Taos, Magic or legendary weapons. For example, a single warrior who faces down a whole regiment of the Qin army accomplishes a Deed traditionally thought to be impossible. During a duel, the use of Taos and sophisticated Combat Techniques will impress onlookers and appear extraordinary to their eyes.

The Game Master will judge the worth of a Deed according to these two criteria, and may use the lists of examples below for assistance.

Deeds worth 1 point

This category includes Deeds which are important to an individual character but which can be performed by anyone, or which do not affect many people.

Examples :

- Fighting in an inn
- Winning a tournament or passing a test
- Finding treasure
- Appearing as a witness in a high-profile trial
- Marrying someone from the same village
- Profaning the tomb of an ancestor

Deeds worth 2 points

This category includes Deeds important to a character and which either can only be performed by unusual individuals (due to the use of Taos or Magic, etc) or affect several dozen people (such as a village or small community).

Examples :

- Using extraordinary techniques in a duel (Taos or Magic)
- Bringing back the head of a wild beast which had terrorized a village
- Saving the life of a village chief
- Profaning the tomb of a holy man

Deeds worth 4 points

To earn this many points a character must use Taos or Magic. In addition, the act must either have been thought to be practically impossible, or have affected a very large community (eg. a whole town or army).

Examples :

- Profaning the tomb of a king
- Capturing a town
- Confronting a battalion alone
- Putting a stop to an epidemic
- Opposing someone with a very high Renown

Deeds worth 8 points

This category also requires the use of Taos or Magic. In addition, the Deed must both be considered impossible and have affected a very large community.

Examples :

- Capturing a state capital
- Persuading an immortal to destroy a whole army

Of course, these lists of examples are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. The Game Master is completely free to reward the characters' Deeds with whatever worth he thinks they deserve.

Witnesses and locations

After a Deed's basic worth has been fixed, the next important factor to determine is the amount of publicity it receives and the extent to which news of the event will spread through the population.

In assessing a Deed's publicity, the GM and the players must have regard to both the number of witnesses and their status. For a character's reputation depends not so much on his achievements as people's opinion of him, and no matter how powerful the creatures he slays, his Renown cannot grow if there is no-one to tell his story.

As a result, the location of a Deed plays an important role. To take a simple example, the act of slaying a terrifying beast in the middle of the desert will not have the same effect as if it had been done in the heart of a state capital on market day. A Deed's publicity value will range from 1 to 4, according to the guidelines in the table below :

Publicity 0 : No witnesses

Publicity 1 : A few unimportant witnesses (eg. villagers or common soldiers)

Publicity 2 : Either between several and a small crowd of unimportant witnesses, or a few important witnesses (eg. renowned merchant, local official, head of clan).

Publicity 3 : Either a large crowd of unimportant witnesses and a few important witnesses, or a few eminent individuals (eg. high-ranking officials, governors).

Publicity 4 : Either an enormous crowd of unimportant witnesses, or at least one highly eminent individual (such as a king or minister).



Increasing Renown

To calculate the amount by which a hero's Renown is increased after accomplishing a Deed, simply multiply the worth of the Deed by its publicity.

Example : Killing an outlaw blocking a supply route to a village (worth 2) and bringing his head to the local mayor (publicity 3) will increase a character's Renown by 6 points.

Defining Deeds

Where a character increases his Renown by more than 5 points in a single action, it counts as a Defining Deed, a memorable occasion in his personal history.

Whenever this happens, the player should carefully note the details of the Deed which caused the increase, together with the total Renown that he reached on that occasion. The description of the Deed should contain any elements of the event that the player considers important, including any injury he received.

Example : Xian has a Renown of 21. Alone, he confronts and kills the head of a band of outlaws, and brings his head to the local mayor. This courageous and valuable Deed earns him 6 points, so his Renown increases to 27.

He notes on his character sheet "27 : Killed head of band of outlaws, act recognized and rewarded by local mayor".

After a while, the character will have created a detailed list of his Defining Deeds. This list is used to define the concept of a Deed Interval, being the time between two Defining Deeds carried out by the same character.

Example : After his encounter with the band of outlaws, Xian performs a series of minor Deeds, none earning more than 5 points, and his Renown climbs gradually to 38. Then the governor of his local commandery orders him to fight a demon ogre terrorizing the region. After an arduous combat, Xian brings back the head of the ogre, and the governor places it on public display. This heroic act earns Xian 12 Renown points (4 for confronting an ogre alone, multiplied by 3 due to the governor's efficient method of publicizing the information). Xian's Renown reaches 50 points, and its development can be divided into two Deed Intervals : the first going from 27 to 49 points, the second beginning at 50.

Losing Renown

When a hero withdraws from the world of men, he fades from memory, his exploits are gradually forgotten and his fame dies away. It is the same with characters : if for a certain time their Renown stops growing, it will eventually fall.

Where a character ceases to accomplish Deeds that enhance his reputation, he loses one Renown point per month for the first year, then two points per month for the second year, then three points per month for the third year, and so on. This inexorable fall from greatness can only be halted by accomplishing a worthy Deed.

A character's loss of Renown will be exacerbated by a reduction in the historical worth of his Defining Deeds. When such a Deed is forgotten, the worth associated with it in the character's personal history falls to zero. And since it is forgotten, it will not recover its original worth once the character starts to earn Renown again. For a hero's fame is often fickle...

Example : Imagine that after his memorable exploits in his homeland, Xian decides to withdraw to Songshan to perfect his skills. He stays there for one year and eight months, during which time his name is heard by none. He loses one Renown point per month for the first year (namely 12), and two Renown points per month for the second (namely 16), a total loss of 28 points which reduces his total Renown from 50 to 22. His first Defining Deed is forgotten, and the worth associated with it is reduced to zero. The worth of his second Defining Deed (50 : killed a demon ogre) is reduced to 22. Xian's long months of training make him stronger and more skilled than ever, and when he returns to the world of men he accomplishes a succession of notable achievements, earning 17 Renown points and increasing his total Renown from 22 to 39. But his first Defining Deed remains forgotten and the worth of his second remains at 22.

Recognition

The Recognition Test

To find out whether a character recognizes another person in the game, the player rolls a hundred-sided die (D100), applies the adjustments described below, and compares the character's result with the Renown of the other person. If the result is equal to or lower than the Renown, the Test is a success and the character has heard of the other and may even be able to remember some of his Deeds.

Do I have any background on the person ?

The first important factor in assessing whether a character recognizes a person in the game is whether he has any background information on the person : whether he knows his name, whether he has been introduced to him, whether he has heard tell of his exploits, and so on.

The D100

Rolling a hundred-sided die (D100) amounts to nothing more than rolling two ten-sided dice (D10) and taking the result on the first one as the tens and the result on the second one as the units.

So if we roll two D10 and get a 4 on the first and a 7 on the other the overall result is a 47.

If the character does have a degree of background on the person, then the basic value for the Recognition Test will be the Renown of the person, adjusted appropriately.

Example : Just after Xian defeats the ogre, and before he withdraws to the mountain, the governor decides to introduce Xian to his daughter. To find out whether she has heard tell of his Deeds, and bearing in mind her father's introduction, her Recognition Test will be performed against Xian's Renown, a basic value of 50.

If the character does not have any background on the person, then the Test is performed against a basic value equal to the person's Renown divided by 10.

Example : Xian goes to the local inn in search of entertainment. The innkeeper sees a new customer, richly dressed, but who he has never met before. His Recognition Test will be performed against a basic value of 5 (Xian's Renown divided by 10), adjusted appropriately.

Adjustments

Once the basic value has been set, it needs to be adjusted in order to obtain the final value for the Recognition Test. The adjustments should be applied in the following order.

Types : If the character performing the Test is of the same character type as the person he is trying to recognize, the basic Renown value is multiplied by 2. If, however, the two people are from different sections of society, the basic Renown value is divided by 2.

Location : Once the type adjustment has been made, a second adjustment needs to be made to account for the location of the person performing the Test. For whether a person is aware of major developments and notable Deeds will often depend on where he lives.

- On the plains, in the desert, or in the steppes : value divided by 5 (rounded up).
- Village : value divided by 4 (rounded up).
- Town : value divided by 3 (rounded up).
- Commandery capital : value divided by 2 (rounded up).
- State capital : no adjustment.
- If the person to be recognized is from the locality : no adjustment.

Example : Filled with pride in his great Deeds and considerable Renown, Xian sets off in search of adventure and excitement. But he meets with great misfortune, and loses everything. He is obliged to beg for a meal in the only inn of a small village. The innkeeper sizes up the warrior and wonders whether he knows his name from somewhere. He performs a Recognition Test against a final value of 7 (50 divided by 2, since Xian is a warrior and the innkeeper a merchant, then 25 divided by 4 because of the village location, a final value of 6.25 rounded up to 7).

What Deeds are recalled

If a character performs a successful Recognition Test against the appropriately adjusted value, then he recognizes the other person and is taken to know his total Renown.

It is then simply a question of which of the person's Defining Deeds he has heard of. This is settled by rolling a D100 and seeing which Deed Interval the result falls into. The character recalls all Defining Deeds from all Deed Intervals starting with the Interval in which his result on the D100 falls. If the result on the D100 is higher than the person's Renown, then the character is considered to know just the last Defining Deed.

Example : The innkeeper performs his Test against a value of 7, and rolls a 05. He recognizes Xian, so he rolls another D100 to establish which of Xian's Deeds he has heard of. He rolls a 43, which fits into Xian's first Deed Interval. The innkeeper remembers not only the young *wu xia*'s defeat of the ogre, but also his more distant victory over the band of outlaws. He is so impressed by the stories he has heard of his guest's heroic deeds that he offers him a fine banquet.

Hiding and changing identity

A player may wish to use a false name, or otherwise hide his identity, in order to avoid the difficulties that may stem from being recognized. This is particularly necessary when, for instance, a hero that has made his name by killing outlaws meets a particularly large band of them.

Whenever a character wishes to take on a new identity, he is given a new Renown total for that identity, which starts at zero. His own Renown is not affected ; he merely has a different Renown total for each of his identities and aliases.

Finding out the true identity of a person operating under a false name is not easy. The Recognition Test is performed against the Renown of the identity to be discovered divided by 10.

Example : After a highly satisfying meal, Xian decides to take to the road. Since he does not know the area, he wanders for several days without finding food. Desperate with hunger, he sees a small convoy on the road and decides to attack it. It is only when it is too late that he sees that one of the vehicles in the convoy is carrying Mai-Lin, the governor's daughter, who is certain to report to her father that the noble hunter of demons has become a common highwayman. The attack earns Xian 6 Renown points (2 for fighting several people, multiplied by 3 as the governor will make him a wanted man). It is a Defining Deed which takes his Renown to 56. When he finally realizes that he is pursued by the governor's men, Xian decides to hide his true identity by taking the name of Wai-Lu. This new identity begins life with a Renown of 0, while Xian's Renown remains at 56. To see through the fake identity and unmask Xian will require someone to obtain a 05 or lower on a Recognition Test (Xian's Renown (56) divided by 10)).

A few examples

The list below gives a few values for basic Renown (that is, the initial value for Renown before adjustment) for different official posts and occupations in the *Zhongguo*.

Village chief	40
Mayor	50
Governor	75
High-ranking official	100
Minister	150
King	200
Emperor	500
NCO	25
Captain	60
Commander	75
Colonel	100
General	150
Craftsman	20
Merchant	30
Wealthy trader	70
<i>Wu xia</i>	25
Head of clan of the <i>jiang hu</i>	40

The Warring States, ancient China : Setting the Scene

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Warring States China is a world apart, with its own particular characteristics which make it very different from more traditional medieval-fantasy worlds.

These special characteristics have been brought to the fore in both the background and the rules of Qin, to set both players and Game Master on the path to a distant and exotic land.

In this chapter, we focus even closer on the unique features of Qin and advise on how they can be exploited to the full.

Visualizing the world

A land of paradoxes

Ancient China is a world of many contrasts, a world torn between a quasi-mythical past and a brutally rational present.

Caught between tradition and modernity, superstitions and bureaucracy, the inhabitants of the *Zhongguo* try to live their lives by navigating through the rocky waters of a society full of paradoxes.

A modern world with ancient ways

In many ways, Ancient China is a beacon of modernity.

First of all, it is home to many technical inventions and innovations, most notably in industry. The huge iron foundries, the enormous textile factories, and workshops with dozens of workers are highly visible symbols of modernity. Similarly, the way in which the land is arranged resembles that of a modern country, with irrigation canals stretching for thousands of miles, huge construction sites swarming with laborers, terracing in preparation for the building of a new town, and the rational division of crops. Finally, there is the advanced condition of science : mathematics, medicine, astronomy, chemistry and agronomy are all respected disciplines pursued by great scholars, taught in the most prestigious universities and written about in learned works.

But at the same time, Chinese society still follows the habits and customs of ancient times. Institutions such as the model of the family, the role of women, the relationship between parents and children, the respect for elders, and traditions such as weddings and funerals have barely changed for centuries, giving the impression of an archaic society, set in its ways and untouched by modern values.

For the Game Master, this paradox of a modern world and an archaic social system is a good way to bring out the originality of Qin and shock the players out of their complacency. His descriptions should exploit this contrast by mixing old-fashioned styles with modern vocabulary, and using this dissonance for maximum impact on players'



minds. Evocative expressions such as “military-industrial complex”, “state planning regulations” or “quality control” are completely at home in Qin : used in a description or dialogue that also uses antiquated or obsolete language, they can bring home to the players the unique nature of the game and the world it depicts. Placing the modern aspects of Ancient China in the context of its society of traditional values is the best way to make that world both real and exotic, and for both players and GM to get right to the heart of the atmosphere of the *Zhongguo*.

Administration and superstitions

Here again, the reason and order of the modern world comes face to face with the ancestral beliefs and superstitions of the ancient world.

The great Legalist reforms have created an administrative system which appears both more efficient and more just than the old feudal system, but which is frequently hobbled by excessive bureaucracy. To the common people, the hierarchy of the official class is a complex and sometimes unpredictable machine which, though supposed to serve them, seems time and again to make their life more difficult. All are presumed to know the laws of the land, but many lack the education needed to understand their intricate provisions. With their civil codes, regulations, sector-specific agreements and various official decrees, the states have an extensive and effective body of law, but one that is beyond the comprehension of their citizens.

Perhaps as a result of this, the people prefer to rely on the guidance of the gods, both earthly and heavenly deities. To resolve a domestic dispute, it is often simpler to pray to the God of the Hearth than to fill in a form. To improve the harvest, it is still more common to pray to the God of the Land or Shen Nong than to ask for an agricultural engineer to come down from the state capital. And should some malicious creature come calling, an exorcist has surely more chances of success than the mayor.

All this has led to a tension between officials and Taoists, between bureaucrats and shamans, between all those who follow modernity and those who hold true to the old ways. Again, the Game Master can use this conflict and make his players aware of this key paradox in the world of Ancient China. He can do this by using modern administrative terminology, such as “docket”, “service manager”, “complaints office”, and “customs duties”, and mixing it with old-fashioned language to get the proper contrast. Presenting a tricky bureaucratic procedure alongside a simpler, more natural approach involving Taoist ritual is a good way to play on this aspect of the game.

The town and the country

Warring States China is a rural society, but in many ways an urban civilization.

For while the majority of the population live in the country, the seat of power is always in the town. The towns of the *Zhongguo* are built according to modern, rational architectural principles. They are extremely densely populated, the largest having over a hundred thousand inhabitants. Even normal-sized towns have several thousand people. City life is of course full of noise and activity : streets resound with the chatter of the people and the work of the craftsmen, crowds throng to market, hundreds of shops open late into the night, and the pleasure districts operate from dusk till dawn. But at the same time, the cities are highly ordered : designed and built with geometric precision according to the millennial principles of *feng shui*, patrolled day and night by soldiers, surrounded by and divided up by high walls, they are the classic example of the states’ will to regulate every aspect of the life of their citizens.

Meanwhile, peasants and other country folk still live by the rhythms of nature, rising with the sunrise and going to bed at sunset, and following the eternal flow of the seasons. Villages are set out in a more random fashion than the towns. Each houses just a few families, and

will be almost deserted by day, with the farmworkers out in the fields and the craftsmen occupied in their workshops. An inn here, a general store there, are the only signs of life. The villagers' only opportunity for rest, relaxation, and a party, will be a religious festival or a market day.

A Game Master can draw on this difference in atmosphere between town and country in order to vary the feel of the sessions, with the prevailing character of each adventure set by its urban or rural backdrop. It is not just the external physical environment that will differ, but also the way of life, people's habits, the basic social rules and expectations. Only hardened travelers experienced in alternating between the town and the country fully understand the breadth and depth of the differences involved. So showing the modern, urban way of life alongside the traditional, rural life is another simple means by which the Game Master can confuse and entertain his players.

The states and the jiang hu

The world of martial arts is a parallel society, governed by its own rules, which frequently have little in common with the laws of the states. The *jiang hu* is the last remnant of ancient society, and the last bastion of independence from the stifling hegemony of the states.

The world of forests and lakes is not a particular place, more a way of life that has managed to survive wherever the states' power is limited, drawing on its rich heritage and living tradition to resist change and the ever-tighter grip of state bureaucracy.

To depict the *jiang hu* is to take the players to another world, to show them the unique way in which China developed, by juxtaposing a highly modern world and a parallel world where little has changed since the time of the old dynasties. For in many ways, the *jiang hu* could not be more different from the world of the Warring States : there are no borders, news and developments from the outside world are ignored, and the texts and strictures of Legalism are simply meaningless. This is a land where powerful lords rule over great stretches of land, tied to their subjects by feudal bonds of fealty and protection, surrounded by courts of scholars and martial arts experts. While few can trace the border between this world and that, the unsuspecting traveler who crosses it will find the contrast striking.

Jiang hu is a land of customary law, where honor still counts for something. The traditional martial arts, spurned by the states in favor of the modern arts of war, are treasured in the *jiang hu* as the precious heritage of a bygone age.

This almost complete dichotomy between ancient and modern is a final way for a Game Master to bring alive the essential paradoxes of Warring States China. One session can take place in a state capital ; another deep in the forests of the *jiang hu*. The first will test the players' understanding of government and social structures, and how well they fare in a rational, crowded context. The second will test their imagination and flair for fantasy adventuring.

An action-packed environment

Martial arts are a key part of popular Chinese culture. Their role is recognized not just in myths and legends, but also in formal histories. Chinese culture is rich with tales of real and imagined figures and their outlandish fighting exploits, with images of great warriors, their tragedies and triumphs.

Qin, like any other role-playing game, has a combat system. This system can be used to create epic and spectacular duels, and by drawing on the vivid imagery of martial arts mythology, to build those duels into impressive, incredible and memorable battles of skill and dedication. GM and players alike can add to the fun.

Managing time

This is perhaps the most complex role for the Game Master in any action scene. In such scenes, time must be managed carefully and precisely so as to be fair on everyone.

Both Game Master and players must understand fully the concepts of rounds, exchanges and actions. But it is the Game Master alone who needs to take charge when a combat, pursuit, or other action scene begins. It is up to him to manage the order of actions, to answer the players' questions, to resolve disputes and to clarify his interpretation of any rules which might appear open to interpretation. Meanwhile, the players should respect the GM's decisions, and take some of the burden off him by knowing their characters and their abilities inside out.

At first, it might all seem very complex, and indeed what with the system of initiative, the possibility of multiple actions, the effect of certain Taos (eg. Ten Thousand Hands), and Combat Techniques, Qin might well perplex those new to gaming. But once everyone understands the basic gaming system, knows his own character well, and abides by the GM's decisions, all will soon become clear. And while the combat rules have a degree of complexity, their worth shows through the infinite range of possibilities they open up.

Action outside combat

While combat is still the most-used type of action scene in most role-playing games, it is worth remembering that many other types of situation can be treated as action scenes, and therefore deserve to be managed with the same care and attention as combat.

For example, any kind of chase or pursuit, whether on foot or on horseback, through a forest of bamboo or on city roofs, deserves the same degree of precision management as a classic duel. By dividing up time into rounds and exchanges, the GM can manage the timing and order of actions, taking into account any obstacles, calculate and vary the distance between the parties, and so on.

Similarly, any kind of situation involving a break-in, whether it be to burgle a dwelling-house, to steal historical artifacts from a museum, or to kidnap a high-ranking official, should be managed properly. The GM should consider the intruder's actions and those of any security guards

or inhabitants, co-ordinate them and impose any relevant Tests (Stealth, Climbing, Perception etc).

Generally speaking, any situation involving any kind of opposition may be considered an action scene, ie. a scene requiring management of time and actions, close attention to the rules and co-operation between GM and players. This is the main difference between action scenes and normal description and dialogue scenes. Examples of possible action scenes include an interrogation, a search of a crime scene, a diplomatic conference, an attempt at seduction or intimidation, and the exploration of a tomb. All such scenes may well involve a character using one of his advantages, such as a Gift or a Tao.

Varying the objectives of combat

The usual object of a combat is to put one or more opponents out of action.

To add a touch of originality, it is worth constructing combats with different and unusual objectives. The best example is the practice among *wu xia* meeting for the first time of fighting a duel whose sole object is to test each other's skills and evaluate their worth as a warrior. In such a duel, to injure the other is a mistake, since the object of the combat is to display fighting prowess and not to kill. So the characters should prefer spectacular movements and techniques to deadly blows.

A GM should use all his imagination to generate duels and challenges where combat is a means to some other end than the usual, an intriguing chapter in the story rather than a predictable conclusion.

For example, a common challenge at martial arts tournaments involves two warriors and only one brush, the object being for one warrior to draw a specific pictogram on a sheet of silk. The challenge is to obtain control of the brush, prevent the opponent from using it, and draw the pictogram while fighting off the other. The purpose of such combats is not to kill the other, but to display one's martial arts prowess by being able to perform an action requiring a degree of concentration while denying the other the ability to interfere with that action. In such a context, actions should be managed carefully, with one eye on the specific nature of the combat : it might take one action to knock the opponent over, another to take hold of the brush, and another to draw the first stroke of the pictogram.

To give another example, a character may encounter a martial arts master obsessed with the infinite profundities of *go* who challenges him to defeat him at the game while defeating his disciples at combat. The character will need to use certain actions to fend off attacks, others to attack the disciples, and others to make his moves. If, in addition, the game is played against the clock, the suspense and tension can be such that although the character is not playing for his life, it may at times seem as if he is.

Descriptions

The secret to making any action scene unforgettable is for the GM and the players to invest all their energy into describing the setting, the actions, the thrills and spills, each adding his own contribution and building the excitement until the scene becomes a breathless, spectacular event in the history of the game.

For this to happen, each player must know his character as well as he knows himself. Gifts and Weaknesses, Skills, Taos, Combat Techniques and even Magic : all of these can come into play in combat, adding to the competitiveness and vigor of the scene. The Game Master should also know the characteristics of any Non-Player Characters that he uses, but above all concentrate on setting the scene. Before he even starts with describing the actions of his own participants, he needs to give a full description of the location, including any features or factors which might have an influence on the combat, such as weather conditions, lighting, obstacles, noises and smells. Then the players can take up the challenge and draw on aspects of the description to assist their alter ego in gaining an advantage.

The next step is to generate a dynamic between GM and players, and between the players themselves, where each builds on each other's descriptions in an interactive and co-operative manner to build up a complex, sophisticated action scene which will stick in the minds of every player around the table.

For example, a bar room brawl could simply end up as a drab exchange of blows and simple Tests. But if the drunkards start jumping onto tables, hanging from the beams and running up the banisters, throwing plates and chairs and generally taking the place apart to escape from their enemies, then the fight could really get interesting. GM and players alike should feel free to use Chinese martial arts movies and old kung-fu classics from Hong Kong to find inspiration or simply to crib from, and show off either their natural inventiveness or their extensive research by constructing fights which turn from brutal to poetic, from dreamlike to real-world, and from tragic to comic in the blink of an eye.

What about a picture?

Drawing a picture of an action scene, showing the main protagonists, conditions and background items, may well be a good way to assist the players in visualizing the location and interacting with it. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages.

On the one hand, a picture enables players to grasp a situation immediately without the GM having to get bogged down in lengthy and ambiguous descriptions. Once the players see the location, they can see the possibilities it offers and start to construct their plans of action. It can also avoid confusions or disagreements about how things are.

On the other, the main drawback to a picture is the risk of players focusing on it to the detriment of imaginative descriptions. Instead of bringing the players closer to the scene, a picture may cause the players to draw back from it, acting as strategists rather than active participants. Since they have an overall view of the whole situation, they may be tempted to use that overall view to design an overall strategy, rather than acting with immediacy and instinct as their characters might. Another drawback is that a picture can limit the imagination of players. If they see bar stools in a particular spot in the bar, they may tend to be pedantic in their use of the stools, focussing more on the details of the picture than on the free-flowing, interactive process that Qin tries to achieve.

At the end of the day, it is up to the Game Master to decide on the basis of each set of circumstances, including the décor and the number of participants, whether a picture would be useful and how much detail he should include.

Blending action and description

One of the most remarkable features of martial arts movies is that action never interrupts the story, but rather contributes actively to it. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that martial arts are part of China's cultural heritage, and that Chinese cinema is a direct descendant of the Beijing Opera.

Any action scene in Qin should follow the same principle : it should not be seen simply as an opportunity for the players to test their characters' strength and skill, but as an integral part of the development of the plot.

This can be achieved in several ways. The simplest way is to define characters through their fighting style. A warrior armed with a mace and with a high level in the Tao of the Destructive Breath is quite different from one with twin short swords adept in the Tao of the Invisible Shield. This difference in style will reflect a difference in nature. The Game Master can take advantage of this natural connection between action and personality by giving his Non-Player Characters specific weapons and combat techniques, and unique ways of moving and attacking, which will be just as useful in illustrating those characters' personalities as his description of their dress and speech. Another way to blend action and narration is to arrange combats and oppositions that match the theme of the scenario : an attempt to break into a building should involve silent aerial attacks, while a military campaign will be full of bloody, deafening battles. Action scenes are a way to consolidate or enhance the atmosphere to be created.

In light of this, a conscientious Game Master should pay careful attention to incorporating his action scenes into his scenario seamlessly, making them appear to occur naturally rather than in a contrived fashion, ensuring they have a role in the plot rather than being a meaningless diversion for the players.

Types of adventures

Warring States China is an immense and richly-varied world, full of exciting opportunities and terrible dangers. The characters can experience all kinds of adventures, and the Game Master can draw on many different themes and devices to construct a game scenario. Adventure, action, and horror are just three of the basic ideas that the GM can build on to develop a fascinating plot fitting the characters into the colorful history of the Warring States.

Mystery

In the first basic type of scenario, the characters have to resolve a mystery. Examples of mysteries involve

solving a murder, discovering how a valuable object was stolen, or working out who kidnapped the local mayor.

While the characters focus on the mystery, the Game Master may entertain himself by generating clues, laying false trails, introducing witnesses and hearsay, all to keep the players engaged in the mystery and to prevent them from getting lost down a blind alley.

Intrigue

Here, the characters must use their wit and diplomacy to resolve a delicate situation requiring a cool head and a steady hand. They may have to act as ambassadors of one state to the court of another, infiltrate a clan of the world of martial arts, or foil a plot by an influential guild of merchants. In all cases, it will be their intelligence and their political acumen that will bring them success.

This type of scenario depends heavily on interactions between players and the Game Master, who will no doubt have to play the role of several Non-Player Characters revealing the personalities, motivations and foibles of each.

Action

In this type of scenario, rhythm and timing are key. The plot is little more than a pretext for a series of death-defying deeds and unbelievable duels, each action scene being more spectacular than the last, the Game Master keeping a vivid description running and using outlandish NPCs to challenge the players.

Not only the GM but also the players will need to know the rules well and manage time with care so as not to break the rhythm of the action or leave anyone behind.

An imaginative GM should have no problem coming up with action scenes to play out and keeping his players on the edge of their seats. Think of the duels on the rooftops, the chariot chases, the ten-on-one combats, the improbable prison breaks, and more...

Military campaign

War is part of everyday life in Ancient China. From simple border skirmish to all-out invasion, it takes many forms, and has been omnipresent across the land for many centuries.

For a Game Master, a military-style scenario is the perfect opportunity to plunge his players right into the events that made history. It presents an almost endless range of roles, including soldiers, officers, spies, and engineers, and countless possibilities for scenarios : planning a campaign, espionage operations, infiltrating the enemy camp, sabotage, raids, peace negotiations, and of course epic engagements involving taking a city by siege, pitched battles, guerilla war, and so on.

Adventure

Adventure scenarios are best suited to characters eager to set off to discover the many corners of the *Zhongguo*. Whether intrepid explorers, state archeologists, or common grave-robbers, they can roam over hills and valleys to their hearts' content, wandering from state to state to find their chosen treasure.



And what might they search for? The list is endless : lost cities of the ancient dynasties, mysterious ruins in darkest Chu, sacred artifacts left behind by the last immortals, or even the tomb of an emperor. Some might search for love, others for money, learning, or just for fun.

Setting off to meet the Xiongnu or the southern barbarians represents a more advanced type of adventure scenario, one requiring higher skills of diplomacy and negotiation, and a particular type of character.

Martial arts

These adventures focus on martial arts iconography, and so usually take place in the *jiang hu*.

They are not necessarily about combat for combat's sake. They are about exploring and applying the popular mythology of the world of martial arts. They may include elements such as secret techniques, inscrutable teachers, hermits with mastery of lost styles, and legendary weapons. They should stress the old values of honor, loyalty and vengeance, and mark the chasm between the old ways and the rationality of the states. The shadowy backdrop of the *jiang hu* will allow the Game Master to give free rein to his imagination and add touches of fantasy, breaking the chains of historical fact to construct almost surreal adventures in a mysterious parallel world.

Horror

Demons from the Ten Hells roam the Earth, ghosts haunt abandoned houses and the undead rise from

the tomb to plague the night of man. While the people quake in fear, certain of being devoured by these horrific creatures, exorcists and demon-hunters go to work.

Horror is a difficult genre to carry off but extremely rewarding. Chinese mythology is full of malevolent creatures who leave terror and death in their wake. A Game Master should combine the imagery of this folklore with the mechanics of the bestiary to confront his players with the grotesque, the unspeakable, and the unknown and so impart an atmosphere of fear, loathing and terror to his game sessions.

Fantasy

Fantasy scenarios are based on the deep secrets of the world, the hidden history of Ancient China known only to a select few.

A Game Master who wants to construct this type of scenario should use all the elements at his disposal : the Guo Long, the Sect of Leaning Heaven and its conflict with Qin Long, Magic and other mysteries. He should coax the characters toward the world behind the visible world, slowly bring them face to face with the hidden forces that forged history, and connect their destiny with the eternal conflict at the root of all the wars and misfortunes of the *Zhongguo*. Whether they be servants of the Dragons, pawns of the Sect, or agents of the Black Shell, it is on their actions that will depend not just the fate of the world, but that of the universe itself.

Scenario

Toward a world of forests and lakes

Introduction

This first Qin scenario is a prologue to the main campaign. You can either use it as is or adapt it to the style of your characters and your own vision of how events in the campaign will play out.

The main objective of the scenario is to familiarize the players with the world of Warring States China and the rules of Qin. But it also contains some factual elements which will be important later in the campaign.

The scenario is intended as an introduction, and assumes that all the players are playing newly-created characters. All the characters are young, and at a crossroads in their lives. They have completed their education and begun to establish themselves in their chosen occupations ; the way ahead seems clear. But this adventure will present them with the opportunity to give it all up for another life, to choose another path, one which leads to the world of forests and lakes. These events take place in the year 240 BC, according to the Western calendar, or year 881 of the Zhou Dynasty, two years before the Qin campaign.

Summary

For the average citizen of the Warring States, coming of age is a crucial time. Soon he will be given a new name, one that describes his adult self, and key decisions will be made about his life, most probably by others. This is the situation that the characters find themselves in at the start of the adventure. They bear the hopes and expectations of their communities, yet have little role in deciding their fate. Just as they attempt to prepare themselves for the great changes attendant on their coming of age, an unprecedented series of events arrives to disturb their well-ordered lives. Between ghosts from the past and portents of a troubled future, will they have the courage to take their chance to choose a life which is truly theirs ?

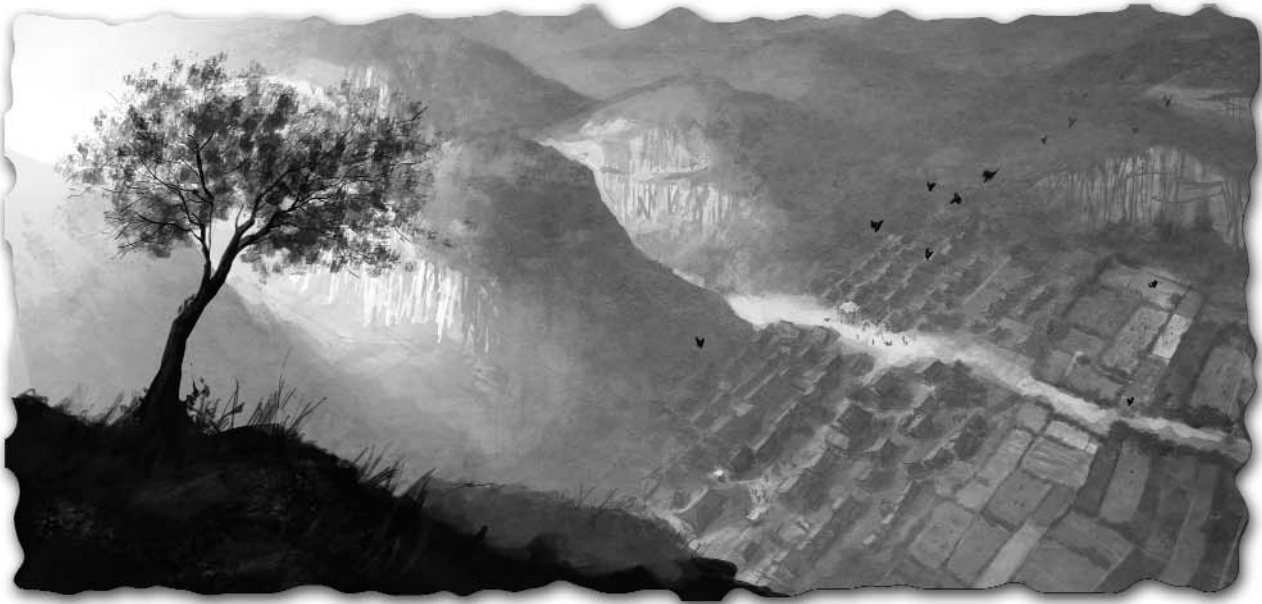
Adventures in Qin will be full of tortuous plots, heroic deeds, spectacular action scenes and the occasional dash of fantasy. This prologue scenario should get you and your players used to facing this kind of challenge. Read it all the way through and make sure you have identified the motivations of the key NPCs and understood the sequence of events. If the creation and objectives of the characters do not fit with the scenario, they risk taking inappropriate decisions with serious consequences for their chances of survival and their future as heroes.

Characters' background

The players will play the part of young people just attaining adulthood. Most, if not all, will be from the small town in Zhao where the adventure takes place. Each will have known the others, to at least some degree, from childhood. Explain this to the players and let them dwell on the childhood years and the relationships between the characters. Better still, fit this information directly into the process of creating the characters. Some might come from another town, or even another region, and just have ended up in Nao either on their first voyage alone or while accompanying a teacher or family member. If so, work with the players to explain the reason for their presence.

The town of Nao

Nao is a small provincial town in Zhao, near the border with Qi. Around a hundred buildings make up the town center, and about the same number of farmhouses are dotted around the fields and prairies. The town sits in a valley surrounded by steep hills with sparse woodland. Shallow, slow-flowing streams flow into a system of channels and ditches, supplying water both to the town and to the fields, where the peasants produce mainly cereals and fodder. Some meadows are home to flocks of



sheep and goats, but most are occupied by horses belonging to the various businesses and buildings set along the beaten-earth road that crosses the valley. With its inns, stores, workshops and stables, the road is the beating heart of the town. For the town's main importance is as a stopping-place for the many convoys of merchants and merchandise passing between Zhao and Qi, and the town's economy depends on the road.

The town itself is divided into three main districts. Along the road are stores, workshops, and inns. To the East is the administrative district, with government buildings, temples, and the residences of the town's most wealthy citizens. The other half of the town is occupied by the common people, a district with dusty, winding roads and the mean dwellings of workers. Outside the town are arable fields and pastureland.

Description

These sections contain ideas and advice to help you describe locations and events vividly. You are free to use them as much or as little as you wish, or to start with the descriptions and let your imagination take over.

You should start by explaining the town of Nao to the players. Although the characters grew up here, the players will need a hand. One way would be to describe a late summer's day, and the slow arc of a hawk across the evening sky. He takes off from the topmost branches of a tree high on one of the hills around the natural basin-shaped valley where the town is set. He slips into the warm air, gliding over green fields where peasants work and animals rest. The countryside passes slowly beneath him, until finally the first buildings appear, on either side of the road packed with colorful, noisy merchant convoys. He swoops over the rooftops of the three districts of the town before spotting his prey. With a single beat of his wings, he darts upwards, leaving behind the world of men, coming ever close to the world of the gods.

What if not all of the characters are from Zhao? Not a problem. Even if they weren't born here, they might still have grown up here. This is all the more possible given that Qi is only two days' ride away. Their parents may have come to the town fleeing war or their own past, or simply in search of work. It is even possible that one of the parents only arrived in town a few months ago.

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Let us assume that all the characters have lived in the area since early childhood, either in the town itself or in one of the outlying farms, and that it is the center of their world. Life in the Warring States being what it is, short of becoming a soldier or a merchant, they will have little opportunity to leave their home. Unless things change...

Each of the districts of the town contains several temples to Tsai Chen, the God of Wealth particularly revered by merchants. The town itself enjoys the protection of Song Xi, the local god who watches over trade and travelers. There is a temple to Song Xi in the administrative district, but most stores and workshops around the town have their own altar.

Sun Wong Lo, governor of the town, is entrusted by the state authorities with ensuring the smooth passage of merchandise and the proper respect for trade regulations. Appointed by the king of Zhao, and loyal to his king, he directs his administrative officers with skill and zeal. His priorities are the security of merchant convoys along this significant trade route, public order and the collection of taxes. To assist him in his work, he relies on a corps of soldiers led by an expe-

rienced officer named Gao Dao, or Sword of Bronze. Most of the soldiers are riders, who patrol the area around the town to protect the road from highwaymen. Within the town itself, law and order is maintained by court agents, policemen under the control of mayor Ting Sen Liao. While the mayor's reputation for probity is beyond question, the same cannot be said for some of his subordinates. Most of the court agents are simple thugs who obey orders without question. But some are a little more intelligent and a little more self-serving, and take advantage of their role to supplement their income. A few coins is usually enough to prevent news of a barroom brawl or disturbance of the peace reaching the ears of the court. To turn a blind eye to a serious crime would pose too many risks to their own position, so there are limits to such unofficial leniency. But the current policing system has the support of patrons of illegal drinking-houses and lovers of illegal merchandise alike.

Another important figure in Nao is Left Hand. This old soldier of Yan, the veteran of countless battles, decided to retire from active service to this peaceful corner of the world. He runs a small martial arts school on one of the hills outside the town, instructing his young charges in the handling of swords, sabers and other weapons. He is a hard but fair master, but teaches his students only a small part of his great fighting skill. The work of this strict and austere individual is appreciated by Gao Dao, who is grateful for a regular supply of young men who, although inexperienced, have at least the basic skills needed to form the core of a local defense force should circumstances demand it. Any inhabitant of Nao with any skill with a weapon has certainly received it from Left Hand.

And what of the characters? Whether they grew up here or moved here some time ago, it now seems as if they are fated to spend the rest of their lives here. They may have learnt the rudiments of a profession, and yet dream of a life of adventure. For the time being, their apprenticeship, their families or their employment keep them in Nao. But by its very location Nao attracts many travelers, who bring fantastical tales and stories of mighty deeds performed by legendary heroes.

The Temple of Song Xi

In the center of a small leafy square is a circular building of varnished wood with an open arch at each of the four points of the compass. In the heart of the building, a fire always burns, and small altars are laid out in readiness for the offerings of passing merchants hoping for good fortune in their business. The walls of the temple are painted on the inside with scenes depicting travel and marketplaces. Outside, the walls are covered with images of birds.

Sun Wong Lo

Around fifty years old and with a proud bearing, this loyal servant of the king of Zhao performs his duties with dedication and conviction. His long years in the service of the king have earned him the complete trust of his sovereign. He combines his official role as governor of Nao with a less formally-recognized function. As the main route linking Zhao and Qi, the road that passes through Nao is popular not only among merchants, but also among spies. It is Sun Wong Lo's task to locate and detain any secret agent, whether from Qi or elsewhere, that passes through the town. He accomplishes this through the range of administrative powers and official documentation at his disposal, requiring every visitor to prove their identity and justify their presence in Nao. But in case that proves insufficient, he has another weapon up his sleeve: Two-Faces. This mysterious man of indeterminate age is part of a little-known group of Zhao assassins. Using many disguises, he visits all the inns, hostels and illegal drinking dens of the town, reporting back to the governor any information that might prove valuable. When ordered to do so, he takes care of any undesirables himself, generally just after they leave town. He is the eyes and ears of his master.

Street brawl

A beautiful morning, with a light breeze sweeping through the town, lifting here and there the odd cloud of dust. Today, just like any other day, the characters are either strolling down the street or going about their business around the market. A sizeable but not unusually large crowd of people wander between the stalls of local merchants and the tents of traveling salesmen come to Nao for a day or two. The air is filled with the cries of storekeepers hawking their wares, and other sights, sounds and smells of the town. Where the street meets an alley, at the entrance to one of the temples around the market square, in front of a stall of tasty ripe fruit or precious stones, the characters meet up, call out to each other, and stop for a chat. Use this chance meeting as an opportunity for the players to introduce and describe their characters. As each one arrives, he can join the conversation and tell his own story. Take the time to answer any questions they might have about the town and its surround-

dings. Let them wander round the stalls and admire the exotic wares from all seven states. Give them the time to feel at home, as if by walking down this street and meeting up with these friends they are simply following a long-established habit. Once the players have settled into their surroundings and know the setup of the market, they should notice another group arrive.

It is Tong, Left Hand's adopted son, and ten of his regular drinking companions. They stride into the square, looking all about them, staring impudently at each face in turn and even knocking some passersby out of their way. Then they notice the characters.

Although at this stage, our heroes won't know why, Tong is looking for students of Left Hand. He leads his group slowly but surely toward the characters and stops a few feet away. Then he furrows his brow, puts his hands on his hips and says to them sharply :

"For shame ! Trying to rob me, taking what is rightfully mine ! You think you're better than me, don't you ? Little shits, tell me where they are or you're in for a rough time !"

Tong pays no mind to the people in the marketplace, but fearing his tone they soon disperse. He continues his tirade against the characters, alternating insults and threats, and takes their blank looks for mockery. He is too enraged to stop for explanations. Whatever the characters say only seems to make him angrier. His voice grows louder and louder and his gang of thugs is ready for action. In any case, whether the characters make a wrong move or Tong loses his patience, a fight starts, with the thugs grabbing sticks and other improvised weapons from stalls around them.

Description : fight in the marketplace

For a character with a healthy imagination, the marketplace in Nao should provide many opportunities to incorporate stunts and improvised weapons into the fight. The characters can overturn stalls to make into improvised defenses, and launch attacks with whatever goods and produce come to hand. Fruit, vegetables, jars of oil, even rolls of silk may prove valuable. One kick to a supporting pole and a whole tent will fall on those underneath. Meanwhile, Tong and his drones are simply looking for trouble, and rush the characters without thinking. Some might chase a character down an alley to a sheep pen, forcing him to fight amid the din of the terrified animals. Two thugs might take a wall hanging and try to roll one of our heroes in it. Yet others might hide behind a sculptor's stall and throw fine statuettes at the characters, to the anguish of the sculptor. Will our heroes be able to catch the statuettes before they break on the ground ? Encourage the characters to run, jump, think on their feet and work with their surroundings. For it is not their lives that are at stake, just their honor !

After a few minutes, the market is in utter chaos. Stalls crash to the ground, sending merchandise flying in all directions, tents collapse and animals panic. But soon, soldiers from the nearest barracks begin to arrive, and those thugs who can still walk flee the scene. The characters would do well to follow their example, unless they want to spend the next few hours explaining themselves and paying for the damage.

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Left Hand has disappeared

Let us deal with the characters. The players have just created them on paper and are eager to send them on the road to adventure. A few young citizens of the Warring States ready to make a name for themselves across the Zhongguo. But for now, they remain ordinary citizens of Nao, and while their dreams may carry them to the skies and beyond, their immediate futures are inextricably linked to the town. Remind the players of this, and ask them to explain the relationships between their characters, and any key events in their short lives. After all, most of them will have grown up together or at least know each others' faces. Nao is a small town with no shortage of work, but opportunities for escape, and chances to become a hero, are few indeed.

Once they get their breath back, the characters will want to find out what is making Tong so angry. Since he accused them of stealing his 'heritage', they assume it has something to do with their connection to Left Hand. The obvious move is to seek out the old master at his home at the school, located at the edge of a large bamboo forest on one of the hills outside town.

When they get to the house, the door is open but no-one is home. Those characters who have studied with Left Hand know the location well, and after a quick tour of the property conclude that the *shifu* has gone. Stranger still, the locked chest where he kept his martial arts books has been forced open (by Tong, although the characters cannot know that) and the priceless works within have been stolen. The simplest assumption is that this is what Tong was talking about, but the players might come up with other possibilities. Could Tong have stolen the books himself in order to cast suspicion on the characters ? Has the old master been kidnapped ? If so, by whom ? Let the players speculate, for while they are discussing their discovery, they hear a sudden noise in the courtyard.

What is Tong after ?

The young Tong is eager to take over Left Hand's school, and impatient to learn his father's most advanced and secret techniques. He knows that the master keeps some old fencing manuals in a locked chest in his bedchamber, and decides to look through them, even if it means breaking the lock. They are, after all, his own heritage, and they will soon enough be his. But on opening the chest, he finds to his dismay that the books have disappeared. In his twisted imagination, he sees it as a theft, a wicked trick on the part of his worst enemies, and his father's best students, the characters. Without stopping to think, he assembles a gang of followers and sets off to track them down. His intention is not to kill them, merely to teach them a lesson. Tong's complete self-belief is his greatest strength and his eternal weakness.

Crank up the tension for the players. Having recently been involved in a serious street brawl, here they are at Left Hand's home, with the old man disappeared and his chest forced open. It doesn't look good, and this could be trouble on the way. But whether they flee the building or hide in the corners, as it turns out, they have nothing to fear. It's only Yii, the master's daughter, coming back from market, laden with groceries. If the characters got a shock hearing the noise in the courtyard, then so does she when she finds them in her house. She saw the scrap in the marketplace, and if it was particularly spectacular, says how much she enjoyed the show. But once the characters start asking questions about her father, she starts to have her doubts. Disappeared ? How ? And what's this about books ? The characters seem to be acting suspiciously, and they'll need to prove their honesty to her quickly. For already more noises can be heard outside ; Tong and his friends have alerted court agents to the theft, and they have come to speak with Left Hand. Tong accuses the characters of stealing the books, failing to mention of course that it was him that broke the lock. If the characters succeed in persuading Yii of their innocence, she will help them to escape through a back door. But they may also choose to confront their accusers.

Description

Caught off guard in Left Hand's house, surrounded by accusers and faced with evidence of their guilt, the characters may well try to escape. Tong is accompanied by four of his friends and six of the mayor's men. The main building is surrounded by a six-foot wall ; to one side is a

smaller building housing a training room with a wooden door leading outside. Four agents have been posted in the courtyard to watch the house. If the characters want to escape through the training room, they will need to get there across the roof (six yards' walk across the narrow rooftop, then a leap of four yards). A real test of the characters' stealth and acrobatic skills. If they are spotted, this provides a fine opportunity for a chase across the rooftops, along the walls, and into the bamboo forest.

The disappearance of Left Hand

Where has the old master got to ? Not too far. He is in his cabin, in the heart of the bamboo forest, in a deserted clearing where he regularly goes to meditate. Only Yii knows of this place, and she will only speak of it in a situation of extreme urgency. During a recent visit to the governor's palace, Left Hand heard Sword of Bronze announce that the town would soon be visited by Lao Li and his bodyguard Su Zuo. Left Hand knows Su Zuo well, as both studied with the same shifu. Left Hand stole his secret manuals from that master (see "the books of discord" below), and knows that Su Zuo has never forgiven him.

Investigations

Whether they head straight to the mayor's office, to another local notable, or whether they simply go to ground, the characters now have a mystery on their hands. Where is Left Hand ? They thought they knew the old master, but now they think on it, they realize they know little about his past. The same goes for Tong and Yii, since their adoptive father was always tight-lipped about his background. And since he largely kept himself to himself, never really making any friends in the town, it will not be easy to find clues. Let the characters wander around town and show their sleuthing skills. By asking questions here and there, they should be able to reconstruct the old master's last movements before his disappearance. A servant will tell them that only this morning he was in the governor's palace, where he spoke with Sword of Bronze, and that he left in an uncharacteristically dark mood. If the characters are wanted by the authorities, then it will be difficult for them to enter the palace, but if they do manage to enter, then they will be able to ask questions of the chief guard, who will confirm the servant's story. He will even tell them that the conversation between Left Hand and Sword of Bronze concerned the visit to Nao of a scholar sent by the king of Zhao, Lao Li. The name will of course mean nothing to the characters.



Guilty or not guilty ?

If the characters choose to evade the attentions of the forces of law and order on this occasion, they will be wanted men until they have proved their innocence. Fleeing the scene of the crime will not exactly plead in their favor, so they will have to keep their heads down for the rest of their adventure. Mayor Ting Sen Liao knows how suspicious Tong can be, and is ready to give the characters the benefit of the doubt. But his agents will be watching, waiting for them to stray from the straight and narrow, ready to pack them off to the cells. Meanwhile, Tong will do everything in his power to put a spanner in the works and force them to go that one step too far.

Other witnesses will have seen the master leave the palace and head home. But although the trail leads all the way back to his dwelling, there it runs cold. Yui cannot explain her father's disappearance, as she noticed nothing unusual about his behavior over the last few days. What she will say is that Tong seems ever more bitter at not receiving the advanced learning that he desires. The character's investigations will take them the best part of the day, especially if they have to play hide and seek

with the forces of order or Tong and his friends. But as the light fades and the sun starts to slip behind the hills, they hear a great commotion coming from the road. They might be settled into one of the inns along the road, discussing the events of the day, or if they are off the road, the noise should draw them to it.

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The procession

Great crowds line the road, and in the distance appears a remarkable procession. Four riders surround a richly-decorated chair carried by six strong men, followed by ten footsoldiers, in full armor and armed with spears, marching in silence ahead of a heavy chariot pulled by four mules. Lao Li, renowned scholar and official historian to the king of Zhao, is making his entry into Nao. The four riders are officers, and the onlookers recognize two in particular : Su Zuo and Red Beak. The procession draws to a halt, and is soon met by the governor Sun Wong Lo, accompanied by Gao Dao and a dozen soldiers in full dress. Formal greetings are exchanged and Lao Li alights from his chair in a statesmanlike fashion. The scholar and the governor then walk together toward the palace, followed by the fabulous and multi-colored procession.

Description : as night falls

A radiant sunset bathes the scene in a warm gold light, the shadows lengthen. The flags of Zhao, carried by the footsoldiers, flap in the breeze. With the glint of bronze armor, the clank of arms, the proud horses and

the bodies of the bearers glistening with sweat, the procession has an air of legend about it. These fierce warriors illuminated in gold and shrouded by shadow begin to resemble the heroes of old, returned from the tomb to walk again. The crowd is left gasping at their air of power and unspeakable menace.

Should the characters come close enough to the procession to observe the newcomers, they should notice a worrying detail. One of the officers has an unusual pictogram tattooed onto the back of his left hand. Those that can read will recognize it as signifying “Perfection”; and the students of Left Hand will know it well as the same sign worn by their own master!

By questioning one of the palace guards, or even a well-informed servant, the characters should find out that that man is Su Zuo, the personal bodyguard of Lao Li. The other officer is known by his men as Red Beak.

A mystical quest

While we know that Left Hand has withdrawn to his cabin to avoid running into Su Zuo, we still need to find out why Lao Li has come to Nao. To do so, we need to go back several months, to a chance discovery made deep in the archives of the royal library of Zhao.

Lao Li is skimming through and classifying various dusty old texts from the time of the ancient dynasties, piled up in no particular order in a corner of the library many years ago. Suddenly, a single sheet of bamboo catches his eye. The shaky yet refined calligraphy, the half-decayed seal and the remnants of silk string cause him to suspect a valuable historic testimony. Once he begins to decipher the text, however, he finds that it is merely a fragment of a bigger text. The fragment appears to be by a writer named Timeless Memories, claiming to be a learned scribe, and the only one to have observed the great battle between Nu Wa and Gonggong. But the account of that battle is in another section of the text which is missing. Gripped with the excitement of his discovery, Lao Li sets off on the trail of the missing section of the text and finds out that it was offered to the library of Zhao several years ago by one Storm of the North, referred to in the text as an “adventurer”, but whom Lao Li presumes to have been a grave robber. The evidence suggests that this character gave Lao Li’s predecessor one fragment of the text and promised to bring the missing section, implying all the while that he had found the tomb of Timeless Memories. But the “adventurer” never returned and the fragment was forgotten, left in a corner to gather dust. The scholar orders an urgent inquiry into the movements of Storm of the North, and the trail eventually leads to Nao. Through separate researches, he discovers the existence of three ancient mounds, which according to legend were built atop an ancient, cursed tomb. And so it was that, with the permission of the king of Zhao, Lao Li decided to undertake the next stage of his mystical voyage of discovery.

A strange detail

The disappearance of Left Hand, the unexplained visit of Lao Li, the tattoo on Su Zuo’s hand : too many coincidences for the characters not to suspect some connection between these events, too many in any case not to inspire their curiosity. But unless they can find or negotiate a way into the palace, they will have to be content with watching Lao Li’s retinue from afar, especially if they are still wanted by the authorities for the street brawl or the theft of the books.

Should the characters manage to speak directly to Su Zuo, and ask him about his tattoo, he will not be forthcoming. He dismisses it as a youthful folly, a souvenir of a time when he was a simple soldier of Yan. But the characters’ curiosity intrigues him, and he asks why they are so interested in his tattoo. If they are vague on the point, and fail to mention Left Hand, then the old warrior will have them followed, in order to learn more about them. Once Su Zuo discovers that Left Hand is in Nao, he will seek him out with such zeal as to neglect his role as bodyguard. But Lao Li will be so occupied with work on the site that he will barely notice.

Note for the Game Master

From this moment on, various events will take place simultaneously in Nao. While the events are more or less linked, their precise timing and the way they turn out will depend to a great extent on the actions of the characters. You will need to adapt your decisions and your descriptions to the speed at which the players want to proceed, and the choices they make. There follows a brief account of the various opportunities that the characters will have to show their worth.

The site

On the day after his arrival in Nao, Lao Li sends Red Beak round all the inns and taverns of the town with an open offer for manual work, to be paid at twice the normal daily rate. This provides the characters with an opportunity to meet the officer of Zhao, or even Lao Li himself, and indeed to earn some money by taking up the offer. Given the handsome rate he is offering, Red Beak has no difficulty finding around twenty strong men ready to go to work with picks and shovels. In the early afternoon he gathers his workers in front of the Temple of Song Xi. Lao Li arrives with his guard and leads the workers to a group of ancient burial mounds on the side of a wooded hill some thirty minutes’ walk from Nao. When they arrive, he introduces himself and explains the nature of the work.

The scholar draws a large circle in the earth and announces that his researches indicate the presence of ancient and valuable relics beneath the ground. If pressed, he will say that they are relics of the Zhou Dynasty, which is of course a lie. The king of Zhao has expressed a desire to look on the timeless wonders of Nao, and has

entrusted the task of uncovering these relics of a bygone age to his personal historian and librarian, Lao Li. This is the official story, and the one told to governor Su Wong Lo. Only the scholar himself knows what really lies beneath the mounds, but Red Beak has his own ideas. The workers' first job will be to construct a bamboo roof over the site to protect it from curious onlookers.

Even if the characters do not seek work on the site, they will certainly want to get close to it. But the sentries are well-paid, and attentive, and will only let them enter the site for a very good reason, or if there is a very good diversion.

The excavation site consists of three large burial mounds, which over the years have become covered with thick vegetation, shrubs, climbing plants and wild grasses. The site, is about three hundred square yards and covered by an eight-foot bamboo roof held up by wooden poles spaced 16 feet apart. Red Beak's soldiers watch over the site and keep away the curious ; four soldiers remain on watch overnight. The workers must arrive every day at the beginning of the hour of the dragon (seven a.m.) and leave every night at the beginning of the hour of the rooster (seven p.m.). They have a small hour for lunch, when a traveling salesman brings soup and dumplings. The work mainly consists of clearing land, excavating areas and digging tunnels from ground level to the burial chamber beneath the largest mound.

Another day, another drama

Here are the various events that will take place over the next few days. Each is a suggested outline, intended to be developed according to the characters' choices and actions. The players may skip over some possibilities in order to concentrate on others. But even if they do, matters will occur in such a way as to enable them to draw the right conclusions. Ideally, the characters should follow several trails at once, following and participating in an ever-accelerating sequence of events leading inevitably to an unknown conclusion. If you can transmit this tension to your players, and make them feel as if they have to fight on all fronts and act with urgency to avoid disaster, then you will have them at your mercy. And the adventure will be all the more dramatic for them.

There follows a brief account of the various situations in which the characters might get involved.

The three assassins

This is one of the most important elements in the scenario, not so much for its importance in this scenario as for its future implications. It is imperative that the characters prevent the assassination of Red Beak, since this particular NPC will return in future adventures and play a key role in the campaign involving our heroes in the beginnings of the Qin Dynasty.

Background

Red Beak is a young and ambitious officer in the king of Zhao's personal guard, personally appointed by the king to lead the detachment accompanying Lao Li to Nao. For this soldier with the wiles of a courtier, such a mission could not have come at a better time, for the capital Handan has become an irksome environment for him, with too many vexatious individuals badgering him about petty gambling debts that he is more than ready to pay as soon, as his salary permits it. That and too many jealous husbands too quick to listen to their wives' gossip, and the small matter of a family vendetta. When the murder of an army captain in one of Handan's brothels created a vacancy in the king's personal guard, only Red Beak and officer Sung were considered of sufficient rank and dedication to occupy the post. Sung appeared to be winning more support than his comrade, but on the night before his formal promotion he suffered a tragic accident, slipping into the river after a drunken night. His body was found the next day on a muddy riverbank, and the inquiry confirmed that he had been the victim of an accident. As the only other candidate, Red Beak became captain and took up his post in the royal guard. But Sung had three brothers...

Development

Lao Li's procession did not arrive from Handan alone. Of course merchant convoys arrive from the capital every day. But the locals could not fail to notice the three travelers with the wide straw hats masking their faces who arrived the next morning. Despite their efforts to pass unnoticed, or perhaps because of them, the three travelers made a deeper impression on the locals than the usual stream of merchants and hangers-on.

If the characters spend their evenings moving between teahouse, tavern and gaming house, they will sooner or later bump into Red Beak at the end of his shift, ready to relax over a few drinks. Should they try to speak with him, they will get short shrift. Red Beak is not a talkative man, preferring to avoid conversation and while away the hours in a quiet corner of the bar. He is careful not to attract attention to himself, avoiding any conflict and slipping away quietly whenever things start to degenerate. Over the next few days, should any characters be in the vicinity of the palace, the site, or decide to follow the taciturn officer of Zhao, they may well notice that in watching him, they are not alone. For Red Beak has three shadows, who on closer inspection turn out to be three young men who hide their faces behind outsize headgear and their presence behind voluminous overcoats. The three men take turns following Red Beak in his lonely wanderings, spending whole days at the excavation site, and spying at the window of his chamber at the palace by night. If the characters approach them, they will deny any connection with or interest in Red Beak, and become more discreet in their surveillance. By asking the right questions of the right people, our heroes should discover that the three men have arrived from Handan and are staying in the "Calm Morning" inn near the governor's palace. The owner of the inn is a man of indeterminate age and affected manners who refuses to answer any questions concerning his customers. But his wife is a lively young woman with a roving eye (with predictably untoward consequences should her husband find her in improper company)

and is as talkative as her staff. It would appear that the three men are brothers, and that they intend staying in Nao no longer than three days. They claim to be there on business, but do not appear to have met any other merchants and have kept themselves to themselves. They paid for their room in advance. Should the characters manage to get into their room, they will find no clues as to their objectives, except maybe the three sabers hidden in a bundle of clothes.

Outcomes

As soon as they see their opportunity, after three days at the latest, the three brothers will lie in wait for Red Beak during one of his nightly walks, and ambush him in a deserted alleyway. Choose the right moment for the ambush according to the characters' activities, ensuring that they are at the right place at the right time, either because they have been following Red Beak or the assassins, or simply by chance. If they come to Red Beak's aid, then he will play no part in the combat unless the characters are doing poorly and his safety is under threat. If so, he will use all his skill and command of the Chi to deal with all three attackers in a matter of seconds. But this should not be necessary: the characters should be able to defeat the brothers without assistance. Once the combat is over, Red Beak will agree to speak with the characters, but only briefly and only about his attackers. He thinks the three attackers sought vengeance, and presumes their vendetta had something to do with his recent promotion. He will refuse to go any further, but just before fleeing the scene before the authorities arrive and start asking embarrassing questions, he says the following:

"Tonight, you have saved my life. I will not forget my debt to you, and I wager that destiny and the gods will one day give me the opportunity to repay it. Goodbye, young heroes."

The characters will indeed cross Red Beak's path in the future, but in different circumstances and with quite different consequences. He will remember them. But he has also had the advantage of seeing them in combat and of evaluating their strengths and weaknesses.

Description

Dark and deserted, the cobbled street resounds with Red Beak's footsteps. A milky moon casts a weak light, and in each corner is darkness. The characters are surrounded on all sides by tall houses, their windows hidden by heavy wooden shutters. The houses support each other by thick beams joining the walls of houses on each side, placed six feet apart, ten feet from the ground. The three brothers lie in wait for their victim, one at each end of the street, the third on the upper floor of a house. It is this brother who will come out onto a beam and drop a heavy blanket onto Red Beak as he passes underneath.

The rage of a son

Background

Tong is still convinced that the characters have stolen his father's books, and even blames them for his

disappearance. Given his reputation for anger and suspicion, and the resources needed for Lao Li's visit, the authorities have not yet followed up on his accusations. But the agents of mayor Ting Sen Liao are suspicious of the characters, and soon Left Hand's adopted son decides to take the matter into his own hands.

Development

Tong instructs a few of his drinking companions to keep a close eye on the characters. But his men are far from professional, and the characters should find it easy to tell that they are being followed. If the characters confront one of Tong's men, he will try to flee. If caught, he will tell all. Tong will give up on having the characters followed, and instead try to get information out of their neighbors and acquaintances. Meanwhile, Tong and his men spread rumors about the characters' involvement in the disappearance of Left Hand and cast doubt on their honor.

Outcomes

The consequences of this whispering campaign are not too serious in themselves, but the characters may well find the authorities becoming more suspicious of them and reluctant to assist them. They will not find a sympathetic ear either at the mayor's office or at the governor's palace unless they have a close personal link with either official. And since rumors spread quickly in such a small town, other citizens begin to regard them with mistrust, and even fear. If the characters are involved in any illegal activity, such as breaking and entering or a street brawl, several witnesses will come forward and implicate them, even if the witnesses were nowhere near the scene at the time. In short, the characters have a reputation problem. Should they end up in court and the mayor decide not to take any action against them, Tong will cause an almighty scene. Things will only return to normal once Left Hand returns and explains matters, if indeed he does return (see below). Whatever happens, the characters should learn how fickle people can be, and how easy manipulated.

Sooner or later, Tong is likely to start another fight with the characters. Use this opportunity to speed the game up again, and wake up any players who might be getting a little too passive. This time around, Tong sets an ambush for the characters in a closed building, such as one of the characters' houses or a tavern. The customers of the tavern flee at the first sight of trouble and the local soldiers have seen too many drunks fighting to care about intervening. Again, Tong's objective is not to kill any characters but to give them a sound beating and find out what happened to the lost books.

Description

This time, Tong has come prepared. His gang now numbers three thugs to each of the characters. Tong waits until all the characters are gathered in one place and posts one of his men on each exit. The thugs are armed with clubs, and grab anything within sight to use as improvised weapons to throw at the characters. Their plan is to harass and disperse the group until one becomes separated from it, and then rush him together. Should the victim's companions come to his aid, the thugs will drop back and start harrying the group again. Tong will urge his men on, but will stay some distance away and only intervene if to do so would not mean excessive risk to his own safety.

Another disappearance

Background

Sooner or later, whether from Gao Dao or some talkative local, Su Zuo is bound to find out that Left Hand lives in Nao. From that moment on, his only thought will be to track down his former comrade. He will become so obsessed with this as to neglect his role as bodyguard, and he will be ready to use all the means at his disposal to fulfil his oath.

Development

First, Su Zuo goes to Left Hand's house, finding only Yii and a drunken, enraged Tong. The girl explains that her father has disappeared and that some of his teaching manuals have been stolen. Then Tong barges in and starts blaming the characters, hoping to recruit a powerful ally in his personal battle. But the old soldier leaves without a word. Thereafter, he is curious to learn more about the characters, but has been around for too long to believe groundless rumors. He questions the characters' families and friends, and finally goes back to see Yii alone, who convinces him of their innocence. He organizes a meeting with the characters to question them about the disappearance of the old master. In the absence of any lead from them, he decides to proceed with his plan. Meanwhile the characters may have noticed a mysterious aura around the old warrior, a presence that is almost magical, and certainly troubling. Following his investigations, Su Zuo is convinced that his enemy has gone into hiding to avoid having to face him, and that all he need do is flush him out. In his view, Tong is a useless fool, but Yii may well be another matter...

Just as Lao Li is uncovering the secrets of the burial mounds, Su Zuo disguises himself and kidnaps Yii from Left Hand's house. While making his escape, he comes face to face with Tong, but has no difficulty in eliminating such a pathetic opponent, flattening him with a single blow of his saber. The following day, Tong runs screaming through the town and into the courthouse of mayor Ting Sen Liao, weeping and wailing about the kidnap of his sister Yii. His story is so wildly exaggerated ("*There were ten of them, no twenty, and demons*" etc.) and so riddled with contradictions that the mayor has difficulty taking him seriously. Nonetheless, news of Yii's disappearance has already spread through the town. Tong tries once again to blame the charac-

ters but no one believes a word. Ting Sen Liao appoints an investigator to look into the matter, and the investigator will be keen to ask a few questions of the characters.

Outcomes

Once more, the characters find themselves mixed up in Tong's problems. While they would like to find out more about the kidnap, they will find it difficult to get anything out of him. Whether by his tattoo or by his questions, Su Zuo might have given them an idea, and should they ask around they might well find out that Su Zuo failed to return to the palace last night. Hoping that Yii's disappearance will flush Left Hand out of his hiding-place, he has holed up with his captive in a stable just outside the town. Only one man knows that he is there, one of his most loyal soldiers, entrusted with the task of patrolling the streets of Nao waiting the return of Left Hand. As soon as Left Hand does return (either because the characters have found him or because the soldier sees him entering his house), the soldier speaks with him and arranges a meeting. Su Zuo will meet him the following night, at the edge of the bamboo forest, not too far in fact from the cabin where he was hiding.

Description

Just when they least expect it, Su Zuo appears from nowhere and looms before them like a specter. He looks them up and down, just as a hunter eyes its prey. He is not looking for a fight, just some answers. And he counts on getting them. His questioning is direct and his manner superior. At the mention of Left Hand, his voice shakes with rage, and a mysterious deep red haze appears to escape from his mouth with each breath. He will only explain the source of his anger if the characters start speaking of the old master as some kind of hero. If they do, he will not be able to stop himself telling the whole story about the books, so far as he knows it himself, in order that they might reflect on it. If the characters try to attack Su Zuo, they will be surprised by his readiness for combat and overcome by his magical powers. But our heroes should survive, and learn some valuable lessons for their next challenge.

The books of discord

This is the story of Left Hand and Su Zuo. At one time, they were friends, the most promising students of the renowned *shifu* of Yan, Yu He. But while Su Zuo saw his education as no more than a means to satisfy his personal ambitions, Left Hand (known as Both Hands at that time, since he was ambidextrous) sought above all to fulfil his oath to avenge the murder of his father. Since Su Zuo was of higher birth, he received more attention from Yu He, and as the young Both Hands' progress grew slower, he became ever more jealous of Su Zuo. On the day that the *shifu* decided that Su Zuo was ready to learn the school's most secret fighting techniques, Both Hands felt rejected and his envy turned to a bitter rage. That night he broke into his master's

quarters and tried to steal his teaching manuals. But before he could escape, he was caught in the act by the *shifu*. Overcome by fear and spite, Both Hands ran through his own master's chest with his sword. It was at that moment that Su Zuo appeared, to be greeted by the terrible scene of the old man writhing in a pool of blood, laid low by the hand of his own student. Both Hands blocked an attack from Su Zuo and leapt toward the window. As he flew through it, the sword of Su Zuo sliced clean through his right arm at the wrist. Yet he escaped into the blackness of the night and the priceless texts escaped with him. Su Zuo stayed with his stricken master, swearing to avenge this base act of betrayal.

From that moment on, Both Hands would be known as Left Hand. He now had no master and only one hand, but with the aid of his former master's books he was able to develop his skills and avenge his father. As he grew older, he decided to move to Nao and open a martial arts school. And ever since he has lived there with his regrets, hoping to appease the wrath of the gods by living out his days in exemplary fashion.

Meanwhile, Su Zuo became an officer in the Yan army. Despite showing initial promise, his bitterness and obsession with vengeance caused him all manner of problems, and finally he left the army before reaching the rank of general. For several years he worked as a mercenary, seeking out his enemy along the roads and through the back country of the *Zhongguo*. But as the years went by, that life proved too trying and he obtained a position as bodyguard at the royal court of Zhao.

As for the old *shifu* Yu He, he was never reconciled to such an unjust death, and his ghost took possession of his former student's severed hand. Su Zuo carries the mummified relic everywhere, and the spirit of the departed gives him phenomenal powers.

All this took place some twenty-eight years ago.

The secret of the mound

From the comfort of his chair, Lao Li supervises the progress of work on the mounds. During the third day of the excavations, the workers uncover a walled tunnel under the largest of the three mounds. A stone stele the height of two men stands at the entrance to a vault made of rocks set with quartz crystals. The stele is engraved with ancient symbols threatening with the darkest of curses any man who would dare set foot in this lost place.

Background

As explained above, Lao Li is looking for the tomb of Timeless Memories, the ancient scribe who recorded the great battle between Nu Wa and Gonggong. His researches have led him to Nao, and he is close to his goal. It seems as if the tunnel dug by Storm of the North collapsed behind him, and the stone stele fell back into its original place.

Development

Once the stele has been uncovered, Lao Li pays off his workers and sends them away. He has the site guar-

ded day and night by ten of Gao Dao's men, remaining there during daylight hours with Red Beak and four of his soldiers. It will take them a whole day to remove the giant stone sealing the entrance to the chamber, as the mechanism used by Storm of the North has been damaged beyond repair. Once the stele is removed, Lao Li gains access to the ice caves, from where he will doubtless never return. Members of the Sect of Leaning Heaven begin a constant watch over the site and make contact with Red Beak on the very same night. He may well be on his way to meet them when his life is saved by the characters.

Outcomes

Without knowing it, Lao Li has given the Sect of Leaning Heaven just the help it needed to launch its campaign to sow chaos through the Warring States. Now that the tomb of Timeless Memories is open, they can find the lost secrets of Gonggong. Should the characters have a role here, it should be to save Lao Li.

The followers of Gonggong

Background

While Lao Li watches the excavations being carried out for the king of Zhao, another more insidious faction is watching him. For the Sect of Leaning Heaven is also interested in the tomb of Timeless Memories, albeit for more shadowy reasons. The group has a network of spies and informers dotted throughout the states, and it has not taken long for news of his work to reach them.

Development

The night before Lao Li's arrival in Nao, five members of the Sect meet in the town. Posing as ordinary travelers, they hire a modest room in one of the inns set along the road. Two obtain employment on the site excavating the burial mounds, and the other three come and go, keeping abreast of Lao Li's movements and other events in the town. One approaches Red Beak as he relaxes in a gaming house. If the characters see the conversation between the two and try to speak with Red Beak, the member of the Sect will introduce himself as a messenger come with news from Handan. Red Beak will let this lie go by and will try to put the characters off until later.

Outcomes

The five men do not break the law, threaten none and do little more than ask questions and observe events. This should make it difficult to spot them, and nigh-on impossible to guess at their objectives. Should the characters hear about these curious individuals and confront them, they will be evasive and do their utmost to avoid any trouble which might draw attention to them. But if our heroes attack them, they will not hesitate to complain to the authorities. Once the tomb has been opened, they will wait quietly outside the town for Red Beak to join them with the stolen documents (see below).

The ice caves

The tomb of Timeless Memories : this is where the most dramatic events in this adventure will take place. The mechanism controlling the stele at the entrance to the tomb has become useless with age. The tunnel dug by Storm of the North has collapsed. So it takes Lao Li's workers a little over three days to clear the entrance to the tomb.

Just behind the engraved stele lies a dark shaft descending deep into the clammy Earth. The shaft is round, nearly five yards across, with a damp, uneven staircase clinging to its jagged walls. The suffocating darkness is tempered only by a pale light which appears to rise from the depths. A cold, foul-smelling wind blows around in gusts, causing lamps and torches to flicker.

The characters descend the spiral stairs for many long minutes and come to a wide ledge with a low stone archway cut into the wall. The shaft continues down, far beneath the ledge, to the source of the strange pale light. But there are no more stairs. The characters must pass through the archway and walk in single file through a narrow tunnel for about ten yards. Toward the end of the tunnel, they see a blazing light; their eyes now accustomed to the dark are dazzled. Then, at last, they come to the end of the tunnel and emerge into the ice caves.

Description

The characters might follow Lao Li down the staircase, or might be trying to find him. Try a slow, ponderous description, evoking the gloomy, silent experience of the descent. They should feel as if the Earth is eating them up, and should sense a growing unease at the darkness, the buffeting wind, the biting cold, the damp, and the ever-worsening stench of death. The steps are roughly cut and covered in moss : one character should slip. He might be caught by another character, or catch onto a stair some yards lower down. There should be no need to kill a character here : just use him to feed the tension.

Once through the tunnel, the characters find themselves in a vast underground chamber, on a small ledge overlooking a vast network of naturally-occurring caves. In the center of the chamber is a huge roughly circular cave ringed by seven smaller caves anything from twelve to thirty yards deep. The whole chamber is bathed in a pure light, which appears to come from the walls themselves. It is bitterly cold, and damp, and the caves are filled with countless stalactites and stalagmites, some joining together to form tremendous columns of ice reaching all the way to the roof of the chamber, twelve yards above the characters' heads. The path leading from the ledge to the caves is covered in ice, and walking down it requires good balance. Should a character slip, he will fall three yards down the slope, right into an enormous stalagmite covered in sharp icy protrusions. He will be wounded, and lose at least a box of Breath of Life.

Once the characters begin to explore the caves, they may soon feel lost in this icy labyrinth. In such a confusing environment, it is easy to get separated from the group. The

bleak cold and the blank silence of the chamber soon become oppressive. But near the center of the chamber they find a body scorched by the cold and preserved in a skin of ice : the body of Storm of the North. His frozen hands clutch a few bamboo sheets, the fragment of the writings of Timeless Memories that he had returned to steal. Closer inspection reveals a harpoon of ice embedded in the graverobber's back, and a pile of ashes mixed with ice a few feet away. The ashes have fallen in a vaguely humanoid shape, with a few wooden beads rising from the pile. The ashes are those of the demon awakened by Storm of the North. The graverobber was killed by the demon's harpoon, and the demon by the necklace. Once a simple wooden trinket, it was transformed by an exorcist into a deadly weapon which would consume with fire any demon that wore it around the neck.

Description

The mighty columns of stone and ice are like a hall of mirrors, which bemuse and confuse the characters, making it difficult for them to get their bearings or locate opponents. Sounds are muffled by the rough walls of dead stone, and sudden movements are hazardous on the ice-clad floor. A blow to one of the walls, whether intentional or not, will cause an avalanche of shards of ice to fall to the floor and stick there, making it even more treacherous. In this mysterious labyrinth, combat can be both spectacular and frustrating for our heroes.

Four of the seven caves are simple hollows in the rock, with slippery floors and jagged, icy walls. The three others, furthest from the tunnel by which the characters enter, lie slightly above the level of the floor of the chamber. The entrance to each of these three caves is blocked by a wall of ice over four inches thick. In front of the central cave lies an abandoned mace. Set into the wall at the entrance to this cave, sticking slightly out, is a single sheet of bamboo, another fragment of the writings of Timeless Memories. Behind the wall lies the tomb of the ancient scribe : his body is not there, just a simple stone stele. At the foot of the stele is the complete and definitive text of his account of the battle between Nu Wa and Gonggong. But the cold and damp of the ice caves, and the passing of the years, have made most of the text virtually unreadable.

The two other caves are home to the seven demons who guard the tomb. They have the ability to pass through ice and can emerge from their caves as soon as either Lao Li or the characters try to break through the ice wall blocking the entrance to the tomb. Their duty is to protect the ancient document ; for according to legend, it contains information on the manner by which Gonggong might be returned to the *Zhongguo*. This is why the Sect of Leaning Heaven have followed the excavations with such interest. It is the demons that generate the intense cold in the caves, so should the characters destroy three of the demons, then the ice will begin to melt and the cave will run with icy water. When only two demons remain, the chamber will start to collapse in on itself and the characters will need to rush back the way they came, and find the spiral staircase quickly, or risk being crushed under tons of rock.

If the characters choose not to follow Lao Li into the caves, but to go down some time after him, they will discover his body and the bodies of his four guards encrusted with crystals of ice. The scholar appears to have died attempting to break through the wall of the tomb. The seven demons will already have left their caves and may appear at any moment, playing hide-and-seek and causing panic among the characters. Red Beak might accompany the characters, or might follow them down. His objective will be to find the bamboo text and return it to the members of the Sect. He will seize on any combat to make good his escape, leaving the characters to deal with the demons alone.

Epilogue

At the end of this adventure, the characters will be faced with a multitude of choices. What should they do about Left Hand's books? Should they report Su Zuo's suspicious conduct? If so, to whom? Red Beak has fled with the work of Timeless Memories, but where to? Is Lao Li still alive? If he is, he will want to show his gratitude to the characters. But if he is not, the king of Zhao will want a full explanation. But above all, the characters must face up to their own destinies. Their lives have been turned upside down by this extraordinary chain of events. Will they ever return to normal? They may now be wanted by the authorities, or face a family vendetta of one kind or another. They may simply decide to take their future in their own hands. Anything is possible. The group of characters may splinter, each choosing to follow his own path in the *jiang hu*. Whether they have forged firm friendships or earned the scorn of their fellow heroes over the course of this adventure, sooner or later destiny will cause their paths to cross. And on that day they will set out on a journey that will go down in history and legend.

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The curse of the eternal lover

There is no body in the tomb, just a funerary urn half encased in the ice and placed near to the bare stele. The urn is carved in jade, in the shape of a naked woman with fine, delicate features. It contains both the ashes of the scribe and his eternal curse. For he dared to look on the sight of the goddess for too long, eventually falling in love with her, and died with his love weighing heavy on his heart. Any male character that opens the urn and breathes in the ashes by mistake must succeed in a Resistance Test with an ST of 7, or fall victim to the curse. The curse will make all women appear dull and unattractive to him, and prevent him from ever falling in love. For he knows that the only wife worthy of his love dwells at the Court of Heaven, and lives only to seek her out and to perform ever more noble deeds to win her love. Sometimes, he will lose heart, and his melancholy will add +1 to the STs of all of his Tests. The Game Master will decide how often this will happen and for how long.

The character receives, in addition to his own Gifts and Weaknesses, the Gift of Insensitivity (any attempt to seduce him will automatically fail) and the Weakness of Obsession (for his only reason to live is to win the love of a goddess). The curse has no effect on a female character.

Non-Player Characters

Su Zuo, the hawk of Zhao

Once an officer in the army of Yan, then a mercenary, and finally a bodyguard at the court of Zhao, he now works as bodyguard to Lao Li.

Su Zuo is a man of average height but above-average build. His body is extremely muscular for a man his age. He is bald, with a long and carefully-trimmed moustache. His somber demeanor is tinged with an air of cruelty. He never laughs. He wears a *chang pao* of embroidered silk, with a long sword worn to the side. The small leather pouch hanging from his belt holds the mummified hand of his former comrade, together with the ghost of their old master, which gives him certain extraordinary powers.

Bodyguard 5'6" / 156 pounds / 49 years old
Metal 4 Water 4 Earth 3
Wood 2 Fire 2

Gift and Weakness : Strength of the Ox / Curse of Zhu Rong (avenge his master by killing Left Hand)

Skills : Investigation 2 ; Perception 1 ; Heraldry 1 ; Intimidation 2 ; Meditation 2 ; Art of War 2 ; Hand-to-Hand 2 ; Dodging 2 ; Jianshu 3 ; Nushu 2 ; Daoshu 1 ; Horsemanship 2



Combat Techniques : Jianshu (Total Block, Direct Hit, Trap, Disarm) ; Nushu (Snapshot, Strong Hit) ; Daoshu (Direct Hit)

Taos : Tao of the Six Directions 2 ; Tao of the Light Step 2 ; Tao of the Strengthened Body 2 ; Tao of the Invisible Shield 2 ; Tao of the Destructive Breath 2 ; Tao of the Inner Eye 2

Chi : 18 **Breath of Life** : 19 (8/5/3/2/1)

Passive Defense : 8 (9 with the hand) **Renown** : 50

Equipment : Sword, two daggers, fine clothing, the mummified hand

The Hand

Su Zuo goes nowhere without the mummified right hand of his former comrade, which now holds the spirit of their former master Yu He. This ghost has the unusual characteristic of being unable to act alone, but of granting to its bearer some extraordinary powers. The ghost will only leave this world when Left Hand is dead, or when successfully driven out by a *fangshi*. Should an exorcist attempt this, however, he will be sure to meet with the anger of Su Zuo. Should Su Zuo be killed, the spirit of Yu He will contact a person of his choice within a radius of ten yards of the hand, and try to gain possession of that person. The new bearer will gain the same powers held formerly by Su Zuo, the better to avenge the death of the old *shifu*.

Powers granted : Cancellation of penalties due to loss of Breath of Life ; Terror 3 ; Passive Defense +1 ; Resistance Tests +3 ; Perception Tests +3.

Yu He's powers : Possession 4

Lao Li, scholar in search of glory

This pudgy and affected man is the head of the king of Zhao's personal library. He is passionate about the history of the ancient dynasties and convinced that by discovering the tomb of Timeless Memories, he will win eternal glory. He speaks with a delicate voice and has acquired encyclopedic knowledge. He is usually careful to the point of timorousness, but as he nears his goal, he loses all his reserve and forgets that Su Zuo is not there to protect him. He wears loose-fitting blue robes and a long silk *chang pao*.

Scholar 5'7" / 145 pounds / 39 years old

Metal 1 Water 2 Earth 3
Wood 5 Fire 2

Gift and Weakness : Memory of the *Zhongguo* (history) / Mind of the Hare

Skills : Bureaucracy 2 ; Calligraphy 2 ; History 4 ; Literature 1 ; Learning (legend of Nu Wa) 3 ; Etiquette 2 ; Theology 1

Taos : Tao of the Clear Mind 3

Chi : 24 **Breath of Life** : 15 (5/4/3/2/1)

Passive Defense : 9 **Renown** : 60

Equipment : A beautiful silk fan, fine clothing, several books, a silver mirror engraved with a portrait of Nu Wa.

Left Hand, shifu with a dark past

The old teacher from Yan began studying martial arts to prepare himself to avenge his father. When he tired of feeling rejected by his *shifu*, he resolved to steal the mas-

ter's teaching manuals, but was caught in the act and killed his own master. The secret techniques that he learnt enabled him to fulfil his oath of vengeance, but he was forever filled with regret. He enlisted in the Zhao army and fought many battles against Wei and Qin, and when he grew too old for active service, he retired to live in Nao. There, his friendship with Gao Dao inspired him to reject the life of a hermit and to share his fighting skill by founding a school. He yearned for the forgiveness of the gods and sought to lead an exemplary life, adopting two orphans, Tong and Yui, and often coming to the aid of the townsfolk. Left Hand became popular in the town but remained silent as to his past. The loss of his right hand does not affect his great fighting skill. On his wrist is tattooed a pictogram signifying "Perfection". He wears short, practical clothes, and his austere appearance is enlivened only by a wide belt of red silk, a souvenir of his time in the Zhao army.

Shifu 5'8" / 141 pounds / 48 years old

Metal 4 Water 4 Earth 2
Wood 2 Fire 3

Gift and Weakness : Gift of Nezha / Code of Honor (will not allow others to suffer through his fault)

Skills : Perception 1 ; Heraldry 1 ; Legends 1 ; Taoism 1 ; Hand-to-Hand 1 ; Jianshu 3 ; Daoshu 2 ; Bangshu 2 ; Chiushu 1 ; Gongshu 1 ; Qiangshu 1 ; Dunshu 1 ; Acrobatics 1 ; Meditation 2

Combat Techniques : Jianshu (Direct Hit, Total Block, Trap, Rebound, Disarm) ; Daoshu (Direct Hit) ; Bangshu (Double Blow, Total Block), Chiushu (Knock Over)

Taos : Tao of the Six Directions 3 ; Tao of the Light Step 1 ; Tao of the Sudden Lightning 2 ; Tao of the Invisible Shield 2 ; Tao of the Ten Thousand Hands 3

Chi : 12 **Breath of Life** : 17 (6/5/3/2/1)

Passive Defense : 8 **Renown** : 25

Equipment : Sword, dagger, mace, shield, old clothes, books of Yu He.

Tong

The adopted son of Left Hand has disappointed his father by acquiring none of the virtues of a hero of the *Zhongguo*. He is strong in combat, but prefers to spend his nights drinking and gambling rather than devoting himself to continuing his father's work. For he has always looked for an easy way out. He is arrogant, believing that once his father dies, he will automatically become a *shifu*. He is an unpleasant character, jealous of those characters who study with his father, especially those who are more gifted than he. He wears expensive but showy clothes. While Left Hand clearly prefers his sister Yui, Tong treats her as little more than a servant.

Wu xia 5'10" / 147 pounds / 18 years old

Metal 3 Water 3 Earth 2
Wood 2 Fire 3

Gift and Weakness : Luck of the Hare / Misogynist

Skills : Intimidation 1 ; Games 2 ; Hand-to-Hand 2 ; Jianshu 2 ; Dunshu 2 ; Acrobatics 1

Combat Techniques : Jianshu (Direct Hit, Total Block)

Taos : Tao of the Six Directions 2 ; Tao of the Light Step 1 ; Tao of the Sudden Lightning 1

Chi : 12 **Breath of Life** : 19 (7/5/4/2/1)
Passive Defense : 7 **Renown** : 10
Equipment : Sword, shield, bottle of liquor, dice.

Tong's men

They are simple drones, whose only strength is in numbers and whose only courage is in drink.

Red Beak

A young and promising officer, who has earned his unusual nickname from his habit of painting his lips with red pigment. This sharpens his features, making him appear cruel, but also attracting the attention of women. His long silky hair flows freely in the wind and he is never seen in anything but the finest and most richly-colored clothes. He exudes a detached, serene air at all times, but he is fiercely ambitious, and knows that he can only go so far within Zhao. He bears an abiding hatred for Qin, since his family was one of the noble houses of that state which lost their wealth and their rank in the Legalist reforms. He found sanctuary in Zhao, but now fears that his adopted state will never measure up to the might of its neighbor. He has recently been contacted by members of the Sect of Leaning Heaven, and feels strangely drawn to their vision of a cleansing chaos to rid the world of the tyrannical order of Qin. Red Beak is a complex character, with a long history and unfathomable motivations, which will be developed later in the story. He should be played as an almost invincible and supremely confident warrior.

The three vengeful brothers : Song, Chu and Li

They follow Red Beak and lay an ambush for him, which the characters must save him from.

Metal 3 Water 3 Earth 2
Wood 2 Fire 2

Gift and Weakness : N/A

Skills : Intimidation 1 ; Games 1 ; Dodging 1 ; Stealth 1

Song : Jianshu 2 **Combat Technique** : Total Block

Chu : Qiangshu 2 **Combat Technique** : Double Blow

Li : Chiushu 2 **Combat Technique** : Knock Over

Taos : **Song** : Tao of the Six Directions 2

Chu : Tao of the Destructive Breath 2

Li : Tao of the Light Step 1 ; Tao of the Invisible Shield 1

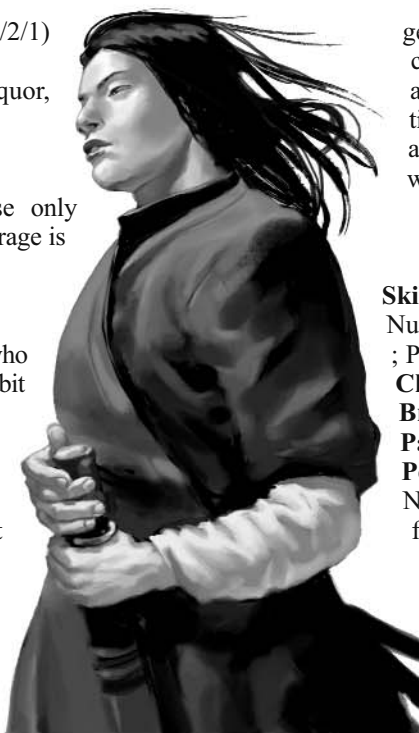
Chi : 12 **Breath of Life** : 19 (7/5/4/2/1)

Passive Defense : 7 **Renown** : 5

Equipment : Each has his own weapon and wears a wide straw hat and a long overcoat.

The ice demons

The demons were called forth by Nu Wa to prevent anyone from disturbing the tomb of Timeless Memories and to protect the original copy of his text. They



generate the cold that pervades the ice caves. They have little intelligence and even less sense of self-preservation. In combat, they spit ice crystals as sharp as darts and beat their victims with enormous clubs of stone and ice.

Metal 3 Water 2 Earth 2
Wood 1 Fire 2

Skills : Chiushu 3 ; Learning (legend of Nu Wa) 4 ; Intimidation 2 ; Climbing 2 ; Perception 2

Chi : 18

Breath of Life : 17

Passive Defense : 7

Powers : Terror 9 ; Natural Armor 1 ; Natural Weapon (ice picks) 3 ; Do not feel effects of loss of Breath of Life.

Summary chronology

Note that this basic chronology does not take into the account the actions of the characters, who can speed up or slow down parts of the following sequence of events.

Day 1 : In the morning, Left Hand speaks with Gao Dao and learns of the impending arrival of Su Zuo. He decides to disappear for a few days. Tong starts a fight with the characters in the marketplace.

In the evening, Lao Li and his retinue arrive in Nao. One hour later, the three brothers arrive in town and find accommodation in an inn in the merchants' district.

Day 2 : Red Beak employs laborers for the site on the mound. Members of the Sect of Leaning Heaven arrive in Nao.

Day 3 : Unless he has already done so, Su Zuo learns that Left Hand lives in Nao. He seeks out the characters in order to question them, and has Yii watched. Tong tries to persuade the mayor to have the characters arrested.

Day 4 : Song, Chu and Li lay a trap for Red Beak. A member of the Sect of Leaning Heaven approaches the young officer of Zhao. In the morning, Su Zuo kidnaps Yii and entices Left Hand into the bamboo forest for a duel. In the afternoon, Tong returns to cause problems for the characters. In the evening, the bodyguard finally kills his former comrade.

Day 5 : The workers open a passage to the ice caves. Lao Li enters the caves and awakens the demons. Red Beak flees with fragments of the text of Timeless Memories.

NAME

STATE

CHARACTER TYPE

Qin

PORTRAIT

CHI

PASSIVE
DEFENSE

RESISTANCE

BREATH OF LIFE

NORMAL

BRUISED

L.I. -1

S.I. -3

F.I. -5

FIRE

火

H

W

S

A

METAL

金

EARTH

土

WOOD

木

WATER

水

GIFT

REOWN

WEAKNESS

EXPERIENCE

DEFINING DEEDS

EQUIPMENT



SKILLS

水 WATER

木 WOOD

火 FIRE

土 EARTH

COMBAT 金 METAL

PROTECTION

WEAPON	LEVEL	DMG	RES	C	M	L	E	TECHNIQUES

TAO - MAGIC

TAO - TECHNIQUES LVL T M EFFECTS



Glossary

- B -

Bang : Stick.
Bishou : Dagger.

- C -

Chang pao : Traditional garment of Warring States China, worn either short or long, loose or close-fitting.
Chi : Primordial energy of the universe, emerged from the Tao and source of all life on Earth.
Chui : Mace.

- D -

Dao : Saber.
Da xia or **Wu xia** : Knight-errant. This is the name given to the wandering warriors made famous in martial arts novels and films. *Da xia* implies virtue and honor (from *Da* : great, in the sense of a great soul) while *wu xia* has more of a warlike connotation (from *Wu*: martial, as in *wushu*).

- E -

Emo : Demon.

- F -

Fangshi : Taoist practitioner versed in one or more of the ways of the Tao ; types of *fangshi* include exorcists, diviners and alchemists.
Feng Du : Hell, also known as the Yellow Source.
Fenghuang : Phoenix.
Feng shui : Geomancy.
Fu : Halberd.

- G -

Gong : Bow
Gonggong : Warlord of ancient times who wrought chaos on Earth and was imprisoned by the goddess Nu Wa. The Sect of Leaning Heaven work to free him.
Gui : Monster or ghost.
Guo Long : Dragon Protectors of the States ; generic name given to the seven dragons who protect the seven states and struggle for primacy over the other dragons in order to devour them.

- J -

Jian : Straight sword.
Jiang hu : World of forests and lakes. The *jiang hu* covers all those who live on the margins of society, not just knights and martial arts experts. It therefore includes the *wu lin*.
Jiang shi : A type of vampire, a powerful zombie motivated by hunger for human flesh, and which moves by leaping.
Ji nu : Common prostitute.

- K -

Kilin : Chimera with the body of a horse, the paws of a tiger, the head of a stag, the tail of snake and wings of fire. The legendary mount of gods and immortals.

- L -

Long : Dragon.
Lurong : Short sword.

- N -

Nei Dan : Internal Alchemy.
Nu : Crossbow.

- Q -

Qiang : Spear.

- S -

Shifu : Master, teacher.

- T -

Taiji : The Highest Form, a representation of the Tao. It is generally symbolized by a black and white circle depicting Yin and Yang.
Tian Xia : “Everything under Heaven”, name given by the rulers of Qin to their plan to reunify the states into a single Empire.
Tao : The Eternal Absolute, without consciousness nor design, from which all things come.

- W -

Wai Dan : External Alchemy.
Wu : Sorcerers or shamans, who use the same magic as *fangshi* but in a more homely, instinctive way.
Wu lin : The world of martial arts in the strict sense. The world in which clans and *da xia* live. Part of the *jiang hu*.
Wushu : Martial arts, only practised with weapons in the time of the Warring States.

- X -

Xian : Immortal.
Xiongnu : Nomadic tribes of the northern steppes, renowned as riders, ancestors of the Mongols and Huns.

- Y -

Yang : One of the two primordial forces that emerged from the Tao. Associated with light, Heaven, the masculine, and the positive.
Yao : Animal with various powers and the ability to assume human form. Most commonly foxes and snakes.
Yi ji : Courtesan.
Yin : One of the two primordial forces that emerged from the Tao. Associated with darkness, Earth, the feminine, and the negative.
Yue : Axe.

- Z -

Zhongguo : “The Middle Kingdoms”, name given to the combined territory of the Warring States. The term was used later to give the name “The Middle Empire” to unified China.
Zi : Honorific suffix granted to a renowned scholar, most frequently after his death.

Sources of Inspiration

Here is a list of books and films that Game Masters and players alike can use to draw inspiration for themes, scenarios, and practical details for game sessions.

Bibliography

Dao de Jing

Lao Zi
Chinese Classic

The Analects and Book of Rites

Kong Fu Zi
Chinese classic

Shi Ji (about famous historical characters)

Sima Qian
From the pen of one of the greatest Chinese historians, biographies of the most important individuals in the history of Ancient China.

The Water margin

Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong
The best-known Chinese adventure story, describing one hundred and eight big-hearted outlaws facing up to the might of the imperial authorities.

The Art of War

Sun Tzu
The work of the great strategist of ancient times, with valuable insights into war in the time of the Warring States.

Understanding Taoism

Jennifer Oldstone-Moore
A perfect account of the many complex strands of Taoism. Explains its origins, development, and beliefs, and introduces its great thinkers.

Filmography

Hero

Zhang Yimou, Universal
A sublime and beautiful film recounting a legend concerning the attempt to assassinate Qin Shi Huang Di.

The Emperor and the Assassin

Chen Kaige, Asian Star
A grandiose historical panorama of the reunification of China by the first emperor.

The Emperor's Shadow

Zhou Xiaowen, Fox Lorber
Tells of a strange friendship between Qin Shi Huang Di and a childhood friend who became a talented musician.

Musa – The Warrior

Kim Sun-Su
A Korean epic involving proud tribes of Mongols, descendants of the Xiongnu.

Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon

Ang Lee, Warner
A magical sword has been stolen, and is coveted by many.

Blade of Fury

Sammo Hung
A martial arts movie backed by a remarkable plot of political intrigues.

Green Snake

Tsui Hark
A supernatural, poetical tale, telling of the time two snake-women arrived in the world of men.

The Sword

Patrick Tam
The destinies of several knights meet over a cursed sword.

Jiang Hu. Bride with white hair

Ronny Yu
A poetic and bewitching work blending clan conflicts, romance and the supernatural.

Zu, the Warriors from the Magic Mountain

Tsui Hark
A magical and frenetic martial arts movie, an action comedy which never stops for breath.

Mister Vampire

Ricky Lau
A fast-moving fantasy comedy with an exorcist *fangshi*, bungling disciples and leaping *jiang shi*.

Killer Clans

Chu Yan, Wildside
A twisting and turning plot describing conflicts between clans of the *jiang hu*.

The Magic Blade

Chu Yan, Wildside
Conspiracies and disguises in the world of martial arts, with a solitary, silent *wu xia*.

Blood brothers

Chang Cheh, Wildside
A tale of how ambition can destroy a friendship between brothers in arms who had sworn eternal loyalty.

The new one-armed Swordsman

Chang Cheh, Wildside
A tale of heroism and vengeance, featuring a tragic one-armed warrior and a classic ending.

The Golden Swallow

King Hu, Wildside
The first modern martial arts movie, directed by a master of Chinese cinema.

Sword in the Moon

Kim Eui-Suk, Asian Star
Friendship, betrayal and politics : a Korean martial arts movie of staggering beauty.

Note that some of these sources of inspiration do not deal with the Warring States period as such, but they should still give you ideas for spectacular action and combat scenes.