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World Of Darkness
Of The East

KINDRED OF THE EAST™

A Sourcebook for Vampire: The Masquerade®

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KENDRED

OF THE EAST™

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION: BEHIND THE WALL

He steps into the boiling night. Tokyo neon shines on Spanish leather. With a smirk, he eyes the gaudy skyscape and chuckles at the reedy streetsong whine. The little monkeys had done a marvelous job of copying everything that was tacky and soulless in the West.

Prime feeding ground.

His mind's eye dancing with samurai flicks, the Ventrue crosses Naka Meguro Street. Tiny people in bright colors make way for the stranger. None poses any threat. Behind this man lies the weight of centuries, a Cainite's strength and the power of a clan.

So easy.

A whistling song cuts through his reverie. And his neck.

The pavement leaps up to meet the Cainite's gaze, then becomes a blur of near and far, street and sky, until a bit of trash brings the panorama to a halt.

From a distance, he hears his body spasm and fall.

A flash. A sizzle behind him. The smell of cooking meat. Across the street, he feels a hot blade dice him into quarters.

One final sizzle as the heart dies. Five hundred years die with it.

No one notices.

"Konnichi-wa, gaijin," says a young man's voice. "Welcome to my home."

While living
Be a dead man,
Be thoroughly dead —
And behave as you like,
And all's well.
— Zen Master Bunan

For thousands of years, the Kindred have ravaged the World of Darkness. Claiming descent from the First Murderer, Caine, these parasites have riddled Old and New World alike. The Children of Caine influence, subvert and pervert the highest echelons of mortal government, economics and culture. Nothing, they claim, escapes their corrupting touch.

They are wrong.

One realm eludes their clutches: the ancient land of Asia. Although Asia offers unthinkable riches and oceans of blood, Kindred who come here do so fearfully. Since the nights of the galleons, Western vampires' attempts to exploit this land have met with dismal and horrific failure.

For another sort of vampire rules Asia's nights. These vampires scorn the myth of Caine — for they are cohorts of spirits and demons. Not for them are the indulgences of generation — respect, power and age are privileges to be earned. Their curse is not a random, pointless Embrace, but a karmic debt to be repaid. Their Beast is not a mindless adversary, but a double-edged weapon. And, as the Kindred have learned to their dismay, their Eastern counterparts have developed fearful powers and arcane arts.

Kindred of the East is a sourcebook detailing the unique vampires indigenous to the Orient: their society, their wars, their environment, their duties and, above all, their reaction to the Western incursion. Before we address the vampires of the East, however, a few notes about their world are in order.

THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

Westerners have long spoken of Asia's exoticism, of its alien ways and rules. In the World of Darkness, they are correct, more so than they realize. The Asian World of Darkness is referred to as the Middle Kingdom by its supernatural denizens, and in many ways it is truly a world unto itself.

On the surface, the Middle Kingdom resembles the rest of the World of Darkness. The same ambience of decay and gloom shrouds it, highlighting its most sinister aspects. The major cities are overcrowded hives choked with faceless, impersonal skyscrapers, anonymous hordes of frantic workers, vice tongs, and teeming, disease-infested slums. In the countryside, rural folk hack a subsistence living — if that — from trackless jungles and defoliant-saturated craters, all the while praying for protection from the monsters and spirits they know exist just out of sight. In the Middle Kingdom, it is all too easy to step around the nearest corner or the next bend in the road, then simply…vanish.

In many areas, dictators grind their subjects to paste under gun butts and tank treads. Every year, thousands of people simply disappear, never to be heard from again. Government "facilities" and political prisons are veritable abattoirs; once interned, no one emerges to tell tales. Ancient families and secret societies manipulate entire economies from behind screens of honor and propriety, while family vendettas from the days of emperors and samurai are

settled in boardrooms and back alleys alike. Most people are ingrained simply to look the other way, and thus, even legitimate investigations often become fruitless endeavors, punctuated by noncommittal shrugs and blank stares.

SHEN

Like the Western World of Darkness, the Middle Kingdom is haunted by a variety of supernatural beings, remnants of past Ages of the world. Vampires prowl the cities and shantytowns, while the jungles and mountains are home to the shapeshifting hengeyokai. Wily sorcerers weave their spells in suspiciously nondescript curio shops, ghosts avenge unhallowed deaths or guard their mortal families, and faeries curse those who fail to honor the ancient ways. Although often at odds with one other, these beings differ from their Western counterparts, for they see themselves as part of a greater family of spirit beings. Collectively, supernatural beings are known by many names, but often refer to themselves by the Chinese word "*shen*."

Unlike supernaturals in the West, *shen* take relatively fewer precautions against discovery. The supernatural here has less need of Masquerades and Veils, for it is unobtrusive enough to mind its manners. Conversely, the Middle Kingdom's mortals, as a rule, have learned to ask fewer questions. Let the Night People walk their road, the *amahs* say, and they will let you walk yours — unless *joss* frowns on you.

THE YIN AND YANG WORLDS

Beyond the Middle Kingdom, separated from it by a psychic Wall, lie entire worlds of gods, spirits and demons. Those Westerners who are knowledgeable in such matters speak of the Umbra, the Underworld or the Dreaming. *Shen*, however, know that they interact with the dualistic Worlds of Yin and Yang. Although invisible to mortal eyes, the Yin and Yang Worlds lie just over the threshold of human consciousness, and sensitive mortals often detect "eerie" auras in places where the barriers are weak.

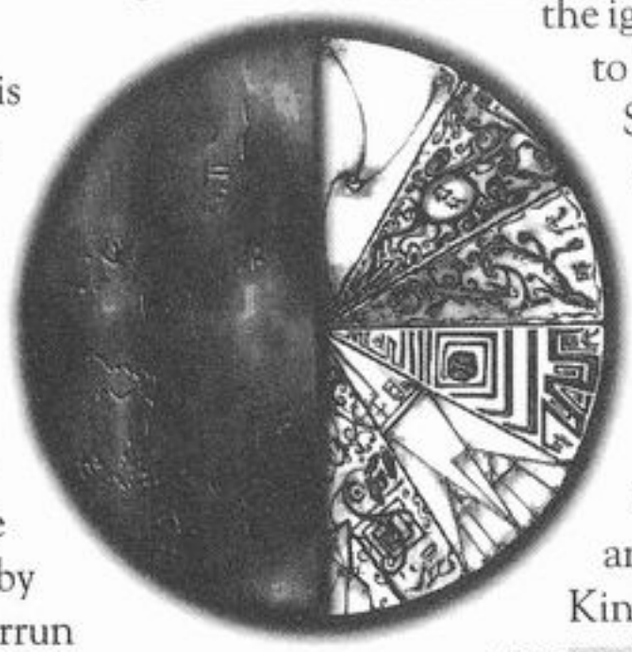
The Yin World is a gloomy place, the source of passive, negative energy. Many mortals pass into the Yin World when they die, and some become restless ghosts. Eerie spirits and phantoms of all descriptions haunt the Yin World, and its central realm is the terrifying Dark Kingdom of Jade.

By contrast, the Yang World is a patchwork of wild, turbulent realms, the source of active, positive energy. Spirits of nature and the elements dwell there, as do those entities revered by the shapeshifting hengeyokai. Some mortals, particularly those from Shinto or animist traditions, pass to the Yang World upon their deaths. Shapeshifters and fae, in particular, are attuned to the Yang World.

In the First Age of the world, matter and spirit were one, as was the design of creation's embodiment, the August Personage of Jade. As the Ages passed, though, the Yin and Yang Worlds separated from the Middle Kingdom. Now, a Wall separates the Middle Kingdom from the spirit worlds, and travel between the two is an arduous, and often hazardous, process. The forces of Yin and Yang find it more and more difficult to turn the Great Cycle of Being, and thus, the Middle Kingdom's essential spiritual energies grow more and more dissipated. The resulting discord and imbalance can surely be seen in the current state of the Middle Kingdom and in the misery of its denizens.

THE WHEEL OF AGES

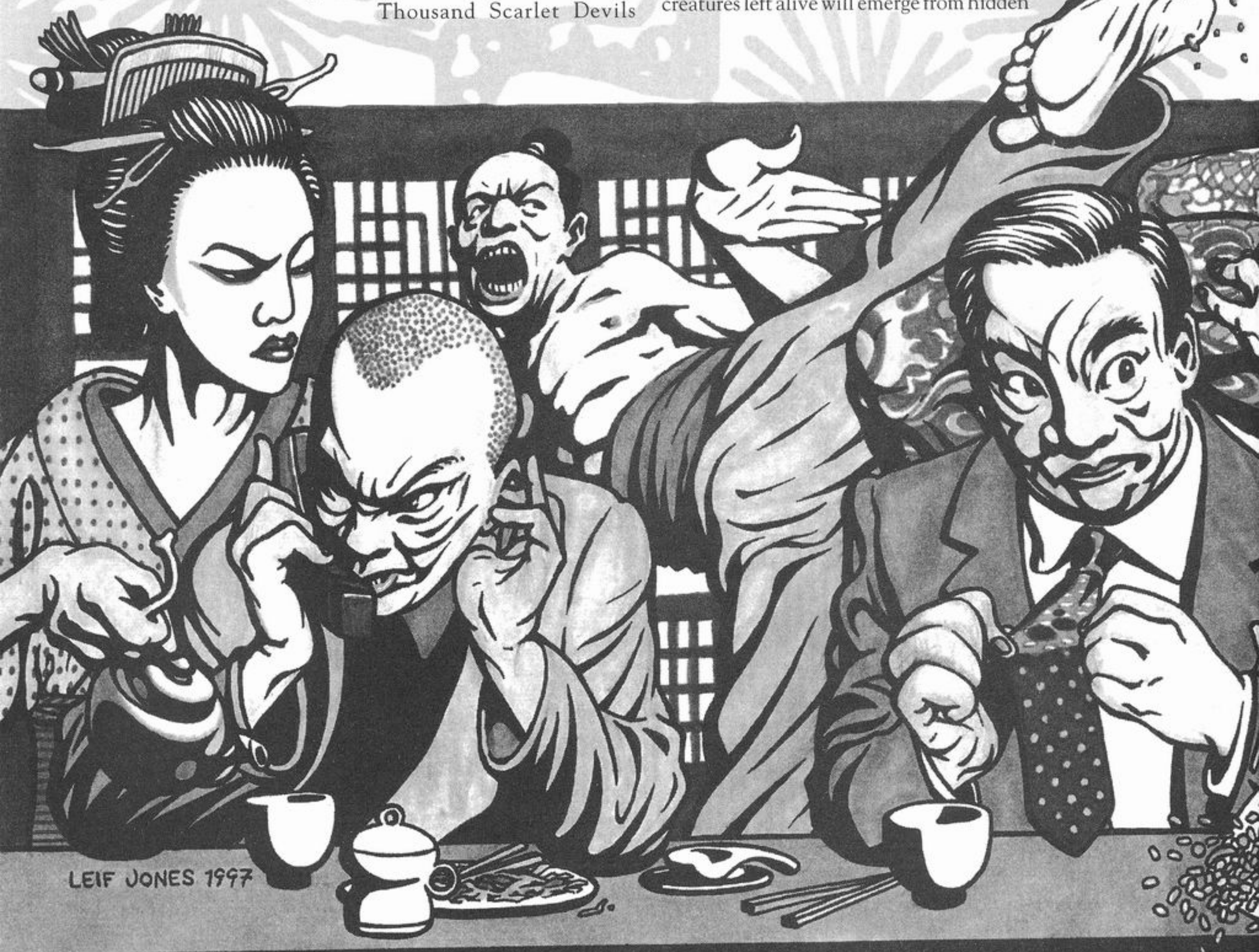
Even the spirits of the Yin and Yang Worlds must conform to the inexorable progression of the cosmos, which most *shen* dub the Wheel of Ages or the Great Cycle. Unlike their Western counterparts, few *shen* speak of an ultimate beginning or final ending. For them, the universe is a series of Ages revolving endlessly.



Much of the Middle Kingdom's sadness is the byproduct of the current Age — the Fifth Age of the Great Cycle, or the Age of Darkness. The ancient sutras spoke of this Age, saying that it would be an anxious and unruly time, when monstrous portents would trouble the people, when the dragons would shift restlessly in their beds and disharmony would spread across the land. And indeed, the omens of the Fifth Age are occurring, one by one. Have the Five Directions not been overrun with devils from the West? Did these devils not corrupt the soil with Yellow Winds and trick the people into imbibing poisonous elixirs? Did not the Shadow Dragon breathe plague-fires over Hiroshima, and the Ghost Phoenix blossom into life over Nagasaki days later? And did not the Thousand Scarlet Devils rudely cease to acknowledge the Great Cycle itself, mockingly renaming the Age "Year Zero"?

A bad time, indeed. But the worst lies ahead. Soon, the *shen* know, the Wheel will turn yet again, and the world will reach the nadir of the Great Cycle — the Sixth Age, or the Age of Sorrow. All know of the Sixth Age's imminence, even the ignorant devils from the West, though they refer to it as "Gehenna" or "Apocalypse." During the Sixth Age, the wheels of matter and spirit will cease any semblance of alignment. The August Personage of Jade, already estranged from the Ten Thousand Things of creation, will leave its throne. In the August Personage's place will rise a Demon Emperor, to reign supreme over the Sixth Age as the August Personage ruled over the First. An age of war and terror will take hold throughout the Middle Kingdom and beyond. Heaven will have its revenge against the impious, and ten thousand devils will be loosed upon the world.

But just as the Sixth Age is prophesied to come, it is prophesied to pass. The struggle will cease, and there will be a great stillness, and those few creatures left alive will emerge from hidden



places. Then will arrive a Seventh Age, a little better than the Sixth; and an Eighth, a little better still; and so the Cycle will once more turn until it reaches the 12th Age, which is also the First Age, and the Ten Thousand Things of matter and spirit will become one once more.

Or so the sutras say. Few, in this Age, have sufficient hope to believe.

Chi

This Wheel of Ages is turned by the interactions of Yin and Yang, represented by the divine Ebon Dragon and Scarlet Queen. Even in the Fifth Age, energies of creation permeate the world, flowing to and from the Yin and Yang Worlds. Called Chi, this energy flows through and among all the Ten Thousand Things. Chi is found in mortals; it is what allows them to act and to rest. In its more concentrated form, Chi is found in shapeshifters, who call it Gnosis; in mages, who call it Quintessence; in fae, who call it Yugen or Glamour; and (in its dark Yin aspect) in wraiths, who call it Pathos.

Shen see this energy as consisting of two types. There is Yin Chi, the dark energy of chaos, of repose and ultimately of oblivion. There is also Yang Chi, the dynamic energy of direction, of motion, of life and growth. The denizens of the spirit worlds are typically made of one or the other type of Chi, while beings in the Middle Kingdom store and use both to remain in balance. Chi is a fundamental part of all things, because all things are part of the Great Cycle.

One type of *shen*, however, makes no Chi of its own. It must sustain itself by stealing the Chi of other creatures, just as a vampire steals blood. This creature has been known by many names over the centuries; Western Kindred, who fear it, name it "Cathayan," after Europeans' ancient name for China. *Cathayan*: a descriptive, utilitarian name, like "Cappadocian" or "Setite." In this manner, the Kindred rationalize, the inscrutable Cathayan becomes just another vampire: an exotic bloodline, certainly, far removed from the ancestral tree, but a child of Caine nonetheless.

Again, they are wrong.

Kuei-jin

Asian "vampires" are not Cainites. They are a species completely separate from the 13 clans of Caine. They bear some superficial similarities, and certain of their myths parallel the tales of Lilith, the First City and the Second Generation.

Dharma, a karmic path traced by your ancestors. Although the way might prove hard and long, the possibility of redemption or outright transcendence flickers like a distant firefly, urging you through lifetimes of sorrow and pain.

But, unlike your ancestors, you don't have hundreds — or even dozens — of lifetimes to find your answers. The Fifth Age immerses the Middle Kingdom in despair, and the Sixth will soon come crashing down. Already, the Kindred walk your streets, violating your feeding grounds with their unclean practices. As time runs out, the people turn against each other, and the *shen* do likewise. And your worst enemy lies not without, but within. Although you have a greater understanding of your nature than do the foolish Kindred, that understanding comes at a heavy cost. As Kuei-jin, you are haunted not by a mere Beast, but by a malignant Demon that constantly plagues your thoughts and nightmares, urging you to self-destruction.

Indeed, some Kuei-jin sink into the same depths of shallow depravity that characterize Kindred dealings. The Sixth Age is inevitable, they say, destruction preordained, and rebirth as Hungry Dead can be seen as a karmic *carte blanche* — indeed, a mandate — to be a monster.

Their wiser fellows, however, seek to drown out the noise of the Fifth Age, to hear the Great Cycle silently turning in the forest of the Middle Kingdom. In so doing, they strive toward pinnacles of excellence and wisdom beyond anything the self-absorbed Kindred can possibly conceive.

Bodies

Most who take the Second Breath manifest in their mortal bodies. The Yin and Yang used to effect the reanimation ensure that the bodies in question appear much as they did during breathing days. For example, few Kuei-jin display the "zombie" features characteristic of the Risen, though vampires suffering from an excess of Yin often look grotesque indeed.

Occasionally, a Kuei-jin reincarnates in a body different from the one that housed its twin soul during mortal life. This manifestation is especially common if the body was cremated, though certain vampires claim to have re-formed their very ashes upon taking the Second Breath.

Yin and Yang

Kuei-jin are the Hungry Dead, and Chi is the substance for which they hunger. Yet not all Cathayans consume Chi in equal measure. Kuei-jin possess the Chi Virtues of Yin and Yang, which not only regulate Chi intake, but also dictate personality based on their proportionate ratings.

Yin-aspected Cathayans are reservoirs for negative, death-oriented energy. They tend to be calm, rational and cruel. They typically have great insight into the world of ghosts. Among many Cathayans, attunement to Yin is thought to be a punishment for excessive focus on the Self.

Yang-aspected Cathayans, by contrast, greedily consume life energy. They are passionate creatures, attuned to mortals and the emotions. Among many Cathayans, attunement to Yang is thought to be a punishment for a lifetime of Desire.

Some Cathayans are creatures of Balance, their bodies maintaining life and death energies in equilibrium. These creatures are sought out for their sporadic enlightenment, yet regarded as unpredictable and untrustworthy.

Hun and P'o

Likewise, all Kuei-jin must maintain some sort of balance between their dual souls. Each Kuei-jin has a Hun soul, the embodiment of her higher, rational self. However, upon undergoing the Second Breath, each Kuei-jin awakens her P'o — the lower, bestial soul. Once awakened, the P'o — or Demon, as some Kuei-jin call it — never remains quiescent. Indeed, the P'o takes on a distinct — and malignant — personality of its own. Constantly goading the Cathayan to improper actions, the P'o is sometimes able to possess the vampire entirely, forcing it to commit shameful deeds.

Cathayans with strong Hun are creatures of honor and temperance. Although no vampire escapes the grip of the Demon, Hun-aspected vampires are the best at controlling the instinctive impulses of hunger and rage.

Conversely, vampires with strong P'o are wild and savage, unruly and animalistic. Other vampires find them insufferable, yet even detractors concede the utility of the Demon-ridden in a battle. A few Kuei-jin actively exalt their demonic natures, but most do not have the stomach for such a repulsive task.

Some Cathayans see balance between Hun and P'o as the only true path to transcendence. For these vampires, the P'o must be cultivated, shaped and nurtured, like a bonsai, yet trimmed carefully lest it overgrow its bounds.

Dharmas

Kuei-jin have been sent back to fulfill their karmic purpose, and it is imperative that they discover what that purpose is. Each and every Kuei-jin learns to follow a Dharma, a way of unlife whereby the Cathayan seeks to discover her purpose in the Great Cycle. In some ways, a Dharma resembles such Western constructs as the Sabbat's Paths of Enlightenment; however, Dharmas are much more than simple codes of behavior. Through the following of a Dharma, a Kuei-jin learns to channel Chi, understand her undead nature and reattune herself to the karmic wheel. The mightiest scions of the Dharmas — the bodhisattvas and arhats — are as potent as any Kindred Methuselah and much more enlightened.

Kuei-jin Versus Kindred

Kuei-jin differ profoundly from Kindred in many respects, both physiologically and psychologically. Some of the differences between the two types of vampires appear below:

- **Aggravated Damage.** Kuei-jin take aggravated damage from fire, the teeth and claws of *shen*, and certain Chi-augmented attacks. Kuei-jin rot, rather than burn, in sunlight.
- **Beast.** Over the centuries, Kuei-jin have become intimately familiar with their primal, instinctual souls (which they refer to as P'o). All Kuei-jin have a P'o Virtue, representing the strength of their inner Demon; the P'o has its own Nature and can actually prove beneficial to the character. However, the P'o is as unpredictable as any Western Beast and much more clever; incautious Kuei-jin can find themselves trapped and helpless in their own bodies, as the P'o rampages out of control.
- **Blood Bond.** "We are all of one blood," the Kuei-jin say sincerely (well, hypocritically). Kuei-jin blood is naturally "inert" and cannot be used to create a Blood Bond. Certain Disciplines, though, allow marked exceptions to this rule.

• **Blood Points.** Kuei-jin have no Blood Points. Instead, they refine all substances into Chi: Yin (black) Chi or Yang (scarlet) Chi. Chi may be used to heal wounds, power Disciplines and (provided the proper Disciplines are known) increase Abilities. Kuei-jin also gain dark emotional energy from their P'o. They refer to this substance as "Demon Chi."

• **Dharmas.** Kuei-jin have been sent back to the Middle Kingdom for a purpose, and it is their duty to find out what that purpose is. Kuei-jin categorize their personal beliefs through a series of codes, which are known as Dharmas. These Dharmas resemble the Sabbat's Paths of Enlightenment, but are much more rigorous — and much more rewarding. Following one's Dharma leads a vampire to greater understanding of her condition and ultimately to Golconda.

• **Diablerie.** Kuei-jin have no generation *per se*, but they are more than capable of feeding on one another. In fact, they have refined the craft of soul-stealing to a science, and certain powers are even based upon it. Some Kuei-jin hold diablerie in every bit as much dread as their Western counterparts, while others govern its use through elaborate ceremonies.

• **Disciplines.** Kuei-jin use Disciplines, but not the ones known in the West. Centuries of studying the physiological and psychological nuances of undeath have given them great insight into the vampiric frame and soul. This insight can easily become a weapon, as many Kindred have found to their horror.

• **Embrace.** Cathayans are not victims of a random Embrace. They are truly undead — dead mortals cursed to return from the spirit worlds and reincarnate in the Middle Kingdom. This process, called the Second Breath, is similar to that undergone by the Risen — but Kuei-jin are not wraiths in mortal shells. Pathos is meaningless to them, for Kuei-jin have no overriding passion, save hunger; instead, Kuei-jin must fuel their powers by ingesting Chi.

• **Fangs.** Kuei-jin have no fangs naturally, though they may sprout them by calling upon the P'o.

• **Final Death.** Final Death is just as real for Kuei-jin as it is for Kindred. Upon Final Death, the soul exits the corpse, which immediately collapses and crumbles to ash. Indeed, Kuei-jin fear Final Death as few other creatures do. For them, they believe, there will be no further reincarnation. If they die unfulfilled yet again, the Great Cycle will cast them out, and they will meet an Oblivion equal to that of the most monstrous Spectre.

• **Frenzy and Rötschreck.** The P'o is as real for Kuei-jin as the Beast is for Kindred. Asian vampires can suffer not only from frenzy and Rötschreck, but also can literally be possessed by their P'o souls. A Cathayan refers to his "normal" state of mind as "wa nature." When frenzied, he is in the grip of "fire nature." When maddened with terror, he suffers from "wave nature." And when the P'o rises to control him, he experiences the state known as "shadow nature."

• **Generation.** Kuei-jin do not believe themselves to be descended from Caine, and thus, the concept of generation is irrelevant to them. They measure their power by age and by progress along their Dharmas. As a side effect, there are no "clans" of Cathayans; though they typically group themselves into sects, hierarchies, schools and other social structures, such

units are not dictated by the vagaries of the Blood. **If it ever becomes absolutely necessary to calculate "equivalent" generation for a Kuei-jin, treat it as (13 - Dharma score).**

• **Ghouls.** Kuei-jin cannot create ghouls. It is their karma to bear their curse alone, not to share it with others. However, Yang-imbalanced Kuei-jin can become pregnant or impregnate others! The hybrid children thus birthed are called dhampyrs.

• **Golconda.** Most Kuei-jin believe themselves to have been sent back to the Middle Kingdom for a specific reason — and most, hating their tormented and unnatural state, seek to find a way out of their existence. The Kindred's concept of "Golconda" may actually be a Cainite's (Cappadocius' or Saulot's, perhaps) flawed interpretation of Kuei-jin practices.

• **Imbalance.** Kuei-jin must regulate their Chi intake carefully, lest they suffer from Chi imbalance. An imbalance of Yin Chi often leads to the vampire becoming more corpselike and inhuman over time; conversely, an imbalance of Yang can lead to the outbreak of various deadly and exceedingly contagious vampiric diseases.

• **Stake Through Heart.** A stake through the heart does not automatically paralyze a Kuei-jin. However, the heart is instrumental in processing Chi energy, and certain types of attacks can disrupt the Chi flow in a Kuei-jin's body. Vampires of Yin prove vulnerable to wood, the element of Yang; conversely, vampires of Yang are vulnerable to metal, the element of Yin.

• **Sunlight.** Kuei-jin are vulnerable to sunlight in some measure, but their degree of vulnerability varies according to the amount of Yin energy in their bodies. They do not "burn" in the light; rather, they rot, as the Yang energy of the sun corrodes the unnatural magics keeping the Kuei-jin corpse animate.

• **Sustenance.** Not all Kuei-jin need to drink blood to obtain sustenance. The lowest, the *chih-mei*, take their Chi from human flesh (or that of other sentient beings). More refined vampires can "drink" breath, spirits and even raw essences. As a side effect, Kuei-jin are perfectly capable of eating and drinking normal food and beverages, though such things provide no nourishment. Kuei-jin can even get drunk, though the quantity of alcohol required for such a feat is truly prodigious (assume a Kuei-jin can drink 10 times as much liquor as the average mortal).

• **Torpor.** Torpor, for Kuei-jin, is a state called the Little Death. During the Little Death, the vampire's body "dies," but the dual soul lingers on within the corpse. Kuei-jin fear the Little Death, for it is a harrowing time of visions and nightmares, when the spirit is quite vulnerable to hostile magics. Many Kuei-jin lose their Dharmic way after entering the Little Death.

• **Virtues.** Kuei-jin do not possess the Virtues of Conscience, Self-Control and Courage. Instead, they use the two opposed pairs of Yin and Yang, Hun and P'o. Yin measures the Kuei-jin's sensitivity to negative energies, while Yang measures the vampire's receptivity for positive energies. Hun is the higher, "rational" soul, while P'o is the lower soul — the Demon.

Theme and Mood

Balance and imbalance are the themes of this book. The imbalance of the Kuei-jin reflects the imbalance within the Middle Kingdom and the larger imbalance between East and West. The axis between matter and spirit turns increasingly askew, the Kuei-jin courts bicker and fight among themselves, and the Wheel of Ages itself spins at an ever more rapid pace. By finding the balance within themselves, and by righting their place in the karmic order, the Kuei-jin may be able to right the imbalance in the larger world. Then again, that imbalance may itself be a necessary stage, just one more turn of the eternal wheel.

The mood of **Kindred of the East** is one of exoticism, of a detour into lands and cultures unknown to Western Kindred. The vampires of the East act in ways that, at times, seem incomprehensible to their Cainite counterparts. A player used to relative freedom in the West may have a tough time dealing with the more stratified elements of Kuei-jin society. Storytellers should constantly be on the lookout for ways to highlight exotic elements — from the ultra-high-class geisha performances of Kyoto to the floating slums of Hong Kong.

How to Use This Book

The Kuei-jin see eight as a harmonious number, and so we present a book divided into eight chapters.

Chapter One: The Hungry Dead details the society of the Cathayan, or Kuei-jin, vampires.

Chapter Two: The Second Breath describes the Dharmas that lead the Kuei-jin toward Golconda.

Chapter Three: The Ten Thousand Things tells the reader how to create a Kuei-jin.

Chapter Four: Forces in the Land describes the mystical powers of the Kuei-jin.

Chapter Five: Arts of the Kuei-jin describes systems intrinsic to the Kuei-jin and the East.

Chapter Six: The Middle Kingdom details the unique ambience of World of Darkness Asia and offers a region-by-region tour.

Chapter Seven: Storytelling explains how to invoke the ambience of an Asian adventure.

Chapter Eight: Rivals and Barbarians describes the other creatures who haunt Asia's nights.

Lexicon

The Kuei-jin are not nearly so culturally malleable as the Kindred. Indeed, the term "Kuei-jin" itself is a recent and somewhat laughable polyglot designed to instill harmony between the Chinese Quincunx and the Japanese *uji*. However, the longtime cultural hegemony of China's vampires has fostered some common terminology among the vampires of the East.

As a general rule, Kuei-jin who need to communicate across sect and culture lines use the older forms of Chinese dialects and script. Many Japanese, Sanskrit, Korean and other loan-words have found their way into this potpourri. While Kuei-jin of the old school pride themselves on their mastery of the *kaja* script, younger vampires write in simplified ideographs or even Roman letters (to the consternation of their elders).

Kuei-jin speech uses a preponderance of Chinese words. This focus occurs not out of any disrespect to Korean, Thai, Japanese, Malaysian or other cultures, but due to the fact that ancient Chinese civilization did indeed greatly influence the culture of the Kuei-jin. Kuei-jin in Japan, Korea or Southeast Asia often substitute native words for Chinese.

Age of Beauty — The Second Age of the Great Cycle, when the Middle Kingdom and Spirit Courts were still close together.

Age of Beautiful Sadness — The Fourth Age of the Great Cycle, heralded by the Kuei-jin's forsaking of their Heavenly duties. Human history begins during this period, and the Kuei-jin trace their vulnerability to sunlight to this time (the Chou Dynasty, specifically).

Age of Heaven — The First Age of the Great Cycle; a time before time, when all things were one.

Age of Darkness — The Fifth Age of the Great Cycle; the time period extending roughly from first contact with the West to the present nights.

Age of Legends — The Third Age of the Great Cycle; the mythical prehistory of the Middle Kingdom, when the Kuei-jin walked among and ruled humanity as benevolent spirits.

Age of Sorrow — The coming (Sixth) Age; the nadir of the Great Cycle. Analogous to the Kindred's Gehenna; however, most Kuei-jin see the Age of Sorrow as a necessary part of existence.

Akuma — "Devil"; a Japanese-derived epithet for those Kuei-jin who serve the Yama Kings.

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

Arhat — A vampire who has completely mastered his Dharma.

August Personage of Jade — In Kuei-jin myth, the current, though inactive, ruler of Heaven. When the Sixth Age arrives, the Personage will step down, to be replaced by the Demon Emperor.

Balance — See *Center*.

Bishamon — Mistakenly translated as "Bushi." A house of Japanese vampires.

Black Chi — Yin Chi.

Bodhisattva — In the Kuei-jin sense, a vampire who has nearly attained *dâh*, but chooses to forego her transcendence in favor of helping other vampires progress.

Cathayan — Cainite term for Asian vampires.

Center — In Cathayan philosophy, the perfect midpoint between life and death.

Chih-mei — A "feral" vampire who has not attained the enlightenment of a Dharma, or one who has forsaken the path to transcendence.

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

Clans of the Sun — Collective term for the various houses of Japanese Kuei-jin. (Note that the term "clan" in this context does *not* mean the same thing as a Kindred clan.)

Court — A group of Kuei-jin *wu* who join together to advance common material or spiritual goals. A court somewhat resembles such Western institutions as the anarchs and the Harpies. Many courts use corporations, tongs or secret societies as pawns and smokescreens.

Crimson Fever — A vampiric disease manifesting in Cathayans whose Yang aspects have become imbalanced.

Dâh — "All-Awareness," i.e., Golconda. The ultimate enlightened state, which very few ever achieve.

Daimyo — A Japanese synonym for ancestor; a house leader.

Demon Emperor — In Kuei-jin myth, the ruler who will ascend to cosmic supremacy to usher in the Sixth Age of the Great Cycle. Most Kuei-jin believe that one of the Yama Kings will become Demon Emperor, though some think that the wraith tyrant Qin Shihuang, ruler of the Jade Kingdom, will assume this office.

Dên — A small *satori* (q.v.), or flash of insight, in which things suddenly become clear. Such flashes indicate progress in a Dharmic journey.

Diao — Moments of blindness when a Kuei-jin loses track of her Way and wanders off into a sea of mortal illusions.

Dharma — A Kuei-jin's path to Golconda. The old form of the term, *Di'hana*, has been lost to many younger Kuei-jin; the old ones still remember it, however, and prefer that term to the modern corruption.

Direction — An astrologically based influence that allegedly governs a Kuei-jin's personality and duties. There are five: north, west, center, east and south.

Dragon Line — A line of strong Chi connecting two or more dragon nests. *Shen* of sufficient power can use dragon lines to transport themselves vast distances. Dragon lines of Yang are known in the West as "Moon Bridges"; dragon lines of Yin are called "Byways." In the Middle Kingdom, these lines are much closer to "surface" reality than they are in the Western World of Darkness.

Dragon Nest — An area where Chi is strong and the Wall is weak (5 or below). In the West, dragon nests are known as caerns, haunts, nodes, etc.

Ebon Dragon — Hun Dun, the first lord of the Dead. Representative of Yin. Some vampires believe that the Ebon Dragon has been deposed and eaten by the Jade Emperor; others, that the Jade Emperor is one of the Dragon's avatars.

Fifth Age — Age of Darkness.

Fire Nature — Frenzy.

Fivefold Way — The five principles that the vampire bodhisattva Xue taught to his followers. See *Great Principle*.

Gaki — A loose term for Japanese Kuei-jin.

Genji-myo — A "noble house" of Japanese vampires who are involved with modern corporate culture.

Ghost Dancer — A Cathayan whose duties entail dealing with the spirit worlds; commonly used to refer to Cathayans of the west direction.

Golden Courts — General term for various societies of vampires dwelling in a specific geographic region largely encompassing Southeast Asia and Indonesia. Existence in the Golden Courts is often tumultuous and chaotic, and the vampires therein are infamous for decadent and "barbaric" practices; however, female Kuei-jin have historically enjoyed much more respectful treatment in this region.

Great Cycle — See *Wheel of Ages*.

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

Green Courts — Various groups of Kuei-jin inhabiting Korea and nearby areas in China. The Green Courts are renowned for their love of jade and noncommittal stance in larger struggles.

Gweilo — A Chinese term for a foreign asshole, usually white. The more familiar Japanese version, **gaijin**, means more or less the same thing.

Harmonic — A Cathayan of the center direction, one whose duties entail exploring the vampiric condition and the soul.

Harvester — A Cathayan troubleshooter and *agent provocateur* among the mortal "herd"; a vampire of the east direction.

Heaven — In Kuei-jin parlance, that inexplicable force overseeing the interaction of Yin and Yang and ordaining what should and should not be. Most Kuei-jin see themselves and the rest of the Middle Kingdom as having fallen from Heaven's favor. Conversely, beings who transcend the eternal cycle of life and death are said to have reached Heaven.

Heike-myo — A house of Japanese vampires who are loosely allied with the Bishamon.

Hengeyokai — Shapeshifter.

Hima — The "goblin lantern" form that masters of the Ghost-flame Shintai can assume.

House — Synonymous with "court"; primarily used in Japan.

Hun — The "higher," rational half of the soul.

Hundred Clouds, The — A symbol of ultimate Kuei-jin enlightenment, when all duties are set aside. See *Dâh*.

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

Kaja — The ancient, extraordinarily complex ideographic script of the Wan Xian. *Kaja* influenced, and was influenced by, early Chinese characters.

Kata — A series of ritualistic movements whereby Chi is focused properly and precisely.

Ki — The Second Disciple of Xue.

Ki Chuan — A holy book written by Xue's disciple Ki.

Kin-jin — A contemptuous slang term for Western vampires; a corruption of a term meaning "people of Caine."

Kôa — Vampiric adolescence. Each Kuei-jin is allotted a mortal lifetime to act like a child before assuming his duties under Heaven.

Kuei-jin — An Asian vampire; the term is a recently created hodgepodge, primarily used by younger vampires. Thought to have derived from *Gui Ren* ("demon people").

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

Leyak — An Indonesian term for *shen*.

Magistrate — A Cathayan whose duties entail interpreting tradition, arbitrating disputes, passing and executing sentences; synonymous with the north direction.

Mandarin — A Kuei-jin official with specific duties, usually involving various functions in Kuei-jin society.

Mandator — A Cathayan whose duties entail enacting change or carrying out the will of the courts; generally of the south direction.

Na Kua — A primordial ancestress in Kuei-jin myth; believed to have some similarities to the West's Lilith. See *Scarlet Queen*.

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

Palace — A communal meeting site for all the Kuei-jin in a region. Often, but not always, the haven of the region's most powerful court or ancestor.

Penangallan — Name given to certain sects of matriarchal vampires in the Golden Courts region. *Penangallan* commonly revere the Scarlet Queen and make extensive use of the Flesh Shintai Discipline, which they hone to a level of mastery beyond any of their other Disciplines.

P'o — The "lower," animalistic half of the soul; in Kindred terms, the Beast.

Quincunx — A sect formed by the alliance of five important Chinese courts. While not all Chinese courts pay tribute to the Quincunx, many do.

Raksha — Name given to certain P'o-aspected vampires, particularly ones who make use of the Demon Shintai Discipline.

Rangda — A hag-demon widely venerated by Indonesian and Southeast Asian vampires; believed to be a Yama Queen or an aspect of the Scarlet Empress.

Running Monkeys — Slang term for young Kuei-jin, those 40 years old or younger. Also, a Kuei-jin insult for Western vampires, who supposedly act like children no matter how old they become.

Satori — A sudden flash of enlightenment that turns one's world upside-down. Reaching a *satori* may take years, or it may occur in an instant of clarity. In either case, the world never seems the same afterward. See *dên*.

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

Scarlet Queen — The legendary female progenitor of the Kuei-jin. Oddly enough, representative of Yang (traditionally a masculine force). A few scholars note her similarities to the Kindred's Lilith.

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

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

Serpent-borne — Vampires who arrived in Japan during the Fourth Age.

Shadow Nature — Period when a Kuei-jin's P'o dominates its body.

Shadow War — Ritualistic combat between Kuei-jin *wu* or courts.

Shen — Any supernatural/Awakened being.

Shih — An ancient order of Chinese witch-hunters (further detailed in the **Demon Hunter X** supplement).

Shikome — Female, Yin-aspected vampires who serve the Yama King Mikaboshi.

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

Spirit Courts — The intangible realms adjoining the material realm. From these places come spirits and Chi. In Western thought, the various Umbrae.

Strike Force Zero — A top-secret branch of the Japanese government dedicated to investigating the supernatural (further detailed in the **Demon Hunter X** supplement).

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

Tong — In its vampiric connotation, any group of mortals that willingly and (in most cases) knowingly serves a vampiric master. Compare with *Scarlet Screen*.

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

Urn — A mortal who has the potential to become Kuei-jin or who actually does so.

Wa Nature — A Kuei-jin's "normal" persona, when she is not in a frenzied or P'o-possessed state.

Wall, The — The psychic barrier separating the Middle Kingdom from the Yin and Yang Worlds. In the West, the Wall is known as the Gauntlet or the Shroud.

Wan Kuei — "Ten Thousand Demons"; elder Cathayans' name for themselves.

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

Wave Nature — Rötschreck.

Wheel of Ages — The eternal cycle of being, in which the earth suffers through eras of increasing misery, until the nadir of the cycle is reached and the world begins to right itself toward Paradise once more.

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

Xue — The first and most famous vampiric arhat, founder of the Fivefold Way. (Depending on tone, the name can mean "study" or "blood.")

Yama Kings — Various malignant spirit beings predating the coming of the Jade Emperor. The Yama Kings are powerful demonic spirits who hold territories in the outer reaches of the Yin and Yang Worlds. Yama Kings of Yang are known as "Banes" in the West, while those of Yin are termed "Malfeans" by Western ghosts. In the Fifth Age, the Yama Kings have a link to the Kuei-jin P'o, and they often seek to subvert Kuei-jin to their service. Ones who succumb are known as *akuma*: "devils."

Yang — In Kuei-jin terms, the active, positive principle of life, as well as Chi derived from that principle.

Yang World — The tumultuous, "higher" spirit world composed of Yang energy and inhabited by nature-spirits and kami.

Yin — In Kuei-jin terms, the passive, negative principle of death, as well as Chi derived from that principle.

Yin World — The negative, "lower" spirit world composed of Yin energy and inhabited by wraiths and Spectres.

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

Zao-lat — Saulot.

Names

To symbolize the transition between life and death, many Kuei-jin discard their mortal names for sobriquets after their Second Breath. Kuei-jin in some *wu* and courts take the name of the *wu* or court as their surname (thus, Akira of the Bishamon *uji* would be known as Bishamon Akira, while the third member of the Dream Blood *wu* might be referred to as Dream Blood Three).

A large number of Kuei-jin, particularly those serving a court or spirit master, assume titles or descriptive epithets (Five Ghost Killer, Harmonious Fist of the Eighth Hell, Judge of Kowloon). More remorseful Kuei-jin do so out of homage to the duties they have forsaken, while their skeptical brethren take similar names out of mockery or irony. In any event, flowery titles are what the foolish Kindred expect, and they help keep the foreign devils on their toes.

Author's Note: For purposes of this supplement, all uses of the term "vampire" are understood to refer to Kuei-jin unless specifically indicated otherwise.

Suggested Resources

Storytellers and players alike may find these books and films useful and/or inspirational. The resources listed here are included more as a style reference than a list of research volumes — there are innumerable books and travelogues of factual information on the "Middle Kingdom," but we're more concerned with the exotic and mystical feel of the East.

Books

- Hoff, Benjamin, *The Tao of Pooh* — It may seem like a strange source for a **Vampire** book, but Hoff's explanation of Taoism Made Easy is fun to read and accessible as hell. A sequel, *The Té of Piglet*, is available too, but lacks the classic qualities of the Pooh book.
- Hughart, Barry, *Bridge of Birds*, *Eight Skilled Gentlemen*, and *The Story of the Stone*. Delightful series set in ancient China; full of legendry, myth, wit, humor and damn good fun. If you read nothing else in this bibliography, read these.
- Musashi, Miyamoto, *The Book of Five Rings* — A brief (if dry) guide to winning, samurai-style. Used as a textbook in Eastern thought by American businessmen during the Reagan Era, the *Book* is still easy to find in libraries and stores.
- Pocket travel guides for Japan, China, Korea and Indonesia — These booklets come from a variety of companies and include helpful cultural details, phrases, cash systems and legal notes. Invaluable for the Storyteller with a taste for local color.
- Reps, Paul and Senzaki, Nyogen, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones* — Hard-to-find but worthwhile collection of Zen writings, koans and stories.
- Smith, Huston, *The Illustrated World's Religions* — A readable and accessible guide to the most popular religions in the modern world.
- *The Analects of Confucius* — The essential text for Confucianist philosophy. Like many ancient philosophical writings, this one can get a bit didactic, but is worth reading, if only for the common-sense things that so many people forget.
- *The Dhammapada* — One of the key Buddhist texts. Much richer than many other scriptures, this Indian classic is fairly easy to read if you can get past the inevitable footnotes.
- Time-Life's Great Ages of Man Series, *Ancient China* and *Historical India* — Both books contain timelines, cultural details and interesting discussions of Buddhism and other faiths.
- Tzu, Sun, *The Art of War* — While the Kin-jin have Machiavelli, the Kuei-jin have Sun Tzu. Any Cathayan elder worth her salt knows this tactical diary by heart. The Thomas Cleary translation also includes running commentary by later Chinese notables — generals, philosophers and historians — who add a richness only hinted at in other translations.

Movies

- *Akira* — (Japanese) More technological than supernatural (though the mystic cult fits right in), this anime is nonetheless a

gorgeous look at a dystopic, damned Neo-Tokyo. Give the soundtrack a listen as well.

• *Akira Kurosawa's Dreams* — (Japanese) Anthology of ephemeral tales, from the harmonious to the horrific. Some are better than others, but the really good ones (the fox wedding tale, the soldier's nightmare and the old man's last dream) are fascinating.

• *Big Trouble in Little China* — (U.S.) Of course it's goofy. Of course it's broad. It's also one hell of a lot of fun if you don't take it seriously (which it was never intended to be, anyway).

• *Black Rain* — (U.S.) West meets East on East's home turf. The World of Darkness, Japanese-style.

• *Bullet in the Head* — (Chinese) Gritty, suspenseful *film noir* pitting Chinese gangsters against the Viet Cong. A great view of Kuei-jin in the making.

• *A Chinese Ghost Story* — (Chinese) Rousing (and arousing) tale of love, undeath and the journey between them. Highly entertaining.

• *Chungking Express* — (Chinese) Sexy and cynical, this vivid tale portrays the desperation of modern-day losers on a crash course. Great visuals and atmosphere override a thin, confusing plot.

• *Darkstalkers* and *NightWarriors* — (Japanese; Film and Games) Skip the insipid American cartoon, but find the Japanese series, as they are a good, fun (if four-color) watch. Of particular interest is the creepy "dark faith" to which the humans pathetically cling: a bizarre mixture of Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Buddhism. The game itself has some (obvious) Asian influence, as well, including a Chinese ghost and a samurai returned from Hell on a murderous slasher-spree.

• *Demon City* and *Supernatural Beast City* — (Japanese) Anime that show just how malignant life (and unlife) in a city overrun with supernatural influence can be. The latter film is just shy of prurient, but the horror and love story compensate for the monster tentacle sex.

• *Full Contact* — (Chinese) An edgy, violent exploration of sexuality and carnage. The Howl of the Devil-Tiger rattles this film to its foundations.

• *Green Snake* — (Chinese) If you get a chance, see this film in a theatre — the subtitles are lost across the bottom of the screen in the videotape version. Still, this lush tale of supernatural creatures trying to find peace is marvelously fun and evocative.

• *Hard-Boiled* — (Chinese) Besides the fact that the film is quintessential John Woo fare, its characters display the dispassionate callousness so common among the Kuei-jin.

• *High and Low* — (Japanese) Slow but stunning, this black-and-white masterpiece by Akira Kurosawa follows a policeman into the Tokyo underbelly. *Film noir*, Japanese style, without the usual over-the-top theatrics.

• *The Killing Fields* — (U.S.) A Western journalist's holiday in Cambodia during the rise of the Khmer Rouge government, and his struggles to get his Cambodian colleague out of the country. Chilling footage of a genocide equaling the Holocaust in brutality and rivaling it in body-count.

• *The Last Emperor* — (U.S.) Academy Award-winning drama about China's final monarch and the changes in his country. Well worth seeing.

• *Lone Wolf and Cub/ Shogun Assassin* — (Japanese) Years ago, the multi-part *Lone Wolf* was reedited into a single film and released stateside under the title of *Shogun Assassin*. Now, the full version is available, and is worth every minute of its original length.

• *Mr. Vampire* — (Chinese) A wild mix of humor and horror.

• *Ninja Scroll* — (Japanese) See this! It's an anime flick set during Japan's Tokugawa Shogunate, but the Eight Devils of Kimon are top-notch horror.

• *Once Upon a Time in China* — (Chinese) *Way* over the top, but dripping with period splendor and entrancing set pieces.

• *Shall We Dance?* — (Japanese) A lighter vision of Japanese culture meeting Western entertainment. Funny and enlightening.

• *Shogun* — (U.S.) If you can find the full-length version of this TV miniseries, watch that one; the "film edit" is damned near incoherent. Although it's draped in hokey American conventions, this epic features Toshiro Mifune, the Japanese Bogart. That, in itself, is enough reason to watch the series.

• *Supercop*, a.k.a. *Police Story III* — (Chinese) One of Jackie Chan's best films. Offers a wild ride across China and Southeast Asia. Over the top, but loaded with action, local color and Michelle Yeoh.

• *The Bride with White Hair* — (Chinese) One of the best films of the Hong Kong renaissance. Picture Lien Ni-chang as a vampire — it's not hard.

• *Vampire Hunter D* — (Japanese) Yeah, yeah, the vampires in question are more like Kindred than Kuei-jin, the animation is less fluid than, say, *Akira*, and the moves are pure manga, but what the hell — this is a great flick and well worth the rental price.

• *Wicked City* — (Japanese) Available as both Japanese anime and Hong Kong live-action, this tale of demonic apocalypse is perfect World of Darkness fare.

• *Year of the Dragon* — (U.S.) "Year of the Yellow Peril" is more like it. Still, this hyperviolent run through Chinatown captures the cynical world of the Kuei-jin better than many other less atmospheric efforts.

Other Cool Stuff

Kowloon's Gate (Game) — Murders, mysticism and monsters. For a peek at what the Middle Kingdom may look like, check out this game.

Peter Gabriel's *Passion* (Album/CD) — An exotic, Eastern ambience is what this album is all about, as well as being incredibly inspirational.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE HUNGRY DEAD

I remember Hell.

They made blankets of my skin. I felt each rustle of the fabric, though it covered sixteen different demons.

For fun, they played tug with me. Or snapped my skin at dogs with human teeth. One used me to mop his shit from an ichigo bush, then laughed as he wrung me out in the River of Tears.

I recall each touch as if it were my lifetime.

Then I awoke at the bottom of the sea.

The fish had chewed me into tatters. With streaming arms, I lifted myself from the mud and drew the moonlight to me. So far above. So crushing far, but I have no need to breathe.

Hell is below me. Moonlight is above. I dive toward the moon.

By the time I reach the surface, my arms shine like newborns. Thick hair floats about my shoulders like a mad jellyfish. Blinking water out of eyes still crying from a demon's poker, I attempt a breath.

Force of habit.

My lungs are full already. I must empty them when I get to shore.

The harbor glistens like a bloody knife. Flickers like candles in a shrine. With arms that once were fishes' joy, I drag the harbor to me.

I have debts that must be paid.

And I remember Hell.

Where there are humans,
You'll find flies,
And Buddhas.
— Issa

It is the lost world.

It is a hemisphere of almost two billion mortals, surviving in cultures and lifestyles that have remained enigmatic for nearly five millennia.

It is the last uncharted place on Earth for the Children of Caine, a tempting blood-red pearl. To some, it holds the key to deliverance, the path out of the Damned existence that a Cainite suffers night after night, year after year. To others, it is a font of power and prestige, ripe for the taking by the first Cainite with the right mixture of initiative and ruthlessness.

It is Asia, and for the last five centuries it has stood like a great eastern fortress, unreachable by most Cainites and unbreachable by those who have tried to conquer it. To the scarce pockets of Western Kindred who have managed to carve out tiny niches in this monolithic entity, Asia is a sensory inundation. Its people, culture, religion, politics, businesses and ways of life do not correspond to anything familiar in the Kindred mindset.

And neither do its vampires. When the Western clan leaders or the lords of the Inner Circle speak of Asia, they often refer to its dark immortals as "our Eastern brethren," or "our Eastern counterparts," or some other appellation that gives the impression of fellowship among the Damned. Those Kindred who reside in Asia, and who have come face-to-face with these creatures, know better. No common origin, powers, mentality or manner of existence links the two species.

Asian vampires, Kuei-jin, diverge so much from Western Kindred as to constitute an entirely different strain of supernatural being. Their place in the world of mortals, also, differs greatly from that of the Kindred. Whereas the Kindred eke out existences in the aberrant corners of life, in the shadows, hiding behind the leaden curtain of the Masquerade, the Kuei-jin are far less secretive in Asia. Many mortals in Asia are far more aware of the presence of the supernatural and believe that it, too, exists for some purpose. Although most Kuei-jin believe that ancient treachery has cost them their mandate as governors of the Middle Kingdom, they are proud, nonetheless, and do not kowtow to mortal sensibilities.

The Middle Kingdom

Of bones the city is made,
Plastered with flesh and blood,
Where decay and death are deposited,
And pride, and ingratitude.
— The Dhammapada

An ancient term in Eastern mythology and faith, the Middle Kingdom is the moniker Kuei-jin bestow upon their half of the globe. As the sobriquet implies, the Middle Kingdom is seen as the universe's place between, the piece of territory warred over by mortal and spirit warriors alike.

The Middle Kingdom's overall atmosphere conforms in many respects to the soiled modernity so familiar to the Kindred. In the megalopoli of Asia, life moves at breakneck speed. Millions upon millions of people live and work literally from floor to ceiling, in the massive, charmless skyscrapers of the Orient's financial nexuses. At street level, there is barely room to breathe, yet countless numbers of faceless and forgotten still manage to cut their own hovels out of the pitiably meager space afforded them by the 20th century, often cutting one another in the battle. These nerve centers of the Far East are exactly that: centers full of human nerves being stretched, frayed and snapped apart by the collective sprint toward the next millennium.

The Middle Kingdom does not exist only in the capitals and major cities of Asia, though. Its shadows loom even thicker outside the blare and glare of the towers. In many parts of the Middle Kingdom, life progresses in much the same way it has since the earliest empires. The mentalities of peasants and farmers have altered little with the roll of the centuries — right down to their belief in and terror of the supernatural. The sanguinary side of creation claims these hills and plains and mountains — places that, despite the apparent overflow of activity in the cities, are truly the most alive and the most dangerous.

The Middle Kingdom is a place where the newest fads from Europe and America jostle for prominence with a vast array of ceremonies and half-serious offerings to the ancient gods and spirits. It is a place where cutting-edge technology and design exist in equal measure with the cheap mass production of foreign-controlled sweatshops. It is a place where young go-getters rise before dawn and transact billions on the trading floors of Tokyo and Hong Kong, only to die on the way home amid the crossfire of gangs and tongs. It is a place where dictators and their military pit bulls oppress and slaughter waves of people in the name of order and control, yet refuse to venture into the rural areas of their own countries, for fear of angering the Night People who reside in the shadows.

Kuei-jin thrive throughout all these strata, even as they toy with the course of humanity to serve their spiritual guardians, their courts, their Dharmas and themselves. But no matter where a Kuei-jin finds himself, there exists throughout the Middle Kingdom the same indelible emptiness, the sense of decay and wasting. As the Fifth Age of the Great Cycle rolls forward, the world's Chi ebbs a little faster, and the lightning-fast energy of the city eats away at the soul of the people a little more painfully. It is a tragic realm, where the few moments of brightness serve merely to underscore the depth and breadth of corruption.

Dragon Nests

As eaters of Chi, Kuei-jin prefer to lair in sites where the Wall between spirit and matter is weak. These areas, which are rich in ambient Chi and typically haunted by spirits, are known as dragon nests. Kuei-jin ancestors can often siphon sustenance directly from a nest, and the mightiest Kuei-jin courts typically base themselves near one or more dragon nests.

Unfortunately, the Fifth Age and its accompanying "progress" have led to the weakening or outright destruction of many dragon nests, as sites of spiritual resonance are plowed over or developed. Ironically, the vast majority of Kuei-jin, unable to sustain themselves directly from dragon nests, must abandon the sacred sites in favor of the spiritually void cities where their prey dwells.

Bands of younger Kuei-jin and marauding *akuma* occasionally drain dragon nests entirely dry, angering the spirits and hastening the Sixth Age's coming. Furthermore, Kuei-jin are not the only *shen* who value these sites; the shapeshifting hengeyokai, in particular, claim many dragon nests for themselves and are more than willing to fight for them. As the number of dragon nests dwindles, Kuei-jin are often forced to battle among themselves for the ever-scarcer reserves of precious Chi.

Dragon Tracks

The Middle Kingdom resembles a vast spiderweb of Chi. Lines of Yin and Yang stretch between dragon nests, linking one spirit site to another. These lines, known as dragon tracks (as well as dragon lines, riverpaths, and other colorful names), enable spirits — and knowledgeable *shen* — to traverse the spirit worlds in a modicum of safety, so long as the traveler in question stays on the proper path. Dragon tracks also allow for near-instantaneous travel between two linked dragon nests. In this way can a Kuei-jin court extend its influence over vast reaches of the Middle Kingdom, moving its minions hither and yon like spearmen on a *shogi* board.

It need not be said that powerful dragon nests linking several dragon tracks are among the most prized possessions in the Middle Kingdom. *Shen* of all stripes — Kuei-jin, hengeyokai, spirits and ghosts — war incessantly over such sites.

The Kuei-jin

The Middle Kingdom is home to all manner of Kuei-jin, with their various appearances, powers and philosophies. They are as limited in number as the Western Kindred are, in roughly the same proportions (one Kuei-jin for every 100,000 mortals), but in the vastness of the Middle Kingdom, these proportions are staggering indeed. China alone, with a population of around 1.2 billion mortals, is thought to boast almost 12,000 Kuei-jin.

In contrast to the strictures placed on Kindred society, the Kuei-jin exist in a relatively loose environment. Of course, Kuei-jin do not roam freely about the Middle Kingdom flaunting their otherworldliness, but neither do they impose upon themselves something so paranoid as the Masquerade. Privacy thrives in the nations of Asia; centuries of tight family and community structures coupled with (and often sparring against) the heavy-handed menace of dictatorial governments have seen to that. People often resolve everyday conflicts behind the scenes in Asia. Although government, law and the police bludgeon the populace into submission on many occasions, the authorities rarely become involved in many citizens' disputes. Partly, a general wariness exists about how they might handle things, but also there is a long-standing tradition here of settling matters away from outsiders' eyes. It is the way of the East, a way that, for the Kuei-jin, is much more stable and effective than a foolish Masquerade.

The fortunate existence of such human secrecy is not the sole key to the Kuei-jin's more emancipated activity. As children of matter and spirit, Kuei-jin are connected to the world's Chi, the primal forces that flow through the Middle Kingdom from the Yin and Yang Worlds. Regardless of where in the Middle Kingdom they travel, Kuei-jin are innately bound to Chi, giving them a much greater degree of mobility than Western Kindred. All Kuei-jin must replenish themselves with Chi, yet not all Kuei-jin do so in the same manner — older and more powerful Kuei-jin are often able to go for long periods of time without feeling the hunger for replenishment. Particularly enlightened Kuei-jin can occasionally tap directly into cosmic streams of Chi, without resorting to the carrion-eating and blood-drinking ways of their lower fellows. Such abilities are a decided advantage to the most ancient Kuei-jin; they allow a wider scope of activity across the Middle Kingdom than do the Kindred's physiological laws, which, for all intents and purposes, make the Westerners prisoners in their own cities.

Despite such a degree of freedom, however, there still exist natural proscriptions upon the Kuei-jin. In the early Ages, the worlds of matter and spirit were close together, both serving the will of the August Personage of Jade. As the Great Cycle progressed, though, the Middle Kingdom drew apart from the Yin and Yang Worlds. This schism widened with the coming of the Fifth Age, the Age of Darkness.

The Fifth Age

This era arrived in the last few centuries, coeval to the arrival of unclean foreigners; for the Kuei-jin, each passing year only makes things worse. The Fifth Age's corruption is reflected in all facets of the world, and it foretells an even greater and imminent woe soon to beset the Middle Kingdom: namely, the nadir of the Great Cycle, the Sixth Age, or Age of Sorrow.

Many Kuei-jin, old and young alike, feel the Age of Sorrow is closer than anyone is willing to admit. They worry that, when it arrives, the Kuei-jin will not be prepared to take their preordained place in its unfolding. This unreadiness, they fear, may be their undoing and might very possibly herald their erasure from the Great Cycle itself.

The Ways of Karma

To understand the society of the Kuei-jin, the wise student must first understand the nature of the Kuei-jin themselves. And, to understand what the Kuei-jin are, it is essential to understand what they were and why they became Kuei-jin in the first place. This task is not so simple as it might seem. The Kuei-jin have a great many stories concerning the truth of their origins — indeed, their greatest prophet, the Grand Arhat Xue, is reputed to have said that there are as many reasons for becoming Kuei-jin as there are Kuei-jin, plus one. Still, a few conclusions can be drawn.

According to the Buddhist lore of the Middle Kingdom, a mortal soul, upon the death of its body, can meet several fates. It can be reborn as a human or, less fortunately, as an animal. Sinful souls can be reborn in one of the many Hell-realms of the Yin and Yang Worlds, while particularly enlightened souls can become gods.

Certain souls, however, meet a different sort of karma. The gods might find a use for a particularly strong soul and gift the dead person with the status of *asura*, or celestial demon. And other souls — ones suffering for sins of unrestrained desire or ones otherwise strayed from the path of enlightenment — return to the living world as starving demons, cursed with endless hunger.

The existence and traditions of the Kuei-jin long predate Buddhism's arrival in the Middle Kingdom. Nonetheless, many Kuei-jin have grafted the Buddhists' doctrine to their own lore, for the Kuei-jin's nature reflects features of both *asuras* and starving demons. The very process by which Kuei-jin return from the spirit worlds is an arduous one, and only individuals with strong souls can hope to endure it successfully. Certainly, Kuei-jin derive many wondrous and terrifying powers from their unnatural state. And yet, actions as simple and instinctual as breathing or replenishing Chi in a natural fashion from food and air are beyond them. Kuei-jin must take the Chi they need from other beings, and when deprived of Chi, they are as feral and dangerous as any demon.

Some Kuei-jin, believing themselves irrevocably cursed with hunger and evil urges, succumb fully to their baser natures. If they have been reborn as demons, these Kuei-jin say, then it is only proper to act like demons. Others, smug in the knowledge of their karmic superiority, lord over the Middle Kingdom like the tyrannical emperors of old; ironically, in action these Kuei-jin differ little from their monstrous counterparts. The wise Kuei-jin realizes that, in truth, she is neither entirely *asura* nor entirely starving demon, but a combination of both. Indeed, she is many things; it is only the illusion of the world that makes it seem otherwise. And once the illusion has been dispelled, once the karmic debt from her past and present existences has been erased, she is to assume her rightful place in the cosmic order.

A difficult task, far easier said than done. It is no wonder that so many Kuei-jin fail.

The Curse is Levied

For Kindred, the Embrace is fatally simple: A mortal, through no particular virtue or fault of her own, is assaulted and drained of blood by a vampire, then given back enough of the vampire's blood to induce the transformation. The typical vampire, then, does not even have to bear the blame for her monstrous state.

Things are not so convenient in the Middle Kingdom, where everything is thought to happen for a reason and supernatural entities are not born on a passing whim. Why, then, do some bodies in the Middle Kingdom refuse to stay in their tombs?

The mortals of the Middle Kingdom have many legends as to why souls rise as Hungry Dead. Some claim that improperly performed burial rites can resurrect a soul in its body. Other legends state that a Kuei-jin is a body possessed by its P'o, or dark, animalistic soul. Still other stories say that a Cathayan is the soul of a dead mortal karmically cursed for sins of desire or indulgence.

The truth bears elements of all these legends, yet is more complex than mortals are aware. To become Kuei-jin, a mortal "urn" must have suffered one of two fates:

- During his lifetime, the mortal awakened his dormant P'o. Such an occurrence is possible only through sustained deeds of depravity and callousness, such that the mortal's "dark side" has a significant impact on his personality and overall karma. (In game terms, any human whose Humanity score drops below 5 may have awakened his P'o, and anyone whose Humanity score falls to 1, then gains a subsequent Derangement [see **The Vampire Players Guide**, pp. 34-35], certainly has done so.)
- The mortal died in such traumatic fashion that his P'o awakened at the moment of dying. This situation typically arises only when a very nasty death combines with an overwhelming urge to remain in the living world. Unfortunately, the Fifth Age, with its brushfire wars, political "detention centers" and tong battles, offers countless opportunities for this sort of death.

Furthermore, in any event:

- The mortal must have great strength of will. Although many restless shades (most commonly referred to as *kuei*) haunt the sites of their bodies, it is a much more difficult endeavor actually to reinhabit a body from the other side. Every Kuei-jin must begin the game with a Willpower rating of at least 5.

In any event, the mortal dies, typically unready, unfulfilled and unwilling to depart the living world. The P'o-weighted soul rockets howling into the spirit worlds. Such a creature normally ends up as a malevolent spirit (a "Spectre," "Bane" or similar "demon"). In the case of souls cursed to become Kuei-jin, however, the Karmic Wheel has a different fate in store.

The Yomi World

The soul spirals straight through the Yin or Yang World, until it reaches a terrible place paralleling both, yet part of neither. Kuei-jin call this realm many things: the Yomi World, the Thousand Hells, the Abyss and the Labyrinth are but a few names for it. Few Kuei-jin care to think overlong about the Yomi World, but most scholars believe it to have formed from defiled pieces of both the Yin and Yang Worlds. Certainly, corrupt spirits from both the Yin and Yang Worlds haunt Yomi, serving the Hell-masters as demonic minions.

For the P'o, Yomi is a nightmare landscape of howling winds, monsters, horrific vistas, shrieking voices and constant pain. Here the soul floats, lost in a lightless womb of lacerating winds and rains of knife-edged bone. Many souls are destroyed outright or disfigured beyond recognition; others are devoured or enslaved by the demons lurking in Yomi. For most souls, Yomi is the end; if there is rebirth after mortification in Yomi, only the greatest gods would know.

Occasionally, though, the dual soul actually splits in two. The Hun soul retains sufficient composure to tear itself away from the P'o before the latter's immersion into the Yomi World. Trapped in the Mirror Lands of the Yin or Yang World, yet unable to move on, the Hun is resigned to skulking impotently within its corpse (or, as the case may be, its ashes). Most such souls, made of relatively feeble stuff to begin with, weaken rapidly, fading into ephemeral tatters within a few years. A few souls are thought to haunt their corpses for centuries of purgatory.

Some souls are composed of stronger stuff. In rare instances, the P'o manages to escape Yomi and return to the site of its corpse, attracted by the "homing beacon" of its Hun. (Whether the soul claws its way out or *is released* is a subject of much speculation among Kuei-jin; only the wisest bodhisattvas are thought to know the truth.) At this point, the P'o is a powerful but mindless thing, maddened by pain; conversely, the incomplete Hun, tied to its corpse by the death-trauma, is unable to pass on to its final fate.

The dual soul now has two fates open to it. Most souls haunt the spirit worlds near their corpses as pathetic refugees, until they fade away or are devoured by stronger spirits. But some souls — souls in whom the desire to live again is great — resolve to reincarnate in the Middle Kingdom here and now. And the only way for them to do so is to reinhabit their bodies.

The Second Breath

So, in one instant of overwhelming pain, the twin souls reunite, and the corpse rises from its resting place.

The process is called the Second Breath. Over the millennia, Kuei-jin have written volumes concerning it; still, no one precisely understands it. Cathayan scholars speculate that to complete the process, the Hun must be sufficiently adept to "weave" a housing from ambient Chi lines near the corpse and, thus, connect strands of Yin and Yang that imbue the body with unnatural life. By contrast, the P'o must be sufficiently strong to "slash" open the Wall separating the spirit world from the Middle Kingdom. In the Fifth Age, more fatalistic Kuei-jin lament, the Wall is strong, and so, by default, only individuals with powerful P'o souls can muster the sheer savagery to claw open the Wall. As such, all returning Kuei-jin bear at least a modicum of the monstrous.

The process itself takes relatively little time as denizens of the Middle Kingdom reckon it — generally, a Kuei-jin rises no later than two months after its mortal death. Miraculously, the corpse is restored to its appearance during life. Even the ashes of a cremation meld together and rise whole, for, say the Kuei-jin, the Great Cycle levies its curse, body or no body.

And so, the newborn Kuei-jin, P'o swollen from its work and inflamed with memories of torment, starved for life-force, unable to breathe and cut off from the Chi that sustained it in living days, stands up and opens its eyes. With a gaze attuned to the worlds of the dead, it views the Middle Kingdom and sees the corruption of the Fifth Age mirrored in a desolate landscape of ebbing Chi.

Needless to say, the aftermath of the Awakening is generally quite unpleasant for the Kuei-jin. It is even less pleasant for hapless mortals in the vicinity.

Burial Rites

Many cultures in the spirit-haunted Middle Kingdom maintain elaborate customs relating to the interment of their dead. People began these customs long ago to honor departed ancestors, to display the piety of the living family — and, above all, to keep corpses and ghosts happy, quiet and still.

While improper burial rites *per se* do not mandate a corpse's rise as Kuei-jin, such an insult certainly stokes the anger of a P'o that returns to its corpse and fuels its drive to slice through the Wall. By contrast, a proper and timely funeral can soothe the Hun (and, occasionally, mollify the P'o), thus causing the split soul to diffuse into the spirit worlds before it has a chance to reunite and rise.

In the Fifth Age, relatively few families honor the ancient burial rites, and many corpses are laid to rest in improper fashion. Kuei-jin ancestors speculate that such neglect has contributed to the increasing numbers of Kuei-jin returning over the past four centuries.

Grave Undertakings

Through the Ages, Kuei-jin have attached great importance to the resting places of their mortal shells, wherever they may be. Some Kuei-jin believe that the grave plays a fundamental role in determining where, when and how a Kuei-jin experiences the Second Breath. The care and upkeep of a deceased person's grave, say many Kuei-jin, helps quicken the pace and shorten the length of the Road Back; conversely, the dilapidation of a gravesite offends the rulers of the afterworld and makes the journey even harder. To this end, Kuei-jin throughout the Middle Kingdom maintain a series of elaborate customs relating to their mortal interment.

• Jade: The power of jade for any *shen*, particularly a Kuei-jin, cannot be overemphasized. Jade acts as a lodestone for meditative and spiritual energies, as a receptacle for elements of the soul and as a tangible connection to the Yin and Yang Worlds. Some Cathayans choose to decorate their former tombs with intricate jade sculptures, inlays and other trinkets, in order to funnel and store Chi from the immediate area, as well as to keep the lines of communication and access to the spirit worlds clear. Of course, this option is available only to those Kuei-jin who can afford to take it. The lower classes of vampires, whose reliquaries are the only items of jade they are likely ever to possess, clutch these baubles to themselves as drowning men clutch life rings.

• Pictographs: Many of the earliest Asian cultures marked gravesites with representations of real or mythical creatures. These pictographs were designed to symbolize the journey through the spirit worlds. Such stylized pictures, either on the actual tomb or on objects buried with the deceased, are often reproduced by Kuei-jin, who place great faith in the power of representation as a sort of talisman. Amulets, signet rings, letterheads, chops (signature markings), corporate logos, and patterns in tiled floors and mosaicked ceilings feature symbols for many *wu* and courts. Even the simple act of drawing the representation on a scrap of paper while performing a ritual is thought to have mystical significance.

• Protection: The protection of a tomb or gravesite has been a constant feature of both mortal and vampiric culture in the Middle Kingdom. While the tombs of the oldest and most revered bodhisattvas and ancestors are often located in preserved shrines, parks and museums, a large number of burial places (particularly the mass graves on a centuries-old battlefield) consist merely of the actual physical spot where a Kuei-jin was standing when his mortal self hit the ground. Maintaining the physical and spiritual integrity of such a site in the middle of nowhere is enough of a chore. It becomes exponentially more difficult when someone comes along and decides to build a bank on top of the site.

Protecting and watching over a tomb or gravesite happens on several levels. Many Kuei-jin with surviving families rely on mortal relatives for protection. Nine times out of 10, the normal, proper ceremonies of ancestor worship and ritual are enough to appease local spirits. Some *wu* and courts in the Middle Kingdom's large cities institute local measures to safeguard the gravesites and tombs of all native Kuei-jin — for a fee.

For Kuei-jin without such recourse, added wrinkles occur. Kuei-jin in this category have been known to use mortal slaves or, in the more remote areas of the Middle Kingdom, chained *chih-mei* to act as guard dogs. Such practices violate several standing codes of etiquette, but what happens in the hinterlands rarely attracts serious attention from the larger courts. Some Kuei-jin with acute understanding of geomancy and exceptional attunement to Chi lines can manipulate the directions and "frequencies" of Chi deposits around a vampire's interment site, in a method akin to an animal marking its territory in the wild. Although this method occurs most frequently in rural areas, the aftereffect is detectable in certain cases, especially by mortal *fang shih*, who can sense the natural "disturbances" in an area and steer architects away from unfeasible construction plans.

THE BLACK LOTUS BLOSSOMS

Upon return, most Kuei-jin find themselves under the yoke of the P'o. At this point, they are mindless monsters whose sole purpose is the satiation of their hunger. Kuei-jin at this stage are known as *chih-mei*; they are little better than predatory animals, with no purpose other than to kill humans and ingest the Chi contained in their victims' flesh. Many Kuei-jin never pass beyond the *chih-mei* state.

Few *chih-mei* survive for long. They starve to death, or else they are put down by witch-hunters, hengeyokai or their own kind. Some are enslaved by other Kuei-jin, chained and used as hunting animals. Little more need be said of these wretches, save that their fate in the Great Cycle is assuredly not pleasant.

Better to focus on the Cathayans who escape this ignominious fate — as some do. A rare few vampires, ones of particularly strong will, emerge from the Second Breath with their *wa* nature in control. Some rise as *chih-mei*, but manage to tame their inner Demons at some point during their feeding frenzy. Others are captured by established Kuei-jin, taken to the communal palace, then run through a series of torturous tests during which the Kuei-jin appraise the *chih-mei*'s body and soul.

If, during these tests, the Hun soul is incapable of manifesting, the *chih-mei* is summarily enslaved or put down. If the Hun soul manages to overcome the P'o, the newborn Kuei-jin is taken in by the community, and the process of *ré* — instruction in the rudiments of Kuei-jin society — begins.

RÉ

A novice Kuei-jin must tread most carefully. At this stage, she is not *shen*, but *hin* — a "nonperson" with no rights. A *hin* can be destroyed at the whim of the ruling ancestor; indeed, a *hin* can be arbitrarily cut down by any established Kuei-jin who finds her offensive. Civility and etiquette are carefully cultivated among the superior *hin*.

Hin receive rigorous training, not merely from a *sifu*, but from the entire Cathayan community. In the old nights, this training process might last a full 24 years (two cycles of the zodiac); in the Fifth Age, expediency is paramount, and few initiations last longer than five years. During this process, all the region's jina collectively participate in the *hin*'s education — thus, a novice Cathayan might be taught the *kaja* script by a court's Fifth Superior Mistress of Calligraphy, spirit etiquette by the Watcher in the West, and kenjutsu by the Celestial Sword Dragon. The training is harsh and instructors display little tolerance for error. In the Fifth Age, Cathayans are not overly patient with their charges. They have little time to spare on the niceties of instruction, and pupils who lack the physical and emotional fortitude to survive lifetimes of war and hunger are best served by a quick and merciful destruction.

Hin also learn their Disciplines and supernatural arts at this time; under the watchful eyes of acknowledged masters, all receive instruction in the rudimentary mystical powers appropriate to their dispositions. The first part of most *hin*'s training involves the manipulation and understanding of Chi.

Hin are taught how to attune themselves to Chi, how to manipulate Chi within their bodies and how to view the Yin and Yang Worlds. During this phase of instruction, a *hin* centers his Chi, finds his Chi balance, and becomes aspected to Yin, Yang or Balance.

Naturally, as vampires, *hin* must also be instructed in dealing with their essential attributes: sating their hunger, mastering the fire and wave nature and avoiding the sun. When a *hin*'s Demon Art manifests (as it inevitably does), the vampire is given over to the court's terrifying First Oni, the vampire most skilled in conjuring her P'o. The First Oni, typically (though not always) a member of the Devil-Tiger Dharma, trains *hin* in control over and use of their P'o. This period of the training is generally the most harrowing, as it involves confronting and evoking the Demon; many *hin* do not survive with their sanity intact.

During this time, a *hin*'s every word, every gesture, every action is scrutinized by the community as a whole. Established *wu*, courts and cliques evaluate the *hin*'s skill and character. A promising pupil may attract the attention of established court figures, who offer to take the character as a "special student"; of course, acceptance of such an offer irrevocably immerses the vampire in the abyss of Cathayan factionalism. The mentor's allies become the student's allies...but the mentor's rivals become the student's foes, and the rivals' students typically stop at nothing to show up or destroy the "impudent upstart" outright.

The instruction period is also the time when the character begins her path along a Dharma. Representatives of each of the five Dharmas scrutinize the *hin* and consult among themselves as to which students are best suited for which Dharmas. In certain cases involving exceptional pupils, Dharmic masters have been known to journey from afar (sometimes shocking the pupil's court with their sudden appearance), in order to conduct the pupil's training "properly." Kuei-jin consider such an event extremely auspicious; a pupil thus chosen is held in high esteem, and her fellows tolerate nothing less than greatness from her thereafter.

The Fire and Water Test, which marks the end of initiation, always takes place on the 23rd day in the month of the Dragon. At this festivity, which is often disguised as a mortal party or festival, the *hin* demonstrate their mastery of skills both mortal and supernatural for the assembled court. Mortal vessels, who serve as refreshment for the *hin* and as reminders of how essential subtlety is, walk unwittingly about the proceedings. Each *hin* must conduct herself with impeccable poise and courtesy, and not only must demonstrate the minimum standards necessary for existence as Kuei-jin (training in Disciplines, mastery of fire and wave nature), but must also display her area of greatest excellence, be it in calligraphy, painting, seduction or war. (Pupils specially selected by one or more established Kuei-jin must perform particularly well; demonstrating anything less than excellence is a great blow to the honor of the mentor.) Should a *hin* fail to impress the court, the ancestor's raised eyebrow or curt chop of a finger beckons nearby jina; the unfortunate *hin* is swiftly and efficiently removed from the proceedings, never to be seen again.

Near the end of the night, the ancestor and mandarins induct surviving *hin* into the court and bestow upon them the rank of disciple. They are now "persons": full members of Kuei-jin society. This achievement coincides with the swearing of reciprocities, as the disciples swear loyalty to their fellows and promise obedience to vampires of higher station.

At this time, each disciple is assigned a "direction," based on prior astrological analysis of the date on which the vampire rose from the dead. This direction (north, west, center, east, south) is thought to govern the vampire's general disposition, temperament and role in society.

Finally, each disciple joins a *wu*. This word (which, depending on tone, can mean "five" or "house") signifies a "blood family" of undead. Typically, a *wu* comprises Kuei-jin who displayed interest in or sympathy toward one another during training. Increasingly, newly initiated *hin* are simply allowed to unite into their own *wu*, thus forming a new one. Certain mandarins deplore this practice, saying that the traditional "Hundred Corpse Families" are good enough; their more liberal brethren counter that only by allowing the young to write their own histories can Kuei-jin society survive the turbulence of the impending Sixth Age.

HUNDRED CORPSE FAMILIES: THE WU

For a Kuei-jin, survival in the Middle Kingdom is a nightly battle. From the moment a Kuei-jin takes those first few steps on the Road Back, he must steel himself against continual threats: fanatical witch-hunters, enemies among his fellow *shen*, Yama Kings and their demon minions, and the seething parasite inside himself.

Since few Kuei-jin move beyond the stage of *chih-mei*, ones who do tend to cling to others around them for support, creatures who, like them, have endured the trial of rebirth. This idea of natural mutual support among like-minded Kuei-jin ordains the primary level of social interaction and definition within Kuei-jin society. Kuei-jin organize themselves into groups of five (usually), traditionally called *wu*. A *wu* functions as a Kuei-jin's surrogate family during this second chance at existence. A grouping of five vampires (one from each direction) is considered the most auspicious and harmonious number for a *wu*; in the Fifth Age, however, many *wu* include more or fewer Kuei-jin.

In some ways, a Kuei-jin *wu* resembles a Sabbat pack, but *wu* are far more purposeful. The oldest *wu*, which have survived for centuries or even millennia, have illustrious histories, legends, traditions, and all manner of pomp and circumstance attached to them. These "Hundred Corpse Families" (there are traditionally 100 "original" *wu*, although the actual number is probably over 1,000) were supposedly founded millennia ago, as the Kuei-jin scattered throughout the Middle Kingdom. Their names and pictographs were recorded on the (now destroyed) jade pillars at Changan, and their alliances and feuds have shaped the course of Kuei-jin and mortal history.

Conversely, because of the ever-increasing number of Kuei-jin being reborn in the Fifth Age, many *wu* are ragtag bands of recently created vampires, hastily thrown together and given whatever duties the ancestors feel will keep them out of trouble. Many ancestors scorn these *wu*, though some elders feel that the new *wu* are keys to the Kuei-jin's survival and ultimate deliverance.

The coming together of a *wu* can take on a number of forms. Some *wu* are created spontaneously, through the convergence of five lone Kuei-jin who share a primal bond with one another. This bond can range from a spiritual connection around a single Dharma to a familial connection in the members' former lives. *Wu* centering on spiritual instruction in a particular Dharma sometimes consist of a jina and four disciples. *Wu* can also come about for more mundane reasons, including political and financial ones. The ancestors of the Blood, Bone and Flesh Courts, for example, are members of a *wu* that exists to maintain contact and mutual support among the Five August Courts. As evidenced by the recent state of the Quincunx, however, this form of *wu* is often the most tenuous.

Like any familial relationship, the *wu* is subject to life's (or unlife's) vagaries. Personality conflicts and power struggles exist as much among a group of five vampires as in a household of mother, father and three children of varying ages. Nerves fray, tensions build up and arguments ensue. The maintenance of a healthy interdependency among the Kuei-jin in any *wu* translates directly into its collective strength. A near-ironclad fealty exists among the members of a healthy *wu*. Kuei-jin who belong to such a close-knit group often perform tasks that go above and beyond the call of standard obligations, even going so far as to act as *de facto* protectors of their fellow Kuei-jin's surviving mortal families, if any still exist. In contrast, the deterioration of the *wu* relationship can result in the weakening of each Kuei-jin member, in both Dharmic progress and control over the P'o.

DIRECTION

Most Kuei-jin find themselves assigned a "direction," a particular purpose they are expected to fulfill throughout unlife. Through the proper interaction of direction and Dharma, say the mandarins, each Kuei-jin discovers his overall destiny. The assigning of direction is a major event in many courts; Kuei-jin soothsayers laboriously consult divination texts and study the stars under which the new vampire experienced the Second Breath, all in an attempt to ascertain the divinely ordained direction. Direction often corresponds to a vampire's Yin/Yang balance, though some Kuei-jin prove notable exceptions.

There are five directions, each corresponding to one of the compass points. According to the *Ki Chuan* texts, a harmonious *wu* should comprise one vampire from each direction, but in this unsettled Age, the courts must make do.

Vampires of the north are the preservers and enforcers of tradition; they are the magistrates, executioners and judges of Kuei-jin and mortal society alike. Vampires of the west study the spirit worlds in order to serve as messengers and guardians of Chi; ironically, they also serve as spies and assassins when necessary. Vampires of the east are the "harvester" caste, the "farmers" who ensure that the mortal herd remains harmonious and healthy; they act as *agents provocateur* when necessary. Vampires of the south are the "firebirds" — it is their duty to foment change in the Cycle and to lead the Kuei-jin into battle. Finally, vampires of the center are students of the eternal interaction between Hun and P'o, Yin and Yang, Kuei-jin and other *shen*. It is their duty to uncover — or create — the enigmas of supernatural existence.

Naturally, Kindred have no direction, for they do not hail from anywhere in the "real" world. Accordingly, they are useless, disruptive devils, of little merit and better off destroyed.

Kôa

Having been initiated into *wu*, Dharma, and direction, the Kuei-jin is now ready to embark on his *kôa*. This period, which lasts for approximately one human lifetime, is a debut of sorts, during which the Cathayan explores his nature and establishes his place in the world. For some Kuei-jin — the Japanese and Golden Court vampires in particular — the *kôa* is a time of extravagance and enjoyment, in which the vampire is expected to wallow in mortal power and sensuality (often settling old scores in the process) before severing mortal ties and assuming the responsibilities inherent to being Kuei-jin. (Cathayans still speak with mixed vexation, bemusement and wonder about the *kôa* of the youngling Singing Snake, which, through no conscious decision of its initiator, led to purges in the People's Republic government, gutted Pentex Hong Kong, exposed the corrupted bodhisattva Patterned Tortoise, and foiled a plot of the Yama King Mikaboshi.) For other Kuei-jin, the *kôa* is the beginning of a long and often arduous road to enlightenment; disciples are given tasks to accomplish and allowed little latitude for personal goals.

Vampires of the Fifth Age view the *kôa* as a time to make one's mark in undead society and (shockingly) to establish one's individuality. To the ancestors' dismay, these vampires often view their own aims and the ambitions of their *wu*-mates as more important than the good of Kuei-jin society overall. Some *wu* even prepare to depart for the West, in hopes of carving fiefdoms from the world of the Kin-jin under the guise of establishing footholds for their own kind.

To test the disciples, mandarins often give them specific duties to accomplish during the *kôa*. The disciples may accomplish these goals however they like, so long as they violate no strictures of their Dharmas or of Kuei-jin society. Occasionally, however, true wisdom is found in forgoing the established goals in favor of a more oblique and useful end; a disciple perceptive enough to discern this truth and accomplish the alternate goal is treated as a true prodigy and given a high measure of esteem.

Goals for disciples are typically based on direction and can include such things as:

- **North:** Establish the *wu*'s influence in the West. Make peace between two rival *wu* whose feud threatens to disrupt the entire court.
- **West:** Turn the spirits of the dead against invading Kindred. Find an ancient bodhisattva or artifact lost for generations.
- **Center:** Solve a riddle presented by a visiting bodhisattva. Maximize one's understanding of both Hun and P'o (i.e., increase both Virtues to maximum levels).
- **East:** Wrest control of a corporate or criminal enterprise from rivals. Enslave an influential mortal family and use it to the *wu*'s advantage.
- **South:** Destroy a Kindred outpost. Reclaim a dragon nest from marauding *akuma* or hengeyokai.

Upon completion of the *kôa*, a Kuei-jin typically takes a new name, one with absolutely no ties to his mortal existence. This name is bestowed in an elaborate ceremony, during which the vampire is presented with a plaque, pendant or other trinket inscribed with the ideograph of the new name.

As with all other aspects of society, the deterioration of the Fifth Age has compromised the *kôa*. Between the incursions of the Kindred and the increasingly inauspicious omens, Kuei-jin

THE YAMA KINGS

In addition to the manifold dilemmas presented by the Kindred, rival *shen* and the P'o, Kuei-jin disciples learn to fear another peril. According to the Kuei-jin's most ancient myths, it was the original responsibility of the Cathayan race as a whole to battle the depredations of a group of dreadful spirit beings, collectively known as the Yama Kings. In the Fifth Age, the Yama Kings still exist; they are evil spirits and demons of the highest order. They wait in the darkness of the Yomi World, but their minions burrow through the Middle Kingdom like maggots through a corpse. The Yama Kings' demonic nature gives them an uncanny amount of control over a Kuei-jin's P'o, and they enjoy nothing more than subverting their ancestral enemies' loyalties.

These dreadful beings are believed to have been created soon after the world's beginning. Originally powerful servants of Heaven, the Yama Kings disgraced their posts through gluttony and greed for Chi, whereupon they were exiled to the farthest reaches of the Yomi World. A few Kuei-jin scholars dispute this detail, and claim that even the Yama Kings serve Heaven in their appointed roles as instigators of strife and turmoil. In the Fifth Age, it matters little: The Yama Kings are demons and masters of demons. It is their role to foment misery, punish the wicked and test the mettle of the pure. Their spies are numerous and everywhere; little in the Middle Kingdom or the spirit worlds escapes their notice.

The precise number of Yama Kings is unknown; some sources say nine, others 10, and a few sutras list dozens. A few names have survived the Ages: Mikaboshi, ruler of the Wicked City of Yin; Emma-o, Lord of the Shikome Hell; Tou Mu, Queen of the Hell of Being Skinned Alive; Rangda, Mistress of Pestilence. They are rarely met, as they prefer to act through their servants: evil spirits, malignant ghosts, goblin spiders and other foul creatures.

Although it was originally the Kuei-jin's role to guard the world's Chi against the rapacity of the Yama Kings, the vampires succumbed to their own hungers and became little better than their ancient foes. Indeed, many Kuei-jin have come to worship and revere the Yama Kings, fatalistically rationalizing that, since the Yama Kings were ever true to their own nature, it is only seemly to honor the Yama Kings' superiority through the swearing of vassalage. Among younger Kuei-jin, some see service to the Yama Kings as an easy ticket to worldly power and endless Chi. Both sorts of vampires are known as *akuma*: devils. In exchange for oaths of loyalty (commonly sworn during the *akuma*-to-be's nightmares), the Yama Kings provide power and Chi to their servants.

The Great Cycle's devolution, particularly the coming of the foreign devils and their Kindred parasites, is likewise thought to be a stratagem of the Yama Kings. Many Kuei-jin believe that, come the Sixth Age, the August Personage of Jade itself will abdicate its celestial throne, and the mightiest Yama King will rise to take its place. This figure will become the Demon Emperor and will lead the other Yama Kings in an orgy of destruction that will consume Middle Kingdom and spirit worlds alike.

Some Cathayans exhort a return to their ancestral duties as warriors against the Yama Kings, while others shrug and go about their business, resigned to whatever fate Heaven has in store. In any event, the myth of the Demon Emperor sounds suspiciously similar to the Kindred's legends of Gehenna. For Cathayans, this correspondence is one more proof that the Kindred are the dupes of demons, and thus, should be exterminated as efficiently and mercilessly as possible.

of the Fifth Age might not have the luxury of even a mortal lifetime before the Sixth Age comes crashing down — much less the centuries or millennia needed to fulfill their Dharmas. As such, many ancestors reason, perhaps it would be best merely to deploy the disciples where their service is most supportive of the whole — and if such service entails the disciples' destruction, well, then, perhaps their propriety and obedience will win them another chance at reincarnation.

Interesting Times

And so, for Kuei-jin rising in the modern age, the Second Breath is a tempest of boundless, electrifying — and, all too often, lethal — possibilities.

Most Kuei-jin spend at least a part of their *kôa* settling unfinished mortal affairs. Whether such an accounting involves hunting down their mortal murderers or repaying old family debts, matters of love, duty and vengeance weigh heavily on the twin souls of most disciples. Mortal goals must be accomplished — or failed in spectacular fashion — so that their ultimate uselessness and transience might thereby be comprehended. Of course, certain Kuei-jin of imperfect understanding please themselves greatly through their ability to satisfy their own coarser hungers; these characters wallow in orgies of power and sensuality as they become corporate and underworld colossi or simply colossal predators.

The struggle with — and planned counterattack against — the West occupies the attention of many Kuei-jin. In these endeavors, younger Kuei-jin, with their knowledge of barbarian ways, prove exceedingly useful. Already, Kuei-jin *wu* make mortal contacts in Vancouver, San Francisco, New York and other Western cities. If the Kin-jin can come to the Middle Kingdom, the Cathayans say, the Middle Kingdom can certainly go to the Kin-jin. Perhaps, the ancestors postulate, the Cycle can be set aright in the Cainites' own hunting grounds.

Other Cathayans, seeing societal bolstering — or destruction — as the only hope for salvation in the wake of the Sixth Age, immerse themselves in the doings of their fellows. The largest court of Kuei-jin, the Quincunx, seeks to reunite all Kuei-jin under its banner. Only in this way, the Quincunx mandarins argue, can Kuei-jin complete their Dharmic duties in the face of the oncoming tumult. Conversely, the Cathayans of outlying regions, realizing that such "unity" would lead to slow suffocation in the Quincunx's coils, fight bitterly against any hint of "assimilation."

Still other vampires devote their First Subtle Journey to the study of the damaged spirit worlds and their place within the Great Cycle. These Kuei-jin undertake mystic quests in search of ancient bodhisattvas, dragon nests and sacred artifacts. Many Kuei-jin pursuing spirit goals prefer to act alone, though, in the dangerous Fifth Age, questers increasingly seek the safety inherent to a like-minded *wu*.

Social Hierarchy

A people difficult to rule is because they are too clever.
— Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*

As with the Kindred, Kuei-jin belong to different social classes, but there the similarity ends. The two main criteria for status among Kindred, namely age and generation, occupy

Shadow War

Make no mistake: Kuei-jin *wu* and courts can wage rivalries every bit as fierce as those among the Kindred. The feuds among various Japanese *uji* date back centuries, while the Blood Court and Golden Courts have despised each other since the nights of Confucius and Lao Tzu.

When tensions between individual Kuei-jin or Kuei-jin groups become intolerable, and mandarins and ancestors are unable to resolve the dispute, shadow war occurs. This form of ritualized combat pits rival factions against each other in a contest of might, subterfuge and treachery. Shadow war is always declared formally and is generally preceded by elaborate ceremony, blade dances, ritual bloodshed and the composition of martial poetry. In the greatest of shadow wars, spirits, hengeyokai, mortals and even Kin-jin can be drawn into the fray, as paid mercenaries or unwitting pawns.

Shadow war can take two forms: "twilight" and "midnight." Twilight war is the more genteel, and perhaps the more interesting. In many ways, it resembles a duel more than a war. The combatants fight according to prescribed rules of conduct, and a neutral party is brought in to arbitrate the dispute. The objective is not to decimate the opponent's holdings, *per se*, but to accomplish a designated objective — the takeover of a company, assassination of a valued warlord, or abdication of a popular political leader, for example — with as much strategy and finesse as possible. The objective for each side is typically chosen by the "referee." The winner in the dispute is whichever side first achieves its designated objective. Twilight war brings out the betting streak in nonparticipant Kuei-jin, who often wage princely sums on the outcome.

Midnight war is more brutal — a vendetta in which each side uses any and all tactics in order to eliminate the other, and no quarter is given. Midnight war must be declared openly, in front of a ranking ancestor; once it is declared, though, there is no honorable way to end it, save Facing the Eye of Heaven.

Facing the Eye of Heaven

Kuei-jin mandarins are extraordinarily inventive in the devising of punishments, and transgressors often linger for centuries of torture. Still, the most common, and most severe, form of punishment for traitors and miscreants is known as Facing the Eye of Heaven. Quite simply, it involves binding a Kuei-jin criminal in an outdoor area, then leaving him for the sun. Because many Kuei-jin can resist the sun for far longer than their Kindred counterparts, this means of execution is satisfyingly prolonged and painful.

Facing the Eye of Heaven can also be undertaken voluntarily, to exculpate shame or demonstrate helpless protest (this custom was most common among the Kuei-jin of samurai-era Japan, but it has survived and spread throughout the Middle Kingdom). The suicidal vampire faces east, in a cross-legged position, and awaits the dawn. While facing the destroying sun, the Kuei-jin composes and recites a spontaneous poem commemorating the occasion of Final Death (resisting wave soul all the while). Kuei-jin who die elegantly, without displaying fear or pain, gain great posthumous respect, and some say they are reborn as mortals or spirits.

different positions in Kuei-jin society. Because there is no Embrace or Curse for the Kuei-jin, there exists no generation. Physical age is respected in twofold fashion, as both a reflection of one's ability to survive for several centuries and a measure of significant progress toward fulfilling one's Dharma.

In essence, Kuei-jin society is predicated upon an intertwining of spiritual advancement and political initiative. Within courts and Dharmas, and amid the larger Kuei-jin community, social status marks a vampire's communion with and proximity to the Great Cycle. The particular categories that Kuei-jin use to describe their social place demonstrate the importance placed upon spiritual completeness. As a Kuei-jin progresses along his Dharma, he earns higher status within society, but also receives responsibilities and obligations that he is expected to fulfill.

Court

Early in the Kuei-jin's history, there were five great courts of Kuei-jin ruled by five immortal emperors: the Court of the Black Tortoise in the north, the Court of the White Tiger in the west, the Court of the Yellow Emperor in the center, the Court of the Azure Dragon in the east, and the Court of the Scarlet Phoenix in the south.

In the Fifth Age, these great courts are no more. The Black Tortoise Court became corrupted with *akuma* (as part of a bet between the Yama Kings Tou Mu and Mikaboshi) and ceased to exist. The White Tiger Court similarly fell apart when its empress entered forbidden Tibet in search of holy sites and never returned. The Azure Dragon Court disintegrated into camps of rival warlords as Japanese and Korean history progressed, and the Scarlet Phoenix Court renounced membership in the Five August Courts centuries ago, devolving into the Golden Courts of Southeast Asia. Only the remnants of the Yellow Emperor Court remain, restructured into the Five August Courts of the Quincunx (see Chapter Six).

Nonetheless, the institution of the court has survived, albeit in modified (and, some say, bastardized) form. While the Hundred Corpse Families have always been the nuclear unit of Kuei-jin society, the vampires of the East also group themselves into larger units, generally based on geographic proximity, political goals or the whims of a powerful ancestor. These units are called by various names; for simplicity, the term "court" will hereafter be applied.

Unlike *wu*, courts exist primarily to meet social and political needs. Courts commonly form when allied *wu* gather to fulfill a particular purpose or purposes, such as governing a region, advancing a political agenda in the mortal world or guarding a dragon nest. Over time, these various courts develop their own rituals, traditions, power bases, and mortal smokescreens. Courts are most similar to such Western institutions as the anarchs, the Harpies or the Inconnu; in some ways, they can be thought of as extended (and not always harmonious) coteries.

Most regions of the Middle Kingdom house one or more Kuei-jin courts. A region may be governed by one court, or may house several courts (which might act at cross-purposes). A typical city usually contains one or two Kuei-jin courts, though large cities often contain several. Courts can be secretive and insular or loose and scattered; it depends on the particular Kuei-jin and *wu* involved.

In the old nights, courts centered themselves near dragon nests, and the elders of the court were able to bask in the Chi-rich environment. These days, not all courts have access to such sites; particularly in large cities, modern courts must lair where they can. Bitterness and rivalry usually result between courts fortunate enough to have dragon nests and ones to which *joss* has not been so kind. Some imperious courts force lesser courts and unaffiliated *wu* to pay tribute in exchange for access to dragon lines. Other courts find themselves at war with, or ousted outright by, greedy neighbors.

Courts often maintain holdings in the "floating world" of mortals and use these institutions to advance their goals. These groups are called tongs or Scarlet Screens; courts are very protective of their mortal pets, though they do inevitably sacrifice them should the need prove sufficiently great. Thus, one court might work through a corporation or holding company; another might use a street gang or triad as its pawn, while a third insinuates itself behind the regime of a dictator. It is a great coup to destroy or subvert another court's Scarlet Screen during the waging of a shadow war.

A Western Kindred, used to a city full of vampires bound by little save common plotting, might be surprised by the inner workings of many courts. In more orderly courts, members of the different *wu* receive (and carry out) responsibilities for different tasks necessitated by the court. So, one vampire or *wu* might oversee a certain vice tong, while another might treat with the local wraiths, and a third might try to keep the peace with the region's hengeyokai.

On the other hand, many modern courts scheme ceaselessly against each other. There is only so much Chi to go around and, even given the Middle Kingdom's vast population, only so many mortals on whom to feed. Particularly in the Quincunx and Golden Courts regions, courts often resemble the secret societies of old, ever seeking to advance their agendas against those of their neighbors. Nothing is sacred in these battles, and even the Kin-jin may be used as pawns if the need is great enough.

The most common model of organization within a court is familial; that is, individual *wu* handle their own affairs, and the elder members of the various *wu* collectively make decisions about larger matters. In some regions, an individual ancestor acts as the ruler of a court, in the manner of a Western prince or Japanese daimyo; however, this practice is typically confined to the Quincunx and the Japanese *uji*.

Many different courts haunt the Middle Kingdom, each with its own flavor and purpose. Some examples are:

- **The Bone Court of Chongqing:** One of the Five August Courts of the Quincunx, the eerie Bone Court devotes itself to the practice of Yin magic. A number of *ch'ing shih* are found among its ranks, and the court occasionally practices its sorcery on captured *shen* or Kin-jin. The Bone Court is secretive and insular, but is believed to be interested in reentering the forbidden lands of Tibet.
- **House Bishamon:** One of the oldest Japanese *uji* courts, House Bishamon is occasionally mistranslated as "Bushi." Naming itself after the Kami of War, the Bishamon seeks to right its members in the Great Cycle by aggressively protecting Japan from Kin-jin influences. Outsiders might argue that the *uji* has had indifferent success, though few would say so to its

members' faces. The Bishamon works through several corporations and Yakuza *gumi*.

• **The Righteous Devils of Kowloon:** A court consisting of those Kuei-jin who remained in Hong Kong after the Treaty of Nanjing. The Righteous Devils are a fractious lot, concerned primarily with holding on to a modicum of power. Little save mutual self-interest unites the various members, and many of the Devils fear the reemergence of the Quincunx Flame Court.

• **The Yinbang:** One of Korea's "Green Courts," the Yinbang is a collective of *wu* devoted to two ends: playing Chinese and Japanese *shen* against each other and garnering jade for use in supernatural rituals. It is the dominant court in Seoul and keeps a steady eye peeled for its hengeyokai rivals in North Korea.

Individual Ranks

Chih-mei (Dharma 0)

The lowest vampires in the karmic cycle are the *chih-mei*, that vast majority of Kuei-jin whose Hun souls do not survive their initial return to the world. They are the mad, the ravenous, the carrion-eaters of the Kuei-jin, the near animals. *Chih-mei* tend to inhabit the most rural and desolate parts of Asia, the areas that are depopulated or barren. *Chih-mei* can also gravitate to regions where the Chi lines are corrupted or weak; there, they fight among themselves and slay unfortunate mortals for the flesh that will sustain them.

For the most part, *chih-mei* are destroyed, either by other *chih-mei*, by mortal witch-hunters and exorcists, or by their own talons. Some courts of Kuei-jin also take it upon themselves, as part of their commonly understood duty, to purge their regions of *chih-mei* if they foresee a threat to their own existence or to those of mortals. Rumors circulate that certain opportunistic Kuei-jin keep packs of chained *chih-mei* for purposes of protection, intimidation and even gambling (in the manner of fighting cocks), although such exploitation of *chih-mei* violates several sacred Kuei-jin precepts. Kuei-jin regard *chih-mei* as unfortunate casualties of the Great Cycle, as souls condemned to truncated unlives of misery and madness. Kuei-jin who take it upon themselves to destroy *chih-mei* know well that they are doing the wretches a favor.

Hin (Dharma 0 to 1)

Hin are the "nonpersons": vampires who have managed to conquer their shadow nature but who have not fully proved their worthiness to exist as Kuei-jin. They are permitted to exist and taught how to feed, but are given neither rights nor responsibilities until they have been initiated into the Kuei-jin unlifestyle, a process that can take several years.

The unlife of a *hin* is harsh, akin to that of a pledge in a military college. Although the entire Kuei-jin community takes responsibility for training *hin*, elders expect lessons to be learned diligently, gracefully and speedily. *Hin* must conduct themselves decorously, respectfully and — most important in the Fifth Age — competently. *Hin* who demonstrate stubbornness, disobedience or ineptitude are quickly winnowed out.

DISCIPLE (DHARMA 1 TO 3)

All Kuei-jin who have survived the Second Breath without completely succumbing to the P'o have done so through a combination of inner strength and innate power. A Kuei-jin who manages to rise above his initial existence naturally gravitates toward a specific Dharma, based upon his spiritual powers and strengths. After several years of rigorous training and gradual initiation, a (surviving) Kuei-jin is welcomed into the larger community, then initiated into a *wu* and (usually) a court of fellow Kuei-jin.

These vampires are called disciples, for, by their initiation into a *wu* and court, they are considered to have embarked upon the first step toward fulfilling their specific Dharma and finding their true purpose. Disciples are officially considered part of the larger Kuei-jin community. Although these Cathayans are lowest on the social ladder, they earn the basic rights of Kuei-jin, in both their court and the larger community. What rights a disciple has varies from court to court, but the fact that they achieve rights and respect from other court members is a significant episode in Kuei-jin existence. Besides being separated from the *chih-mei*, a disciple is accorded a respect that the childer of Kindred do not possess. Disciples exist to further the court and the Dharma. They are the agents of continuity, the inheritors of the Dharma and the new members of the quest to reenter the Great Cycle. Rather than maltreating disciples, scorning them or using them as pawns — as Kindred do their own childer — established Kuei-jin see such nascent vampires as the future of the Kuei-jin race. Thus, elders must encourage and assist disciples' spiritual growth, or so disciples are told.

All beginning player characters are assumed to have attained this rank.

JINA (DHARMA 4 TO 5)

Once a disciple has adhered for a certain amount of time to the teachings of his Dharma and has followed the laws of his court, he reaches a state of spiritual advancement that opens his mind and body to a greater level of inner power and magics. This state of existence, called *ling*, corresponds to a disciple's first comprehension of the potentiality of his power and, more importantly, ways to control it. The achievement of *ling* is a great accomplishment for a disciple; it is his first of many epiphanies on the road to the completion of his Dharma.

Vampires who have achieved *ling* are called jina, an ancient term for a spiritual guru. The conferring of jina status is a profound occurrence within Kuei-jin society; along with their increased social weight, jina also have the responsibility of instructing disciples. Upon attaining the rank of jina, such vampires are officially presented with one or more disciples, whose correct spiritual guidance is the ultimate responsibility of their respective jina. If its disciples are the future of any Kuei-jin court, its jina are the first formative influences for such beginners. As the largest social caste after disciples, jina fuel the spiritual fires of all Cathayans.

MANDARIN (DHARMA 6+)

In traditional Chinese society, the class of intellectuals — the ministers, teachers and advisors to the emperor or regional governors — held a special status based on their intellectual prowess and administrative acumen. In Cathayan society, such status goes to the advisors and administrators of a court or regional ancestor; these Kuei-jin, like their mortal counterparts, are commonly called mandarins.

Mandarins, be they advisors for individual courts or larger political bodies, are jina who have distinguished themselves in their roles as spiritual guides, but who also show particular affinity for larger advisory capacities. The mandarins are a singular caste within Kuei-jin society; they have their own customs, rituals and *patois* separate from all other social levels. Mandarins function as political advisors to ancestors, as ambassadors among the different courts, and as spiritual advisors to jina. Some mandarins perform other duties: Minister of Ceremonies, Foreign-Devil-Slaying General or First Interrogator, for example. The mandarins are also given the awesome responsibility within each court of selecting the court's ancestor. Considering their vast array of responsibilities, many Kuei-jin are puzzled by the taciturn and insular nature of mandarins; although they are received within Kuei-jin society as trusted spiritual advisors and *de facto* kingmakers, the enigmatic aura that envelops them remains bewildering to many, although very few Kuei-jin would actually admit such a thing.

ANCESTOR (DHARMA 7+)

The term "ancestor" has multiple definitions for Kuei-jin. It can refer to the original founder or one of the original founders of a Kuei-jin court. These figures are usually called "Imperial Ancestors" or simply "emperors" to distinguish them from the modern meaning of the term, which is either the head of a specific court or the governor of a region comprising several courts of Kuei-jin (something akin to a Kindred prince).

It is a court's mandarins who choose a court's ancestor, if one is chosen at all; they select candidates through a combination of debate and spiritual revelation, as well as the state of a candidate's Dharma. Such selection is strictly the purview of the court's mandarins; they have the final say in the consideration of candidates and appointment thereof.

The selection of an ancestor to govern a city or region of Kuei-jin is a more open affair. In this instance, each court of Kuei-jin within a city or region may send a delegation to convene, to put forth and to consider candidates, and eventually to select the ancestor of a city or region. The Kuei-jin appointed to this post invariably displays great political ambition and guile and has the spiritual grounding in his Dharma to effectively represent the Kuei-jin under his authority. For this reason, the ancestor of a city has traditionally been ancestor of a court, but this qualification is not stringent: On some rare occasions, due to a low Kuei-jin population or because of a powerful exhibition of talent, a mandarin or high-level jina is appointed ancestor.

Imbuing a Kuei-jin with ancestorship of a court or city is never automatic. Any Kuei-jin selected must undergo a test of leadership and character, thus proving his fitness to rule. Called the Three Dialogues, the test ranges over three nights and calls upon every facet of a Kuei-jin's abilities to pass it.

The first night is a test of the mind. The candidate is effectively grilled for the entire night by all teachers and mandarins in the court (or, in the case of a regional appointment, by all the assembled delegates) to determine his com-

mand of the vast library of Cathayan philosophy and teachings. Fierce debate over spiritual matters and commands to recall the most obscure, out-of-context references from the major works of Cathayan thought are the norm. A potential ancestor is expected to conduct his arguments with razor-sharp acumen, and nothing less than perfection is tolerated.

The second night is a test of the physical body. An ancestor is expected to know how to fight, and to this end, a candidate faces five of the most respected warriors in the court. Depending upon the court, the combat may or may not employ weaponry, but the potential leader must vanquish all of his opponents, often in several battles apiece.

The third, and arguably most important night, involves testing of the soul. The mandarins and sages involved in the Dialogues collectively turn on the potential ancestor and tap into his P'o through a combination of magic and psychological warfare. The vampire must reach deep within himself to bring his near-frenzied P'o back under control and fight off the attacks of the assembly, thus maintaining a grasp on his rational, higher Hun self. In addition to testing strength of will, the activity breaks down any psychosomatic barriers that exist between the Kuei-jin and his P'o, thereby opening a successful candidate to Demon Arts that had been heretofore dormant.

Needless to say, the Three Dialogues are not easy. Many apparently qualified Kuei-jin have not endured the third night of the tests, often resulting in madness or Final Death. The intensity of the Three Dialogues highlights the gravity Cathayans place upon the choosing of the right ancestor, and it shows the vampires' willingness to destroy one of their own rather than suffer the consequences of a poor choice. Kuei-jin believe that Heaven, the spirit worlds and the Great Cycle invariably illuminate the correct choice for ancestorship. The Three Dialogues serve as the traditional way of discovering the wishes of these august forces.

Bodhisattva (Dharma 9+)

When a Kuei-jin reaches the final stages of his Dharma, he removes himself from the larger world, from political and social interaction, and lives the unlife of an ascetic. These ascetics are known as bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are primarily concerned with the end of their Dharmas and their earthly existences — though most remain in the Middle Kingdom for centuries more, instructing lesser Kuei-jin and providing unliving examples of correct behavior.

Near the end of their Dharmas, bodhisattvas obtain communion with the spirit worlds: They experience frequent contact with historic Kuei-jin, Grand Ancestors, the Yin and Yang Worlds, and even the Yama Kings, all of whom bodhisattvas believe grant the final answers for transcending earthly existence. It is only when a Kuei-jin reaches the final stages of his Dharma that his consciousness opens to this dialogue with the ancients. (Zao-lat, the imperfect one, dubbed this state the "Suspire.")

Relatively few Kuei-jin ever attain the rank of bodhisattva; the process takes centuries, even millennia, and most Kuei-jin meet Final Death or succumb to the P'o long before they reach the bodhisattva stage. Kuei-jin who do reach the bodhisattva stage are vastly powerful beings — easily on the level of a Kindred Methuselah — and are revered as near-gods by other Kuei-jin. (Some are feared, and rightly so; those bodhisattvas following the Devil-Tiger Dharma, for example, have spent centuries perfecting the way of monstrosity, and it shows. Even the most vicious and homicidal "enlightened ones," though, are respected rather than reviled — albeit at a safe distance.)

Although most bodhisattvas live solitary existences in the wilderness, a few congregate in remote communities across Asia. The most famous one houses the spiritual teachers of the Shaolin Monastery in central China, all of whom are bodhisattvas. Along with their personal Dharmas, bodhisattvas act as spiritual leaders for all Kuei-jin, typically receiving any Kuei-jin who comes before them with questions. For sentimental reasons (though these sentiments are often viewed as imperfections), some bodhisattvas even maintain close ties with the ancestor of the court to which they belonged. Although they are ostensibly available for any Kuei-jin to consult, bodhisattvas' innate spiritual force can be overpowering, even debilitatingly painful, for younger Kuei-jin to endure.

The bodhisattva's existence ends when he becomes an arhat, a term that symbolizes the completion of the journey along the Road Back. There have been very few arhats in the multimillennial history of the Kuei-jin. Arhats are those bodhisattvas who have completely fulfilled their Dharmas and discerned their place in the Great Cycle. They have transcended their endless hunger, and they live out the rest of their nights as total hermits before their essence is reunited with the Great Cycle.

Arhats are the saints, buddhas and holy men of Cathayan society. To many Kuei-jin, they are unliving proof that there exists a purpose for their vampiric existence. To shed one's karmic curse and rejoin the Great Cycle is a Kuei-jin's primary and most daunting task; the arhats are testaments to the worth of a Kuei-jin's Dharma and place on Earth. Bodhisattvas believe that in their meditations they speak with the arhats, receiving guidance and advice from them. In many ways, the arhats hold a social standing and respect akin to what Kindred accord Antediluvians. Unlike those terrible Cainites, though, Kuei-jin arhats keep completely to themselves and do not interfere in the affairs of the greater Kuei-jin society. They have ended their sojourn in the Middle Kingdom and belong to the Ages and the Great Cycle.

Outsiders

Cathayan society is very exclusive. Kuei-jin recognize only their own kind as meriting any sort of fundamental rights or respect. Outsiders are given little attention and even less thought; they are actively shunned, denied the hospitality and protection of a city's court, and sometimes forcibly driven from a certain region. Individuals treated as outsiders have literally no identity for the Kuei-jin; it is as if they do not exist. This stigma applies to the Kindred, to be sure, but outsider status is not limited to foreigners — after all, unknown Cathayans could easily be pawns of the Yama Kings, and even long-standing members of a court can easily wind up on the outside looking in.

Kin-jin

Western Kindred are commonly called Kin-jin, a corruption of "Kain-jin," or "People of Caine." They are the original

outsiders, the unclassifiable foreign devils and barbarians who have brought down the Fifth Age upon the Middle Kingdom. Most Cathayans see the Kin-jin as enemies, menaces and infiltrators, the ignorant and corrupt tools of the Yama Kings.

Despite this attitude, open hostility against the Western clans is rare. A combination of political diffusion and personal self-control makes this hatred manifest itself as wariness, suspicion and tenuity — though things are about to change, and change violently indeed.

As far as relations between Cathayans and Kin-jin, personal feelings and objective reality are often at cross purposes. The steady Western intrusion into Asia over the last three centuries has brought, in addition to trading vessels and anti-Communist troops, the Western Kindred. If anything is certain in Asia, it is that the Kindred will not cease to come in the future. Thus, the mandarins of the major Kuei-jin population centers must perform a delicate balancing act in dealing with the Kin-jin. Over the decades, there has existed an unwritten rule that only the ancestor of a city or court is empowered to deal extensively with the Kin-jin in his or her sphere of authority. Only she may give them leave to move about; only she may mandate their extermination.

Despite the political freedom of ancestors in dealing with Kin-jin, the larger Kuei-jin society still forbids contact with the Kindred on any level. Most Kuei-jin courts consider it a serious breach of conduct for a Kuei-jin to associate freely or form personal connections with any Western Kindred; it is a crime tantamount to political treason. Enforcement of this rule is intermittent at best, due to the population volume in any major Asian megalopolis, but transgressors who are caught invariably suffer the harshest punishments available. In effect, they become outsiders themselves.

Akuma

Akuma, a word meaning "devil," are Kuei-jin who have succumbed to the lure of the Yama Kings and rejected Dharmic transcendence in favor of demonic vassalage. They have severed all contacts with their teachers or any proper Kuei-jin and have renounced their Dharmas. Most Kuei-jin loathe *akuma*; although Cathayans have fallen from their karmic station, many remember that one of their original tasks was to guard humanity from the Yama Kings' machinations. Vampires who serve the ancestral enemy willingly are the basest of traitors, and forever shame the *wu* and court to which they belonged.

In the Fifth Age, a Kuei-jin can be declared *akuma* for other reasons, such as disobeying a court's rules, deviating from the Great Principle or freely cooperating with Kin-jin. To be branded *akuma* in this manner is traditionally perceived as one of the most humiliating punishments inflicted upon a Kuei-jin; it says that a Kuei-jin is no longer part of the larger community, that he has forsaken his quest for unity with the Great Cycle and performed unforgivable acts in the eyes of Kuei-jin society.

Because of the implications a pronouncement of *akuma* has upon a Kuei-jin, it has historically been a rarely used form of censure. Most courts and ancestors go to great lengths to prevent themselves from resorting to its pronouncement, but the history of the past few hundred years, particularly with the arrival of the Western clans, has resulted in more *akuma* being created than any elder would prefer.

Even less pleasantly, the vampires of the Quincunx tend to see themselves, and China proper, as the "center" of Kuei-jin existence. Kuei-jin on the fringes of the Middle Kingdom, such as the *uji* courts of Japan or the Golden Courts of Southeast Asia, are often labeled *akuma* by virtue of their unorthodox customs. The fact that this declaration provides an excuse to raid the so-called *akuma* for their Chi and jade is typically dismissed out of hand.

Akuma tend to attract other *akuma*. Followers of the Yama Kings regularly worship frightful demonic forces, while attempting to further their masters' goals in the material sphere. Thus, even the Devil-Tiger Dharma despises *akuma*; it is the Cathayan's role to be a demon oneself, not to kowtow to another demon.

Despite their fringe existence, *akuma* exist throughout the Middle Kingdom; some have even managed to portray themselves as respectable individuals, pass the Three Dialogues with assistance from Yama Kings and set themselves up as ancestors of important cities.

Heimin

Loners and drifters are rare among Cathayans. Because the *wu* is the primary social unit of Kuei-jin society, vampires without a *wu* are traditionally perceived as rootless vagabonds. Travel throughout the Middle Kingdom is extremely problematic for solitary Kuei-jin who have neither a home court nor an ancestor to vouch for them. With the arrival of some Western Kindred in major Asian cities, the appearance of a drifting Kuei-jin tends to cause alarm among ancestors, who fear the unpredictability of possible unauthorized contact with the foreign devils.

In light of this threat, the Five August Courts, as a matter of policy (with other courts following suit), assimilate these vampires into the position of heimin, a word derived from a Japanese historical term denoting a "half-person." Heimin perform crucial duties within the Middle Kingdom. They are official intermediaries between the Kuei-jin and the Western Kindred who reside in Asia. In return for agreeing to act as couriers and delegates of local ancestors, heimin receive blanket letters of safe conduct throughout the Middle Kingdom, items freeing the vampires to travel in any direction.

Many mandarins dislike the idea of entrusting secure communications to Kuei-jin who are little better than wandering vagrants. The Quincunx and other courts employing heimin are confident that the ease of travel through ancestral domains and the pledge of ironclad loyalty, combined with the small number of heimin in existence, make the use of these drifters an acceptable tradeoff. How naive this position is remains to be seen, but heimin have been utilized throughout the Middle Kingdom for at least two centuries, and with the steadily growing influx of foreigners into the Middle Kingdom, the practice may very well increase.

Politics

For Asian vampires, politics is important in maintaining harmonious relations among the different courts. The relative lack of modernization in many parts of Asia — as well as the complexities of social and business interaction — necessitates an even smoother flow of information and agreement along political

channels. In the major cities, where the cramped populations can easily support a much greater number of vampires than cities in the West can, Kuei-jin place a high premium on peaceful interaction. Any significantly controversial act causes ripples among Kuei-jin and mortal populations alike.

The Ancestor

The ancestor of a court of Kuei-jin, when one exists at all, is similar to a Kindred prince, insofar as both entities hold domain over all vampires within a certain region, social stratum or field of endeavor. But there the similarity ends. Accession, power base and rights of governance of an ancestor in Beijing or Tokyo starkly contrast with the comparative instability of a prince's influence in London or Chicago.

The most immediately obvious difference is the respect accorded an ancestor. For the Kindred, a prince typically takes power through violent revolution and maintains his position through political kowtowing to the city's primogen, who function simultaneously as advisors and opposition. All the power of a prince rests on his or her ability to quash potential usurpers, and to prevent the primogen from deserting *en masse*. Respect and deference toward a prince are spotty at best, even absent in some of the largest and most fractious metropoli.

With an ancestor, it is a much different matter. From the outset, the phenomenon of ancestry is a collective process. Chosen by representatives of all the affected Kuei-jin courts within a city, the ancestor enjoys the full faith and credit of his or her subjects (or at least most of them). The process is deliberate and painstaking, but rarely takes on the character or violence of a municipal civil war.

However, because a given region may consist of two or more courts, two or more court ancestors might find their purviews overlapping. Suppose that the Flowery Minister of the Opal Mirror, an ancestor ruling a spiritually oriented court in a major Asian city, finds himself at odds with the court of his rival, the Ancestress of Steel Knives, over the ascendancy of a radical mortal cult. The Flowery Minister feels that the cult's activities fall under his jurisdiction, but the Ancestress, seeing the cult's potential as a weapon against invading Kindred, decides to use the cult as a Scarlet Screen for her court. Shadow war is declared, and disciples on both sides (as well as unaffiliated Kuei-jin) are mustered (or duped) into action. The resulting tension could theoretically bring both courts to their knees and disrupt mortal life in the city as well.

Needless to say, Kindred refugees seeking to present themselves to the "leader" of their inscrutable rivals can find this phenomenon confusing...and lethal.

The political authority of an ancestor is real and near-absolute. Compared to the chaos of the Jyhad, the shadowy dealings and infighting that scar the Western Kindred, the order of a city of Kuei-jin under a powerful and respected ancestor is almost shocking. Ironically, an ancestor rarely maintains control over mortal institutions such as government, crime or business; these trifles she leaves to the courts and the mandarins. An ancestor is typically of sufficient power to enforce her will through personal strength alone.

The specific rights and duties of an ancestor reflect this mandate of authority. First and foremost, the ancestor is the prime lawmaker for a city of Kuei-jin. With her mandarin advisors, she enacts and enforces the specific codes for those areas of the city under her aegis, thus protecting the purviews of various *wu*, settling disputes, overseeing treaties or agreements between *wu* or courts under her auspices, arbitrating shadow wars, and delineating the boundaries of interaction between Kuei-jin and the mortal populations.

The ancestor also acts as an ambassador for her territory by receiving venerable Kuei-jin from other regions and by acting as the territory's representative in drafting treaties or agreements with the ancestors of other realms. Safe conduct and protection are given by the ancestor alone. Any Kuei-jin who takes the normal risks of travel to the domain of another ancestor usually carries an official signet of safe conduct, bestowed by his own ancestor, which guarantees the protection of the ruling ancestor during his or her stay. Yet, just as safe conduct and protection are given, they are as easily renounced; Kuei-jin travelers who conduct themselves unbecomingly can be officially enjoined from entering the domains of certain ancestors.

The ancestor also has the sole right to interact with any and all Kindred within her domain, and to control similar interaction for all Kuei-jin under her authority. The ancestor's official sanction is needed for any Kuei-jin to make deals with or offer hospitality to the Western clans, and such sanctions do not come casually.

Last, but definitely not least, the ancestor has the final authority to guard the territory against evil spirits and Yama

"The Mandate of Hell"

The cornerstone of an ancestor's power is believed to be connected to the course of the Great Cycle. Called, ironically, the Mandate of Hell, it is similar to the old dynastic ideas of imperial power. The Mandate of Hell decrees that the ancestor of a city or region is believed to be the choice of the Cycle itself. The meticulous debate and discussion among court representatives, including their use of astrological data and divination in selecting an ancestor, is done to determine the Kuei-jin who is, in effect, the preordained ruler.

This belief underscores the longevity of many ancestors, but the practicality of the Mandate is not necessarily as clear-cut. Although many Kuei-jin do not care to admit it, there is a strong belief in the antithesis of the Mandate — in a belief of disobedience against the ancestor who proves himself wicked, corrupt or derelict in his duty. The Mandate of Hell does not, in its formulation, assume the existence of this form of opposition. Indeed, many elder Kuei-jin have even gone so far as to deny that the Mandate allows for disobedience, but some Kuei-jin, especially the younger ones, look to the dualism of the universe as a reason for refusal to obey the laws of the ancestor, particularly the prohibitions of association with Western vampires.

Kings, which includes the ability to pronounce *akuma* status on any Kuei-jin within her domain. Specific court leaders usually make their pronouncement of *akuma* on the unfortunates involved, but the ancestor has final say in the matter. The declaration of *akuma* upon a Kuei-jin is a momentous decision, one never made lightly. The subsequent approval of the ancestor, then, is more or less automatic, but there have been rare instances of an ancestor reversing a decree.

THE GREAT PRINCIPLE

It is the heart and spirit of the people. It defines how we act and what we believe and what is right and what is wrong and how we live and how we die. It is who we are.

—Robert Crais, *Stalking the Angel*

The Great Principle constitutes the ancient code of behavior for all Kuei-jin. It is the single most important teaching in Cathayan society. Each new disciple is commanded to learn and live by its precepts, called the Fivefold Way, in his or her every word and deed. Whether the vampire in question actually does so or not, or whether the vampire's *wu* and court actually adhere to the teachings, are other matters. Still, the Great Principle provides a theoretical framework linking all Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom.

The Fivefold Way, in contrast to the Six Traditions of the Western Kindred, acts as much more than a fundamental code of laws. The Fivefold Way is literally that: a way of life. It permeates practically all facets of Cathayan existence, both individual and communal. The Great Principle embodies a Kuei-jin's personal directive of discovering and fulfilling his divine purpose.

The Fivefold Way functions as a guide to realizing that fulfillment, yet adherence and devotion to its precepts vary as much as everything else in Kuei-jin society. Many of the older and more established courts, particularly ones that have their origins in China proper, follow the Fivefold Way with unwavering diligence. As one travels farther out from the core of Kuei-jin society, cultural differences and political circumstances result in differing levels of interpretation of the one correct way of unlife for a Kuei-jin — if there is indeed one "correct" way.

THE GRAND ARHAT XUE

The Fivefold Way of the Great Principle is said to have been espoused first by a Kuei-jin called Xue (an allegorical name meaning, alternately, "study" or "blood"), who existed sometime during the Third Age. Legend says that Xue was one of the Kuei-jin who fell in the karmic order. Part of one of the first courts of Kuei-jin, Xue thereafter lived a life of exemplary spirituality and balance, and he was the first Kuei-jin to find Golconda after the fall of the Wan Xian. The code of conduct that Xue (also called simply "the Grand Arhat") followed came to be known as the Great Principle, a product of both celestial revelation and personal meditation.

THE TWO DISCIPLES

Upon Xue's ascension to the rank of bodhisattva, he supposedly removed himself from the world of mortals and went into the wilderness in search of a student who would receive his teachings and use them wisely. During the course of his travels, Xue met a foreigner, a wanderer from the West, who also sought a way out of his Damned existence. This stranger, who called himself Zao-lat (Saulot), let himself be instructed by Xue, whose teachings on inner harmony and peace he eagerly absorbed. But Zao-lat proved to be imperfect in the eyes of Heaven; he fell out of favor and was banished from Xue's company, whereupon he returned to the West.

Saddened, Xue continued on until he encountered another tortured creature, one with whom the gods were pleased. This disciple was called Ki, and it is through Ki that the words of Xue endure, to be handed down through the Ages to modern generations of Kuei-jin. His writings, the *Ki Chuan*, or *Commentaries of Ki*, comprise the main texts of the Kuei-jin. Every follower of the Fivefold Way, from the newest disciple to the most powerful ancestor, owns and consults these works constantly.

THE WAY OF ORIGIN

The Way of Origin sums up the fundamental difference between the Kuei-jin and the Western Kindred. It is the one truth of all Cathayans' existence: the belief that all Kuei-jin come from the same place. Each Kuei-jin believes that he or she traveled the Road Back for a specific reason. Despite an individual's homeland, Dharma, social status or political influence, no single Kuei-jin is, as far as the Great Cycle is concerned, inherently different from another. All Kuei-jin are connected — to the earth, to each other, across life and death — through their Origin.

Origin underscores the majority of variations between the Cathayans and the Western Kindred, in both the physiological and philosophical senses. All Kuei-jin originate in the same place, travel the same Road Back and have the same primordial spirit essence coursing through them. No Kuei-jin Embraces any other, or any mortal. There is no Curse to hand down, nor is there any weakening of generation in the manner of Western Kindred. Sires do not exist; neither do clans. A Kuei-jin's Dharma and court remain voluntary choices, based only upon inner predilections and talents.

Origin lends itself to ways of thought totally removed from beliefs of the Western clans, thus giving Cathayans the semblance of a giant, extended community. Of course, within any community there is bound to exist some strife and disagreement. Nonetheless, the Cathayans see themselves, in all their multitudes of composition, as directed toward the same goal: the reconciliation with the Great Cycle. It has bred within them a feeling of superiority over the Kin-jin, whom they see as ignorant and vulgar and very, very dangerous.

THE WAY OF LINEAGE

Respect for one's elders and ancestors, living or dead, is a staple of Asian society. For Cathayans, such reverence is no less important, although their definition of elders and ancestors varies from that of the Western bloodlines.

In Cathayan terms, lineage is regarded as the product of two factors: the Age when one returned from the spirit worlds and one's individual progression along one's particular Dharma. There is no direct sireship as exists for the Western Kindred; Kuei-jin instead revere their mentors, their jina and the ancestors of their courts. In some instances, certain *wu* are composed

The Great Principle

The Way of Origin

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

The Way of Lineage

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

The Way of Integrity

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

The Way of Obligation

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

The Way of Propriety

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

of Kuei-jin who were related in their mortal lives. These *wu* exhibit a palpably stronger bond among their members because of actual familial unity, but the concept of lineage carries equal weight and importance among all Kuei-jin.

Kuei-jin who honor the Way of Lineage believe that each one of their number has something valuable, however small, to teach her fellows. The older the Kuei-jin is, the more she has to teach, but the opposite is also true — younger Kuei-jin have ideas and insights that hold merit equal with ones of the most hallowed Cathayan sages. Younger disciples see the accumulation of wisdom through the Ages as priceless, for the experiences and teachings of the old promise aid to the young in taking a place in the Great Cycle and fulfilling their Dharmic duties.

Lineage is a radical departure from the relationships between elders and childer of the Western Kindred. So powerful is this notion that some Cathayans do not stop merely at learning from their immediate elders; certain courts have attempted to communicate with the arhats of old, such as the Grand Arhat Xue. This activity has caused some controversy in Cathayan society, especially in the case of younger Kuei-jin. Some of the younger disciples, dissatisfied with the teachings of their elders, seek to communicate directly with the arhats, even with Xue himself, who they feel is the only true authority in Kuei-jin society. According to these vampires, the filtering of Xue's teachings through ancestors, whom they see as politicized, and through mandarins, whose teachings have calcified over the ages, does a disservice to Kuei-jin of the modern Age. They seek the truth, plain and unvarnished, and prefer to go straight to its source. A good deal of strife has resulted among the Kuei-jin, because of the ambiguous nature of this disobedience: Although the younger Kuei-jin are not faithfully following their immediate elders, neither are they totally forsaking the Way of Lineage. It remains a touchy subject.

The Way of Integrity

For the Kuei-jin, personal honor and trustworthiness are as important as they are to the mortal populations. What the mortals call "face" is referred to by the Kuei-jin as the Way of Integrity.

A Kuei-jin's word is his bond, and his reputation and standing in the larger Cathayan community are as much a part of him as his physical existence. All Kuei-jin hold some amount of rights within the larger society, depending upon their status and the maintenance of their Dharmas. Each Kuei-jin is ultimately responsible for her actions. No idea of a sire's Accounting exists in the Cathayan world view.

Individual Kuei-jin are expected to conduct themselves in an honorable manner: respecting others' position and power, remaining true to their Dharmas, abiding by the laws of the court and the ruling ancestors, etc. Integrity assumes that a Kuei-jin does her part to sustain the harmony of the court and the community by refraining from untoward actions or underhanded plotting.

The force of the Way of Integrity trickles down to the most meticulous details in social interaction. Absolute answers are rarely given in public, to avoid the discomfort and disappointment that follows a "no" — Kuei-jin dialogue is often couched in vagueness and enigma. In addition, arguments and berating are often had out behind closed doors, so as not to attract attention or cause a scene. Grievances within and between courts are handled in closed ceremonies, and even the gravest punishments are handled quietly and quickly. The Way of Integrity also mandates the respect and upkeep of other Cathayans' honor. It is considered improper in the extreme for a Kuei-jin openly to defame or challenge another's power or authority, or to act in a way that would bring dishonor upon his own court or ancestor.

The Way of Obligation

All Kuei-jin are bound by duty, the Way of Obligation. Duty can and does take numerous forms: duty to one's Dharma, to the rules and procedures of one's court, and to the ruling ancestors. In theory, a Kuei-jin also has a duty to the life forces of the earth, to the celestial population and even to mortals.

During the Fourth Age, a Cathayan *wu*, drawing upon the writings of Ki, formulated a concept that the Kuei-jin still practice tonight, that of the Five Obligations. The Five Obligations define a quintet of relationships that represent a Kuei-jin's interconnectedness with his or her fellow vampires, and with the rest of the universe. They are the Obligation of Power (the relationship between a Kuei-jin and the officials of the court), the Obligation of Legacy (the relationship between elder and younger Kuei-jin), the Obligation of Knowledge (the relationship between mentor and disciple), the Obligation of Court (the relationship between Kuei-jin of different courts or Dharmas) and the Obligation of the World (the relationship between Kuei-jin and the rest of existence, which includes the mortal world, the Yin and Yang Worlds, and the dragon tracks themselves).

These Five Obligations are the spokes of a wheel that has the Kuei-jin at its center. In order for the entirety of the structure to function smoothly, Kuei-jin must keep these five relationships strong and healthy, so that the spokes do not weaken and cause the wheel to cease turning.

In practice, the Way of Obligation is often a one-way street; although a Kuei-jin may keep his word and fulfill these Five Obligations, such faithfulness and solidity may not be reciprocated by his more worldly brethren. It does not matter. A Kuei-jin is supposed to keep his word and follow through in his actions and oaths.

As with everything else in Cathayan society, the understanding of the Five Obligations becomes fuzzy on the individual level. A Kuei-jin's personal relationships with other Kuei-jin who were familial ancestors in life, or with his own former mortal family, invariably complicate the precepts of Obligation. Familial bonds can prove to be amazingly strong, often at the most inconvenient moments. Kuei-jin more often than not maintain ties with other Kuei-jin to whom they were related in life, a practice that often pits a vampire against his own court when the relative belongs to a hostile court or follows an "unacceptable" Dharma. In addition, Kuei-jin often utilize the cultural practices of ancestor worship and the belief in household gods to exert control over their former mortal families during times of need, whether the need is for a safe haven, a bit of favorable action from mortal power structures or a trusted reservoir of Chi.

The Way of Propriety

Propriety concerns itself with ritual, ceremony and etiquette; in short, the correct way of doing something. To Cathayans, everything has one true nature within the universe; consequently, there is only one correct way of performing an action, a ceremony or a task in one's Dharma.

Ritual and ceremony are mainstays of Cathayan existence. Kuei-jin understand that their powers and magics, like everything else in the universe, stem from the interaction of the Yin and Yang energies that drive all creation. Every aspect of a Kuei-jin's supernatural abilities ultimately comes via the grace of the Ebon Dragon and Scarlet Queen. In order for a vampire to tap into her individual Disciplines, she performs meticulous rituals to placate the spirit rulers, rituals that have been handed down for millennia.

These ceremonies are called Reciprocities, and they do not occur only between a Kuei-jin and the spirits. A Reciprocity can be instituted between two or more vampires as a pledge of fealty, as the final seal on a treaty or contract, or in any other situation of mutual exchange. Kuei-jin society is extremely complex and formal, with a host of correct greetings, exercises, and trappings — all done to maintain the Way of Propriety. No short cuts or easy answers exist for the Kuei-jin; everything has a purpose and an established series of steps. To do otherwise offends not only the Great Cycle and the celestial forces, but also the object, person or ceremony itself. Such behavior cheapens the value of things and robs them of their complete and rightful being. Ignoring Propriety effectively arrests the Great Cycle and places the Kuei-jin further away from her Dharmic goal.

The Great Principle in the Fifth Age

As with any texts of faith, the Great Principle and the Fivefold Way are followed with differing emphases by different courts of Cathayans. As many courts adhere to the letter of the law as interpret it more loosely, and opinions on the Great Principle come from every position on the compass.

Because the Great Principle is based on the teachings of one Kuei-jin, Xue, who followed one particular Dharma (the intricacies of which tragically seem to have been forgotten over the centuries), the notion that one litany of thought and ritual can apply across the Middle Kingdom to all courts and Dharmas equally has weakened in credence over the years. How strictly a Kuei-jin practices the Fivefold Way is as much a matter of the immediate practicalities of a vampire's situation as it is of her own belief system. At their most basic level, the Great Principle and the Fivefold Way stand as anchoring points for a Kuei-jin in her eternal battle with her uncontrollable P'o.

The Origins of the Kuei-jin

The sword that kills the man
Is the sword that saves the man.
— Ekai, *The Gateless Gate*

Cathayans do not view themselves as descendants of Caine, nor do they believe the evolution of their race to have any ties to the Western clans. In fact, most Kuei-jin scoff at the self-importance that many Kindred afford themselves, especially when the Westerners boast of their closeness to the Third Mortal. To Kuei-jin who have heard the barbarians from the West tell such stories, Caine was nothing more than an insignificant farmer, and a murderer on top of that: A rather ignominious ancestry for an entire race of supernaturals — and many Kuei-jin believe that the Kindred's unlifestyle of vice, anarchy, megalomania and destruction is a fitting legacy for such an unflattering sireship.

By contrast, say the Kuei-jin, they are the descendants of gods, hybrid beings of matter and spirit. True, many Kuei-jin see themselves as a species in disgrace, having lost their place in the karmic order. Nonetheless, unlike the Children of

Yin and Yang

The concept of Yin and Yang is one of the oldest and most prevalent in Asian philosophy. To the earliest Chinese philosophers, the universe was a dynamic entity, set and kept in motion by the forces of Yin and Yang. Yin is regarded as the passive force in nature, its reactive quotient; Yang is the active force, the initiator. Yin and Yang have been and are applied in Asian thought across a broad spectrum of concepts, both abstract and practical. This concept of action-reaction effectively separates everything into polar opposites: light/dark, male/female, etc. From the dynamism of these opposites acting upon each other, the world and the larger universe move in relative harmony and balance.

Cathayans know the forces of Yin and Yang well; as undead, they are suspended between the negative Yin pole of death and the positive Yang pole of life. Chi, the force on which Kuei-jin feed, is invariably aspected to either Yin or Yang. Yin and Yang also appear in much of Kuei-jin philosophy and mythology, from the first genesis of the Kuei-jin race to modern relations among various groups of vampires. Many Kuei-jin *wu* and courts see themselves as embodying one of these two forces: There are courts devoted to a specific definition and practice of Yin and ones likewise dedicated to Yang. More temperate Kuei-jin believe that even they are in some sort of opposition to each other in this regard, and that the normal spiritual forces and practical activities of their various courts effectively balance each other.

Caine, the Kuei-jin realize the magnitude of their position, and some among them even hope to reattain their honored state. Even vampires who scoff at this premise and believe the Sixth Age to be at hand seek, nonetheless, to face it with dignity. Not for the Kuei-jin is the self-indulgent whining of the Kindred. "If it is our karma to be demons," reads the *Red Book of the Iron Bridge*, "then we must happily leap into Hell."

The specific origins and mythological chronicles of the Kuei-jin are as fragmentary as those of the Western Kindred, perhaps even more so. What fables do survive, passed down through at least seven millennia in either oral or documentary forms, speak of eras and worlds transcending the mortal one.

The Two

For all Kuei-jin, regardless of ethnic background or homeland, there exists in myth a pair of beings, called the Two, believed to have created the East's vampires. The identities of the Two vary from region to region, as different mythologies and creation myths take hold, but most Cathayans accept that this pair of individuals, one male and one female, by their actions and interactions, ordained Kuei-jin existence. The Two represent the incarnations of Yin and Yang, whose interaction with and opposition to each other maintain the balance and the integrity of the universe.

Unlike Caine, whose identity and exploits are firmly established in Kindred lore, the identities and myths surrounding the Two vary among Cathayans. When speaking across cultural and national lines within the Middle Kingdom, Kuei-jin often default to calling them the Ebon Dragon and the Scarlet Queen, in order not to offend others' perceptions of their nature.

The female Scarlet Queen personifies the force of Yang for Kuei-jin: the creative, initiating, kinetic force of the universe. The warriors, artists and hellraisers among Cathayans consider themselves to be subjects of the Scarlet Queen; many of these Cathayans employ specific rituals and homages to her. The Scarlet Queen, so the myths say, first provided life to men and women: In her Chinese guise of Na Kua she created the first human beings; as the Japanese Izanami she gave birth to the islands that compose Japan. She is the guardian of emotion, ecstasy and the fire nature, and vampires aspected to Yang give thanks to the Scarlet Queen for allowing them to live and feel again.

In contrast, the Ebon Dragon symbolizes the Yin force, the contemplative, reflective, meditative half of existence. The sages, hermits and judges of the Kuei-jin follow the Ebon Dragon in his many passive forms. In China, the Ebon Dragon is Hun Dun, the deposed judge of the Underworld to whom the humans created by Na Kua went when they died; in Korea, he is Hwan-ung, who spent 100 days in darkness in his quest for immortality. The Ebon Dragon is the bellwether to the Scarlet Queen, the counterweight to unbridled passions and absent self-control. Yin-centered vampires believe in study and reflection, in meticulously controlled rituals to understand their true nature and, they hope, to transcend their karmic state.

Kuei-jin see themselves as the children of the Dragon and the Queen. Unlike many spirits, the vampires are neither fully of Yin nor fully of Yang, but suspended between these two. It was for this reason that they were chosen to return to the Middle Kingdom, that they might guard and guide its inhabitants.

The Great Cycle of Being

A central idea that flows through all Cathayan thought is the existence of a Great Cycle of Being. This Cycle, set in motion by the August Personage of Jade and kept in rotation by the Ebon Dragon and the Scarlet Queen, determines the course of the world and the place of all creatures within it. Its unceasing revolution shapes and ordains lives and deaths, the rise and fall of empires, the destinies of men and beasts. As beings act in harmony with their nature, their souls reincarnate through nobler and nobler lives, becoming more and more divine with each incarnation. As beings flout the will of the Cycle, though, their souls become weighted and corrupt, until finally they become demons and eventually are purged from the Cycle altogether.

Metaphorically, the Great Cycle resembles a wheel, with 12 spokes standing for the 12 separate Ages through which the world progresses. The turning of this Wheel of Ages enables the world to achieve balance, by separating all of its component parts into their preordained roles and innate natures, into Yin or Yang.

There is a dark facet to the Great Cycle: As the Ages progress and the world continues to separate into its myriad of dualistic opposites, it becomes more fragile in nature, less unified and altogether worse. For Kuei-jin, the devolution of their species and the general decay of natural Chi in the Middle Kingdom lend credence to this observation. As the Wheel turns, things grind toward a violent and possibly final confrontation.

Some Kuei-jin seek to reverse the Cycle's degenerative course, so that they might redeem themselves; others, seeing the increasing numbers of Kuei-jin entering the world, believe that their duty is, in fact, to turn the Ages from one to the next, and that the vampires are to be the harbingers of the Sixth Age. Regardless, most Kuei-jin see the Western Kindred as devils sent to precipitate the Cycle's end; as the Kuei-jin act against the Kindred, the coming of the Sixth Age will either be halted or arrive all the faster.

The First Age

The First Age is generally taken to be the period before the creation of the world. Called the Age of Heaven, it marks the era when Yin and Yang had not separated, when all things were One, and that One was the August Personage of Jade. The First Age was a period of ultimate harmony, the first point of interconnectedness among all things. Many Kuei-jin believe that the fulfillment of their Dharmas allows them to return to this state of being; of course, many others discount the First Age as pure myth, and they prefer to think of Dharmic fulfillment as simply bringing an end to their earthly imprisonment.

The Second Age

The Second Age, or the Age of Beauty, marks the separation of the Yin and Yang Worlds from the Middle Kingdom, which bore elements of both. It is also the era that sets the Great Cycle in motion. During this Age, the Ebon Dragon and Scarlet Queen were born, and their interaction and opposition furthered the turning of the Cycle, coalescing matter and

spirit-stuff alike.

Soon thereafter, the Ebon Dragon and the Scarlet Queen learned to breathe, and as they breathed, the Ten Thousand Things of matter and spirit began to take shape. Where breathed the Dragon, spirits and properties of Yin appeared; where breathed the Queen, spirits and properties of Yang took form. Soon, the worlds of matter and spirit had been breathed into existence. Gods and dragons walked the young, vibrant world, and to them Heaven ordained duties and positions in the Spirit Courts.

However, as the celestial beings gravitated to their specific realms, some escaped the notice and tutelage of the Dragon and the Queen. These beings, deprived of proper instruction, neglected their duties and failed to make obeisance to the will of Heaven. Certain creatures became dualistically opposed to others, while others combined Yin and Yang in unwholesome imbalance. Demons and monsters, greedy devourers of Chi, appeared during the Second Age.

The worst of these creatures made lairs deep within the wildest regions of the worlds. Disregarding the August Personage's authority, these demons drained entire regions of Chi, then claimed the blighted and diseased lands as their own. The demons warred among themselves, and the mightiest forced the other demons to swear fealty to them. Calling themselves Yama Kings, these archdemons ravaged their surroundings and plotted to garner vast amounts of Chi for their own selfish appetites.

To maintain the Cycle's purity in the face of the ever-bolder Yama Kings, the Dragon and the Queen birthed *shen* into the world — the shapeshifting hengeyokai, the *kamuii* fae and other creatures. These beings received various tasks to perform, so that the Cycle would spin as it should. Humans also came into being during the Second Age, a product of the Dragon and Queen's love for each other. This last act, in particular, was not received kindly by the monstrous Yama Kings. Jealous of their fairer brethren, the Yama Kings stalked amid the first mortals, afflicting upon them sickness, terror and destruction.

The August Personage grew alarmed at the demons' actions. But there were many Yama Kings, most of whom dwelt in dismal lairs, far from Heaven's scrutiny, and emerged only to ravage and conquer.

The Coming of the Wan Xian

And so, to protect its newborn charges, the August Personage bestowed its favor upon certain of the most superior mortals, and a new race of beings was born.

The members of this race were not called Kuei-jin then — they were the Wan Xian, the Ten Thousand Immortals. Selected for their wisdom, power and balance, the Wan Xian were neither wholly mortal nor wholly spirit, but possessed elements of both. To become Wan Xian, a mortal soul had to cross into the spirit worlds, then enter the Middle Kingdom once more. Thus attuned to the world of spirit, the Wan Xian could draw upon the stuff of the Yin and Yang Worlds — Chi — and utilize it for sustenance and power.

These first Wan Xian ensured that all under Heaven was properly ordered. Above all, the Wan Xian were responsible for the first humans, from whom they had been selected. The Wan Xian needed neither food nor drink, for the dragons themselves gave of their bounty to the Wan Xian. As the gods subsisted on the Peaches of Immortality, so did the Wan Xian nourish themselves with Chi, which they inhaled in moderation from the ebb and flow of the world itself.

The Age of Legends

The Third Age, or the Age of Legends, was a glorious time during which the Wan Xian bore their Heavenly mandate proudly. They were the immortal emperors, the demon-slayers, the gods who walked among humanity and guided its progress. At the directive of the Ebon Dragon, the Scarlet Queen and the August Personage itself, the Wan Xian purged the world of the Yama Kings' servants. If a spirit or demon grew unruly, the Wan Xian could drive it from the Middle Kingdom, then report the transgression to its spirit master; if a mortal ruler strayed from the way of Heaven, the Wan Xian could set the mortal aright. As Wan Xian gained in wisdom and completed their tasks, they passed from the world to join the gods, and the Ebon Dragon and Scarlet Queen then selected more Wan Xian to replace them.

The Wan Xian took it upon themselves to watch over many of the fledgling settlements of humanity that settled in Tibet and along the Yellow River in ancient China. The Wan Xian guided the people in their endeavors, guarding them and ensuring that all acted in accordance with Heaven's will. The old scrolls speak of the Yellow Emperor, Oh-kuni-nushi, and other heroes. Drawing on the gifts of the Dragon and the Queen, the Wan Xian cleared the earth of the Yama Kings and their minions by driving these unruly creatures deep into the Yin and Yang Worlds or by destroying them outright.

Because of the near-mythic status of these first Kuei-jin, the Third Age is referred to as the Age of Legends. It is also during the Age of Legends that the majority of the Cathayans' founding texts and sacred writings were composed, although few of these works survive in complete written form today.

Years passed, though, and the whispers of the Yama Kings darkened the noblest of ears. The Wan Xian turned from their sacred duties and betrayed their trust. During the Third Age of the Great Cycle, certain Wan Xian learned a terrible secret. The gods had taught them how to harvest Chi from the natural eddies of the Middle Kingdom — but Chi could also be taken from other creatures. Chi permeated flesh; it flowed through blood, and breath and jade. And it could be wrested from beings weaker than the Wan Xian.

At first, the Wan Xian stole Chi only from demons, monsters and other enemies. As they did so, though, it became easier and easier to justify their cravings. And the more they stole, the more they hungered.

The Age of Beautiful Sadness

The Fourth Age of the Great Cycle dawned in fear and flame. Wan Xian warlords stained the soil with blood. Immortal generals led hordes of slaves in ceaseless raids for jade and blood. Death cults arose among the mortals, cults devoted to feeding the Wan Xian's ever-growing appetites. The Wan Xian made war on the other *shen* of the Middle Kingdom, even going so far as to set the hengeyokai against one another, that the Wan Xian might plunder their sacred sites. Even the spirits grew fearful of the greedy Wan Xian; the Yin and Yang Worlds withdrew further from the Middle Kingdom, and the road

between the two grew difficult. Sages and spirits alike tried to reason with the Wan Xian, but their greed and hunger blinded and deafened them. At last, the Wan Xian's gluttony grew intolerable, and the dragons cried to Heaven for succor.

Karmic Punishment

And Heaven answered.

The Wan Xian were cast from their thrones and scattered to the Five Directions. From them the August Personage stole the knowledge of how to breathe. They became cold, unliving things. Yet neither were they dead. Without breath, the Wan Xian found themselves forever separated from the living world. Yet, having rejected their purpose, they had no passions to sustain them among the Dead. New Wan Xian, denied true rebirth, were forced to inhabit the corpses of their mortal lives. And, since they were so eager to wrest Chi from others, the August Personage saw to it that they could nourish themselves in no other fashion.

Then, its work done, the August Personage turned its face from Middle Kingdom, Spirit Courts and Great Cycle alike. Deprived of supervision, the Yama Kings and their demon minions seeped back into the Middle Kingdom. The hengeyokai, angered beyond reason by the Wan Xian's depredations, fell upon the humans who had foolishly followed their immortal masters.

The Dragon and Queen, ashamed, likewise turned away from their errant children — but not before leaving the secrets of the Dharmas hidden in clouds, wind, rain and blood, so that one night the Wan Xian might redeem themselves and regain their place in the Cycle.

As the Cycle turned, the Wall between the mortal and spirit worlds grew thick, and Wan Xian could be born only with great effort. Slashing through the spirit walls became a brutal task, and only individuals with strong P'o souls could muster the necessary savagery. In an ironic judgment, Heaven had seen to it that only souls weighted with evil could become Wan Xian. Wan Xian would continue to walk the Middle Kingdom, as had been decreed in the early days of the world. But because they had rejected their ordained place, their numbers came only from mortals whose hungers and lusts had overwhelmed them. And so, those beings created to be the Middle Kingdom's guardians instead became its eternal misery.

If, before, they had been gods, the Wan Xian now resembled the very demons they had pledged themselves to overcome. And, the Wan Xian realized to their sorrow, the Middle Kingdom itself had been turned into their Hell.

Thus did the Ten Thousand Immortals become Wan Kuei — Ten Thousand Demons.

The Fifth Age

Now, in the Fifth Age, the Wan Kuei, or Kuei-jin, are wretched creatures indeed. Driven to madness by the P'o, forced to reanimate corpses and sustain them with stolen life-force, most Kuei-jin endure existences every bit as miserable as those of their Kindred rivals. In fact, for the Hungry Dead, unlife is often worse, for their personal struggles are overlaid with tremendous, collective guilt.

Even their Chi sight continually reminds them of their failed responsibilities. With their Yin sight, they see the decay of the Fifth Age eat away at the Middle Kingdom. With their Yang sight, they see the rippling, jagged energies of hatred, war, rage and terror. Indeed, for many Kuei-jin, the Second Breath catapults them into a dreamscape of unending nightmare.

The Kuei-jin must now decide whether they should seek to right the Great Cycle, attempt a desperate escape or succumb to their curse as monsters. And their decision must be made soon.

The Future: The Sixth Age

The Sixth Age is the Age of Sorrow. It is the lowest point on the Cycle, which many Kuei-jin believe will usher in a time of apocalyptic disruption, when the Yama Kings will rise and rule among the nations. How long the Sixth Age will last is indeterminate, but all are convinced that it is imminent and will be violent.

Kuei-jin are of several minds as to what will occur either during or after the Sixth Age. The most optimistic Kuei-jin believe that the spirit worlds and the Middle Kingdom will reunite, that the dragons and spirits will resume their Heavenly duties. Others feel that this reunification will occur, but that it will signal the end of the Middle Kingdom, as everything is suffused back into the first true state of interconnectedness. And still others, having traveled frequently to the Yin and Yang Worlds, believe that the mightiest Yama King will rise and rule as Demon Emperor in the August Personage's stead, and the Kuei-jin will be cast from the Great Cycle into eternal oblivion.

The state of the Wheel of Ages concerns many Kuei-jin at the brink of the Sixth Age. Many Kuei-jin who have resigned themselves to a bitter and brutal Age of Sorrow contend that, despite the inevitable suffering and death, the Sixth Age will eventually end and the Great Cycle of Being will come full around to the First Age again. But an equal number prophesy that the accumulation of centuries of karmic debt will weigh down the Wheel of Ages to the point where it stops turning. This, they say, will herald a horrific end to the world.

The Age of Sorrow will definitely be some sort of end; on that all Kuei-jin agree, as do the Western Kindred, who refer to the time as Gehenna. Yet, for the Kuei-jin, the fact of the Great Cycle makes the Sixth Age inevitable. Unlike the panicky Kindred, who will attempt any measure to halt its arrival, the Kuei-jin are far more resigned to this end. Whatever form it takes and however long its duration, the Age of Sorrow will come, and it will arrive hard and ruthless.

It is the way of the Great Cycle of Being — the way of life itself.

ד"ר סוס

CHAPTER TWO: THE SECOND BREATH

Blossoms float on dragon's breath.
Trees whisper to each other.
In their shade, a man lies sleeping,
Pierced with iron nails.

The path to the Deathless is awareness; unawareness, the path of death.

— The Dhammapada

THE LANTERN SHOW

All things have a purpose under Heaven.

All things.

The wise man. The nurse. The torturer. The demon. The maggot. The vampire.

All things have a purpose. Most are wise enough to know what that purpose is. Kuei-jin, however, must learn their place under Heaven before they can assume the true powers of their office. More to the point, they must understand what they are before they can come to terms with their undead state. By all measures, the Kuei-jin are unclean parasites, shut off from the sight of all good folk. They may be powerful, even immortal, but that power grows thin when compared to the endless hunger of eternal nights.

Faced with this emptiness, the Grand Arhat Xue despaired. As the Wan Xian scattered, Xue wandered off on a long journey. He searched for 1,000 years, and he asked secrets of the five elements as he searched. In time, he assembled a Fivefold Way, and founded, it is said, five Dharmas: divine philosophies to guide the footsteps of the Damned.

Creation may indeed be a shadowplay, but it is a show with substance. Like the flickering images thrown by a lantern (which, as many mystics believe, have lives of their own), the illusions of the mortal world grant insight into the greater truths. By discovering his place in that shadowplay, a Kuei-jin finds purpose; by transcending that place and the world around it, he (theoretically) finds peace.

Despite their name — a corruption melding Xue's term *Di'hana* with the Sanskrit term for destiny's law — Dharmas are not Hindu, not Buddhist, not Confucian, Taoist, Shinto or even Christian. They are elemental paths, the trails of which were blazed long before the philosophers and prophets of the great religions were born. Not to say that Kuei-jin concepts haven't been *influenced* by the grand cultural sweeps of Buddhism and the other faiths; the modern name attests to that much. However, Cathayans who would seek true enlightenment must, as always, go beyond the easy roads imposed by mortal vision and seek the traces of faint footprints and snapped twigs, the traces that reveal the path of the true visionary.

It's also vital to remember that Kuei-jin are monsters. Vampires. Eaters of life-force. Animated corpses. And they are very much aware of that fact. The Dharmas *can* be seen as avenues to transcendence, but many Cathayans regard them as roads to perfection instead. If one is a monster, then it stands to reason that perfection often means becoming more of a monster than one already is. Hence, Kuei-jin are not "Grasshopper"-spouting sages, peacefully picking lotus flowers in search of enlightenment; they are monsters seeking a purpose to their unlives.

A Dharma is not a path to power or a roadmap of enlightenment; consider it, instead, to be a series of auspicious stones, a trail of bent grass-blades marking the way of ones who went before. Each vampire must find her own path; a Dharma merely tells a vampire where to start looking, not where to find each and every step. The search is part of the larger journey.

A PLACE UNDER HEAVEN

The Western concept of sin and redemption, so vital to the Kindred's sense of Humanity, is fairly alien to most Kuei-jin. That's not to say the Eastern vampires don't see things as right or wrong; rather, they regard themselves as above those concepts. By virtue of what they are, vampires are fundamentally unclean. Still, they serve some purpose under Heaven. Unlike her Western counterpart, a Kuei-jin doesn't feel guilty about what she is. Instead, she takes a more Zen view of things: "I am an unclean thing. Yet I exist. Because I exist, there must be some place under Heaven for me." A Dharma helps guide her to that purpose.

Although it resembles the Kindred concept of generation, Dharma works more like the Humanity rating in reverse; rather than measuring a vampire's fall from grace, Dharma reflects her rise above her original state. When a Kuei-jin first returns from the spirit worlds, she's little better than a cannibal-corpse; soon (if she's lucky), she regains some sense of her former humanity and begins acting like a person with mighty powers. In time, this behavior wears thin; the vampire requires a semblance of peace and destiny. Raw might is fun for a time, but, as the Kindred elders can attest, it feeds on itself until an immortal life goes hollow.

Wisdom — and the hunger for it — often comes with age. For the first few years of her unlife, the vampire finds herself enmeshed in mortal concerns. Resplendent in her newfound powers, she usually returns to her old home to settle a few scores and carve a new piece of turf. After a while, however, she understands that mortal games are like a thousand scattered grains of rice — too small to collect and too tedious to pursue. A vampire who survives long enough to appreciate immortality eventually wants more than mere superhuman powers. The quest down a Dharmic road takes a vampire many mortal lifetimes; the lanterns of that quest — moments of insight called *dên* — goad her onward in the night.

Dharmas have practical benefits, too. Most Kuei-jin courts require at least a minimal familiarity with some Dharmic path; the living dead are too dangerous (to the living *and* the dead, and everything else in between) to be left in a shameful, undisciplined state. A renegade who refuses to learn anything about her place in creation does not exist for long; soon, an ancestor tires of having such a capricious creature in his domain, and he instructs her, enslaves her, exiles her or destroys her. A Kuei-jin with an advanced sense of purpose, on the other hand, earns respect for her enlightenment. That sense of attunement also helps the vampire to shift about Chi; the more harmonious a vampire becomes to creation, the better she can use creation's lifeblood. Furthermore, her affinity helps her overcome the powers of lesser rivals; some soul-powers simply won't work when a youngster uses them against an enlightened ancestor. Even so, all the power in the world cannot ease a vampire's hunger the way simple harmony can. By advancing her awareness, the Kuei-jin transcends her anguish.

Each beginning Kuei-jin character is assumed to belong to one of the five Dharmas listed hereafter and to begin the game at a rating of 1. Dharmas are not power-based; you cannot purchase them with experience points, nor do they reflect the strength of a **Kindred of the East** character. Instead, they measure a vital, yet ephemeral, thing: the journey to find a place in creation. For a living dead thing, some sign of destiny may be all there is to hope for.

Systems

To study Zen, the flowering of one's nature, is no easy task in any age or civilization. Many teachers, true and false, have purposed to assist others in this accomplishment.... Zen is not a sect but an experience.

— Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki, *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*

Attempting to use a game system to portray something that defies description presents a koan worthy of a Zen master. What is the sound of a soul made of numbers? At its heart, Dharmic progression is a roleplaying and storytelling experience, not a collection of modifiers and experience points. It flows through the character and her activities; like a breeze, it cannot be predicted until it is felt, although its progress can be seen in the branches overhead. The Dharmic quest is a dance beyond words. The challenge is to put it into game terms.

It has been said that Zen cannot be defined. That to refer to "Zen" is to lose sight of what it is. That apparent contradiction is true of the Dharmic journey, too; the more you try to nail it down, the further you stray from it. This conundrum is as true for the vampires as it is for your troupe; a Kuei-jin disciple who asks an elder for "the answer to the next level of Dharma" will be knocked through the nearest wall and sent on his way. The insights that lead a Cathayan down his Dharmic path must

come from the things he experiences — in other words, from the events in your chronicle.

STORYTELLING

No list of charts or points can tell a Storyteller what to do. Ultimately, the Dharmic journey and the events in the chronicle become one and the same. Fortunately, there are enough common elements to shape the first few stories of your chronicle. From those first steps, the road to enlightenment takes shape.

Put simply, the steps of a Dharmic journey are:

- Sataa — Death, the Yomi World and Rebirth
- K'naa — The Hunger
- Ré — Instruction
- Kôa — The Running Monkey
- Dên — The Ten Dawns
- Na Tou — The Wandering
- Suru'a — Finding a Place
- Dâh — All-Awareness, the Eternal Lotus

As the Second Breath begins, a newborn vampire claws his way through the Wall and feasts; this marks his passage from mortal man to Kuei-jin. Hopefully, after a wild period, he masters himself enough to become a civilized member of society; here, his Instruction begins. The First of Ten Dawns is that sudden flash of satori (see below) that illuminates the Dharmic paths; it may strike a vampire before or during his cultivation, and it makes him realize that there's more to his unlife than simple bloodlust. Sooner or later, the Kuei-jin seeks greater answers and leaves his life behind; the Wandering begins, punctuated by insights, adventures and long meditations. In time, the Wandering reveals the vampire's place under Heaven; he assumes that place and becomes an elder Kuei-jin. After centuries of service and esoteric meditations, he may reach the fabled state of *dâh* — known in the West as Golconda, the enlightened state.

It looks simple. It isn't. It seems straightforward. It's not that, either.

The first steps of the journey are obvious; a dead soul is cast through the afterworld and sent back to the living lands. After that, things get tricky. Some Kuei-jin never pass the *k'naa* state; mindless, they feed until someone or something destroys them. Other times, an outside party drags the vampire into some form of society, where he may or may not learn about the greater role he plays. In most cases, any halfway-intelligent Cathayan soon understands he's got a greater purpose and looks for it on his own. Sometimes, awareness comes to him, knocking him upside the head with the cane called *dên* until his eyes open. Sometimes, that vision eludes the vampire — he's heard the footsteps, but he can't see the road. Frustrated, he goes wandering off until *dên* appears — which might take years. The more his vision clears, the more he wants to see; that Wandering stage might last for decades, even centuries, before the vampire is satisfied. Sometimes, the journey gets in the way — the sound of the footsteps drowns out the truck coming up the road. Sometimes, enlightenment *never* comes, and the Kuei-jin gives up the quest, settles down or finds another road to walk. A Dharma is never as obvious as it seems, and it never obeys hard-and-fast rules.

These stages of a vampire's unlife suggest a host of stories (see below for examples). An imaginative Storyteller can grab these plot-threads and run with them. Like a kite, the plot takes flight from the combination of structure (the rules), the run (Storytelling) and the wind (roleplaying). Until the kite flies on its own, its flight — the Dharma — cannot be seen. Once it does, the systems given later in this chapter come into play.

SATORI AND *DÊN*

The quest for a Dharma begins with a flash of insight; among living humans, that insight is called satori, a moment of clarity in which a disciple's worldview changes forever. "In a flash," goes the punchline of many Zen tales, "he was enlightened." This moment — known to mages as "the Awakening" — happens on a grand scale only once in a person's life; smaller satoris (often known as "Epiphanies") herald lesser shifts of consciousness, moments of progress along a mystic path.

A vampire experiences her first and greatest satori at the moment of the Second Breath. While other souls go back to the karmic wheel, remain trapped in the spirit worlds, or (as some claim) rise or fall to some eternal afterlife, the vampire is "born again." This satori sends the Kuei-jin into a frenzy; when she calms down, the road of her new unlife awaits. Lesser satoris, called *dên*, illuminate portions of this road, if the vampire is willing to look for them. These *dên* mark passage in a Dharma; the Dharma, in turn, leads the unliving one toward some new *dên*.

RUNNING MONKEYS: INSIGHTS AND DISTRACTIONS

Extreme events mark these flashes of insight. Although they might not seem extreme at the time — some are as innocuous as a simple Zen poem suddenly understood — they challenge the vampire's preconceptions and strip away the illusions that mark this earthly trap. Those illusions are inevitable, even to vampires; it's one thing to say "existence is nothingness," another thing entirely to walk through the world as if it didn't exist. When some event shakes the illusions, *dên* may be waiting around the corner.

The illusions often fade with time, however. Kuei-jin *are* immortal, after all. During the early stages of her unlife, the vampire remains wrapped in threads from her old life; as that lifetime fades and a greater awareness blooms, mortal distractions diminish in importance. Eventually, they disappear entirely — such things just don't seem important anymore — *if* the Cathayan is willing to put them aside.

Kuei-jin philosophy assumes that every vampire takes one mortal lifetime to sort through the baggage and enjoy himself. During this stage, called *kôa* or "the Running Monkey" for its wild activity, the vampire isn't expected to act wisely. Although the visions and instruction that are to guide the Kuei-jin to his Dharma begin during this phase (see "The Ways of Karma," p. 23), elder vampires assume that the youngster will play with the illusions like a monkey batting at shadows. Sooner or later, the shadows fade and the Kuei-jin — it is hoped — begins to act like an adult.

When the Running Monkey plays with the shadows, he discovers how illusory they are. Those moments, in game terms, raise the character's Dharma rating. During an auspicious occasion, he gets a chance to see a flash of his path. If he grasps its importance, his Dharma rating rises.

Sometimes, however, the shadows get the better of the

Monkey; these moments of blindness, called *diao*, send the vampire off track. He literally loses his Way. In game terms, a *diao* signifies a loss of Dharma — the character has forgotten his place and his path and must wander around "blind" until he rediscovers it.

Despite all the best prognostications on the part of the ancestors, the Running Monkey phase sends a Kuei-jin careering back and forth between *dên* and *diao*. The vampire won't progress far in his Dharma until the *kôa* has run its course. Hence, young Kuei-jin are limited to the lower Dharma levels; it will be quite a while before they can grasp the subtleties of advanced enlightenment. Fortunately, young vampires aren't really expected to be sages, just sensible and respectful.

With the Sixth Age approaching, however, the Running Monkeys may never achieve their full potential. Secretly, many ancestors wonder if such is the will of Heaven — and so they treat the children like cannon fodder. This may be the final Dharma for young Kuei-jin: to be fuel for the fire of the vampire lords.

Or maybe not.

The gods aren't talking.

The Vampire Courts

During the *kôa*, *ré* and *na tou* periods, the blade of Dharma is folded ten thousand times; the *suru'a* phase marks a Kuei-jin's ascent to duty. Upon becoming a jina, he assumes a position in the ranks of society. Earthbound though he might be, the vampire's understanding leads him to take greater responsibilities, to lead others of his land and to teach the Way to younger Kuei-jin. By becoming one with his station, the monster eventually rises to the rank of mandarin, perhaps ancestor. Many vampires end their journeys here, their long fingernails testimony to their wisdom.

Some remain restless, however. The Hundred Clouds shine from the top of Mount Meru. By this stage, most Kuei-jin know that Earth is an illusion, yet many still serve that lantern-shadow; the blood-sages, however, move further on, setting their powers, duties and titles aside for other, more ephemeral, things. The lessons they seek become too esoteric to describe; a Zen koan becomes a hunk of granite compared to the mysteries sought by the great immortals. While the human cities crawl with Running Monkeys and sing beneath the hands of mandarins and ancestors, would-be bodhisattvas climb the nonexistent slopes of Mount Meru and leave the rest behind.

The Hundred Clouds

The higher reaches of Dharma are as invisible as the water droplets in a mountain cloud. As indescribable as the scent of night. A vampire must exist for many mortal lifetimes before the sublime truths of The Hundred Clouds become obvious. Until then, he may recite the sutras, speak the koans and command the elements, without truly understanding what it is he does.

"The Hundred Clouds" is a metaphorical term for ultimate peace, the transcendent state in which even the duties of Heaven are set aside. The Clouds are not power, although lesser Kuei-jin might see them that way; they are not illusions, though they might seem so to individuals who cannot understand them. By joining The Hundred Clouds (which the wise understand to be a symbol, not a group), a Kuei-jin reaches the threshold of godhood, but waits to guide others to that door.

Like the mists that form them, The Hundred Clouds are intangible. No sutra can contain their essence, and no lesson can impart their truths. It has been said that a Kuei-jin who achieves such a state is no longer a vampire — or that he has become the ultimate vampire. Perhaps he is both.

As we said, the gods aren't talking. And the slopes of Mount Meru are very steep.

Choosing a Dharma

Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs; the sage is ruthless, and treats the people as straw dogs.

— Lao Tzu, *The Tao Te Ching*

As avatars of souls lost during life, each Kuei-jin quickly learns to trace his path through the deeds he performed — or did not perform — during life. The trick is finding out whether those deeds should guide the reborn Kuei-jin toward a similar destiny — one she was obviously *following* when she was alive — or away from her intended purpose — which she was *avoiding* when she lived.

Example: *Charlotte Chen was an enforcer for the 14K Triad. During her lifetime, she killed her targets in memorably gory ways and left the remains behind as warning signs. Eventually, her lifestyle caught up with her; a rival enforcer shot Charlotte and dumped her into Tolo Harbor.*

After her return from death, Charlotte might be bound for the Howl of the Devil-Tiger — the path of P'o — as a continuation of her brutal life. Conversely, she might tend toward the Way of the Resplendent Crane — the Hun Way — instead, because in life, Charlotte built up a karmic debt that can be repaid only by reversing her old ways.

When she drags herself from the harbor, however, this assassin couldn't care less about destiny. Her first priority is hunger; a group of dockworkers makes a serviceable first meal. Her next priority is revenge; the man who shot Charlotte must be tracked down and killed. Old contacts (who might already have heard that Charlotte was dead) are renewed and new ones made. By the time the Kuei-jin runs her prey to ground, she's opened a thousand new doors and nailed shut a few old ones. The lamp of enlightenment might beckon across any of those thresholds. The question is, which one?

Perhaps Conrad Chu, a Hollywood Road jina, sees Charlotte's talent for carnage. Knowing how fatal carelessness can be (even for a vampire), Conrad introduces Charlotte to the Dance of the Thrashing Dragon. In the tenets of that path, the undead killer learns harmony with living things. By the time she feeds her murderer into a wood chipper, Charlotte may learn that there are higher things in undeath than simple revenge. Her quest begins.

In game terms, a player should choose a Dharma based on her character's Virtue ratings and on her plans for the future. If you were Charlotte's player, you might consider the following:

- You could continue the legacy of your living days, pick the *highest* Virtue rating and base your Dharma on it. Charlotte Chen reverts to her old ways and begins her unlife with the Howl of the Devil-Tiger.
- For a more dramatic story, you might instead select your path based on your *lowest* Virtue rating. In the Yomi World, Charlotte learns of her enormous karmic overdraft. When she returns to the Middle Kingdom, she decides to atone for her

crimes through relentless discipline and kindness — the Way of the Resplendent Crane.

• If the character's actions suggest an ironic twist that has little to do with Virtue scores — such as Charlotte's propensity for killing — you could base the Dharma on something that contrasts with the way she used to live.

Virtues in between the two extremes don't usually inspire a path. Enlightenment and drama flow from opposition. The best tales arise when a character wants something that's not easy to attain or that seems easy but actually retreats every time she tries to grasp it.

Changing Dharma

The choice doesn't have to be permanent. Most Kuei-jin start down one path, then abandon it in favor of other destinies. Sometimes, they even return to their original purpose. Immortality offers a greater range of choices than any mortal lifetime, and those choices are never as obvious as they might seem.

If your character fails four successive Dharma rolls, you may consider changing her path; destiny doesn't seem to be agreeing with the vampire, and in her frustration, she may pursue another Way instead. In most cases, she can return to the same path later. Alternatively, you can simply give up on a chosen path and begin another one from scratch without failing the four rolls.

Either way, there is a cost. All Dharma levels are surrendered; the Kuei-jin begins a new Way at Level One and loses any status or benefits granted by her old rank. If she's within the first 50 years of her unlife, such failings are to be expected; she can anticipate being scolded, but not badly shamed.

If the character has reached beyond the fifth Dharma rank, however, changing paths costs her considerable respect in the eyes of other Kuei-jin. She becomes like the fly, the lost soul who cannot find rest, and she is deeply shamed before her elders. Once a character advances beyond Level Five in a Dharma, she may not reenter that Way after having fallen from it. In falling from such lofty heights of wisdom, the character becomes overwhelmed with shame and may never again look upon the tenets of the failed Dharma. If the character falls from all five Dharmic paths in this manner, her soul is summarily blasted from the Middle Kingdom into oblivion, and she meets Final Death.

Dharma Rolls

When a dramatic event shakes the illusions of the mortal world, your Storyteller may ask you to make a Dharma roll. Sometimes, this event is a good thing, an *auspicious occasion* when enlightenment might be around the corner. Other times, it might signify disaster, usually a disaster you brought upon yourself through some *act of blindness*. Either way, your vampire's sense of purpose clashes with her P'o. When the mist clears, your Dharma may have risen, fallen or remained the same.

The Dharma Reference Chart (p. 54) shows a number of events that might bring about sudden enlightenment or blindness. The tenets of the various Ways can be found in their respective descriptions.

Auspicious Occasions

Kuei-jin stand eternally caught between beast and bodhisattva. When *dên* beckons, the Demon springs. As your

character reaches a moment of insight, make a resisted roll pitting the Virtue rating of your chosen Dharma against your P'o rating. Do so even if P'o happens to be the Virtue in question — there's a difference between mastering the Demon and having it master you. If the Virtue is Balance, use the average of your highest and lowest Virtue.

The difficulty of the roll is your permanent Willpower Trait; to reach a higher state of awareness, you must first triumph over your ego. Obviously, you can't spend Willpower to get an automatic success on a Dharma roll; you cannot will yourself to insight, only open yourself to it.

• If the Dharma Virtue wins, enlightenment strikes, and you gain a point of Dharma. In a flash, an invisible thunderbolt screams from the sky. All mortal concerns wash away — even in the middle of a fight — and a sense of peace descends. After a moment, you can do whatever you choose, guided by a sure sense of purpose. Those next few actions will probably come from the core of your chosen Dharma; the auspicious event has shown how *right* that purpose is.

• If the P'o wins, your shadow nature takes over. A red-black haze swirls across your vision, and stolen Chi burns like hot oil beneath your skin. *K'naa*, the Hunger, sweeps everything away and you fall into a the grip of your P'o Nature. Fuck enlightenment — you're *hungry*!

• If neither side wins, things remain as they were. In the back of your mind, you sense the gliding mist that might have been.... Forget it. It was nothing, really. You were a fool to expect that anything important might have happened. Unlife goes on.

Acts of Blindness

Sometimes, a vampire — especially a young one — acts so selfishly that insight dims. The Demon feeds on such mistakes and encourages them whenever possible. By acting like a petty mortal, the Kuei-jin can actually cost herself enlightenment. If she cannot rise above trivial concerns, the sages reason, a vampire *deserves* to collect stray gains of rice for all eternity!

Nobody's perfect. Even the greatest ancestors have their weak moments and may lose sight of their roles under Heaven. When your vampire acts carelessly, make a Dharma roll as described above. Willpower is your enemy, not your resource, as Virtue and Demon-soul fight:

• If the Virtue wins, you retain your sense of purpose. For a moment, thunder rumbles in the back of your mind and your hands tremble. You hesitate, stunned by a sudden fear. Then it passes like a waterborne twig and swirls away in the current.

• If the P'o wins, Heaven scowls. Darkness crashes down to obscure your vision, and a sudden hammer-blow crushes your lifeless heart. All things disappear; you're struck literally blind for a moment and stagger to your knees. When the darkness clears, your sense of purpose has been scattered like a thousand grains of rice on a farmer's floor. The Demon takes over then, and all things become like blood. Your character loses a point of Dharma.

• If neither side wins, a dark mist gathers on the fringes of your sight. The tortures of Yomi burn their way through your memory again, and you can hear the screams of the damned as the skinning-blades do their work. Then the feeling passes, leaving you with a burning shame. Although you cannot blush, you fight the urge to hide your face. The monster and the sage retreat, leaving an empty battlefield.

Dharma Level Zero

A young Running Monkey must be careful; at the lowest levels of enlightenment, the Demon waits just out of reach. A *diao* at this point could turn a rational vampire into a cannibalistic parasite, a *chih-mei*. For a Kuei-jin, few things are more disgraceful than falling into a mad state. It's like an adult becoming a bed-wetting infant — a flesh-eating baby, but a baby nonetheless.

Most Kuei-jin who begin their existence as *chih-mei* never get any better. One who falls from a Dharmic search can regain his former state, but it is a difficult and shameful process. Some teacher — usually an elder Kuei-jin, but occasionally a member of the character's *wu* or even a living sage — must take the demented corpse into her care, purify it through some appropriate ritual and instruct it until it regains its former grace.

In game terms, the teacher subdues the *chih-mei*, binds it, drags it to some holy place, cleanses it with water, incense and prayer, then enacts the rite of Restoring the Dharmic Balance (see p. 130). The restored vampire subsequently owes a very large debt to the savior who ended his shameful condition.

Storyteller's Note

Theoretically, you could make new Dharma rolls three or four times per night; a vampire's unlife is full of extremes. After a while, however, the highs and lows become routine and enlightenment is harder to come by. From a Storytelling standpoint, Dharma rolls should be made only under extreme circumstances — *no more* than once per game session — and only during moments of high drama.

As the character advances, Dharma rolls should become rare. It takes more than a chance occurrence to rise to the higher levels of a Way — it takes dedication, experience and a wisdom that can come only with time. Experiences that were once wondrous become stale; if a Kuei-jin understands Zen koans easily, the riddles lose their effectiveness. That character must find new ways to open himself to Heaven's will. It is perfectly appropriate to add one to Dharma roll difficulties if the character has used the same experiences to advance before.

Example: *Charlotte Chen is no stranger to death. During her search for the man who shot her, the vampiric enforcer nearly dies twice more. The first time, trapped under a blazing ceiling beam, she experiences* dên. *The closeness of death has taught her something about the illusion of life, and she gains a level of Dharma. The second time, when a warehouse explodes with her inside, the experience is not enough to jar her awareness. Assuming that the Storyteller allows her a Dharma roll at all, Charlotte's player would roll against difficulty 9 instead of difficulty 8. Perhaps later, under different circumstances, the fragility of life could teach her more about her path; in game terms, the player might roll at normal difficulty if Charlotte faced death in another way at another time. Now, however, she requires new challenges before the Way of destiny becomes clear.*

The Great Faiths of the East

Truth is one; sages call it by different names.

— The Rig Veda

One cannot discuss enlightenment without at least mentioning the beliefs that line the higher path. The Western Kindred are, as a rule, hopelessly entwined in their Judeo-Christian perspective; they might revere it or reject it, but they cannot escape it. Kuei-jin,

DHARMA REFERENCE CHART

THE FIVE DHARMAS

The Howl of the Devil-Tiger (P'o) — The Way of the South, of Fire and of Ghost-Flame

The Way of the Resplendent Crane (Hun) — The Way of the North, of Water and of Blood

The Song of the Shadow (Yin) — The Way of the West, of Metal and of Bone

The Path of a Thousand Whispers (Balance) — The Way of the Center, of Earth and of Jade

The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon (Yang) — The Way of the East, of Wood and of Flesh

DHARMA ROLLS

• **Auspicious Occasions:** (Dharma Virtue) versus P'o rating in a resisted roll contest; difficulty is permanent Willpower rating

Virtue wins: Burst of *dên*; gain one Dharma level

P'o wins: Demon rebels; P'o takes over for one scene

Neither wins: vampire is discouraged; no change

• **Acts of Blindness:** (Dharma Virtue) versus P'o rating in a resisted roll contest; difficulty is permanent Willpower rating

Virtue wins: Kuei-jin keeps control; retain current Dharma level

P'o wins: Flash of *diao*; lose one Dharma level

Neither wins: vampire may feel remorse, or may not; no change

DHARMA LEVEL AND BENEFITS

Note: The Dharma Level and Benefits chart shows some of the obvious "perks" of an advanced state of awareness.

- The **Dharma Level** entry is obvious.
- **Social Bonus** refers to the Dice Pool bonus for Social rolls against Kuei-jin of a lower Dharma rating.
- **Virtue Pair Maximum:** Kuei-jin of great Dharmic understanding can increase opposed Virtue ratings to high levels. So, a Kuei-jin of Dharma 6 could raise Hun *and* P'o, or Yin *and* Yang, to 6 each, or 4 and 8, or any other combination totaling 12.
- **Trait Maximum:** Like Kindred of potent blood, enlightened Kuei-jin can concentrate their Chi to such a degree that they may raise Attributes, Abilities, and Disciplines above 5.
- The **Chi Points** entry tells you the maximum amount of Chi you can spend per turn.
- The **Status** entry gives the approximate ranking in Kuei-jin society a vampire of that Dharma level possesses. There are exceptions on both ends of the spectrum — foolish ancestors or exceptionally enlightened jina — but such exceptions are relatively few and far between.
- The **Age** section reflects the "minimum age requirement" of the level. The break-point, Level Six, signifies the union of Yin and Yang — a balance that takes many years to achieve and many more to master. Note that this is the *minimum* age requirement to reach the level — many Kuei-jin take much, much longer, if they get there at all.

AUSPICIOUS OCCASIONS

Being taught by a Kuei-jin who has mastered a higher level in your Dharma

Being taught by a Kuei-jin who holds a higher rank than yours, but in a different Dharma

Receiving instruction from a bodhisattva

Receiving instruction from a Yama King or similar powerful spirit

Journeying into the spirit worlds (for the first time)

Understanding a master's koan

Doing something within the tenets of your Dharma that costs you something important *

Meditating for at least one week with one of the training methods (see that section)

Coming very near to death (within one Health Level of final destruction)

Receiving an auspicious omen *

ACTS OF BLINDNESS

Violating some important tenet of your Dharma *

Attempting to follow the tenets of your path, but failing in some really costly manner *

Acting in an extraordinarily egotistical manner

Losing yourself in mortal concerns and neglecting enlightenment

Losing yourself to the P'o (even if you belong to the Devil-Tiger path)

Discovering that a Dharma teacher lied to you

Being banished by a priest or other person with True Faith

Killing an ancestor or bodhisattva

Meeting the Little Death

Receiving a bad omen *

* See Dharma descriptions for details

Dharma Level	Social Bonus	Virtue Pair Max	Trait Max	Chi Points/Turn	Status	Age
0	-4	10	5	one	*chih-mei/hin*	any
1	0	10	5	one	disciple	any
2	0	10	5	one	disciple	any
3	0	10	5	one	disciple	one year
4	0	10	5	two	jina	five years
5	0	10	5	two	jina	10 years
6	1	12	6	three	jina/mandarin	100 years
7	2	14	7	four	mandarin/ancestor	250 years
8	3	16	8	six	ancestor	500 years
9	5	18	9	eight	bodhisattva	1,000 years
10	?	?	?	?	bodhisattva/arhat	? years

on the other hand, have little use for Western gods. Their faiths may seem a bit exotic to the Western mind, but such beliefs have crafted the Asian cultures — especially their "mysterious ways" — for millennia. Thus, they're worth noting, if only for their roleplaying value. It's difficult to grasp an Eastern character without some grasp of Eastern ideals.

(**Purists Please Note:** These definitions are, by necessity, *extraordinarily* brief and simple — roughly like describing Christianity as "a monotheistic religion centered on a creator god, who is opposed by an adversary named Satan; who set down a list of laws; who took human form to redeem humanity's sins; and who promised salvation for his devotees and damnation for unbelievers." An in-depth look at the Eastern faiths would take up the rest of this book and several others besides. Players interested in learning more should see the "Suggested Resources" list in the Introduction.)

Contrary to popular Western misconception, Buddhists, Taoists and the like are not enlightened drones who lack a sense of identity, spout bad riddles and have even worse accents. Quite the opposite: A samurai Zen master can be as egotistical as any American cowboy, although his idea of ego would work a bit differently. And while it's easy to misinterpret these faiths as pacifistic hymns to harmony and respect, remember that these philosophies also gave us *seppuku*, killing fields and the Death of a Thousand Cuts. As Tsui Hark's marvelous film *Green Snake* demonstrates, a fanatic Buddhist or Taoist is every bit as irritating (and dangerous) as the archetypal Christian witch-hunter who tortures the innocent in the name of the Prince of Peace.

Other religions, notably Christianity, also comfort and trouble the mortals of Asia. Among the Kuei-jin, however, such faiths are an exception rather than the rule. It's entirely appropriate to have a Christian vampire from Hong Kong. On the whole, however, Eastern vampires draw their beliefs from the following faiths:

Animism

This timeless belief holds that all things have personal spirits — spirits that must be respected, propitiated and occasionally chased away. Shamans (known by many names) tend to spiritual concerns, thus allowing average folk to go about their lives. Even so, most animistic cultures revere the ghosts of ancestors and host occasional sacrifices, observances, vigils and revels to give the spirits peace. Animism forms the root of many local and tribal faiths, and it left its mark on Confucianism and Shintoism (below); it also provides a wonderful fount of Chi for enterprising vampires, who now understand that the spirits do, in fact, live.

Atheism

To the Communists who took over the governments of China, North Korea, Vietnam and Cambodia, religion is a crutch, a parasite bleeding the masses and binding them to a priestly elite. Personal honor, devotion to the community and loyalty to the family are the only true measures of one's worth, and this life is the only life. Most vampires would dearly love to believe that; having been through Yomi and back, however, formerly Communist Kuei-jin must start from scratch. Their political loyalty may remain, but they've seen too much of the big picture to discard the idea of an afterlife.

Buddhism

The root word of Asia's most influential religion is from the Sanskrit *budh* — "to awaken" and "to know." Like its Hindu foundation, Buddhism teaches that mortal life is an illusion; to experience truth, one must transcend mortal vision. The stumbling block to transcendence is *tanha* — "desire" or "ego" — a trait Kuei-jin have in spades. To subvert *tanha*, the Buddhist should follow an Eightfold Path: *right knowledge*, *right aspiration*, *right speech*, *right behavior*, *right livelihood*, *right effort*, *right mindfulness* and *right absorption*. By following that Path, a person — or even a vampire — should be able to escape the eternal wheel of suffering and attain nirvana: the death of the Self and the beginning of peace.

Most people find the Path too rigorous to pursue; most vampires find it even more so. Buddhist philosophy — especially the Zen variety — is impossible to define in concrete terms. The Buddhist ideals are grand, but like so many other faiths, they read better than they live. To Kuei-jin, who stand outside the Path by their very nature, the Eightfold Way is a source of hope, despair, terror and longing. Humans who actually *live* the Path are frightening creatures, glowing with True Faith and channeling various powers against the unholy. Many Kuei-jin long to attain nirvana, but find themselves defeated by their own "un-rightness." It doesn't stop them from trying, however; most Dharma-seekers follow the Buddhist way, if only out of habit. If the tales are true, some may even reach nirvana after all.

Confucianism

An outgrowth of the Warring States period — an era so brutal that most Kuei-jin of the time assumed it was the Sixth Age come early — the divine philosophy of Master Kung Fu-tzu shaped (and possibly even saved) Chinese culture. Confucianism is based on the idea that righteous people can reach harmony through *jên* — the sublime virtue-of-virtues that encompasses benevolence, love, compassion, responsibility and dignity. A supreme degree of order, art and tradition encourages *jên* among the people; this refinement allows them to live in harmony. *Te*, the power that springs from virtue, holds the society together by glorious consent, rather than by oppression. Such is thought to be the order of Heaven.

Confucianist ideals built a good portion of the Chinese empire and culture. In the quest for *jên*, rulers raised walls and roads, parents raised cultured families, scholars spread knowledge and warriors defended their lands. Many Kuei-jin, realizing the transcendent powers of *jên* and *te*, perform great acts of charity and love — or abominable atrocities — in the name of Heaven. To the Confucianist, order and virtue are the glue that holds creation together. Realizing one's place in that order forms an important keystone in a vampire's Dharmic search.

Hinduism

An unbelievably complex collection of faiths masquerading as a single religion, Hinduism assures its followers that this world is an illusion wrapped in its own perceptions. Remaining blinded by shadows (as the Kindred do) causes people to miss the greater dance that whirls around them. Life, death, pleasure, agony — all spin in an ordered but unfathomable pattern, of which the gods are only a part. To reach truth, therefore, you may enjoy the illusion, but remember that an illusion is all it is. Sooner or later, you must rise above it. Most Kuei-jin embrace this idea, using it as a foundation for their Dharmic quest; the name for that search comes from Hindu roots and reflects the powerful influence of the faith.

Islam

Most prevalent in Malaysia and Indonesia, Islam declares that surrender to the One God is the path to great peace. Despite its warlike reputation in the West, the faith of Allah is loving and nurturing — provided one remains keen to the will of God. Good and evil are not abstracts, but commandments. To defy good is to embrace evil. Since few Kuei-jin consider themselves "good," those who follow Muslim tenets are miserable indeed. Most either choose the Resplendent Crane path or descend into the lowest levels of the Devil-Tiger Way.

Shintoism

"The Way of the Gods" harkens back to the animism of the Japanese island people. According to this faith, nature spirits and ancestral ghosts surround us; these entities are as personable as any mortal human, and they can be as capricious, too. Therefore, it's always wise to stay on their good side with sacrifices, prayers, shrines and acts of kindness — and to know how to get rid of them when the rituals don't work.

Many modern Japanese consider themselves both Buddhist and Shinto — it's possible to placate the spirits and advance yourself at the same time. Although people differ in their ideas of reincarnation and Shintoism — Do you return to the cycle, hover around the living world, or, in some cases, both or neither? — most Japanese Kuei-jin observe the sacred ways, if only to learn from the spirits and to keep their favor. While the spirits are, for the most part, invisible to mortal sight, the hengeyokai (and some Kuei-jin) know them very well.

Taoism

More a philosophy than a religion per se, Taoism

takes a multitude of forms, from simple lifestyles to martial arts, to magic, science and alchemy. Although deeply humanist and pacifistic in ethic, the Tao (the Way) is both tranquil and warlike; it responds to the needs of the time, and as the Kuei-jin know, there are times for great good and for ultimate cruelty.

Essentially, Taoism is a philosophy (or a religion, depending on your approach) that taps into creation's essence — Chi — and channels it through the human body and mind. It is the Way of harmony, of energy spent in *just* the right amount to achieve a given task. Wisely used, it can produce miracles; even then, though, those miracles are often quiet, subtle and simple. Occasionally, great acts of magic are possible; the Kuei-jin Disciplines rely on Chi control and have been deeply influenced by Taoist arts.

Naturally, the Way demands discipline; a Taoist practices her craft to perfection, hones her body, mind and perceptions to accept the flow of energy and to send it down the path of least resistance. *Wu wei* — the art of inactive action — collects Chi, then directs it to your purpose without additional effort. For obvious reasons, Taoist practices are *very* popular among Kuei-jin. Still, the hunger lingers; by breaking the bond of life, Kuei-jin have set themselves outside the harmony of the Way. They must feed on Chi by force and thrust it through their bodies with the power of the Demon. A living *tai chi chuan* master can flow like water with the essence; the vampire, by contrast, becomes the sewer and the dam.

Benefits of Dharma

So why bother with enlightenment? It's hard to attain and limited (to some degree) to elder Kuei-jin. Why not simply amass power and demand respect through your supernatural powers and personal might?

That attitude, sadly, marks a profound difference between many young Kuei-jin and their more traditional elders. The West-corrupted *kyonshi* have lost much of their respect for a greater vision; most would rather chew corpse-meat than regain the magnificent heights of Mount Meru. With age, however, comes a desire for something greater. Temporal power is as fleeting as a falling leaf; hence, most Kuei-jin who survive their Running Monkey period eventually devote themselves to a Dharmic path.

Discipline and vision have their perks, too. A hotheaded youngster might sneer at her elder's sagelike pronouncements, but would never do so to his face. A sense of purpose gives the ancestor powers that a newly returned vampire can only wish for. In the beginning, many Running Monkeys pursue their Dharmas solely to acquire those powers; in time, however, they learn the Ten Thousand Joys of serving Heaven...even if such service makes one a monster.

Some of the more measurable Joys include:

Respect

Enlightenment shows. Among the vampires of the East, a master of his destiny gains a fair amount of respect, while a careless bloodsucker is dismissed, no matter how powerful he may appear to be. This status (or lack of it) comes into play during Social contests — in the Dice Pool the character employs.

A Kuei-jin, when confronting others of his kind, has a hard time making an impression if they consider him an undisciplined child. Hence, young or unfocused vampires often suffer a high Social roll difficulty when attempting to impress their peers. Monsters devoted to their cause, on the other hand, can intimidate a cousin with a glance. Kuei-jin who have mastered their road literally radiate harmony; anything a bodhisattva has to say will be taken with the utmost seriousness by any Eastern vampire. Hence, elders have very high Social Dice Pools.

These modifiers reflect a character's preternatural charisma and standing in Kuei-jin society. Generally, they apply only to Social contests with other Eastern vampires, although any perceptive Westerner will recognize enlightenment when he sees it. Since Kuei-jin elders are both mysterious and terrifying to humans, Kindred and even the hengeyokai, Storytellers may assume that high-Dharma vampires (Dharma 7+) have very low Social roll difficulties outside their species, too. Younger vampires use their normal Social Dice Pools against non-Kuei-jin.

Chi Gathering

Chi is the lifeblood of creation. The more attuned a vampire becomes to her role in creation, the easier it is for her to gather Chi. Lesser vampires must devour flesh or guzzle blood; blood-sages can gather this essence of the world by breathing it in. A truly enlightened vampire can channel Chi more effectively, too. Just as an elder Kindred shifts his rich blood around with ease, a Kuei-jin master can increase her Chi flow to unearthly degrees through arcane principles and heightened awareness.

In game terms, this Chi affinity simply allows a Kuei-jin to refine Chi from multiple sources and to spend Chi points in ever-increasing amounts.

Protection

Some powers simply don't work against Kuei-jin of a higher Dharma rating. The youngling who attempts to bind the soul of his elder will meet with mocking dismissal — at best. A high Dharma can also help a Kuei-jin overcome the effects of human True Faith (see p. 143).

Peace

The concept of *divine philosophy* — of an ethic that raises a person to almost godlike levels — marks one of the greatest differences between Western and Eastern religions. While Christians, Jews, Muslims and even pagans bow before a superior creator (or a group of them, or His opposite), many Eastern faiths stress that the gods are merely aspects of creation, not its be-all and end-all. Creation itself exists on many different planes, of which the Middle Kingdom is only a pale, decaying reflection. To reach beyond the mortal cycle of misery and deception, a person must embrace a divine philosophy, live by its tenets and rise above the world. Otherwise, he's doomed to live a narrow life, suffer karmic retribution for all the things he did wrong and fall back into the cycle again.

Kuei-jin have been through that wringer already, and this time they know they might not get another chance. Damnation — usually a temporary stop in Eastern religion — might *be* final for a vampire who was brought back to serve a destiny, but failed to do it. By living up to her Dharma, a Kuei-jin might escape a return to the Cycle — or worse, to the Yomi World.

Training

Because Thou lovest the Burning-ground,
I have made a Burning-ground of my heart—
That Thou, Dark One, hunter of the Burning-ground,
Mayest dance Thy eternal dance
— Bengali hymn

Enlightenment does not come without discipline. As all Eastern philosophies teach, you must refine yourself in body, mind and spirit before the mists can part for you. Intense training burns away mortal delusions; in this elevated state, *dên* (it's hoped) appears.

Although Running Monkeys aren't expected to behave like mature immortals, they do require instruction and correction. The disgraceful Kindred run around like sick dogs, biting everything that crosses their paths; such carelessness is not allowed among the cultured Kuei-jin. Every new vampire is expected to find a master and receive instruction. A youngster who does not choose a teacher usually has one chosen for him — often the hard way. Some *sifus* (masters) grant their pupils a fair amount of time and freedom; others virtually chain their charges in the training hall and supervise them constantly.

The rigors of the *ré* phase include lessons in culture, history, physical fitness and Dharmic philosophy. Blood Sutras are read and koans are offered. Sometimes the lessons get violent — mortal masters are rarely patient, and immortal ones are less so. Most *sifus* keep human slaves around to clean up blood and repair the training hall when necessary. While many of the lessons concern culture, literacy or the martial arts, the most important ones involve self-discipline — the traditional road to wisdom and mastery over the Demon.

Masters drill their students with a hundred forms of training; the methods vary from teacher to teacher and discipline to discipline, but none of them is easy. Ironically, the practices that lead some people to insight often distract others from it.

Many people — and vampires — spend so much time on the trappings of enlightenment that they miss the open-minded state so essential to a true epiphany. Still, the following tools have become essential parts of the Dharmic quest: focuses for meditation, solace for the truth-seeker and bribery for the gods.

(In game terms, training encourages a character to buy and cultivate a range of Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Any vampire who follows a Dharma by using the methods below should have at least a handful of related Traits. Examples include: Alchemy, Archery, Artistic Expression, Crafts, Dancing, Empathy, Herbalism, Martial Arts, Performance, Poetic Expression, Seduction, Survival, Torture and, of course, Meditation.)

• **Asceticism:** To transcend the flesh, many monks deny its hungers. Avoiding sex, cloistering themselves away from human contact, setting up near-impossible vows and consuming only the barest nourishment, ascetics reach beyond their flesh and seek harmony with the spirit through meditation and hard work.

Denial is a difficult task; few humans can handle it for long, and vampires find it nearly impossible. The craving for food is nothing compared to the howling of a vampiric hunger (if you want an idea of how severe this craving must be, try going without food or water for one day, then multiply that feeling by a hundred). Sooner or later, the P'o comes roaring out of its cave. The denials that went before are washed away by the indulgences that follow.

As undead flesh, a vampire soon discovers another obstacle to asceticism: he rots. When the Chi grows sluggish in his veins, the corpse-body begins to crack and harden. Many a would-be ascetic vampire has meditated so long on a mountain peak that the birds carried off his skin and left sinewy bones behind. Even so, every Kuei-jin tries asceticism at least once, if only out of custom.

• **Benevolence:** All the sages agree: It is good to be kind, to offer assistance when you can and to cure suffering whenever possible. In the misery of the Middle Kingdom, there are always opportunities to be benevolent. And, as even the cruelest Devil-Tiger disciple can attest, nothing feels as good as a pure, unselfish act.

Benevolence takes several forms: Some Kuei-jin form courts to benefit the mortals around them, fellowships the vampires sustain with money and support. Other Cathayans offer sudden mercy or forgiveness to enemies or failed subordinates. Still others simply commit "random acts of kindness and beauty": giving huge gifts of food or money to needy strangers, etc. In any case, the act of benevolence is never done for long-term gain; although a grateful society or individual can always be helpful later, the gift itself is given for its own sake. Thus, a monster redeems herself with generosity.

• **Chants, Mantras and Breathing:** The voice is the passage of the soul and the breath is its carrier. When trained, a voice can mimic the OM, which brought forth creation, and may focus life-essence into a stream of sound. Even at its lower, common levels, the voice conveys thoughts, emotions, plans or ceremonies; thus, the voice — that greatest of instruments — becomes a worthy tool for meditation and control.

Every style of meditation — and there are hundreds of them — utilizes different chants, mantras and prayers. Some appeal to higher (or lower) powers, while others circulate breath, stimulate the senses or distract the mind from mundane

Classic Bits and Skills

Half of the fun of an exotic chronicle is the flavor of the setting. Because certain familiar "bits" of classic Oriental stories require specialized skills or Trait combinations, we include a few "essential" Traits and rolls.

Creating a Masterwork: (Appropriate Attribute) + Crafts (Extended roll; at least three successes to start, then a total number of successes as decided by the Storyteller. Some Kuei-jin spend entire lifetimes creating one sculpture, sword or poem!)

Exquisite Torture: Perception + Torture

Flying Leaps: Dexterity + Acrobatics or Athletics

Koans and Riddles: Intelligence + Enigmas, or Intelligence + Poetic Expression or Perception + Enigmas (for Zen koans; Intelligence is actually a *liability* with such riddles!)

Oriental Medicine: Intelligence + Medicine, with a Chinese or Taoist Medicine specialization (Herbalism helps, too)

Performing Impressive Katas: Perception + Brawl, Martial Arts or Melee

Recognizing Martial Arts Style: Intelligence + Martial Arts

Self-Torture: Stamina + Torture

Serenity Under Fire: Perception + Meditation

Teaching: Charisma + Instruction, Poetic Expression or Expression

Trance Meditation: Intelligence + Meditation (often an extended roll for really long trances, with the difficulty and the successes needed rising by one per day)

Kuei-jin must resist the Demon each day of meditation. Every Intelligence + Meditation roll must be resisted with a P'o roll. The difficulty of the Meditation roll begins at 5, the P'o roll at 10; every night, the difficulty of the Meditation *rises* by one, while the P'o roll's difficulty *falls* by one. (5 versus 10 on the first night, 6 versus 9 on the second, 7 versus 8 on the third, etc.) When the P'o wins, the trance ends.

Staredowns: Charisma + Intimidation; could also be Stamina + Intimidation (for those long standoffs) or a Willpower roll to see who cracks first

Walking Softly: Perception + Stealth

Zen Archery or Swordplay: Perception + Archery or Melee

Zen Works of Art (gardening, swordmaking, etc.): Perception + Crafts

concerns. Many chants employ simple, yet important, phrases — "All things are illusion," for example — while others repeat a single, significant sound over and over again until the rational mind gives way to instinctive reflex.

Most meditation styles also feature intricate breathing techniques — breath, after all, is life. Although Kuei-jin do not, as a rule, breathe, some Cathayan meditations actually direct air flow back through the body again. Some vampires, especially those following the Thrashing Dragon Dharma, cultivate such "false breathing"; truly enlightened Kuei-jin can literally breathe Chi from the air. Many vampires who aspire to this state practice their breathing for centuries, even though they have no "practical" reason to do so. If nothing else, breathing bridges the gap between living and dead.

- **Cruelty:** The flipside to benevolence. A sudden act of cruelty can refresh a Kuei-jin's sense of purpose by reaffirming what he is in the grand scheme of things. Just as a monster can gain a sudden insight from a moment of kindness, so a saint can break the mold with an unexpected atrocity. Rare is the Resplendent Crane who has not smiled at least once to the song of a boiled child. Truly, Heaven smiles on a wise devil.

  Like an act of benevolence, the barbarism should be spontaneous, unexpected and performed for its own sake. The vampire doesn't "lose himself" — he knows exactly what he does and why he does it. When the deed is finished, he may well repent his act, feel miserable for a while, and go off to meditate upon why he did it and how it felt. Perhaps he'll find it so enlightening that he'll want to do it again....

- **Herbalism and Alchemy:** Many Taoist practices revolve around foods, drinks, formulas and exercises designed to stimulate Chi flow and control. Natural sources of Chi (known to some mages as "Tass"), pure plants and waters, mineral compounds and even fermented beverages play essential roles in herbal and alchemical techniques. By eating properly, exercising well and ingesting "auspicious medicines," a living person cultivates her Chi flow. Some vampires do the same.

  (In game terms, a Kuei-jin should purchase the Herbalism or Alchemy Traits [see **The Vampire Players Guide**, Chapter Two] or the Medicine Knowledge with a "Taoist Medicine" specialization, if she wants to practice Chinese healing arts.)

- **Incense and Candles:** Although they're really more tools than techniques, incense and candles are such common meditation aids that they're worth mentioning. Few hideaways or monasteries are complete without a collection

of flickering candles and a haze of scented smoke. Their purity drives away corruption.

Bored or even repulsed by "mortal" incense formulas, many Kuei-jin create their own recipes out of ashes, baby fat, corpse dust, dried blood, ground bone, poisonous herbs and spirit flowers (plucked in the Yin and Yang Worlds). While such scents are often terrifying to living humans, master vampires claim the smoke carries a certain calming essence.

• **Journeying:** All searches begin with a step away from one's old life. To break with stale ties, every Kuei-jin leaves her home sooner or later. The essence of this vision-tool is simple: Although miracles and nightmares surround us at all times and in all places, sometimes you have to move away from familiar surroundings to notice what was around you.

Asia is huge; a vampire can (and often does) wander for centuries without settling down in any one spot, even if she chooses never to leave the East. In the modern world, the journey usually spans the entire globe and the spirit worlds, as well. According to many elder Kuei-jin, the wild rage of earthly sensations and experiences is more of a distraction than a tool; younger vampires, naturally, disagree and seek their enlightenment across the mortal world.

• **Katas, Postures and Dance:** Katas are precise exercises in body control and grace. The hundreds of different martial art katas stylize fighting postures, combat situations and animal movements. Through endless kata practice, a student is supposed to hone her skills beyond conscious thought; ideally, the movements become reflexes that leave the mind free to concentrate on more pressing matters.

Yogic, Tantrik and Taoist postures open pathways through the body, stimulating life-energies and circulating Chi (*ojas*, in Hindu terminology). Although they seem uncomfortable to untrained mortals, these meditation poses cultivate good health and longevity; among the undead, they keep the corpse-body supple and the Hell-mind nimble. Kuei-jin of the Thrashing Dragon Way spend much of their time meditating in yoga postures and Tantrik forms.

Dances, which range from ecstatic improvisations to formalized ritual movements, channel the spirit and send breath flowing through the body. Like katas and postures, many dance styles carry symbolic gestures or reflect animal behavior. Followers of the Song of the Shadow have mastered achingly beautiful ritual dances based on the movement of ghosts; their performances are said to bring tears to the eyes of bodhisattvas. By contrast, wild dancing is considered shameful behavior among the Middle Kingdom's more repressive mortal cultures — which,

of course, adds to its appeal, especially among the undead. The insights that Devil-Tiger and Thrashing Dragon devotees experience during ecstatic dances are said to be the most powerful *dên* imaginable. Such dancers suddenly spin out of control, crash into things and black out; when they awaken, they speak of grand designs and ineffable sights.

• **Koans:** A riddle that defies logical answers, the koan offers the student a seemingly ridiculous idea, then forces her to meditate on it until she understands its meaning. The famous "one hand clapping" is a good example, although most koans are much more exotic than that. Zen stories measure the time it takes to "solve" a koan properly in years or even decades; to do so, a person must move beyond preconceptions and reason to a more instinctive (and often silent) level. Vampire masters create their own koans, many of which take decades or even lifetimes to solve. When understanding does dawn, however, *dên* is often close behind.

• **Meditation:** Sometimes, a seeker just sits and meditates. Taking a lotus position, she banishes all distracting thoughts (a task in itself) and sends her perceptions on wondrous tangents. Mortal ascetics have been known to meditate until their skins crack and their bellies hollow; vampires have less patience and discipline. Even so, a trained Kuei-jin can meditate deeply for nights or even weeks before the hunger tears through her concentration. In this trance-state, she may employ a number of soul-powers or simply lead herself to the edge of enlightenment. The longer the meditation, the greater the potential for insight.

• **Mortification:** Flesh, supposedly, is an illusion; to break that illusion, many seekers torment their flesh, driving themselves past the bounds of pain and into ecstasy. As popular as "modern primitivism" has become in the Western world, its roots lie in Asia, where self-torture has risen to exquisite heights of art.

The Mantra of Pain is a popular "pastime" for Kuei-jin; a soul that has experienced the glory of the Yomi World has much higher limits than any mortal could comprehend. Driven by a combination of fervor, desire, self-loathing and exhibitionism, some Cathayans break their own bones and set them backward; skewer their genitals with flaming pins; flay themselves, tattoo the interior, then sew the skin shut again; and indulge in many other forms of self-mutilation. Their pain becomes a sacrament and fashion statement in one.

• **Violence:** Pushing someone to his limits, especially with sudden threats or blows, is a good way to wake him up. When a student seems really thick or stubborn, many a good master is likely

to bash him upside the head, ambush him, throw him across the room or send attackers to beat the student to a pulp. Usually — but not always — the last resort, physical violence forces a seeker to break out of his complacency or suffer the consequences.

• **Yantras and Mandalas:** Complex designs of staggering geometric interplay, yantras and mandalas symbolize the world of forms that can be transcended only through meditation. These portraits of creation, which are traditional sacred art in Tibet and India, mix rigid shapes, human elements and symbolic letters and glyphs into dizzying patterns. The seeker meditates on the shapes and on the meaning behind them; in time, he hopes, the illusion of the world falls away and the mysteries stand revealed.

The Dharmas

Deep knowledge is to know without going out the door, to see the way of Heaven without looking out the window.

— The Book of Balance and Harmony

Each Dharma charts a separate destiny; all the same, these paths lead in similar directions. The vampires who follow them have certain things in common. While their sects are fairly informal, a few generalizations can be made about them.

Unlike the Kindred clans, the five Dharmas do not act in any organized fashion; rather, they provide instruction for the young, guidance for the searchers, power for the elders and solace for the weary. Every Kuei-jin follows her Dharma in a slightly different way, and endless arguments can — and do — erupt between disciples of a common path. The tenets of each Way are wrapped in riddles and woven through verse too arcane for human understanding; no "official bylaws" exist, although the Resplendent Cranes have some pretty detailed rules worked out. Ultimately, each vampire must find his or her own Dharma; such insights cannot be defined or limited, merely alluded to. In the end, a Kuei-jin's experience and the will of the gods dictate his travels on the road. These descriptions show the essence of the path, not the twists and turns it follows.

Each Dharma fits this essential format:

Virtue: The Virtue the path aspires to embrace, and the Trait employed during a Dharma roll.

Verse: A short, symbolic verse excerpted from a larger work, from which the Way draws enlightenment and purpose.

Overview: A general description of the path, its origins (as taught by the masters; considered more symbolic than literal, and drawn from sources like *The Blood Sutras*, *The Hollow Reed* and *The Songs of Hell*) and its Ways.

Training: Each sect trains its followers differently. This section describes initiation, early teaching and preferred meditation styles.

Weakness: By focusing on a single Way, a Kuei-jin loses sight of other things. These faults often cause problems for followers of a given sect.

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

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

Concepts: The sorts of people drawn to the Dharma — or shaped by it.

Tenets: Each Way has eight tenets to guide its lessons and philosophy. To pursue one's purpose, one must follow these precepts as closely as possible.

Rival Paths: Stereotypical views of the other Dharmas and the Kindred.

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

THE HOWL OF THE DEVIL-TIGER

VIRTUES: P'O

With rods do the farmers drive the bullocks,
You are the rod and the farmer and the ax and the fire.
Fine skin-lanterns shall be your sunlight
And corpse-dust shall be your perfume.
— The Songs of Hell

Some souls scream when they reach Yomi. Others enjoy the trip and bring the torment back with them when they return. To these souls, the Howl of the Devil-Tiger is a mantra of hope. Pain is a cleansing thing to these vampires; it roots out imperfections and applies the healing torch. In the shriek that follows, a higher Truth appears.

According to *The Blood Sutras*, Xue discovered the Mantra of Pain after the destruction of Mount Meru. Weeping, he lashed himself with nettles and tore gashes in his sides. As his blood poured to the ground, it burst into flames. Xue ripped off his own face and threw it into the flames. It was then that he became enlightened.

Despite misconceptions, the followers of this path are not demon-worshippers. Oh, they *appear* to be, to the unenlightened observer: Devil-Tiger temples crawl with atrocities — from skewered babies to maimed slaves — and ring with obscene chants and discordant music. Unclean spirits frequent such places, and the Chi that boils in Devil-Tiger dragon nests is corrosive and foul. The outsiders miss the point, however: Devil-Tigers do not *worship* devils, they want to *become* devils. And that is a far greater purpose than servitude.

To the Searing Wind (another name for the Devil-Tiger sect), pain is instructive and purifying. A devil, in the grand scheme of things, is the doctor with a cauter-knife and bone-saw. By cutting off the rotting limbs and burning out infections, a devil makes creation healthy. It is Heaven's wish that the Devil-Tigers fulfill this task on Earth — both on others and upon themselves.

These vampires epitomize sadomasochism; they enjoy tormenting other creatures mentally, emotionally and physically, but revel in the same treatment, too. Each tear is a new lesson, each cry a vision of truth. Just as a sudden flash of light leaves a deeper darkness, so the lash of pain creates a greater calm. Restraint comes from the *fear* of pain; hence, welcome pain and banish restraint. Agony should be savored for the insights that it brings — insights that turn to higher joys, if you understand their meaning.

The Searing Wind tries to help others find those joys; paradoxically, it also seeks to destroy people who understand the truth too well. These devils are surgeons too, after all, and destined by Heaven to cauterize disease. Like the goddess Tien Mu, Devil-Tigers are the lightning that illuminates the wicked; like Le Kung, they are the thunderbolt, which strikes down sinners. The Sixth Age, so they say, will be the brightest strike, the flash that will burn a wicked creation to ashes. Like the lightning, the Devil-Tigers will fade when their task is done, and a new, wiser creation will rise from the embers of the old.

It will be a grand game! And it has already begun....

Training: Like tigers, the vampires of the Searing Wind prefer magnificence to brutality. Such evil has a grace and power that simple carnage cannot match. Their lessons cut like razors — literally! — and their mantras flay one's ears. Skill is a virtue, brutishness a waste. A Master abducts her future disciples, imposes horrific lessons on them, then has them meditate on the essence of their pain.

The students themselves come from violent backgrounds. In their lives, they learned to live with pain. In time, they drew strength from it and often died gruesome deaths. During their stay in Yomi, these souls had their weaknesses sliced away. Now, with the Second Breath in their lungs, they strive to continue their training and to pass on the lesson to individuals who might appreciate it.

Modern Devil-Tigers find the world a fascinating playground. Never before has pain been so acceptable, so mass-produced. At the same time, many people seem numb to exquisite anguish. The challenge of the modern world is to make it feel again — to apply the hot iron until creation's eyes fly open and behold the sight of Heaven.

Weakness: Even the wisest Devil-Tigers seem impulsive, a bit too quick to provoke a scream. The younger ones are clumsy tempters or raging killers, and their elders aren't much better. Subtlety is not this Dharma's strong point. In the dawning of the Sixth Age, Devil-Tigers stand ready to claim the world and are none too humble about that privilege. They cultivate Bane-spirits in their gardens, but cannot quite hide the hunger in their eyes.

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

Affiliations: Fire, the number 2, the color red and the south direction

Concepts: Rebelsub kid, assassin, entertainer, prostitute, smuggler, hired gun, torturer, enforcer, philosopher, bureaucrat, wandering stranger

Tenets

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

Rival Paths

Resplendent Crane: Law is a bandage. I will rip it off and make you bleed.
Song of the Shadow: Cold as marble. Strike it hard and it shatters.
Thousand Whispers: To shift between lives is an admirable but cowardly way to learn Dharma. Are you studying creation or running from it?
Thrashing Dragon: In the white furnace of passion, the line between life and death is turned to ashes.
Kindred: Oh, quit bitching! You enjoy what you are. Now admit it and get on with your existence!

THE WAY OF THE RESPLENDENT CRANE

VIRTUE: HUN

Like arrows from the forest
The bowman strips you, boils you and straightens you.
Bowman and arrow and target are one.
The rain watches, but does not answer.
— The Empty Gate

The earth is a chaotic shadowshow of unruly imperfections. Heaven, by contrast, is ordered, secure and settled.

Shouldn't earth be more like Heaven?

When imperfect souls are returned to earth, Heaven must have some task for them. Some Kuei-jin recognize that they died wreathed in sin; Yomi was not enough penance — they must make bent things straight.

Xue recognized this need. Pride had slapped the face of Heaven, and Heaven had responded. The unworthy, he noted, had not been destroyed, but were left to ponder their curse. Perhaps, he reasoned, if they could return to their former glory, Heaven would forgive them and the hunger would be eased. Xue meditated for a thousand nights beneath the Falls of Tóng. His arms bloated and his skin turned green, but no enlightenment would come. At last, hunger drove him from the water and he wandered naked in the snow. Nothing could be found and Xue despaired. At the edge of a frozen pond, he saw a white crane pluck a frog from the ice. The bird set the frog aside and the frog became a butterfly. At once, Xue understood.

Like Legalists and Confucianists, Resplendent Cranes see suffering flow from imperfection. If enlightened rulers can set examples — and laws — for their people, those people should prosper. The key lies in the purity of the lawmakers; if the leaders are enlightened, their laws carry Heaven's blessings. The Wan Xian disgraced their posts; their heirs, the flawed souls returning as Kuei-jin, are likewise shameful. To alleviate their shame, the vampires must serve as the Correctors of Heaven, as enforcers and exemplars of the Harmonious Way. The path is not easy — the Demon chews at one's honor and the hunger gnaws at one's resolve. Resisting these distractions, however, provides salvation: salvation for the lost souls of the vampires and for the continuation of the mortal world.

The Sixth Age is not set in stone. It can be averted by virtuous behavior and right action. With a powerful effort, the Great Cycle can be turned back and a new Age of Heaven can begin. The Shining Ice Guardians — as some Resplendent Cranes call themselves — want literally to save the Middle Kingdom from itself. It's a mighty task; never before has the world seemed so corrupt. Still, Chi, the power of Heaven, flows through all Kuei-jin. They have one last chance to redeem themselves, and

the Cranes are resolved to do just that.

The Eight Lotus Path (a collection of analects and koans) gives a formula for salvation: The First Lotus offers the recognition of hope. The Second Lotus demands virtuous existence. The Third Lotus involves nurture — rewards for virtue, correction for recklessness — and the Fourth calls for the purgation of the wicked. The Fifth Lotus encourages instruction, while the Sixth demands law. With the Seventh Lotus, mortal law gives way to harmony; the Eighth Lotus transcends the living world and unites it with the spirit. By meditating upon the Eight Lotus Path, a Crane discerns what must be done.

Shining Ice Guardians recognize that the entire world cannot be saved. Things have gone too far out of balance; dead wood will have to be cut away. Most sages set their hopes on the redemption of the Golden Fields — of the Eastern lands and their peoples. The misery in the Orient has been caused by foreign invaders, from the Mongols to the Americans. These invaders carry disease like plague-dogs, and their sickness must be purged. If that requires a blood-cleansing, so be it. Heaven will deal with the dogs in its own way; the Kuei-jin have been sent back to make the Golden Fields pure again.

Training: Resplendent Cranes recognize their impurity and strive to overcome it. While they lived, these vampires shamed (or *believe* they shamed) their families through careless, immoral behavior. In Yomi, their sins were boiled to the surface; now, they wear the residue as punishment for their disgrace.

Still, there is hope. Rigorous discipline, generosity and benevolence are like Hell-money paid for the vampires' souls. A Shining Ice Guardian is counseled to be wise, honorable, prudent and refined. Asceticism is encouraged, but mortification is considered bad form. Masters present their pupils with complex riddles and reward attentiveness with great gifts.

Weakness: Resplendent Cranes have no tolerance for rebellion, and their rage is like the north wind. In theory, they follow the Fivefold Way religiously, punishing anyone who deviates from it. In practice, the Shining Ice Guardians are regal monsters, interpreting the law as they see fit and enforcing it when it suits them. Some Cranes follow Devil-Tigers around like carrion-crows and fall on sinners like icicles plummeting. It is said that Resplendent Cranes are as honest, cold and merciless as the winters they enjoy. In that purity, they hope to find forgiveness, even if they have none to grant themselves.

Affiliations: Water, the number 1, the color yellow and the north direction

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

Concepts: Policeman, priest, monk, soldier, lawyer, teacher, martial artist, paramedic, technician, Mr. Fixit

Tenets

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

Rival Paths

Devil-Tiger: Like oxen, they pull a heavy load, trample the unwise and must be slaughtered to feed the family when the journey ends.
Song of the Shadow: Leave them to tend the ghosts. We will tend the living.
Thousand Whispers: Does one who gouges out his own eyes see clearer for it?
Thrashing Dragon: Like naked children, they run to the spiders' dens and get stung. Soon they'll learn better.
Kindred: Rabid dogs in the gutter biting their own balls.

AS THE MASTER SAID, THOSE WHO ERR ON THE SIDE OF STRICTNESS ARE FEW INDEED!

THE SONG OF THE SHADOW

VIRTUE: XIN

With a nose-ring, I guided the wind.
With a whip, I made it smile.
The dust it stirred smelled of lotus-flowers.
I wept and made it burn.
— The Midnight Jewel

There is life, there is death and there is the bridge between the two. Xue recognized this truth when he romanced a ghost from the forests of Hing Fan. To be with her, he entered the Yin World. He was not welcome there, however; at length the Ebon Dragon breathed on him, and Xue turned into dust.

"Would you swirl in my air forever and a day?" asked the Dragon.

"If doing so would bring me closer to my love," Xue replied.

"We have no use for love," the Ebon One sneered. His snort whisked the dust into the air. Xue scattered to the five directions and settled like fine ash. Behind the Dragon, Xue's lover waited, her eyes as cold as stones. Yet the ghost was not unmoved. A single tear slid down her cheek and spattered in the dust. Xue sprang full-formed from the spot of mud and the Dragon was enlightened.

The Midnight Jewel (an important Dharmic sutra, from which the name "Bone Flowers" comes) compares the spirit realm to a glittering web and the living world to the dew upon its strands. Drifting across that web like spiders, the followers of the Shadow Song Dharma taste the dew, pluck the strands and occasionally feed on unwary flies. Like the Dragon, the so-called "Bone Flowers" learn from the song of mortality. Wreathed in the dust of death and the wind of life, they dance slowly to the rhythms of both. Like autumn leaves, these Kuei-jin glide between the Jade Kingdom and the living world. Along the way, they comfort the grieving, shepherd the ghosts and punish disrespectful mortals. In the Middle Kingdom, there are plenty of all three.

Aware of their immortality, these Kuei-jin share a thirst for discovery. From libraries and mass media, they gather stories about the living world; from the spirits, they collect memories and news. To bind the two together, the vampires record their insights in works of art or scholarship. The Second Breath stimulates their curiosity, and the hunger to learn rivals the hunger to consume.

Learning seems to be the only passion these creatures have. In all other matters, Bone Flowers seem distant and precise. Every fact must be dissected for significance, and each event becomes a symbol for a much grander thing. This curiosity brings them into the company of other *shen*; there, they act as ambassadors, mystics and lorekeepers. With their talent for enigmas, such vampires understand the spirit paths as well; an elder makes an excellent guide to Yin and Yomi Worlds alike. During her instruction, the average Bone Flower visits both.

In life, these vampires tended to be melancholy. Not surprisingly, most committed suicide, neglected their families or never married. Art or academia took the place of

love, and these souls often died unfulfilled. When they return, these Kuei-jin feel both longing and a void. The Scarlet Queen calls from across death's mists; the winds steal her words, but the feeling remains. Perhaps the Bone Flowers find their Hundred Clouds in the Queen's embrace — in discovering the love they avoided for so long.

Training: Following Xue's legacy demands a certain detachment. To stand at the doorway between life and death, one must grow immune to the torments of both. Still, to rise from dust, one must feel the tears of living things. Some vampires take that literally, while others try to overcome the cold void.

Mandarins of the Shadow Song Dharma stress learning and meditation. All lessons come in symbolic terms, leaving the disciple to figure out the meanings. Most Bone Flowers prefer to be left alone, but gather into troupes to create grand artworks. These performances feature elaborate rites, haunting music and stylized dancing. Through these plays, the vampires try to capture insights and pass them on. Not surprisingly, few patrons understand, but the Bone Flowers keep trying.

Weakness: Bone Flowers are cold and dispassionate, flowing through the darkness like silent kites. White as corpses, skin stretched across their bones, they seem fragile, almost girlish. The winds of death whisk their voices away, and they speak in eunuchs' whispers. There's something both abhorrent and beautiful in a Bone Flower's face and faraway gaze, and she never seems to care about anything that happens. The shadows' songs drown out mortal concerns.

While many vampires (and some mortals) find the bone-song bewitching, others are appalled. Most hengeyokai bristle when a Bone Flower draws near. Mortals run in one of two directions; either they fly away screaming or fall hopelessly in love. The Bone Flower never seems to care one way or the other.

As romantic as they might seem, Bone Flowers are known for their cold cruelty. Familiarity with the Hells and the fleeting nature of creation makes them callous to suffering of any kind. Where the Devil-Tigers teach through pain, the Flowers dismiss it. Like all things, agony is short-lived and therefore irrelevant.

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

Affiliations: Metal, the color black, the number 4 and the west direction

Concepts: Priest, artist, archivist, detective, wandering sage, necrophiliac, weirdo in the graveyard, ambassador to other *shen*

Tenets

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

Rival Paths

Devil-Tiger: Choking on blood will not answer your questions.
Resplendent Crane: Cold as ice, hard as iron and brittle as glass.
Thousand Whispers: Deafened by all voices, you cannot hear the one which leads you.
Thrashing Dragon: Dance with me, little brother, but beware the edge of that pit.
Kindred: You speak of death? By all means, let me show it to you....

YOUR MOTHER BORE YOU. YOUR FATHER RAISED YOU. I SPEAK FOR THEM. AND THEY ARE NOT HAPPY.

THE PATH OF A THOUSAND WHISPERS

VIRTUE: BALANCE

Ten men came forth from the hills;
Ten men were one, yet ten were ten.
One man left, the others fell,
Was this the fault of any?
— The Hollow Reed

Observe the humble centipede. Unlike the cricket, he does not jump; unlike the wasp, he cannot fly. Instead, he trundles along on 100 legs, each connected to a segment of his body. Each segment moves harmoniously, yet contains its own set of legs, its own shell and, some say, its own heart. Xue noted the harmony of the centipede; by its example, he was enlightened.

The Hollow Reed praises moderation; while the other paths describe themselves as storms or fires, the *Reed* speaks of emptiness given form. The sutra's title comes from the Dharmic ideal: to be like the reed, fed by water but filled with nothing, rooted in the ground but reaching to the sky. The Way's name comes from its practice of living multiple lives to gain multiple insights. To maintain balance, the so-called "Rootless Trees" walk a thousand roads, each under a different name. It's a long path to enlightenment, but then, vampires have nothing but time.

The Whispers do not believe that the Sixth Age is the end of creation. To them, it's a ritual death, one of many. Like the reeds rising from a riverbed, the Rootless Ones trust that when the storm ends, their flexibility will carry them through. Other Dharmas will not survive. The cricket is drowned. The wasp is blown away. The centipede remains unharmed. The hollow reed still stands.

This path's disciples love riddles and couch everything in symbolism. Some vampires claim that the Thousand Whispers write sutras for each blade of grass, and, while that's an overstatement, it captures the Way's perspective. These Kuei-jin love to look at old things through new eyes, and do so literally at every opportunity. Talented shapechangers, the Rootless Trees shift gender, alliance, lifestyle and temperament with bewildering speed. Each change, claim the sages, teaches a Whisper a little more.

The Whispering Way is the rarest of Dharmas, and with good reason: It's the hardest to maintain. Kuei-jin are neither balanced nor temperate. To offset their destructive natures, Whispers cultivate the Broken Mask technique — a multiple-personality path to enlightenment. While most people cling to their identities, the Rootless Trees take on different personas, then kill them off when all lessons appear to have been learned. Since most lives tend to be full-time affairs, many vampires take on one or two personas at once, then stage tragic deaths and enter new roles. Immortal as they are, the Whispers can experience the full range of human perspective and thus rise above any single view.

Naturally, such insight takes time. In the early stages of the path, a Whisper is pretty much like any other Running Monkey. Her elders scold her and offer koans that demand a wider view. As she moves through many lives, the vampire's vision broadens. In time,

she becomes like a fine jade carving — precious in the rough, but smoothed into exquisite form by the sculptor's steady hands. The key to the path is to be both sculptor and jade, to craft yourself into a work of art.

Training: To follow the Whispering Way, a Kuei-jin must continually die and be reborn. Every few years, she suffers a ritual "death," is buried and returns as a new person. During her burial, the vampire enters a long trance, during which she meditates on the lessons of her past life. Certain powerful Whispers project their soul into the spirit worlds while the body sleeps. The Kuei-jin's body remains in stasis, guarded by mortal friends or other Whispers. The former are usually devoured when the vampire returns from her travels; the latter salute her and walk away as she emerges from the tomb. Each time she "dies," the Kuei-jin severs all ties to her past life; in time, she walks away from her *wu* and court as well.

In their breathing days, most Whispers were either fanatics for one cause or scattered among many. Neither path allowed them to learn their karmic lessons. When the training begins, *sifus* ask impossible questions, then send their pupils out to seek the answers. Disciples are given three new identities by their masters, and these identities are as different as possible. All the necessary skills are passed on through early training, along with funds, sutras, meditations and Kuei-jin manners. When those three lives end, the disciple is on her own.

Weakness: Moderation is hellishly hard to practice, especially if you're a vampire. Despite the meditations and Broken Mask technique, the four-way pull between Yin, Yang, Hun and P'o yanks many Rootless Trees from their paths. To hold true to their Way, many Whispers look to the earth. That earth appears solid, yet it melts away as mud, swirls into sandstorms and hardens into rock. Sometimes, it splits open and swallows its surroundings. It never simply lies still.

To be truly balanced, one must occasionally go to extremes. To avoid attachments, Whispers destroy things and people they love too much. These betrayals gave rise to the Dharma's other name — the Way of the Wise Centipede, a sarcastic comment on the Arhat's inspiration. Other vampires distrust the followers of Balance; who knows when your friend might suddenly turn on you?

Affiliations: Earth, the color white, the number 0 and the center point direction

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

Concepts: Lunatic, spy, teacher, martial artist, wanderer, mercenary, enigmatic stranger

Tenets

1: Live 1,000 lifetimes, each one different from the last.
2: Learn what you can from each life.
3: Change as much as possible between breaths.
4: If you grow too close to something, kill it. It will only hinder you.
5: Turn your back on each life as you leave it.
6: Give when generosity is needed; take when theft is required.
7: Pry open the eyes of the sightless and make the mute defend their wordless state. All beings must confront their choices, so question them as you pass.
8: When something appears to be out of balance, correct it. If you cannot, destroy it.

Rival Paths

Devil-Tiger: What an ugly mask! Take it off before you scare yourself.

Resplendent Crane: The Monkey King put all your kind to shame. It took the Buddha and the elements to teach him to behave.

Song of the Shadow: I hear the whispers too, but some of mine know how to laugh.

Thrashing Dragon: Well named — lots of activity going nowhere.

Kindred: Ants in the path of the coming flood.

To see each sunset with a new pair of eyes is grand. To *be* each new sunset is the ultimate enlightenment.

THE DANCE OF THE THRASHING DRAGON

VIRTUES: YANG

The breathing cage set one bird free.
It nestled in the bars and shat in the straw.
The bird's wings were mountains
And forests covered them.
— The Blood Sutras

Like trees, the Laughing Rainbows of the Thrashing Dragon Dharma rise out of the fertile ground and unite it with the raging sky. These vampires are as alive as the undead can be. Bursting with life-energy, the followers of the Green Way resemble forces of nature — too powerful to be silenced, too vivid to be real.

Those forces inspired Xue to put down his staff and meditate. While a thunderstorm fed the rivers and the grass, the Arhat put aside his misery and took comfort in the rain. Around his feet, ants crept; at his back, insects scurried. Shrouded by ten thousand leaves, birds called to one another. Try as he might, Xue could not shut out the overwhelming pulse of life. At last, the rains subsided and a rainbow curled across the sky. Xue laughed as birds crossed through the colors, and that moment he awakened.

Moved by a life-force too potent to be caged, these Dragons thrash around like restless serpents. Their insights come through flesh-vigils and forest musing. As far as they're concerned, creation is a rainbow — illusory, but too colorful to ignore. In its colors, they see the unity and symmetry of Heaven. The idea, as the Dragons see it, is to experience each of those colors as vividly as possible. As lovers of the Scarlet Queen, they embody her life-force; as cousins of the Ebon Dragon, they beat him into submission or perish trying.

As a rule, Laughing Rainbows are messy and vulgar, indulging themselves with wild feasts and drunken orgies — celebrations that usually feature living "entertainment," too. Thailand, Cambodia and Malaysia hide Rainbow temples so infamous that even vampires avoid them. The Thrashing Dragon path isn't evil per se, but the Way's aggressive approach to life usually includes fucking it from every conceivable angle, willingly or otherwise.

Naturally, these Kuei-jin do more than just copulate. Shunning society's restrictions, they explore life's lush infinities through martial arts and Tantrik practices. Since life assumes ten thousand forms, most Thrashing Dragons master shapeshifting arts. To run with the animals, you must become one first.

Study requires suitable subjects. While the remote Bone Flower drifts across her graveyard, the Thrashing Dragon capers in the cities, forests and seas. His ferocity draws

other creatures to his side, and many willingly join his dance. Charismatic as a tiger, this vampire reveres his victims even as he drains their living blood. The vessel is divine to the Rainbow path — more divine than the Demon who consumes it. When the feast is over, he performs a thanksgiving rite. It's important to honor the keepers of Yang, even as you escort them to the other side.

The Thrashing Dragon Way is highly animistic. Looking deep into nature, each Rainbow sees the spirits beneath life's skin, and he honors them with thanks, gifts and rites. Truly skilled Dragons can move beyond the Wall and speak to the spirits in their own tongue; a younger one simply recognizes the kami and grants them respect. In his calmer moments, a Thrashing Dragon can be gentle and compassionate. Like wood, he grows tall and strong, yet bends before snapping. He nurtures life, yet feeds on it without remorse. His Way is to keep the Cycle fresh.

Training: Before their deaths, many Thrashing Dragons denied the flesh. All their repressions blow sky-high when the karmic debt comes due. Some ferociously carnal people *do* return to finish what they started in life, but most Laughing Rainbows learned to laugh only after they died. Tantrik postures feature prominently in Dragon rites. By coupling with a living partner, the vampire shifts her energy to his own, then refines it into potent Chi — the life-force many once denied.

Weakness: As could be expected, Thrashing Dragons are shameless, impulsive, lusty and violent. Most go naked, or nearly so, and delight in smashing social customs. Confrontation is enlightenment to these vampires, and they go out of their way to enlighten everyone in the vicinity.

This voraciousness doesn't end with sex; the hunger takes a literal turn in the Thrashing Dragon philosophy. Greedy for Yang, these creatures often eat their prey raw (and usually alive). Although it has been said that Laughing Rainbows are cannibalistic, they stop short of eating vampires. The average Dragon would find diablerie as repulsive as eating a bloated dead cat.

Beneath the revelry, however, many Dragons hate themselves. In a way, their hunger is a denial of what they have become. By consuming life-force, they secretly hope to undo their curse; it doesn't work, but they keep trying. Needless to say, these appetites have not made the sect any friends; Buddhist vampires find the Thrashing Dragons especially repulsive and often bar Laughing Rainbows from their courts.

Affiliations: Wood, the number 3, the color green and the east direction

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

Concepts: Artist, prostitute, doctor, therapist, Tantrika, farmer, entertainer, forester, ecoterrorist, daredevil, activist, cannibal

Tenets

1: Attune yourself to life in all its forms.

2: Meditate upon passions; do not shut them out, but experience them, learn from them and encourage them in others.

3: Use your power as a farmer employs his threshing-tools: break the stalks, gather the rice, scatter the seeds, help them grow.

4: Help all living things thrive. When something appears to be dying, consume it and send it back to the Cycle.

5: Half-life is an abominable state. Be as alive as you can be.

6: Guide the sun up each morning. Sleep when it is risen.

7: Laugh often and help others to see the humorous shadows.

8: Protect the spirits. Without them, the life-dance stops.

Rival Paths

Devil-Tiger: Pain-poetry disguises their ignorance. The only color they see is blood-red.

Resplendent Crane: I answer to an older law than yours. Cross me and the sword will be in *my* hands.

Song of the Shadow: Sweet sister, please stop weeping. Take my hand and laugh!

Thousand Whispers: The centipede is not immune to his own poison.

Kindred: You drank the blood of a *dead thing*? (sound of a vampire's head being torn off and tossed into a dumpster) Then that's where you belong!

I MAY BE DEAD, BUT I FEEL MORE KEENLY THAN ANY LIVING SOUL.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter Three: The Ten Thousand Things

On a holy pilgrimage, Hon Li shat on the slopes of Kailas. How else was he to worship?

In the forests of Quang Tri, he sold the deadly Howling Lotus. The final visions it bestows are said to be most miraculous.

A dozen lamas bared their throats to his holy fangs. A tiger sought to purge him, but its blood made flowers on the snow.

Hon Li sits on a golden throne. A Buddha screams by his side. Lucky are we who attend him. He feeds his hunger with our eyes.

Who is it that is dragging this corpse around?
— Zen koan

This chapter provides the rules needed to create a Cathayan character. Most of the Kuei-jin creation process follows the guidelines established in **Vampire: The Masquerade**. However, Kuei-jin do have many new Traits, and some of the Kindred's Traits don't apply to them, so creating a Cathayan is a little different from creating a Kindred.

One difference involves the Second Breath. Your character begins as one of the Hungry Dead, a mortal who was sentenced to rebirth as a Cathayan. All Kuei-jin souls spend time in the spirit worlds prior to rebirth; this period of incarceration is most commonly 49 days as mortals reckon it, but can seem like centuries to the prisoners. Some Kuei-jin remember almost nothing of their afterlives, while others remember every agonizing detail of their P'o's travails in the Yomi World. Likewise, though most characters remember their mortal lives, some (particularly ones with high P'o scores) remember events before their rebirth only as a distant haze.

The trauma of rebirth itself also affects the character, in a manner decidedly different from the Embrace. To reenter the Middle Kingdom, your character literally had to rend the psychic Wall separating her soul from her corpse. This process was exceedingly arduous, and required your character to call upon her P'o soul. Thus, all Kuei-jin begin play with two Natures — a Hun (higher soul) Nature, chosen from the standard Archetypes; and a P'o Nature, to represent the Demon Within.

In any event, the character has been a vampire for 50 years or fewer, and is decidedly a creature of the Fifth Age. Moreover, most Kuei-jin take the Second Breath in the Middle Kingdom; there are rumors that a few Hungry Dead have risen in American Chinatowns and the like, but these stories are unconfirmed.

The Second Breath

The journey into vampirism begins with the character's mortal death. The circumstances of the character's mortal life and death are extremely important to a Kuei-jin; her precise karmic failings (or what she imagines her karmic failings to be) influence her P'o Nature and choice of Dharma. In some cases, the character's death itself is the trigger activating the dormant P'o and causing the character to rise as Kuei-jin. Few Kuei-jin die peacefully or from old age; they must rely on their Second Breath to give them the time to find wisdom.

Upon a Kuei-jin dual soul's reentry into its corpse, all wounds, decomposition, etc., that the vampire suffered are

healed (though Kuei-jin may take the Monstrous or Disfigured Flaw to represent less-than-perfect healing processes). If cremated, the individual's ashes reconstitute — the Great Cycle levies its punishment, body or no body.

The character returns to the world at the site of her grave (if buried) or urn (if cremated). If her ashes are scattered, she returns at the approximate central point of the scattering site. If buried at sea, she must undergo the brutal task of swimming to shore. In any event, she makes it back to the lands she knew in life.

The *Chih-mei* Form

Before play, most characters begin their trek back as a *chih-mei* — a mindless, ghoullike scavenger at the mercy of her P'o. Most Kuei-jin remember little of this time, for while in *chih-mei* form, the character is not much more than an animal. The character roams the Middle Kingdom, possessed of an all-consuming hunger for Chi. Shortly after the rebirth, local Kuei-jin harvest the character and induct her into the larger Cathayan society. At this time, her training begins.

The *Ré*

For a period of at least one year — and sometimes as many as 10 years — Kuei-jin jina and mandarins guide the character through the *ré* — a combination instruction/indoctrination period during which the character learns of her powers and weaknesses. She is taught the proper greetings to use when addressing the ancestors, the proper ceremonies to enact when dealing with spirits, and the basics of harnessing Chi. Perhaps she rebels against the training, but she nonetheless masters the rudimentary knowledge needed to undertake her *kôa*. Her survival is proof of that fact.

Wu and *Guanxi*

Some Kuei-jin follow their Dharmas alone; however, if you are playing in a troupe, it is likely that you and the other player characters have formed a *wu*. This "family" may be either a directed *wu* or a motley band of malcontents. If the character's *wu* has a purpose (and, likely, a nushi; see p. 87), the players and Storyteller should hash out the nature of this purpose during the prelude.

As a result of a mystical binding, you begin play with strong feelings of loyalty toward your *wu*-mates, whom you consider members of your "blood family" (and vice versa). The links among you are represented by ratings called *guanxi*. *Guanxi* ratings are established through a Reciprocity, which Kuei-jin elders cast on all newly established *wu*. You have a *guanxi* rating of (5 + *wu*-mate's Charisma - [your P'o or Yin, whichever is higher]) toward each of your *wu*-mates. This *guanxi* rating acts in all respects as a Sabbat Vaulderie score, cementing filial loyalties among Kuei-jin in a *wu*.

Kuei-Jin Character Creation

Character Creation Process

- **Step One: Concept** — Choose balance, direction, Dharma, Nature and Demeanor
- **Step Two: Attributes** — Choose Physical, Social, Mental (7/5/3)
- **Step Three: Abilities** — Choose Talents, Skills, Knowledges (13/9/5)

No Ability higher than 3 at this time

- **Step Four: Advantages**

Choose Disciplines (one Demon Art, two others), Backgrounds (any 5); spend points on Chi Virtues (4; characters start with one dot in each Virtue).

- **Step Five: Finishing Touches**

Record Hun score (1), P'o score (3), Willpower (equal to final Hun score), beginning Chi (equal to permanent Yin/Yang), and Dharma rating (1).

Spend freebie points (15). A Kuei-jin must start the game with a minimum P'o rating of 3. Likewise, a beginning Kuei-jin's Willpower must be raised to at least 5, either through raising the Hun or increasing Willpower independently.

Determine *guanxi* ratings toward other player characters (5 + [*wu*-mate's Charisma] - [P'o or Yin]).

Chi Balance

- **Yin:** You are a creature of the darkness.
- **Balanced:** You maintain a fragile harmony between your dichotomous natures.
- **Yang:** You are attuned to the pulse of life.

Direction

- **North:** Your duty is to interpret the laws and preserve the traditions.
- **West:** Your duty is to bear messages — and punishments — from the spirits.
- **Center:** Your duty is to guide yourself and others toward enlightenment.
- **South:** Your duty is to create, lead and destroy.
- **East:** Your duty is to watch over the "floating world" of mortals.

Dharma

- **The Howl of the Devil-Tiger** (P'o) — The Way of the South, of Fire and of Ghost-flame
- **The Way of the Resplendent Crane** (Hun) — The Way of the North, of Water and of Blood
- **The Song of the Shadow** (Yin) — The Way of the West, of Metal and of Bone
- **The Path of a Thousand Whispers** (Balance) — The Way of the Center, of Earth and of Jade
- **The Dance of the Thrashing Dragon** (Yang) — The Way of the East, of Wood and of Flesh

P'o Archetype

- **The Bandit:** Your P'o is a rampaging, savage monster.
- **The Barbarian:** Your P'o rejects the true ways in favor of the decadent Kindred.
- **The Deceiver:** Your P'o undermines the Hun through lies and treachery.
- **The Demon:** Your P'o is a grotesque monster who lives only to destroy.
- **The Fool:** Your P'o distracts you from the true path in favor of the easy way.
- **The Legalist:** Your P'o insists on rigid obedience and even more rigid punishments.
- **The Monkey:** Your P'o is a capricious creature bent on preventing inner harmony.
- **The Slave:** Your P'o seeks to abase you before your "superiors."

Disciplines

Shintai Disciplines

- **Blood Shintai:** As the alchemist practices *nei tan*, so the practitioner of the Blood Shintai learns to focus Chi through the humors of the undead frame.
- **Bone Shintai:** Focusing the body as a receptacle for death energies.
- **Jade Shintai:** Polarizing the body to act as "soul stuff" for the focusing of Chi.
- **Flesh Shintai:** The restless Yang gifts of the *penangallan*.
- **Flame Shintai:** Conjuring the shade-time flame of the spirit world.

Chi Disciplines

- **Equilibrium:** Maintaining harmonious balance between Yin and Yang, Hun and P'o.
- **Yang Prana:** Attuning the body to its inner Yang.
- **Yin Prana:** Attuning the body to its inner Yin.
- **Tapestry:** Manipulating ambient Chi in the environment.

Soul Disciplines

- **Cultivation:** The P'o must be understood and assimilated.
- **Chi'iu Mich:** The true secrets of the third eye.

- **Internalize:** Focusing the will for mighty feats and cunning insights.
- **Obligation:** The strongest soul prevails and triumphs.

Demon Arts

- **Black Wind:** Fearsome speed and savagery granted by the Demon.
- **Demon Shintai:** Allowing the P'o to possess one's body and turn it into a demon.

Backgrounds

You may not take Generation or Status, but you may take the Backgrounds of:

- **Horoscope:** The stars smiled — or frowned — upon you.
- **Jade Talisman:** You are blessed with a Chi-storing talisman.
- **Magic Artifact:** You possess one or more magical devices.
- **Nushi:** A guardian spirit watches over you or your *wu*.
- **Rites:** You know one or more ceremonies for placating spirits and tapping into dragon lines.

Virtues

- **Yin:** Your penchant for, and control over, negative energies.
- **Yang:** Your thirst for, and control over, the energy of life.
- **Hun:** Your rational, dutiful side.
- **P'o:** Your monstrous, instinctual side — the Demon.

Freebie Points

Attribute	5
Ability	2 (3 if Martial Arts)
Discipline	10
Background	1
Chi Virtue	3
Hun	3
P'o	1
Willpower	1

Step One: Concept

Here is a perfect opportunity to stretch roleplaying horizons and, from the beginning, mark your character as different. On the one hand, it's entirely possible to have a character whose basic outlook differs little from that of his Western contemporaries. The clash between Kuei-jin ancestors and their Fifth-Age charges, while more subdued than that of their Western counterparts, is nonetheless a constant undercurrent in Cathayan society. A Hong Kong or Tokyo tycoon risen as one of the Hungry Dead can prove every inch as ruthless and avaricious as her Ventrue counterpart.

On the other hand, the Middle Kingdom offers many new possibilities for roles and motivations. A character concept of "student" becomes far more interesting if that student was involved in the Tiananmen Square massacre. What about a political dissident who was jailed and murdered for speaking out against the state? An Indochinese pirate? A 12-year-old guerrilla who died in the service of the Viet Cong or Khmer Rouge? In many parts of the Middle Kingdom, the basic social services and civil liberties Westerners take for granted do not exist, and this privation can shape a character's background. A farmer who died from malnutrition or a beggar who literally starved in the street might scoff at the unlifestyle and rhetoric of the typical gangsta-wannabe Brujah.

Remember, too, that Kuei-jin are not Embraced. They die, and then they return from the dead. What sorts of things did your character do in life that would make him a candidate for the Second Breath? What does he hope to accomplish now that he's back? Does he want to perform his duties and escape the Cycle, or does he plan to wallow in the material world for as long as he can?

Especially among younger Kuei-jin, the Second Breath can prompt all sorts of questions and a good deal of resentment. Many fledglings view Cathayan mandarins, Dharmas and societal mores as reactionary, even anachronistic. Although a certain degree of mental discipline and acceptance is necessary to avoid losing oneself completely to the P'o, younger Kuei-jin tend to prefer the confines and comforts of the modern world. Elders' talk of Dharmic corruption, Yama Kings and the Age of Sorrow is often dismissed as a bunch of superstitious crap.

Chi Balance

A character's Chi Virtues can have a great deal of impact on the character concept. Kuei-jin divide themselves into three broad types, depending on their proportionate Yin/Yang Virtues. The greater the difference between the Virtues, the more pronounced the character's personality. Selecting one of these aspects can guide you in assigning your character's Chi Virtues and give you a better handle on how to play your Kuei-jin. A character with one beginning Chi Virtue at two or more dots higher than its opposite (e.g., Yang 5/Yin 3) is considered "attuned" to the Chi Virtue in question. A character whose Chi Virtues are equal or within one dot of each other (e.g., Yang 4/Yin 3) is considered Balanced.

Yin

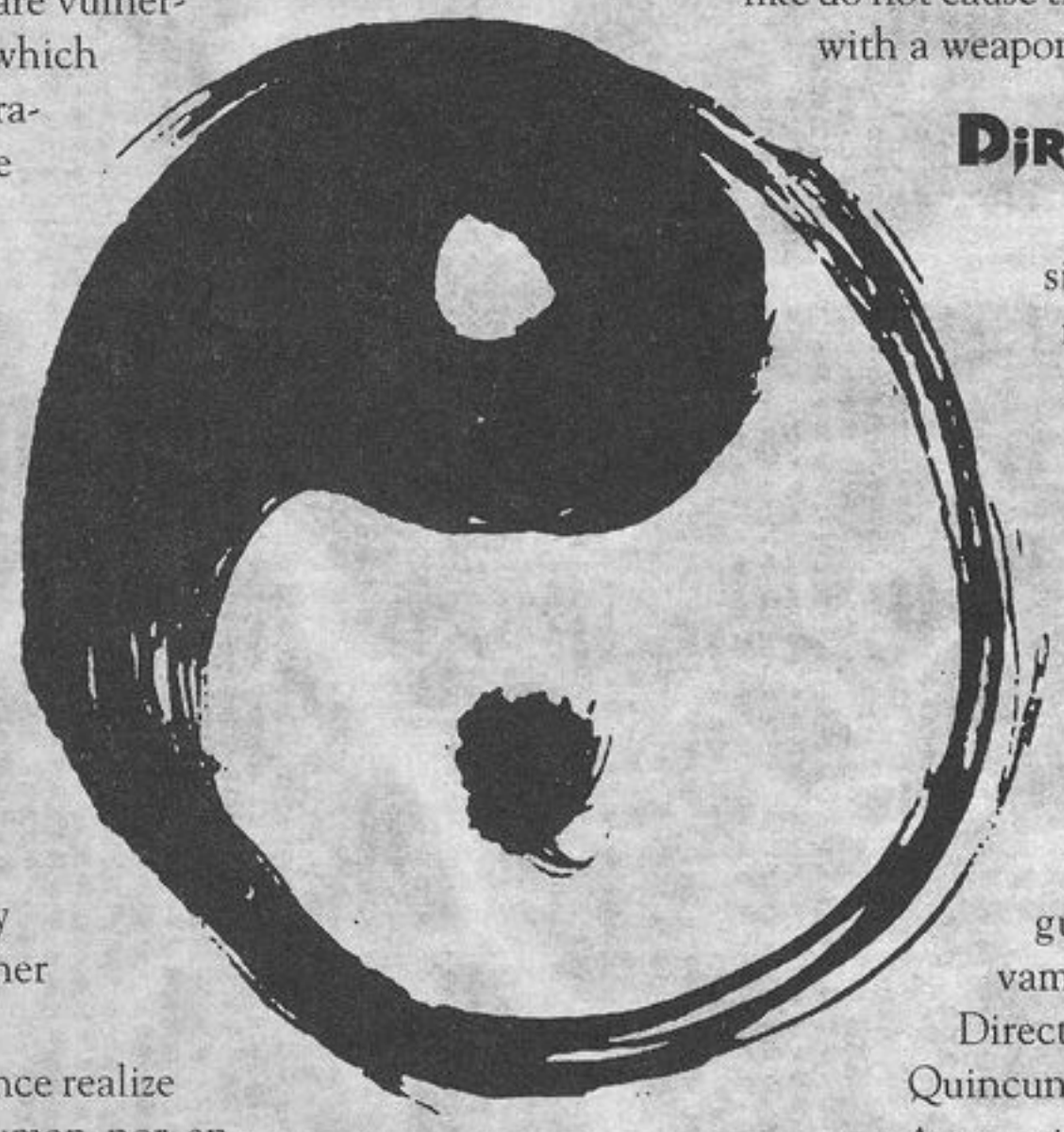
Vampires with high Yin scores are most at home amid the night, the moonlight and the dead. They are efficient (some

might say merciless), pragmatic (some might say unfeeling) and contemplative (some might say morbid). Other Kuei-jin often refer to them as "ebon worms" — though rarely to their faces. Among Kuei-jin, Yin vampires act as magistrates and liaisons with the Underworld. They also make skilled assassins and necromancers; after all, why not add a few more corpses to the world?

Many Yin vampires are lovely, in a pallid and gaunt way, yet most are eerie and discomforting. Their flesh is cold, their gaze chilly, and they often remain completely unmoving for long periods.

Yin vampires know they are inhuman and make little pretense otherwise. Even other vampires often find them cold and callous — though the Yang vampire is capable of flying into insane rages, it is the Yin who can calmly watch a foe's agonizing torture without so much as blinking.

Weakness: Vampires of Yin are vulnerable to the element of Wood, which represents Yang. They can be paralyzed by wooden stakes through the heart, exactly as if they were Kindred. The same sort of roll needs to be made, and the effects are identical.



Balanced

Vampires whose Chi Virtues are equal, or close to equal, are said to be aspected to Balance. They are equal parts light and dark, dead and alive. In Kuei-jin society, they are the sages, the wanderers and the seekers of truth. Of all vampires, they are the ones most interested in inner fulfillment and self-mastery.

Vampires who strive for Balance realize that they are neither entirely human nor entirely monstrous. They see the vampiric state as the first step in a riddle of sorts — just as the Buddha could seek enlightenment only when properly centered, so in vampirism they have centered themselves between the fundamental poles of existence. Of all vampires, they are perhaps the most comfortable with what they have become — and yet, of all vampires, they most desire to transcend their state.

Weakness: Vampires of Balance must maintain Chi harmony at all times. They are considered temporarily imbalanced whenever their bodies contain two or more points of one type of Chi than its opposite. While thus imbalanced, any use of Chi has the potential to provoke a bad reaction.

Yang

The "scarlet dragons" still cling to the life they have left. Vampires aspected to Yang are almost alive — and they are determined to bridge the gap by any means necessary. Among Kuei-jin, Yang vampires act as harvesters who infiltrate mortal society to check on the herds and make sure everything runs smoothly. Their passion, properly directed, also makes them ferocious warriors.

Yang vampires are far more human-appearing than those of Yin. Their flesh is warmer and often has color to it; they sometimes appear to breathe. Yang vampires often partake of mortal pleasures, such as food, drink and sex; the fact that they cannot enjoy these things as fully as mortals is an endless source of frustration.

Yang vampires often find themselves mocked by their Yin counterparts because of their nostalgic longing for life. They are the vampires most likely to see their state as a curse or karmic punishment. Ironically, Yang vampires with high P'o ratings are among the most savage predators of the Middle Kingdom, for they ruthlessly carve a place among the mortals.

Weakness: A vampire of Yang is vulnerable to metal, the element of Yin. A metal blade or shaft thrust through her heart disrupts her Chi balance and induces paralysis, just as a wooden stake does to a Kindred. Bullets, metal-tipped arrows and the like do not cause this effect; it takes an impaling hit with a weapon at least a foot in length.

Direction

Kuei-jin of earlier Ages were classified according to their perceived role in the overall society. Upon a Kuei-jin's initiation into a court, great pains were taken to discover the precise astrological date when the vampire rose from the dead. With this information, the elders assigned the disciple a direction — an astrological attunement toward one of the cardinal points of the compass. This direction supposedly guided many aspects of the vampire's unlife and responsibilities. Direction is still greatly honored in the Quincunx, less so elsewhere.

A vampire's direction is not an absolute guide to duties, but more of a gentle suggestion. How seriously the accompanying prescriptions are taken depends on the vampire, the *wu* and the ancestor concerned. Still, Kuei-jin society as a whole is somewhat superstition-prone, so elders often assume that a vampire will behave in a manner befitting her direction.

Direction traditionally corresponds to Yin/Yang balance — that is, high-Yin vampires are seen as being of the north or west, while high-Yang vampires take the east and south directions. These yokings are not always true, particularly in the turbulent Fifth Age, and it can be interesting to play a vampire whose balance and direction conflict — for example, a high-Yin vampire who still likes to frequent nightclubs, or a high-Yang vampire who prefers to express herself in solitude.

"Lucky" colors and numbers are traditional and strictly for roleplaying purposes. In many areas, vampires wear clothing or adorn themselves with tattoos appropriate to their direction. So, a vampire attuned to south might commission seven red-inked firebird tattoos, customarily wear a red shirt or hat, or even dye her hair red.

• **North** — Vampires of the north are stereotypically viewed as cold, logical, just and heartless. They are often, though not always, attuned to Yin. North vampires are charged with maintaining the traditions of the Kuei-jin — and with passing sentence on individuals who transgress. North vampires act as the magistrates and judges of their kind, by investigating and arbitrating disputes; woe betide the mortal or *shen* who violates a north's laws. Their color is black, and their number is 6.

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

• **West** — Vampires of the west, so say the sages, maintain ties to the dead and the worlds beyond. Even other Cathayans find them bizarre and somewhat alien. It is the job of west-aspected vampires to carry out the dictates of the mandarins, and they do so with merciless precision — but it is also their responsibility to interpret and carry out the spirits' wishes in the Middle Kingdom. These Kuei-jin are often punishers or executioners, but they also serve as sorcerers and messengers. Their color is white, and their number is 9.

Common Natures: Autist, Conformist, Deviant, Loner, Survivor

• **Center** — The vampires at the center of the Great Wheel are, metaphorically speaking, the soul of their society. They explore their own nature, and also help others find a place in the great tapestry of the universe. Vampires of the center often assist in inducting new Kuei-jin into the larger society, though some withdraw altogether, preferring personal quests into the wilderness or the spirit worlds. Their color is yellow, and their number is 5.

Common Natures: Deviant, Jester, Loner, Martyr, Visionary

• **East** — Vampires aspected to the east are the "harvesters" — the farmer caste of the Kuei-jin. It is their responsibility to move among the mortal herds by night, ensuring that all is harmonious. Of all vampires, ones of the east tend to be most comfortable with their former species and most capable of guiding — or manipulating — mortals "for their own good." They are also the Kuei-jin most likely to try to return to their old lives — typically with tragic results. Their color is blue, and their number is 8.

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

• **South** — Vampires of the south are the dynamos keeping the Wheel of Ages in motion. Ever changeable, never predictable, a vampire of the south often finds herself at odds with the more traditional members of her society. Although their fellows often consider them insufferable, south-aspected Cathayans are tolerated for their formidable intellects and fighting prowess. They are the Kuei-jin's leaders, creators — and destroyers. A "firebird's" temper often gets her into trouble, but just as often extracts her from it. Their color is red, and their number is 7.

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

Dharma

Kuei-jin begin play with a rating of 1 in one of the five Dharmas (fully detailed in Chapter Two). This Dharma guides the character in his endeavors and provides a frame of reference for spiritual advancement. Choose a Dharma that properly (or, for interesting roleplaying, poorly) suits the character.

Nature and Demeanor

Just as with the Kindred, Kuei-jin pick a Nature and Demeanor. However, Kuei-jin have two Natures. The first Nature, that of the Hun, is picked from the same list that Western vampires use; the Hun Nature delineates the character's "normal" personality. The character's direction (above) is a good guide as to what sorts of Hun Natures might be appropriate.

The second Nature, that of the P'o, is chosen from the P'o Archetype list (pp. 92-93). The P'o Nature is the personality of the character's Demon — what the Kin-jin refer to as the Beast. For Cathayans, the P'o is not a mindless ravager — at least, not always. It is a cunning adversary, and it seeks to tempt, cajole and outright force the Cathayan away from the path of Dharma. Players should choose a P'o Archetype that complements both the character's Hun Nature and the circumstances of her life and death.

Step Two: Choosing Attributes

This process is identical to that described in **Vampire: The Masquerade**. The player may put seven points in primary Attributes, five points in secondary Attributes and three points in tertiary Attributes.

Step Three: Choosing Abilities

Again, this parallels the **Vampire: The Masquerade** process. Kuei-jin, like Kindred, put 13 dots in primary Abilities, nine dots in secondary Abilities and five dots in tertiary Abilities. Abilities may not be raised above 3, except with freebie points. Kuei-jin do have many new Abilities from which to choose, and some Abilities might be inappropriate, depending on the starting region of the chronicle.

New/Modified Skills

Acrobatics

You're a trained acrobat who knows the ins and outs of wild gymnastics. Perhaps you learned such skills during martial arts training; maybe you grew up in a family of performers. Then again, you may just be a stuntman for Sammo Hung Kam-bo. In any case, you know how to leap, how to fall, and how to sail through the air in gracefully impossible fashion.

By combining this Skill with Dexterity, you can perform wild stunts, leaps, flips and more. Each dot you have in this Skill lets you ignore one Health Level's worth of falling damage. Thus, a vampire with Acrobatics 4 can fall up to 30 feet without injury.

- • **Novice:** You can tumble
- •• **Practiced:** You can do a few tricks
- ••• **Competent:** Average gymnast

•••• **Expert:** Jackie Chan
••••• **Master:** Olympic gymnastics champ
Possessed by: Circus Performers, Olympians, Ninja
Specialties: Balance Beams, Flips, Asai Moonsault

Crafts

Kuei-jin are lovers of the aesthetic, and the creation of crafts both practical and beautiful is highly regarded among them. Artisan skills of all sorts — from kitemaking to swordsmithing to tattooing — find practitioners among the undead. There are also ghastlier crafts available exclusively to vampires — for example, enacting elaborate ritual ceremonies with blood, preparing human flesh in an artistically pleasing manner, and preserving human heads for use in necromantic rituals.

A specialty — origami, gardening, calligraphy, mechanics, jewelry, etc. — must be chosen for this Skill. To learn additional Craft Skills, this Ability must be taken again.

• **Novice:** A few classes
•• **Practiced:** Journeyman
••• **Competent:** Seasoned professional
•••• **Expert:** Master artisan
••••• **Master:** Muramasa
Possessed by: Artisans, Peddlers, Hobbyists
Specialties: Swordsmithing, Engraving, Flaying

Martial Arts

Characters trained in the martial arts may use this Skill to replace the Brawl Talent. Martial arts has long been depicted as a tough, time-consuming calling, which is reflected in the rules for its acquisition. During character creation, Martial Arts Skill costs two Skill dots per dot desired. If raising the Skill with freebie points, each additional dot purchased costs three freebie points. Raising this Skill with experience costs 150 percent of the normal amount for an Ability.

However, characters with the Martial Arts Skill gain access to a variety of special combat maneuvers. Additionally, all martial artists learn how to throw their foes. Special Maneuvers and rules for throws are provided in the Systems Chapter, pp. 140-142.

A martial artist must define her style as "hard" or "soft," which indicates the type of special maneuvers she can learn. Hard styles, such as karate, focus on powerful strikes; soft styles, including aikido, focus on redirection and defense.

• **Novice:** Beginner
•• **Practiced:** Student
••• **Competent:** Brown belt
•••• **Expert:** Black belt
••••• **Master:** Shaolin monk, Bruce Lee, etc.
Possessed by: The Most Unlikely People
Specialties: Snake Style, Chops, Legsweeps

Meditation

An essential tool in the Dharmic search, this Skill allows you to fall into a trance, calm yourself and find inner peace. By centering yourself this way, you may also unlock puzzles (roll Perception + Meditation, difficulty 9; each success lowers the difficulty of the next Intelligence roll by one); go without feeding (Stamina + Meditation, difficulty 9; each success allows you to go

one night without sustenance); or gain a foothold against fire soul (Wits + Meditation, difficulty 9; each success raises the difficulty of your next fire soul roll by one — or, if you want to meditate yourself into a battle-trance, *lowers* it by one).

Meditation requires a focus of some kind — a chant, a dance, a yantra, a kata, etc. — that helps you screen out distractions. Many of the archetypal Eastern practices (martial arts, mantras, Tantrik sex postures, etc.) are meditation aids, practices or refinements.

- • **Novice:** You can sit still and focus your thoughts.
- •• **Practiced:** You can achieve a short-lived state of peace.
- ••• **Competent:** Even under adverse circumstances, you can compose yourself.
- •••• **Expert:** You may achieve a state of calm that few can disrupt.
- ••••• **Master:** Even when things are going to Hell, you can remain calm, master your emotions and think clearly and precisely.

Possessed by: Monks, Yogis, Students

Specialties: Mudras, Mantras, Staying Motionless

Performance

From the ancient Noh and wayang dramas to modern Cantopop and Hong Kong cinema, Asia has enjoyed a rich and varied artistic culture. The Performance Skill indicates some level of mastery over a particular art form — whether music, drama, painting, dance or something else. This Skill must be taken separately for every type of artistic endeavor you wish to master (thus, learning to play the guitar does not make one a skilled actor).

- • **Novice:** Can plunk out a few notes.
- •• **Practiced:** You impress your friends.
- ••• **Competent:** You can win local contests.
- •••• **Expert:** Nationally renowned
- ••••• **Master:** Gong Li

Possessed by: Beijing Opera Divas, Rock Stars, Geisha

Specialties: Guitar, Action Films, Samisen

Portents

You are exceptionally skilled at formal and informal fortunetelling and omen-reading practices. Depending on your level of skill, you may be able to set up a thriving business in the mortal world. In any event, Kuei-jin take such things extremely seriously, and a skilled diviner can gain great respect in the society of the *shen*.

Once per story, you may attempt a divination roll. You must have appropriate tools (*I Ching*, Tarot cards, compass, oracle bones, star charts, even a computer program), and the process takes a minimum of 30 minutes, as you scan the heavens for omens, toss oracle bones, or shatter ideograph-painted human skulls. You may either attempt a general reading ("What do the stars hold?") or ask a specific question. The Storyteller assigns a difficulty, based on the general intent of your question (if any), and then allows you to roll Perception + Portents. Success means that the Storyteller gives you some sort of clue or hint; the greater the success, the more exact the answer, though it is always cryptic.

Thus, if the Storyteller knows that the characters' territory will soon suffer an invasion of Camarilla Kindred led by a crazed (and therefore vulnerable) Malkavian, she might say something

like: "White Bone Dragon strikes at the Jade Dragon's flank. Enter the Bone Dragon's maw, and its head will strike its tail in confusion."

- • **Novice:** "The bird flew south? Umm...good luck tomorrow."
- •• **Practiced:** Neighbors ask you to perform *I Ching* readings.
- ••• **Competent:** Mothers for miles around ask you to interpret their newborns' horoscopes.
- •••• **Expert:** You could have a column in a major newspaper.
- ••••• **Master:** Your predictions make and break banks, stock markets...and military campaigns.

Possessed by: Tao-shih, Street Hustlers, Hobbyists

Specialties: *I Ching*, Astrology, Predicting the Stock Market

Torture

Cathayan mandarins will have the truth, and so Kuei-jin have devised all manner of clever atrocities, some of which are sufficiently brutal to make a Sabbat Tzimisce wince. When employing torture, the Cathayan may make a Dexterity, Strength, Perception or Manipulation + Torture roll (depending on the precise technique). The victim resists with Stamina. Both rolls are difficulty 6. Each success allows the torturer to remove one point of temporary Willpower from the victim without inflicting actual Health Levels of damage (unless the vampire desires to maim the victim).

- • **Novice:** Bamboo under the fingernails
- •• **Practiced:** You can adjust your techniques according to your specific aims.
- ••• **Competent:** You can make a *shen* scream.
- •••• **Expert:** Cultivator in the Torture Garden
- ••••• **Master:** He's begging for death — before you begin.

Possessed by: Military "Special Advisors," Dictators' Aides, Tong Soldiers

Specialties: Psychological, Razor Blades, Avoiding Accidental Death

New/Modified Knowledges

Enigmas

Without a keen sense of creation's illusions, one remains blind to the subtleties of the world. This Trait, a reflection of your talent for riddles and illusions, helps you solve puzzles, comprehend koans, decipher hidden meanings and navigate the spirit worlds. You can remember trivia, make leaps of dislogic and piece together the conundrums that make creation such a challenging — and treacherous — place.

- • **Student:** You can solve simple puzzles.
- •• **College:** Large problems become easy.
- ••• **Masters:** It's difficult to fool you — you have a talent for discovery.
- •••• **Doctorate:** You may puzzle order out of chaos, or *vice versa*.
- ••••• **Scholar:** If the clues are there, no mystery is too great for you.

Possessed by: Zen Masters, Tao-shih, Barroom Philosophers

Specialties: Koans, Riddles, Satori

Linguistics

Linguistics is a bit more difficult in the East. The Chinese language, for example, has several dialects; Mandarin and Cantonese bear less resemblance to each other than do English and German.

A character with no Linguistics Knowledge knows her native dialect and only her native dialect. Thus, a Mandarin-speaking character with no Linguistics Knowledge cannot speak Cantonese. One dot in Linguistics lets the character have a more or less fluent understanding of all dialects of a language. Thus, a Mandarin-speaking character with Linguistics 1 who purchased "Chinese" could speak Cantonese, Shanghainese and all other dialects fluently. (Yes, this is simplistic, to say the least, but for the purposes of a roleplaying game, a few short cuts must be taken.)

Also, the Linguistics Ability, as it stands, does not accurately reflect the actual aptitude of some talented individuals. People accustomed to dwelling in multicultural societies routinely learn several languages, though obviously not all tongues are known fluently. We recommend that, especially in Asian chronicles, the following rules supersede those in **Vampire: The Masquerade**.

Each dot in Linguistics doubles the character's "extra" language capacity. Thus:

- • One additional language
- •• Two additional languages
- ••• Four additional languages
- •••• Eight additional languages
- ••••• 16 additional languages

Each of these language slots can be used to purchase a language, all the dialects of an already known language, or all the written/ideographic forms of a language (so a Japanese-speaking character could spend a Linguistics slot to be "covered" in *kanji* and its *hiragana* and *katakana* derivatives).

And yes, extrapolating from this chart, bodhisattvas can theoretically speak 129 or 257 languages/dialects. Comes with the territory of having been around for millennia.

Literacy: Characters are assumed to be literate unless the Illiterate Flaw (see p. 95) is taken. Characters from impoverished or backward areas should consider purchasing this Flaw; it is an excellent way to hammer home the difference in setting.

Particularly with regard to the 50,000-character Chinese language, however, not all literate characters can read equally. Certain classical or complex passages might require an Intelligence + Linguistics roll, which is treated as an automatic success for characters with high enough Linguistics ratings, but which must be rolled by individuals whose ratings are lower than the difficulty.

Kaja: Kuei-jin of advanced age and learning write to each other in *kaja*, an ancient ideographic script predating the earliest Chinese characters. Many vampires of the Fifth Age don't even bother to learn *kaja* — which means, of course, that ancestors

literate in the script can write untranslatable missives, possibly concerning the player characters, then ask the characters to deliver such messages to fellow elders. Upon the creation of any new *wu*, the *wu* is assigned a *kaja* character representing the *wu*'s name. (The Hundred Corpse Families have jealously guarded their characters for millennia.) *Kaja* may be learned with a Linguistics dot, but it is an extraordinarily complex tongue; it takes years to learn even the rudiments of *kaja*.

China: Putonghua (Mandarin), Cantonese, Shanghainese, Wu

Japan: Japanese (several different writing systems)

Korea: Korean (written *hangul* phonetic system)

Southeast Asia: Thai, Vietnamese, Cambodian, many others

Indonesia: Bahasa Indonesia, many dialects

Rituals

You have learned a few, or many, of the intricate ceremonies and rites surrounding Kuei-jin existence. The ancient sutras and classic texts come easily to your lips. You can read and write the ancient ideographs of the Third Age, enact proper Chi ceremonies and know the proper honorifics to use when greeting your betters.

This Knowledge is essential for invoking rites (see Chapter Four: Forces in the Land). You may not cast a rite of a level higher than your Rituals Knowledge. If you hope to impress (or simply avoid the wrath of) spirits and ancestors, it would be wise to learn this Knowledge.

- • **Student:** Disciple
- •• **College:** West or center Kuei-jin
- ••• **Masters:** Jina
- •••• **Doctorate:** Mandarin
- ••••• **Scholar:** Ancestor

Possessed by: Kuei-jin, Hengeyokai, *Fang Shih*

Specialties: Dragon Rites, Seasonal Rites, *Feng Shui*

Step Four: Choosing Advantages

Here's where things get different. All Kuei-jin must choose a Dharma. Cathayans have access to different Disciplines; they have a few new Backgrounds, and differ considerably in their Virtues. Dharmas have been extensively covered in the previous chapter. New Disciplines are detailed in Chapter Four: Forces in the Land; the character gets three points to spend on Disciplines, but one must be a Demon Art (the P'o sees to that). The character gains five points to spend on Backgrounds (though the Generation and Status Backgrounds are off limits) and four points to spend on Chi Virtues (each Chi Virtue starts at a rating of 1). Soul Virtues start off at sharply defined levels (Hun 1 and P'o 3, respectively), but may be increased with freebie points.

Virtues, for Kuei-jin, define a good bit of the character's capabilities, so choose carefully. Kuei-jin have two Chi Virtues — Yin and Yang. These Virtues govern the vampire's ability to absorb and process Chi. Cathayans also have two Soul Virtues — Hun and P'o. The Hun Virtue resembles Conscience or Humanity, though it also quantifies the character's sense of honor and reason. The P'o measures the strength of the character's Beast.

New Backgrounds

Horoscope

You were reborn under especially auspicious — or baleful — stars. Particularly in the Quincunx, such omens are taken very seriously; newly reborn vampires often undergo extensive astrological analyses, courtesy of their adoptive families. Some vampires even have their astrological signs or data tattooed on their bodies.

Once per story, you may roll a number of dice equal to your Horoscope rating. For each result that corresponds to either your Dharma's or your direction's "lucky number" (North 6, West 9, Center 5, East 8, South 7; Devil-Tiger 2, Resplendent Crane 1, Shadow Song 4, Thrashing Dragon 3, Thousand Whispers 0), you gain one extra and automatic success on an action attempted next turn.

In less concrete terms, a vampire's Horoscope rating often serves as a rough indicator of destiny. Vampires with high Horoscope ratings occasionally find themselves beneficiaries (or victims) of odd coincidences, *dei ex machina*, and other strangeness, which can provide ideal story hooks.

- • The gods took passing interest (one die)
- •• The gods paused to take note (two dice)
- ••• The gods spoke briefly of you (three dice)
- •••• The gods inscribed your name in the heavenly scrolls (four dice)
- ••••• The gods take notice of you still (five dice); may you live in interesting times

Jade Talisman

You own a talisman of true jade, jade attuned to the energies of Yin or Yang. Such a talisman can come in any shape or form — perhaps it is a figurine, a ring, a circlet or even the guard of a sword. Talismans attuned to Yin tend to be fashioned from black or white jade, while talismans attuned to Yang are typically made of green, red or blue jade. In any event, the talisman can store energies from either the Yin or Yang World (never both), then offer them to its wielder as the appropriate type of Chi.

Whenever a jade talisman is in an area where the Wall is weak (6 or lower), the player can choose to make a roll for the talisman, using a Dice Pool equal to the number of dots in this Background. The difficulty of this roll equals the Wall rating + 3. For each success, the talisman may absorb one Chi point from the region's ambient Chi. Only one attempt to absorb Chi may be made per night, and a talisman may hold a maximum number of Chi points equal to the dots in the Background (so, a three-dot jade talisman allows three dice to absorb Chi and may store a maximum of three Chi points at once).

Subsequently, by touching the talisman and spending a turn in concentration, the vampire may utilize this Chi. Chi from a talisman may be used in normal fashion, to power Disciplines, heal wounds, etc. The vampire may still spend only as much Chi per turn as his Dharma rating allows (see Chapter Two).

Talismans of true jade are exceedingly rare and greatly

prized. You may have to defend your talisman against rapacious rivals. Occasionally, talismans are used as prizes in duels and gambling contests, but these contests must be of great consequence to merit such a stake.

- • one Chi point
- •• two Chi points
- ••• three Chi points
- •••• four Chi points
- ••••• five Chi points

Magic Artifact

You own one or more artifacts created in some earlier Age. These magic artifacts may be weapons, jewelry or other mystical relics. Artifacts may have been given to you by spirits or mandarins, or (unlikely) you may simply have found or stolen them. The greater your score in this Background, the mightier the artifact(s). See Chapter Eight for sample artifacts.

- • You own one Level One artifact
- •• You own one Level Two artifact or two Level One artifacts
- ••• You own one or more artifacts with a total of three levels
- •••• You own one or more artifacts with a total of four levels
- ••••• You own one or more artifacts with a total of five levels

Nushi

In most cases, this Background does not apply directly to the character, but to the *wu* as a whole. The characters pay homage to a Yin- or Yang-spirit from the spirit worlds. This spirit (known as a nushi or nat) acts as a sort of "patron" for the *wu*, and uses the vampires as its earthly agents; in exchange, it gifts the characters with advice and, in some cases, special powers.

Nushi are spirits, with all the limitations and powers thereof (see pp. 209-213). They may not be destroyed while the *wu* exists, but they may be reduced to zero Chi. A nushi who suffers such a shameful defeat Re-forms elsewhere in the spirit worlds — with luck, far away from anyone who might have witnessed the ignominious event. While the nushi convalesces, the characters may not contact the nushi or use any of its powers — and upon recovery, it will probably have plenty to say to the incompetent minions who allowed such an intolerable insult....

The power of the *wu*'s nushi is determined by the total points spent by all the characters in the *wu*. Each nushi has a base Background Cost, which must be paid to gain the nushi's favor; examples of nushi and their costs are provided on pp. 212-213. Characters may then spend additional points to provide their nushi with extra abilities per the following chart.

Nushi may also demand obligations from characters, over and above any listed in the Background Cost. Such duties subtract from the total cost of the nushi; however, characters purchasing such a relationship have essentially submitted to vassalage, complete with formal oaths. They are honor-bound to fulfill any duties demanded of them, and spirits grow *very* angry when vassals prove disloyal.... A nushi always costs at least one point to purchase.

A "base-level" nushi has a Chi of 20 and seven points to divide among Rage, Gnosis and Willpower. All nushi have the Charms of Dragon Sight and Re-form. Unless the appropriate extras are purchased, the nushi is a relatively minor and somewhat disinterested spirit.

Nushi may lend special powers to the characters; such powers are listed under the individual nushi. Only one vampire may use the power per turn. At the beginning of each turn, the character using the nushi's powers declares whether he keeps or relinquishes them and, if the latter, to whom.

Nushi are particularly common among the Kuei-jin of Japan and Korea (the former Courts of the Azure Dragon); whole *uji* pay homage to powerful nushi, while many younger Japanese vampires claim to have discovered new, nontraditional nushi (spirits of electricity, machinery and even the Internet).

Nushi are proud beings; if the characters fail to show proper respect to the nushi, it may depart the *wu* outright. Such a desertion causes great loss of face in Kuei-jin circles.

Cost	Power
1	Per three points of Willpower, Rage and/or Gnosis
1	Per 10 Chi
1	Nushi can automatically speak to the *wu*
1	Nushi can always find the characters
2	Nushi is nearly always nearby
2	Nushi is respected in the spirit worlds
2	Per Charm possessed
3	Per extra character who can use the nushi's powers in the same turn
4	Nushi is mystically connected to all *wu*-mates, allowing communication among them even over great distances
-1	Nushi can demand minor duties of the characters ("Punish the impious student who carves lewd graffiti on my sacred image.")
-2	Nushi can demand serious duties of the characters ("Prevent the Western blood-drinkers from defiling the sacred shrine.")
-3	Nushi can demand critical duties of the characters ("Go to the Yomi Hell of Being Skinned Alive and bring me the necklace of the Yama Queen Tou Mu.")

Rites

Kuei-jin are not limited to the power of their Disciplines alone. Some Cathayans can also tap into local streams of Chi through potent ceremonies called rites (p. 126). The Rites Background quantifies how many levels of rites a character knows at the beginning of the chronicle; a character can know many small rites or one big rite. A character must have a Rituals Knowledge equal to or greater than the level of any rite purchased, and no beginning character should know a Level Four or Level Five rite.

- • Character knows one level of rites.
- •• Character knows two levels of rites.
- ••• Character knows three levels of rites.
- •••• Character knows four levels of rites.
- ••••• Character knows five levels of rites.

CATHAYAN VIRTUES

It is in the Virtues, perhaps, that Cathayans differ most from Western Kindred. As a rule, the Kindred worldview is that of a savage, individualistic struggle against one's inner nature; by contrast, classical Kuei-jin thought focuses on attunement to the harmony of the All.

Even those Kuei-jin sympathetic to Western ideals and practices tend to possess the following Virtues rather than the Western ones of Conscience, Self-Control, etc. The Second Breath holds harsh lessons, and only through rigorous instruction may one avoid karmic collapse.

CHI AND SOUL VIRTUES

Kuei-jin have four Virtues, which are grouped into two opposing pairs. They are the Chi Virtues (Yin and Yang) and the Soul Virtues (Hun and P'o). Chi Virtues act as measures of personality and quantify the vampire's ability to absorb and use Chi. Soul Virtues measure the character's rational and bestial sides.

Both Chi and Soul Virtues can range from 1 to 10 — but, because they are opposed, points in one Virtue reduce the maximum allowable points in the opposing Virtue. A beginning Kuei-jin can have a maximum of 10 points in each Virtue pair — thus, if a vampire's Yin score is 6, her maximum Yang score is 4. In beginning characters, a Chi Virtue above 5 is considered extraordinary, and a rating of 7 or higher automatically qualifies the character for permanent Chi imbalance.

Higher Dharma ratings provide characters with greater insight into their existence. Accordingly, vampires of advanced Dharma ratings can supersede these limitations. So, a character with a Dharma rating of 6 can have 12 points in a Virtue pair — Hun 4/P'o 8, for example, or Yin 6/Yang 6. See Chapter Two for more information.

CHI VIRTUES: YIN AND YANG

In the beginning, say the sages of the Middle Kingdom, the universe split into two halves. One of these halves was the bright, active Yang; the other, the dark, negative Yin. Kuei-jin are creatures suspended between life and death, and thus they have a measure of Yin and Yang.

The character sheet displays two separate Chi Virtue tracks. The first, the permanent rating (the dots), measures the character's personal leaning toward positive or negative energies, as well as her degree of control over the energies she ingests. **This rating is used whenever the text calls for a Yin or Yang roll.** The second track, the squares, measures how much temporary Yin or Yang (otherwise known as Chi) the vampire has ingested. Temporary Yin or Yang may (and often does) exceed the vampire's permanent Yin or Yang rating; this condition is known as Chi imbalance, and can lead to deleterious side effects (see pp. 139-140).

Permanent Yin and Yang serve as rough measures of a character's personality. A character with a high Yang rating is likely to be energetic and prone to emotional extremes (of happiness, anger, even fear or sadness); conversely, a character with a high Yin rating is likely to be icy, calm, cynical, and somewhat pessimistic, possibly even morbid. In most cases, a high rating in one Virtue necessitates a lower rating in its opposite — it is difficult to be simultaneously calm and emotional. However, vampires of great enlightenment (6+ in a Dharma rating) have learned to assimilate and harness their inner dichotomies; thus, one might well find very high Yin and Yang scores coexisting in the same bodhisattva.

YIN

The Yin Virtue quantifies the character's attunement to dark, negative energies. It is used when resisting the fire soul, when powering and channeling Yin-aspected Disciplines and when dealing with ghosts and other Yin-spirits.

Vampires with high Yin scores commonly master Disciplines relating to death and the manipulation of negative forces. Because such Kuei-jin are repositories for so much negative energy, mortals often find these Cathayans repellent or creepy — although some mortals, ones with high Yin energies themselves, find themselves drawn to high-Yin vampires. Vampires who have imbalanced themselves with Yin tend to appear corpselike or even putrescent; these undead are referred to as *ch'ing shih*.

Kuei-jin have two Yin ratings. The permanent Yin rating (the circles) measures the character's control over negative energy. The temporary Yin rating (the squares) measures how much Yin Chi is actually in the vampire's body. If the character ingests much more Yin than he is capable of handling, a number of ill effects may result (see "Chi Imbalance," pp. 139-140).

USING YIN

• **Fire Nature** — First and foremost, the Yin Virtue is the Trait used when rolling to resist fire nature. Vampires with high Yin are simply too cold and detached to be overly affected by rage.

• **Ghostsight** — By spending one Yin point, Cathayans can attune themselves to their Yin, allowing them to view Yin's marks on others. This power functions similarly to the wraith ability of Deathsight, and it lasts for an entire scene.

Ghostsight allows the Cathayan to view creatures from the Yin World; such creatures include wraiths, Spectres, and others. To do so, the Cathayan must concentrate for three turns and roll Perception + Occult (difficulty of the local Wall + 2).

A Cathayan using Ghostsight can scan objects or living prey (undead and Risen count, ghosts don't) for structural weaknesses. By spending three turns in concentration (no attacks, no movement faster than walking speed) and rolling Yin + Medicine (living) or Crafts (inanimate) versus difficulty 8, the vampire can make an "atemi" strike against the object, inflicting one extra level of damage per success. This technique is good for a single physical attack; once the attack is made (hit or miss), the vampire must reattune herself to the object if she wishes to make another focused strike.

The vampire can study the mystic blotches caused by Yin's erosion. In this manner, the vampire can detect and analyze any damage, disabilities or illnesses from which the target suffers. Doing so requires a Perception + Medicine roll (difficulty 4 to 8, depending on the nature of the ailment). Success allows the vampire to make a rough diagnosis of the target's

health, level of injury, and whether or not the target suffers from disease, blood loss, etc. A vampire without high levels in the Medicine Knowledge probably cannot recognize the precise ailments of the target, only that he is "sick," "feverish," "weak," and the like.

By using Ghostsight on a broken inanimate object, the vampire can make a Perception + (appropriate) Crafts roll (difficulty 4 to 8, depending on the extent of the damage). Success allows the vampire to analyze the damage and gives her some idea of how to repair the item.

•	Somewhat tense
••	Relaxed
•••	Meditative
••••	Stoic
•••••	Icy
6•+	Inhumanly calm

Yang

Yang, the opposite of Yin, is the bright, active spark coursing through most living beings. It is Yang that gives Kuei-jin the strength to undertake the Second Breath — but it is also Yang that fuels the vampires' ravenous hunger. In some ways, Yang is the driving force that impels the Kuei-jin to come back and fight on night after night. Without Yang, the Kuei-jin say, they would simply be...dead.

Although Yang is "positive" energy, this term has slightly different connotations among the undead. Yang Chi is the fuel vampires use to advance their ends — whether these ends are "good" or "evil" depends entirely on the vampire in question. Yang is used when resisting terrifying situations and when taking action.

In contrast with their ghoulish Yin counterparts, vampires with high Yang seem more human. They are the undead who rise from the grave to avenge families, settle old scores or reunite with loved ones. They love walking among the Middle Kingdom's teeming throngs, figuratively and sometimes literally drinking in the energy of the crowds.

However, no matter how much Yang a vampire consumes, it is, at best, a parody of life, and stolen life at that. Vampires with high Yang like to pretend to be human, but so it is, exactly — a pretense. When their vampiric natures inevitably come to the fore, their disappointment often prompts frenzies far more vitriolic than the ones of their more phlegmatic cousins.

Using Yang

• **Healing** — Yang Chi can be combined with the vampire's blood and delivered to others as an elixir of healing. Each point of Yang Chi heals one normal Health Level.

• **Lifesight** — Just as Cathayans can view Yin's traces, they may also duplicate the wraith ability of Lifesight. By spending one point of Yang, the vampire may attune himself to the life-flows around him for one scene.

When two (or more) beings encounter each other, the emotional auras surrounding them "flare" for an instant; vampires who attempt to read this aura (Perception + Empathy, difficulty 9) can gain insight into the true feelings of the observed creatures. Thus, if two rival business magnates chummily greeted each other

at a party, an astute Kuei-jin could detect the spark of loathing and envy that momentarily flared between them. (This power is best reserved for mortals; it is considered a dangerous breach of etiquette to use it upon other *shen*, though the Kin-jin and other such barbarians may, of course, be scrutinized at will.)

The vampire may detect overriding emotional passions in mortals. By concentrating on a particular emotion and rolling Perception + Yang (difficulty 9), the vampire may "home in" on that emotion. The range of this power is 20 feet times the vampire's Perception score. Besides its obvious use in hunting (e.g., attuning oneself to lust in order to determine which mortals are easily seduced), Lifesight allows vampires to find vessels with great amounts of emotional energy. For each success on the Perception + Yang roll, difficulties of the vampire's hunting rolls are reduced by one.

Finally, the vampire may attempt to detect creatures from the Yang World, including spirits of the sort known to werewolves, as well as other beings from the realms known in the West as the Middle Umbra. To detect such creatures successfully, the vampire must concentrate for three turns and roll Perception + Occult (difficulty of the local Wall + 2). Once seen, spirit creatures remain visible for the duration of the scene (For more information on spirits, see pp. 209-213.)

• **Wave Nature** — Yang is the seat of bravery. The vampire uses his Yang Trait when rolling to resist wave nature.

•	Lethargic
••	Active
•••	Animated
••••	Passionate
•••••	Feverish
6•+	Inhumanly energetic

Chi Virtues and Nature/Demeanor

In many ways, a Kuei-jin's Chi Virtues are analogous to personality. A vampire with a high Yin score is more detached, cautious and calm than her exuberant, passionate, high-Yang counterpart. The Chi Virtues should be taken into account when selecting Nature and Demeanor — or at least when roleplaying the Archetype in question. Thus, a vampire with a Bravo Archetype and a high Yang might appear as a violent, capricious berserker, while one with a high Yin might come across as a brutal, heartless monster.

Soul Virtues: Hun and P'o

Chinese thought traditionally divides the soul into two parts: the animal, lower soul (the P'o) and the rational, higher soul (the Hun). Most Kuei-jin accept this dichotomous view, although Cathayans in outlying lands often refer to the dual souls by different names. Accordingly, all Kuei-jin have two Soul Virtues, the Hun and the P'o. Like the Chi Virtues, Soul Virtues can range from 1 to 10, though anything above 5 is considered extraordinary for a beginning character.

As with the Chi Virtues, the Soul Virtues are diametrically opposed; a high rating in one decreases the maximum rating in its opposite. And, as with the Chi Virtues, vampires of high Dharmic understanding can assimilate their opposing urges and supersede their limitations. Upstart younglings who challenge a seemingly peaceful bodhisattva are often taken aback at the strength of the Demon just below the elder's placid surface, like a faithful dog awaiting the commands of its master.

Hun

The Hun is the Virtue corresponding to the strength of the character's higher soul. The Hun measures the character's rational side, her ability for abstract and aesthetic thought, her remaining empathy with mortals and her overall resolve. Hun resembles the Conscience rating of the West, but is not precisely the same — characters from shame-based societies have Hun Virtues that focus on fulfillment of obligations, rather than adherence to morality. In some ways, Hun is a measure of the character's honor and devotion to duty.

Characters with high Hun ratings tend to be seen as more thoughtful and spiritual, more patient, and more "in control." Conversely, ones with low Hun scores (even ones with high Mental Attributes) tend to approach existence from a base, animalistic and sensual point of view.

The Hun score is used to resist or control the P'o. A vampire also uses it to attune himself to the invisible world around him. The Hun governs Willpower — a Kuei-jin has a beginning Willpower rating equal to his Hun score, and a maximum Willpower rating equal to his Hun score + 5 (or 10, whichever is less).

Using Hun

• **Demon Arts** — When evoking one of the P'o's Demon Art Disciplines, the Hun may be used to "harness" the P'o into a controlled frenzy. After (and only after) the Demon Art is evoked, the Kuei-jin rolls her Hun score against a difficulty equal to her P'o. Success enables her to evoke the Demon Art while retaining her own Nature; failure means the P'o takes over the body while the Demon Art is used.

• **Empathy** — A Kuei-jin can never have an Empathy rating higher than her Hun.

• **Shadow Nature** — The Hun is the Trait to use when rolling to resist takeover by the P'o.

• **Sharpened Senses** — Because Kuei-jin are spirits trapped in material bodies, they may use their Hun to evoke the sharpened senses of their wraithly counterparts. This power

functions identically to the Auspex 1 power of Heightened Senses. To evoke the power, the vampire must concentrate for a turn and roll Hun (difficulty 6); the power lasts for a scene and may be reactivated (with the same roll or better) every scene thereafter.

• **Spirit Speech** — A Kuei-jin may roll Hun (difficulty of the local Wall) to speak with a spirit, provided she can detect it in the first place.

• **Tempering the P'o** — A Kuei-jin who succumbs to her shadow nature may make a Hun roll (difficulty 9). If the roll succeeds, the Kuei-jin remains aware of the actions taken by the Demon. She may not prevent the takeover, but may spend Willpower to subtly influence the P'o or avoid certain actions for one turn per point spent (e.g., if the P'o-dominated vampire is about to kill a child, she can spend a Willpower point to make herself hesitate for a turn, thus giving the child a chance to run). Likewise, a Kuei-jin whose Hun aspect remains aware can spend a Willpower point to speak one lucid sentence. (In the example above, the vampire might spend a Willpower point to scream, "Run, you fool!" at the child, assuming the kid didn't get the point.)

•	Unstable
••	Normal
•••	Sensible
••••	Wise
•••••	Sagacious
6•+	Enlightened

P'o

The opposite of the Hun, the P'o is the animalistic, monstrous side of the vampire — what Western Kindred refer to as the Beast. It is the P'o that fans the vampire's hunger, and it is the P'o that whips a trivial annoyance into a killing rage.

In many ways, the P'o can be thought of as the dark side of the character's soul — a part the character is not proud of, but a part of the character nonetheless. The P'o has its own Nature (see below); this Nature represents a significant fraction of the character's psyche and should be roleplayed as such. Vampires with high Hun ratings often seek to channel and tame the P'o. Other Cathayans cultivate and accommodate their Demons, as they see this action to be crucial to their karmic duties as monsters.

Kuei-jin have scrupulously studied their condition for thousands of years, and thus, the P'o is not held in the same dread as the Westerners' Beast. The greatest *shen* sages teach that a true end to the vampiric existence can be found only when the P'o is accepted, understood and assimilated. Naturally, the P'o is under no similar compulsions with regard to its "weakling" Hun side.

Unlike in the West, the P'o is not merely a mindless adversary to be tamed and suppressed. A Cathayan's P'o is the embodiment of the character's darker side — a cunning, corrupting Demon, rather than a mere Beast. The character's Hun Nature is chosen from the basic **Vampire: The Masquerade** rulebook — but the P'o Nature, the voice of the Demon Within, is chosen from the P'o Archetypes listed below.

The P'o does have its uses. Vampires with strong P'o ratings are terrifying and formidable warriors. Oftentimes, the character's Demon is the only thing that can extract a character from a perilous situation.

Using P'o

• **Berserk Rage** — The character may attempt to unleash a berserk rage in himself. He rolls a number of dice equal to his P'o against a difficulty equal to his Hun + 3 (maximum 10); success indicates that the character triggers his fire nature. A character in the throes of fire nature suffers no wound penalties and gains access to Demon Chi (below).

• **Demon Arts** — No character may advance a Demon Art to a level higher than his P'o.

• **Demon Chi** — The character can channel some of the Demon's might into his own endeavors. For each point of permanent P'o, the character is considered to have one point of temporary P'o, or "Demon Chi"; Demon Chi can be "spent" on extra actions (as if the Kuei-jin were employing Celerity), extra damage successes (automatic, like Potence), and extra Strength successes (again, automatic).

A Cathayan may spend no more Demon Chi per turn than her Stamina score. Once spent, Demon Chi is gone for the remainder of the night. However, the character typically regains some or all of it when she reawakens next evening; upon awakening, she may roll P'o (difficulty 6), and each success returns a point of Demon Chi to the pool. Demon Chi might also be gained in place of regular Chi if the character feeds at a site of defiled Chi (see p. 139).

To evoke Demon Chi for a scene, the vampire must make a P'o roll against a difficulty of his Hun Virtue + 3. He must score at least one success to evoke Demon Chi. If he scores four or more successes, he succumbs to fire nature — though he does gain access to Demon Chi during this time.

• **Fangs** — Unlike Western Kindred, Cathayans have no natural fangs. By spending a point of Demon Chi, the character may sprout fangs that are, in all respects, identical to those of a Western vampire. By spending two Demon Chi, the character can sprout a fanged maw (Str + 2 aggravated damage). The fangs last for one scene.

• **Nature Shift** — The P'o is the Virtue used to determine if the character enters fire, shadow or wave nature. Generally, a number of dice equal to the P'o rating is used to roll for a shift in nature. Depending on the particular shift in question, the character resists with Yin, Yang or Hun.

• **Resistance** — When a character suffers magical mind control, he may attempt to use his P'o to break the control. The vampire rolls his P'o rating (difficulty 9); success releases the character from control, but triggers an automatic check for shadow nature (below).

• **Shadow Nature** — The most feared power of the P'o is its ability to take over the Kuei-jin's body. During certain conditions, the P'o soul may actually overwhelm that of the Hun, substituting its own personality for that of the Hun. When the P'o is dominant, the player must play the character per the character's P'o Archetype; if the player is incapable of doing so, the Storyteller is free to dictate the P'o-dominated vampire's actions.

•	Aggressive
••	Vindictive
•••	Violent
••••	Cruel
•••••	Bestial
6•+	Monstrous

P'o Archetypes

Much as with a wraith's Shadow, a Cathayan's P'o has its own Nature. This side of the character — the inner Demon embodying the character's weaknesses and self-destructive urges — is the greatest scourge a Cathayan vampire faces. The P'o often speaks "telepathically" to the vampire — castigating, criticizing and coaxing the vampire toward monstrous acts.

Thus, characters have a Hun Archetype — a Nature chosen from the Archetypes common to all **Vampire** characters — and a P'o Archetype. The P'o Archetype embodies the vampire's deep-seated fears, hatreds, repressed feelings and other negative traits. The Archetype is always present as a whispering voice inside the character's soul, urging improper, dishonorable and even monstrous behavior. At times, the P'o's insidious whisperings may be enough to trigger frenzy.

During certain situations, the P'o Archetype can attempt to take over the Kuei-jin. When controlled by the P'o, the character must conform to the dictates of the P'o Archetype. Storytellers should deduct experience points from characters who refuse to play the P'o properly.

There are near-infinite numbers of P'o Archetypes; common ones include:

The Bandit

While a Kuei-jin may have a specific role to fulfill or a particular reason to have returned from the dead, the Bandit is having none of it. This P'o sees no use in the Great Cycle, which, after all, is far removed from its night-to-night existence. Rather, it ignores the mandates of Heaven and Hell and seeks to drive the Kuei-jin to random acts of self-satisfied destruction. The Bandit's ultimate goal is to bring down the entire Great Cycle, perhaps out of resentment at being ordered back into the lands of the living, but in the meantime any target — and any representative of order — serves as a focus for the P'o's rage.

Conditions for Takeover: The Bandit can force a shadow nature roll whenever anyone seeks to order the Kuei-jin to do anything, or tries to put the character "in his proper place."

The Barbarian

The Barbarian seeks to reject the traditional ways of Kuei-jin and replace them with the chaotic, undisciplined methods of the Kin-jin. Seeing the relative freedom of Western vampires, it wishes to abandon its heritage and join the Kin-jin in their decadence. The Barbarian mocks the Hun's devotion to duty and respect for tradition, and it takes every opportunity to compare Cathayan and Western ways. Needless to say, in the Barbarian's analysis, Western ways always come out better.

Conditions for Takeover: The Barbarian can force a shadow nature roll whenever adherence to a traditional practice causes the Kuei-jin pain or some other form of discomfort. It may also attempt to manifest whenever the Cathayan comes in contact with a Kin-jin.

The Deceiver

The Deceiver has no use for the truth, good, bad or indifferent. It practices lying for the sake of lying — telling the Hun what it wants to hear one minute, then driving it to the brink of madness with patent falsehood the next. While this behavior may seem erratic, the P'o does have an underlying goal. It seeks nothing less than to render the Kuei-jin unable to trust himself. The more times the Deceiver gets the Hun to believe its lies — and the more times it tells the truth and is ignored — the less the Hun can trust its own judgment. If the P'o has its way, eventually the Hun's will is wrecked, and the vampire finds himself incapable of making a move or any decision without the loving advice of the Deceiver.

Conditions for Takeover: The Deceiver can force a shadow nature roll whenever a lie would serve as more advantageous to the Kuei-jin than the truth would. However, the Deceiver picks its spots carefully, usually trying to take over only after the Hun has tried — and failed — to handle several similar situations on its own.

The Demon

The Demon seeks to devour all. Anything weaker than the Kuei-jin is prey, and anything stronger is power that can be subsumed through treachery. While the Demon may pay lip service to duty, friendship and honor, it is devoted to personal power and nothing else. Western eyes might see the Demon as sociopathic, but it has no concern for the opinions of others. To the Demon, all that it sees exists for its amusement, for it to destroy and devour at its whim. Other souls matter only in terms of how they relate to the Demon — and how quickly the Demon can devour them.

Conditions for Takeover: The Demon can force a shadow nature roll when it sees an opportunity to make itself stronger through the destruction of another. Whether that involves devouring a weaker Kuei-jin or striking down a more powerful one through treachery is irrelevant; it is the chance for advantage that matters.

The Fool

A Hun afflicted with a Fool is in for a frustrating unlife, as its P'o begs for explanations of even the simplest or most self-evident action. Furthermore, the Fool is incapable of long-term or preplanned action, and sees no virtue in either. As such, it works as hard as it can (it does get distracted easily) to get the Kuei-jin to take the easy, simple way, and to avoid unnecessary (read: any) complications. A Fool P'o is never silent, and its incessant prattling can drive even the most self-controlled Hun to distraction.

Conditions for Takeover: The Fool can force a shadow nature roll whenever the Hun finds itself at a loss for words or actions. Whenever the Kuei-jin becomes confused, the Fool is always ready, able and willing to make the situation worse.

The Legalist

The Legalist P'o has no tolerance for deviation from the celestially ordained order of things. There is no room for interpretation or improvisation in this P'o's world; everything has a specific role to play, from which it cannot deviate. Any action the Kuei-jin takes that contradicts this divine order — whether speaking familiarly to one higher in rank or taking insubordination from an inferior — causes the Legalist to fly into a rage until the "insult" has been set aright. Of course, only the P'o can decide what constitutes appropriate atonement, either by the Kuei-jin or another. As such, a particularly sadistic Legalist P'o can keep its other half jumping through very formal hoops for days (or even longer).

Conditions for Takeover: A Legalist P'o may force a shadow nature roll any time the Cathayan is shown disrespect by an inferior, with the P'o being the one to define what exactly constitutes an "inferior." Conversely, the P'o can also attempt to take over if the Kuei-jin herself is disrespectful or oversteps her bounds.

The Monkey

While the Kuei-jin may have returned to the Middle Kingdom for a reason, the Monkey doesn't much care. It is a creature of the moment, its each new pleasure or distraction being the most important thing in its world. The Monkey is capable of concocting elaborate plans to achieve small or momentary goals, but it is in no way concerned with any overarching mission that the Kuei-jin might have. Indeed, the Monkey seeks, at every turn, to waylay the Cathayan from her appointed goal, to divert all of the vampire's attention and energy to lesser, transitory things.

Conditions for Takeover: The Monkey can force a shadow nature roll if it sees a diversion that may distract the Kuei-jin from her appointed goal — but only if that diversion is something that the Hun would normally be interested in pursuing in any case.

The Slave

The Slave has no trust for the Kuei-jin's judgment, which it seeks to undermine at every turn. Whenever possible, the Slave does its best to place the Kuei-jin under the control of another. This course is for the best, obviously, as the Slave knows that the Kuei-jin is incapable of doing anything properly himself. Therefore, it questions every decision the Hun makes and seizes every opportunity to force the Kuei-jin to submit. Not surprisingly, once the P'o succeeds in enthralling the Hun, the Slave immediately starts to bemoan its fate and urges the Hun to escape, to seek another "master" to guide it through existence. Ultimately, the Slave seeks to serve the Yama Kings, and Cathayans with a strong Slave Archetype often become *akuma*.

Conditions for Takeover: Ironic as it may seem, the Slave can force a shadow nature roll whenever the Kuei-jin is in the presence of someone who appears older, stronger or wiser. The Slave may also make attempt to take over whenever one of the Hun's decisions goes disastrously wrong.

If none of these Natures properly defines a particular character's Demon Within, the player and Storyteller should design their own P'o Archetypes. **Wraith: The Oblivion** and **The Shadow Players Guide** give ideas for Shadow Archetypes, which can easily be converted into P'o Archetypes.

Willpower

Willpower is used much as it is among other *shen*. A Cathayan's beginning Willpower equals her Hun score. Cathayans specializing in the Internalize Soul Discipline can perform amazing feats of Willpower.

Step Five: Finishing Touches

Now it's time to put the last bits of polish on the character. Characters begin play with a Hun rating of 1 and a P'o rating of 3, which can be increased with freebie points. The character's initial

Willpower equals her Hun rating, and must be increased to at least 5 (either through raising the Hun Virtue or by raising the Willpower score separately). The character begins with Chi reservoirs equal to her permanent Chi Virtues. Thus, a character with Yin 4/Yang 3 begins with four points of Yin Chi and three points of Yang Chi.

The character may now spend freebie points, per the chart on p. 79. All beginning Kuei-jin gain 15 freebie points and may increase any Traits desired. Like Kindred, Kuei-jin may take Merits and Flaws at this time (see below).

Merits and Flaws

Kuei-jin may take Merits and Flaws just like other vampires. Indeed, Merits and Flaws are common among these beings, who are so unusual and so bound by karmic ties. Merits and Flaws can reflect unfinished mortal business or the peculiarities of a particular Kuei-jin's Second Breath.

Recommended and Disallowed Merits and Flaws

Psychological

Recommended — Code of Honor, Higher Purpose, Intolerance, Nightmares, Prey Exclusion, Territorial, Vengeance, Driving Goal, Hatred

Disallowed — Berserker, Dual Nature

Mental

Recommended — Common Sense, Concentration, Light Sleeper, Iron Will, Amnesia

Disallowed — None

Awareness

Recommended — Any are fine, though none is particularly appropriate.

Disallowed — None

Aptitudes

Recommended — Natural Linguist

Disallowed — Eat Food (Cathayans can automatically eat food)

Supernatural

Recommended — Medium (especially for Yin vampires), Spirit Mentor, Destiny, Cursed, Repulsed by Garlic (this classic bit of vampire lore is thought to have *originated* in China), Haunted (especially by disapproving ancestors), Dark Fate

Disallowed — True Faith, Light-Sensitive

Kindred Ties

Disallowed — All, unless the Kuei-jin is an undercover operative in a Kindred-oriented chronicle. A few (Enemy, Notoriety) can be used in Kuei-jin chronicles, but be careful.

Mortal Society

Recommended — Nightclub, Corporate Ties (in an appropriate city), Criminal Ties (Yakuza *gumi* and triads are ideal Scarlet Screens for vampires), Hunted (Shih)

Disallowed — None

Physical

Recommended — Huge Size, Allergic, Disfigured, Child, Deformity, Monstrous

Disallowed — Baby Face (Yang vampires automatically have similar powers, while Yin find such a ruse virtually impossible), Misplaced Heart, Efficient Digestion, Selective Digestion, Thin-Blooded

Akuma (3 pt. Flaw)

Either through vassalage to the Yama Kings or violation of Kuei-jin tradition, you have been branded *akuma* — a devil-ridden outcast. You are ostracized from Kuei-jin society, exempt from any consideration under the Fivefold Way, and other Kuei-jin are within their rights to hunt you down and destroy you.

Because of the sheer size of the Middle Kingdom, it might be possible to conceal your identity and "pass" in Cathayan society for a time. You might even be a member of a *wu*, in which you masquerade as a respectable vampire. Also, certain courts, such as the Green and Golden Courts, either care little for the old traditions or ask fewer questions. Nonetheless, your unlife is likely to be a perilous one.

If you actually do serve a Yama King, you may choose to have the Merit of Demon Mentor, which is a separate five-point Merit that may be purchased only by *akuma*. Your demonic mentor often visits you in nightmares to give you advice and orders. The Yama King may also gift you with supernatural talismans from time to time. All Yama Kings are notorious for their intolerance of failure, however, so it is wise to stay in their good graces.

Shadowguiding and the P'o

The P'o of the Cathayans is virtually identical to the P'o that manifests in Jade Kingdom wraiths — not surprising, given that Cathayans are essentially spirits reborn into material bodies. As such, the concept of Shadowguiding, from Wraith: The Oblivion, is perfectly appropriate for Kindred of the East games.

In brief (very, very brief), Shadowguiding entails another player in the troupe taking the role of the vampire's P'o, playing it according to its Archetype. The P'o serves as a sort of backseat driver to the character, verbally prompting the character to act on instinctual urges ("Look at him! Such excellent features! Surely there is much Chi in that one! Go! Drink him dry now!"). When the P'o takes over the body, the Shadowguide player directs the character, playing the vampire according to the P'o Nature.

Shadowguiding can add a great deal to a chronicle, but it can quickly become distracting or just plain irritating. Its use should be restricted to mature troupes seeking additional roleplaying depth.

Defiled (6 pt. Flaw)

You have ingested corrupt Chi and bear its taint. This Flaw is most common among vampires who fed near the blasted zones of Hiroshima or Nagasaki, but any site of tainted Chi has the potential to defile a vampire.

Defiled vampires constantly suffer nightmares and burning pain. Thus, defiled vampires' wound penalties are actually reduced by one (-2 becomes -1, etc.). However, anytime a defiled vampire botches any roll involving the expenditure of Chi or Willpower, he must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 6). Failure induces a horrid physiological reaction — from one to five (one die, divided by two) points of Chi spontaneously reject themselves from the Kuei-jin's body. The vampire vomits the Chi as a disgusting (and unusable) sludge. Furthermore, the vampire loses a permanent Health Level from the accompanying internal burns. This Health Level cannot be restored through any widely known method, though rumors persist that certain reclusive bodhisattvas know a cure. Few Kuei-jin with this Flaw live very long unlives, and most are immediately branded as *akuma*.

Different Body (1 pt. Flaw)

You were forced to reincarnate in a body different from the one that housed your soul during mortal life. This body is not entirely comfortable to you, and this discomfort might manifest itself in the form of nervous ties, involuntary twitches or similar habits. Occasionally, you might spontaneously display a mannerism of the previous body's inhabitant — and if, by ill fortune, the body's original soul still exists as a wraith or spirit, unlife can get interesting indeed....

Illiterate (3 pt. Flaw)

You can neither read nor write. No matter how many dots of Linguistics you possess, your aptitude is solely for the spoken form of all languages. You may not learn to read until this Flaw has been bought off.

Superstitious (1 or 3 pt. Flaw)

You have inherited some of the superstitions associated with the Hungry Dead. Vampires who cannot enter a Shinto shrine (because they are impure) or who recoil from mirrors suffer from a one-point Flaw. Truly outrageous superstitions (compulsively stopping to count grains of rice thrown in your path, recoiling from human saliva) count as three-point Flaws.

Vengeful Ancestors (4 pt. Flaw)

Your ancestors disapprove of what you have become...and they take every opportunity to let you know it. You are continually haunted by one or more ghosts: possibly a mortified (pardon the pun) ancestor, possibly a wraithly ex-lover who wails remorsefully over your shameful existence as one of the Hungry Dead. This spirit plagues you constantly, possibly scaring away prey or inconveniencing you in various minor ways. Behaving piously and performing tasks for the spirit might cause it to cease troubling you for a time, but, until the Flaw is bought off, it always comes back. Of course, certain vampires are more than capable of dealing with the dead, but behaving forcefully toward an ancestor or family member can have serious karmic repercussions.

The Prelude

A prelude is as important for Kuei-jin as it is for Kindred, and many of the same questions apply. The unique experience of the Second Breath does make for some differences, though. The following questions are specific to Kuei-jin characters and, we hope, can help players and Storytellers flesh out their Hungry Dead.

• **What were you like in life?**

Kuei-jin are not innocent victims. Among other things, Kuei-jin follow a Dharma in an attempt to atone for bad karma accumulated during life. As such, understanding of a Kuei-jin's mortal life is immensely important for determining how the Kuei-jin acts following her Second Breath. What bad karma did you accumulate in life that led to your return as one of the Hungry Dead? Has the trauma of the Second Breath made you decide to change your ways, or do you act much as you did in life? Do you still maintain ties to your living family? Do you seek a living mortal, out of love or desire for vengeance (or both)?

• **How did you die?**

By its very nature, the Second Breath can be undergone only by beings with a great will to live again. Accordingly, very few Kuei-jin die in anything resembling a peaceful manner. Many Kuei-jin have interesting stories to tell about their deaths. Were you buried with improper rites, or did you leave crucial tasks unfulfilled? Did you die violently or in a humiliating manner, so that your Demon howled for vengeance even as you passed away? Do you even remember your death?

• **Do you remember any details of your time in the Yomi World?**

The afterlife is a crucial shaping experience for Kuei-jin. Some, mercifully, remember little of their time in Yomi; others return traumatized and half-mad from their experiences in the Thousand Hells. Did your P'o simply wander in the void, or did it meet other spirits? Was it captured and tortured — perhaps by a Yama King? Did you meet any lost loves, enemies, etc., in Yomi? Are you indebted to demons or other malignant spirits?

• **Did you return as *chih-mei*, and if so, do you remember any of this time? Did you do anything you regret?**

Most Kuei-jin pass through the *chih-mei* "larval stage"; some never leave it. This early, monstrous existence often scars Kuei-jin; some attract the ire of demon hunters, and others inadvertently commit atrocities for which offended parties seek a reckoning. Because a *chih-mei* returns near the site of his grave, there is always the potential to prey on persons known to him in life (even relatives). Did your capture cause great difficulties, for which jina and mandarins might still resent you?

• **What were the particulars of your *ré*?**

The *ré* — the period of instruction during which a Kuei-jin is taught how to behave and how to use her powers — is one of the most important shaping experiences in Kuei-jin culture. The *ré* is where most Kuei-jin meet *sifus* (mentors), and friends and enemies made during the *ré* can stay with the character throughout her unlife. Did you take readily to your training, or were you a willful and recalcitrant pupil? Did you particularly impress — or disgust — a particular jina or mandarin? Did you develop a rivalry with another disciple?

• **What are your opinions of your Dharma and of Golconda?**

All Kuei-jin are rigorously instructed — brainwashed, one might say — into accepting the teachings of a Dharma, in order to avoid complete servitude to the P'o. A Dharma also provides mystic understanding that, in turn, leads to greater power. All of which doesn't mean that characters enjoy being force-fed a bunch of new beliefs. Do you strive for Golconda, or do you think the whole thing's a bunch of superstitious hogwash?

Designing the *Wu* and Court

A chronicle with the characters as wandering vagabonds can be entertaining, but it is much more evocative (and convenient) to have all the characters belong to the same *wu*, complete with *guanxi* bonds and customs.

• **Name:** What is the *wu*'s name?

• **Nushi:** Does the *wu* have a guardian spirit to advise its members? Many *wu* make pacts with spirits over the centuries. Nushi typically serve *wu* aligned toward goals pleasing to the spirit; for example, south *wu* directed toward war might gain the patronage of a battle-demon from the Realm of Fighting Spirits, while west *wu* might pay homage to an ancestor-ghost from the Dark Kingdom of Jade.

• **Structure:** Many *wu* are set up like the families the Kuei-jin left behind, with the eldest vampire assuming the title of "Father" or "Mother" and the younger members becoming "Eldest Brother," "Second Sister," etc. These types of *wu* have tight *guanxi* bonds and established hierarchies. The "Father" or "Mother" is expected to protect his or her charges, but he or she also demands obedience. Other *wu* are fairly democratic, with no clear-cut leaders, which is probably best for a typical troupe, although it can be a challenging roleplaying experience to function in a hierarchical structure, especially if other players are involved.

• **Rituals:** Many *wu* practice rituals handed down since the earliest nights of the Fourth Age. A *wu* might gather to honor the spirits during the Dragon Boat Festival, or trek into the hengeyokai-haunted wilds to meditate on *The Blood Sutras*, or live as mortals for a month out of every year. Then again, more anarchic *wu* simply live from night to night, with little concern for the morrow.

• **History:** The Hundred Corpse Families have existed for millennia; as members are inducted, meet Final Death, fall from Dharmic grace or leave the *wu* in pursuit of ultimate enlightenment, the *wu*, as a whole, gains a rich history and legacy. Newer *wu* have existed for mere centuries or decades, and the characters may form a self-contained and newly created *wu*.

• **Customs:** Do all the members of the *wu* tattoo themselves? Does the *wu* inflict harsh punishments on members who fail in their tasks, or do the vampires go on periodic "binge and party" sprees? Does the *wu* participate in mortal politics or remain strictly aloof from the herds? Is the *wu* tight and insular, or (particularly in the case of a *wu* with low *guanxi* among its members) do its members pursue their own interests and only rarely converge?

• **Affiliated Mortals:** Many *wu* have tongs or Scarlet Screens attached to them, both for utility and for companionship. Is the characters' *wu* the nucleus of a corporation or crime syndicate, or perhaps the guiding fist behind a petty warlord or

dictator? If mortals are affiliated with the *wu*, are they aware of whom they serve, or do they view the characters as potent and dangerous, but nonetheless human, allies?

Directed *Wu*

Wu, like characters, can have a direction, indicating the purpose the *wu* is supposed to fulfill. By fulfilling these duties, the Hundred Corpse Families keep mortal and supernatural society harmonious, while the vampires work toward karmic redemption. The *wu*'s direction, if any, is typically chosen during its inception, as the mandarins assign the new disciples a task to fulfill. Using their diverse abilities and directional mandates to achieve a specific end, the vampires thereby gain insight into how their existence relates to the Ten Thousand Things of the Great Cycle. Or so the ancestors hope.

Typical functions of directed *wu* include the following:

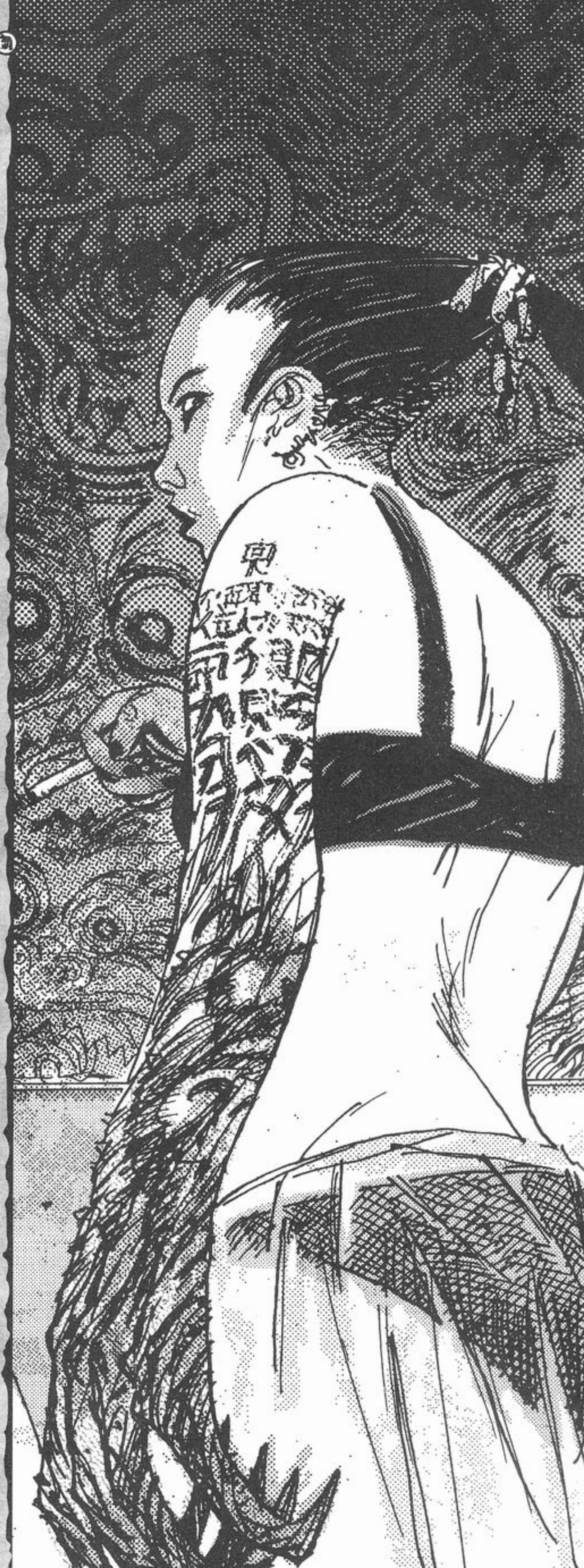
- **North:** Magistrate (a "detective" *wu*, like immortal versions of Judge Dee), disciplinary (punishes transgressors of Kuei-jin law or custom), guardian
- **West:** Spirit (the *wu* pacifies — or subdues — hostile/malignant spirits), ritual (performs collective dragon rites), messenger (bears messages between different courts or between Kuei-jin and other *shen*)
- **Center:** Soul (*wu* tracks down and cures vampires in the grip of their P'o), questing (undertakes quests for ancient artifacts or Dharmic truths), mediator
- **East:** Infiltration, subversion, harvester (makes sure there are plenty of tasty mortals for the Kuei-jin community)
- **South:** War/terrorist, leadership, artistic

As characters pass through multiple lifetimes and duties change, the direction of the *wu* can also change. A *wu* can be consecrated as an east *wu* when first infiltrating a Kindred city, only to become a south *wu* when the ancestors back home order war. It can subsequently change to a center *wu* when the players decide to defy their ancestors and make peace with the Kindred.

The Court

This concept might be hard to grasp for players used to the rigidity of clans and sects. Essentially, a court is a social, spiritual, geographical or political unit of Kuei-jin working to maintain control of a region or advance a specific aim. A court can consist of Kuei-jin from several directions and Dharmas, so long as all are committed to advancing the goals of the court. While court design is technically the Storyteller's purview, more permissive troupes can have a great deal of fun collectively designing the nature of the Kuei-jin court or courts in a region.

Of course, because they are not bound by blood ties, as are Kindred, Kuei-jin can leave one court and join another, or even belong to several courts simultaneously. Courts can be as inclusive or insular as the troupe sees fit, and certain secretive courts might offer patronage (and training) to vampires who distinguish themselves during their *kôa*. For each region in your chronicle, make up one court (or more) and define the characters' relation to it — as agents, outcasts or otherwise.



CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER FOUR: FORCES IN THE LAND

He has breath like rotten fish and a complexion to match. "It's a good thing you came tonight," he says, as pachinko balls rattle nearby. "I was beginning to get angry."

"It won't happen again, Toro-san." My voice sounds flat as flashing lights. Three missing knuckles on my right hand attest to what happens when Toro-san gets angry.

"It had better not." His voice is a wheedle, nasal and sharp. "Disappearing like a little kid. When I was your age, we did not run from the sight of blood!"

I've been practicing my left-handed grip. The gun I hold low, out of view, feels like pride.

Not that I need either one now.

Fishface leans across the table. A bit of tamago quivers on his lip. "Why have you come here again, 'Hito?" he asks. "You must know I won't hire you again."

His final insult in a public place — or a private one, for that matter. With a roar, the gun spits fish guts across the back of the booth.

The tamago falls from his lip. Good. I was beginning to get disgusted.

Everyone turns, of course. But what can they say? That one dead man killed another?

"I had my reasons." I smile to a corpse.

Just like a kid, I disappear.

Generally, in battle, use the normal force to engage; use the extraordinary to win.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Like Kindred, Kuei-jin gain access to various supernatural arts through their transformation. Some of these arts date back to the days of the Wan Xian, when the vampires' precursors used them to battle the forces of the Yama Kings. Other abilities manifested after the scattering and the karmic curse. In any event, Kuei-jin practice a repertoire of mystical crafts every bit as extensive as the Kindred's.

In many ways, these Disciplines superficially resemble ones practiced by Kindred; many allow the evocation of similar, though not identical, effects. However, the powers of Kuei-jin are rooted in an understanding of their condition, not merely an acceptance of it. For Kuei-jin, advancement in Disciplines entails arduous training, meditation, repetitive katas, the chanting of sutras and communion with spirit entities. Although Kuei-jin are not so quick to master their powers as are Kindred, Cathayans' centuries of study pay off in increased versatility.

Kuei-jin are not, of course, limited by bloodline-borne predilections. Indeed, the Disciplines found in these pages are but the most noteworthy expressions of Chi and soul mastery. Other Disciplines, taught by *wu*, courts and even individual masters, are practiced throughout the Middle Kingdom. The Serpent-borne *gaki* of Japan, in particular, are rumored to practice various arts exclusively their own.

Like Kindred Disciplines, Kuei-jin Disciplines are ranked from 1 to 5. Unlike Kindred Disciplines, a specific Kuei-jin "kata" might permit a variety of related effects to be produced. Also, Kuei-jin of great Dharmic understanding (or ones heedless of their P'o) can attain scores of 6, 7 or even higher; alas, space limitations do not permit the inclusion of those potent powers, and so the secrets of the bodhisattvas and arhats must await another night.

Note: Although their users refer to them by remarkably similar terms ("Discipline," "arts," etc.), Kuei-jin "Disciplines" and Kindred "Disciplines" are not the same. Kindred derive their powers from the Blood of Caine, while Kuei-jin gain their powers from mastery of Chi and the dual soul. **Kindred may never learn Kuei-jin Disciplines, and Kuei-jin may never learn Kindred Disciplines.** (How the traitor Zao-lat did so remains a mystery, but one that obviously proved unhealthy to him.)

Types of Disciplines

Kuei-jin group their Disciplines into several categories. The most widely known are Chi Arts, Soul Arts, Demon Arts and Shintai Arts. Shintai Arts allow vampires to study and practice the movement of Chi through their bodies — the five shintai ("god body") forms are transformative arts based on the Kuei-jin elemental system of Blood (Water), Bone (Metal), Jade (Earth), Flesh (Wood), and Ghost-flame (Fire). Chi Arts allow Kuei-jin to evoke internal and ambient Chi for various purposes. Soul Arts allow Kuei-jin to channel and master their Hun and P'o souls. Finally, Demon Arts are special powers unique to the Kuei-jin's dark side of the soul.

Chi Arts

These Disciplines allow a Kuei-jin to evoke mystical effects through redirection of his Chi (or, in some cases, others' Chi or the ambient Chi in the environment). Most Chi Arts allow the channeling of Chi (Yin or Yang) into various tangible effects or augmentations. Kuei-jin commonly study four Chi Arts: Equilibrium (balancing and imbalancing Chi in their own bodies), Tapestry (manipulating ambient Chi), Yin Prana (manipulation of internal Yin), and Yang Prana (manipulation of internal Yang). Many Kuei-jin scholars consider the Shintai Disciplines of Bone and Flesh to be Chi Arts of Yin and Yang, respectively.

Kuei-jin using Chi Arts create mystical "eddies" and other disruptions in the Mirror Lands (see p. 182). Particularly potent uses of Chi might cause reverberations that affect the spirit world for days or even leave long-lasting "tracks" marking the vampire's presence in the area. A botch on any Chi Discipline roll attracts hostile spirits, who are displeased with the vampire's rude disturbance of their surroundings.

It should be noted that most Kindred Disciplines are considered extremely "unnatural" by Kuei-jin. Kindred call on their Blood gracelessly and recklessly, with little concern for what they are trying to do; as such, Kindred warp and bend Chi flows wherever they practice their arts. Although there are no mechanical effects as such, Kindred Disciplines produce ripples and rents in the Middle Kingdom's ambient Chi, and these disruptions are uncomfortable and disturbing to spirits and sensitive Kuei-jin alike. As far as many Kuei-jin are concerned, unrestrained use of Kindred Disciplines speeds up the Great Cycle's deterioration, which is yet another reason these impudent foreigners should be ousted from the Middle Kingdom — or destroyed outright — as soon as possible.

Internal Alchemy

Some Kuei-jin powers manifest as clouds, sprays, flame gouts or other projectile forms. Vampires seeking to strike victims with these powers roll Stamina + Athletics or Firearms (player's choice) to target a victim and may project the attack 10 feet per point of Strength (Demon Chi may be spent to add to this range). The victim may choose to dodge the attack normally. If hit, the victim may resist the attack per the specific power description.

Equilibrium

The Discipline of Equilibrium allows the vampire to regulate and redirect the flow of Chi in her body. Masters of Equilibrium commonly concern themselves with maintaining proper Chi balance in their systems; conversely, though, Equilibrium can be used to create grotesque Chi imbalances in individuals who displease the user. Most abilities require a touch, and this Discipline may not affect ghosts and spirits unless the vampire has other Disciplines enabling her to touch such beings.

• MASTER FLOW

Vampires with Equilibrium quickly master the basic processes of regulating Chi flows in their bodies.

System: The vampire spends three turns in contemplation, spends a Willpower point and rolls Intelligence + Meditation (difficulty 8). For each success, one Chi point may be converted to its opposite.

Normally, a Cathayan may spend only Yin or only Yang in the same turn. This power enables the vampire to ignore that restriction, and spend as much Chi as her Dharma score allows.

•• ADJUST BALANCE

By touching a victim, the vampire may adjust the Chi levels in that victim's body. A target may be overwhelmed with Yin or Yang, or an imbalanced being may be restored to health.

System: The vampire touches the victim, then rolls Perception + Medicine (difficulty 8). For each success, one point of temporary Chi may be converted to its opposite. In this manner, the vampire may render Kuei-jin foes imbalanced or (at least) incapable of accessing certain Disciplines. This power can also be used to heal Kuei-jin who are in an imbalanced state.

This power may also be used on mortals and Kindred to adjust their internal chemistry. The vampire decides whether he wants to attune the target to Yin, to Yang or to Balance. He then rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Success balances or imbalances the target in the direction desired.

A mortal or Kindred attuned to Yang becomes feverish and manic. For the remainder of the night, the victim spends Willpower on nearly any task attempted. A Kindred suffers a +1 difficulty to resist frenzy.

A mortal or Kindred attuned to Yin becomes lethargic and melancholy. For the remainder of the night, the victim is overwhelmed by negative, possibly even suicidal, thoughts. Difficulties of all Willpower rolls increase by one, and a Kindred suffers a +1 difficulty to resist Rötschreck.

A mortal restored to a state of Balance enjoys greatly improved physical and mental health. Most normal ailments and infections are cured (though truly debilitating sicknesses such as cancer and AIDS are beyond the scope of this power); this power's effects last for one month, during which all difficulties of any rolls to resist disease or Derangements are reduced by one. A Kindred adjusted to Balance finds it easier to resist frenzy (-1 to difficulty) for the remainder of the night.

••• SHIFT THE BALANCE

With this power, a vampire may regulate the levels of Chi in her own body. She may attune herself to Yin or Yang and become a conductor for positive or negative energy.

System: The vampire spends a Willpower point and rolls Stamina + Meditation (difficulty 8). For each success, the vampire may raise a permanent Chi Virtue by one, while lowering its opposite. A Chi Virtue may never be reduced below zero. If the vampire creates a difference of three or greater between her Yin and Yang levels, she suffers the normal effects of imbalance.

The effects of this power last for one scene.

•••• CHI INTERRUPT

A vampire at this level of power may interrupt the flow of Chi through another being. This interruption causes spasms and, if the Chi points are hit properly, total paralysis.

System: The vampire touches the victim and rolls Dexterity + Medicine (difficulty of the opponent's Stamina + 3). For each success, the victim suffers -1 to Dice Pools for one turn (thus, with two successes, the victim would be at -2 to Dice Pools for two turns). If the vampire scores four or more successes, the opponent is completely paralyzed for a scene. Mortals take a Health Level of damage in addition to the above effects; victims with Stamina scores of 2 or less typically die of heart failure upon being hit with this power.

••••• CHI MASTERY

This power is one of the most feared Kuei-jin arts, for with it, a vampire becomes master of the Chi in others' bodies. With a touch, a vampire can bleed the Chi from a victim or can corrupt the Chi flow, rendering the victim defiled.

System: The vampire must touch the victim for the art to take effect.

To disperse Chi, the vampire rolls Dexterity + Equilibrium (difficulty 6). A victim with Equilibrium may attempt to resist by rolling Stamina + Equilibrium (difficulty 6). For each success, one Chi point disperses from the target's body into the surrounding atmosphere. If this power is used against Kindred, an equivalent amount of Blood Points are instantly rendered inert. If used against a ghoul, enough Blood Points may be rendered inert to turn the target back into a human; if so, the target suffers the effects that a normal human would (see below). Other supernatural beings have an equivalent amount of power (Gnosis, Quintessence, Pathos, Glamour, Sekhem, etc.) dispersed. Humans suffer one Health Level of damage per success, although this damage heals at the rate of one point per day.

To infect Chi, the vampire rolls Intelligence + Equilibrium (difficulty 8). A resistance roll may be made as above. For each success, one Chi point becomes corrupted, infecting the victim. This Chi cannot be used, and it begins to rot the victim's body from the inside out. The victim suffers one automatic Health Level of normal damage per turn until all the infected Chi is spent. Again, this power corrupts equivalent Advantages in other *shen* (e.g., a werewolf would take damage until she spent all of her "infected" Gnosis).

A human whose Chi is infected is extremely unfortunate; he takes one Health Level of damage per turn and will die unless treated by a physician with knowledge of Yin-Yang healing. To heal this power's effects with Yin-Yang healing, a practitioner must have Medicine 4+ and the appropriate background (i.e., training in Eastern medicine). Healing requires the doctor to make an Intelligence + Medicine roll (difficulty 8) and score more successes than the vampire who caused the infection. A vampire with Equilibrium •• or greater can also cure the infection by rolling Intelligence + Equilibrium (difficulty 8), then scoring more successes than the attacker.

TAPESTRY

Just as mortal *fang shih* can manipulate the Middle Kingdom's Chi forces through geomancy, so can certain erudite Kuei-jin use

the Discipline of Tapestry to manipulate dragon lines more directly. Through the practice of Tapestry, the vampire attunes himself to Yin and Yang forces in the wind, water and soil, then manipulates those forces for a variety of effects.

A vampire with this power may typically affect an area with a radius equal to her Perception + Tapestry score, in yards.

• Spirit Call

The vampire first learns to manipulate the threads of the spirit world. By weaving them in interesting (or annoying) fashion, the vampire can attempt to lure a nearby spirit. In this manner, the spirits of rocks and streams — or the ghosts of the dead — may awaken and answer the vampire's call.

System: The vampire rolls Intelligence + (Yin or Yang) (difficulty of the local Wall). Success attracts a Yin- or Yang-spirit, who will come (at its leisure) to investigate. The spirit is under no obligation to the vampire (who must use other powers to control or even perceive it) and is created by the Storyteller.

If the vampire wants to call a specific spirit, he must know its name and must score three or more successes on the roll; furthermore, the spirit in question must be in a nearby part of the spirit worlds (as determined by the Storyteller).

•• Chi Ward

The vampire may manipulate ambient dragon lines in the area, weakening or strengthening the area's Wall.

System: The vampire rolls Willpower versus a difficulty of the local Wall. Success enables her to raise or lower the local Wall by one for a scene. The Wall may never be lowered below 1, and if it is raised to 10, no being in the area may use Chi powers of any sort. Spirits in a vicinity with a Wall rating of 10 must roll Willpower (difficulty 6) or flee the area; in any event, they will be extremely uncomfortable and unable to spend Chi. This power may be used only once per scene.

••• Chi-Shaping

At this level, the vampire has become more adept in her control over Chi lines. She can weave local dragon lines into various shapes, creating invisible skeins, walls, nets, and even traps of spirit energy, which can have profound effects on the environment.

System: The vampire spends three turns in concentration, expends a point of Chi and rolls Perception + Crafts (Chi-shaping) against a difficulty of the local Wall. The effects last for a scene and depend on the number of successes rolled. Only one effect can be chosen (thus, infecting an area with bad *joss* and weaving a Chi-trap are two separate uses of the Chi-shaping power).

1 success The vampire can shape the area's Chi flows into loops, whorls, spirals or whatever she desires. In particular, she may use ambient Chi energy to deflect and rechannel Chi attacks aimed at her. The vampire gains one extra die to defend against any Chi-based or magickal projectile aimed directly at her. Such things include, but are not limited to, Ghost-flame and Chi-breath attacks, Forces magick, elemental shapeshifter gifts, Lure of Flames Thaumaturgy, and most rituals that affect the vampire directly.

2 successes The vampire can cause "good" or "bad" emanations of Chi to flow through her construct, which translates into good or bad *joss* in the immediate area. If attuning someone (typically herself) to good *joss*, the lucky target can win almost any gambling game attempted. Furthermore, any roll she botches is treated as a normal failure, and she may reroll any "10" results

of her die rolls, as if she had a specialty in the task attempted, to garner additional successes.

If attuning a specific person to bad *joss*, the vampire must roll Manipulation + Yin (difficulty 8). Otherwise, the entire area, including the vampire, is affected. If successful, for the remainder of the scene, any roll of "1" *or* "2" on the part of the victim (or anyone in the area) is treated as a botch. Vampires who cast this effect over an area typically hide and let the bad *joss* do its work.

Bad *joss* can be canceled out by good *joss*, and *vice versa*.

3 successes — The vampire can weave traps to catch spirits. To snare a spirit, the vampire must be able to see it. The vampire can then roll Dexterity + Crafts (Chi-shaping) in a resisted roll against the spirit's Gnosis (difficulty 6 for both rolls). If the vampire scores more successes than the spirit, the trap immobilizes the spirit for a scene or until the spirit agrees to perform a service for the vampire.

• • • • Ride the Dragon

The vampire may tap into a local dragon line and ride its Chi flow, effectively teleporting herself from place to place. Kuei-jin typically use this power to travel from one population center's dragon nest to another. In this manner, Kuei-jin courts can extend their influence over vast geographical areas.

System: The vampire must find an appropriate dragon line (Perception + Chi Virtue, difficulty of the local Wall). This search typically takes a number of minutes equal to the Wall rating. Once one is found, the vampire must then make a Dexterity + (appropriate Chi Virtue) roll (difficulty 8) to center herself over it. Success enables instantaneous teleportation, to a maximum distance governed by the number of successes on the centering roll.

1 success	500 feet (or less, if desired)
2 successes	2,500 feet
3 successes	1 mile
4 successes	10 miles
5 successes	100 miles

The successful vampire appears in the designated spot at the beginning of the next turn, and she gains four dice to initiative; she may take her full turn.

A botch deposits the vampire at some random site within a 100-mile radius.

• • • • • Chi Rift

This art allows the vampire to strengthen Yin and Yang lines to such a degree that he opens a portal between the Middle Kingdom and the Fabric of the Yin or Yang World. This portal causes devastating effects on the immediate environment, as raw spiritual energy torrents out of the spirit worlds into the Middle Kingdom. These "storms" of spirit force start out small, but most quickly blossom beyond the vampire's control to become devastating whirlwinds of elemental energy.

This power causes severe stress on both the Middle Kingdom and the spirit worlds. It is not undertaken lightly; reckless use of Chi Rift is clear grounds for severe punishment, by Kuei-jin and enraged spirits alike. Certain *akuma* are whispered to open rifts to the Yama Kings' Hells via this power, but such uses are

inauspicious and we will not speak of them further here.

System: The vampire spends three turns in concentration, expends three points of the appropriate type of Chi, then rolls Intelligence + Rituals (difficulty of the local Wall).

If opening a portal to Yang, the vampire creates a localized Yang-tempest, which the hengeyokai refer to as a Wyldstorm. In the Middle Kingdom, it manifests as a howling typhoon. Spirits of rain, thunder and wind eagerly ride the Wyldstorm from the Yang World into the Middle Kingdom. By speaking to those spirits (and rolling Manipulation + Rituals, difficulty 8), the vampire can direct the activity of the storm to some degree, although this control is by no means perfect; the gods of wind and water are quite fickle.

If opening a portal to Yin, the vampire actually manifests raw Yin energy in the Middle Kingdom and creates a localized Yin-tempest (in wraithly parlance, a Maelstrom) in the Yin World. In the Middle Kingdom, this manifests as a roiling cloud of black energy, shot through with rains of bone and hissing ebony lightning. Ghosts and Yin-spirits of all descriptions ride the tempest's winds, howling and wreaking havoc. Again, by speaking to the ghosts (Manipulation + Rituals, difficulty 8), the vampire can exercise a modicum of control over the storm.

In any event, material beings trapped in the center of either type of storm take a number of Health Levels per turn equal to 5 - Stamina. Kuei-jin can resist this damage by rolling permanent Yin or Yang (difficulty 7), whichever is appropriate; Kindred can resist the damage with Fortitude.

Both types of storms are extremely perilous for travelers in the spirit worlds. A spirit traveler caught by a spirit storm must roll Stamina + (Chi Virtue) (difficulty 9) or be blown off course, hurled into the depths of the Fabric and hopelessly lost.

Yang Prana

Kuei-jin are taught many exercises and rituals to calm, evoke and control their Chi. The most astute vampires study the ways of the Yin or Yang Prana. The Yang Prana is actually a series of increasingly more difficult forms and postures, which gradually allow a vampire to channel more and more of his Yang.

Study of the Yang Prana requires great vigor and flexibility; a vampire may never increase his levels in the Yang Prana to a level higher than his Dexterity or Stamina rating, whichever of these two is lower (e.g., a vampire seeking to raise Yang Prana to 4 must have Dexterity and Stamina ratings of 4 or higher). Additionally, use of any of these powers requires relatively free and uninhibited motion; a bound vampire, for example, may use none of the Yang Prana powers.

• Principle of Motion

Yang is the basis of motion and activity. The vampire calls forth his internal Yang energy, allowing it to flow through him and augment his actions. Some vampiric combat masters routinely slay their foes with *iajutsu* strikes before the foe can even react, let alone defend.

System: The vampire spends one or more Yang points. For each Yang point spent, the vampire gains either three extra dice on initiative or one additional action next turn. The vampire may spend no more Yang points than he has dots in this Discipline.

• • Yang Mantle

The vampire first learns how to evoke her animus, an aura of Chi that she can will about herself. This animus, or mantle, is invisible to mortals, but it feels to them like electricity in the air. Observers using Chi Sight, Aura Perception or similar powers can see it clearly. To such mystic perception, the animus often appears as a spiritual double of the vampire, although some vampires manifest anima in the shape of zodiacal beasts or objects of Dharmic significance. If the P'o is dominant, the animus typically resembles the character's Demon Shintai avatar, though the P'o can will the animus to appear as a shapeless mass of Chi energy.

In any event, evocation of the Yang Mantle has several beneficial effects. The mantle serves notice to mortals and spirits alike that a powerful master of Yang is in the vicinity. Furthermore, the vampire can channel her animus through a weapon of wood, the element of Yang, to gain great advantages in battle.

System: A Yang animus costs one point of Yang to evoke. It provides several benefits.

- By using Lifesight to sense the emotional aura of a person or animal, then making a Perception + Empathy (for mortals) or Animal Ken (for animals) roll, the vampire can attune his mantle to the aura of the mortal or animal. The difficulty of the roll is 5 (for animals) or the target's Willpower (for mortals). If successful, the mortal or animal in question is attracted to, and favorably inclined toward, the vampire.
- The vampire can also use the mantle to influence Yang-spirits, provided she can see them. While the animus is active, the vampire can use Social Abilities such as Intimidation or Subterfuge against spirits by rolling against a difficulty of the spirit's Gnosis + 4.
- Finally, the vampire can attune her mantle to the natural Chi resonances of wood, the element of Yang. A vampire who channels her Yang aura properly gains power over that element.

While holding a wooden object, the vampire can channel Yang energy through that object. For one Chi point, a wooden object, such as a staff or nunchaku, can be charged with Yang for a scene. So long as the vampire holds the object, it inflicts aggravated damage.

For an extra Chi point, the weapon can be caused to spark with Yang energy for a turn. While infused with this Yang, the weapon can be used to strike ghosts and spirits and to inflict damage directly to their Chi. Alternatively, the vampire can discharge the Yang as a bolt of scarlet flame, inflicting three dice of aggravated damage to a material target (Dexterity + Melee to aim, normal firearms penalties).

• • • Dragon Dance

Through a series of wild leaps, acrobatic katas and yogic posturings, the vampire enters a battle trance. He is capable of impressive combat feats while in this state.

System: The vampire spends a point of Yang Chi. No roll is needed. While engrossed in the Dragon Dance, the vampire is considered to be in a controlled form of fire soul. All difficulties to influence or control the vampire increase by one. The vampire suffers no wound penalties, and he may add attack successes of a Brawl, Martial Arts or Melee maneuver to his damage Dice Pool, as if the attack were from a firearm. The

vampire may spend Yang Chi to gain extra initiative or additional actions, and he may even activate the Black Wind Discipline if he chooses (though this latter activity is often a swift ticket to a prolonged and uncontrollable frenzy).

• • • • Eightfold Yang Mantle

By whirling and twisting, the vampire refines her animus about her, then shapes it into whatever form she desires.

System: Evoking the Eightfold Yang Mantle takes two turns and costs one (or more; see below) point of Yang. The vampire may choose to concentrate or diffuse her Yang animus. If she concentrates it, her whole body crackles with roiling, scarlet energy. This aura adds one soak die per Yang point spent against Yang-based attacks, attacks from wooden weapons and fire attacks.

If she diffuses the animus, the aura radiates out from her body in rippling waves. By rolling Wits + Crafts (Chi-shaping), she may mold the animus around her, shaping it into whatever form she desires and, thus, effectively cloaking herself in an illusion. The difficulty of the roll is based on the complexity of the desired shape. Beings who view the vampire with Lifesight or Chi Sight realize that the object of their scrutiny is radiant with Chi, but cannot detect the illusion for what it is, unless they roll Perception + Alertness and score more successes than the wielder of the power scored when creating the illusion.

This power may be "stacked" on top of the Level Two Yang Mantle power, provided the vampire is willing to pay the Chi costs for both.

• • • • • Semblance of the Scarlet Queen

The vampire floods his entire body with Yang energy in one mighty pulse, transforming him into Yang-substance. In this form, the vampire essentially distills himself to his spirit nature; he may walk among the clouds and treat with the lords of the Yang World.

System: The vampire concentrates for a turn, then spends three Yang points and rolls Yang + Rituals against a difficulty of the local Wall. If successful, the vampire's body turns to spirit-stuff formed from raw Yang energy, and the vampire passes into the Yang World. While in spirit form, the vampire is invisible and incorporeal to material beings, although he can choose to become visible. He may pass freely through barriers and the like, and material attacks are incapable of affecting him.

The vampire can affect and be affected by Yang-spirits (through the use of Hun, P'o and Willpower). For purposes of spirit combat, the vampire can withstand an amount of damage equal to his Health Levels + permanent Yang rating. Chi-based attacks (such as Yin ghost-flame) affect him normally. He may be affected by mental attacks, such as Soul Disciplines, provided the wielder of the power can perceive him at all.

The vampire remains in spirit form until she chooses to recross the Wall into the material world (rolling against a difficulty of the local Wall to do so). She may explore the Yang World as she chooses, interacting with the bizarre and terrifying spirits of that place. While in spirit form, the vampire does not spend Chi to animate herself, but does spend Chi normally to activate powers and heal her spirit body.

Yin Prana

This Discipline, the counterpart to the Yang Prana, allows the vampire to tap into and manipulate her internal Yin energy. Like Yang Prana, Yin Prana relies on motions and postures to utilize the various powers, but these motions are a far cry from the frenzied katas of the Yang Prana. Yin Prana motions are slow, graceful and deliberate. Nonetheless, as with the Yang Prana, wielders of this Discipline must have relative freedom of movement.

For students of the Yin Prana, absolute control is essential. Disciples are well aware that, improperly channeled, Yin energy can generate chaos and death. Yin Prana students often spend entire weeks locked into painfully rigid postures. As with the Yang Prana, the Yin Prana is a complicated endeavor; a student may raise his level in this Discipline no higher than the lower of his Perception and Stamina ratings.

• Shrouded Moon

By concentrating on her Yin energy, then attuning it to the shadows around her, the vampire may become invisible and silent, like a shadow under a new moon. This art is exceedingly useful to Kuei-jin, who use it to sneak up on their prey like the ninja of old.

System: The vampire spends a point of Yin. The vampire must be in an area that provides shadows or concealment. So long as she remains still or moves through shadowy areas no faster than walking speed, she is effectively invisible and inaudible. Beings actively seeking to detect the vampire must have some means of supernatural perception and must successfully roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty of the vampire's Stealth rating + 4).

• • Yin Mantle

This power is identical to the Yang Mantle power on p. 105, save that the vampire conjures forth the essence of her Yin.

System: A Yin animus costs one point of Yin to evoke. It provides several benefits.

• By using Ghostsight to sense the Passions of a ghost, then making a Perception + Occult roll, the vampire can attune his mantle to the aura of the ghost. The difficulty of the roll equals the target's Willpower. If successful, the ghost is attracted to, and favorably inclined toward, the vampire.

• The vampire can also use the mantle to influence other Yin-spirits, provided she can see them. While the animus is active, the vampire can use Social Abilities such as Intimidation or Subterfuge against spirits, rolling against a difficulty of the spirit's Gnosis + 4.

• Finally, the vampire can attune her mantle to the natural Chi resonances of metal, the element of Yin. A vampire who channels her Yin aura properly gains power over that element.

While holding a metal object, the vampire can channel Yin energy through that object. For one Chi point, a metal object, such as a sword, can be charged with Yin for a scene. So long as the vampire holds the object, it inflicts aggravated damage.

For an extra Chi point, the weapon can be caused to crackle with Yin energy for a turn. While infused with this Yin, the weapon can be used to strike ghosts and spirits, thus inflicting damage directly to their Chi. Alternatively, the

vampire can discharge the Yin as a bolt of black lightning, inflicting three dice of aggravated damage to a material target (Dexterity + Melee to aim, normal firearms penalties).

• • • Bone Dance

Through a series of slow, languorous mudras and postures, the vampire focuses her Yin energy into a series of concentrated waves that permeate the surrounding area. All within the area begin to grow lethargic, eventually becoming highly suggestible.

System: The vampire must concentrate for a turn to focus the energies used in the Bone Dance. She then begins the postures of the Dance, spending one Yin point per turn of activation. To perform the Dance successfully, the vampire must roll Stamina + Athletics (difficulty 7). For each success, the Dance must be performed for one turn, cumulatively. Once the vampire reaches the maximum effect desired, the vampire must continue to perform the Bone Dance, but no further Yin need be spent.

1 success/turn Victims grow lethargic. All difficulties to enter fire soul are one greater. Mortal victims add +1 to difficulties of all rolls; *shen* are unaffected.

2 successes/turns Victims grow drowsy and hypnotically suggestible. If using this power on mortal targets, the vampire may lull them into a trancelike state of great suggestibility. The vampire may not command the victims to take aggressive actions, but may request that the victims stand still, allow her to pass, ignore her or otherwise act passively. ("These aren't the fugitives you're looking for." "These aren't the fugitives we're looking for.") Unless the targets succeed in a Willpower roll (difficulty 7), they forget that they ever encountered the vampire.

Shen targets instead grow sluggish, adding +1 to the difficulties of all rolls.

3 successes/turns Mortal victims must make a Willpower roll to avoid slumber. *Shen* grow extremely drowsy, adding +2 to the difficulties of all rolls. A Kindred or Kuei-jin must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 6) to avoid entering torpor for the remainder of the night.

• • • • Eightfold Yin Mantle

The vampire calls forth a crackling black aura of Yin energy, then shapes it into constructs of her desire. Objects created in this manner typically appear to be made of a black, icy substance. Clever vampires use this power to conjure all sorts of useful and deadly toys.

System: The vampire spends a variable amount of Yin points, depending on what she wants to do. The vampire can "solidify" the conjured Yin to create various objects. She can create ropes, chains, claws or blades of a black, icy substance. Creating mundane tools costs a point of Yin, while creation of Melee or thrown weapons costs one Yin for a weapon inflicting Str aggravated damage, +1 Yin per additional point of damage the weapon deals. (Firearms may not be created in this manner, though individual Yin-bullets may, with a Wits + Crafts [Gunsmith] roll [difficulty 10].) Tools created from Yin are steel-hard, freezing cold and seem to sap the warmth from beings they touch; shattering ropes, chains and similar items made of Yin requires a Strength of 5 or greater merely to attempt.

The vampire can conjure Yin energy about her as a form of armor, providing one soak die per Yin point spent against Yin-based attacks, attacks from metal objects and attacks from water- or wind-based weapons.

Finally, the vampire can, by spending three Yin points, solidify her very shadow into a quasi-tangible creature. The vampire spends three Yin to give her shadow substance, then makes a P'o roll (difficulty 8) to imbue the creature with the personality of her Demon. The resulting creature is a savage, twisted thing that is best used as an attack dog. A shadow-creature (known as a *wayang*) has Physical Attributes equal to the vampire's, inflicts Str aggravated damage (from shadowy teeth and claws), and has a number of Health Levels equal to the vampire's P'o rating. It can slither up walls and through cracks, and takes damage as if it were the vampire. The *wayang* remains animate for a number of minutes equal to the vampire's permanent Yin. If the creature is destroyed, the P'o-spark used to animate the shadow washes over the vampire and prompts an immediate roll to avoid shadow soul.

• • • • • Semblance of the Ebon Dragon

The vampire channels Yin through her corpse to transform her entire body into a cloud of pure Yin energy. In this form, she is completely intangible, although she may travel the roads of the Dead and deal with the ghosts of the Dark Kingdom of Jade.

System: Except for the different type of Chi used to activate it, and the fact that the vampire enters the Yin World rather than the Yang World, this power is identical to Semblance of the Scarlet Queen.

Demon Arts

All Kuei-jin bear the taint of the P'o, a condition reflected in their Demon Arts. These Disciplines originate with and are powered by the P'o. A character may never increase a Demon Art to a rating higher than her P'o score.

All characters learn at least one Demon Art following the Second Breath; these arts are instinctively used by *chih-mei*. Some characters might not want to cultivate such aspects of their personalities; unfortunately, the P'o typically insists otherwise.

While the character uses Demon Arts, he may not use any Soul Disciplines except Chi'iu Muh. Generally speaking, evocation of a Demon Art allows the P'o to manifest itself in the vampire's consciousness; great effort is needed to avoid frenzy or P'o takeover while any Demon Art is used. Anytime a Demon Art is invoked, the character must make a shadow nature roll (see p. 151) to avoid losing control to the P'o).

Black Wind

Allowing the rage of the P'o to channel itself through her body, the Kuei-jin becomes inhumanly swift — a typhoon of destruction. Essentially, Black Wind is a focused — or not so focused — frenzy. While in the Black Wind state, the character gains powers similar to prolonged use of Demon Chi (see p. 91), but because the character is in a continuous demonic fury, she gains demonic energy as fast as she uses it. This Discipline is a common one among more warlike Kuei-jin, who use it to become whirling blurs of carnage.

System: This power costs the Kuei-jin one point of Demon Chi per turn of use. For each dot in the power, the vampire may take an extra action (as with Celerity), arithmetically increase running speed or add one automatic success to a Brawl or Melee

damage Dice Pool. Each turn, the vampire may reassign dots. So, a vampire with Black Wind 4 may choose to take two extra actions, run at double speed, and add one success to all Brawl damage Dice Pools. The next turn, he may choose to take four extra actions and add no dice to damage. Extra actions gained by Black Wind occur after all other characters have taken their actions for the turn.

While using Black Wind, the vampire may not use any other Discipline except Demon Shintai, although he may maintain previously activated powers. Moreover, each turn the power is used, the vampire must roll P'o (difficulty 8); if he fails this roll, he enters fire soul. A frenzied vampire suffers no wound penalties, but may not use firearms or any other missile weapons; he instead prefers to shred foes face to face — of course, such is the intent of most who use Black Wind. The problem lies in the fact that a vampire using this power just as readily attacks allies as enemies.

Black Wind, like all Demon Arts, is a violent Discipline. While accessing Black Wind, a character must use it to perform deeds suitable to the P'o's dominance. Thus, a character could use Black Wind to attack or move with superhuman swiftness, but not to play a guitar at superhuman speed.

Demon Shintai

Quite simply, this Discipline allows the P'o to manifest itself in the Kuei-jin's body. When this Discipline is activated, the character assumes a monstrous form, appearing as nothing less than a demon-spirit from the Yomi World.

Characters who assume such forms regularly are often called *raksha*. This Discipline is occasionally taught by evil spirits, in exchange for the character's service in the material world. Vampires who assume their demon form too often are likely to attract the notice of the Yama Kings.

System: It takes three points of Demon Chi and three turns to transform into the demon form. While the character is in demon form, the character's Charisma and Appearance drop to zero, but the vampire gains cumulative Physical Attribute bonuses, per the listings below:

•	+1 Strength, Dexterity, Stamina
••	+1 Strength
•••	+1 Stamina
••••	+1 Strength
•••••	+1 Dexterity

Additionally, for each dot in the Discipline, the character gains one of the features on the following page. As the character advances in the Discipline, she may continue to "build" her demon form. Once a feature is selected, it is permanent; the character always assumes the same demon form.

The specifics of a vampire's demon form are left to the player's fertile imagination. P'o Natures play a part in the specific transformation; thus, a Demon form might be covered in corded muscle, hairy and tusked, while a Slave form might be laced with scars and obscene tattoos, and a Legalist form might appear as a demonic Yama King.

Shintai Disciplines

Shintai, a Japanese word meaning "god body," refers to those Disciplines in which vampires learn to focus Chi energy through their physical forms. The shintai are ancient arts that have disseminated throughout Kuei-jin society. Although simi-

lar in some respects to such Western arts as Protean and Vicissitude, the shintai are much more meticulous and systematically studied. Most vampires view mastery of a shintai as demonstrating a corresponding understanding of Chi principles, and thus a significant step toward mastery of self.

There are five commonly practiced shintai arts; each corresponds to one of the five elements of Chinese thought. Kuei-jin, being vampires, have adapted the five-element system into a schematic representative of their undead bodies; thus, for Cathayans, the five shintai are Blood (Water), Bone (Metal), Jade (Earth), Flesh (Wood), and Ghost-Flame (Fire).

Chi Attunement: Unlike Western Kindred, Kuei-jin cannot automatically raise Physical Attributes with Chi. However, mastery of each shintai involves a series of basic katas and exercises, through which the vampire learns to raise a particular Attribute to superhuman levels. Accordingly, each shintai lists a particular "Chi Attunement" Attribute; vampires who have studied the shintai in question may spend Chi (either sort) to raise the attuned Attribute, on a one-for-one basis, up to a maximum of the Discipline rating. Thus, a Kuei-jin with Blood Shintai 4 can spend up to four Chi to raise her Strength by four points (maximum), if she chooses.

Blood Shintai

The Blood Shintai Discipline, the Water element analog, concentrates on the ebb and flow of Chi through the character's circulatory system.

Blood Shintai disciples can be attuned to Yin, Yang or Balance; in the view of a practitioner, Yin and Yang compose but one aspect of the cyclical flows that permeate eternity like blood through a body. As blood is in constant, yet regulated, motion, flowing from the heart through veins to limbs, so Yin and Yang themselves are not rigid quantities, but ever-changing.

Chi Attunement: Strength

Demon Shintai Characteristics

• Claws: The character grows claws inflicting Str + 2 aggravated damage.

• Demon Armor: The demon armor may appear as scales, ornate samurai armor, or anything else, and it gives +1 to soak (may be taken multiple times). Demon armor soaks aggravated damage.

• Demon Weapon: A mystical weapon appears in the character's hand. Such a weapon blazes with Chi, emits frightful moans, is covered in leering faces, etc. This weapon may be any handheld weapon (no missiles or firearms). Damage is per the weapon type and is aggravated.

• Extra Arms: Two extra arms sprout from the character's torso. The character gains two extra dice when grappling or to simulate multiple attacks.

• Foulness: The character's demon form is exceedingly unclean: perhaps encrusted in dried blood and pieces of flesh, perhaps surrounded in a mephitic cloud, etc. Any opponents within five feet of the character suffer a one-die penalty to all Dice Pools, unless they are also in Demon Shintai form.

• Horror: The shintai may afflict humans with effects similar to the Delirium (see Werewolf: The Apocalypse, pp. 202-203). This effect is constant, though if picked twice, it may be turned on and off at will. Troupes without Werewolf: The Apocalypse may assume that humans failing a Willpower roll flee in fear.

• The Host: Fanged, demonic faces sprout from the character's back, torso and limbs. These faces can inflict automatic bite damage (Str + 1 aggravated) on grappled opponents.

• Huge Size: The character gains three Bruised Health Levels. He is between nine and 12 feet tall, and he resembles a Japanese *oni* or similar demon.

• Maw: The character's mouth distends and sprouts terrible teeth, perhaps even tusks. The character's bite inflicts Str + 3 aggravated damage.

• Spikes: The character's body is covered with spikes (or perhaps nails, razors, barbs, etc.). The character's body-slams inflict aggravated damage, and an attacker botching a Brawl or Martial Arts roll against the character suffers aggravated damage equal to the attacker's own Strength score.

• Tail: The character grows a tail. This tail is prehensile and can wield weapons; it can also bash opponents (for Strength damage, normal) or perform appropriate martial maneuvers (such as Legsweep), provided the character knows the maneuvers.

For an extra dot, the character may grow a scorpion-stinger capable of injecting poison. This poison is capable of affecting mortals and *shen* alike. The sting itself inflicts Str + 1 aggravated damage. To inject poison, the character spends Yin Chi on a hit, and for each point spent, the victim takes one die of aggravated damage unless he makes a successful Stamina or Yin roll (difficulty 8; each success negates one die of poison damage).

• Third Eye: The character sprouts a third eye in the middle of her forehead. This effect is not the Soul Discipline of Chi'iu Muh, but a specific demonic investment. The character gains +1 to all Perception rolls.

• Wings: Batlike pinions stretch from the character's back. The character can fly — clumsily — at a speed of 25 miles per hour.

Other features can be created by the player, with the Storyteller's permission.

• PERMEATE

The disciple of the Blood Shintai first learns to manipulate gross quantities of blood within his body. The vampire may diffuse blood through his body, thereby swelling up in the manner of a puff adder; alternatively, he may concentrate his essence into his center, thereby appearing to shrivel. A vampire with sufficient control over his blood flow can squeeze through narrow cracks in the manner of an invertebrate, though such a process is arduous and time-consuming.

System: No roll is needed; one Chi point (of either type) must be spent. Either diffusion or concentration reduces soak rolls to difficulty 5. With this power, a vampire may easily slip into narrow crevices or wriggle free of bonds. Getting through very tight spaces (between bars or through a small window) might require a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty depends on the situation).

By selectively swelling and shriveling his face and body, the vampire may attempt to obscure his features. He may not disguise himself as someone else, but he may veil his own identity (and, generally speaking, will appear less attractive!). To recognize the vampire, a viewer must roll Perception + Empathy against a resisted roll of the vampire's Stamina + Subterfuge (difficulty 6 for both).

The power's effects last for one scene.

•• BLOOD ATEMI

By touching another creature, the vampire may move the blood in that being's body. This ability can cause all manner of detrimental effects, particularly to mortals.

System: To use the power, the vampire must touch his victim, spend a Chi point and roll Perception + Medicine (difficulty 7). The effects of the power depend on where the victim is struck.

If the vampire touches the victim's body, he causes the circulatory system to go haywire. Nausea and dizziness result, as blood rushes to and from the victim's head, stomach and inner ears. Unless the victim scores more successes on a Stamina roll (difficulty 7) than the vampire did on his attack roll, the victim is overwhelmed by nausea for one turn per success on the attack roll. A nauseated victim must make a Dexterity roll (difficulty 7) to take any action(s) during her turn, and the difficulty of any action she does undertake is raised by one. If the victim botches the Stamina roll, she is completely overwhelmed with nausea for the entire scene (if *shen*) or suffers a stroke (if mortal).

If the vampire touches a limb, he may choose to numb the limb or to induce spasm. Numbing a limb produces a "pins and needles" effect; all activities using that limb are at -2 to Dice Pools. Inducing spasm in a limb forces the victim to make a straight Dexterity roll (difficulty 7); if the roll fails, the victim's extremity is contorted by muscle cramps, which render the limb useless for one turn per success the vampire scored. If the roll is botched, the victim takes a Health Level of damage from severe cramps.

Alternatively (if rarely), a vampire may use this power to facilitate healing in a human or animal. For each success on the vampire's roll, healing time on the Mortals' Healing Times chart (**Vampire: The Masquerade Second Edition**, p. 191) is halved.

Obviously, this power may be used only upon beings with bloodstreams. Vampires, shapeshifters and changelings, for example, are fair game; Risen and wraiths are not.

• • • Flow Like Blood

The vampire instantly disperses Chi through her bloodstream into every molecule of her being. In so doing, she becomes as fluid as blood, and thus, preternaturally hard to strike. Although the vampire appears barely to move, perfectly aimed attacks simply miss her, bullets strike the wall behind her without touching her, etc.

System: The vampire spends a point of Yang Chi. For the next three turns, the vampire may dodge any and all attacks directed at her as though she had a full Dice Pool, in addition to any other actions she chooses to take. She suffers no penalty to dodge multiple attacks. So, if a Kuei-jin with a Dexterity of 3 and a Dodge of 3 is being attacked by three opponents, she may dodge all of her opponents' strikes with a Dex + Dodge Dice Pool of six dice and versus difficulty 6, in addition to taking her allotted action for the turn.

If the vampire chooses solely to dodge during a turn in which this power is evoked, she may do so per the rules above, but all Dodge rolls are made versus difficulty 5.

• • • • Bloodlash

With this power, the vampire uses Chi to coagulate his blood into a lethal weapon. The vampire extends a tendril of blood, then wields it like a liquid whip. The tendril is razor sharp, capable of slicing through flesh and metal with equal ease. Yin lashes are black and bubbling, while Yang lashes are bright red and hiss with roiling energy.

System: The Cathayan spends a point of either Yin or Yang Chi, then opens her mouth or slits her wrist. The lash extends from the open orifice or wound. The lash has a reach of four feet per point of the vampire's permanent Chi (Yin or Yang, depending on the substance from which the whip is formed) and inflicts Str + 2 aggravated damage; alternatively, it can hit for normal Str damage, then constrict a victim. Victims seeking to escape the bloodlash must score three or more successes in a resisted contest of their Strength versus the vampire's permanent Chi Virtue.

• • • • • Blood Awakening

At this level, the enlightened student can utilize his Chi-rich blood for all manner of wondrous tasks. By sprinkling Yang-laden blood on an object, the vampire can awaken the spirit within the object, thus imbuing it with life. Alternatively, by spitting Yin-heavy blood on a spirit, the vampire can freeze the spirit in place, causing it to calcify and fall immediately out of the spirit world. Spirits snared in this manner resemble bizarre statues of pure white jade.

System: Animated objects must have some means of mobility, and this power is therefore most commonly used on statues of persons or animals. The object in question must be well crafted (creator must have scored at least three successes on the roll to make the object), or else its spirit is too weak to awaken. For each Yang point spent, the animated object gains two Health Levels and one die in all Physical Attributes. Objects obey the Kuei-jin's orders to the best of their (limited)

ability. A minuscule object (for example, a tiny statuette imbued with five Chi points) grows huge, perhaps larger than the Kuei-jin. The Storyteller may assign an object any other properties that logic or whimsy dictates (for example, a brass cobra could bite, an iron soldier would have extra soak dice, and an origami swan could surely fly).

If the vampire instead chooses to spend Yin, she can concentrate her blood into a freezing projectile, which she may spit at any ghost or spirit she can detect. Spirits and ghosts hit by this projectile "calcify," turning into white, jadelike and completely immobile "statues," which then collapse through the Wall and into the Middle Kingdom. A spirit so calcified is completely helpless, and can be smashed (which disperses its Chi and sends the spirit back through the Wall to re-form) or drained of Chi. Kuei-jin can use this power to hunt spirits for their Chi, but doing so enrages the spirit worlds as a whole, and vengeance assuredly is to follow.

BONE SHINTAI 骨

The Bone Shintai, the Metal element analog, is a frightening and forbidding art, the subject of speculation even among Kuei-jin. Closely tied to Yin, practitioners of the Bone Shintai use it to augment the corpselike features of their bodies, to become awesome and terrible combatants.

Practitioners of the Bone Shintai commonly congregate in small *wu* of like-minded Kuei-jin, often honing their arts in sites of strong Yin, such as burial grounds. Although not all practitioners are *ch'ing shih*, most grow heavily imbalanced to Yin over time. Certainly, Bone students are among the most frightening Kuei-jin to meet in combat.

Chi Attunement: Stamina

• CORPSE SKIN

The student learns how to channel unwholesome Yin energies through his flesh, which becomes pallid and corpselike. While in this state, the vampire is preternaturally resistant to damage, much like a zombie.

System: The vampire must spend at least one point of Yin to evoke this power. While using this power, the difficulties of all the vampire's Social Dice Pools increase by one. However, for each point of Yin spent, the vampire gains two Bruised Health Levels. Thus, a vampire who spent two points of Yin would gain four Bruised Health Levels, which would all have to be damaged before the vampire would drop to Hurt.

All Chi must be spent upon first activating the power, and a maximum of three Chi may be spent on it. Corpse Skin lasts for an entire scene.

• • WHITE TIGER CORPSE

The vampire forces Yin energy into her skin and bone marrow. By doing so, the vampire renders herself transparent and effectively invisible. This power does not affect clothing, weapons or other objects, though the vampire may "bleed" additional Yin onto personal possessions to render them invisible, too. Vampires using this power can occasionally be detected by the palpable chill they radiate.

System: This power costs one Yin point to activate and lasts for a scene. By spending an additional Chi point and three turns smearing the liquid Yin onto her possessions, she may turn them invisible.

• • • BONE OBEDIENCE

The Bone disciple, through selective manipulation of Chi, can cause his bone structure to calcify and grow like rock crystals. This power allows the diligent student to transform parts of his skeleton into all manner of useful tools.

System: The vampire spends Yin Chi as listed below to manifest the feature desired. Each change takes three turns to produce; the bones slowly "grow" into position.

The following features may be produced:

- Talons (1 Chi): The vampire extrudes bony talons from nails or knuckles. This effect is similar to the Protean power Wolf's Claws. The talons inflict Str + 2 aggravated damage.
- Bone Blade (2 Chi, 1 Chi/three turns to maintain): The vampire extends a section of his forearm into a two-foot blade of bone. This "sword" may be used to parry attacks and inflicts Str + 3 aggravated damage.
- Bone Armor (1 Chi/point): The vampire fills his skeleton with Chi, strengthening it. For each point of Chi spent, the vampire gains one soak die. Bone armor protects against aggravated damage from supernatural attacks, but not from fire or sunlight.
- Visage (2 Chi): The vampire uses Chi to alter his bone structure. This effect allows him to become up to six inches shorter or taller, and to alter his facial features and body type (though not precisely enough to disguise himself as someone else).
- Key (1 Chi): The vampire can form a finger, quite literally, into a skeleton key capable of opening any normal lock. This feature reduces the difficulty of appropriate Security rolls by three.

With the exception of the bone blade, all transformations last for one scene, after which they must be maintained with additional Chi expenditure.

• • • • FIVE POISON CLOUD

The vampire can exhale a breath or cloud of concentrated Yin. This cloud manifests as a mass of freezing black vapor. The cloud seethes with the destructive energies of raw Yin; within the cloud, metal corrodes, flesh rots and plants wither and die.

System: The vampire spends two points of Yin. The cloud swells to fill an area 10 feet by 10 feet. Everyone within the cloud, except the wielder of the power, suffers six dice of aggravated damage.

• • • • • CH'ING SHIH

The vampire may permeate her flesh and bones with Yin. This precipitates a grotesque transformation: The vampire's flesh turns a sickly gray, while her bones turn jet black. Her skin wrinkles and compresses around her bones. Her fangs grow long and drip venom, and black spikes jut from her back, joints and

rib cage. Her entire body glows phosphorescently and sparks with Yin energy. This form is known as a *ch'ing shih*.

System: To activate the *ch'ing shih* form requires five turns and five points of Yin Chi. The transformation is automatic, and the effects last for one scene.

All sorts of changes take place in the vampire. First, the vampire's Appearance drops to zero. The character's bones fill with Yin-marrow, and she gains near-complete control over her skeletal structure. She can extrude spikes, razored edges or bony barbs. In game terms, she can choose to inflict automatic aggravated damage with any attack, even a body-slam or punch.

She may attack and damage wraiths, Spectres, and other Yin-spirits (though the reverse is also true; she may be attacked as well). She may also feed her flesh and blood to such spirits, providing Chi to them; Yin-spirits who accept this "offering" can use the Chi to replenish their own Chi on a one-for-one basis.

Finally, the vampire may inject a lethal toxin through her claws or fangs. This effect inflicts two Health Levels of aggravated damage per turn to humans or animals and one point per turn to *shen*, including wraiths. The toxin's effects last for (6 - victim's Stamina, minimum 1) turns. Mortals who die from this toxin rise as zombies, under the *ch'ing shih*'s control, during the following scene. Zombies have the Physical Attributes they possessed during life, but no Mental or Social Attributes. They have three additional Health Levels, but are incapable of healing damage inflicted on them. Each zombie must be fed one Yin point per night, or it withers to dust. At any rate, a zombie rots within one turn of being exposed to sunlight.

Jade Shintai 玉

The Jade Shintai, the Earth element analog, teaches that all things, even vampires, are but temporary receptacles for the Chi that naturally flows from the Yin and Yang Worlds to the Middle Kingdom. The Jade Shintai bears similarities to the Equilibrium Discipline; rather than focusing her personal energies, however, the vampire becomes a conduit for the ambient Chi flows of the elements around her. In this state, the vampire gains properties similar to jade itself, which is reputed in legend to act as a "soul substance."

Chi Attunement: Strength

• Stand upon the Dragon's Back

The vampire first learns to channel Chi from the Earth's natural flows into his body, and *vice versa*.

System: The vampire roots himself to the Earth. No roll is needed. He may not be knocked back or down, nor may he be thrown by a martial arts attack.

• • Tread the Thrashing Dragon's Tail

By polarizing her Chi in line with that of her surroundings, the vampire makes herself preternaturally deft and light. She may walk safely and steadily along the narrowest of ledges, the most unstable ground and even the surface of lakes or oceans. She may also jump long distances.

System: The vampire gains the ability to walk on any surface, even water. She may walk up walls and along ceilings at normal speed, and she leaves no footprints of any sort. All Stealth rolls are made at one difficulty lower. She will still fall if, for example, she is pushed over the edge of a building; however, her fall will be slow (the vampire will take only half normal damage). Finally, all leaping distances are doubled (perhaps the legend of "hopping vampires" derived from witnesses' accounts of this art in use).

• • • Placate the Earth Dragon

By gently singing to the spirits of earth, stone and wood, the vampire may cast himself into their embrace. He may sink into the protective earth, or he may walk through a wall or other impediment.

System: The vampire must spend a point of Chi and three turns in concentration to attune himself to the spirit worlds, then roll Manipulation + Etiquette against a difficulty of the local Wall. Otherwise, this power is identical to the Level Three Protean power of Earth Meld. Additionally, by placing one hand on a barrier to be breached (e.g., a wall, door or floor) and making the Chi expenditure/roll listed above, the vampire may pass through the barrier as if he were incorporeal. The barrier in question may be no more than a foot thick.

• • • • Harnessing the Dragon's Breath

The vampire, by attuning his body to local streams of Chi, may actually fly along "updrafts" of energy. While in flight, the vampire may hold objects or even wield weapons, but must make Dexterity + Athletics rolls to perform complicated maneuvers.

System: To tap into a Chi line, the vampire must roll Dexterity + (Chi Virtue) (difficulty of the local Wall). Success enables the vampire to hover, glide or fly at a speed of ([12 minus local Wall rating] x 5) miles per hour. So, a vampire cruising along in an area with a Wall rating of 7 could fly at 25 miles per hour ([12 - 7 = 5] x 5).

Once a Chi line has been tapped, the vampire is "locked into" the flow, so no new roll must be made if, for example, the vampire travels from a Wall 4 dragon nest to a Wall 8 downtown core. The vampire can make a new Dexterity + (Chi Virtue) roll to tap into a stronger energy field, should one present itself.

• • • • • Jade Servant of the August Personage

The ultimate attuning of Chi to surroundings, this power draws upon the Five Element theory as well as great mastery of Chi. The vampire may channel spiritual energies of the classic Five Elements — Water, Metal, Earth, Wood and Fire — through his form, thus gaining the properties of the element in the process. In so doing, the vampire's skin transforms, becoming hard and slick, as if the vampire were covered in liquid jade.

Vampires who attain this level of Jade Shintai often decorate their havens with artworks formed from the Five

Elements in question, so that they might have access to them in times of trouble.

System: The vampire must touch a sizable quantity of the element to be emulated. He must then spend a Willpower point and a number of Chi points listed below to assume the mantle of the corresponding element. The spiritual properties of the element merge with the vampire's Chi. This mantle provides protection as if it were Class Three body armor, and each type of mantle imbues the vampire with additional properties, listed below.

• **Black Tortoise (4 Yin):** The vampire must touch a body of water at least the size of a large fishtank. The vampire's body is chilling to the touch — each time the vampire strikes or touches a victim, the victim must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 7) or lose a point of Dexterity. When Dexterity drops to zero, the victim is frozen rigid for a scene.

• **White Tiger (3 Yin, 1 Yang):** The vampire must touch a piece of metal at least as large as a human-sized statue. The vampire's body crackles with static electricity. Opponents touching the vampire with bare skin, metal weapons or other conductors suffer three dice of normal damage per turn of contact.

• **Yellow Emperor (2 Yin, 2 Yang):** The vampire must be in contact with the Earth. The vampire's body grows rock-hard. Anyone striking the vampire with bare fists, feet, etc., takes half the damage inflicted on the vampire. If the vampire is struck with a Melee weapon, the Storyteller should make a roll using a number of dice equal to the vampire's Stamina (difficulty 6); each success inflicts one level of damage on the Melee weapon. If (in the Storyteller's opinion) the weapon sustains excessive damage, it breaks.

• **Azure Dragon (1 Yin, 3 Yang):** The vampire must touch a piece of wood at least the size of a door or sapling. Opponents striking the vampire with bare fists, feet, etc. take damage per the Yellow Emperor mantle, above. Weapons are not affected by the mantle. However, the vampire may punch or kick a Kindred character as if wielding a wooden stake — i.e., if the Cathayan scores three or more levels of damage, the Kindred is paralyzed.

• **Scarlet Phoenix (4 Yang):** Tough — the vampire must thrust his hand into a fire at least the size of a fireplace blaze and make a wave soul check in the process. The vampire gains an extra soak die versus fire attacks (in addition to the three he gains merely for evoking the mantle). Additionally, the vampire's body radiates heat. Opponents striking the vampire with bare skin or combustible equipment suffer three dice of aggravated damage.

Once activated, the mantle lasts for a scene.

Flesh Shintai 肉

The freakish Flesh Shintai is believed to have its roots in the jungles of the Golden Courts, although it has spread throughout the Middle Kingdom. As the Wood element analog, the Flesh Shintai allows a Kuei-jin to channel Yang energy through the medium of her corpse in order to augment and transform it.

Practitioners of this shintai typically group themselves into matriarchal covens. In some areas, vampires with great skill in the Discipline are referred to as *penangallan*. *Penangallan* typically attune themselves to Yang energy and, thus, appear to be relatively human — until they demonstrate the powers inherent to the Discipline. Many *penangallan* adorn themselves with elaborate tattoos and jewelry, as they enjoy the feeling of metal or ink against the flesh.

Chi Attunement: Dexterity

• Long-Neck

The name of this power is somewhat misleading; the vampire can actually extend either her neck or limbs, sending them slithering over walls and around corners. The skin does not extend with the limb, so onlookers experience the gruesome sight of the vampire's head or digit extending along a stringy thread of viscera and muscle tissue.

System: No roll is needed. The neck or limbs can extend five feet per point of Stamina the vampire possesses, allowing the vampire to bite, strike or grapple at range. The limbs may be attacked anywhere along their length, and decapitation will kill the vampire normally.

• • Detach Limb

This power is one classically associated with the mythical *penangallan*. The vampire has mastered Chi to such an extent that she may separate a part of her life-force from the main reservoir. In this manner, she may actually detach a part of her body and allow it to act at range.

It is most commonly used to allow the head and guts to separate themselves from the vampire's trunk. Folk legends depict the resulting mass as capable of flight, although such a feat is possible only if the Cathayan possesses the power of Harnessing the Dragon's Breath. Otherwise, the head-mass slithers/crawls along at the character's normal ground speed. It is capable of crawling up walls, ceilings, etc., though its passage leaves a bloody smear.

Limbs may likewise be detached. This function is most commonly reserved for hands; while a vampire is certainly capable of detaching its leg, imbuing it with life and allowing it to hop along under its own power, doing so can prove somewhat useless and rather comical. Detached hands may prove quite useful, though, enabling the vampire to grab an out-of-reach item or strangle a victim at range. Again, unless the vampire has the power of Harnessing the Dragon's Breath, the hand is limited to scuttling along like a spider.

System: The vampire spends one point of Yang Chi and one turn in concentration. The detached head-mass or appendage is considered a small target (difficulty 7 to hit in Melee, firearms difficulties increased by one). A head-mass

is considered to have four Health Levels; a limb, three; a hand, two. In all cases, Physical Attributes and Abilities of the head-mass are considered to be identical to those of the vampire. Chi and both aspects of the soul remain in the head-mass, but the heart does not (the head-mass cannot be staked with either wood or metal, though if the dormant body is staked, the head-mass immediately collapses, paralyzed).

By far, the most common use of the power is the detachment of the head-mass. Under conventional means of locomotion, the head-mass alternately slithers and scuttles along at normal ground speed. Because it is largely boneless, the head-mass may fit into any open area accessible to the skull. It may use its viscera to constrict (Str +2 normal damage) if it can get a firm grip (e.g., by dropping on a victim from ambush, or one turn after a successful bite). Otherwise, the head-mass may attack by striking (normal Dexterity + Brawl, inflicts standard bite damage).

The body remains dormant and extremely vulnerable. Most vampires take care to surround themselves with retainers, or else they hide their bodies in very secure locales. If the body is destroyed, the head-mass is trapped in its…visceral…state. It can maintain an unlife, of sorts, though it can never gain more than four Health Levels and must spend an extra point of Chi when animating itself (to avoid drying out).

Limbs creep/drag themselves along at half normal ground speed. A limb may remain detached from the body for up to a night; at dawn, the limb ceases to remain animate (and rapidly disintegrates). Limbs may attack (strangle) or grasp objects at a distance, though if the limb is outside the vampire's line of sight, it may "see" its target only if the vampire is focusing on it via some sort of clairvoyance power.

Special: If the vampire also has the Level Two Cultivation power of Cleave the Demon, the dual souls can be forced into different parts of the vampire's body. Thus, the vampire could animate her head-mass with her Hun soul, while using the P'o to animate the headless trunk. So long as the head-mass can keep the other body part within line of sight, the body part can "see" and act at no penalty. A body part out of the head-mass's line of sight is treated as if blind.

• • • Lotus Cloud

By combining internal Chi with drawn breath, the vampire may exhale an opalescent cloud of euphoric Yang energy. All who breathe the vapors become dreamy, giggly and generally incoherent. This power does not affect vampires, spirits or other unliving things, but mortals and shapeshifters are susceptible.

System: The vampire spends a point of Yang Chi, then exhales the cloud. Mortals within the cloud automatically become giddy and highly suggestible, as if experiencing a narcotic drug. *Shen* may roll Willpower (difficulty 6) to resist, as may certain specially trained mortals (martial arts masters, Shih demon hunters). A narcotized victim can take no aggressive action and is likely to succumb to any pleasurable suggestion. If the victim is aggressively attacked, he defends himself, but at -1 to Dice Pools.

The power's effects last for one scene.

• • • • Pelesit

The vampire can construct small creatures from his body, detaching them and sending them out on various errands. These creatures are known as pelesit, and they prove exceedingly useful as spies. Pelesit typically appear as grotesque insects or deformed homunculi, though many vampires who master this power decorate their bodies in elaborate *irezumi* tattoos, then cause the tattoos themselves to animate at the Cathayan's bidding.

System: The vampire spends a point of Yang Chi and one or more Health Levels to detach a pelesit from the body. For each Health Level the pelesit "borrows," it has two Health Levels and a Strength and Stamina of 1 (these Traits increase arithmetically as the pelesit is bestowed more of the vampire's flesh). The creature has a Dexterity of 3, Mental Attributes of 2, a Brawl and Dodge of 2, and can deliver a sharp bite for Str (normal) damage. It travels with a bizarre hopping gait, can climb fairly well and can speak in a shrill, abrasive voice.

The pelesit may remain detached for an entire night, but immediately withers and dies at dawn. If the pelesit returns to the vampire before dawn, it may merge back into the vampire's body, and the vampire regains the Health Levels bestowed upon the creature. If the pelesit is killed or fails to return, the vampire loses the Health Levels and must heal the resulting damage normally.

• • • • • Ten Thousand Forms

At this level of mastery, the vampire gains near-complete control over her shape. She can appear as nearly any type of person by changing skin, hair and body parameters, and can even sprout wings. She can also appear as an animal, so long as the animal is of roughly the same mass as the vampire.

System: This power costs two points of Yang to activate. The vampire must make a Perception + Athletics roll (difficulty 7). Success enables the vampire to take nearly any humanoid shape she can imagine. For an extra Yang point's expenditure, the vampire can grow an extra pair of arms or a pair of batlike wings. These accouterments duplicate the effects of the equivalent Demon Shintai powers (see p. 109).

Duplicating a specific person or becoming an animal requires a Perception + Athletics roll (difficulty 9).

Ghost-Flame Shintai

The Ghost-Flame Shintai, the Fire element analog, allows its practitioners to evoke the "shade-time flame": raw Chi energy from the spirit worlds. This energy manifests as unearthly fire, which radiates from a vampire's eyes, mouth, hands or entire body.

There are two types of Ghost-flame: the scorching Yang flame and the icy Yin flame. Yang flame burns red, blue, purple or other bright shades; Yin flame burns black, white, ice-blue or other lunar hues.

Masters of this shintai may utilize either, making this Discipline one of the most versatile and deadly.

Practitioners of Ghost-Flame are scattered throughout the Middle Kingdom, though there are relatively few in any given area. It is most prevalent in Japan; several Japanese vampire-warriors have mastered the *hima* form. To access the energy, a vampire learns to handle the searing pain involved in channeling the Chi energy through her body. Many practitioners bear permanent burn scars, testaments to mistakes made in training.

Chi Attunement: Stamina

• Goblin Face

The vampire's eyes and mouth blaze with eerie Chi energy, which manifests as flame of the appropriate (Yin or Yang) color. When the vampire speaks, flames lick from her mouth. This power is exceedingly unnerving; most animals and many mortals flee when confronted by a vampire wielding Goblin Face.

System: No roll or Chi expenditure is needed, but it takes one turn of concentration to evoke the power. The vampire can see in pitch darkness, and her bite inflicts an extra die of damage.

• • Goblin Spark

The vampire can conjure a piece of her Chi and send it forth from her body as Ghost-flame. At this level, the flame is not concentrated enough to burn, but it does sting or chill. All sorts of interesting effects are possible: lights, shapes, even pyrotechnic sparks. Skilled Ghost-Flame practitioners often entertain Kuei-jin courts during the vampires' few moments of levity.

System: The vampire spends a point of Yin or Yang Chi, which blazes forth from her body in the form of Ghost-flame. The most common use of this power is the creation of floating lights under the caster's mental control. As noted above, Yang lights tend to be brighter and more colorful than Yin lights. A Chi point's worth of light can be a huge "lantern," three feet in diameter, or it can be several smaller lights hovering and whirling about each other.

Yang flame can be released as stinging sparks (Dexterity + Yang roll to target, use appropriate firearms penalties). Yang sparks explode and burst like firecrackers. If a creature hit by them fails to score more successes on a Stamina + Alertness roll than the wielder scored on the attack roll, the victim is blinded for one turn. If hit by the sparks, a Western Kindred must make a Rötschreck roll; so must a Kuei-jin whose Yang rating is less than that of the flame-wielder.

Yin sparks also flare and explode. They do not blind, but might scare away spirits and ghosts (the vampire rolls Yin versus a difficulty of the spirit's Willpower; each success causes the spirit to retreat for a turn).

• • • Goblin Shapes

The vampire develops more precise control over the flame emitted. He may emit larger quantities of flame and may configure the flame into all manner of complex shapes. These constructs are obviously of luminous spirit matter, but can comprise many colors; in the hands of an expert, Ghost-flame constructs can be useful illusions.

System: The vampire spends a point of Chi to emit a luminous, approximately human-sized mass of Ghost-flame. He may then make a Dexterity + Crafts (Ghost-Flame) roll to shape the flame into its desired form (difficulty assigned by the Storyteller, depending on the complexity of the shape). The vampire may mentally direct the construct anywhere within 500 feet of his current position.

The construct is phosphorescent and luminous. Spirits who see it may well be fooled into thinking the construct is another spirit, and creatures such as Kindred may have no idea what the thing is, but Eastern *shen* are unlikely to be fooled. Still, the construct can prove a functional distraction.

If a Ghost-flame construct comes into contact with a material being, the construct flares up, self-destructing and removing one point of its opponent's Chi (opposite type of Chi versus that used in the construct — thus, a Yin construct coming into contact with a mortal flares up, removing one of the mortal's Yang points). When used against other *shen*, the construct consumes one point of the victim's Gnosis, Quintessence, Glamour or Blood Points, as appropriate. Ghost-flame constructs severely sting beings they touch, but inflict no actual damage. Still, a creature suddenly touched by Ghost-flame must make a Willpower roll or recoil in shock and lose the ability to act next turn. Such consequences can be very dangerous if, for example, the victim is climbing a wall or walking a narrow ledge at the time.

• • • • Goblin Scorch

The vampire becomes a living (well, undead) flame-thrower, breathing a gout of Yin- or Yang-flame, like the dragons of early Ages.

System: The vampire faces her target, then spends a variable number of Chi points. For each Chi point spent, the attack inflicts three dice of damage.

Yang-flame is blazing hot and inflicts fairly straightforward fire damage. This damage is aggravated.

Yin-flame is icy and "burns" a victim's soul. Yin-flame inflicts Chi damage against spirits (Yin- or Yang-spirits), provided the vampire can see them. Against material beings, Yin-flame destroys temporary Willpower (the victim may use permanent Willpower, difficulty 6, to soak). See the "Soul Flaying" sidebar (p. 119) for details on what happens when a soul has been "scorched" below zero Willpower.

• • • • • Goblin Lantern

With this spectacular power, the vampire can ignite her entire body, thus surrounding it in a corona of Chi fire. Kuei-jin call this effect "the little sun," an apt name for what is surely one of the Cathayans' most deadly combat arts.

With sufficient Chi expenditure, the vampire can transform her entire body into Chi to become a round, glowing ball (Japanese Kuei-jin call it the *hima*). Such a display is terrifying, particularly for a P'o-dominant vampire, who often manifests a leering, demonic face in the middle of the flame-ball.

System: The vampire spends three Chi points, three turns in concentration and one Willpower point. The vampire's body ignites with Chi-fire of the type used to power the Discipline. The precise effects of the Chi aura depend on the type of Chi-flame generated.

While surrounded in Yang-flame, the vampire inflicts aggravated damage with any Brawl or Martial Arts attack. Anyone grappled by or touching the vampire takes three dice

of aggravated damage per turn. Additionally, the vampire gains five soak dice usable against fire attacks. However, vampires surrounded in Yang-flame are walking bonfires, easily capable of igniting flammable materials or explosives.

While surrounded in Yin-flame, the vampire may attack spirit creatures with Brawl or Martial Arts maneuvers. Against spirit creatures, Yin-flame inflicts three dice of damage against Chi (or Corpus, if using **Wraith: The Oblivion**). Against material beings, Yin-flame inflicts three dice of damage against the victim's Willpower. However, fire attacks inflict an extra die of damage against vampires sheathed in Yin-flame.

While surrounded in either type of aura, the vampire can spend a point of Chi to "flare up" for a turn. While flaring, the vampire's aura inflicts six dice of damage for the turn, and all strikes inflict +2 damage. Furthermore, any being looking directly at the vampire must successfully roll Stamina + Alertness (difficulty 7) or be blinded for a turn (five turns if the victim botches).

If, upon activating the power, the vampire chooses to spend two Willpower points rather than one, the vampire's entire body turns to Ghost-flame, compacting into a sphere. This sphere-form has all the powers listed previously. Additionally, the sphere can fly at a speed of ([10 - local Wall] x 5) miles per hour. Finally, because the vampire is only semisolid, the difficulty of all physical attack rolls against the vampire increases to 8. While in this form, the vampire has no hands and may not hold anything, but may bite normally.

While engulfed in the Chi aura, the vampire is vulnerable to attack from the opposite type of Ghost-flame. A Yin-flame attack against a vampire covered in Yang-flame, or a Yang-flame attack against a vampire covered in Yin-flame, inflicts an additional die of damage.

Soul Flaying

Certain Kuei-jin attacks allow a vampire to drain or absorb temporary Willpower from the victim. These attacks are very deadly, for they directly damage the soul of the victim. If an attack reduces temporary Willpower below zero, the victim begins taking Health Levels of damage instead. Furthermore, the victim must make a roll using permanent Willpower (difficulty 8). If the victim fails this roll, he either loses a point of Humanity/Hun or gains a permanent Derangement (Storyteller's decision). Even if the victim succeeds, he gains a temporary Derangement, which lasts until he regains at least half his Willpower.

Soul Disciplines

This cluster of powers centers on Kuei-jin understanding of, and control over, the Hun and P'o souls. Kuei-jin who master the Soul Disciplines are truly formidable creatures, able to perform exceedingly difficult feats of will or to dominate other creatures' souls outright.

Vampires who study the Soul Disciplines take their calling very seriously. Perfection in thought and execution is demanded, for laxity allows the character's Demon to manifest itself. A botch on any roll to activate a Soul Discipline forces an immediate check for shadow nature.

Cultivation

This Soul Discipline is widely distrusted, even among the Kuei-jin. Practitioners of Cultivation learn various techniques for communing with and influencing the P'o — their own and others'. To a master of Cultivation, the P'o is just another family member — an unruly one that must occasionally be disciplined, but a useful member nonetheless. Indeed, many vampires skilled in Cultivation wear their P'o visage as often as their Hun Archetype.

Although disreputable, practitioners of Cultivation have become a necessary evil in the Fifth Age, particularly with the arrival of the Kin-jin. Given these newcomers' relative unfamiliarity with their Beasts, wielders of Cultivation are able to send them into howling frenzies with relative ease. Unfortunately, given the unpredictable nature of the Cultivation Discipline, its users often suffer the same fate as their victims.

- **Scrutinize**

The student of Cultivation first learns to attune himself to the urges of the P'o, both in himself and in others. He becomes privy to the dark drives in mortals and *shen* alike.

System: The vampire spends three turns in meditation (if using the power on himself) or concentration (if using it on others). He then rolls Perception + Hun (difficulty 7).

If using the power to pacify his own P'o, success enables the vampire to add one to the difficulty of his next fire, wave or shadow nature roll. With three or more successes, the vampire can force a "dialogue" with his Demon; the P'o is played either by the Storyteller or a Shadowguide. Naturally, the P'o is balky and recalcitrant, but a clever player might be able to extract some sort of useful information from his character's darker half, particularly if he steers the conversation in the direction of evil, demons, etc.

If using the power to scan another's P'o, success enables the vampire to gain insight into the target's darker urges. If the target has an actual P'o, the vampire learns the approximate (with one or two successes) or exact (with three or more successes) rating of the target's P'o. He also gains some idea of the target's P'o Archetype, thereby acquiring useful knowledge for subverting a rival Kuei-jin. If using this power on a Kindred, the vampire gains basic information about the Kindred's Hu-

manity or Path, Virtues, Derangements and other Traits relating to the state of the Kindred's soul. If using this power on a mortal, the vampire gains intuitive hints about the target's vices, dirty secrets and other hidden flaws. In any event, successful use of this power allows the Cathayan to add one die to all Social rolls dealing with appeals to the target's base nature (bribery, certain types of seduction, etc.).

A botch when using this power enables an instant P'o takeover.

•• CLEAVE THE DEMON

The vampire learns how to separate her dual souls, thus clearly demarcating the Hun from the P'o. By doing so, she allows one soul to animate and control her body, while the other soul hovers nearby. Both souls can act in tandem, allowing the vampire to exercise a variety of useful options. However, the P'o remains its malevolent self and does everything in its power to cause harm and despair.

System: To Cleave the Demon, the vampire must spend a Chi point and two turns in concentration, then roll Willpower (difficulty 8). Success enables the separation to begin. The player must then roll a contest of Hun (difficulty 6) versus P'o (difficulty 6). For each success scored on the Willpower roll, the player may add one die to either the Hun or the P'o Dice Pool.

If the Hun wins or ties, the dual souls separate and the Hun Archetype is in control of the body. If the P'o wins, the souls separate, but the P'o Archetype is in control of the body.

In any event, the remaining soul is pushed out of the Cathayan's body and hovers nearby in the Mirror Lands. A displaced soul may travel up to 500 feet from its body. While separated, the soul is treated as either a Yin- or Yang-spirit, depending on which type of Chi was used to power the Discipline. If attacked by a spirit entity, the separated soul has Chi and Willpower scores equal to the character's own. If the soul is Hun, it may use its Hun score as Gnosis; if the soul is P'o, it may use its P'o score as Rage (see "Spirit Traits," p. 210). If reduced to zero Chi, the soul temporarily returns to the Yomi World, and the vampire immediately enters torpor.

If threatened, the displaced soul may take refuge in the Cathayan's body. This maneuver protects it from spirit attacks, but the displaced soul may be pushed out at any time by the dominant soul. Naturally, this situation can be dangerous if the P'o is in control of the body, and can lead to some rather interesting internal negotiations....

While the souls are separated, the vampire may effectively act with both the body and the displaced soul. Each half of the soul can take actions during the turn. So, for example, a vampire who split her P'o from her body could use the Hun-dominated body to perform physical actions or employ Soul Disciplines, while simultaneously sending the P'o to attack spirits (with its Rage) or to scout ahead for trouble.

The two souls retain a telepathic link, and each soul is aware of the other at all times. Both souls have access to the vampire's basic Chi powers (Lifesight, Ghostsight) and Willpower, though only one soul can use them per turn. The soul in the spirit worlds may automatically see its surroundings, so Cleave the Demon is a good (if dangerous) way to view the nearby spirit world and the beings therein. A soul may be commanded simply to whirl around the body, in a sort of "holding pattern"; while this activity takes place, difficulties of all rolls to sneak up on or surprise the vampire increase by two.

The power's effects last for a single scene.

••• LASH THE DEMON

A Cultivator at this level of erudition learns how to prod and goad others' souls, to separate the Hun and P'o and force one or the other to the forefront of consciousness. This power resembles Cleave the Demon, above, but affects other creatures' souls.

System: The vampire must make eye contact to use this power. The vampire spends a Willpower point and rolls Manipulation + Hun (difficulty 6). The victim may resist with Willpower (difficulty 6). If the vampire succeeds, the victim's Hun and P'o souls separate, but remain in the victim's body.

What happens next depends on whether the victim has a higher Hun or P'o score. If the victim's Hun is stronger, he immediately becomes passive and malleable. The victim can take no aggressive action and likely flees if confronted. The victim is highly suggestible and obeys any orders given to him, unless he succeeds on a Willpower roll (difficulty 6); however, these orders cannot include aggressive or self-destructive actions. If attacked, the victim can defend normally, but cannot pursue a fleeing foe.

If the victim's P'o is stronger, the victim immediately enters fire soul. If the vampire scores three or more successes (after the resisted roll), the P'o takes over the victim's body. If the power is used on a victim whose P'o is already dominant, the victim becomes confused and listless for a scene.

If the victim's Hun and P'o are equal, the twin souls immediately go to war. The victim must roll a contest between the Hun and P'o (both at difficulty 6). If the Hun wins or ties, it retains control of the victim's body and nothing further happens. If the P'o wins, its Archetype takes over the victim's body.

When a Kuei-jin uses this power on a Kindred, ghoul or other creature with a Beast, the victim immediately frenzies. When a mortal is the target, the victim becomes passive per the rules above, unless (in the Storyteller's opinion) his bestial side is strong; in this case, the victim frenzies.

•••• YOKE THE DEMON

The Cultivator may psychically reach into her dual soul, pluck the P'o from the Hun and subordinate the internal Demon. A Demon thus subordinated can be used to intimidate lesser creatures and watch for enemies.

Few things anger a P'o more than use of this power. A Cathayan who routinely employs Yoke the Demon may find herself in great peril the next time the P'o takes charge.

System: To perform the operation, the Cathayan spends a point of Willpower and two turns in concentration, then rolls Dexterity + Empathy (difficulty 8). Success enables the operation to begin. The Cathayan makes a resisted roll of Hun versus P'o (difficulty 6 for both), adding one die to the Hun Dice Pool for each success scored on the Dexterity + Empathy roll. If the Hun wins or ties, it yokes the P'o; if the P'o wins, it automatically takes over the vampire's body for a scene.

A yoked Demon may not take over the Cathayan's body, though the vampire is still vulnerable to fire soul. (If the

vampire frenzies, the Hun's yoke is automatically broken, so the P'o typically does everything in its power to provoke fire soul.) While yoked, the P'o may do nothing without the vampire's permission; however, the vampire may not use Demon Chi or Demon Arts.

The P'o may be used as a "watchdog" and can detect other "demons" within 50 yards by making a successful Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7). (Creatures for which this designation applies include Kuei-jin, Kindred, hengeyokai, Spectres, P'o-dominated wraiths, human lunatics, savage spirits and other "wild souls.") This application cannot pinpoint magically hidden or invisible creatures, but does let the vampire know that such creatures are in the area.

Also, because the seething rage of the Demon is so close to the character's surface, the vampire exudes a menacing aura; mortals must make Willpower rolls (difficulty 6) to approach or oppose the vampire at all.

This power lasts for a scene.

••••• Two Become One

A vampire who achieves this level of Cultivation can partly resolve the dual soul's dichotomy, as if he were mortal once more. This power can prove inspirational to Cathayans and provide a taste of the Golconda to come; unfortunately, the concomitant overconfidence can send them spiraling into depravity all the quicker.

When this power is used, the vampire's personality is a combination of the Hun and P'o Archetypes. Although the P'o cannot enforce its will on the character, the player must make sure to roleplay the P'o as well as the Hun.

System: The vampire spends a Willpower point, then rolls Charisma + Empathy (difficulty 8). If successful, the vampire's Hun and P'o Natures merge for a scene. The vampire is immune to fire, wave and shadow soul, and she may use any of the P'o's powers or Demon Arts without fear of backlash. Because the vampire effectively has two minds, any opponent attempting to affect her with a mind- or emotion-controlling power must make two separate checks; if either fails, the power does not affect the Cathayan.

Chi'iu Muh (Dragon Tears)

According to the sages, the dragons of the early Ages bore opalescent pearls in their foreheads. These pearls were the receptacles and conduits of vast celestial power. Long ago, in happier Ages, the Kuei-jin developed this Discipline to emulate and pay homage to the dragons.

The Discipline received its name from the curious protuberance that develops on vampires who study it. At the first and second levels, this organ appears to be a circular gemstone. At the third level, the stone becomes a third eye, similar in shape and color to the vampire's original two. As the student advances in the Discipline, the eye develops and swells, so that by the time the student learns the fifth level of Chi'iu Muh, the eye is a great blazing orb in the center of the forehead. The eye always opens when the Discipline is activated; it is a permanent part of the vampire's physiology, though a Kuei-jin may roll Stamina + Stealth (difficulty 5) to "retract" the eye into the skull for a scene.

Even more so than Cultivation, Chi'iu Muh is greatly distrusted. Depending on which element of the soul is in control of the Kuei-jin, Chi'iu Muh can function as a Soul Discipline or a Demon Art. When the Hun is in control, this Discipline allows its wielder to repair wounded bodies and spirits. When the P'o dominates, Chi'iu Muh can be used to steal souls and ravage spirits.

Kuei-jin ancestors whisper that a version of this art, alone among their secrets, has been stolen by the Kin-jin of the West. The First Disciple of Xue, the barbarian Zao-lat, learned the secrets of the third eye. Unfortunately, his understanding was imperfect, and his P'o quickly corrupted him. Banished from Xue's presence, Zao-lat crept back to the West, there to disseminate his evil knowledge among his childer.

• RASA

The third eye, here, is in its most rudimentary stage of development. At this level, the vampire begins to experience visions of the Great Cycle, the spirit worlds and his possible future. The flashes can prove prophetic or even precognitive, enabling the vampire to predict impending events.

Vampires with this power have exceptionally rich dream lives. During daily slumber, they experience vivid nightmares of Yomi or rich visions of the spirit worlds. Often, these dreams provide clues to Dharmic understanding, or hints of the vampire's destiny. In the Fifth Age, these dreams have turned noticeably darker, creating a pall of gloom over many Cathayan courts.

System: No roll is needed. The character experiences prophetic dreams nearly every day and may make Intelligence + Portents rolls (difficulty assigned by the Storyteller at her discretion) to interpret them. The vampire is also likely to realize when he is in the presence of persons or objects destined to play important roles in the Great Cycle. While dominated by the P'o, the vampire usually receives hints on how to maintain dominance and subjugate the Hun forever.

• • CHI SIGHT

At this level, the third eye's vision vastly enhances the vampire's normal powers of Ghostsight, Lifesight and Sharpened Senses. In essence, the entire invisible world of spirits and Chi opens to the vampire.

System: This power works similarly for both Hun- and P'o-dominated Kuei-jin. The vampire spends one point of Yin Chi and one point of Yang Chi. The Dragon Tear appears on the vampire's forehead, and through it the vampire receives vastly enhanced sensory input. He automatically gains all the advantages of Ghostsight, Lifesight and Sharpened Senses. Furthermore, the vampire may clearly see all spirit beings in the vicinity and may gauge their approximate strength by making a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 7). The vampire may discern the strength of the local Wall and any dragon nests in the vicinity, and he may view Chi eddies, whorls and dragon lines. The vampire is likely to notice any disturbance in the local Mirror Lands (for example, from the workings of mages or the presence of malevolent spirits), and he can detect the presence of defiled Chi.

With his enhanced Lifesight, the vampire is able to read the auras of living (and undead) beings, in a fashion similar to the Auspex power of Aura Perception. The vampire may also make a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 6) to gauge how much Chi is in living beings.

With his enhanced Ghostsight, the vampire is able to detect the Pathos and Passions of ghosts, and to discern their connections to the world of the living. Again, this function requires a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 8).

The Chi Sight lasts for a scene.

• • • DRAGON WARD

The vampire widens the third eye and channels her Chi into a powerful ward of protection. Persons seeking to approach the vampire must engage her in a grueling psychic duel. This power also works similarly when used by Hun- and P'o-dominated vampires.

System: The character spends a Willpower point, then rolls Willpower against a difficulty of the local Wall. Upon doing so, no being (material or spirit) not already within 10 feet of the vampire may approach her.

A being who attempts to approach the vampire must battle her in an extended and resisted contest of Willpower versus Willpower (difficulty 6 for both parties). If, at any time, the opponent scores three or more successes than the vampire, the opponent may shatter the Dragon Ward and approach. However, if the vampire scores three or more successes, she manages to bend the Chi-flows of the Dragon Ward around the opponent to paralyze him for a scene.

• • • • PURIFICATION

This power, a legacy of nobler days, was used by the Wan Xian of old to cleanse their mortal subjects and domains of demonic taint. When a Cathayan uses this power, the third eye bathes the target in a luminous radiance, thus allowing the vampire to work healing magic on the target.

Of course, when the P'o is dominant, the third eye, instead, allows the injection of demonic energy into the target, with appropriately detrimental effects.

System (Hun): The vampire must be within five feet of the target. The vampire may sense the target's Derangements by rolling Perception + Empathy (difficulty 6), and he may attempt to cure them by rolling Charisma + Medicine (difficulty of the target's Willpower). For each success scored on the diagnosis, the vampire gains one extra die to roll for a cure. The vampire may also attempt to force a target's P'o into quiescence by rolling Hun + Empathy (difficulty of the target's P'o). A sedated P'o cannot force fire, wave or shadow nature rolls for an entire scene, but the target may not use Demon Arts or Demon Chi during this time.

This power can also be used on an area, to cleanse it of defiled Chi. The vampire must touch the defiled site, then roll Stamina + Empathy (difficulty 8) in an extended roll; each success allows one point of defiled Chi to flow through the vampire's body and disperse harmlessly into the local dragon lines. If, at any time, the vampire botches, a backlash of defiled Chi floods his body. The vampire suffers three levels of aggravated damage and must make a roll to avoid shadow nature.

System (P'o): The vampire must bite his prey. The third eye acts as a channel for Demon Chi, which flows from the vampire's bite into the target's body. By spending a point of Demon Chi, then rolling P'o in a resisted roll against the

target's Willpower, the attacker can infect the victim with psychic poison. A victim thus infected succumbs to her darkest urges and willingly serves the vampire as a slave. This state lasts for one day per net success the vampire rolled.

• • • • • Spirit-Eating

With this awesome power, the vampire may physically remove the soul from a victim's body. Hun-dominated vampires use this ability to work healing magic or set a tormented soul right, while P'o-dominated vampires use the art to devour souls outright. The vampire must be within 10 feet of the victim and must stare into the victim's eyes with his third eye. The vampire, and anyone else using Chi sight, can actually see the ghostly soul flow from the victim's body and enter the vampire's eye.

System (Hun): To remove a soul from the body, the vampire must look into the eyes of her target. If the target is unwilling, the vampire must roll Hun (difficulty 6) in an extended roll and garner three successes; the target resists with Willpower. Success enables the vampire to pull the soul or spirit through her third eye and into her body. The victim lapses into a catatonic state and must be told to eat, avoid harm, etc.

The victim's soul joins with the vampire's own, and the vampire can begin a process of purgation on the soul. For each point of Willpower spent, the vampire may restore one point of lost Hun or Humanity to the victim. For five Willpower points, the vampire may attempt to set a fellow Kuei-jin back on his Dharmic path. This feat requires a roll of Wits + Enigmas (difficulty of the victim's P'o); if successful, the victim regains the Dharmic point he lost.

System (P'o): The vampire removes the victim's soul, then gives it to her P'o as a "chew toy." To do so, the vampire rolls P'o (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). Success wrenches the soul from the body, which then lapses into a comatose state, as above. This power may never be used on Kuei-jin of a higher Dharma.

• The vampire may choose simply to torture the soul. This act lasts for an entire night and scars the victim's soul, which returns to its body with a permanent Derangement. While tormenting the soul, the vampire may implant any commands desired or even go so far as to change the victim's Nature.

• The vampire may eat the soul, thus fusing it to her own. This act automatically costs a point of permanent Dharma, unless the vampire follows the Howl of the Devil-Tiger Dharma or is in service to a Yama King. A vampire who eats a being's soul gains access to that being's memories and Knowledge Abilities for one day per point of the vampire's P'o. The victim immediately dies.

Internalize

The dual soul can be a curse, but Kuei-jin who master Hun and P'o are capable of feats of will far surpassing anything their Kindred rivals can imagine. The Internalize Discipline centers on inner focus and control. Vampires who master it are rare, but capable of channeling their inner strength to perform seemingly impossible tasks. They are among the most controlled of all Kuei-jin.

The Internalize Discipline is as much a way of unlife as it is a simple set of powers. Over the centuries, it has influenced and been influenced by Zen and Taoist practices. Vampires who develop it must practice rigorous meditation, katas and exercises. A vampire may never raise an Internalize rating to a level higher than his Rituals Knowledge (p. 86).

• No Mind

Through a series of meditative exercises, the vampire empties his Hun of all surface thoughts and gives himself over to direction by the All.

System: The vampire spends a Willpower point to evoke the No Mind, which lasts for a scene. While under the effects of the No Mind exercise, the difficulties of all rolls to read or control the mind of the vampire (including use of Kindred Auspex and Dominate) are increased by two. The difficulty to frenzy also increases by two, but the vampire may not use the Disciplines of Cultivation, Obligation, or Chi'iu Muh while evoking the No Mind exercise. The aura of a vampire using No Mind is blue-white.

•• Blood Yoga

Engaging in deep meditation, the vampire seeks to banish her ever-present nightmares and recharge her psychic reserves more quickly. Vampires with this power regain their mental focus far more readily than other creatures can.

System: By spending a point of Chi and at least an hour (and sometimes as much as an entire night) in uninterrupted meditation, then successfully rolling Perception + Hun (difficulty 6), the vampire regains a point of Willpower. If the player scores three or more successes on the roll, the vampire regains two points of Willpower.

••• Distant Death Kata

The Kuei-jin forces herself to inhale while concentrating on a foe within line of sight. She must then hold the breath, focus and exhale while simultaneously executing a flawless strike to the empty air in front of her. If the attack is delivered properly, action and spirit become one, mystically delivering the force of the attack to the target.

System: The Kuei-jin spends one turn inhaling and holding the breath. She then exhales, spends a point of Willpower, and rolls a normal Melee, Martial Arts, or Brawl attack. The attack is made as if the vampire were in close combat with the target (i.e., typically difficulty 6), but three or more successes must be scored (the attack must be perfect, or nearly so). If the vampire succeeds, the target takes damage as if he were actually struck by his distant opponent. The target may not dodge the attack, but may soak normally.

•••• Iron Soul

The vampire at this level of mastery is a frightening opponent, for he has learned to channel his inner strength into the accomplishment of prodigious acts. Kuei-jin with Iron Soul can perform Herculean feats, make "impossible" shots and otherwise act heroically.

System: The vampire spends three turns in concentration, then rolls Hun (difficulty 9). For each success, the vampire gains an additional automatic success on a Willpower expenditure. Thus, a vampire who scores three successes on the roll may spend a Willpower point to gain four, not one, automatic successes when spending Willpower to accomplish a feat. The Willpower point must be spent on the turn immediately following the Hun roll.

A failed roll causes the vampire to lose a temporary Willpower point, with no successes gained whatsoever. A botch causes the vampire to lose two temporary Willpower points.

••••• Harmony with the All

At this level, the vampire can attune her consciousness to the cosmic cycle, temporarily casting back her mind to the unity of the First Age. While using this power, a vampire acts spontaneously and effortlessly, executing tasks perfectly without thought or planning.

System: The vampire spends two turns in concentration and two points of Willpower. She must then roll her Dharma rating (difficulty 8). If she succeeds, she attunes herself to the Great Cycle.

For the duration of the scene, the vampire cannot botch, nor can she suffer any environmental or situational penalties applied to Dice Pools or difficulties. She may use a weapon in each hand, attack normally even after suffering crippling damage, defend normally against multiple attackers, climb a slick surface as if it were dry, and so on. She may also use Skills she does not possess, as if they were Talents. So, a vampire with no training in Melee could wield a sword at her basic Dexterity Dice Pool, with no difficulty penalty. The vampire must be physically able to perform whatever task she attempts; for example, a one-armed vampire could not wield a staff.

The vampire gives up her consciousness to the Great Cycle. She resists mind control as if she were employing the lesser No Mind power, and she cannot enter fire or shadow soul (though she may not use Demon Arts or Demon Chi while in the Harmonious state).

Finally, a vampire using Harmony with the All is predisposed to uncanny insights. She cannot be ambushed or surprised (this ability is treated similarly to the Auspex 1 ability of sensing danger), and she may make a Perception roll (difficulty 8) to detect invisible creatures. While in the Harmonious state, the vampire may gain precognitive flashes or "mystic" wisdom relating to the current situation, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Obligation

In the early Ages, the ancestors of the Kuei-jin walked among mortals as emperors and gods. As divine emissaries, they received Heavenly blessing to command the lesser mortals of the Middle Kingdom. The power of dragons shone in their gaze, and when they spoke, their voice was as thunder.

The Discipline of Obligation is a legacy of those days. Kuei-jin who study this Discipline learn to channel their Hun souls and use the sheer force of their spirits to inspire — or overwhelm. Not all vampires of the Fifth Age use this power for noble purposes, and some Kuei-jin use it even on other *shen*.

Unlike the Kindred Discipline of Dominate, no generation restriction applies to the use of Obligation.

• Evaluate

The successful magistrate must first learn to look into the souls of his charges. The power of Evaluate allows a Kuei-jin to gauge the state of a target's Hun. By using this power, the vampire can discover a great deal of information, which can be used to gain an advantage over the target.

System: The Kuei-jin spends a turn in concentration, then rolls Perception + Empathy (difficulty of the subject's Willpower).

1 success Cathayan gains a basic understanding of the

target — general personality, surface likes/dislikes, etc. Some information may be cryptic or false.

2 successes Cathayan gains a deeper understanding of target — true name, some history, Demeanor.

3 successes Cathayan gains insight into the deeper areas of the subject's soul — repressed memories, hidden dislikes/hatreds, etc. For the duration of a scene, the Cathayan is able to tell if the subject lies to him. At this level, the vampire can detect Blood Bonds and Spirit Bonds.

4+ successes Cathayan gains complete understanding of target, including Nature, Willpower score, Humanity/Path/Dharma type and rating, and whatever other information the Storyteller deems appropriate.

A botch on the Perception + Empathy roll indicates that the Cathayan misreads the soul or becomes too empathically attached to the person (perhaps mistaking the target for a closely linked soul from another life).

• • Soul Bridge

Gradually extending her mastery of the Hun, the vampire is able to establish a psychic link between her soul and someone else's. Through this channel, the vampire can use her own Hun to influence the workings of a lesser soul.

System: The vampire must face her subject, then roll Manipulation + Empathy (difficulty 6 for mortals, 7 for *shen*).

If the vampire succeeds, she may perform one of the following:

- Add one die per success to her next Social roll against the target (a vampire who scored three successes can add three dice to her next Social roll).
- View one of the target's surface thoughts (chosen by the Storyteller) per success. Thoughts viewed typically appear in pictorial form, like paintings.
- Make a Hun roll (difficulty 6) to silently transmit simple empathic urges to the target. Thus, a vampire could fill a victim with fear, joy, sorrow or similar emotions. A Kuei-jin victim may resist with Hun. If the wielder succeeds/wins, the emotion is strong enough that the victim is forced to act on it.

This power does not work on Kuei-jin with higher Hun scores.

• • • Authority

The Cathayans once held a mandate over mortals. Although Heaven seems to have annulled this mandate, the Kuei-jin have not forgotten it. With this power, the Kuei-jin displays the strength of his Hun by using it to awe and overwhelm other souls. Souls thus subordinated are quick to obey the Cathayan's commands, as if he were an emperor of old.

System: The vampire spends a Willpower point, then rolls Hun + Etiquette against a variable difficulty. If using this power against a mortal, ghoul or similar creature, the difficulty is only 5. If using Authority against a *shen* (Kindred, hengeyokai, etc.), the difficulty is 8. Kuei-jin cannot use the power against other Kuei-jin who have higher Hun or Dharma scores. The same roll is used to determine the power's effect against all creatures in the vicinity.

Example: A Kuei-jin with Hun 3 and Etiquette 3 rolls 3, 1, 9, 6, 6, 5. The botch cancels out the "9," so the vampire is left with 3, 6, 6, 5. He easily affects the mortal Yakuza gangsters near him, but has absolutely no effect on their Hakken werewolf *oyabun*.

If the roll succeeds, for one scene the Kuei-jin is imbued with Authority, which affects all present at the time of the power's manifestation. While under the mantle of Authority, the vampire's Charisma and Manipulation scores increase by three points with regard to affected creatures. These creatures also find themselves unable to lie to the vampire. In the eyes of affected individuals, the vampire is a person of rank and importance; victims obey him with little thought as to why. Most mortals do not even realize that the vampire's authority is supernatural, although wise ancients might suspect, and *shen* certainly know.

The vampire may give commands and expect to have them obeyed. To give a command, the vampire faces the person(s) to be commanded (who must be affected by the Authority already established), then vocally gives them an order. The victim must be able to understand the vampire. The vampire rolls Hun against a difficulty based on the chart below.

The mantle of Authority lasts for a scene.

• • • • Thousand Hell Stare

Truly, this power is a terrible one, traditionally reserved for only the most honorable ancestors and mandarins. In the Fifth Age, knowledge of the art has spread among the unworthy, and so a few *akuma* and other riffraff can use the secrets of their elders. The power is also used on occasion as a torture.

In short, the power enables the wielder to channel all her guilt, frustration, anger and hunger into her Hun soul, then project this negative psychic energy like a knife into her victim's soul. The target of this power feels as if a demon is staring into his soul, judging him and finding him utterly unworthy of consideration or mercy. Prolonged use of the Thousand Hell Stare has been known to drive mortals to suicide or send Kindred into shrieking Rötschreck.

System: The vampire spends a Willpower point, then rolls Hun + Intimidation (difficulty 6). The target resists with Willpower or Humanity, whichever is higher (difficulty 6 for supernaturals, 8 for mortals). This roll is an extended one. If, at any time, the victim accumulates more successes than the vampire, the power ceases to function. If vampire and victim have the same number of successes (for a net of zero), the psychic struggle continues, but no tangible effects take place

Difficulty	Number of Successes Needed	Type of Order
5	one	cease action, do not act, do nothing
6	one	simple order, or one the victim knows is the "correct" thing to do
8	one	complex order, order to do something "out of character"
8	two	potentially life-threatening, violation of the victim's honor/principles
9	two	self-destructive

that turn. If the vampire accumulates more successes than the victim, the victim begins to experience great psychic torment, per the chart below:

Vampire's Net Successes	Effect
1 success	Target loses a point of temporary Willpower, acts at -1 to Dice Pools.
2 successes	Target loses another point of Willpower; experiences psychic agony (-3 to Dice Pools). Cannot attack the vampire; is likely to flee or heed simple commands.
3-4 successes	Target becomes cringing, sniveling and submissive; does nearly anything the vampire asks, short of self-destructive actions. Kuei-jin and Kindred must check for Rötschreck.
5+ successes	Target collapses in a useless heap for the scene, gains a permanent Derangement.

If the vampire botches the Hun + Intimidation roll, she instantly enters fire soul. Note that Kuei-jin and hengeyokai can use their P'o in an attempt to break the Thousand Hell Stare, per the rules on p. 91.

• • • • • Soul Shackles

Vampires at this level of Obligation learn the ultimate secrets of soul mastery. With this power, the vampire can form long-lasting or even permanent bonds between his soul and another's soul. Certain ancestors use this power to cement oaths between themselves and members of their court. This power does not affect a Kuei-jin of higher Hun or Dharma.

System: The vampire spends one turn in concentration and one point of Willpower. The player then makes a Hun + Empathy roll (difficulty of the opponent's Willpower). Success creates a Friendship Bond between the vampire and his victim. Treat this bond as a Vinculum score of 3 (see **The Players Guide to the Sabbat**, p. 47). The victim is friendly toward the vampire, but not blindly so.

The vampire may stop there, or he may further apply the power. (At this point, the victim is sufficiently friendly that she allows the power's continued use.) To continue, the vampire spends another turn in concentration and another point of Willpower. The player then rolls Hun + Leadership (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). If he fails this roll, the soul-bond immediately shatters, probably filling the victim with revulsion. If he succeeds, the bond strengthens, becoming a Giri Bond — the equivalent of Vinculum 6. The victim is exceedingly loyal to the vampire, although a few concerns (true love, deep-rooted personal honor) still supersede the vampire's mastery.

Again, the vampire may choose either to stop the power or to continue. To continue, the vampire spends another turn in concentration and another Willpower point. The player then rolls the vampire's unmodified Hun (difficulty of the opponent's Willpower). Failure breaks the Soul Shackles, with results identical to the ones delineated above. If this last roll succeeds, the victim has a Spirit Bond — the equivalent of a full-scale Blood Bond — toward the vampire. This Spirit Bond overrides all other forms of loyalty, even a previously established Blood Bond.

Each type of bond, once established, lasts a certain amount of time, according to the vampire's successes on the final roll.

1 success	one night
2 successes	one month
3 or more successes	permanent

Rites of the Kuei-jin

Kuei-jin can manipulate Chi through their Disciplines, but they also know means of tapping into the ambient Chi all around them. Although, as undead, Kuei-jin are cut off from the Great Cycle, they nonetheless retain memories of how to manipulate the Cycle's Chi. They do so through the casting of rites: ceremonial words, gestures and actions that allow Kuei-jin to tap into circulating Chi.

Rites are similar, in some respects, to Thaumaturgical rituals, but are far more holistic. Kuei-jin enact rites to placate the spirits, celebrate the seasons and tap into the vast Chi energies of dragon nests. All Kuei-jin have the potential to learn rites, though rites are most commonly employed by Kuei-jin of the west and center directions.

Rites are rated in levels from One (the simplest rites) to Five (the most potent rites). To learn a rite, a Kuei-jin must have a Rituals Knowledge at least equal to the rating of the rite. Moreover, rites are best performed by the enlightened; the difficulty, if any, of a rite cast by a Kuei-jin with a Dharma lower than the rite's rating increases by one. Rumors abound that certain ancestors and bodhisattvas know mighty rites rated at Six or even higher; these rumors remain unconfirmed, for now.

Characters may start play with one or more rites, represented by purchase of the Rites Background (p. 87). Kuei-jin may also learn rites during play. To learn a rite, the character must undergo instruction from a mentor (either another Kuei-

Beyond the Middle Kingdom

It is most auspicious that Kuei-jin traveling outside the bounds of the Middle Kingdom, into the realm of the Kin-jin, may still use their Disciplines normally. Thus, members of a south *wu* invading New York's Chinatown to strike against the barbarian Sabbat may use their powers freely, even in an area as spiritually void as the Bowery.

The spiritual composition of the Occidental World of Darkness, however, is very different. Kuei-jin using spirit-contacting powers may well encounter the minions of Stygia or the Western Garou's totems, who are sure to regard the Cathayans with suspicion.

jin or a spirit). Learning the rite typically takes a number of weeks equal to the rite's rating, and most mentors deign to teach rites only to worthy pupils (or vampires who prove themselves worthy through completion of a quest).

Kuei-jin typically require material components (jade, ginseng, pearls, blood, etc.) to cast rites. Casting a rite usually takes about 10 minutes per level of the rite, as spirit names are invoked, ideograms are laboriously painted and precise gestures are enacted.

The following section outlines several general types of rites and provides sample rites for each type. Storytellers should feel free to use or ignore these rites or to create their own. There are many more types of rites, some peculiar to individual courts or Dharmas; these others, though, must remain mysterious for now.

Polishing the Dragon's Scales: Chi Rites

The rites described in this section deal directly with the Chi forces of Yin and Yang, which allow the Kuei-jin to locate places of power, gain entry into the spirit worlds and effect small Chi adjustments in their immediate vicinity. These rites are collectively known as "polishing the dragon's scales."

Trace the Dragon's Blood (Level One Rite)

To trace the dragon's blood is to utilize one's own Chi to call out to the streams of Chi that flow between dragon nests. In essence, Yin calls to Yin and *vice versa*. The ritual allows Kuei-jin to see all the potent lines of Chi power within visible range and identify them as Yin or Yang Chi. Once the Kuei-jin can clearly see the lines, she is able to tell where they lead (unless they have been deliberately cloaked, an effect that requires a ritual known only to very powerful Kuei-jin).

System: The Kuei-jin chooses a vantage point where she can cast her ritual (obviously, standing atop a mountain gives a greater viewing area, but the lines may be some distance away, thus necessitating a new casting when the Kuei-jin gets close enough to utilize the line she saw from afar). She then spends a point of Chi and concentrates on locating the dragon lines, as she petitions the local dragons for assistance. A small token pleasing to the dragon (jade, lucky money, aromatic herbs, incense or an additional point of Chi) must then be sacrificed. The ritual generally takes anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes, depending on how elaborate the petitioner makes it. The Kuei-jin need not make any roll to succeed unless the lines are cloaked. If they are, the vampire must roll Perception + Occult (difficulty 8) to discern where the lines lie. Their destination points are, nevertheless, not readily perceivable. At the Storyteller's discretion, particularly elaborate or inventive rituals can lower the rite's difficulty number by one or two points.

Behold the Spirits' Doorway (Level Two Rite)

Finding entry points into the spirit worlds allows a Kuei-jin to enter without the need for jade replicas or high levels of Prana Disciplines. Since gateways open to specific destinations, using them is more accurate than simply picking a spot and crossing over there, then having to seek out the proper location the traveler wishes to visit.

Gateways always exist within a dragon nest, although not every dragon nest serves as a gateway. These doorways into the spirit worlds lead to either the Yin or the Yang World. Although rumors of gateways into the Yomi World persist, no Kuei-jin has ever located one. Vampires who wish to find a gateway must travel to an area where they believe such a passage exists, then use this ritual to determine its exact location, whether it is Yin or Yang, and what the gate's terminal point is.

System: Upon reaching the place where she believes a gate to be, the seeker inscribes a *kaja* ideogram symbolizing "gate." The medium for this inscription can be a scroll on which the seeker draws the appropriate characters, a length of silk twisted into the shape of the ideogram, a chalk drawing made on pavement, sprinklings of powder — even several rocks laid out in a gatelike pattern. While drawing the characters or forming the gate, the seeker intones a plea to the denizens of both worlds and beseeches them to grant her the vision she needs. She lights incense and waves it over the pattern. The gateway then becomes visible.

Imbuing the Jade (Level Three Rite)

This rite enables Kuei-jin to imbue jade with properties that allow the gem's possessor to cross into the spirit worlds or utilize dragon lines. The vampire crafts jade replicas — tiny likenesses of the Kuei-jin — for use when following in the crab's footsteps, whereas she carves small boats for use when riding the dragon's tongue.

System: The Kuei-jin must acquire several small pieces of jade. If she wishes to travel to the Yin World, the jade should be white; if to the Yang world, red is preferred. Any color of jade may be used for making the boats. The Kuei-jin must fill a bronze bowl with clean water, add an infusion of savory herbs and set it outdoors in the moonlight for an hour. While the infusion steeps, the Kuei-jin uses a bronze knife to make scratches on each piece of jade she wants to imbue. The scratches must approximate a humanlike figure or a boat, but need not be particularly adept renderings. The ritualist expends two points of Chi, then she immerses the jade in the water. Under the moon's light, the jade assumes the proper form — boat or person. The jade is now imbued with power. Travel jades (as they are commonly called) are usually kept in a small, highly decorated or embroidered pouch. Each ritual can create 12 travel jades, which may be divided any way the ritualist chooses (for example, all may be boats or persons or any combination of the two). The water used in the ritual becomes charged with Chi and can enhance the growth of night-blooming flowers if poured over them.

Cloak the Dragon's Passage (Level Four Rite)

Diametrically opposed to the ritual for tracing the dragon's blood, this ritual serves to hide a dragon line and conceal its destination point. Cloak the Dragon's Passage is a method whereby a Kuei-jin whose resting place lies near dragon tracks may make them more difficult for other Kuei-jin to find, while still maintaining a dragon line for the ritualist's own use. Once another Kuei-jin overcomes the attempt to hide the dragon line, the ritual must be reenacted.

System: The ritualist must use a jade boat to travel the length of the dragon line she wants to cloak (see "Riding the Dragon's Tongue," p. 146). While traveling, she must spend two points of Chi, invoke the dragons' aid and strew a mixture of jade powder, crushed gems and ground ginseng along the path behind her, coating it. Such a mixture can be quite costly, depending on the quality of the materials used. She must fling a handful upon the path every few feet, as she intones pleas to the guardian dragons. While this ritual seems to take hours to complete, it actually lasts no longer than the normal journey time. Should exceedingly precious materials be used in the ritual, the Storyteller may assign a higher difficulty level to vampires attempting to find the cloaked dragon track (to a maximum of 10).

Rite of Supplication (Level Four Rite)

Once a gateway has been found and identified, Kuei-jin of power and standing may open such a portal and cross through it into the spirit worlds. This task is deceptively simple, though only mighty Kuei-jin can perform it properly. Having completed the rite to Behold the Spirits' Doorway, the Kuei-jin wishing to cross through the portal need only ring a small bell or gong.

System: The Kuei-jin takes a small bell or gong and rings (or beats) it five times slowly. Each peal of the bell must die away fully before the next can sound. With the final dying away of the fifth tone, the gateway opens and the traveler can step through it. Note that there may be guardians of the gate, either within the Middle Kingdom or on the other side, who must be placated or bested before the Kuei-jin can utilize the gate.

Creating the Rivergate (Level Five Rite)

In order to ride the dragon's tongue, Kuei-jin must enter a portal and sail along the river of Chi from one destination to another. Each year, those doorways (called rivergates) must be renewed. This ritual allows Kuei-jin either to create or renew a rivergate. Every rivergate has a "protector" who is responsible for its upkeep. Some protectors ignore their gates, thus allowing anyone who wishes to utilize such portals to do so; others may charge a toll for passage or allow a gate's use only at particular times. Some protectors refuse to allow passage at all unless beings who want to utilize the dragon's tongue best them in combat or at some other challenge.

System: On New Year's Day, Kuei-jin responsible for the maintenance of a rivergate must renew its power. As soon after dusk as possible, they must go to the gate, chant a paean to the dragon affiliated with it and sacrifice a fine piece of jade or a pearl (by crushing it). The vampire then expends a point of Chi to stabilize the rivergate for another year. Each destination that the tongue leads to ends in a similar rivergate, each of which must also be renewed by its guardian if travel between the two portals is to remain possible. A rivergate closes if it is not maintained. Such a portal can be reopened by performing this ritual and expending three points of Chi on the night of the next full moon. Whoever performs the ritual is the rivergate's guardian, though guardians who are already in place have the right to renew a gate first. Usurpers who take over an established gate without having it bequeathed to them or assigned to them by an ancestor may be driven out or otherwise punished for their transgression.

Traveling the Inner Paths: Individual Rites

Kuei-jin frequently make use of rites to mark, commemorate or otherwise signify changes in their unlives. In some cases, these rites simply underscore a decision that has already been made; in others, the rite effects a transformation that cannot otherwise occur. The following rites primarily affect individuals rather than groups and illustrate the kinds of events that warrant ritual attention. Storytellers and players should feel free to invent their own versions of these rites or create new ones for themselves.

The Way of the Lone Walker (Level Two Rite)

Occasionally, a Kuei-jin discovers that she does not conform to the strict hierarchy or rigorous protocol of existence among the Cathayans. Rather than being declared outcast by society, the rebellious or eccentric Kuei-jin willingly and willfully turns her back on the systems of court and wu by declaring herself heimin. This rite of self-renunciation provides an acceptable means for such dissatisfied Kuei-jin to legitimize their decision without cutting themselves off entirely from Cathayan society or arousing its active hostility. A Kuei-jin who seeks the way of the outsider typically holds fast to her Dharma and assigned direction. She has no desire to deny what she is, only to forego the trappings of Kuei-jin society.

System: A Kuei-jin wishing to perform this rite upon herself must issue invitations to members of her *wu* (if she has one) and to at least one appropriate elder (her former *sifu* or one of the mandarins of the court she is leaving). Once all the participants gather at the time and place designated by the invitation, the renunciate performs a tea ceremony (using an infusion of water, blood and herbs) for her guests. She refrains from drinking the tea to symbolize her break with Kuei-jin society. After the ceremony, she breaks the tea vessels and turns her back upon her guests, who then depart, leaving the newly acknowledged heimin free to walk her own path.

Taking the Left-Hand Path (Level Two Rite)

Kuei-jin who realize that their chosen Dharma does not suit them sometimes enact this rite to cast away their old path and embrace a new one. While this rite often takes place in the presence of a vampire's *wu*-mates or at a meeting of her court, some Kuei-jin prefer to conduct the ceremony in private and announce their decision after the fact.

System: Before beginning the rite, the Kuei-jin prepares a list of reasons why her old Dharmic path no longer provides her with the vision and purpose necessary for her continued progress along the Road Back. She may use calligraphy or brush painting to produce this list, so that it becomes a thing of beauty as well as the centerpiece of the rite. The rite itself consists of a series of ritual purifications (baths, incense, meditation and fasting), followed by the donning of completely new clothes, symbolic of the vampire's new beginning. The rite culminates in the fiery destruction of the list prepared earlier and the inscription of a new parchment or the creation of a brush painting that illustrates the new Dharmic path. No rolls need be made to perform this rite, but the character must

spend a point each of Yin Chi and Yang Chi to solidify the change. After completing the rite, the character loses all levels in her old Dharma and begins her new path at a rating of 1.

Restoring the Dharmic Balance (Level Four Rite)

This rite restores a fledgling Kuei-jin who has fallen from her Dharma and relapsed to the state of a *chih-mei* (Dharma zero). Another Kuei-jin, usually an elder or — at the very least — a more enlightened individual, must perform this rite for the fallen vampire. The subject undergoes a ritual cleansing involving water, the burning of incense and the recitation of mantras. If the rite succeeds, the *chih-mei* returns to her senses and begins her Dharmic journey once again.

System: In most cases, the *chih-mei* must be subdued and forcibly brought to the place of purification — usually some site that is rich in Chi or that has some significance to the performer of the rite or the subject. After completing the steps outlined above, the Kuei-jin enacting the rite rolls Wits + Expression or some other appropriate Ability (difficulty 9). The number of successes gained is subtracted from 10. The difference is the difficulty for a sustained Willpower roll by the subject. One such roll may be made per night, so the rite may need repeating several times. Once the subject achieves 10 successes, the rite succeeds in restoring a Dharma rating of 1 to the subject, thus bringing her back from the ranks of *chih-mei* and allowing her to resume her "normal" existence as a Kuei-jin.

Social Rites

Just as individual Kuei-jin use rites to enhance and give structure to their existence, Cathayan society likewise uses rites to acknowledge changes that affect the greater community. The following rites provide some examples of ceremonies for auspicious occasions; Storytellers may use them as guidelines for creating other social rites or ignore them altogether. Other possible candidates for rites include ceremonies for declaring a Kuei-jin to be *akuma* or for acknowledging declaration of a shadow war between rival individuals or courts.

Embrace the Spirit's Change (Level One Rite)

As the years of his existence fall away, a Kuei-jin goes through many stages of personal and social progress. From the nights of his vampiric "youth" (the lifetime of a normal human) to his eventual (though not inevitable) attainment of status within the ranks of Cathayan society, each Kuei-jin experiences considerable changes in personality and temperament that transform him from the person he was into a new individual. Many Kuei-jin mark these passages along the Road Back by taking new names, thus signifying their new identities. This rite publicly acknowledges the assumption of a new name.

System: A Kuei-jin first petitions the members of her *wu* or the mandarins of her court for the privilege of taking a new name. Upon receiving permission, she spends three nights prior to the naming ceremony in ritual purification, during which she meditates upon the most appropriate name. The ceremony consists of the vampire appearing before the assembled gathering (of her *wu* or court), performing the necessary obsequies and publicly announcing her desire to take a new name. She then recites this name five times, to each of the five directions (north, south, east, west and center). The attendees then formally address the Kuei-jin by her new name, thus clothing the intent with reality. The character must spend one point of Chi to link the new name to her inner self and sever her association with her old name. If a Kuei-jin does not wish to replace one name with another but wants

instead to adopt both names (thus symbolizing a continuity of personality), she spends a point of Chi to link the two names together in the eyes of the spirits.

Rites of Wind and Water

Some Kuei-jin practice their own version of *feng shui* that uses their study of harmonious alignments with Chi lines to achieve a number of effects powered by energy from the spirit worlds.

Harmonious Shielding of the Guarded Home (Level One Rite)

This rite protects from violation or invasion a Kuei-jin's resting place or the tomb that contained her mortal body. Similar in effect to the Thaumaturgical ritual Defense of the Sacred Haven, this rite prevents harmful influences from entering or defiling the affected site. It also provides a sleeping Kuei-jin with a warning if intruders attempt to approach the site.

System: The individual performing the rite must take an hour to perform a ritual cleansing of the site. She may use human servants to accomplish this task if she does not wish to indulge in menial labor herself, but she must be physically present during the cleansing. The character then places incense and purifying herbs in a bowl of steaming water and allows them to steep until their aroma fills the room. The final step involves using a small brush to paint harmonious symbols inside the room or around the tomb and draw curved lines or circles to repel demons. (Some versions of this rite involve strewing grains of rice in a circle inside the protected site.) Each point of Chi spent provides 24 hours of protection, but no more than three points may be spent at any one time.

Construct the Dragon Bone Prison (Level Three Rite)

By means of this rite, the ritualist entraps another Kuei-jin in her own resting place, thus rendering the target unable to leave her prison until the interval specified during the performance of the rite has expired.

Rumor has it that certain Kuei-jin have developed variants of this rite that enable them to affect Western Kindred.

System: The character must first locate the resting place of the target and make a thorough study of its physical layout and relationship to the Chi lines nearest it. By using mirrors, screens or other appropriate instruments, the Kuei-jin then constructs a series of Chi lines that act as a barrier around the site and prevent anyone inside from leaving, so long as the lines remain intact. (Usually, the devices used in constructing these lines are concealed so that the victim — or, more likely, a servant of the victim — cannot immediately locate and remove them.) The character then rolls Dexterity + Occult (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Three successes are necessary to entrap the site's resident for 24 hours; four successes allow the ritualist to designate a duration of up to one week. Five successes confine the target for a full month.

To break the entrapment, a Kuei-jin must roll Willpower (difficulty 9) and achieve 10 successes to escape the confines of her resting place for one hour. She must then spend that hour locating and removing all the obstacles used to devise her prison. This activity requires a Perception + Investigation roll versus a difficulty equal to the combined Dexterity + Stealth of the ritualist (to a maximum of 10). If the victim cannot find all the objects within the allotted hour, she must return to her resting place and cannot repeat the attempt for 24 hours.

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ROBINSON
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Chapter Five: Arts of the Kuei-jin

I kissed my love on a pile of skulls. Cut and bleeding from the shards, we made love among the bones. His breath was sweet on my tongue and his muscles rolled atop me like a blood tide.

In the end, I let him live.

We said goodbye as the birds awoke. Gently, I picked a bit of white from his crimson shoulder and kissed him with lips that had tasted jade. With a playful slap, I sent him on his way.

His tears were the first life to grace my home.

Weapons are the instruments of misfortune and should be resorted to only when unavoidable.
— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The ways of the East differ, sometimes subtly, sometime profoundly, from those of the West. This chapter presents systems to cover various actions available to Kuei-jin. The fundamental similarities and differences between Kindred and Kuei-jin are quantified here, as well; thus, this chapter presents rules for differences in healing, diablerie and other basic processes.

Aggravated Damage

Kuei-jin take aggravated damage from fire, most Chi-based attacks, and the claws and fangs of *shen*. Kuei-jin are vulnerable to sunlight, but in a different manner from Western vampires. See "Sunlight," p. 151, for more particulars.

Blood Bond

Kuei-jin blood may not be used to create Blood Bonds. Nor may Kuei-jin be Blood Bound to Kindred; they may drink as much vitae as they like and remain unaffected. However, Kuei-jin with the Obligation power of Soul Shackles (p. 126) are more than capable of forging unbreakable spiritual bonds with other beings (willing or otherwise).

Chi

For Western Kindred, the blood is indeed the life. Their power is measured in terms of their proximity to the cursed blood of Caine, and they fuel their unliving condition and arcane arts with the blood of their prey.

Kuei-jin, on the other hand, realize that blood is only one expression—albeit a tasty one—of the essence that flows through all aspects of creation. This energy, known as Chi, is the source of all thought, movement, action and even repose. In the Middle Kingdom, beings who can access internal and external sources of Chi gain a connection to reservoirs of unfathomable power.

Kuei-jin, cut off as they are from the cycle of life and death, have no natural Chi of their own. It is their karma to steal it from others. By doing so, they gain the energy to maintain their undead state and fuel their Disciplines.

Permanent Versus Temporary Yin and Yang

Cathayans have two ratings for Chi. The permanent Chi Virtue ratings, as described in Chapter Three, measure a character's attunement to and ability to process the appropriate type of Chi. Cathayans also have temporary Yin and Yang scores that measure the actual amount of Chi energy in their bodies. No Cathayan may have more than 10 points of either type of temporary Chi (though rumors state that the bodhisattvas and arhats can store much, much more).

A character's temporary Chi may (and often does) exceed his permanent Chi rating. Whenever this condition occurs, however, the character is in danger of temporary Chi imbalance (see "Chi Imbalance," p. 139).

Yang and Yin Chi

In the Middle Kingdom, all energy is either positive (Yang) or negative (Yin). Positive energy is referred to as Yang Chi, while negative energy is called Yin Chi. The amounts of Yin and Yang Chi available to a Kuei-jin are represented by the vampire's temporary Yin and Yang scores.

Yang Chi is the "kinetic" energy of life. It constantly seethes, constantly crackles from point to point, constantly transforms itself. It flows through raging rivers; it rides on summer storms. It is present in the kiss of a lover and the spring of a tiger. Kuei-jin, who are so cut off from the normal cycles of the world, find Yang Chi to be a heady, often euphoric, stimulant.

Yin Chi, by contrast, is "potential" energy: energy at rest or in a passive state. Yin Chi also encompasses the energy of terror, depression and other "negative" emotions. At its ultimate level of development, Yin Chi is the energy of death, and it permeates the various levels of the Jade Kingdom. Yin Chi tends to "coagulate," to mystically accumulate in sites suited to it, such as graveyards, abandoned buildings and plague-ridden shantytowns. In contrast to the "kick" of Yang, vampires find Yin to be a sort of narcotic: dark, soothing, deceptively intoxicating.

Although Yang Chi tends to display qualities Westerners think of as "positive" or "healthy," while Yin Chi embodies superficially "dark" or "unhealthy" qualities, *shen* know that both are vital and valuable parts of the Ten Thousand Things. Someone who is constantly overwhelmed with emotion, never still or contemplative, is as "unhealthy" as any morbid old *ch'ing shih*.

Kuei-jin also have "Demon Chi," the restless energy generated by the P'o. It is not true Chi, but may nonetheless be used to power certain Kuei-jin arts. The cost for doing so, however, can prove quite high.

Places to Find Chi

Chi flows from the Yin and Yang Worlds and permeates the Middle Kingdom. Its primary repositories are living beings (particularly *shen*) and special sites (dragon lines, dragon nests and other places where the Wall between matter and spirit is weak). Vampires with sufficient knowledge of Chi can detect (and potentially tap) the subtle flows all around them.

An average human being's body contains 10 Chi points. Vampires may drain this Chi in any of several ways. Mortals of particularly strong spirit (demon hunters or anyone of Willpower 9+) might have more Chi, but this state is rare.

"Black" and "Scarlet" Chi

Vampires' bodies act as cauldrons, collecting and refining Chi into various ichors and bodily humors. Chi absorbed by a vampire permeates the creature's corpse. It moves through the bloodstream as fluid and through the cavities as vapor.

Yin Chi, per its nature, congeals into a viscous, blackish liquid or a heavy black mist. Kuei-jin refer to this stuff as "black" Chi. Black Chi is used to power Yin Disciplines.

Yang Chi, by contrast, undergoes some changes in the vampiric metabolism. Vampires may use "positive" Chi, but such Chi is a far cry from the relatively "pure" Chi found in a newborn baby or the light of the sun. Yang Chi of the sort used by Kuei-jin is known as "scarlet" Chi; it is a fierce, roiling energy, the distilled essence of torment and rage. This scarlet Chi manifests as a seething, effervescent liquid or gas that flows freely through the Kuei-jin corpse. With it, vampires power Yang Disciplines.

Greedy human alchemists seeking the secrets of immortality covet both sorts of Chi. Occasionally, a particularly intrepid or foolish alchemist hunts Cathayans for their Chi; such a mortal often finds his wish of immortality granted, albeit perversely, as his essence is drained and subsumed into the eternal Kuei-jin body.

Almost all *shen* have at least 10 Chi points, and, despite various treaties drawn up over the years, Kuei-jin do occasionally hunt other *shen*. Not only is this activity dangerous in and of itself, but vampires who constantly drink from *shen* might well attract the wrath of spirits.

Unlike their Kindred counterparts, Kuei-jin may not feed from animals. To feed from beings so much lower in the karmic cycle is impossible, and the very thought is somewhat shameful. *Chih-mei* occasionally stalk and eat animals out of sheer savagery, but they gain no sustenance from doing so.

Certain sites are rich in Chi. These sites tend to attract *shen*, as well as mortals sensitive to the supernatural. *Shen* inhabitants of these areas call them by various names: caerns, nodes, haunts and other things; Kuei-jin refer to them as dragon nests. Kuei-jin of sufficient Dharmic understanding can feed directly from such sites, though centuries of self-discipline must take place to reach such a level of mastery.

Additionally, Kuei-jin know of the dragon lines: mystic tracks of Yin or Yang Chi connecting the Middle Kingdom's dragon nests in a vast spiderweb. Few other supernaturals are aware of these tracks, which can be used for mystic transport (though wraiths employ their Byways, and hengeyokai have their Moon Bridges).

Some *shen*, provided they have sufficient understanding of dragon nests and dragon tracks, can manipulate the flow of Chi through an area. Thus, an antiseptic Hong Kong skyscraper might be "flooded" with Yin Chi directed from the nearby slums; in the process, a "creepy" aura would follow, allowing ghosts and other spirits through the Wall, into the building.

Feeding

To maintain their state and power themselves, vampires must feed. Many Cathayans feed in a manner superficially similar to their Kindred counterparts, but blood-drinking is by no means the sole method Cathayans have for gaining Chi.

A vampire may feed on a number of substances, depending on the Kuei-jin's level of Dharmic understanding. First, the vampire ingests blood (or flesh, or breath or essence) as usual. So long as the amount of Chi imbibed does not exceed the vampire's ability to handle it (i.e., her permanent Chi Virtues), no ill effects result. However, siphoning more Chi than the vampire can handle may lead to a dangerous imbalance (see "Chi Imbalance," p. 139).

Taking Chi from others is never a wholly pleasurable process; the victim always feels a sense of violation, either during the act itself or later. When a vampire siphons Yin, the victim feels waves of lassitude, calm and utter depression simultaneously; conversely, when a vampire siphons Yang, the victim feels panic, anger and boundless, seemingly sourceless, mirth, all at once. Unlike what Kindred inflict, the Kuei-jin feeding process is not a euphoric experience for its mortal victims. Kuei-jin must pacify their prey through one means or another.

Drained Chi returns to the victim at a variable rate. Stolen "breath" returns at the rate of one point per day. If the Chi came from blood or flesh, the victim's Chi returns based on the healing rate of the wound in question (Obviously, taking Chi from flesh in this manner is a devastating attack!). If a mortal drops to zero Chi, she dies, and the Kuei-jin suffers whatever Dharmic repercussions such a murder entails.

Hunger

Like Kindred, Kuei-jin suffer burning hungers. When a vampire has five or fewer Chi points (of either sort) in his body, he is *hungry*. A hungry vampire must make a check for entry into fire soul whenever an obvious source of Chi presents itself. When a vampire has two or fewer Chi points, he is *ravenous*. A ravenous vampire must likewise make a check for fire soul, but the P'o needs only one success to trigger the condition.

Vampires with a Yang imbalance become *ravenous* at five or fewer Chi points, and *uncontrollable* at two or fewer. An uncontrollable vampire *must* seek out Chi at the expense of all

Mortals, Virtues and Chi

The Kuei-jin Virtues can be a bit tricky to apply to other creatures. Although the different *shen* species have various magical Advantages that correspond to Kuei-jin Chi Virtues (and are detailed in their respective sections), it is particularly important to establish Chi ratings for mortals, as they are the beings from whom Kuei-jin feed most often.

Mortals typically cannot use Chi (though certain demon hunters may; see Demon Hunter X). Nonetheless, each has a reservoir of Chi, usually 10 points worth.

Mortals also have permanent Chi ratings, but they cannot use any of the supernatural powers inherent to Kuei-jin (the ratings are defensive only). Generally speaking, a mortal's Yin rating equals his Self-Control, while his Yang rating equals his Courage. Mortals with "particularly strong spirits" make very good eating, as far as the Kuei-jin are concerned.

Mortals also have the Hun Soul Virtue. Typically, mortals have Hun ratings equal to half their Humanity scores, rounded up. Again, they may not use these Hun ratings to perform supernatural feats, though rumor has it that certain mortal mystics employ Hun powers of their own.

Most mortals do not have the P'o Virtue; the Demon is the peculiar curse of the Kuei-jin. A few mortals, however, have rudimentary P'o ratings. If a mortal drops to a Humanity rating of 1, he gains a P'o rating of 1, though he may not use this P'o as Kuei-jin do. Each time the mortal's Humanity rating drops below 1 (see The Vampire Players Guide, pp. 33-34), he not only gains a Derangement, but he also adds one point to his P'o rating. This occurrence might prove significant when certain Kuei-jin powers come into play; P'o-tainted mortals might well "run amok" and join the vampires in sprees of carnage.

If necessary, Western Kindred can be assigned Kuei-jin Virtues per the systems above. A Kindred's effective P'o Rating equals (10 - Humanity/Path score).

other actions, and he automatically enters fire soul unless Willpower is spent to avoid it.

Ways of Obtaining Chi

The basest vampires, the *chih-mei*, may obtain their Chi only from freshly killed human flesh. Kuei-jin may also obtain their Chi in this way, though most do not, as it is considered uncouth at best.

The majority of Cathayans feed, as do their Western counterparts, on blood. One Blood Point's worth of vitae translates into one point of Chi. Whether this Chi is Yin or Yang depends on the victim and the circumstances (see "Blood," below).

Because Asian vampires have no generation, no vampire is "born" with a greater understanding of how to ingest and focus Chi. However, each Dharma teaches yogas, sutras and other exercises that help the vampire understand the inner workings of her Chi. As a vampire becomes more knowledgeable of her undead condition, she learns how to concentrate, channel and focus Chi through her body.

Flesh

The lowest of Kuei-jin, the *chih-mei* and those close to them, gain their sustenance from human flesh. *Chih-mei* and other zero-Dharma vampires can gain their sustenance in no other fashion. Few Kuei-jin of any standing openly indulge in flesh-eating, although certain degenerates among the Quincunx and Golden Courts supposedly have refined the practice to a culinary art.

Naturally, such a banquet is gruesome and highly disturbing. Most civilized Kuei-jin consider the practice unclean and filthy, at the very least, and Kuei-jin who were devout Buddhists or Shintoists in life absolutely loathe this practice and its practitioners alike. Few Dharmas advocate it, most censure it outright, and such cannibalism is a sure ticket to Dharmic degeneration.

System: An average human being has 10 "levels" of flesh; each level converts into one point of Chi. Kuei-jin may easily ingest more flesh than their stomachs can "logically" hold. Each turn, the vampire may eat one Chi point's worth of flesh. Each "level" of flesh taken inflicts one Health Level of damage on the victim. Chi stolen from flesh repairs itself in the victim only as swiftly as any wounds heal.

Flesh from a recently (within four hours) killed victim provides Yin and Yang in equal measure. Flesh from a cold corpse provides mostly Yin (assume 8 Yin to 2 Yang), while vampires who eat their prey alive (it happens, particularly among the *chih-mei*) gain mostly Yang (assume 8 Yang to 2 Yin).

Blood (Dharma 1+)

A vampire with a Dharma rating of 1 or greater may feed on blood, in a manner similar to a Western vampire. Common Kuei-jin feed in utilitarian fashion, while aristocratic mandarins often refine blood-drinking to an elaborate and artful ceremony. One establishment in Kyoto has set itself up as a high-class "tea house," paying homage to the old Japanese *cha-no-yu* ceremonies; the vessels there are conditioned to provide aesthetic enjoyment as well as nourishment. The fleshpits of the Golden Courts often harbor less refined feeding parlors, in which vampires openly feed from terrified — or ecstatic — vessels.

System: Most mortals have 10 Blood Points, which the vampire converts into Yin or Yang Chi on a one-for-one basis. Typically, a vampire automatically converts blood into the Chi type of which he has the lesser amount, thereafter alternating ingestion of Yin and Yang into his body.

Example: A Kuei-jin has a Yin Virtue of 4 and a Yang Virtue of 3. He currently has one point of temporary Yang and three of temporary Yin. Upon drinking blood, the vampire first recovers two points of Yang (thus equaling his Yang Virtue and balancing his Yang with his Yin). Should the vampire continue to feed, he gains a Yin point (taking his temporary Yin to 4), then a Yang point, and so on.

There are many ways to modify this equation. Taking Chi from victims who are in awe or ecstasy may result in a superabundance of Yang Chi, while victims who are made to feel extreme sadness or terror provide larger doses of Yin Chi.

In game terms, a vampire spending time to create the appropriate "mood" in his prey may make a Manipulation + (Chi Virtue desired) roll (difficulty 6 or as adjudicated by the Storyteller). Success enables the vampire to attune himself to the desired type of Chi in his victim's body; Chi taken from the victim is of the designated type until the vampire makes another Manipulation + (opposing Chi Virtue) roll to attune himself to the opposite sort of Chi.

Chi stolen in this manner returns as soon as the victim regains blood (either naturally or through intravenous injections).

Breath (Dharma 5+)

A vampire with a Dharma rating of 5+ may extract Chi directly from a victim's "breath." This "breath" is not actual oxygen/carbon dioxide, but rather the mystic force powering the victim. Of all the "lesser" methods of feeding, breath-draining allows the greatest latitude in the proportions of Yin and Yang received. For example, a Kuei-jin who engages in sexual congress with a mortal while feeding probably receives Yang Chi, while a Kuei-jin who "steals the last breath" from a dying man might find herself infused with Yin.

System: The Kuei-jin must be in a rational state (wind soul). He must make physical contact with the victim and must have access to one of the victim's orifices (not necessarily the nose or mouth). The vampire must then roll to attack, using the Chi Virtue corresponding to the type of Chi he wishes to drain. The victim may resist this attack with a Stamina roll; the difficulty of both rolls is typically 6, though the Storyteller may adjust either based on the specific circumstances of the draining.

For each success gained, the vampire may suck one point of Chi per turn. Each point of breath drained inflicts an automatic Health Level of damage, as the victim's life-force is sucked away. The vampire is by no means required to take as much breath as his Chi roll indicates. Nor does a wound need to be made; indeed, clever vampires may be able to steal a point or two of breath without the victim knowing anything is amiss.

If the vampire scores zero or negative successes, the attack does not work this turn, though he may attempt it again next

turn. If the vampire botches the roll, he may never take breath from the victim, though he may attempt to consume flesh or blood, as usual.

Health Levels drained in this manner return to the victim at the rate of one point per day. Certain martial arts masters can resist breath-draining; for more details, see the forthcoming **Demon Hunter X** sourcebook.

Breath-Draining and *Shen*

The devastating thing about breath-draining is that, when applied to other *shen*, the vampire may choose to siphon Chi energy not only from the *shen*'s life-force, but also from the *shen*'s reservoirs. When inflicting a breath-draining, the vampire may target the Chi reservoir rather than the life-force of the victim. The method for performing the attack is the same.

If attacking another Kuei-jin, or if using the simplified rules in Chapter Eight for other *shen*, each point of Chi stolen causes the victim to lose one point from her Chi reservoir, while the vampire gains that point into his Yin or Yang Chi Pool. No Health Levels are drained via this attack.

If using rules from the other World of Darkness games, Kindred lose Blood Points, shapeshifters lose temporary Gnosis, mages lose Quintessence, wraiths lose Pathos, changelings lose Glamour, and mummies lose Sekhem, while the Kuei-jin gains Chi, on a one-for-one basis. Again, no Health Levels are lost via such an attack. Stolen energy returns by whatever methods the supernatural creature in question normally employs.

Osmosis (Dharma 6+)

The ancients — the bodhisattvas and arhats — can siphon Chi from the essence of the world itself. They are so attuned to Chi flows that they may literally gain sustenance from the Chi permeating the earth, water and sky.

System: Whenever a vampire must feed, she spends three turns in concentration, then rolls Yin or Yang against a difficulty of the local Wall. The vampire attempting this feat must have a Dharma rating equal to or higher than the local Wall (thus, only vampires of the highest Dharma ratings may practice this method of feeding with any regularity). Success enables the Cathayan to siphon a number of Chi points equal to (10 - Wall rating) from the natural dragon lines of the world, with few ill effects to the environment. However, no individual site may be fed from more than once a month, unless the vampire wishes to defile the site (see below).

Should the attack fail, or should additional Chi be desired, more radical means might be necessary. The vampire can take an extra turn and unleash her P'o literally to tear the Chi from the world's flow. To do so, the vampire rolls P'o versus a difficulty of the local Wall. Success enables the vampire to take

as much Chi as she needs. However, this attack automatically disrupts dragon lines in the surrounding region. Often, spectacular results follow in the immediate area, as shapeshifter caerns literally wither and turn to ash, nodes become gray and inert, or haunts become sterile old buildings. The region's ambient Chi (to a diameter of one mile per point of Chi taken) is considered defiled thereafter (any Chi subsequently taken from the site replenishes a Kuei-jin's Demon Chi pool and automatically triggers shadow nature). Needless to say, local spirits are very upset by such actions.

Spending Chi

Lesser Kuei-jin may spend only one point of Chi per turn. However, if a character has a high rating in her Dharma, she may spend more than one point per turn. See p. 54 for more information.

Chi expenditure produces an aura around the character; this aura is obvious to Chi-sensing creatures. If enough Chi (three or more points) is spent in one turn, an effect tangible even to mundanes might occur. Yin Chi exudes a cold, creepy aura, while Yang Chi literally sparks and crackles around the character's body.

Normally, a vampire may spend only one type of Chi (either Yin, Yang or Demon) per turn. To use a power requiring the expenditure of different sorts of Chi, the vampire must spend the Chi on successive turns. The Discipline of Equilibrium, however, allows the Kuei-jin to ignore this rule.

Aspecting the Corpse

Like their Western counterparts with their Blood Points, Cathayans must expend a point of Chi merely to get up and walk around each night. Energy used in the base task of animation attunes the vampire's body to one or the other variety of Chi.

While animated with Chi energy, the vampire is considered "aspected" to Yin or Yang. Once an aspect is assumed, it cannot be shed until the energy used in animating the body wears off. When utilizing Yin Chi, the vampire does not need to feed as often, which explains the bafflement of Western Kinjin over Kuei-jin prisoners (the few they have taken) who seem perfectly fine after prolonged hiatuses between feedings.

- **Yin:** Vampires who spend a point of Yin to satisfy themselves are considered "black cycled." After such an expenditure, the vampire need not recharge himself for 10 nights! (Of course, using Disciplines and the like requires the normal amount of Chi expenditure.)

However, the body is permeated with negative energies. For the duration of the Chi "charge," the vampire exudes an eerie aura and displays a corpselike pallor. Difficulties of all Social rolls involving mortals are increased by one — although certain mortals, such as poets, musicians and the like, might actually find the character fascinating.

- **Yang:** Vampires animating themselves via Yang Chi are considered in "scarlet cycle." Yang Chi "burns" itself through the body much more quickly. Vampires animating themselves via Yang must spend one point per night, just like Kindred. The vampire appears more human and suffers no penalties to Social rolls.

Lack of Chi

A vampire with no Chi in her body begins to crumble and rot. Each time she must expend Chi (to activate a Discipline or merely animate her corpse), she loses a Health Level instead, until her dual soul flees the body and her existence as a Kuei-jin ends.

Chi Imbalance

A Cathayan's Chi Virtues indicate how much of a given type of Chi the vampire may safely channel through her body. As mentioned, the vampire is easily capable of ingesting more temporary Chi than her Chi Virtues indicate. However, a vampire who abuses this practice runs the risk of an imbalance — a dangerous "overdose" of Chi. A vampire who routinely acts as a conduit for energies beyond her capacity may find herself suffering from annoying, unpleasant or outright lethal side effects.

In any event, no more than 10 points of each given type of Chi may be ingested, save by ancestors and other such ancient Kuei-jin — or so it is said.

Permanent Imbalance — Chi Virtues

A vampire who has three or more dots in one Chi Virtue than in another (for example, a vampire with Yin 6 and Yang 3) is in a state of permanent imbalance.

Permanent imbalance has some positive side effects. First, the vampire can obviously handle much a greater quantity of temporary Chi energies. Just as a heavy drinker can imbibe a much larger quantity of liquor than a social drinker can, so a vampire with a high rating in a Chi Virtue can ingest more Chi of that type without ill effects. Moreover, the physiological changes can produce beneficial side effects, such as the Yin vampire's resistance to pain and the Yang vampire's resistance to sunlight.

The personality of the imbalanced character tilts overwhelmingly toward either negative emotions or manic energy. All imbalanced characters gain a Derangement, which they cannot overcome until the imbalance is corrected. Yin Derangements can include Depression, Intellectualization and Obsession (death and the dead). Yang Derangements can include Mania, Multiple Personalities and Obsession (feeding).

Other effects are specific to the type of imbalance:

- **Yin Imbalance:** A vampire with a permanent Yin imbalance attunes himself overmuch to his "inner death" and neglects the living part of him. Most learn the Bone Shintai Discipline. In any event, the vampire's flesh becomes cold and corpselike, and wound penalties are reduced by half (drop any fractions). The vampire may use his Stamina to resist fire damage (the creature's skin becomes clammy and suffused with cold, black ichor). Also, the vampire becomes icy and detached — the P'o needs one extra success to incite fire soul.

However, a Yin-imbalanced vampire must always aspect himself to Yin upon awakening for the night — and to sustain himself, he must spend a Yin point every night, rather than every 10 nights. Yin-imbalanced vampires grow to crave cold blood and dead flesh, the acquiring of which can cause problems if the vampire wishes to maintain Dharmic purity. Difficulties of all Hun rolls increase by one (the vampire is too

callous to care overmuch about his actions). Moreover, the vampire slowly becomes more and more corpselike — each time the vampire botches a Chi roll (either type of Chi) or is burned by sunlight, Appearance drops by one, permanently, until finally the vampire resembles a walking corpse with an Appearance of zero. In China, such Kuei-jin are referred to as *ch'ing shih* or *xiang shih*. Obviously, the vampire then finds it extremely difficult to go abroad, and witch-hunters are sure to consider him a target, rightly or wrongly. The inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom are willing to put up with more than their Western counterparts, but rotting zombies are too inauspicious to ignore politely!

• **Yang Imbalance:** A vampire with a Yang imbalance is very attuned to his human side. His flesh is warm and of normal hue, and he appears to breathe. Most importantly, he is far less affected by sunlight: Indirect sunlight can be borne for up to an hour with no ill effects, and even direct sunlight can be borne for (Stamina x 5) minutes.

However, the passions of life stir much more readily in such a creature's flesh. The P'o needs one fewer success to incite fire soul — and a Yang-imbalanced vampire's fire soul can be triggered by lust for sex or even mortal food. The vampire suffers an extra die of damage from fire attacks (the surplus of Yang in the flesh is flammable!). The vampire contracts human and vampiric diseases much more readily — each month, the vampire must make a Stamina roll to see if he becomes a carrier for communicable diseases (difficulty variable, depending on the environment in which the Cathayan finds himself). Also, the vampire becomes hungry much more quickly — he is considered *ravenous* if he has five or fewer Chi points in his body, and *uncontrollable* at two or fewer (see "Hunger," p. 136).

Finally — and most freakish of all — a Yang-aspected vampire is sufficiently human to impregnate (or, if female, be impregnated by) a mortal!

A pregnant vampire must aspect herself to Yang and spend an additional Yang point (for the child) each day of the pregnancy; if she fails to do so for even one day, she miscarries. If she manages to carry the child to term, the baby is considered a dhampyr (see p. 220). A mortal pregnant with a Kuei-jin child will bear the baby unless circumstances dictate otherwise. Again, the baby is considered to be a dhampyr.

Temporary Imbalance

Temporary imbalance occurs whenever a vampire takes in a greater quantity of temporary Chi than her permanent Chi Virtue rating (e.g., a vampire with Yang 4 who ingests six points of Yang Chi is considered to be imbalanced).

Whenever an imbalanced vampire expends Chi, of either type, he runs the risk of a volatile alchemical reaction. If an imbalanced vampire botches any roll in which an expenditure of Chi is called for (as with many Discipline powers), *all* Chi in excess of the vampire's Chi Virtues ignites or corrodes as appropriate, with devastating effects on the body. For each Chi point that "explodes" in this fashion, the vampire suffers one level of automatic aggravated damage. The vampire may attempt to soak this damage with a straight Stamina roll (difficulty 8). The vampire must also immediately check to see if he enters wave soul.

A vampire with none of a particular type of Chi in the body is considered in an automatic state of temporary imbalance. So, a vampire with two points of Yin Chi and no Yang Chi is considered in an automatic state of Yin imbalance, no matter how high his permanent Yin rating is.

Correcting Imbalance

Temporary imbalance is simple to correct; merely reduce the amount of Chi in the body, and the vampire's body rights itself.

Permanent imbalance may be corrected only by raising the opposing Chi Virtue to a stabilizing level (e.g., the vampire with Yin 6 and Yang 3 must raise Yang to 4). If this correction is impossible (e.g., a low-Dharma vampire with Yin 2 and Yang 8), the vampire is stuck until he raises his Dharma. Rumors abound that certain bodhisattvas have developed a tincture of blood and ginseng that, when combined with jade powder and consumed, protects against the effects of imbalance. Sadly, these rumors remain unconfirmed.

The exception is a vampire who has already become a *ch'ing shih*. Although the flesh does not rot further, it doesn't heal itself either. The vampire is trapped in a rotten corpse unless cured with the assistance of powerful magics.

Combat: Martial Arts

Many Kuei-jin have mastered one or more forms of Martial Arts, either from their living days or through study with an undead master. The Martial Arts Skill replaces the Talent Brawl. An aspiring martial artist must choose between a hard style and a soft style. Soft styles include jujutsu, shuai-chiao, tai chi chuan, and aikido; hard styles include karate, Shaolin kung fu, tae kwon do, and wushu. For game purposes, there is no difference between the various styles, but players are encouraged to choose one for purposes of characterization.

Unlike normal fighting, study of the Martial Arts requires discipline and concentration. A vampire in fire or wave soul cannot use Martial Arts.

Soft- and hard-style martial artists have different difficulty ratings for the basic Brawl maneuvers:

	Soft	Hard
Strike	6	5
Kick	7	6
Grapple	5	6
Throw	6	7

The Throw: Having successfully grappled an opponent, the martial artist may attempt to throw him to the ground. This maneuver requires a Dexterity + Martial Arts roll, with a damage Dice Pool equal to the attacker's Strength. A successful throw can also stun an opponent if it inflicts three or more Health Levels of damage. Stunned characters suffer a two-die penalty to all actions for a number of turns equal to the levels of damage taken.

Additionally, for each dot after the first, the player may choose one of the special maneuvers for her style:

Soft Styles

• **Counter Throw**: The martial artist uses the attacker's own momentum against him. The defender no longer needs to grapple an opponent before throwing him and instead makes an opposed roll of Dexterity + Martial Arts against the attacker's Dexterity + Brawl, Melee, or Martial Arts (whichever is currently appropriate). If the martial artist scores more successes, she deflects the attack and may immediately attempt to throw the attacker.

• **Deflecting Block**: The martial artist, concentrating completely on defense, tries to prevent her opponent from doing any damage and to throw him off balance in the process. When blocking, the martial artist redirects the attacker's momentum and rolls Dexterity + Martial Arts (difficulty 6) against the opponent's attack roll. Each of the defender's successes subtracts one success from the attacker's roll. If the martial artist scores more successes than the attacker, the attacker must roll Dexterity (difficulty 8) or fall to the ground and take his own Strength rating as damage.

• **Joint Lock**: Having successfully grappled her opponent, a martial artist can damage or control him through applying pressure to joints and pressure points. This torsion often results in broken arms, legs and even necks. The martial artist rolls Dexterity + Martial Arts to grapple, then may immediately roll Dexterity + Martial Arts again to inflict damage. For each success scored, the martial artist inflicts one Health Level of damage.

• **Mantis Strike:** This open-handed blow targets the opponent's vital organs or (against undead opponents) Chi gates and vitae centers. Difficulty 7, Damage Str + loss of one Chi point (if Kuei-jin) or Blood Point (if Kindred). Against mortals, the Mantis Strike inflicts Str +1 damage.

• **Withering Grasp:** By making a successful Dexterity + Martial Arts roll, the martial artist may not only inflict damage on her foe, but disarm him as well. The martial artist must score at least three successes to disarm the foe; with five successes, the martial artist may take the weapon for her own use.

Hard Styles

• **Blow to Pressure Point**: The martial artist learns to strike to the pressure points and Chi meridians in the body, thus causing significant damage. Difficulty 8, Damage Str +3.

• **Damaging Block**: The martial artist's blocks are really strikes aimed at attacking limbs. Roll a normal Block roll, but if the artist scores three or more successes, she also inflicts (Str) damage.

• **Dragon Tail Sweep:** This spinning legsweep can knock the martial artist's opponent to the ground. Treat this maneuver like a Throw, but the martial artist does not have to grapple with the opponent. Difficulty 8, Damage (opponent's Str.).

• **Elbow Strike**: A quick, vicious blow, usually delivered to the head at close range. Difficulty 5, Damage Str +1.

• **Spinning Kick**: This fast, powerful kick does significant damage to opponents, and looks impressive as well. Difficulty 7, Damage Str +2.

• **Thunder Kick:** This deadly flying drop kick is both graceful and debilitating. Difficulty 8, Damage Str +3.

Derangements

Kuei-jin gain Derangements just as Kindred do. Chi imbalance is one sure ticket to Derangements. A Cathayan who botches a roll to resist shadow soul gains a Derangement immediately following the possession.

Diablerie

Kuei-jin do not practice diablerie as such, though they may drink each other's blood (or the blood of Kindred) as readily as any other sentient creature's. Consuming another Kuei-jin's blood provides as much Chi as the victim currently holds, while consuming a Kindred's vitae provides an amount of Chi equal to the number of Blood Points consumed. However, through the Discipline of Chi'iu Muh, Kuei-jin are quite capable of consuming souls — whether mortal, *shen* or even Kin-jin.

Experience

Kuei-jin can, of course, increase Traits — indeed, so doing is a necessity for progression on some Dharmas. As with Western Kindred, though, the Storyteller should not let Kuei-jin increase just any Trait. A quintessential feature of Far Eastern adventure is the quest for knowledge and mastery; there is far more to raising a Trait than merely spending the experience points. To raise Disciplines and Traits to high levels, the characters might have to make an arduous trek to a spirit or a distant bodhisattva and beseech her for instruction. (Then, of course, the characters must prove themselves worthy, which can be the subject of countless stories....)

Experience Chart

Attribute	current rating x 4
Ability	current rating x 2 (x 3 for Martial Arts)
Discipline	current rating x 8
Virtue (Yin, Yang, Hun)	current rating x 3 (x 2 if imbalanced toward the Virtue)
Virtue (P'o)	current rating
Willpower	current rating

Kuei-jin have no "Clan Disciplines"; all Disciplines cost the same to advance.

Raising Virtues

Players and Storytellers should learn early on that mastery of the Virtues is a key to mastery of many Kuei-jin powers and defenses. In any event, following one's Dharma typically entails a corresponding understanding of one or several Virtues.

Such effort can produce some interesting roleplaying, as a high-Yin vampire, for example, must strive to "come out of her shell" and gain Yang lest she fall from her Dharma or succumb

to imbalance. Over the Ages, such compulsory character shifts have led to some quixotic politics and two-faced dealings, as vampires have had literally to alter their personalities to cope with the stresses of the Great Cycle.

Raising Yin

Vampires wishing to raise Yin spend great amounts of time — sometimes entire human lifetimes — in contemplation of their undead state. Yin can be gained through discourse with the spirits of the dead (or, more gruesomely, through consumption of the flesh of corpses). For vampires of a more civilized bent, Yin can be gained through study of one's undead limits and capabilities, through contemplation amid graveyards and other habitations of the dead, and by pursuing one's inhuman (not necessarily monstrous, merely alien) nature. Yin vampires typically leave the human world behind, as they prefer to interact only with its more bizarre elements. Consistently showing restraint from fire soul is another way to demonstrate one's eligibility for an increase in Yin.

Raising Yang

Vampires wanting to raise Yang must aggressively seek out their place in the Great Cycle, then do everything they can to live up to it. Yang comes through action, through dealings with the mortal world and through pursuing energetic change. To rise in Yang, one must pursue and revel in emotion and sensation. Tonight is never good enough; vampires seeking Yang must strive for innovation and upheaval come the morrow. Yang can be gained by attaching oneself to a human family down the generations, involving oneself in tumultuous societal change or otherwise imposing one's will on the Great Cycle. In general, to be eligible for a rise in Yang, a vampire must display courage, passion and a lust for unlife.

Raising Hun

The way of Hun is the way of integrity and honor. It is not an easy way to follow in mortal life — and next to impossible, as one of the Hungry Dead.

Vampires seeking to raise Hun must consistently act according to principle. Generally, such behavior includes honoring one's *wu*, court, direction, Dharma, the Fivefold Way and the other traditions of Kuei-jin society.

Raising P'o

Vampires seeking to raise P'o recklessly need do little more than give in to vice, act in impetuous and unruly fashion, and otherwise shame themselves and their superiors. The Demon is easy enough to cultivate.

Faith

Practitioners of Taoism, Buddhism, Shinto, Tonghak and other Eastern religions can have True Faith ratings. We would not presume to delineate every expression of Middle Kingdom religion; manifestations of Faith are best left in the Storyteller's hands. Still, below are a few general guidelines for incorporating Eastern faiths into a chronicle.

System: Generally speaking, practitioners of these faiths do not brandish holy symbols, nor do they cause physical pain to their Kuei-jin enemies. Rather, by sharply castigating the

"evil spirit" (and rolling Faith against a difficulty of the vampire's P'o), the faithful one can cause a vampire to be overcome by remorse, or even (3+ successes) flee in shame. Shinto faithful can brandish mirrors, which typically reflect the ugly inner soul of the P'o; the vampire is gripped by self-loathing and flees.

Certain faithful priests, by inscribing special sutras onto blessed paper, can create protective wards against Kuei-jin. Such devices force the vampire to make a P'o roll to breach the sanctity of a protected site; once the site is breached, the ward is destroyed. A few shrines, particularly temples and *torii* in regions of high Chi, are blessed with similar protective properties.

Kuei-jin are affected normally by Christian, Islamic, Judaic and other monotheistic expressions of Faith. Note that the True Faith Merit is nonexistent among Kuei-jin; they realize that their position in the karmic cycle leaves them inexorably cut off from Heaven's grace. Only through Dharmic understanding and atonement can they redeem themselves.

Final Death and Torpor

Having died once, Kuei-jin are not eager to die again, nor are they easy to kill. Kuei-jin have the same number of Health Levels and take damage in the same fashion as Kindred. A Kuei-jin reduced to torpor, but who still has Chi in her body, dies — her soul passes from her body to haunt the surrounding Mirror Lands. The soul can be seen and affected by individuals with the appropriate powers. Kuei-jin call this state "The Little Death."

The spirit is relatively impotent in this situation and can do nothing except float nearby and try to restore its corpse. Restoring one (and only one) Health Level to the corpse costs one Chi and takes a number of nights equal to the vampire's permanent Yin. Once this task has been accomplished, the vampire may rise and continue its existence. It has one and only one point of Chi, and the vampire must make a shadow soul roll (see p. 151) to determine whether, upon rising, the Hun or P'o is in control of the corpse.

If a Kuei-jin with no Chi in her body loses all her Health Levels, or if a Kuei-jin is destroyed due to aggravated damage, she meets Final Death. She has failed to complete her Dharma; her soul spirals into Oblivion and the unknowable. Perhaps she is allowed the mercy of reincarnation; perhaps she enters Yomi for good. No Kuei-jin has returned from this state, and the bodhisattvas speak sorrowfully of ones who suffer it. In game terms, it does not matter; the character is dead, and a new one must be created.

Fire

Fire inflicts aggravated damage on Kuei-jin, just as it does on Kindred, though many Kuei-jin powers protect against fire to a greater or lesser degree. Indeed, Kuei-jin with the Ghost-Flame Shintai Discipline even use fire as a weapon — albeit a double-edged one. Cathayans with a permanent Yin imbalance are particularly resistant to fire, though the counterbalancing disadvantage of becoming a slimy, worm-ridden mass of rot is a state that few vampires are willing to suffer.

Healing

Kuei-jin heal as do Kindred; simply substitute Chi for Blood Points. Either Yin or Yang Chi may be used for healing purposes. Aggravated damage is likewise healed in the same fashion.

Raising Physical Attributes

Cathayans do not raise Attributes in quite the same manner that Kin-jin do. However, Kuei-jin practicing Shintai Disciplines have the option to spend Chi and raise Attributes (see "Shintai Disciplines," pp. 107-119).

Spirit Travel

Cathayans spend a lot more time in the spirit worlds (pp. 180-185) than Kindred ever do. Presenting the full scope of spirit travel, combat and the like is impossible in a work of this size. For complete information on the spirit realms, see **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** and its supplement **Umbra: The Velvet Shadow, Mage: The Ascension** and **Wraith: The Oblivion**.

For those misers among you who balk at having to shell out nearly 100 extra bucks to play a **Vampire** game, here are some deliberately simplified rules to simulate travel to the Yin and Yang Worlds.

The Wall

The spirit realms are separated from the Middle Kingdom by a mystic barrier known as the Wall. The Wall prevents contact between the mortal and spirit worlds. It is stronger in some areas, weaker in others, but it is never entirely absent. Thus, mundane mortals are incapable of perceiving the spirit realms, though sensitive mortals might suffer "eerie" feelings in areas where the Wall is weak.

The Wall is rated from 9 (strongest) to 2 (weakest). This rating represents the difficulty of crossing the Wall to the other side, whether the traveler in question is a material or spirit being. A being must have the appropriate powers even to attempt a crossing; a normal mortal cannot pass through, even in an area where the Wall is 2. Having crossed the Wall, a traveler in the spirit worlds can neither affect nor be affected by material objects, though certain Chi attacks still affect the traveler.

The strength of the Wall directly corresponds to the level of ambient Chi — the weaker the Chi, the stronger the Wall. In general, the Wall is strongest in areas of great skepticism or disbelief in the supernatural.

Wall	Typical Site	Ambient Chi
9	Bank, science lab	Sterile
8	Downtown core	Weak
7	Typical urban area	Weak
6	Countryside	Moderate
5	Wilderness, graveyard	Moderate
4	Well-kept Shinto shrine	Moderate
3	Supernatural site	Strong
2	The greatest dragon nests	Strong

Traveling Between the Worlds

Yang-based creatures (such as hengeyokai and faeries) find it difficult — if not impossible — to enter the Yin World; by the same token, Yin-based creatures (such as wraiths) experience overwhelming difficulties if they attempt to enter the Yang World. Kuei-jin, by virtue of their tormented stay in the Yomi World, have the theoretical capability to enter both the Yin and the Yang Worlds — although doing so requires the expenditure of Chi and either an appropriate rite or high levels in the Yin or Yang Prana Disciplines. The most common ways Kuei-jin bridge the Wall between the Middle Kingdom and the spirit worlds are outlined briefly below. Other *shen* have their own rites and methods, though the techniques here might work for them at the Storyteller's discretion. Storytellers should use these methods as guidelines but should also feel free to make up their own systems for stories that take place across the barriers of the worlds.

Which world one enters depends on the specific power used and the surrounding area. Obviously, it is easier to enter the Yin World from a cavern or graveyard than it is to enter the Yang World from the same region. Ultimately, the Storyteller must arbitrate this matter, depending on the specific powers used by the traveler.

Yin and Yang Pranas

Kuei-jin with ratings of 5 in the Yin or Yang Pranas can transform their bodies to Chi energy, thereby crossing the Wall. See the Discipline descriptions for details.

Entering the Dragon Nest

Kuei-jin can move between the material and spirit worlds at certain dragon nests, where the Wall is weak (5 or less). It is possible to use these Chi-rich places as natural gateways between the worlds.

The primary advantage of crossing the Wall via a dragon nest lies in its relative ease. A Kuei-jin who desires to enter one of the spirit realms need only cast the Rite of Supplication (see p. 129), overcome the Wall's rating by focusing her own Chi and step through.

The disadvantages, however, can be severe. Dragon nests usually have guardians — either resident *shen* who maintain the integrity and harmony of the nest or spirit creatures commanded to act as protectors of a particular entrance into the spirit worlds. Kuei-jin wishing to use a dragon nest as a gateway must either gain permission of the nest's guardians or best them in combat or some other contest.

Additionally, most dragon nests lead to a particular site in the spirit worlds; individuals must ascertain that the particular nest they desire to use allows them entry to the area of their choice.

System: Once a character finds a suitable dragon nest, the Storyteller should determine if the site is guarded and, if so, what must be done to gain the guardian's permission or to defeat it. If the character succeeds in attaining access to the nest, she must cast the Rite of Supplication and roll either her permanent Yang or permanent Yin rating, whichever is most appropriate, versus a difficulty equal to the rating of the Wall

+ 4 (minimum of 6). Only one success is necessary to cross the Wall. The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty further for individuals with high Yang levels who wish to cross into the Yin World (or *vice versa*).

RIDING THE DRAGON'S TONGUE

Using existing dragon lines, Kuei-jin can transport themselves vast distances. Dragon lines connect two or more dragon nests with each other; at the end of each path is a gateway or portal. Thus, travelers may enter such a "rivergate" in one location and move to any destination gate that particular dragon line reaches. Others may travel back along the same pathway once the gate is opened. Kuei-jin may even meet one another during the journey. Once a year (on New Year's Day), links between rivergates must be renewed (see the rituals for creating rivergates and attuning the jade used for traveling the dragon lines, pp. 128-129). Rivergates need no special ritual to locate or open them once they have been created.

Once the rivergate is entered, the dragon lines begin to glow and seem to flow much like a river. Subtle variations in color indicate both the type of Chi and the various branches leading to different destinations. Traveling the riverpaths between dragon nests removes the traveler from the Middle Kingdom and grants him access to the Mirror Lands. Because dragon lines still run close to the "surface" reality of the Middle Kingdom, a gifted mortal may even sense the passage of the Kuei-jin as they use the paths.

Movement along dragon lines is similar, in some respects, to traversing a Moon Bridge (see **Werewolf: The Apocalypse**). Rather than walking a path, though, riding the dragon's tongue more closely resembles floating along in a watercraft. Kuei-jin wishing to utilize dragon lines employ a small piece of jade shaped like a boat. Placement of the jade in the middle of the dragon line causes the gem to grow and assume the shape of a sampan. The would-be travelers step into the boat and float along the flowing river of Chi energy to their desired destination. Jade that has not been specially prepared through the proper ritual is useless for this purpose. Although the sensation mimics leisurely drifting with a current, the actual journey is quite swift, taking only 1/1000th the required "real world" transit time.

Tales describe dragon lines that reach straight into the spirit worlds instead of connecting two or more locations in the Middle Kingdom. Such wondrous rivers into the Yin and Yang Worlds are surely as closely guarded as dragon nests.

FOLLOWING IN THE CRAB'S FOOTSTEPS

Another method whereby Kuei-jin may enter the spirit worlds involves a process similar to what hengeyokai call "stepping sideways." Because of their innate connection to the otherworldly realms, Kuei-jin need merely concentrate for a moment on a prepared piece of jade, then drop it on the ground, thus symbolically holding a space for themselves in the Middle Kingdom while they are absent. They may then step sideways through the Wall between worlds. Only jade that has been properly prepared through the rite of Imbuing the Jade (p. 128)

can be used in this manner. Other jade, no matter how beautiful or magical, is useless for this purpose.

Unlike hengeyokai, Kuei-jin do not need a shiny surface to project themselves across the Gauntlet, only their jade replicas. Unless the original replica is destroyed while the individual is in the spirit worlds or the Kuei-jin wishes to emerge from the other world in a different place within the Middle Kingdom, the vampire does not need a second replica. He may use the replica like a beacon to make the return journey if he wishes to reenter the world of matter at his original starting point. Should the Kuei-jin wish to exit at a different point, or should the replica be destroyed, he must use another replica to cross back into the Middle Kingdom. Whenever the transit is complete, the original replica shatters. If a replica is left in the spirit worlds so the Kuei-jin could leave, it shatters whenever he once again enters the spirit worlds (regardless of which realm he visits). If the traveler has no other replicas and his original one is destroyed, he must locate a gateway to cross through the Wall.

Using a jade replica allows a Kuei-jin to cross between the worlds with no expenditure of Chi, but it does take some time. At least five minutes are typically required for the individual to attune himself to the replica and make the crossing. Should haste be a consideration, however, the journey can be speeded up by spending Chi. Normally, no roll is required to cross. Spending a point of Chi (appropriate to the world the vampire desires to enter) allows the Kuei-jin to roll versus the following table to determine how quickly he can pass through the Wall. The character must roll Perception + Occult against the rating of the Wall.

Successes	Crossing Time
Botch	Unable to cross at this time
0	10 minutes (Doubles the normal time)
One	4 minutes
Two	2 minutes
Three	1 minute
Four +	Instantaneous

Several Kuei-jin may enter the spirit worlds at once, either through individual use of replicas or by following a leader. If using a leader, all vampires seeking to pass through the Wall must hold hands or otherwise be in physical contact. All arrive together at the same place and time using this method. If the leader rolls to speed the journey, all are subject to the same result.

Despite the fact that the replica is superficially similar to the individual Kuei-jin and that the vampire is attuned to it, the jade cannot be used to cause harm to the individual or to track him. The worst that can be done is to destroy it. Even if moved to a dangerous location in hopes of causing the jade's owner harm, the gem calls its attuned master back to his original starting point, not the place where it now rests.

Combat and Tasks

Kuei-jin in the spirit worlds use the spirit Traits of Rage, Gnosis and Willpower to accomplish tasks; vampires utilize

them in a manner identical to spirits themselves (p. 210). For Kuei-jin, Rage equals P'o, Gnosis equals Hun, and Willpower remains identical. Kuei-jin in the spirit worlds add their permanent rating in the appropriate Virtue (Yang in the Yang World, Yin in the Yin World, P'o in the Yomi World) to their Health Levels to determine the amount of damage their spirit bodies can take. A Kuei-jin reduced to zero Health Levels in the spirit worlds immediately dissolves and is considered to have met Final Death.

The Mirror Lands

The areas of the spirit worlds adjoining the Wall are called the Mirror Lands, so named because they appear as ghostly reflections of the nearby Middle Kingdom. Kuei-jin crossing the Wall appear in the Mirror Lands of Yin or the Mirror Lands of Yang. While in the Mirror Lands, Kuei-jin travel at the normal mortal rate.

A Kuei-jin in the Mirror Lands may automatically shift her vision between happenings in the spirit worlds and happenings in the material world; doing so takes one turn. While viewing one world, a Kuei-jin cannot see what is happening in the other world.

The Fabric and Paths

Through force of will, travelers can walk away from the Mirror Lands into the deeper reaches of the Yin or Yang World. This journey is dangerous, though; order no longer prevails here, and many areas of the spirit worlds suffer the depredations of wild spirits, the tyranny of ministers-turned-dictators, or are the outright domains of demons from the Yomi World.

Much of the spirit worlds' "substance" consists of forbidden zones — undeveloped spiritual energy. *Shen* refer to such regions as the Fabric. The Fabric of Yang is commonly called ephemera, while the fabric of Yin is called ectoplasm. In practical terms, both are identical, and both are haunted by wandering spirits and lost souls.

The Fabric of the Yang World appears as an idealized or blighted version of its real-world counterpart. The Fabric near a Shinto shrine, for example, might be preternaturally serene, dotted with pools and cherry blossoms, while the Fabric near a toxic-waste-tainted swamp might contain moaning trees and bubbling ooze.

In the Yin World, the Fabric is a seething, monochromatic storm of swirling mists and half-seen shapes. Wraiths call it the Tempest. Through this Tempest rage howling storms, floating landscapes, and rains of skin and bone.

Travel in the deeper spirit worlds is largely subjective, taking as long or as short a time as the Storyteller deems necessary and interesting. In general, it is best to have a spirit guide or to stay on one of the dragon lines. Failing to remain on a dragon line typically leaves the traveler lost in the spirit worlds, with all the ill effects that condition implies.

Dragon lines correspond to paths of strong Chi in the material world. Thus, it is relatively easy to enter the spirit

world at a site of strong Chi, then walk or sail along a designated dragon line to another high-Chi site. Again, it is impractical to offer a complete map of all Chi paths in the Middle Kingdom, though there are a few places of particularly strong Chi. Mount Fuji is a nexus point for many dragon tracks, as is Mount Agung in Indonesia, the Shaolin Temple in China and many shapeshifter holy sites in Korea. Recently, many Yin tracks have shifted to sites in Vietnam and Cambodia, as evil ghosts seethe out of the Tempest to feast on the carnage inflicted in those places during recent decades.

The Realms

Within the Fabric of each spirit world are countless realms. Realms are "pocket dimensions" formed from the Fabric and inhabited by a bewildering variety of spirits (see p. 209). In the Middle Kingdom, realms are commonly ruled by one or more supreme spirits. During the Second and Third Ages, these spirits and their realms served the August Personage of Jade and the Great Cycle in an all-encompassing celestial bureaucracy; now, alas, the divine mandate is no more, and the realms are little more than opposing camps ruled by rival warlords.

Realms have definite "realities," but their physical laws are set by the Storyteller in accordance with the whim of the ruling power. For examples of spirit realms, see pp. 183-185, as well as the **Wraith** supplement **Dark Kingdom of Jade**.

Soul Imbalance

Like Chi Virtues, a Cathayan's Soul Virtues can become imbalanced, though this shift is more of a moral choice on the part of the Kuei-jin. As with Chi Virtues, a vampire who raises one Soul Virtue three or more points higher than its counterpart imbalances herself toward the Virtue in question.

A P'o imbalance is pretty straightforward. Not only does the P'o have many more dice than the Hun, but the P'o may also call for a shadow soul roll once per night, at a time and place of its choosing. Such a vampire is likely to spend more time following the Demon's drives than the ones of her higher soul.

But too much Hun can be equally detrimental — after all, vampires are the products of both urges, and it is their karma to assimilate the P'o, not deny its existence outright. While a vampire is in Hun imbalance, she may not spend Willpower for extra successes. Although Willpower is controlled by the Hun, a soul in such a repressed state may not act at its maximum capacity.

Soul States

Kuei-jin are, first and foremost, souls in material shells. They understand their inner life to be a fragile and complex

thing. Try as a Kuei-jin might to act harmoniously and properly, the demands of her undead state inevitably prompt her to selfish, disruptive and even monstrous deeds.

The Grand Arhat Xue dubbed the "normal" state of a Kuei-jin's soul the "wind soul," so named because a vampire in this state flows through existence in a steady, direct manner. When a Kuei-jin is under the influence of the wind soul, the Hun Nature is dominant, and the character is capable of acting in a rational and purposeful manner.

At times, circumstances threaten to overwhelm the wind soul, thus driving the character to commit shameful acts or to succumb entirely to the Demon. These states — fire soul, wave soul and shadow soul — are discussed below.

Fire Soul

Fire soul is madness, pure and simple. Kuei-jin in the fire soul state are savage monsters, consumed by rage. The ignorant Kin-jin refer to this phase as "frenzy," and there is little difference between the two states. When a Kuei-jin succumbs to fire soul, he is treated as if in frenzy.

Kuei-jin resist fire soul with Yin. When circumstances threaten to force a vampire into fire soul, the player rolls the vampire's Yin rating in a resisted roll against his P'o (typically, the difficulty is 6 for both rolls, but it can be modified if the Storyteller judges the provocation to be particularly severe). The contest is extended and can take anywhere from one to five turns. If the P'o accumulates two or more successes, the Kuei-jin lapses into fire soul. If the character's Yin accumulates two or more successes, the vampire overcomes the urges of the fire soul. If, after five turns, the character has not resolved the conflict, the urges of the fire soul lapse. While the struggle takes place, the character is wracked with inner turmoil; he may not spend Willpower except to resist the urges of the fire soul (or, if the player wishes, to aid its coming).

Potential Triggers

- Failure, particularly in front of a group
- Humiliation
- Hunger
- Insulting behavior
- Intense passion
- Threat to other member of *wu*

Wave Soul

By contrast, Kuei-jin suffering the debilitating wave soul completely lose control to impulses of terror. This state (so named because Kuei-jin in its grip are seemingly buffeted about by waves of fear) is considered exceedingly shameful by Hungry Dead, who seek to avoid it at all costs, particularly in front of their peers. The effects of wave soul are identical to the effects of Rötschreck.

Kuei-jin resist wave soul with Yang. When circumstances threaten to inflict wave soul on a vampire, the player rolls the vampire's Yang rating in a resisted roll against his P'o. The process is otherwise the same as resisting fire soul.

Potential Triggers

- Fire
- Sunlight
- The presence of a powerful demon, such as a Yama King

Shadow Soul

Of all the soul states, shadow soul is the most feared. During shadow soul, the character's Demon seeks to establish dominance. When a character lapses into shadow soul, she wages an inner war against the P'o's urges and insinuations. If the Hun loses this war, it recedes into submission, and the P'o Nature takes over for a scene — possibly causing the character to commit acts her higher self would find abhorrent. Protracted failure to resist the P'o can send a character spiraling away from her Dharma to join the ranks of the *chih-mei*, or worse.

Shadow soul has literally inspired millennia of debate, doctrine and conflict. Some Kuei-jin greatly fear this state, claiming that it represents their failure. For these vampires, shadow soul is the invisible yoke of the Yama Kings.

Other vampires, though, accept shadow soul, and some Kuei-jin revel in it. For these Cathayans, shadow soul is as natural and normal as feeding. Since they, as vampires, are already unpleasantly trapped between the living and dead worlds, why inflict a similar fate on their souls? Only in experiencing the Demon's drives can they truly understand themselves.

Shadow soul is resisted by the Hun. When a Kuei-jin is threatened by the emergence of the P'o, the player rolls the character's Hun rating in a resisted roll against the P'o. The process is otherwise the same as resisting fire soul; however, if the P'o wins the contest, its Archetype takes over the character's body for a scene. While under the P'o's dominance, the character must play by the rules of the Demon; the Storyteller is free to dictate the character's actions if she feels the player is not roleplaying the Archetype properly.

Potential Triggers

- Acts in violation of one's Dharma or personal honor
- Botched Willpower roll
- Emerging from fire soul or wave soul
- Failure to execute certain Disciplines, such as Demon Arts, properly
- Great stress, trauma or shame
- Meeting the conditions listed under each P'o Archetype

Sunlight

Kuei-jin are not as vulnerable to sunlight as are their Western counterparts, but Cathayans still find the sun difficult to withstand. In particular, vampires with high concentrations of Yin in their flesh literally rot away in the light. The Cathayans of the Quincunx say that this vulnerability is due to the curse of Yi, the Excellent Archer. Vampires in other regions speak of Amaterasu's disfavor or the wrath of the heavenly spirits. In practical terms, it matters little.

A vampire can withstand the concentrated Yang energies of the sun for a number of minutes equal to (Stamina - temporary Yin). In any event, the vampire may not remain exposed for longer than nine minutes unless he suffers from Yang imbalance. Also, this time limit is cumulative, resetting every 24 hours. A vampire with a Stamina of 5 and three temporary Yin who goes in the sun for one minute, goes indoors for an hour, then comes back outside for another minute, begins to suffer the sun's effects.

Once this "grace period" has passed, the vampire begins to rot. Each turn, the vampire loses one Health Level, one point from all Physical Attributes, one point of Appearance and one point of temporary Yin. When a vampire reaches zero in all Physical Attributes, he cannot move.

Once in sunlight, a vampire cannot spend Yin Chi at all, thus making it impossible for him to "bleed the poison" from his body. Moreover, for each turn of rot, a vampire loses a point of temporary Yin, as the sun literally burns it away. (If temporary Yin drops below Stamina in this manner, the vampire continues to rot.)

However, the vampire can spend Yang Chi to counteract the effects of the sun. Each point of Yang spent allows the vampire to ignore the penalty for one turn.

The rotting effects of the sun are considered aggravated damage for the purpose of healing. Each Health Level healed also heals the side effects, though temporary Yin must be regained normally. Vampires with a permanent Yin imbalance (see "Chi Imbalance," pp. 139-140) cannot heal the damage to their looks, and they often end up suffering from permanent rot.

Slumber

Kuei-jin use their Hun or Dharma (whichever is higher) ratings as a substitute for Humanity when rolling to see if they can remain awake during the day. Thus, while they are less vulnerable to sunlight (see above), few Cathayans are capable of extended diurnal forays; most spend their daylight hours dreaming (or, more often, enduring nightmares).

CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER SIX:
THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

He fell beneath the bullet train.
They washed him off the wheels
And continued on again.
So did he.

She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants.

—Walter Pater

The Middle Kingdom, as the Kuei-jin call their vast portion of the globe, comprises over a third of the world's land space and half its population. It is the largest secret in the World of Darkness; the Western clans have seen little of its majesty, and they comprehend even less than that. The Camarilla, Sabbat, and independents conceive of China, Japan, Korea and the countries of Southeast Asia in much the same way that their contemporaries of 500 years ago did — as otherworldly realms of unfathomable power and riches.

In this regard, they are half right. The Middle Kingdom does have an otherworldliness to it, but not that of the Kindred's assumptions. The countries of Asia, in both their mortal and supernatural guises, are not constructed in any manner familiar or comfortable to the Western clans. Much of Asia is governed by repressive regimes; law, the press, economy, and freedom of movement and interaction are strictly, and often brutally, regulated. Kindred used to making their way around a city by feeding off the fringe groups and subcultures will be at a loss in many major Asian cities. In many places, luxuries taken for granted in the West — mass media, lightning-fast goods and services, simple transportation — are in short supply, if they are available at all.

And that is just the purview of mortals. The Kuei-jin and other *shen* in the Middle Kingdom make up one of the most formidable forces in the World of Darkness. The few Kindred who have come into extended contact with Cathayans remain nonplussed by the very existence of these natives, these possessors of strange powers and magics, of resistances and immunities to woes that would easily fell the strongest and most resourceful Westerner.

The Kuei-jin of the Middle Kingdom do differ from Western Kindred in practically every respect, but their existence is no less bleak than that of the 13 clans. The alliances that form, the rules that everyone follows, and the methods required simply to survive all mirror things in prison life, as does the one true rule in a prison like the Middle Kingdom: There is no way out. The Fifth Age rolls onward, the reserves of precious Chi dwindle, and Heaven has turned its face from the land. The Middle Kingdom is overcrowded and desperate and violent. The friction of the Great Cycle's incessant revolutions affects everyone within the boundaries of the Middle Kingdom, in ways that Western Kindred do not, and likely cannot, comprehend.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first section deals with the history of the Kuei-jin and the Middle Kingdom, through different fortunes and Ages. The second section covers the modern Middle Kingdom, and the last section deals with the Yin and Yang Worlds lying just beyond the reach of human — but not Kuei-jin — perception.

Nights of Spring and Autumn

Cathayan legend extends beyond recollection, but Cathayan history begins in the Fourth Age of the world, after the diaspora of Wan Xian into the Middle Kingdom. As with many of the earliest histories of the Middle Kingdom, the first records of the Kuei-jin liberally interweave fact and legend. Dates and eras are, at least initially, muddled, often deriving solely from oral traditions.

The Great Wandering

Tradition holds that the Wan Xian who survived the August Personage's punishment scattered to the five directions and went to live among the mortals once again, in a period known as the Great Wandering.

The legends continue that the surviving Wan Xian fell into bitter quarreling, as they blamed one another for their curse. Hatred blossomed into strife, and eventually the various Cathayans went their separate ways. Each of the five directions was claimed by a single mighty immortal, who attracted lesser vampires to his or her banner. These Five Emperors guided their people into the farthest reaches of the Middle Kingdom, and they eventually established the first five courts: the Court of the Black Tortoise (covering what is now known as Manchuria and Northern China), the Court of the White Tiger (which stayed near the ancestral homeland of Tibet), the Court of the Yellow Emperor (which established a great power base among the early peoples of the Yellow River and its surrounding environs), the Court of the Azure Dragon (which spread into the unknown lands of Korea and Japan), and the Court of the Scarlet Phoenix (which wandered into the distant jungles of the south). These courts waxed strong in their iniquity, only occasionally bothering to communicate with their erstwhile brethren; hostilities between the courts, while infrequent, shook the heavens and the Earth alike.

A few of the more remorseful Cathayans, distrusting the rise of the courts, left the company of their brethren for the solitude of the wilds and unlives of thought. Many believe the Grand Arhat himself, Xue, to be one of these self-exiled pilgrims.

China

Traditionally the nexus of Far Eastern civilization, China houses the largest population of Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom. The Hundred Corpse Families were founded here, and the most ancient courts — the Yellow Emperor, Black Tortoise, and White Tiger Courts — based their power structures in China.

At one time, through the five-court structure, decisions of the Chinese Kuei-jin affected every court in the Middle Kingdom. Many Cathayans still remember those nights and long for that hegemony's return; others (particularly the Japanese, Korean and Southeast Asian descendants of the Azure Dragon and Scarlet Phoenix Courts) fight against these imperialist ambitions with all their considerable might. Of all Cathayans, Chinese Kuei-jin tend to be the strictest adherents to tradi-

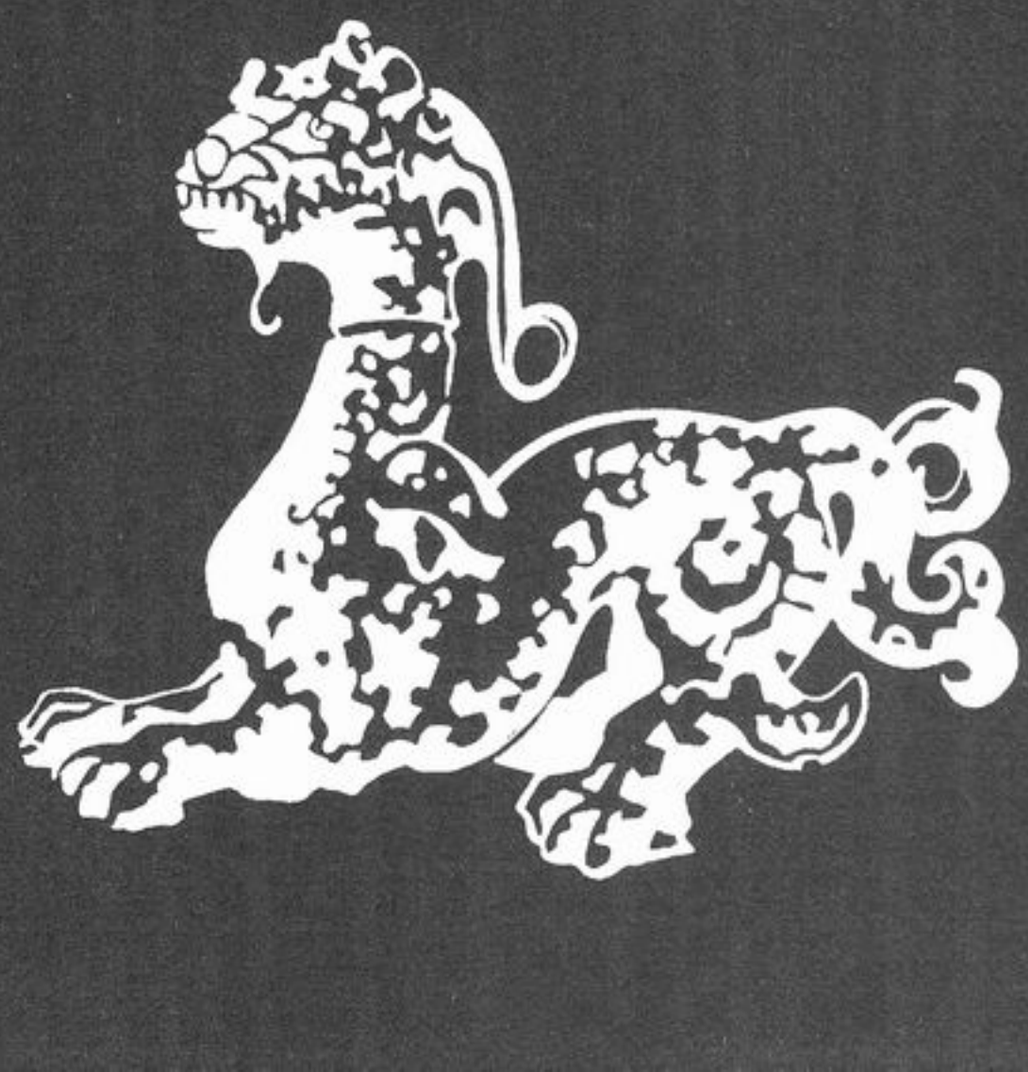
Dragon Lines

Although muted in the Fifth Age, Chi permeates the air, rocks, soil and water of the Middle Kingdom. Certain sites are natural receptacles of Yin or Yang Chi, while linear tracks between these sites — dragon lines — provide paths through the Spirit Courts and give rise to Chi-rich areas in the Middle Kingdom.

It would be impractical to make a Chi map for the entire Middle Kingdom — particularly because Chi ebbs and flows constantly — but some generalities can be made. Most of the Middle Kingdom can be assumed to have a Wall rating of 8, which prevents natural ingestion of Chi by any but the most enlightened Kuei-jin. Particularly developed sites, such as banks, bureaucratic headquarters and places of gross overcrowding, are nearly spiritually dead, with Wall ratings of 9. In these gloomy sites, even the greatest Cathayans are forced to hunt for their sustenance. Conversely, sites of great spiritual resonance (graveyards, well-maintained *torii*, Zen rock gardens, scenic natural surroundings) have Wall ratings of 7, 6 or even lower. Areas with Wall ratings of 5 and below are extremely rare; *shen* flock to them like flies and battle each other for control of these sites. Ironically, such carnage can often lead to the defilement of a site.

Some areas of the Middle Kingdom have been desecrated or otherwise rendered spiritually impure. While the Wall rating of these "defiled" sites is typically low, the *shen* attracted to such sites are of an unhealthy bent, and often in service to one or more Yama Kings. A Cathayan who feeds at defiled sites must take care, for the P'o can often use the influx of unhealthful energies to take over the vampire's body.

Traditional festivals (the Dragon Boat Festival, the Feast of Hungry Ghosts) can lower a region's effective Wall by one, two or even three points during the festival day. At these times, even Kuei-jin of low Dharma can walk among the mortal herds and bask in the radiant Chi.



tional Kuei-jin practices, though this scrupulousness has changed somewhat in the Fifth Age, particularly in the post-Mao era.

The Early Mortal Dynasties

By the coming of the Shang Dynasty in China, the Court of the Yellow Emperor had firmly established itself within mortal society. Moving away from the tribal settlements along the Yellow River, the Shang marked the beginnings of urban civilization. A separate caste of priests and shamans directed the religious beliefs of people during the Shang, and many of these mortals served the Cathayans in various blood cults. Human sacrifices were common in the mortal religious litanies, the victims being mostly slaves and barbarians captured in war. The ruling emperor also sacrificed to his ancestors, as he believed such actions pleasing to his forebears.

The Yellow Emperor Court was particularly active during the Shang period, playing upon the sacrificial nature of religion. Its members sometimes exposed the mortal shamans to the secrets of their magics, but mostly they openly exploited them for the Chi they required. A few vampires passed themselves off as shamans, thus using their magics to cow mortals into submission, infiltrate the imperial court to influence the ruling emperor and promise good omens in return for power and status.

It was also during the Shang Dynasty that the great texts of Kuei-jin philosophy and history were collected and transcribed, in a period known to Kuei-jin as the Scrivening. The tales of the Dragon, the Queen, the Yama Kings and Mount Meru were put into written format, as were the great spiritual and meditative works of Cathayan sages.

Of course, Heaven would not suffer the Kuei-jin to flout its curse. The demon-rulers of the Yellow Emperor were struck down from their pedestals by the overthrow of the dynasty and the rise of the Chou. Several skilled witch-hunters operated among the nomadic Chou, descendants and apprentices of a great southern sorcerer named Yi. As the mortal Chou overthrew the corrupt Shang emperor, their warriors and sorcerers descended upon the Kuei-jin who had riddled the court and the temples. Many vampires perished, and the rest fled into the hills and desolate regions.

During the later decades of the Chou, the great classical philosophers and writers, such as Confucius and Lao Tzu, came to prominence and ushered in new waves of thought. Kuei-jin scholars adopted many of the precepts first articulated by these schools of thought, in order to further the understanding of Kuei-jin Dharmas.

The rise of the short-lived Qin Dynasty, which brought together all states into a unified China under Qin Shihuang, the First Exalted Emperor, initiated a period of brutality and persecution across China. Bent on total standardization and quashing of any deviance in thought or policy, the Qin set about destroying all works of thought and philosophy that had been written prior to their era.

This period, called the Burning of the Books in mortal history, resulted in the destruction of many valuable works of mortal philosophy, as well as the slaughter of hundreds of antistate scholars, whom the Qin usually buried alive. Along with mortal works, Shih took advantage of the Burning of the

The Shih Hunters

The onset of the Great Wandering engendered profound physical and spiritual transformations within the Kuei-jin. Along with their dependence upon taking Chi from the world, they also found themselves vulnerable to sunlight.

This vulnerability was discovered by the Kuei-jin of the Fourth Age, during a terrible conflict between the Yellow Emperor and Scarlet Phoenix Courts. Combining their individual powers, the Scarlet Phoenix Kuei-jin created in the sky 10 suns, in order to burn their enemies. However, the 10 suns also dried up the riverbeds in the southern regions and left the mortal settlements there without water, which killed crops and turned the land arid. In response, a mortal sorcerer called Yi put a stop to the spell. Enchanting nine arrows, Yi stood atop a mountain and fired them at the suns. They all struck, burning out nine of the suns and breaking the spell. The true sun remained in the sky, and Yi turned the solar enchantments upon the greedy vampires. The Kuei-jin believe that the sorcerer Yi has cursed them in perpetuity for their foolishness, thus dooming them to operate only during the dark hours.

Later, Yi's descendants and surviving apprentices banded together to curtail the Kuei-jin's predation upon mortals. Calling themselves the Shih, this band of informal, yet deadly serious, witch-hunters has openly aided rural populations for over 3,000 years and clandestinely assisted metropolitan police forces for centuries. Unlike the Inquisition, the Shih do not actively seek out Kuei-jin for extermination. They act only when their services are requested, believing as much as any mortal in the Middle Kingdom that a vampire has a right to attempt Dharmic redemption. But when a Kuei-jin oversteps its bounds, the Shih act — and they act with a fanaticism that puts the Inquisition to shame.

Books to destroy hundreds of tracts on Kuei-jin history, spiritual progression and magical ritual, along with many of the works' authors. Those Cathayans who escaped the witch-hunters' flames retreated into the Longmen Caves, in central China, where mortals could not follow them. They managed to steal away some of the classic works, but mostly just in fragments.

The Coming of the Northerners

The Han Dynasty overthrew the Qin after 15 years of repression, and reintroduced Confucian philosophy into governmental and administrative activity. The Han made moral superiority the guiding criterion for holding office. During this time, tensions flared among courts, *wu* and individual vampires. The Hundred Corpse Families blamed each other for their increasingly miserable state. The P'o's increasing dominance in the Cathayan psyche resulted in acts of escalating greed, violence and brutality. Peasants soon learned to close

The Treaty of the Quincunx

The Yuan Dynasty, as Mongol rule was called, began an age of broad foreign contact: It imported foreign religions and appointed travelers such as Marco Polo to positions in the imperial bureaucracy. These first contacts with Europeans did not sit well with any of the Kuei-jin courts, and the eventual arrival of the first Kindred, a small party of Giovanni merchants and traders, brought home the impending danger to many powerful ancestors.

The arrival of barbarians from the West (a harbinger of the Fifth Age) prompted the remnants of the Black Tortoise Court, White Tiger Court, and Yellow Emperor Court to convene. Called the Council of Dragons, these courts' respective ancestors met to determine the future of Cathayan existence within the Middle Kingdom, in light of these foreign blood-drinkers and the increasing number of *akuma*. The result of the Council of Dragons was an agreement called the Treaty of the Quincunx, which effectively banded together the ancestors of the original three courts into a new structure of Five August Courts in an accord to rule over the entire population of Kuei-jin throughout the Middle Kingdom. The Azure Dragon and Scarlet Phoenix Courts, ensconced as they were among strange peoples (southerners, Koreans and Japanese), were summarily disowned and their populations reviled as *akuma*.

Agreed upon by the ancestors of Beijing (the Blood Court), Shanghai (the Flesh Court), the southern border provinces (the Flame Court, later moved to Hong Kong), Chongqing (the Bone Court), and the great city of Changan (the Jade Court), the Quincunx pledged to make, enforce and interpret the laws of the Kuei-jin for every court under its auspices. The Five August Courts constituted the Quincunx as the ultimate authority and protective body in China, and by extension the rest of Asia. As for the remnants of the southern and eastern courts...well, they would be brought to heel, lest they be treated like straw dogs. War between the Quincunx and the south and east courts has been sporadic but unending, even to the present nights.

At the height of its power, the decisions of the Quincunx radiated throughout all courts in China. Its influence even extended to Japan and Korea for a time, as like-minded courts in those countries voluntarily adopted and abided by the Quincunx's pronouncements. Today, however, the Quincunx exists in little more than name. The power of the Five August Courts has eroded in recent centuries; the Flame Court of Hong Kong has been under foreign domination since the mid-19th century, and the Flesh Court of Shanghai has hosted a war between Chinese and Japanese Kuei-jin for the past six decades. The ancestors of these courts plan a revival of the institution and the authority of the Quincunx, by retaking the Flame Court now that the British have surrendered Hong Kong, but, thus far, the omens of success have proved cloudy and hard to interpret.

their doors to mysterious travelers, and to shut their ears to strange cries in the night.

Despite the relative laxity of the Han, it, too, soon fell as a result of internal corruption, thus ushering in an 800-year period during which several dynasties ruled. The Sui, Tang and Song dynasties all attempted to unify China and gain victory against the various barbarians and enemies of the nation, but each dynasty had its own military and governmental weaknesses that proved all too easy to exploit. This period marked the fall of the Yellow Emperor Court, as the ancient structure collapsed into a morass of warring *wu* and mutually hostile vampires.

At the beginning of the 13th century, tribes from the Black Tortoise region in the north united into a single entity called the Blue Mongols, and descended upon Song China. Led by the legendary general Genghis Khan, the Mongols easily breached the Great Wall (set up during the Qin Dynasty) and took Beijing. Genghis Khan was unable to conquer all of China, though his grandson Kublai Khan eventually brought southern China into the fold almost 60 years later.

The Closing and Humiliation

Mongol rule atrophied and was overthrown in the mid-14th century by the Ming, a peasant-based dynasty that was to be one of the most despotic in Chinese history. The capital had been moved to Beijing midway through the Mongol reign, and the overall attention of the country turned inward, reducing overseas trade and contacts.

During this time, many of the more venerable ancestors left the courts, and retreated into the wilderness. Travel between the Middle Kingdom and the spirit worlds grew even more difficult; in some places, the Wall grew nigh-impenetrable, and even the most enlightened ancestors were forced to commit atrocities in order to sustain themselves with Chi. Kuei-jin taking the Second Breath grew more numerous, yet more vicious, than ever; outbreaks of *chih-mei* and *akuma* threatened mortal and Kuei-jin alike.

The worst blow came when a suspicious mandarin's investigation revealed that the ancestor of Changan and many luminaries of the Jade Court were actually *akuma* in service to the Yama Queen Tou Mu. In a great battle involving mercenaries from the Azure Dragon Courts, as well as two tiger hengeyokai, the Jade Court was scourged and its relics delivered to the Shaolin Kuei-jin. At the Shaolin Monastery, the bodhisattvas sorrowfully recorded the arrival of the Fifth Age.

The Qing Dynasty replaced the Ming, and it was during Qing rule that the Western powers reasserted themselves inside a weak Qing China. Trade was the main source of contact between East and West, and the Qing's poor negotiation skills allowed European powers to encroach further into China through illegal methods, particularly in the area of opium smuggling. Qing responses to smuggling, including the burning of all foreign opium at the port of Canton, precipitated the Opium War of 1839-42. The Treaty of Nanjing forced the vanquished Qing to cede Hong Kong to Britain for use of its port facilities, to open several other ports for trade, and to agree to the concept of extraterritoriality. This last concession exempted foreigners living in China from Chinese law, thus making them responsible only to their consular courts.

Fanning the Flame

The collapse of the Flame Court has been a thorn in the side of the Kuei-jin since the Treaty of Nanjing. The Quincunx points to this event as a clear harbinger of the Fifth Age. Since the takeover, Hong Kong has been a divided island, boasting two separate, yet continually intrusive, camps of vampires.

The agreements between China and Britain that returned the island to Chinese rule in the summer of 1997 threw the island's vampires into near-frenzy. The mortal government has already curtailed several institutions in Hong Kong that have held sway for decades, and the few Western Kindred who made their homes here under British rule are finding themselves out of luck and devoid of allies in this city that is 98 percent native Chinese. Mainland *wu* have moved in with the occupying Chinese administration and have already begun the retaking of Hong Kong. They plan to eradicate every single Cainite on the island and return the Flame Court to its former status as the southern gate of the Quincunx. The only question is how mercilessly the Quincunx plans to accomplish its objective. If the earliest rumblings are any indication, the purge will be as brutal as possible.

The Modern Century

Qing impotency was exacerbated during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Anglo-French War of 1856-60 resulted in an occupied Beijing with total openness for Western powers to use the city as a trading center. Kuei-jin in government positions were unable to halt the loss of more ground to the Westerners and contented themselves with trying to stop the vampiric hemorrhaging of the shattered Quincunx. In response, powerful Kuei-jin fomented rebellion in northern provinces against Western and Japanese influences. They sabotaged railroads and marshaled support against the unsuccessful emperor.

After several decades of internal fighting, the Qing emperor abdicated in 1911, and the Chinese Republic was formed on New Year's Day, 1912. It was the end of 3,000 years of dynastic rule in China. Several years of instability and initial roughness within China, which the Western powers were happy to exploit, ended in 1928 with the coming of Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang, the Nationalist political party supported by Russian Communists.

The KMT ruled China for more than a decade until 1937, when the Japanese invaded Manchuria during the Second World War. Hostile Japanese Kuei-jin followed in the wake of the advancing forces and fed off the ravaged cities and countryside, always at the periphery of the mass slaughter. The Flesh Court of Shanghai was severed from the Quincunx and thrown into a reign of brutal occupation and war, in which it remains to this night. Whereas jina and mandarins fought the invading Japanese Kuei-jin, many Chinese disciples had followed Mao Zedong on the Long March of 1934-35. The disciples appealed to their counterparts along the northwestern frontiers of China for support in the war in Shanghai, but found little help from the Bone Court.

The Lost Paradise: Tibet

When the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949 under the leadership of Mao Zedong, one of its first stated objectives was to "peacefully liberate Tibet." Kuei-jin in both Beijing and the Bone Court of Chongqing watched the developments closely. Few Kuei-jin had traveled back to the place of origin since the mythical destruction of Mount Meru; none were known to have returned from the holy land.

In 1950, the Chinese army occupied eastern Tibet and negotiated an agreement to control Tibet, while preserving the area's religious freedom. The Chinese soon broke this pact, as they closed Buddhist monasteries and brutally executed or enslaved monks. Repression under Communist rule led to famine, economic collapse and fighting that continues sporadically to the present day.

A few Kuei-jin from the Blood Court moved in with the occupying forces in 1949. They were never heard from again. Pleas to the Bone Court of Chongqing to investigate resulted in no trace of their whereabouts. The Bone Court has reported that travel within Tibet to the ancient holy sites of the Cathayans is impossible; a spiritual residue permeates the country and causes debilitating effects on any Kuei-jin who nears the mountain locations of the ancient tales. The Blood Court dismisses these notions and even goes so far as to accuse the Bone Court of the envoys' sabotage and secret murder. The vampires of Chongqing and their minions flatly deny such accusations, but tension between the two courts has grown in recent years, throwing yet another obstacle in the path of the Quincunx's revival.

The future of the Five August Courts remains uncertain. The invasion of the Flame Court is under way, but victory is by no means guaranteed. The wars in Shanghai's Flesh Court have spread up and down China's eastern coast, and many mandarins fear that the conflict will bleed further inland and destroy the Kuei-jin's holiest sites. The Blood Court of Beijing, long considered to be the seat of authority in the Quincunx, fears that increasing Westernization may encourage the arrival of more Kindred. The Jade Court at the Shaolin Monastery, composed entirely of ascetics, interacts very little in the major affairs of the Quincunx. It exhibits a silence that the other courts construe as disapproving. The Bone Court supports the revival of the Quincunx, but lately is growing more concerned with attempts to regain the holy sites of Meru, an agenda that Kuei-jin throughout the Middle Kingdom perceive as selfish and dangerous.

Japan

The Kuei-jin of Japan — the *gaki* or *ketsuki*, as they often call themselves — differ greatly from their mainland counterparts. Although at one time the Japanese Kuei-jin fell under the aegis of the Azure Dragon Courts, in truth, they never considered themselves part of that political body. Looking ever inward, they were more concerned with protecting their island's Chi and creating a Dharmic paradise in Nippon proper than in interacting with other Kuei-jin.

Japanese courts also differ from ones on the mainland by being organized into territorial "families" that control provinces encompassing several cities. These structures, which resemble extended *wu*, are known as *uji*. *Uji* resemble the aristocratic families of old Japan; they are organized under a family head (*daimyo*) to whom lesser vampires swear oaths of fealty. As a *daimyo* advances past the point of material concerns, she turns her position over to her most promising underling, who becomes the new *daimyo*. Less pleasantly, if a *daimyo* falls under the sway of the P'o or otherwise disgraces herself, a subordinate can challenge her for the position.

The two mightiest *uji* are the Bishamon (often mistakenly translated as "Bushi") and the Genji. The Bishamon is a traditionalist society, concerned with Dharmic redemption through the protection of Japan's customs and Chi. Bishamon tradition places them upon the island right after its inception — as early, perhaps, as the Second Age. The Kuei-jin of House Bishamon possess a singular affinity with the Chi energy that pulses through the mountainous regions of this small, yet powerful, outpost of the Middle Kingdom. By contrast, the Genji is a wild and loose *uji*, heavily involved in Japan's modern corporate culture. The Genji's members have made pacts with all manner of urban nushi, by calling upon the spirits of electricity, metal and energy for aid. Suspicion and distrust between the two factions is rampant; Bishamon and Genji are typically forbidden to enter each other's cities or are constantly watched when they are permitted entry. Several lesser *uji* serve as allies, foils and pawns in the power games of the two great houses.

The Coming of the Serpent-Borne

The Bishamon lived among the Jomon and Yayoi cultures of early Japan, before the establishment of the first imperial dynasty, the Yamato. In early Japan's social structure, which organized elite groups into clans called *uji*, the Bishamon were often regarded as patron deities, in a manner similar to the Kuei-jin of Shang China. The heads of these *uji* clans, who doubled as the clans' chief priests, were fully aware of the power of these native vampires and sometimes implored the Bishamon's assistance over the forces of nature and the harvests. The Bishamon also guarded their mortal charges from the Kumo, or Goblin Spiders, and their Yama King masters.

Kuei-jin from the Azure Dragon Court began to reach Japan around 600 B.C., following the human migrations from the Korean peninsula. These first vampiric conquerors are called the Serpent-Borne by the native *shen*, for it is written that they came across the Tsushima Strait on the backs of great water-serpents.

Unlike the mortal migrations, however, the arrival of Chinese and Korean Kuei-jin was a far more violent affair. The invaders set upon the Bishamon and other Japanese vampire families. The native Bishamon retreated into subterranean dwellings, thus removing themselves from the living earth for decades. The Serpent-Borne established themselves under several family structures, the greatest of which became known as House Genji.

The first imperial court of the Yamato lineage rose to power in 660 B.C. Jimmu, the mortal Yamato emperor, was a powerful force for the Genji to contend with, for he had taken into his inner circle a group of female shamans who had taught

him how to repel the Kuei-jin. Faced with a formidable opponent in Jimmu, the Genji were content to allow the mortal culture to develop in its own way, although they still stalked prey among the populations of early Japanese society, whose members sometimes dubbed them "gaki."

The Reascension Period

During the late stages of the Yamato, a powerful aristocratic family called the Fujiwara began to intermarry into the imperial lineage and court. Soon, the Fujiwara placed one of their own upon the throne and seized the imperial dynasty, which they held for nearly 300 years.

The founder of the Fujiwara clan, Nakatomi no Kamatari, had known of the Bishamon before their defeat by the Genji usurpers. It was during the first few years of the Fujiwara family's reign, called the Heian period, that the Bishamon returned to the mortal world.

None of the *shen* — especially not the Genji — knew where the Bishamon had retreated to three centuries previous. Everyone knew, however, that they had returned with a vengeance. The Genji were no match for the Bishamon, whose Chi magics decimated the ranks of the Serpent-Borne. The Bishamon tracked down many of the Serpent-Borne and slew the more dangerous warriors and plotters outright.

And then, inexplicably, the Bishamon halted their blood vendetta. They went to the surviving Genji and offered their services as spies and assassins against mortal demon hunters and other *shen*. As mortal society reverted to being controlled by individual aristocratic and religious estates, the Bishamon followed suit. Some of their teachers and spiritual guides retreated to these aristocratic holdings, where they were content to concentrate upon Dharmic advancement.

The later Heian period also saw the creation of private armies by these newly reempowered aristocratic families. A new class of warriors was created, the legendary samurai, who themselves grouped into *uji* clans and rose in power and influence at the emperor's court. The Bishamon and other Kuei-jin of a more militaristic bent moved among the samurai class. The vampires taught some of these warrior families magics to control the body and the senses. The mortal clans were eager learners, and a few utilized these teachings in their training to develop into the first ninja families.

As the Heian era progressed, the Azure Dragon Kuei-jin gradually divorced themselves from their continental cousins and organized into *uji*, as did their mortal counterparts. This distancing enraged the mainland Kuei-jin, but, because of Japan's geographical isolation, there was little they could do. The Kuei-jin of Japan preferred to follow their Dharmas in solitude, as they had little interest in the sweeping ambitions of the mainland courts.

The Shogunate Periods

After the decline of the Heian period, Japan was ruled by three successive shogunates for close to 700 years. The first of these three shogunates, called the Kamakura, ushered in its own form of military government through the various shogun estates in Japan. The Kamakura patterned the government hierarchy and chains of command after the model of a Japanese extended family. They focused on respect for elders, close connections and mutual assistance to all members concerned.

After the restructuring of the mortal government under the Kamakura, many Japanese vampires sought to assert their authority over the island. Lesser *uji* of Kuei-jin carved out their own estates and centers of authority in the valleys and abandoned shrines of the island. The Genji went so far as to engage other *shen* who were not Kuei-jin as their vassals, then to further their education in the magical arts.

The feudal period was a time of great strife and turmoil, among mortals and *shen* alike. As the island's dragon nests dwindled, *uji* fought *uji* and Kuei-jin battled hengeyokai (particularly the Hakken werewolves, who had lairs in the deepest mountain wilds). Minions of the Yama Kings, among them the Kumo Goblin Spiders, walked the lonely roads and haunted shrines at night. An offshoot of the Shih demon hunters, ones trained in the ways of Zen Buddhism, sought to protect the mortal populace from *shen* and oppressive samurai alike. And finally, the period saw an influx of Kuei-jin from China and Korea who sought to establish fiefdoms on the island. Nocturnal wars among supernatural factions spilled over into the mortal world, and it was not unknown for an isolated village to greet the rising sun as a deserted graveyard.

The Coming of the West

In 1543, during the Ashikaga Shogunate, the Portuguese became the first Westerners to reach the island. They set up trade with the Japanese two years later. On their heels followed the first Jesuit missionaries in 1549, and soon after that, the Dutch and other Europeans made their way to the island.

To complicate matters further, one of the Jesuit missionaries

The Divine Wind

In 1266, Kublai Khan sent a messenger from the Chinese mainland to the Shogunate to demand Japan's surrender to the Mongol Empire. The Shogun refused, and eight years later the first Mongol invasion, comprising a military force of over 30,000 Mongols and Koreans, landed on the shores of Japan. Included in this force were significant numbers of Chinese and Korean Kuei-jin seeking plunder and Chi.

Japanese *uji* came together and defended the island for seven years, with battles dragging across the heart of Japan. Although the mortal invaders were repelled, the *shen* continued to sweep across the island, as they took their battle with the native *uji* to the island's remotest parts. In 1281, Kublai Khan sent another force of 140,000 men to take Japan. More Kuei-jin than ever before accompanied this force. It seemed as if, by sheer numbers alone, Japan would fall to invaders from the mainland.

And then a miracle happened — a great storm off the coast of Japan unleashed its power on the invading fleet. Nearly half of the 140,000 men sent by Kublai Khan perished in its fury, and all of the Kuei-jin sank to the sea bottom. Mortals called the tempest the "divine wind" — the *kamikaze*. To the Japanese Kuei-jin, and particularly to the Bishamon, it was the power of the island itself rising up to protect its native *shen*.

was actually a member of the Society of Leopold. Learning of the presence of Kuei-jin on the island, he requested a small detachment of Inquisitors to come to Japan and destroy the creatures. The arrival of the Inquisition was greeted with harshness by both the mortal and vampiric populations of the island. The Western witch-hunters spared few of the local shrines as they tore into the wilds and wrecked villages and estates in pursuit of their prey.

In 1639, when a group of particularly zealous Inquisitors destroyed an ancient Yayoi graveyard, which they thought to be a vampire enclave, the Shogun decided enough was enough. He expelled the Jesuits and every other European from the island, except for the Dutch. Japan was closed off to foreigners and would remain so for the next two centuries.

The Period of Excess: The Return of the Foreigners

In 1854, Commodore Matthew Perry of the U.S. Navy landed on the shores of Japan. Faced with a weakening shogunate and internal chaos, the Tokugawa government acquiesced to the demands of the American sailor and abandoned its isolationist policy. Japan was in an uproar, as feudal *daimyo*, samurai, the shogunate government and even the old imperial house were drawn into the debate. Kuei-jin kept a close watch over the proceedings, and influenced them — as best they could — toward expelling the barbarians, but to no avail. After Japan had signed several disadvantageous commercial treaties with the U.S. and several European countries, the Westerners returned, this time with guns.

Unable to oust the foreigners, several samurai leaders (and furious Kuei-jin) banded together and forced the resignation of the Tokugawa Shogunate. They restored the old imperial house to power in 1868, the Kuei-jin believing that the innate power vested in the emperor's person since the time of the Yamato would be enough to render any foreign vampires impotent.

What the Kuei-jin did not factor into their equation was the total transformation of Japan from a feudal society into an industrialized world power in less than 50 years. By the beginning of the 20th century, Japan had become a significant commercial and military power. Its population skyrocketed and began to include more and more Westerners. The emperor Meiji, instead of dictating terms to the foreign peoples, embraced their presence, and was determined to make Japan a power equal in stature with the great nations of Europe.

The Kuei-jin were devastated. A few Western Kindred already resided in some of their most sacred shrines and cities. Many important dragon nests ebbed into near-impotence, lacerated by railroads and construction projects. The island nation became more and more Westernized, even as it defeated the Russian navy at Tsushima Strait and increased Japanese hegemony over easternmost Asia. During World War I, Japanese forces seized several East Asian holdings, a further diminishment of Chinese influence across the continent. As Japan grew more powerful in the Middle Kingdom, its Kuei-jin soon sought another opportunity to reassert themselves over the Cathayans of the Chinese mainland.

Opportunity knocked in 1937. Japanese forces clashed with Chinese soldiers in Peking and won, thus establishing control over eastern China. With the invading Japanese forces came several *wu* of Genji and their allies, who warred with the Flesh Court over the control of Shanghai and Nanjing. For the next several years, Japanese and Chinese Kuei-jin battled on the rooftops and in the alleyways of the major cities of eastern China, where they scavenged among the carnage wrought by the occupying forces. These hidden battles continue to this night.

Postwar Japan houses a few Western Kindred among its masses of humanity. These Cainites have wormed their way into major financial centers of Tokyo and other cities. To the dismay of the Bishamon, the Genji and their vassal *uji* have followed suit by setting up little empires in the business world and making contacts and deals with the foreign devils. Older Kuei-jin have attempted to rein in these young Turks, but with little success so far — too many Genji have held their positions too long to be simply removed. An all-out civil war among the Kuei-jin on the island threatens to bring down the wrath of the mortal authorities and shatter a fragile peace between the two *uji*.

Thus, the Kuei-jin wait, young and old alike, as the island dies a little each night because of the Burnings. Older courts like the Bishamon know that an Age of Sorrow is at hand, and they perceive their own impotence and personal suffering against the Kin-jin as a great tolling bell that signifies its imminence. The Genji, however, continue to go their own way, widening the gulf between themselves and the other courts. The Bishamon can rant and shake their heads and prophesy gloom and doom all they want: The Genji know better. They are the future of this little slice of the Middle Kingdom. And the future is now.

Korea

The Cathayans who inhabit Korea are mostly descendants or offshoots of the Azure Dragon Court, or else they are the remnants of warrior *wu* who ventured onto the Korean peninsula during the Third Age to battle the minions of the Yama Kings. Korean Kuei-jin have historically been very antiauthoritarian; the few courts who took it upon themselves to cleanse the Korean jungles resented the Quincunx's attempts to collect jade tribute from them during the Mongol period.

In the modern Middle Kingdom, the vampires of Korea are singularly possessive of their domains. In the politics among the various courts, they tend to play every side against the middle, thereby cementing their own hold over the peninsular bridge between China and Japan. These nights, Chinese and Japanese Kuei-jin no longer rely primarily upon the Korean peninsula as a pathway between the two nations. Nonetheless, tradition and history have combined to keep the Korean Kuei-jin major players and mediators in the various disagreements between China and Japan, as well as between East and West.

The Green Courts

The Azure Dragon Court is no more, and so, modern Korean Kuei-jin refer to themselves as the Green Courts, a name that pays homage to the vast amounts of jade in sacred sites across the peninsula. Hengeyokai and other *shen* guard these natural deposits, which bestow magical energy through the properties of the stone. The Green Courts also keep their own stores of jade, which they work into fine artifacts and talismans envied throughout the Middle Kingdom.

Historically, they have been wheelers and dealers among the Kuei-jin of the Middle Kingdom, and they are practiced in the

delicate art of negotiation and compromise between Chinese and Japanese Kuei-jin. Throughout the centuries, the Green Courts have also been instrumental in providing easy passage for Chinese Kuei-jin en route to a little mayhem in Japan, and *vice versa*. Somehow, the Green Courts have always managed to keep themselves out of the actual fighting and free of reprisals by the losing side, whoever that may be at any given time.

This predilection for calculated neutrality allows the Green Courts to direct their energies toward their main problems — their relations with the hengeyokai and other *shen* of the peninsula. The Kuei-jin's own stores of jade are being depleted, and lately vampires have been looking to obtain the sacred element from the caerns of shapeshifters. Relations between the Green Courts and the hengeyokai have grown strained as a result. Even beyond shapeshifter resistance to Kuei-jin efforts at plundering caerns, questions have arisen about whether the jade in these caerns is even compatible with Kuei-jin magics.

The Three Kingdoms

By the third century B.C., three of Korea's native mortal tribes had established kingdoms: Silla on the southeast coast, Paekche on the southwest and Koguryo in the north. Following the rough lines of these mortal kingdoms, functionaries of the Azure Dragon Court rose to prominence in their particular spheres of influence. In A.D. 668, the Silla kingdom employed Chinese help and overran the other two kingdoms, thus creating, for the first time, a unified Korea. Although Silla kept Korea unified for another two-and-a-half centuries, battles in the Korean jungles between Kuei-jin and *shen* protective of their own jade stores dragged on for at least as long.

Finally, the Kuei-jin managed to beat down their *shen* enemies during the mortal Koryo Dynasty, in the 10th century. From this watershed came the Agreement of Three, a treaty among the Korean Kuei-jin that bound them together in a common effort to promote what they called "mutual traffic and intercourse among our various brethren courts." In practice, the Agreement of Three allowed the Korean Kuei-jin to concentrate on using the peninsula as a gateway to the rest of the Middle Kingdom.

Mutual Traffic

The Green Courts directed the implementation of the Agreement of Three, and they did so with very beneficial results. The Mongol incursions of the 1200s moved through the peninsula successfully with a good amount of Kuei-jin help, or at least noninterference. Unfortunately, these invasions met with disastrous results, including the deaths of many Korean Kuei-jin who had thrown in their lot with the invading forces. Chinese Kuei-jin blamed the Green Courts for the defeat; Japanese Kuei-jin were furious at the Green Courts for allowing these invaders free progress through the peninsula.

The Green Courts — and by extension the rest of the Korean *shen* — remained caught between the ebb and flow of invading forces moving in both directions. This tension persisted for the next few centuries, until the advent of Westerners to the peninsula, via the Chinese mainland.

Westerners (and a few roving Cainites) obtained a foothold in Korea, a development the Green Courts resented mightily. Abundant anti-Western persecution followed among the mortals, with occasional Kuei-jin encouragement. In 1866 and 1871 respectively, French and American attacks on Korea, in response to its mistreatment of Westerners, allowed the Japanese to gain a favorable trading agreement with the mortal dynasty there. Korea was "opened" to the West shortly thereafter.

The Burnings

During World War II, Japanese vampires unabashedly pursued their own private vendettas against their age-old Chinese oppressors and interminglers; the mortal war was being fought hundreds of miles away, and the emperor's divine will was sure to solidify the resolve of the mortal forces.

Then, on August 6, 1945, in the sky over Hiroshima, the war came to Japan with unholy fire. The first atomic bomb exploded above the city, killing hundreds of thousands in an instant. Three days later, another atomic bomb detonated over Nagasaki, with similar results. Many Japanese Kuei-jin swear to this night that, as the bombs exploded, their dreams were troubled by the Yama Kings' laughter.

The effects of the atomic bombs are still felt among the Bishamon and Genji. The massive destruction, called the Burnings, tore apart the natural fabric of the island, poisoned the land's Chi and corrupted the native vampires' communion with the natural forces of Japan. The Bishamon, being the oldest court of native Kuei-jin, felt (and still feel) the aftereffects the worst: For many, the tainted Chi of postwar Japan both wounds and sustains their physical bodies, and a few Bishamon have decided to forego ingesting the poisoned Chi. They prefer to waste away, rather than endure this singularly cruel suffering.

Japan's other Kuei-jin have not made such a choice. Although the courts of the Serpent-Borne invaders, such as the Genji, do not feel such agony, they are nevertheless concerned about what the continual intake of tainted life-essences does to their bodies. Many feel it is slowly killing them as well or transforming them bit by bit into creatures abominable. What is actually happening (and how fast it is doing so) is anybody's guess, but many Kuei-jin here now possess powers heretofore unknown — and uncontrollable. Some Kuei-jin welcome these added magics, but others fear them to be the first step into a madness or a metamorphosis of horrific proportions.

The Vengeance of the Islanders

In 1910, a powerful and newly assertive Japan annexed Korea and held it under Japanese control until the end of World War II. In 1937, Japanese war *wu* pierced through the heart of the peninsula on their way into Manchuria. The invading forces had been waiting to avenge themselves on the Korean vampires ever since the Mongol invasions of the 13th century, and they did so in spades. While Korea was under Japanese control, many Korean *wu* were wiped out by Japanese Kuei-jin, who impaled their enemies on jade-tipped spikes and left them for the dawn. The surviving Cathayans ensured their own unlives by easing the journey of Japanese vampires into Shanghai and Nanjing, where the invaders battled the Flesh Court over control of China's eastern coastal cities.

In 1945, Japan surrendered to the Allies and gave up Korea, which was divided along the 38th Parallel to separate U.S. and Soviet occupational forces. Under cover of the mortal conflict, the Green Courts took to purging any Japanese Kuei-jin lingering on the peninsula. Today, the peninsula remains divided along the 38th Parallel between North and South Korea, two very different nations. Scattered throughout both countries are the Green Courts, doubly vigilant against the threat of spillage from the war in Shanghai and always looking over their shoulder for another Japanese invasion. The Green Court vampires must also beware the wilderness-dwelling hengeyokai and other *shen*, who harbor centuries-old hatred for their ancestral foes.

Southeast Asia

The nations that make up what is collectively referred to as Southeast Asia have historically been an arena for travelers, traders and pilgrimages. Southeast Asia lies on old Near East-Far East trade routes and has seen many peoples — Arab, Indian and European — traverse its humid jungles, snow-capped mountains and verdant valleys.

The region has also seen the migration of Kuei-jin, who followed many of the same tracks laid down by mortal caravans. Many of the *wu* and courts that inhabit Southeast Asia are nomadic in nature: They have moved with the fragmentation and consolidation of the various mortal states and dynasties in the different countries here for innumerable years. In the 20th century, a few of these courts have founded power bases or spheres of influence in the major cities. Mostly under the cover of the region's repressive or unstable regimes, these courts have been able to exert a great deal of power soon after putting down roots.

The Scarlet Phoenix Court

The region was originally exploited by Kuei-jin from the Scarlet Phoenix Court, who migrated far from their brethren and preyed upon the ancient, indigenous peoples. The Scarlet Phoenix vampires, though, quickly found that they were not the only haunters of the jungle nights. All manner of savage shapeshifters guarded the region's Chi, and ancient scrolls from the region speak of frightful demons, spirits and other horrors that terrorized the area's inhabitants. For the Kuei-jin of the Scarlet Phoenix Court, existence became a nightly battle for survival, pressured as they were by the increasingly hostile northern courts on the one hand, and by the Yama Kings and their demon minions on the other.

It is little wonder, then, that certain Kuei-jin chose to succumb to the demons' lures. The Scarlet Phoenix Court collapsed into a morass of warring *wu* and courts, as ancestor after ancestor became *akuma* and fell from the Dharmic paths. To this night, the courts of the south have a reputation for harboring *akuma*, fostering the viler practices of the Devil-Tiger Dharma, and otherwise behaving in decadent and indecorous fashion. The vampires of Southeast Asia rebut that perhaps their detractors should examine their own conduct; nonetheless, the stigma persists.

THE GOLDEN COURTS

The modern courts of Southeast Asia are known among the Kuei-jin as the Golden Courts. Existing, as they do, on the Middle Kingdom's periphery, the Golden Courts are little trusted by their Chinese neighbors. For centuries, the vampires of the Golden Courts have "enjoyed" reputations as decadent, barbaric and deceitful. It is true that, historically, Golden Court vampires have adopted unorthodox cultural elements from Hindu and Muslim visitors; it is likewise true that, in the Fifth Age, the Golden Courts involve themselves heavily in Southeast Asia's vice and narcotics trades. Perhaps most shocking of all to the traditionalist Quincunx, however, is the matriarchal nature of many of the Golden Courts. Many courts here are ruled by matriarchal ancestresses, *penangallan*-queens who rival any Quincunx mandarin or Bishamon samurai for cunning and deadliness.

THE ARRIVAL OF THE WESTERNERS

Much of Southeast Asia's mortal history revolves around a small number of long-lasting dynasties locked in near-perpetual conflicts to exercise hegemony over the region. Amid the various civil and external wars, Kuei-jin of the Golden Courts moved with the fighting forces to pillage and feast off the carnage. The arrival of Theravada Buddhism, a type of Buddhism based upon the teachings of elder holy men, combined with still-extant pockets of ancestor worship and animism, allowed the Golden Courts to consolidate power among the commoner classes with ease.

The first mortal Westerners — Dutch and Portuguese traders — came during the Age of Exploration, but they were able to gain secure outposts only in Indonesia. It was not until the late 18th and early 19th centuries that the French and British both colonized the various nations. The Golden Courts gladly took the opportunity to feed; the foreign devils supplied just as much Chi as their subjects did.

The French invaded Vietnam in 1858, in response to the persecution of Catholic missionaries in the area. They swiftly took over the country, and by the end of the 19th century had annexed Laos and Cambodia to form French Indochina. Never much for subtlety once in control, the French colonial government began to bleed the peninsula. It devastated the peoples and the lands in an arbitrary and poorly planned system designed with no purpose other than to drain the countries of their raw resources.

The British had set themselves to colonizing Burma, Malaysia and Thailand. Compared to the French, the British were better at administration of their colonies (much in the same sense that losing one arm in an auto accident is better than losing both of them). Western Kindred also followed on the heels of the British — rumor has it that Robert Pedder, the grand old Prince of Hong Kong, sent a few of his most trusted lieutenants to these colonies.

SILLY LITTLE WARS

At the close of World War II, the Japanese had lost their budding Asian empire, including much of the area of French Indochina. Unwilling to return to French rule, the Vietnamese rebel leader Ho Chi Minh, after a long and protracted war, defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu, effectively destroying French Indochina. The actions of Ho Chi Minh and the split of Vietnam into North and South ushered in the United States, which pledged armed support to the South Vietnamese in order to preserve "democracy" against the North's Communists.

Thus began the Vietnam War, a conflict in which more than 50,000 American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians would die. Goaded by questionable politics and domino theories, the Vietnam War wrought untold amounts of misery and obliteration. For the peoples of Southeast Asia, it was hell.

For the Kuei-jin, it was a feast. Vampires threw themselves on the saturation-bombed villages and cities, the defoliated jungles, and the massacres perpetrated by natives and Americans alike. For the Golden Courts, it was an orgy of blood and unquenchable energy. The defeat and frustration of French and American forces (and the isolation of many Western Kindred) allowed these vampires to exact a revenge that had been festering for centuries.

In 1975, Khmer Rouge revolutionaries seized Cambodia from the government, beat back the invading North Vietnamese, and unleashed a reign of terror and mass murder equal to the greatest slaughters in history. They called it "Year Zero," and it was an apt moniker: Approximately two million people were tortured and killed by the regime, for "crimes" as simple as wearing glasses or speaking foreign languages. The killings continued for four years, while the rest of the world watched. Finally, in 1978, Vietnam invaded Cambodia and put an end to the mass bloodshed. Not, however, before the Kuei-jin fed themselves at the state prisons, the execution sites and the mass graves of millions of innocents caught in the gears of a juggernaut.

The Aftermath

The end of the 1970s left Southeast Asia in precarious shape, with its nations trying to heal their shattered countryside and slaughtered peoples. Slowly, the countries of the region rebuilt themselves. Despite the fears of Communism infecting the region, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos have all been encouraging foreign investment since the fall of the Soviet Union. Yet much anti-Western feeling still lives on in major sections of the region. Although the fate of the Khmer Rouge is in question, the purgative measures undertaken to eliminate them in Cambodia promise to be nearly as violent as Pol Pot's policies. Indonesia has suffered through three decades of precarious unity under a "democracy" that has become more and more dictatorial as the years progress. Malaysia has been the site of anti-Western Islamic fundamentalist sentiments, which have left its government in an awkward position of appeasing its people while remaining amicable to foreigners. Kuei-jin have encouraged many of these protests, and aided the Khmer and other anti-Western groups.

Although Southeast Asia still remains ripe for foreign investors, its land and people are decaying rapidly in this part of the Middle Kingdom. Massive defoliation during the Vietnam War has upset the natural balance of Chi. Mortal atrocities during the war and as a result of the Khmer Rouge have torn apart the fabric of these countries. As the people try to rebuild, grasping at foreign money, they still lose themselves in the vice dens of Bangkok, the back alleys of Singapore, the dangerous streets of Saigon and the bomb-marked valleys of Laos. Southeast Asia remains a frontier region in the Middle Kingdom, a place of undeveloped and decimated lands, corrupt capitals, widespread poverty, remorseless cruelty and fatal justice. The fatalism that pervades the Golden Courts has set the region swinging like a giant pendulum in the Fifth Age. It will not be long before the pendulum crashes to earth.

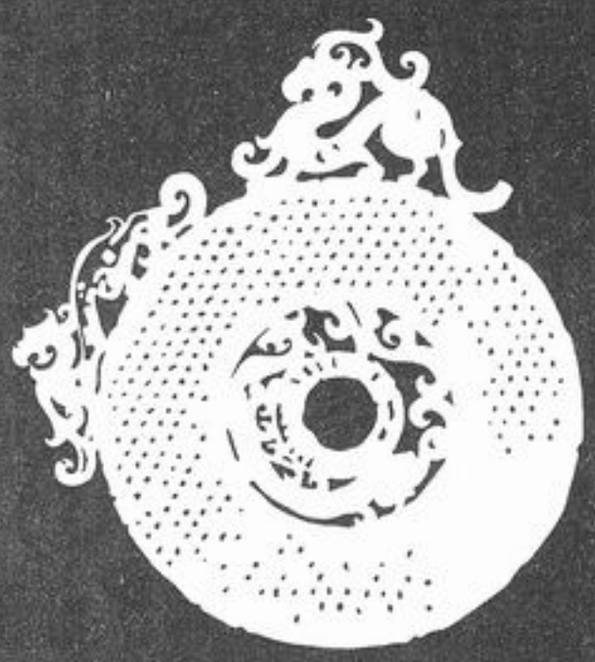
Singapore

Its name derived from a Malaysian word meaning "lion town," Singapore has been a major trading center in Southeast Asia since ancient times. It was founded in its modern identity by Sir Stamford Raffles, a British gadabout who convinced the government in London to underwrite the establishment of a British trading outpost there. Raffles was central in reaching agreements between the major local power figures. He soon transformed this southernmost tip of Malaysia into an international trading port. Until World War II, Singapore was a crossroads of international commerce and ethnic diversity, a sort of second-string Hong Kong for both legal and illegal commerce.

After a brutal reign by the Japanese army from 1941 until the end of the war (which also saw Japanese war *wu* turn the nighttime city into a forbidden zone), Singapore lifted itself from the ashes and rebuilt itself, becoming independent in 1965. Since then, Singapore has tried to recapture the mystique of its former years.

For its vampire population, Singapore has indeed become just what its mortal chamber-of-commerce types have desired for years: a mix of Eastern Kuei-jin and a few Western Kindred who coexist in a manner very much like the vampires of Hong Kong did — with one crucial exception: Singapore is a free city, owing allegiance to no country, under the constraints of no ticking clock. West and East cross its streets with relative freedom and manage to maintain a working relationship — if nothing else.

Hong Kong's vampires watched the course of human events in Singapore while the 99-year lease of the British protectorate neared its end. Still unsure of Hong Kong's future, both in mortal and supernatural terms, the few Kindred in Hong Kong have been talking of a mass relocation before the city is completely absorbed by China — a relocation to Singapore. Neither the Golden Courts nor the few Kindred in Singapore want this sort of development; a sudden influx of Kindred would certainly cause far too many problems. The potential immigrants, however, do not seem to care what the Singaporean vampires think. Singapore, to them, offers a perfect option for resettlement, an option they may be forced to take.



THE MODERN MIDDLE KINGDOM

Now, at the brink of the Sixth Age, the Kuei-jin exist in a morass of conflicting loyalties, courts, and philosophies. Although Cathayans tout a common cause against the Kindred opportunists and invaders, the stresses of *wu* rivalry, Dharmic differences, and demonic corruption tear nightly at any unity.

CHINA: THE CENTER OF IT ALL

China boasts the ancient origins of the Kuei-jin: the first courts, the most important philosophical and spiritual writings, and the most potent reservoirs of power, spiritual connections and simple Chi in the Middle Kingdom. With all of this history and apparent lasting power, one might assume the Kuei-jin of China to be the directors of the Middle Kingdom's entire Kuei-jin population, holding authority on par with the divine emperors of old.

Hundreds, even thousands of years ago, this equation was more or less true, but the modern era has transformed and weakened such power. Today, the vampires of the Middle Kingdom have fragmented into a patchwork of warring courts and *wu*. This strife has only redoubled the efforts of the Chinese Kuei-jin to tighten their hold over what they do control and to work even harder against the interlopers arriving daily in the Middle Kingdom — a task that is long, hard and often fruitless.

BEIJING: THE BLOOD COURT

Beijing is a city of nine million people, but it is not the largest city in China — Shanghai claims that distinction. Still, the capital of the People's Republic remains the nerve center for over one billion Chinese and nearly 12,000 vampires. Its influence ripples outward across the whole of China, due in large part to the stifling national bureaucracy and meticulous intrusiveness of the Chinese Communist government.

Like many of the Middle Kingdom's large cities, Beijing is an odd mix of its timeless past and sought-after future. The city seems caught in mid-metamorphosis: a chockablock juxtaposition of broad boulevards, vast squares, cramped alleyways and courtyards, a few modern skyscrapers, and a myriad of fantastical parks. The municipal sprawl of Beijing leaves one with little sense of direction or even logic; add to the architectural esoterica nine million Chinese, omnipresent military parades and demonstrations, and battalions of tourists, and confusion can quickly overpower anyone wandering through Beijing's maze of streets.

But the natives themselves know Beijing. Nine million people traverse this metropolis, on foot, on bicycles, or in military vehicles. Beijing's citizens move about in what seems a total familiarity with their surroundings, perfect attunement to the city's beat. The Kuei-jin know it even better: They maneuvered silently in the night as Beijing grew to its present configuration, and the *wu* of the Blood Court have, over the centuries, carved out their own individual and communal niches within the city. Still, the Kuei-jin's existence in the shadows of China's capital is not without problems. Beijing is shifting toward Western capitalism and culture, and the presence of a few Kindred in the international sectors of Beijing — in the embassy complexes and purely Western hotels and nightclubs — has started to attract the youngest generations of disciples. It is a situation that the Blood Court ancestor and mandarins do not care for at all. For if Beijing falls to the West, the Middle Kingdom likely falls too.

The Mao Zedong Mausoleum

Wall Rating: 8 during the day, 6 at night

Off Tiananmen Square, to the south, sits the mausoleum that houses the body of Chairman Mao, the architect of modern China. The mausoleum occupies a prime position on the north-south axis of Beijing, but, in opposition to the principles of Chinese geomancy, faces north. The mausoleum is packed with reverent old-timers and tourists during the day, in an unbroken chain of respect-payers and gawkers.

At night, however, the mausoleum is a far more sinister place. During Mao's life and the height of his power, the people of China used to say that his wife, Jiang Qing, was actually a fox-spirit. For the Kuei-jin, it is no rumor. Many, including Ancestor Ch'ang, believe that Jiang Qing survived her life sentence and still wanders Beijing to this night. She is reported to make her home in the mausoleum itself, under the body of her former husband, away from the prying eyes of mortals. The impact of this possibility is devastating to Ch'ang and the rest of the Kuei-jin in Beijing: Jiang is said to feed off the corrupting Chi that wells forth from the ill-placed structure, where she grows ever more powerful in dark magics. Ch'ang and the rest of the Beijing hierarchy are already bracing for a possible revolt by the younger *wu* of the Blood Court, and, in addition to watching for the spark of revolt from the western quarter, he now literally has to monitor his own front yard.

A Stately Pleasure-Dome Decreed: The Forbidden City

Wall Rating: 8 during the day, 6 at night

The Forbidden City, home to the Ming and Qing emperors, is the largest and most intact colony of buildings in all of China. For over 500 years, the emperors of these dynasties rarely traveled beyond the grounds of the city's walls, and anyone stepping onto the grounds met with summary execution. Living and working in the Forbidden City (which was home to the imperial court, concubines, ministers and servants) was literally considered divine work, the work of the emperor. The spiritual power of this enclosure in the heart of Beijing affected not only everyone in the capital, but the entirety of the Chinese nation.

For the Kuei-jin of Beijing, this spiritual oneness of power concentrated in the Forbidden City provides a real, tangible reservoir of energy, which the ancestor, Ch'ang Li, and his ministers draw upon nightly. In the evening, after the City is closed to tourists (at 5:30 P.M., no exceptions), the ancestor holds court within the walls of the old imperial complex.

And a "complex" it is. The palace area of the Forbidden City counts no fewer than 800 buildings and 9,000 rooms. It is a monumental place, which is supposed to (and does) make the visitor feel insignificant. For the native Kuei-jin who come here to request assistance or to undergo judgment by the ancestor, the expanse of the palace complex is a daunting environment. The labyrinthine structure of the palace is also its own defense against any possible intrusion, a potential realized on one occasion: An enterprising Kindred, seeking to view the palace's art and architecture, breached the outer walls and made her way deep into the palace complex…and never found her way out again.

The main entrance to the Forbidden City is through

Storyteller's Hints: Asian Philology

Asian names are structured differently from Western names, in both order and title. The following is a very rough cheat sheet for Storytellers and players.

• Chinese: In English, Chinese names go last name first. The last name is often one syllable, while the given name may be one or two syllables. In the case of Mao Zedong, *Mao* is his last name; *Zedong* his first. ("Chairman Mao" is therefore not an insulting form of address; it is roughly equivalent to "President Nixon.")

• Japanese: Again, last name first. The catchall titular suffix is *-san*, as in *Miyagi-san*, which is Japanese for Mr. Miyagi (though it also functions as Mrs. or Ms.). Last names are usually two or three syllables; first names can range up to four syllables.

• Korean: Korean names have three parts. The last name comes first, followed by the first part of the given name, which is shared by every family member in the same generation. The final part of the name is the individual's actual given name. In the case of Kim Dae Jong, *Kim* is the family name; *Dae* is the name of every family member in his generation (if he had a sister named Soon, she would be called *Kim Dae Soon*); and *Jong* is his first name.

• Southeast Asia: Names vary from country to country. Vietnamese names have three parts and follow roughly the same pattern as Korean ones, except that the middle name is not a generational identifier; it is simply part of the given name. The people of Malaysia do not have surnames; Malay names go first name first, then the word *bin* (for men) or *binti* (for women), then the father's first name. Thai names go like Western names, individual name first.

For players unfamiliar with Asian names, it is probably best to look at a current history of the region in question to see how famous people in the region are named. (One quick glance through a book about the Vietnam War should give naming ideas for most of the Southeast Asian countries, for example.)

Without creating an international incident, it is safe to assume that the look and sound of Asian names generally follow the look and sound of the particular language. Chinese has hardly any staccato quality to its language and features common consonant pairings like *sh*, *zh*, *ng*, etc. Japanese is a language of short syllables, as are the names of its people, as in *A-ki-ra Ku-ro-sa-wa*. Korean is virtually all sharp monosyllables; their names follow suit.

Tiananmen Square to the south. The Tiananmen Gate opens onto another duo of gates, the outer Meridian Gate and the inner Supreme Harmony Gate, on the actual palace grounds proper. Gongs and bells, once used to signal the comings and goings of the emperor, now signal that the ancestor's court is in session. The Supreme Harmony Gate opens onto a massive courtyard that can hold up to 100,000 people. At the end of the courtyard are the Three Great Halls: the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the Hall of Middle Harmony and the Hall of Preserving Harmony. The largest structures within the Forbidden City, the Three Great Halls are where Ch'ang makes "public" appearances, proclamations, and pronounces judgments on Kuei-jin disagreements.

Beyond the Three Great Halls is the real power of the ancestor. The Palace of Heavenly Purity was the imperial residence and now is that of Ch'ang and his closest mandarin ministers. Beyond the palace lies the Imperial Garden, a vast greenery of walkways, pavilions, arches and bridges. The Imperial Garden is Ch'ang's "privy closet," so to speak, his private place for meditation and receiving area for the highest-level Kuei-jin in the city.

The Underground City, Qianmen

Qianmen District, just south of Tiananmen Square, houses one of the world's most unusual sites, the Underground City. In the late 1960s, Chinese paranoia about a possible Soviet nuclear attack prompted the creation of a huge system of underground air-raid shelters beneath the Qianmen shopping district. Built entirely by volunteers, the shelters below Qianmen, called the Underground City, have been converted into a maze of warehouses, factories, shops, restaurants, hotels, theatres and the like.

The Underground City is really that: a city. It can hold 70,000 people in case of an air raid, and has roughly 90 entrances peppered around Qianmen, all of them either long-forgotten or well-kept secrets in the back rooms of aboveground shops and tight alcoves down tighter alleys. The Underground City is a mixture of Cold War civil-defense architecture (there are still communication centers around the complex) and nascent Chinese capitalism.

For the few Western Kindred who reside in Beijing, the Underground City is a paradise. The Giovanni who runs the black market in Beijing, della Passaglia, often takes nightly strolls through the complex, which remains populated after hours. A 100-bedroom hotel serves della Passaglia as a way station for Kindred passing through the city, and the restaurants and theatres entice tourists as well as natives, providing Cainites with a banquet of vitae.

The Underground City is della Passaglia's *de facto* domain, but he keeps it only by the graces of Ancestor Ch'ang. That forbearance has been strained in recent years, particularly after the demonstrations for democracy in 1989. Della Passaglia may hold the shadow economy of Beijing in his grasp, but Ch'ang holds della Passaglia's base of operations in his. The Underground City has only been *partially* converted; many parts of the air-raid complex remain as they were over 30 years ago. The Kuei-jin of Beijing are as familiar with the twists and turns of the Underground City as della Passaglia, even more so, in fact. Because the Underground City connects to the subway system in Beijing, which follows the plan of the old city walls, it is theoretically possible for Beijing's Cathayans to infiltrate the subterranean complex in mass numbers. Several overly ambitious *wu* have done just that, and used the unconverted caverns to descend upon unlucky Cainites. Della Passaglia has complained to Ch'ang on several occasions, with decidedly mixed results. As he cannot take the risk of offending the ancestor outright, della Passaglia has redoubled his protection underground, with the knowledge that a full-scale attack may be imminent.

The Hutongs

Privacy is hard to come by amid nine million people, and the struggle for a Kuei-jin to demarcate his or her personal haven often proves difficult. The ancestor and his Blood Court remain securely sequestered within the Forbidden City, but the

The Hidden Economy

The black market in Shanghai is of singular interest to the city's supernatural combatants. It sells information, weapons — and even people. With China's strict laws on population control, couples are limited to one child per family. Additional children are dealt with in numerous ways, none of them pretty. State-controlled abortions, orphanages and even bands of child laborers are some of the measures that exist to curb the growth of illegal offspring.

The black market has use for these unwanteds — as provisions. Vampires move among Shanghai's millions and offer to buy off excess children for a price. These unfortunates then go to special holding centers, where they are made available for purchase by any Kindred or Kuei-jin looking for a reliable source of vitae or Chi.

The Silent Mandarins are well aware of this practice, but have not yet been able to curtail it. The effects of this human livestock trade have been disastrous for the city. Neighborhoods have been flensed of their children. The police have begun to make arbitrary arrests and to execute persons suspected of trafficking in young girls (who authorities think are being sold into white slavery). The situation has reached epidemic proportions within the mortal and vampiric worlds alike and added more fuel to an already all-consuming fire.

majority of Beijing's Kuei-jin do not have such a luxury. For most of them, the solution is a hutong — one of the countless numbers of cramped streets wedged in between the city's broad avenues and marketplaces. Kuei-jin *wu* mark out their territory behind any one of the blank, unnumbered doors facing outward from the rows and rows of centuries-old buildings.

A hutong is a desperate dwelling. Rotting eaves, crumbling walls and nearly collapsed buildings make fire and sunlight ever-present dangers. Although the anonymity of a hutong allows Kuei-jin some secrecy (and many convenient vessels nearby), the decay of these streets promotes the defilement of Beijing's dragon lines.

Shanghai: The Flesh Court

Shanghai is packed to bursting. It holds over 12 million people, and is the fifth-largest city in the world. Over the years, Shanghai has earned a host of sobriquets — few of them, including the "Whore of China," flattering. The stereotypical images of Shanghai from the 1920s and '30s romanticize everything: images of Paris and New York at the height of the interwar period, broad avenues, art deco buildings, wealth — even the beggars and con artists who prowled the city's back streets were almost pastiche characters.

In 1937, the Japanese invaded China, took Shanghai and placed the city under one of the most repressive occupational regimes in recent history. Japanese Kuei-jin arrived with the invading forces to battle both Chinese and foreign vampires under cover of Japanese military rule, coordination and "reeducation." They never stopped fighting. For the last six decades, Shanghai has been the playing field for one of the longest vampiric open conflicts anywhere in the World of Darkness. Chinese, Japanese and Western vampires wage war against one other and among themselves for control of this city. They slice through the sardine-packed mortals and occasionally employ other *shen*, as they pursue age-old vendettas and respond to fresh insults.

Feng Shui

Chinese for "wind and water," *feng shui* is the practice of Chinese geomancy, the art of coordinating buildings and surroundings in harmony with the earth's spirits and natural lines of force and power. Before any building is put up, in Hong Kong or the rest of China, a *feng shui* practitioner is brought to the proposed site of construction, to determine the natural forces and ley lines in the area and see whether the architect's design conforms to the earth's inherent currents.

Feng shui is taken extremely seriously in Hong Kong. *Fang shih* (practitioners of *feng shui*) are considered to be as important as architects and surveyors, and they are paid handsomely for their services. The word of a *fang shih* is law in the construction of a building in Hong Kong, and this tradition often causes the oddest cosmetic results: curved or S-shaped buildings, several-story holes in the middle of skyscrapers, glassed atriums that reach upward for nearly 10 stories, and other innovations that would be architectural horrors in the West. Such modifications, while lending a unique or comical air to the Hong Kong skyline in the eyes of a foreigner, have distinct purposes: to maintain unbroken ley lines, to facilitate the growth of trees in the surrounding area or even to let the celestial dragons observe the harbor undisturbed. In some cases, *feng shui* modifications are instigated by one Kuei-jin or another, as a karmic strike against the territory of a rival.

Effectively, *fang shih* know rituals and formulas to raise or lower an area's Wall. By constructing a building in accordance with *feng shui* principles, the site can be filled with harmonious energy, effectively lowering the local Wall by one or two. Conversely, by setting up mirrors and other objects in a warding pattern, a *fang shih* can raise an area's effective Wall by one or two, thus preventing "evil spirits" from entering.

Certain Kuei-jin have studied their own version of *feng shui*; several of these Cathayans make themselves available around Hong Kong as practitioners in the evenings. Called Tso Tao (the "black way"), this art is used to place Kuei-jin tombs in correct alignment with the Chi forces, to determine the best way to construct lairs, and even as a tool to search for hidden caves around China's vast rural areas. Conversely, the incorrect placing of (or tampering with) these forces or Chi lines can have debilitating effects upon Kuei-jin, both physically and spiritually.

The "Silent Mandarins"

Who actually runs Shanghai, from a vampiric standpoint, has not been clear since the arrival of the invasion forces in 1937. Hostilities have decimated the former Flesh Court. But over 120 native Kuei-jin call this bloodied patch of ground home, and even in their defense of it, there must be some rule.

Shanghai has been coordinated by a secretive wu of mandarins ever since the hostilities began. These Kuei-jin meet irregularly and in different places each time, so as to avoid discovery by unfriendly forces. Their identities are known only to themselves and to a handful of fiercely loyal underlings and heimin. Natives call them the Silent Mandarins, and they are the mysterious directors of the Kuei-jin war here against Western and Japanese invaders. The identity of the Silent Mandarins has sparked vicious battles between Shanghai Kuei-jin and their enemies, who are convinced that the Mandarins alone hold Shanghai together. Espionage, bribery, suicide missions and other acts of silent aggression are constantly initiated by hostile Cathayans seeking to uncover the source of power that drives Shanghai.

The Three Zones of Shanghai

The vampiric war in Shanghai follows the historical demarcations of foreign influence. There are three distinct zones of Kuei-jin and Cainite concentration in Shanghai, although the fighting itself continually crosses these rough borders and bleeds into the entirety of the megalopolis.

The International Settlement

The International Settlement runs along the northern bank of the Huangpu River, the main body of water that flows through Shanghai. The Settlement is the largest of the three zones within Shanghai. Historically, the Settlement comprised British, European, American and (to an extent) Japanese influence. Boasting banks, hotels and crumbling gentlemen's clubs founded in the heyday of Shanghai's foreign glory, it is the major battleground of the supernatural wars here. Japanese holdovers, desperate independent Cainites and native loyalists fight on the rooftops and through the alleys of the Settlement's many decrepit edifices, particularly along Zhongshan Road, called the Bund (embankment). The Bund follows the western banks of the Huangpu River and skirts the boundaries of all three zones of vampiric concentration in Shanghai. Control of the Bund can be a turning point in the war, and such control has been alternately won and lost for decades, with no one side ever gaining a lasting advantage.

The French Concession

Called the "French Connection" by some Cainites (after the movie of the same name), the Concession is home to the old vice centers of Shanghai: the opium dens, brothels and gang headquarters. "Blood Alley," Shanghai's notorious red-light district, sits here off Fuzhou Road. Despite the best efforts of the Communists during the 1950s to clean up Blood Alley, the war in Shanghai has resulted in the area reverting back to its former state. Blood Alley plays an important part in the war; its nightclubs and opium dens are also vast reservoirs of intelligence and information for any vampire, regardless of his loyalties, to buy and sell. Nightingales' Perch, a bar and nightclub dating back to the turn of the century, is the main crossroads for information and soldiers in this 60-year-old war. It is understood to be a place of sanctuary, of neutrality, from the fighting, but not necessarily from the other businesses of war.

The Old Town

The Old Town is a small section of Shanghai ringed by Renmin and Zhonghua Roads, just west of the Huangpu River. The Old Town is the nexus of Shanghai's Kuei-jin, a packed community of several neighborhoods that have resisted the progress and decay endemic to the remainder of the city. A code of silence and fear blankets the Old Town, one that stands out even in the middle of a war zone. A powerful *wu* of native Kuei-jin called the Blood Circle claims the Old Town as its turf. They act as nighttime protectors and vigilantes among both mortals and Kuei-jin. The Blood Circle dedicates itself to the extermination of any and all foreign influences, Cainites and Japanese Kuei-jin alike, from the city. Its members keep the Old Town permanently locked down, as they wind through the roads and cul-de-sacs with military proficiency. The Blood Circle ventures into the shooting war with increasing regularity and is a formidable force for Cainites and Japanese to confront. Unlucky Kindred who fall victim to the Circle find themselves the subjects of horrifying interrogations and executions.

Hong Kong: The Flame Court

Hong Kong is a time bomb with six million components: its people. The Quincunx and its soldiers plan to detonate the bomb as soon as possible. For over 150 years, the Flame Court has been in disarray, held hostage by Western (and Western Kindred) authority. During this time, Hong Kong has become a worldwide corporate giant, brokering everything from land to commodities futures to its original trading staple of opium. Even as the mortal populations scramble to preserve what personal fortunes they can, never knowing what the Chinese caretakers may do tomorrow, the Kuei-jin already have in motion a plan to seize back their fallen court from the degenerate invaders. The retaking of Hong Kong will signal the reemergence of the Quincunx and renew endeavors to keep the foreigners out. Or so the Five August Courts hope.

Central District

Central District is the corporate and consumer core of Hong Kong. It bristles with banking and insurance towers, high-rise hotels, nightclubs and shops, all vying for space on this zoned-for-anything island. Conspicuous consumption is *de rigueur* in this part of the city; shops selling everything from the latest fashions to 24-karat gold bars and jewelry are barely a stone's throw in any direction. Nestled between the oddly shaped skyscrapers, countless numbers of shops, stalls and boutiques display their wares. Hong Kong Park, a 10-acre affair of waterfalls and fountains, sits on the eastern edge of Central District. The park sports an aviary, a conservatory and a visual arts center.

Causeway Bay

Causeway Bay is a shopping and entertainment center lying east of Central District. It is also a floating city within Hong Kong, and home to the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club, as well as to hundreds of junks and sampans housing the city's boat dwellers. A *wu* of Kuei-jin resides on these junks, and moves up and down the harbor and around the peninsula freely. These Kuei-jin rule over the thousand or so boat people of Causeway Bay, where the vampires act as a sort of protection racket against unpopular policies from the mainland or the Yacht Club. This *wu*, called the Sublime Caretakers, also uses its hold over the residents of Causeway Bay to provide a safe house for native Kuei-jin who fall afoul of mortal demon hunters in the

city. Members of the Sublime Caretakers shelter such vampires and transport them to any of the locales that make up Hong Kong, including Kowloon, Lantau, and the Macau peninsula. Junks and sampans move to and fro with Kuei-jin aboard. Rumors also claim that the Sublime Caretakers have been engaged by the Flame Court to act as the first attack wave from the sea in the retaking of Hong Kong. The truth in this matter is unclear, but the *wu*'s hold on Causeway Bay remains strong and efficient enough to make such hearsay into sudden reality.

Squatters

Hong Kong has always been a haven for refugees from oppressive regimes throughout Asia. Over one million illegal immigrants live in the city, sometimes as many as seven to a bedroom. Government programs established to deal with this constant influx have not worked out as well as anticipated. Close to half a million immigrants from the Chinese mainland live here as "squatters," in crudely made shacks and connected huts along the shore or in hillside slums.

These communities of squatters are often crisscrossed by Kuei-jin, who use the kine as vessels and browbeat these wretches into providing them with places of sanctuary. About 15,000 squatters live on boats moored close together in the harbors around the city, where they are sheltered from the typhoons in this part of the ocean. Their fate is the same as that of the hillside dwellers, for the most part.

Hollywood Road

Hollywood Road is the junk and antique section of Hong Kong, where esoterica from all parts of Asia can be bought and sold in the area's myriad flea markets, curio shops, and antique stands. Hollywood Road is also the base of operations for an organization called the Scarlet Shih, an offshoot of the original Chou demon hunters. The Scarlet Shih are occultists and back-alley fighters who, upon hearing natives' complaints about the activities of unruly "demons," take the appropriate measures to deal with such problems.

The Scarlet Shih make their base in the middle of the Cat Street Market, a nighttime hybrid of tourist shops, drug dens, brothels and gang headquarters. The vice trade in Hong Kong centers in and revolves around the Cat Street Market and is under the influence of a Tremere named Oliver Thrace — unbeknownst to any of the Scarlet Shih. This sort of contradiction is not uncommon along Hollywood Road, where the only fact of life is that it will very likely be shorter than you thought.

The 14K Triad

Triads, criminal organizations combining elements of secret societies and gangs, are rife in the modern era. The triads started during the Ming Dynasty, as resistance groups opposing the encroachment of Manchu armies from the northern regions of China. When the Manchus eventually took over China and became the Qing Dynasty, the triads remained alive as secret societies, working in the shadows and between the seams of the law to increase their influence over the populace. Kuei-jin courts quickly grafted themselves to these organizations, and this symbiosis (or parasitism) continues to the present night.

Modern triads are efficient and extensive underground organizations, spreading outward as far as Europe and the Chinatowns of many major American cities. The first triad, called the Society of Heaven and Earth, was founded about 300 years ago by a radical Buddhist monk whose creed was "Hate all foreigners and destroy their society." Needless to say, the Kuei-jin were rather enamored of this philosophy, and today many vampires are active in triads, or even make up their own triads, which serve as combination courts and underworld organizations.

The largest triad in Hong Kong is the 14K, which numbers about 20,000 members worldwide. The name comes from the address in Canton, 14 Koh Po Wah Street, where 36 soldiers of the Kuomintang banded together to resist the Communist takeover in 1947. The "K" stands for *karat*, which is actually a word that means harshness or violence — the metallurgical coincidence of this appellation being as ironic a twist as one will ever find in China. The 14K is a major player in Hollywood Road's markets, and it serves as a deadly foil to the machinations of Thrace and his chantry. Between the Tremere group and the 14K, Hollywood Road is a DMZ of double-dealing, multiple loyalties, violence and excess.

Kowloon

Kowloon, the section of the Hong Kong peninsula abutting the Chinese mainland, is home to the majority of the city's cultural centers. At its southernmost tip, poking out into Victoria Harbor, the Hong Kong Cultural Center, the New World Center (shopping and hotel complexes) and the Space Museum sit side by side along Salisbury Road. Perpendicular to Salisbury is Nathan Road, Kowloon's main drag. A few blocks north of Kowloon Park, home to the natural history museum and a huge sports and leisure complex, is the market district. Two markets, the Jade Market and the Temple Street Night Market, boast fortunetellers and occult oddities, as well as the finest examples of jade work in China. Kuei-jin occasionally visit the Jade Market, as they know well the divine nature of this mesmerizing stone.

Hong Kong's largest court, the Righteous Devils of Kowloon, bases itself in this area. The Righteous Devils have entertained emissaries from the arriving Flame Court *wu*, but talks concerning the city's future have proceeded haltingly. The Righteous Devils see the Flame Court as a reactionary threat, while the Flame Court sees the Righteous Devils as ragtag *akuma*, little better than the Kin-jin.

Tibet

Wall Rating: 6

According to the most hallowed sutras, Tibet houses the ancient beginnings of the Cathayan race. Kuei-jin believe that the sacred mountain, Meru, stood in Tibet, within the Himalayan mountain chain. Some devout traditionalists claim that the arhats of old still reside in Tibet, among the rubble of the mountain. Such tale-telling vampires eagerly teach this legend to their disciples, who perpetuate it.

Since its conquest by the Chinese government, Tibet has been tightly sealed, even to the Kuei-jin. No vampire inhabits the country, and neither the mortal authorities nor the spiritual rulers seem eager to allow immediate access. The few adventurous Cathayans who attempt entry tell of a debilitating force that attacks their systems the closer they come to the site where Meru is supposed to have been. No Kuei-jin has completed the journey to the ruins of the holy mountain, for the pain of proximity to that place sears through a Kuei-jin's corpse like a hot iron. For all intents and purposes, Kuei-jin crossing into Tibet suffer effects as if from

a True Faith rating of 1; the "rating" increases the deeper they penetrate into the country.

Opinions differ among Cathayans as to why this condition exists. Some Cathayans believe that their intrinsic uncleanliness prevents them from journeying to the holy place until they complete the Road Back. Other Kuei-jin are convinced that evil *wu* are purposely engaging in repellent forms of Chi manipulation to erect a barrier around the region, preventing access to all but their own members. In any event, the birthplace of the Kuei-jin remains, at least for the moment, lost in the mists of time.

Japan: The Ailing Land

To many of Japan's Kuei-jin, the Age of Sorrow has already arrived on the island. The population upheavals of the last 150 years have strained the natural forces of the island to their limit, and the twin apocalypses of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have unleashed a poison that eats steadily away at the cosmic threads binding Japan to the rest of the universe.

To many Western eyes, Japan scarcely appears to be in trouble. Japan is a nation of technological and financial acumen, and it leads the world in many scientific innovations and in the acquisition of overseas companies (at rates alarming to some observers). For the few Western Kindred who reside in Japan, Tokyo and the larger cities are intoxicating playgrounds, and younger Kuei-jin are often willing, if mysterious, associates and partners. How such modernity can exist in an ailing land is incomprehensible to foreign eyes.

But it does. The glitz and glitter of Tokyo is nothing but an elaborate mask, hiding a sallow-featured land that wastes away as each night passes. To look beyond the light and sound of the neon and the bustle is to see an island of corrupted magic and defiled Chi. Although Mount Fuji is still a powerful nexus of Chi, and certain of the island's *torii* maintain the ambience of past Ages, Japan as a whole is slowly being eaten away by the destruction of years past and the indifference of its Kuei-jin.

Tokyo

If the dichotomy between Japan's appearance and its reality is to be understood at all, one must look at the capital, Tokyo. The sheer size of this megalopolis defies comprehension. Tokyo is actually a vast patchwork of dozens of wards, smaller cities, towns and villages; it measures 55 miles by 15 miles and embraces nearly eight-and-a-half million people. Despite its size, Tokyo is not *big*, at least not in the sense that everyone lives in a high-rise dwelling. Most houses and apartment dwellings are only one or two stories tall, spreading out from the center of Tokyo proper in an ocean of humanity. The neon jungle one sees on CNN exists only in the center of the city.

But even though Tokyo is not visually disorienting, it is very easy to get lost here. The small towns and villages are homes to people who have lived for generations in the same neighborhoods. A native knows her way around like the back of her hand; consequently, in much of Tokyo there are no street signs. Kindred easily lose themselves in this maze of white, box-shaped dwellings; therefore, few venture far into the city's border regions.

The heart of Tokyo is divided into old and new, just like its Kuei-jin. The older section of the city, called Shimatachi, is where the members of House Bishamon dwell, in and around the Imperial Palace and its environs. Dividing the city is the Ginza, Tokyo's answer to Fifth Avenue. On the other side is Yamanote, the newer sections of Tokyo, laden with wealth and culture and excitement. The Genji prowl here, interspersed with a handful of Western Kindred who also feel at home in the thick of Yamanote's frenetic pace. But even that pace is full of fits and starts, courtesy of Tokyo's many idiosyncrasies. Automated teller machines, in this financial haven, shut down at 7 P.M., for example. Clerks are impeccably polite, but young men shove old ladies aside to get a seat on a subway car. Tokyo has a lot of wonder and beauty, but it also has some of the ugliest buildings in the Middle Kingdom (or any other kingdom on the planet). Tokyo is a city constantly at war with itself in practically every aspect of existence. Particularly the vampiric.

joss

Gambling is the recreation of choice throughout China and a lucrative business in Hong Kong. Kuei-jin and mortals alike flirt with the vagaries of chance, and the city has ample places in which to do so. Apart from private casinos and illegal numbers rackets, the main staples of gaming for the vampiric population are the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club (the Jockey Club for short) and the casinos on Macau.

Any one of these venues is extraordinarily exclusive. Membership in the Jockey Club alone (which has a sanctioned monopoly on horse betting) costs over 200,000 HK dollars, and everyone who is anyone in Hong Kong belongs. The casinos on Macau Peninsula — the Lisboa, the Flutuante ("Floating Casino"), and the Jai Alai — are the typical 24-7 fare of slots, poker, blackjack and others, except for the Jai Alai, which also houses an indoor jai alai arena where patrons can bet.

Casinos and gambling, in general, are all a matter of what the Chinese call *joss*, or luck. The Chinese who live in the Middle Kingdom do not attribute luck, whether good or bad, to something as abstract as chance. Rather, *joss* is based on the whims of the gods and the celestial dragons and what sort of mood they're in that day with respect to you. If a god or several gods are angry, they visit their anger upon a person in the form of bad *joss*.

Joss is applied not only to gambling and chance, but also to business deals and politics. The good will of the celestial dragons is paramount for Kuei-jin seeking to carve out a future in this city; the business deals, politics and individual rulings of Hong Kong's Kuei-jin are conducted with overly meticulous Propriety and foresight. To the Kuei-jin, the *joss* of their nightly life is intimately connected to the *joss* of the entire city. For the advance scouts of the Quincunx, *joss* is sure to prove instrumental in the projected recapture of the Flame Court.

The Imperial Palace

Wall Rating: 6

The Imperial Palace sits in the heart of Tokyo, as it has since the days of the Tokugawa Shogunate. It is nearly impreg-

THE ZERO KILOMETER

Wall Rating: 8 to 4, in variable pulses

On the north side of the Nihonbashi, or Bridge of Japan, a few blocks east of the Imperial Palace, stands the true center of Tokyo. For the Kuei-jin, it is the center of all of Japan: the Zero Kilometer. When Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu had the bridge constructed, he designated it the starting point of the five major roads leading out of the city and the point from which all distances in Japan were to be measured forevermore. The physical starting point, a black pole on the Nihonbashi bridge, is called the Zero Kilometer, and it still exists as the starting point for all the national highways of Japan.

The choice was no accident. The Bishamon knew centuries ago that the Zero Kilometer sat on a major nucleus of the island's Chi forces. Hakari encouraged Ieyasu to make this geographic point the source of all direction in Japan, through a complex endeavor of magic and Dharmic divination. For the Kuei-jin of Tokyo, the Zero Kilometer is like a vast reactor of power and spiritual energy. Every temple in Japan inhabited by Kuei-jin feeds off this central source, although it has been giving off spiritual essences less and less frequently in recent years. The main recipient of this power is the grounds of the Imperial Palace, where Hakari and the eldest Kuei-jin on the island exist.

The Zero Kilometer itself is off limits to all save the ancestors; Cathayan legend says that the purity and sheer force of the island's spirit there can physically and spiritually destroy a vampire.

nable, bounded all around by several functioning moats. Although the palace is accessible via no fewer than a dozen subway stops, mortals rarely go there, since the palace is closed for all but two days of the year. The palace buildings, set back from the outer edges of the moats and enclosed by massive gardens, provide the perfect sanctuary for Hakari, the Kuei-jin ancestor of Tokyo, to preside over the chaos that is Tokyo by night. The Imperial Palace is emblematic of the ancient ways, the timelessness, of the Japanese Kuei-jin.

AKIHABARA AND KANDA

The biggest, noisiest, most blindingly bright spectacle in Tokyo is the Akihabara merchandise mart. It is a massive electronics center: If a thing can be plugged in, it's for sale here. Almost one-tenth of Japan's gross domestic product in electronics is sold to foreigners in the Akihabara market.

But Akihabara is not only a gadget guru's paradise. The area was once a black market, just after World War II, and a good portion of this dirtier side survives in the Tokyo of the Middle Kingdom. Drugs, stolen goods, prostitution, pilfered art and artifacts, and high-class pornography operate in the Akihabara, from the shadows behind the huge stalls and tents of the electronics hawkers. Among Tokyo's legitimate tourists and denizens stalk the purveyors and purchasers of these less savory commodities, with not a few Kindred and Kuei-jin on both the supply and demand sides.

To the south of the Akihabara is an area known as Kanda. Here live the Edokko, the original generations of Tokyoites, who have lived in the city for centuries, long before it became the capital. Among the residents of Kanda live a few older Kuei-jin, who sit and watch the activities of the Akihabara.

UPTOWN

Two of Tokyo's uptown districts, the Ginza and the Roppongi, are the territory of the Genji vampires. The Ginza, which lies just southeast of the Imperial Palace, is Tokyo's most exclusive shopping district, a home to fashion houses, art galleries and some very expensive (and often perverse) nightclubs. The Roppongi, in southwestern Tokyo, is the epitome of eat-drink-and-be-merry-for-tomorrow-we-may-die wildness. The Square Building in the Roppongi district houses no fewer than seven eardrum-shattering discos playing cutting-edge world music. Both of these sections of the city are packed with natives and tourists in the evenings.

THE SUBWAY

Tokyo's subway system is like no other on Earth. Millions of people are in constant movement during the system's hours of operation; consequently, the size and make of the subway system are radically different here. Each station is equipped to handle hundreds of passengers at once; the system is its own underground city, with thousands of shops and restaurants operating below the streets of Tokyo. Tokyo Station, by the Imperial Palace, is frequently a spot for younger Kuei-jin to see and be seen. The tunnels of the system themselves provide an excellent method of transport for these fledglings, who sometimes latch on to the back of a train and surf the third rail to their destination. It can be a dangerous way to travel, though — the bullet trains of Tokyo have rendered more than a few inexperienced hitchhikers incapacitated, or worse.

THE YAKUZA

The phrase "Japanese Mafia" is a misnomer. The Yakuza, Japan's major criminal organization, does indeed control Japan's illegal drugs, prostitution, white slavery, numbers running and much, much more. Such avenues of business are where the similarities between the Japanese cartels and the world of Gotti and company stop.

The Yakuza is a powerful force throughout many neighborhoods in Tokyo and cities all over Japan. The Yakuza is divided into several families, or *gumi*, each of which controls a major section of organized crime. Unlike its Mafia counterparts, the Yakuza does not make a huge production of hiding behind storefront operations. Many of the largest Yakuza families have headquarters in major office buildings in Tokyo, and everyone who does business with them knows what they are and what they do.

Yakuza members abide (or at least are supposed to abide) by rules and a strict code of honor that keep the organization functioning as perfectly as a top-shelf microchip. The code stresses loyalty, support of other members' activities, unquestioning obedience and ruthless efficiency; members who fail often receive harsh punishments, including bodily mutilation and even death, if they so much as transgress a single rule.

Naturally, vampires are present at all levels of Yakuza *gumi*. The Yakuza offers Kuei-jin an excellent cover for their own nocturnal activities, as it is a formidable opponent for the police.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki

At 8:15 A.M. on August 6, 1945, the United States military dropped a single four-ton bomb called Little Boy over the Industrial Promotion Hall in the center of Hiroshima. Exploding at an altitude of 1,900 feet, the first-ever atomic bomb killed over 200,000 people instantly: one bomb, which wiped out half a city. Three days later, a second bomb fell on Nagasaki: "Fat Man," as it was called, wiped out a third of that city.

Every Kuei-jin present on the island of Japan during those 72 hours over half a century ago felt a searing pain, as each vampire's P'o literally tried to claw apart its owner. Unbeknownst to the American pilots, both bombs detonated over major dragon lines, killing the spirits congregated there. The celestial balance of Japan was forever upset by these acts of destruction.

Hiroshima

The city was rebuilt after the destruction of 1945, but the legacy of the bomb still grips the hearts of its mortals and Kuei-jin alike. Remarkably, the Industrial Promotion Hall was not vaporized; the charred framework stands as a symbol of humanity's resilience to its own self-destructive impulses. Now called the A-Bomb Dome, the structure stands in the Peace Memorial Park at the confluence of the Otagawa and Motoyasugawa Rivers. The entire park is a chilling place; visitors who see the imprinted human shadows on the marble steps of the Dome know that those faded black outlines are all that remain of human beings disintegrated at the moment of the blast.

Kuei-jin are loath to tread here; to their Ghostsight, the shadows appear as distended, demonic figures, and waves of nauseating spiritual "bile" offend Life- and Ghostsight alike. Sometimes, during the bleakest hours of the night, the Yama Kings themselves are said to gather here, just on the other side of the Wall.

Nagasaki

A grim, black pillar marks ground zero of the August 9, 1945 blast. It stands in the Peace Park, which is overlooked by the International Cultural Hall. This building houses exhibits to mark the tragedy. Here, too, few Kuei-jin walk, and even fewer feed.

Korea: The Crossroads

In the Middle Kingdom, the Korean peninsula is a giant way station for Kuei-jin (and even Kindred) traveling from the Asian mainland to Japan and the other island nations. The Green Courts direct one of the largest routes of safe houses and contacts in the Middle Kingdom, perhaps the world.

Called the Parallel Path, it extends throughout the peninsular nations and the DMZ, winding its way through the hills and mountains of both North and South Korea. Temples, shrines, caves and villages throughout the two countries provide temporary sanctuary and semipermanent havens for Kuei-jin from all over the Middle Kingdom. Never ones to reject the indebtedness of others, the Green Courts' *wu* also shelter Kuei-jin in and around the "special city" on the peninsula, Seoul.

Kuei-jin are taken in from anyplace, for any reason, no questions asked. They travel the Parallel Path under the auspices of Korean *wu*, following treacherous and meandering paths through the country to their final destinations, whether China, Japan, or a permanent haven in Seoul or the Korean wilds.

Although the Parallel Path is overseen by the Green Courts, its vampires do not act as escorts. Rather, they point out places for a hunted vampire to disappear or hibernate. This information is accessible to anyone who comes seeking help and bearing jade; all too often, pursuers are also given the routes of the Parallel Path, genuine cases are turned down, and unacceptable vampires are abandoned by the Green Courts and forced to skirt the boundaries of hengeyokai caerns. The Parallel Path is a fickle, enter-at-your-own-risk venture for the vampire who gets that desperate. But many do, and it thrives.

Seoul

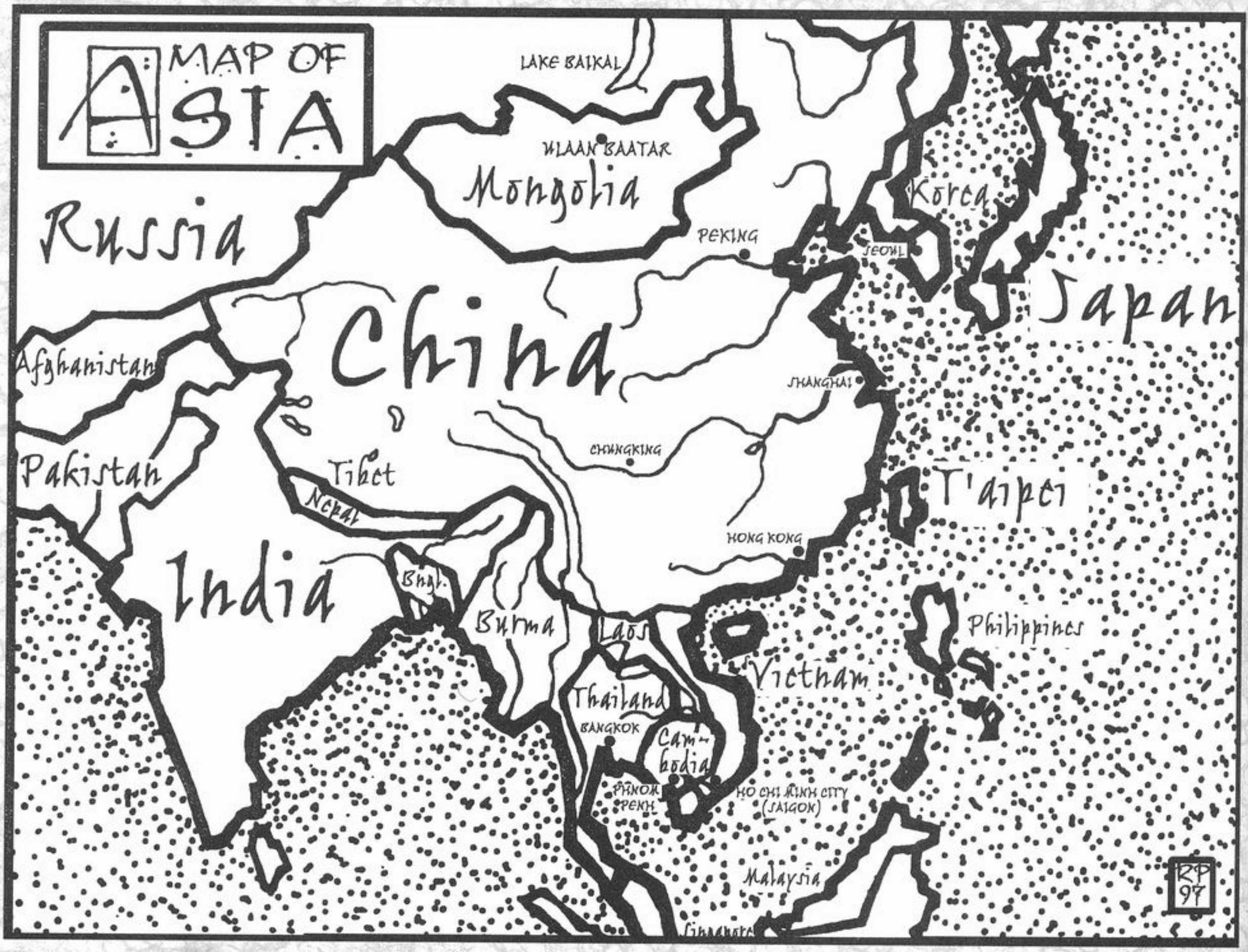
Seoul is a city of 10 million people, roughly 100 native Kuei-jin and the major node of exchange on the Parallel Path. The simple laws of vampiric Darwinism are constantly being stretched and tested here, as dozens of Kuei-jin pass through the city regularly on their journey along the Path. For vampires in the Middle Kingdom, Seoul is a crossroads. Both the city proper and the surrounding suburbs harbor places for vampires to gather, share information and plan the next stage of their journey through the Koreas.

Mount Namsan

Mount Namsan is a granite mountain in the heart of Seoul. The entire mountain is a public park, but it is unlike any other public park anywhere in the world; it features hotels, a vast market at the foot of the mountain, and the Seoul Tower at the summit. The Seoul Tower is Korea's version of the CN Tower in Toronto, with a vast panoramic restaurant and observation deck. It is not uncommon to see Kuei-jin frequenting the hotel nightclubs and watching over the thick blanket of a Seoul night. Beneath the mountain, three tunnels connect the northern and southern districts of the city, thus making the moun-

Poisons

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, forever branded as twin cities of death, were saturated with dark spiritual poisons in the destruction over half a century ago. They are, in effect, off limits to Kuei-jin: No vampire on the island, save *akuma*, dares willingly enter the cities. Chi lines here were either hopelessly defiled or obliterated completely, and the psychic effluvia that vomit forth from the former epicenters of the blasts are the equivalent to Kuei-jin of the most potent carcinogens.



tain Seoul's central hub.

It'aewon, a vast shopping and entertainment district off the Third Namsan Tunnel, features fashion houses, stores, discos, art galleries and antique dealers. The Korean Press Center, a short distance from City Hall, houses a Foreign Correspondents' Club, an Elysium of sorts, that is frequented by the city's few Kindred visitors.

It'aewon also holds the distinction of being a trading center for jade. The wilds of Korea hold many deposits of jade, particularly in the dragon nests of shapeshifters and other *shen*. Green Court envoys often enter into treaties with regional *shen* to obtain the raw ore, which vampire artisans craft into some of the most intricate and magically potent talismans in the Middle Kingdom. Kuei-jin from every corner of the Middle Kingdom visit the stalls of It'aewon to obtain the enchanted products, although the high price typically restricts talismans to more established ancestors. Kuei-jin who lack the wherewithal (and many do, after having paid the high prices of the Parallel Path) have been known to resort to robbery and murder in the city in order to make up the difference.

The Palaces

Three palaces in the heart of downtown — Toksugung, Kyongbokkung and Changdokkung — sprawl over generous acreage with lush gardens and tall pagoda towers. The Green Courts run the Parallel Path from these three palaces.

Most palaces in Seoul and around the peninsula are or were stopovers for the Parallel Path, as their gardens' secrecy provided excellent cover and places for meditation. Nowadays, however, with Westerners on the path, many of the older places of respite have fallen out of the loop in favor of slick hotels and nightclubs. The pagodas and shrines in Korea's trackless wilds still remain inhabited, however, by older bodhisattvas and many of the peninsula's hengeyokai.

Inchon and the Folk Village

Inchon is one of Korea's vital port cities and an important terminus for the Parallel Path, one where Kuei-jin stow away aboard freighters or military ships bound for Southeast Asia. In the Folk Village, part of the Seoul suburb of Suwon, over 200 traditional houses are inhabited by potters, weavers, blacksmiths — and a few Kuei-jin who keep watch over Seoul's southern gate and the Inchon port to the southwest.

Tumuli Park, Kyongju

Tumuli Park rests in the middle of Kyongju, the old capital city of Korea's ancient Silla Kingdom. The park is dotted with tombs of the royal Silla household, which date from the

preunification era of the seventh century A.D. Scores of other tombs dot lower Korea. These tombs represent the densest concentration of safe houses for vampire travelers in the Koreas, and possibly in the world. The Sokkuram Grotto, located near the southeastern shore of the Korean peninsula, is the final stop for vampires going eastward to Japan and beyond.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is still reeling from the aftereffects of the Cold War, and in many places it is losing the battle against total collapse. Vampires native to the region and left here by the conflicts in Vietnam and elsewhere still stalk the jungles and river deltas, their own wars still unfinished.

Scattered around the peninsula are the major cities of Southeast Asia, where the native Golden Courts wage their own wars, both intramural and against the odd Western Kindred. These vampires fight with a hatred and intensity that even the most traditionalist ancestors of China or Japan cannot fathom. The Kuei-jin of Southeast Asia have had to shriek and tear at their little patches of earth since the dawn of mortal civilization in Asia, simply to claim something that is theirs. Having suffered and bled and endured so much, they are willing to destroy it all, rather than let it fall into outsiders' hands.

Bangkok, Thailand

Sixty million people live in Thailand, which is about the size of Texas, and about eight million Thai live in Bangkok, a city whose infamy for vice, prostitution, drugs, crime and humidity is exacerbated in the waning days of the Fifth Age. Bangkok's Thai name is Krung Thep, which means "City of Angels." And, like L.A., the expectation built by the moniker far exceeds actuality. Traffic and crowds are perpetually gridlocked, and the entire city is encased in a crust of salt, soot and sweat from the weather and the pollution of Western luxury automobiles. Bangkok is a rich city, but it has made its wealth by feeding off its less fortunate denizens, in a desperate display of self-destruction. The millions of people living in (and continually moving to) the city are straining Bangkok's already poor infrastructure and services, thus leaving great, gaping holes for *wu* of the Golden Courts to control major sectors of turf within the seedier districts.

The Wretched Hive of Scum and Villainy

Bangkok's vice trade is legendary in Southeast Asia and throughout the Middle Kingdom. Prostitution caters to all tastes, however perverted, and the major vice brokers in Bangkok go to any lengths to procure women and children of all ages. These defiled unfortunates, who typically hail from the poorer regions of Thailand itself, are either tricked into prostitution through promises of wealth and a secure job in Bangkok, or else simply abducted outright and forced into the work for no compensation. Among the "hill tribes" of northern Thailand, tribal leaders often sell young village girls, at 11 or 12 years of age, into the white slavery rings run by enterprising *wu*.

The results are obvious: a frightened rural population under the thumb of Bangkok vice lords, and a host of sexually transmitted diseases ravaging natives and tourists alike. Nearly half the country has or is expected to have HIV by the end of the millennium. Individuals who ignore government proscriptions regarding movement and interactions of people with HIV or full-blown AIDS land in a

special "leper" colony and detention center, where they presumably waste away in captivity.

As in the rest of Southeast Asia, drug trafficking is extraordinarily illegal and carries an immediate life sentence in prison — and in some cases death — for anyone caught participating. Yet, such penalties have not stopped the drug trade from flourishing in Bangkok. The Golden Courts have some influence over the legislature as far as the opium and heroin pipelines in Bangkok are concerned; these Kuei-jin manage to keep their shirts and stay in business by periodically sacrificing a few mortal lackeys to the police.

The Golden Courts are rather pleased with the current situation in Thailand. The social rot of the country, worsened by its people's slide further and further into the grip of illicit activities, allows the courts to flourish and feed upon the misery here. Those Western Kindred who travel to Bangkok are quickly swept up in the rush of its seediness, and all too often they let down their guard and permit the Kuei-jin to strike. Like the song says, there's not much between despair and ecstasy in Bangkok. For the Golden Courts, they are one and the same.

Diverting Pastimes

Many Dharmic practices peculiar to the Golden Courts center on vampiric versions of animism, giving the region's Kuei-jin a close affinity with other *shen* and the beasts of the wilderness regions. Enterprising Kuei-jin in Bangkok, Saigon, Jakarta and other Golden Courts domains have set up contests between wild animals and various *chih-mei* the vampires keep under lock and key, in a supernatural equivalent of cockfighting or bearbaiting. These contests typically pit one or more *chih-mei* against tigers, bears, foxes or — best of all — imprisoned hengeyokai. Betting flows back and forth as freely as the blood spilled in these matches. Several Kuei-jin keep prize *chih-mei* the way mortals keep prize fighting cocks. The vampires unleash their investments in the ring regularly.

Chinatown

Bangkok's Chinatown has been home to ethnic Chinese for over 200 years. The area is filled with street markets, healing shops and a few expatriate Chinese Kuei-jin, mainly from the Bone Court of Chongqing, who have developed a sympathy with the Golden Courts. As both courts base themselves heavily in occultist magics, they tend to get along well. Bone Court disciples have been known to assist the *wu* of the Golden Courts in their searches for victims, and the isolation of Chinatown allows the Bone vampires to assist in concealing Bangkok's drug trade from the eyes of the authorities.

Bars

There are many bars in Bangkok, and they all cater to one thing: sexual congress. Bars in Bangkok run the gamut from low-end establishments featuring child prostitutes of both sexes, to high-class "hostess bars" where ladies of the evening serve patrons' drinks and chat at tableside for hours on end. Invariably, these places are also fronts for or serve as guides to opium and heroin houses around the city, and the Kuei-jin of Bangkok actively coordinate these trades from the back offices of many such bars.

Street Markets

Bangkok's street markets are open into the early evenings. After they close, the black markets open, selling gems, drugs, pornography and knock-off designer fashions in alleyways and out of back rooms. An hour out of Bangkok is the Damnoen Saduak Floating Market, which is frequented by people in everything from rowboats to cigarette crafts that go up and down the Chao Phraya River. The Floating Market is a prime area for smuggling, although Kuei-jin seeking to capitalize have been known to run afoul of the area's few (but territorial) Zhong Lung shapeshifters.

Saigon, Vietnam

Vietnam still conjures up images of Agent Orange, saturation bombing and a war from which no one emerged victorious. The destruction from the occupations lingers in the minds of many. In the Middle Kingdom, defiled dragon lines run all up and down the thin sliver of land that makes up the easternmost part of the Southeast Asian peninsula.

Saigon stands at the tail end of a vampiric forbidden zone that picked up where the mortal wars left off. The old headquarters, trials and DMZs of the war years are still in operation. Golden Courts *wu* and mercenaries fresh from the wars in Shanghai battle encroaching *shen* and Kuei-jin from other courts, with a ferocity that dwarfs anything seen in the years of mortal conflict.

The Apocalypse Now Club

The Apocalypse Now Club, a bar on Thi Sach Street, harkens back to the height of the Vietnam conflict, when CIA agents and grunts brushed shoulders with locals, and no one trusted anyone else in the city. The AN Club is now a neutral site for native and foreign Kuei-jin alike; it serves as a place of sanctuary. Neither violence nor weapons of any sort are allowed inside, and transgressors are sharply and finally dealt with by the ruling mandarins of Saigon. Open all night, the AN Club is popular with the few Western Kindred who find their way to Saigon, but natives from around the city often make appearances here as well, partly to keep an eye on the foreigners.

The Floating Restaurants

Saigon has several floating restaurants where Kuei-jin cut deals and plan their strategies in the wars along Vietnam's eastern coast. Several such establishments exist along the Mekong, and they move easily up and down the river, toward or away from the fighting in the jungles and hinterlands, as needed, to transport fighters or material to points north.

The Cu Chi Tunnels

Wall Rating: 5

The tunnels of the Cu Chi Viet Cong lie outside the city. In our world, the tunnels are now a tourist attraction. In the Middle

Kingdom, though, the tunnels remain as they were during the war: cramped, oppressive, silent and a haven for the Green Snake, a deadly *wu* dedicated to the service of the Devil-Tiger Dharma. For this *wu*, the tunnels function just as they did during the war: as lodgings, secret roadways and prisons. A few captured *shen* and Kindred are incarcerated within these tunnels; these unfortunates provide the Green Snake with sources of information and Chi.

Singapore

Singapore, a financial dragon of the Middle Kingdom, is beginning to recapture some of its nostalgic glory from the pre-World War II era. Goods and services of all sorts, both legal and illegal, pass through this port city at the southernmost tip of Malaysia. Although Singapore goes to great pains to present a clean, sophisticated, Disneyesque appearance, many parts of this trading city bear the clear stamp of dictatorship. The law is absolute in Singapore; offenses of anything from selling chewing gum (which is illegal and leads to a caning) to selling illegal drugs (which leads to caning, rotting away in prison, and a bullet in the head) are punished quickly and efficiently. The Western Kindred who make Singapore their haven city are well aware of the lack of assistance the government or embassies can give them here, regardless of how completely they Dominate even a barrage of consular officials.

The city is a melange of peoples from all over Asia and Europe, the requisite vampires mixing among more than two million residents in the city proper. Although Singapore's population is small compared to many other cities in the Middle Kingdom, the bustle and movement more than make up for the relative paucity of the municipal population.

Orchard Road

The nightlife of Singapore centers on Orchard Road. Bars, tattoo parlors and highly secret prostitution houses, ever watchful of the law, flourish here. The Silver Monkey, a bar at the intersection of Orchard and Scotts Roads, is reminiscent of an Indiana Jones movie setting, with mahogany, wicker, ceiling fans and that yellowed-parchment lighting. In the 1930s, before the Japanese invasion, the Silver Monkey was a gathering place for pilots and adventurers who traveled around Southeast Asia and stopped regularly in Singapore. It evokes a lot of that old charm these nights, with a piano bar, singer and small, backroom casino. The Golden Court *wu* who run Singapore allow the Silver Monkey to operate unfettered, as they consider it a valuable source of information and victims.

Chinatown and Little India

Both of these slices of ethnicity look as if they were lifted straight from their spots at Epcot Center's World Showcase. The "restoration" projects of these areas went overboard with the bright paint and kitsch, and nowadays few tourists visit these towns, unconvinced of their "authenticity."

That is, in the daytime. At night, both areas swarm with Kuei-jin from the Chinese mainland and the Golden Courts. Camouflaged by the "Asia Lite" atmosphere of these sections of the city, Golden, Bone and Flame Court refugees, who run the non-Western parts of Singapore through triads and secret societies, mingle here. The Historic District of Chinatown abuts the financial district of Singapore, and Kuei-jin in the upper echelons of the corporate jungle also have offices in Chinatown. From these headquarters, they funnel proceeds from smuggling and money-laundering operations through their networks of banks and investment houses.

Indonesia

Population-wise, Indonesia is the fourth-largest nation in the world. Over 190 million people live on the islands that constitute this former Dutch commercial outpost, and over 60 percent of them live on the two islands of Java and Bali. Naturally, overcrowding reaches intolerable levels here. Haphazard government resettlement efforts to many of the archipelago's smaller islands have been slow and mostly unsuccessful, and those pockets of native islanders on the receiving end are being secretly killed off by many of the resettled, in yet another version of "ethnic cleansing." The outer islands are home to hundreds of different ethnic and tribal cultures.

Kuei-jin in Indonesia stay close to the land and the powerful Chi forces that well up here from deep beneath the earth. On the smaller islands, brutal *wu* hold control over small villages, in relationships very similar to the ancient blood-sacrifice cults of the Wan Xian. The unfortunate mortals are caught between powerful *shen* in their own backyard and the threat of government resettlement at their doorstep. The vampires of these areas have progressed little beyond animistic magical practices, and they prefer to keep control over their personal fiefdoms.

The Monas, Jakarta

Wall Rating: 6

South of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta stands the Indonesian national monument called the Monas. Often called "Sukarno's Last Erection," after the late former leader of the country, the Monas is a large, phallic structure, built to represent the fertility of the island. And, like the Zero Kilometer in Tokyo, the Monas stands directly over a major node of Chi that radiates throughout the archipelago. Combined with the presence of 190 million Chi-bearing mortals, the Monas deposit acts like a reactor for all the Kuei-jin on the island.

For this reason, the rest of the Golden Court *wu* keep good relations with the Indonesian Kuei-jin, more out of thinly veiled greed than any honest solidarity. The power of the Monas has not escaped the notice of the other courts in the Middle Kingdom. The Kuei-jin of Japan, whose own islands' Chi has been corrupted by the effects of the Burnings, are desperate to partake of the Chi overflowing from Java. Fact-finding expeditions to Indonesia by Japanese Kuei-jin are already underway, in case their hopes come to pass. The Genji and Bishamon may soon do more than look toward this island nation.

Cambodia and Laos

Cambodia is one of the more put-upon countries in the Middle Kingdom, and its ravaged population and countryside are feeding grounds for vampiric parasites. Among the rural temples and *wat* of the country, there still exist some pockets of diehard Khmer Rouge divisions. These rebels constantly attack the precarious government, with Cambodia's decimated rural populations left to reap the whirlwinds of bloodshed. State prisons, still full of old Khmer Rouge prisoners, now receive Khmer Rouge

themselves, often putting jailer and jailed in the same cell. Kuei-jin constantly roam the prison complexes of Cambodia, feeding off not only the life-forces of the mortals' blood, but also the hatred and psychological misery the atmosphere creates.

Laos was a vast wilderness to start with, and over two million tons of bombs dropped on the country during the Vietnam War scarred its landscape and cut great gashes in its dragon lines. Despite Southeast Asia's rush to modernize, Laos is ever forgotten in the excitement, by both mortals and vampires alike. Much of Laos is wasteland — there was little arable land here to start with, and the suffocation of explosives and defoliants from the Vietnam War has done significant damage to the region. The few vampires in the country stay because they can find no other place to go, and no one to help them get there.

The Great Leap Outward

Seize the day, seize the hour,
Our force is irresistible.
— Mao Zedong

For Western Kindred, the existence of Asian vampires remains shrouded in mystery. Although some isolated individuals choose to taste the sweet fruit of the East, they are often written off by the Western clans. Della Passaglia and his little clique refuse to communicate with the Camarilla. Oliver Thrace has gotten no further along in the Great Tremere *Anschluss* here than roughing up a bunch of bookies, prostitutes and drug dealers in a city that operates much like any Western capital. Despite the pace of travel and technology in the modern world, the Camarilla fears that the vampires of Asia may remain an unknown quantity to them for another five millennia.

They are wrong.

Hong Kong is the first step. The Quincunx has positioned soldiers and material all around the city ever since the transfer of power. Other outposts of Asian dominance in the West have seen the arrival of a few advance parties of Kuei-jin, concentrating themselves in the Chinatowns of New York, Boston, San Francisco and elsewhere. The free city of Vancouver, currently held in truce by the region's Kindred and Lupines, has seen an increase in the activity of the Bishamon, who maintain a haven there. The insular nature of these microcosms provides the perfect cover for Kuei-jin to move undetected by Kindred or mortal forces.

For the Quincunx, the question is not if, but when. Once the Flame Court is returned to Quincunx control, the Great Leap Outward is to commence. The Kindred have long wished to know the nature of the vampires of Asia. The Quincunx is determined that they will — and they will wish they had never heard of the Kuei-jin.

The Worlds Beyond the Wall

Beyond the mundane world of the Middle Kingdom lie countless realms inhabited by spirits of all descriptions. Although these realms are invisible and intangible to mortal eyes, *shen* — and particularly Kuei-jin — routinely interact with the

spirit worlds and their denizens.

Spirits are literally everywhere, though they are most numerous in places of strong Chi. In the early Ages, spirits often manifested themselves physically in the Middle Kingdom; thus, the earth-spirit of a particular rock, or the *gei-ryo* spirit of a masterwork sword, might appear to aid or hinder legendary heroes. In the Fifth Age, most of the spirits sleep and must be coaxed or coerced into wakefulness. A particularly beautiful sunrise, or the *yugen* gained through contemplation of a brilliant work of art, are often the only discernible traces of the spirit worlds' presence.

The spirit worlds exist in juxtaposition to the Middle Kingdom, though humans, by and large, are completely oblivious to them. Certain *shen*, including Kuei-jin, can travel to the spirit realms, there interacting with the kami of the rivers or the shades of the dead. Such travel is a difficult endeavor in the Fifth Age; a spiritual Wall separates the spirit realms from the material sites they overlap.

In some ways, the spirit realms of the Middle Kingdom resemble their Western counterparts. However, the Middle Kingdom realms are not divided into the Three Worlds familiar to Western supernatural beings. Kuei-jin know that the Middle Kingdom derives its name from its position between two vast spiritual planes — the dualistic Worlds of Yin and Yang. The Yang World houses all manner of nature-spirits, kami and similar beings. The Yin World, by contrast, is a gloomier realm encompassing the Underworld and its innumerable ghosts. It is from these realms that Chi flows to the Middle Kingdom, and it is to the denizens of these realms that most *shen* pay homage.

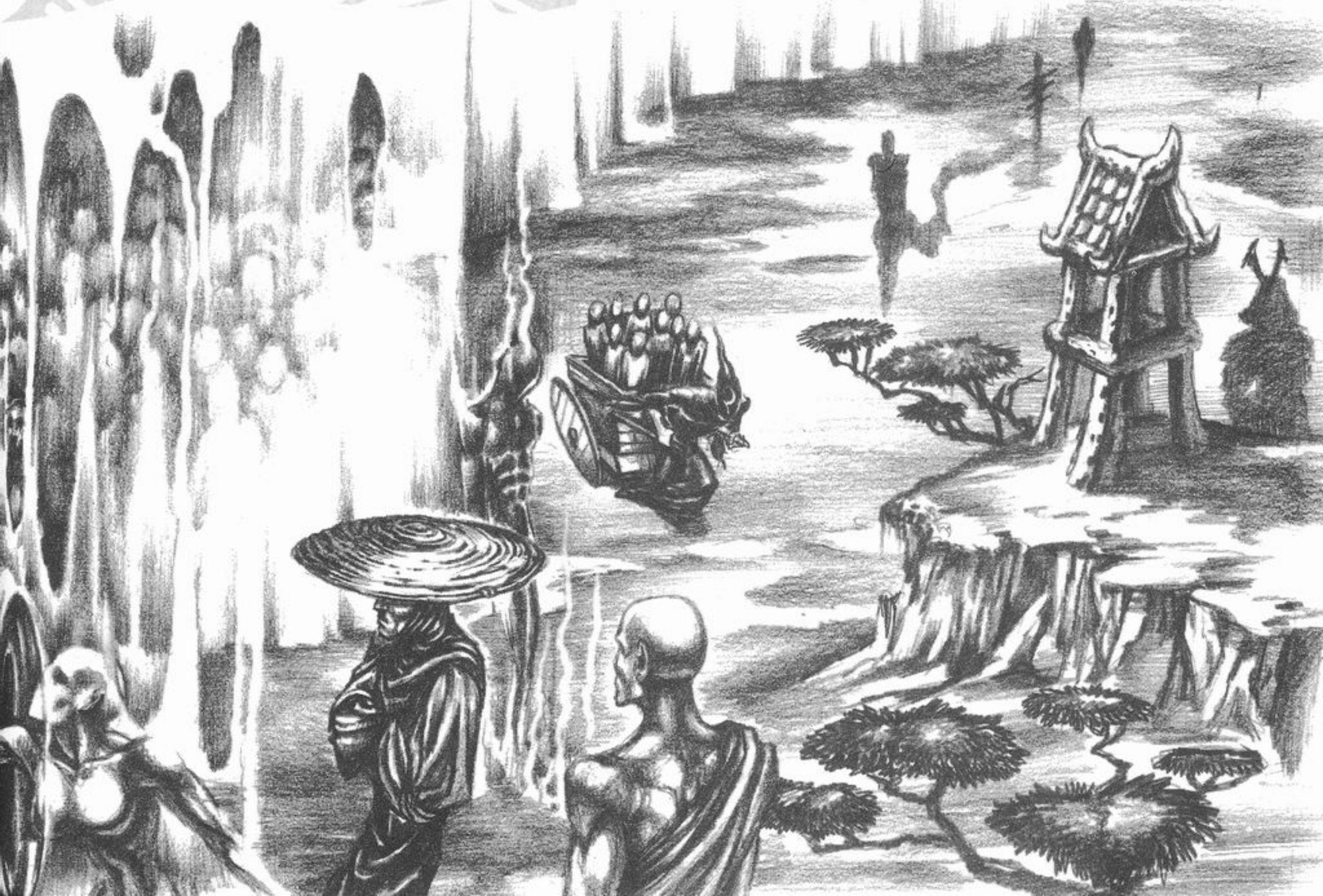
The Fifth Age

In earlier Ages, the spirits went about their assigned duties, happily — or at least respectfully — serving the August Personage's will. Now, however, the order of both the Middle Kingdom and the spirit worlds has broken down. As the mundane realms reflect the degeneracy of the Fifth Age, their spirit counterparts suffer likewise. Kuei-jin, with their preternatural senses, look out on blighted and corrupted worlds. Pollution and nuclear testing erode the Sea King's palace; the twisted towers of the Wicked City mirror the labyrinthine streets of Tokyo and Hong Kong; the Realm of Fighting Spirits swells with victims of the wars in Indochina; and the Yin World bordering Cambodia is a skull-littered plain haunted by howling Spectres.

Increasingly, spirits neglect their posts and become as opportunistic as their mortal and vampiric counterparts. Many former household and nature spirits, their worship neglected by the cynical or "reeducated" populace, wander the spirit realms as shiftless nomads. Ministers and protectors become brutal warlords, ruthlessly fighting for control of this spirit realm or that. Competition for places of unspoiled Chi grows fierce, and spirits increasingly turn to Kuei-jin, to strike symbiotic deals with the undead.

The Worlds of Yin and Yang

The first turn of the Wheel of Ages occurred when the universe divided itself into two polar opposites: Yin, the dark, passive, reactive principle; and Yang, the bright, energetic, active principle. It is from Yin, Yang, and the combinations thereof that



the Ten Thousand Things of matter and spirit formed.

Although Yin and Yang had divided themselves from the All, they remained close to the Middle Kingdom. Under the guidance of Heaven, Yin and Yang governed the turning of the Cycle. As Yang would create, so Yin would erode. As Yang would goad Heaven's soldiers to great deeds, so Yin would offer soothing rest. During the Second and Third Ages, dragons and *kirin* heralded the rise of emperors, the spirits of the dead aided and advised their living families, kami manifested themselves in rocks and trees and pools, and sorcerers magically conjured feathery bridges to the heavens.

Following the Wan Xian's treachery, a Wall was thrown up, and free passage between the spirit and material realms was barred. This event left the *shen* of the material world trapped and confused — they had no heavenly guidance, no spirit mentors. Some interpreted their orders as best they could; others, eschewing their duties to the courts, ran amok throughout the Middle Kingdom.

As the centuries passed, certain *shen* learned magics enabling them to travel to the Yin and Yang Worlds, but what they found there shocked them. The August Personage's order had unraveled like a silkworm's cocoon; various spirit ministers had set up domains willy-nilly and begun running them in the manner of feudal tyrants. Although a few spirits still spoke of Heaven's will, most agreed that the greatest dragon-gods, if not dead, were at least asleep. Some *shen* fatalistically proclaimed that Heaven had turned its back on the Middle Kingdom and the spirit worlds alike, and that only after the purges of the Sixth Age would the world be set aright.

At any rate, two great spirit worlds — Yin and Yang — define the paradigm of the Middle Kingdom. Although the Yang Realms are often spoken of as being "above" the world, while the Yin Realms are described as "below" the earth, this configuration is strictly a metaphor.

What Are the Spirit Worlds?

The spirit worlds are worlds of pure Chi energy that defy natural physical laws. The spirit worlds coexist with the Middle Kingdom, yet the barrier of the Wall renders them proof against mundane perception or interaction. The spirit worlds reflect the material world; changes on one "side" affect the other.

The Mirror Lands

The areas of the Yin and Yang Worlds just beyond the Wall are called the Mirror Lands, because they reflect their counterparts in the Middle Kingdom. Items in the Middle Kingdom cast spiritual "shadows" in the Mirror Lands. Although the features of the Mirror Lands remain relatively constant, each traveler in the Mirror Lands experiences the environment according to her particular perception. A serene rock garden casts a Mirror Lands "shadow" of peace and tranquillity; conversely, a decaying shantytown in the Middle Kingdom appears as a loathsome, vermin-infested wasteland in the Mirror Lands. Each Middle Kingdom realm casts a Mirror Lands "shadow" in the Yin and Yang Worlds. Beings in the Mirror Lands of Yin can typically neither perceive nor interact with beings in the Mirror Lands of Yang, although certain spirit powers allow exceptions to this rule.

The Mirror Lands typically house minor spirits: ones who lost their posts and were cast out of the realms, ones who were trapped (or who chose to stay) near the Middle Kingdom, and renegade spirits on the run from their superiors. Such spirits often interact with vampires, and a few agree to serve as nushi — spiritual "advisors" to Kuei-jin *wu*. Others hover near the Middle Kingdom, as they try desperately to preserve places of beauty or to greedily feed on humans' anguish and misery (depending on the nature of the spirit in question).

Travel through the Mirror Lands is handled similarly to travel through the Middle Kingdom. Distance and direction are identical. If a Kuei-jin enters the spirit worlds, travels a mile through

the Mirror Lands, then returns to the Middle Kingdom, he emerges a mile from his original position.

The Mirror Lands and the Middle Kingdom affect each other. If a site in the Middle Kingdom is despoiled or ravaged, its spirit counterpart suffers likewise. Conversely, if a spirit site is desecrated or defiled, its material counterpart typically becomes rundown, unsafe and full of "bad vibes."

The Tapestry

The deeper regions of the Yin and Yang Worlds are referred to as the Tapestry. Unlike the Mirror Lands, the Tapestry lacks Middle Kingdom counterparts, as it is composed entirely of spirit-stuff. Distance and time in the Tapestry are subjective, and travel through its realms often resembles a dream. Most of the more powerful spirit beings dwell in the Tapestry, where they possessively guard their domains against intruders.

The Tapestry consists of two main sections: Fabric and realms. The Fabric is the "ebb and flow," the uninhabitable stratum through which beings travel from realm to realm. In the Yang World, the Fabric is called the Umbra; in the Yin World, it is called the Typhoon or the Tempest. Spirits are born from the Fabric, travel through it, and return to it to heal or rest. The appearance and "physical laws" of the Fabric can vary wildly, depending on the nearby spirits and even the mental state of travelers within it.

Within the Fabric lie countless realms, domains where powerful spirits have established holdings or lairs. Some of these realms resemble the ancient courts of mortals; others are nightmarish counterparts of modern cities; still others resemble nothing known in the Middle Kingdom. The realms are the dwelling places of spirits, and Kuei-jin of great might or enlightenment often travel to realms, there to supplicate or serve spirits.

Travel through the Fabric is largely subjective; a journey might seem to take a few seconds or several months. Travel seems to be affected by the mental strength and confidence of the travelers, for here spirit reigns supreme and matter is but an illusion. Spirit guides are often vital, though their directions can be misleading or malevolent. It is best to know one's destination and to stay on one of the many glowing dragon tracks that lead through the Fabric. Certain of these paths correspond to Chi lines within the Middle Kingdom, and wise travelers can use dragon tracks as a "road map" to travel great distances within the material world.

At points within the Fabric, gates lead to realms. Some gates are guarded, while others beckon invitingly. Countless worlds await within the Yin and Yang Worlds.

The Yang World

High above the Middle Kingdom stretches the wild, tumultuous Yang World. The Yang World houses a near-infinite number of realms, and their constant transformations make them seem more numerous still. In the Yang World exist Paradises and Hells, dreamlands and nightmare realms, the Realm of Fighting Spirits and the courts of dragons. Here roam spirits of all descriptions: Some are personifications of ideas or objects, while others represent nothing save their own freakishness.

Although fewer human souls pass to the Yang World than to its darksome Yin counterpart, numerous Middle Kingdom dwellers end up here. Their stay is short: They pass into a realm; are judged, rewarded or punished by the spirit denizens; then become a spirit, are reincarnated as human or animal, or are cast into the Yomi World.

Shen do come here; in particular, hengeyokai and fae tend to pass into the Yang World upon their demise. These beings are also capable of limited contact across the Wall; hengeyokai speak of the Yang Realms as "The Umbra," while changelings refer to them as "The Dreaming." Kuei-jin aspected to Yang claim descent from/allegiance to the Scarlet Queen, who is said to haunt the deepest reaches of the Yang World.

The Yang World has no particular center. Yang energy flows capriciously through the area; wild

storms and winds buffet the Fabric, and travel is uncertain and dangerous. Various realms dot the Yang maelstrom; these realms house all manner of deities, dragons and powerful spirits.

YANG REALMS

Ki, in the *Ki Chuan*, wrote of the realms he visited, both in dreams and when awake. Here are a few of the more commonly known Yang realms.

THE REALM OF FIGHTING SPIRITS

Buddhist mythology speaks of the Realm of Fighting Spirits, a vast plain of carnage where the spirits of the unhallowed dead go to do battle. This realm exists in the Yang World. On endless *li* of bloodstained ground, innumerable spirits tear each other apart amid screams, smoke, clashing metal and gunfire. The ground is littered with bodies, skeletons of titanic creatures, weapons, armor and machinery of all sorts. Broken chariots from the Warring States period mingle with scraps of People's Army tanks and Mitsubishi Zeros. The battle never ceases, night or day; a wounded or "slain" spirit eventually picks itself up, reattaches any severed parts, and continues to fight.

Kuei-jin who have been to the realm sometimes speak of three great forces struggling amid the swirling melee. The first fights with clockwork precision under a banner depicting a great spider. The second force is a legion of nightmarish monsters, fighting under the standard of a great serpent or centipede. The third "force" is an unruly mob of shapeshifters and swirling vortices of energy; the term "force" is merely a polite euphemism, for these creatures fight under no emblem and turn on themselves as often as they attack "enemies." Kuei-jin, for their part, understand little of why these forces eternally battle; most deem it wise simply to stay out of the way.

UMI, THE DRAGON KINGDOM OF THE SEA

One of the mightiest of the Yang realms, the domain of Umi claims the entire Pacific as its purview, though certain Polynesian and Indonesian spirit realms beg to differ. This realm can supposedly be reached through great vortices in the deepest oceanic abysses. From his palace at the bottom of the realm, the Dragon King of Umi oversees the myriad responsibilities of his domain: sending calms and tempests, guiding ships into port or sending sharks to attack shipwrecked sailors.

The Dragon King is served by squadrons of Zhong Lung and schools of Same-Bito. Also, spirit versions of sharks, jellyfish, giant squid and other oceanic terrors keep order in the Sea King's domain.

The Dragon King himself keeps to his private chambers and has not been seen publicly in 50 years. Speculation concerning the self-imposed exile runs rampant through Umi and beyond. Certain courtiers say that the Dragon King mourns his love, the destroyed Dragon Princess of Hiroshima; others mutter that the Dragon King was in the Dragon Princess's bed on August 6, 1945, and that since then he has suffered from a frightful and disfiguring malady.

In the Dragon King's place rules his seneschal, Gajyra, a brutal and towering dragon-spirit whose flaming breath can vaporize white jade and metal alike. Some among the spirit worlds whisper that Gajyra himself has felt the taint of nuclear testing in the Pacific, but none dare to say so to his face.

THE YIN WORLD

Below the Middle Kingdom, opposed to the realms of Yang, lies the gloomy Yin World. Here, things are still and shadowy, gray and silent. The realms here are more stable than ones in Yang, the inhabitants more relaxed — or resigned. The majority of human souls come to the Yin World upon death, though some pass into the Yang World during the process of reincarnation.

Unlike the colorful mosaic of the Yang World, the Yin World has a relatively stable nexus point: that gargantuan spiritual construct known as the Underworld, and below it, the Void. Few among the living travel these lands, although Kuei-jin, certain mages and shapeshifters descend into the Yin Realms on errands of various sorts. Vampires aspected to Yin consider themselves beholden to the Ebon Dragon.

YIN REALMS

The Yin World also contains realms, of which Ki likewise wrote. A few are presented below.

THE DARK KINGDOM OF JADE

At the center of the Yin World lies the Underworld, also known as the Dark Kingdom of Jade. Most Middle Kingdom humans who become Restless Dead end up here, although some are harvested by the Yama Kings and taken to the Yomi World. The Dark Kingdom of Jade is an expansive and gloomy land, sculpted from pallid white jade. This jade is formed from the souls of hapless inhabitants who are deemed unworthy of anything save contributing to the realm's foundation.

The Dark Kingdom of Jade is ruled by the tyrant Qin Shihuang, whom some Kuei-jin serve and most fear. For more information on this realm, see the section on wraiths in Chapter Eight, as well as the **Wraith: The Oblivion** sourcebooks **Dark Kingdom of Jade** and **Dark Kingdom of Jade Adventures.**

THE WHISPERING JUNGLE

On the outskirts of the Dark Kingdom of Jade lies a vast expanse of foliage winding crazily in all directions, its tendrils extending into the Tempest itself. This forest, which grows in ways impossible to normal plants, and which chimes in the Tempest's winds, is known as the Whispering Jungle.

The entire jungle and its inhabitants are made of metal, for metal is the element of Yin. Silvery trees with knife-edged leaves glisten in the murky, ambient light, and vines with barbed-wire thorns impede passage. Brass snakes and iron dogs prowl through the jungle, posing hazards to unwary travelers. The most dangerous dwellers of the jungle, though, are the Mukade — gargantuan demon-centipedes seemingly constructed from plates of black iron. The Yama Kings routinely enslave Mukade for use as living siege engines in the demon lords' eternal wars.

THE YOMI WORLD

There is a third spirit world, though few *shen* like to speak of it. It is the dread Yomi World, lair of the Yama Kings and their demon minions. Also known as the Thousand Hells, the Yomi World is a terrible place, seemingly composed from the worst elements of the Yin and Yang Worlds. The Yomi World is juxtaposed by both the Yin and Yang Worlds, and it com-

bines elements of each in its construction. Some *shen* say that, as the Middle Kingdom grows defiled and corrupted, its spiritual counterparts suffer likewise, providing great chunks of spiritual foulness that help build the Yomi World.

Kuei-jin know the Yomi World better than most; all Kuei-jin P'o souls undergo a harrowing journey into the Yomi World prior to rebirth. The lashing bone-winds and maelstroms of Yomi leave their mark upon the P'o, disfiguring and enraging it. In becoming Kuei-jin, however, a soul that proves itself strong enough to escape the Yomi World also makes the inhabitants of the Thousand Hells strive ceaselessly to bring it back into the fold.

The Yomi World is haunted by demonic beings of countless types. Those parts of the Yomi World closer to Yin are overrun by evil ghosts known as Spectres; those areas closer to Yang house monstrous Bane-spirits. The masters of Yomi, the dread Yama Kings, hold Hell-realms deep within the firmament of the Yomi World. There, surrounded by howling tempests and fields of carnage, they make war on each other and on *shen* of purer nature, ever yearning for the night that the Sixth Age is loosed upon the world and one of their number attains the mandate of Demon Emperor.

Yomi Realms

Iron Book of the Red Bridge, penned by the mad Kuei-jin poet O, lists thousands of Hell-realms. A few are described below.

The Wicked City

This vast, smog-choked megalopolis can be reached from the vicinity of Tokyo, Bangkok, Jakarta or Hong Kong, although it corresponds precisely to none of them. It is an oppressive place of dizzying skyscrapers, endless arcs of lunar neon and crumbling slums, where the sky is the color of television tuned to a dead channel. The buildings, deliberately flouting *feng shui* principles, spire in all directions. All manner of ghosts and urban elementals haunt the buildings and streets; metal-spirits, electric demons and wraithly masters of Inhabit walk here, as do cyborgs from the Technocracy.

The Wicked City is ruled by the Yama King Mikaboshi. In the 70-story skyscraper from which he rules, Mikaboshi gloats at the spiritual malaise overtaking the Middle Kingdom. Soon, he reasons, the Wicked City will be the mightiest domain in the spirit worlds, and he will usher in a never-ending Sixth Age — an Age in which, naturally, he will reign as Demon Emperor.

Kakuri

Near the Yin World, bordering the Conquered Territories of the Japanese Underworld, the Yomi realm of Kakuri yawns for the Japanese Dead. The mighty Yama King Emma-o rules over this lightless realm, from which he plots to storm the Paradises of the Buddhas themselves. In Kakuri dwell a fair number of Restless Dead who have escaped the clutches of Qin Shihuang, though their lot under Emma-o is little better.

Emma-o has vampiric servants, all of whom are female. In fact, only females are allowed to serve him. Whether this restriction is levied in homage to the ancient traditions regarding Yin as the feminine principle, or because of simple conceit, is unknown. These Kuei-jin commonly refer to themselves as *shikome*. They receive favors and magical gifts from Emma-o in return for unstinting service and the delivery of a certain quota of souls to the Yama King. Should they fail to meet their quota, Emma-o drags them down to Kakuri and takes their souls instead.

The Hell of Being Skinned Alive

This Yomi realm is a terrifying place of lacerating winds and endless storms of crackling energy. The landscape has been stripped bare and eroded into crazy spires by the never-ending, knifelike winds. Any being, spirit or material, that remains exposed for long is sure to be torn to pieces by the howling gusts.

The Hell of Being Skinned Alive is ruled by the Yama Queen Tou Mu. Also known as the Iron Empress, Tou Mu wears a frightful metal mask and gloves adorned with metal talons, perhaps to protect herself from the forces of her domain. The demoness controls legions of damned souls and has been known to employ vampires in her schemes, though she was a great foe of the Wan Xian and likes nothing better than flaying the skin and Chi from their descendants.

The Heavenly Realms

Certain *shen* speak of the Heavenly Realms, high in the spiritual firmament above Yin and Yang. If they exist at all, the domains of the August Personage — and its minions, the Dragon Kings — have completely separated from the rest of creation.

The Heavenly Realms appear to have turned their collective face from the cares of the Middle Kingdom. Mortals and *shen* recite sutras and chant mantras, as they strive for release from endless lifetimes of sorrow, but the Heavenly Realms rarely respond.

A few Kuei-jin sages teach that, through Dharmic transcendence, one can escape the cycles of the world and find eternal solace — or oblivion — in the Heavenly Realms.

Chapter Seven: Storytelling

The fire taught me to live.

It fell like god-tears long ago, driving us down like maggots. Our noses ran with earth and burnt skin. Soon, the others left me. Then the fire. Then the light.

One night, I floated in the monsoon rain that flowed like birth-water into the caves. The ripe dead drifted beside me, pregnant with flies. In the corpse-soup, I discovered the taste of life.

I have never lost it, even now.

Lo! as the wind is, so is mortal life:
A moan, a sigh, a storm, a strife.
— The Dhammapada

Kindred of the East is a core rulebook supplement for **Vampire: The Masquerade**. It assumes that you've already read **Vampire**, know what the World of Darkness is like and know how to put together a plotline. This chapter is not about literary techniques, dream sequences or other scripting advice. This chapter details the most important aspect of the storytelling game: the story.

More than just a random jumble of characters, plot threads and dice-rolling, storytelling is about the myth of the world. **Kindred of the East** presents a new take on the classic White Wolf **Vampire** myth, that of the mysterious vampires of the East who do not claim descent from Caine. The Kuei-jin are literally devils: lost souls returned from the Yomi World to exact their revenge, continue their villainy or otherwise carry out their supernatural whims. The players who embody these Kuei-jin trust the Storyteller to create a dynamic, interesting and pleasurable story.

Themes

You can't avoid themes. They lurk behind every good story, come out in the actions of every character and bubble just below the surface of every setting. Many individual themes can be highlighted in **Kindred of the East**, and a clever Storyteller can mix the elements her players enjoy the most.

Balance Versus Imbalance

The Cathayans, like other vampires, are static creatures, resigned to roles of relatively little change. Normally, this stasis is not too great a problem. The Kuei-jin resolves — or fails to resolve — her karmic debt and returns to the spirit worlds, thus finding her place in the Cycle one way or another.

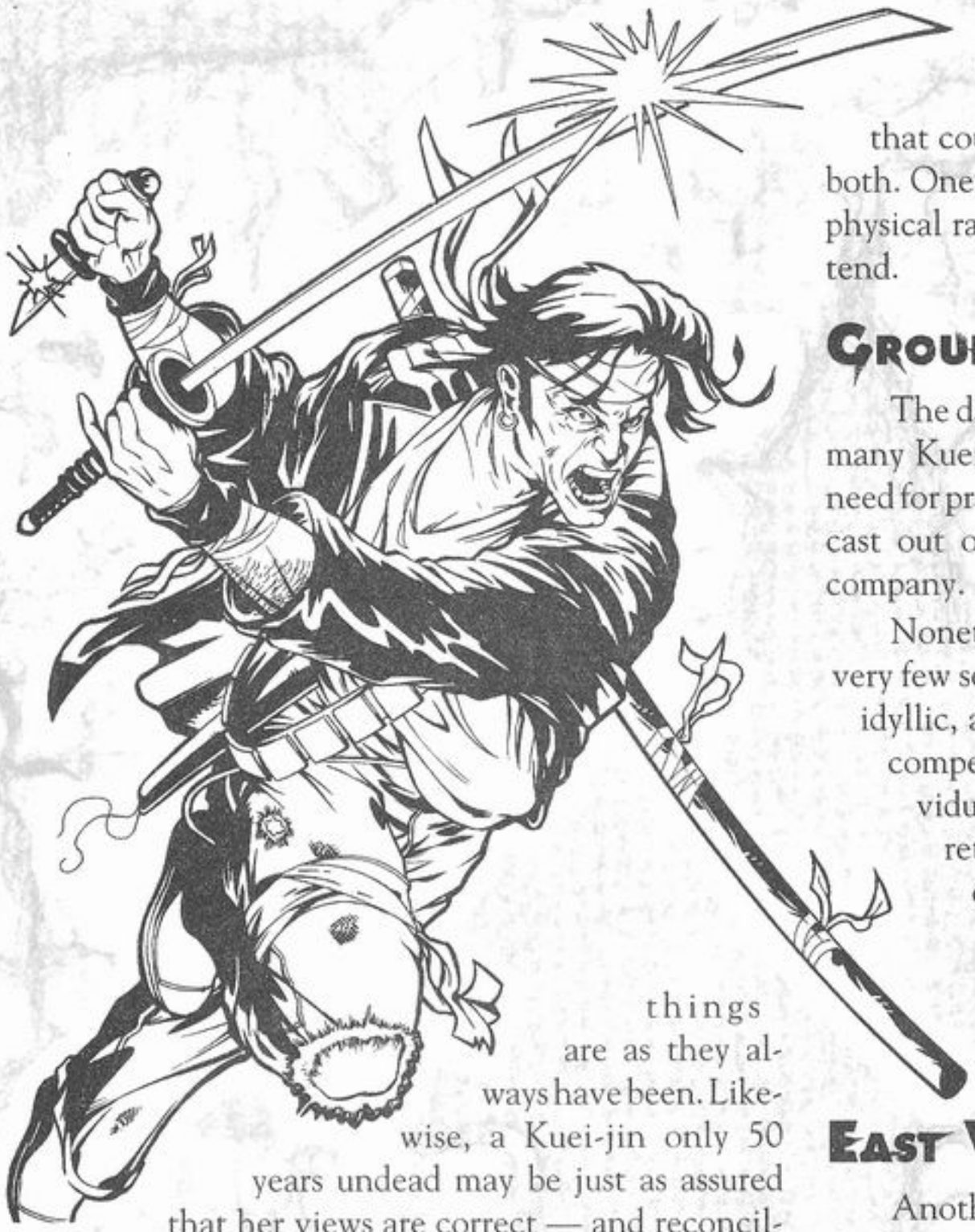
Such resolution does not always happen, however. Sometimes, the Kuei-jin in question finds herself too greatly aspected to the entropic force of Yin, and she begins to physically resemble a natural example of the corpse-shell she inhabits. Other times, Yang becomes too great in the Kuei-jin, and her passions sway her easily. Neither of these imbalances is particularly beneficial to the Cathayan, and her imbalance may sorely affect the resolution of her karmic debt.

Imbalance is problematic enough on the individual level — but imagine the problems caused by a *wu* of vampires following different Dharmas or in various states of balance. The surrogate family of vampires may easily be torn apart by the disparate nature of its members, should harmony remain elusive.

On a larger scale, the theme of balance versus imbalance can apply to the world as a whole. The Fifth Age is certainly a pivotal time for the Kuei-jin, and various elements of the Middle Kingdom itself appear to be out of balance. The dragons groan beneath the tread of the West, and the Kindred slowly insinuate themselves amid the Middle Kingdom's towers and *torii*. Some Kuei-jin (the Resplendent Cranes, for example) see swift action as necessary to right the world's balance, while others (the Devil-Tigers) believe themselves to be agents of that selfsame imbalance.

Tradition Versus New Ways

As mentioned before, the Kuei-jin are static creatures, locked in their ways from the night they take the Second Breath. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to find a staid mandarin many hundreds of years old and assured of his ways, because



things are as they always have been. Likewise, a Kuei-jin only 50 years undead may be just as assured that her views are correct — and reconciling them with the mandarin's is likely to prove very difficult.

In many ways, the classic clash of old and new, the epic saga of the Western Jyhad, is just as prevalent in the Middle Kingdom as it is elsewhere. In some ways, this disparity is even more pronounced here. The lands of the East have always been more tradition-bound than the barbarous West. It is for this very reason that the Cathayans are as wretched as they are — they have failed in their karmic responsibilities and have taken the Second Breath in a final opportunity to complete their destinies. All who succeed in paying off the karmic debt may once again join the Cycle. All who fail are…removed from it.

How, then, does one negate the debt, when confronted with a myriad of opposing viewpoints? The mandarin certainly does not address his debt in the same manner as the newly created Cathayan. In the great drama of the Wheel of Ages, Kuei-jin are bound to meet again and again in contention — over issues in which neither side is wholly correct or wholly wrong.

Destiny Versus *joss*

In matters philosophical, there are very rarely clear-cut answers. Does the force of destiny guide the Kuei-jin? Are the Cathayan vampires locked in an immutable cycle of predestination? Or does *joss*, the force of luck and fortune, play some part? The role of destiny versus *joss* forms the basis of many Kuei-jin tenets. Some courts see themselves as agents of destiny, others as agents of *joss*, and both these forces' mysterious workings color every night of a Kuei-jin's existence. Certainly, Kuei-jin are constantly haunted by strange coincidences and phenomena that could be the workings of the Cycle, simple chance or both. One *shen*'s fate is another *shen*'s fortune, and the metaphysical ramifications of the Great Cycle are difficult to portend.

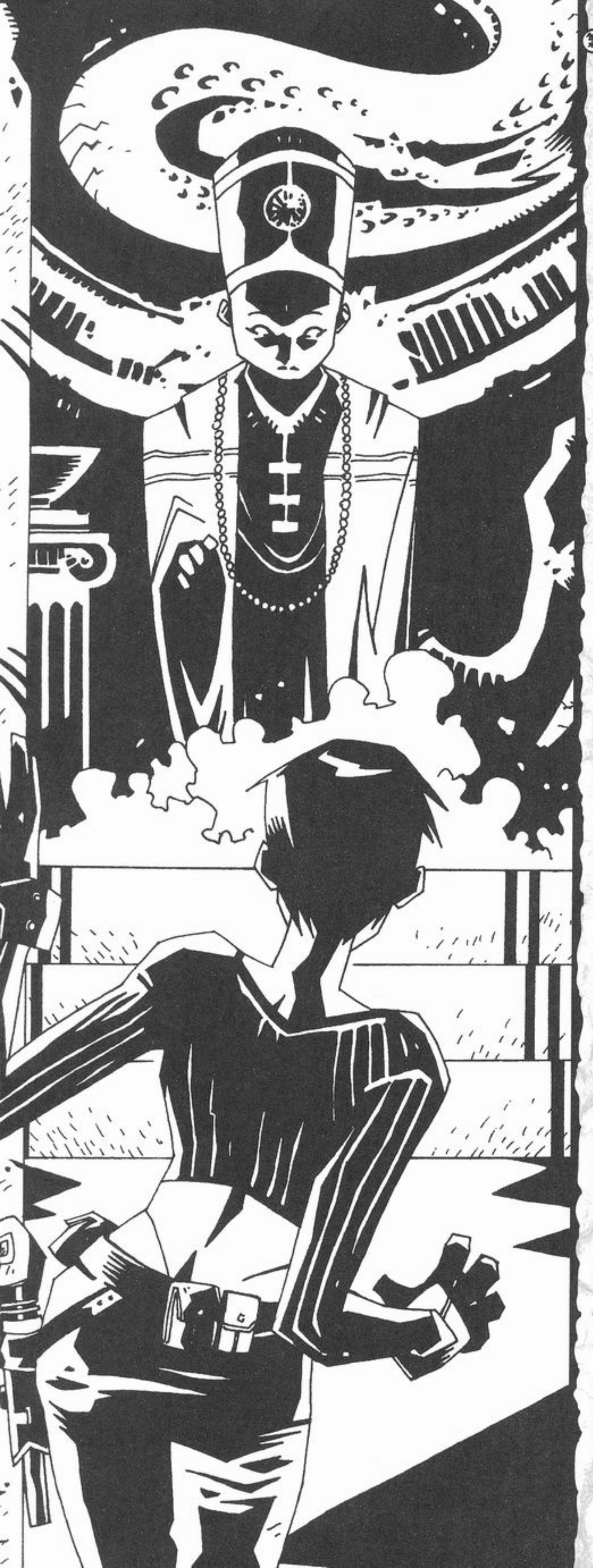
Group Versus Individual

The damnation of a Cathayan is a very personal thing, yet many Kuei-jin seek the company of others, as much out of a need for protection (after all, if the Kuei-jin fails this time, she's cast out of the Cycle forever) as out of misery's want for company.

Nonetheless, vampires, like people, are individuals, and very few see eye to eye on all matters. Unlife in a *wu* is hardly idyllic, as it comprises five monsters returned from Hell to compensate for their mortal failures. Naturally, the individuals in a *wu* have radically different reasons for returning from the grave, most of which may not coincide with the motivations of other Kuei-jin. Obviously, the unlife of a Cathayan is fraught with the tension of resolving one's personal issues and the goals of one's compatriots — not a pleasant fate.

East Versus West

Another powerful element of **Kindred of the East** is the dichotomy between the Western Kindred and their Eastern counterparts. Almost all Kuei-jin view the Kin-jin as barbarians, content to claim descent from a legendary progenitor who was, in essence, a homicidal gatherer of roots and berries. The



Kuei-jin see themselves, by contrast, as the chosen consorts (or rivals) of the very gods.

The East is in a curious position. On one hand, this modern age of instant communication holds open the doorway between the East and West. As such, Western culture seeps into the East and is slowly but surely saturating the region.

Simultaneously, however, many regions of the East remain extremely traditional. A multiplicity of precedents followed here by both mortals and *shen* are observed simply because "that's the way it has always been." Asian cultures have longer recorded histories than any other extant societies on Earth, and members of these cultures see daily reminders of the significance of their ancestors' actions.

This precarious balance colors the new struggle for Easterners: How can they best integrate the beneficial aspects of Western influence without "selling their souls"?

On a different level, the Kuei-jin are divided culturally among themselves. The result of this individuality is obvious —Kuei-jin culture is further fractured by its internal disparity. As with the schism between East and West, elder and neonate, the whole of Kuei-jin society is doomed to remain forever divided due to the simple fact that no *wu*, Dharma, court or even individual sees eye to eye with another.

This fractiousness is an excellent element to introduce both as a plot device and as a dynamic to keep character interactions interesting. Situations similar to the ones described in "Morality," below, certainly apply and help to enrich the world the more you use them.

Nonetheless, the West encroaches ever more on lands long regarded as the dominion of the Kuei-jin. Vulgar Western Cainites wander the Eastern reaches and bring their crude and alien ways with them. Never ones to accept the karmic order of things, the Children of Caine espouse free will; the challenge of long-accepted ideals; florid, purple tales of personal woe and damnation; and the tragedy of being trapped in an endless night.

Kuei-jin don't give a damn about all that overwrought angst-ridden bullshit. Their unlives are ones of horror, true, but they all know that, ultimately, they are locked outside the cycle of life and death. Whether they actively pursue their own reintegration into the Great Cycle or approach unlife as the blackest of terrors is a personal choice.

Turnabout is fair play, though, and Kuei-jin are beginning to cross the Pacific into the West. Some Western Kindred are already feeling the onslaught of the "Asian Threat," as they find their once-impregnable havens penetrated by powerful and angry Cathayans.

All of this culture shock creates tension, and any encounter with the Kin-jin is sure to be memorable. Whether the vampires in question resolve their differences peaceably or brutally is up to the players.

The Pecking Order

The great Jyhad also rages in the East, even if the vampires there do not recognize it as such. Although the Kuei-jin may not have arcane Antediluvians calling the shots from centuries-old resting places, a structure does exist by which vampires of the East inevitably end up at each other's throats.

It is one of the primary themes of not only **Kindred of the**

East, but of **Vampire: The Masquerade** as a whole. It has a place, even if only a small one, in practically every chronicle or story in creation.

Elder vampires have always feared and mistrusted younger vampires, and those feelings breed a healthy antagonism. As Kuei-jin do not have "clans" *per se*, it is even more true, because even the common ground that comes from simple "familial" ties is absent among them. In practice, many elders bear open hostility not only for the more recently created vampires, but for each other as well. If you couldn't trust a rival warlord 600 years ago, why the hell would you trust him now?

The courts, especially, are vipers' nests of politics and favor-currying. During the years-long training process, most worthy disciples find themselves "attached" to one or more *sifus*, whose goals and honor become the disciples' own. And those disciples who do not prove particularly worthy...well, they end up as pawns, or even *akuma*.

Kuei-jin society is an incestuous skein of ancient, almost feudal, commitments, passionate hatreds nursed by centuries of paranoia, and incomprehensible systems of boons and favors. Factor in the immense power attained by immortal beings who can call on the nether regions to generate unspeakable effects — *and have been doing so for hundreds of years* — and the result is a truly frightening maze of interpersonal intrigue. It's a terrifying time to be alive. It's even more terrifying these nights to be undead.

Many stories emphasize this theme, as the Kuei-jin are ultimately vampires, and therefore social creatures of the cities. In a sick, dysfunctional way, they actually *require* each other's company, if only to assert their dominance over one another or learn an unknown secret about a third party. It is very likely — almost unavoidable, really — that the players' characters must encounter other Kuei-jin at some point in their unlives. The society of the Eastern vampires is so pervasive that the Kuei-jin are truly *everywhere*, though they are not necessarily always visible....

Morality

Morality is another extremely pervasive theme, and also a very personal one. A Storyteller proficient in using this theme effectively creates little passion-plays for her players, each of whom gets to see the fruits (or consequences!) of his decisions as the game progresses.

This theme is a very mature one, as it truly involves the inner workings of every character who takes part in the story — even ones run by the Storyteller. In fact, many Storyteller characters can work handily as "foils" to inflame players' characters into response. This technique can be particularly effective in the East, where many ancient Kuei-jin lived their mortal lives under a system of morality that bears little resemblance to anything in the West. How does one argue human rights with a Japanese mandarin who grew up as samurai under the shame-based *bushido* code, or with a Chinese ancestor who witnessed the atrocities of the Warring States period firsthand?

For example, assume the characters are searching for an ancient document that chronicles the travels of a Kuei-jin very advanced in her Dharma. The last vampire known to have seen this document is an insane *ch'ing shih*, loathed and feared by other Kuei-jin for his...messy...method of study. Before he even deigns to speak with the characters, this vampire wishes to "test their mettle" by looking for the true Demon among them. He locks the characters in his receiving room and refuses to communicate with them until they kill a victim, whom he is more than happy to provide. That victim turns out to be a pregnant woman. How do the characters react?

Probably, they will react in a variety of individual ways, as dictated by their diverse personalities, which is something that the enterprising Storyteller may use to her advantage in crafting a good tale. The ways in which they react — and thereafter react to *each other* — build powerful ties between the characters. If Masaru killed the pregnant woman without moral qualms, would Ibuki, who was horrified by such a merciless slaughter, be justified in killing Masaru? Probably not, though she could easily justify to herself some other form of punishment, or even vengeance, if that's what her player thought most appropriate for Ibuki.

There is no "right" or "wrong" answer to a question of morality; there are as many answers as there are people in the world — and there are a hell of a lot of people in the East. In a game without simple "good guys" and "bad guys," each individual fits somewhere on a sliding scale of gray, but almost never occupies the same position on that scale permanently.

Redemption Versus Damnation

Some Kuei-jin — *akuma*, *chih-mei* and others — have forsaken the need to repay their karmic debt and instead revel in their return to the Middle Kingdom. Their unlives are rife with rampant destruction, the need to cause pain and sorrow in others, or the simple desire to "survive" from night to night.

Other Cathayans actively pursue what destiny and luck have ascribed to them; they seek to return to the Great Cycle and shake off their cursed existences.

To attend or deny one's Second Breath is a personal decision — as the Kuei-jin's fate hangs in the balance. Vampires who decide one way or the other may change their minds several times over the course of their immortal nights, but once their time is up, their souls are judged. It is then that a Kuei-jin's deeds speak either for her return to the Wheel of Ages or for her utter removal.

Not all Kuei-jin a particular Cathayan encounters are likely to share her outlook on the karmic debt. Here is another opportunity to illustrate the radical differences among the mindsets of the Eastern Kindred, and perhaps add some tension to the characters' *wu* — perhaps a spiritual *wu's* existence is threatened when one of the members forswears the Fivefold Way, or a war *wu* comes apart when a Cathayan in its ranks undertakes a peaceful Dharma. The quest for redemption or the acceptance of damnation is one of the most powerful themes in **Kindred of the East**, for it spells out the destiny of the soul in question for all eternity.

Moods

While the theme is the meaning of the story, the mood is the feel of the tale. **Kindred of the East** encompasses numerous moods, all of which may be used to give a distinct style and flavor to your troupe's stories.

EXOTICISM

This ain't Kansas. **Kindred of the East** stories should positively overflow with the malignant, spooky, alien nature of the Middle Kingdom. Nothing is as it seems, and nothing is a foregone conclusion, for mysterious and ancient powers lurk behind every shadow. Jakarta, Hong Kong and Osaka are not just New York moved eastward, and each place has its own identity and hideous secrets buried beneath a web of supernatural intrigue.

The *shen* of the Middle Kingdom may not even superficially resemble their Western counterparts. Politics among them is certainly different, as are the customs and practices of every individual the players encounter. Even relations with street people and "mundanes" should leave the characters' *wu* with a sense of curiosity and awe.

The Middle Kingdom is large, vicious and fraught with peril. It's not a place for boorish Westerners — or boorish Easterners! Making every event memorable and subtly (or blatantly) strange goes a long way toward building the mystique of the East.

VIOLENCE

The world moves inexorably toward the Age of Sorrow. These are troubled times, and violence is rampant, as the desperate lash out at their surroundings, as they attempt to leave some kind of mark justifying their existence. The Cathayans are no strangers to horror and atrocity, certainly.

You, as the Storyteller, can use this carnage to illustrate the horror of the Kuei-jin's world. It is unlikely that a group of players could be repulsed by a simple dead body, so shatter their stereotype. They find no simple dead body, but rather a gore-spattered corpse. The head has gone missing — or is that it, lying in the darkened alley? Strips of flesh splay raggedly across various regions of the cadaver, torn — no, lacerated — from it in a seemingly random pattern. The appendages lie livid, purpled by the pooling of what meager blood remains in the defiled corpse. Bent beyond recognition, the body keels at an impossible angle against the alley wall.

Every inch of the cataclysmic East exudes this violence — one cannot avoid it in many areas of the Third World.

Violence need not even be disgusting to terrify. Perhaps a powerful tong has claimed the area as its own, and people who oppose it...disappear. Or perhaps the characters manage to corner a particularly vicious Kuei-jin in his lair, and a fetid stench of rotting, rancid *meat* taints the air, grim testament to the fate of his victims. Anything that produces discomfort in the characters (and even, to some extent, the players) is wholly appropriate to the Eastern World of Darkness.

In addition, violence should always be a very real threat, one waiting just around the next corner or seething forth from the sewers. After all, Kuei-jin don't become ancestors through foolish complacency; they know that catastrophe awaits them, and they either avoid it or best it with martialry of their own.

Consider using violence as a dramatic device, as well. For example, assume the players' *wu* needs to consult with a terrifyingly powerful bodhisattva of the Devil-Tiger Dharma. They enter his sanctum, which lies littered with the exsanguinated bodies of infants and young children (the bodhisattva prizes their joyful innocence — even savors it). As the *wu*-mates travels deeper into the bowels of the subterranean haven, they notice fewer and fewer *whole* corpses, though progressively more disturbing and less identifiable *parts* of the dead punctuate their path. Just beyond the great arch at the end of the carnage-strewn tunnel lies row after row of...orchids. Apparently, the ancient does not wish to sully his personal space with carrion. The sudden lack of omnipresent violence creates a vivid image for the players, and their consultation with the bodhisattva becomes a memorable oasis in a sea of gore.

RESPONSIBILITY

Kindred of the East is just a game. As such, the concepts it deals with are similarly constructs of that game, and they should begin and end at the table. You are not a vampire, and the things your characters do in your game should not carry over into the real world. When the game is done, walk away from it and resume your normal life. Violence is not something with which to toy.

CONFLICTS

Kindred of the East provides many opportunities for an enterprising Storyteller to cast new and exciting challenges before the players. The tense, thrilling exoticism of the Middle Kingdom is an excellent backdrop for endless nights of undead intrigue and action.

KUEI-JIN VERSUS KUEI-JIN

This one almost goes without saying — the Kuei-jin, like their Western counterparts, have rivalries and enmities with each other that stretch back hundreds (if not thousands!) of years. Ancestors play younger Cathayans off each other in manipulative bids for supremacy, while Running Monkeys battle each other for simple survival.

These conflicts can be among the easiest to arrange, but are also among the most complex and rewarding. Establishing a "rival" character who constantly runs afoul of the players' endeavors builds a tangible, achievable goal for the players — the destruction (or simple humiliation) of their timeworn enemy. Perhaps the rival is stronger than the players' *wu* combined, or is too cagey to engage in open physical conflict. Whatever the case, building a memorable antagonist is an excellent way of lending a signature style and flavor to the game.

By the same token, **Kindred of the East** is the perfect venue for throwing hordes of maniacal foes at the players and letting them mow down who they will amid severed limbs and gouts of spraying blood. The world is in discord — as evidenced by the legions of *chih-mei* erupting from the Earth — and it's all the players can do to bring the Yama Kings' forces back in line.

The conflict between Kuei-jin is also felt very strongly in the division between the ancestors and the newly returned. Imagine the mandarin holding a *kyonshi's* unlife in her hands, as she judges whether the Kuei-jin is worthy of continuing to haunt the Middle Kingdom — or needs to be extinguished for eternity.

Court Versus Court

If there is one truism among vampires — of the East and West — it's that they love to foil each other's carefully laid plans. As creatures of passion and action, Kuei-jin cannot help but accumulate rivals. Another truism states that my enemy's enemy is also my friend....

Is it strange, then, that the courts have accumulated extensive lists of foes, not the least of which are opposing courts? Certainly not; vampires are social creatures and form their own cliques and secret societies. With the absence of clans, Kuei-jin join groups larger than their *wu* in the interests of advancing personal and communal goals. These societies, each devoted to a different goal, wage wars over grievances both fresh and near-forgotten. Whether that war is fought on the battlefield or in the tearoom is a decision for individual courts, though the opportunities for variety are endless.

Court-versus-court conflict is also an excellent way to introduce tension into the characters' *wu* itself — though they share the same immediate "pack" or "family" in their *wu*-mates, they might well be members of different courts, and these allegiances may flare into clashes between volatile Cathayan personalities.

Wu Versus Wu

Another simple yet satisfying conflict is the eternal war between packs of Kuei-jin. *Wu* organize themselves according to common ideologies — there are war *wu*, spiritual *wu*, mystic *wu*, *wu* of reconnaissance, exploration *wu*, spy *wu*, emissary *wu* — you name it, and it's been formed. Then, too, the Hundred Corpse Families have existed for millennia, and conflicts between them date back just as long. A character adopted into an "illustrious" *wu* may inherit an equally "illustrious" grudge from the nights of the Chou Dynasty. And for those characters who start their own *wu*...well, they must prove themselves quickly, lest the original Hundred Corpse Families "accidentally" eliminate the annoying and potentially dangerous upstarts.

Like conflicts between courts, conflicts between *wu* may take many forms and are best suited to the preferences of the players. If *wu* treachery must occur in the back rooms of governmental offices, so be it.

At lower levels, *wu* clashes are like struggles between rival street gangs — the Akuma-Ryu have long been on bad terms with the Lotus Eaters, and meetings between their members are never pretty. This enmity may result in social snubbing — who hasn't seen gang members strut around like roosters and spout off obscenities at their nemeses? — or, more often, violence, as rival members tear down their opponents physically and brutally.

Kuei-jin Versus Kin-jin

You know you want to. Go ahead. Really sock it to your players and emphasize the freakishness and odd behavior of the barbaric Westerners. Good players can ignore their knowledge of the Children of Caine, the better to enjoy the horror and mystery in the collision of two mutually exclusive worlds.

That said, bad players just want to beat the crap out of the Kindred and take over their power bases. It's your game, but hopefully you won't cheapen it with super-powered blood-brawls.

Kuei-jin Versus Hengeyokai

The night belongs not only to the Kuei-jin, but also to the other *shen* of the Middle Kingdom. It is fairly widely believed that a prominent Asian governmental official's wife was a fox-spirit, and if the shapeshifters have managed to infiltrate the government....

Like their Western counterparts, the vampires of the East have no love for the Changing Breed. Although the Middle Kingdom lacks the outright genocidal conflict between Kindred and Lupines, relations between Kuei-jin and hengeyokai are savage at best. The Kuei-jin, though secret masters of the cities, wish to wrest the Middle Kingdom's remaining dragon nests from the werecreatures. The hengeyokai return this antipathy toward these monsters who prey upon humanity for their survival.

Kuei-jin versus hengeyokai is a perfect chance to play up "the enemy within." Both types of *shen* are indigenous to the Middle Kingdom, yet both assail each other with cunning and fury. A continent full of monsters is indeed a dangerous place to live.

Kuei-jin Versus Spirits

The Middle Kingdom is historically a spirit-haunted realm. Vengeful ancestral shades, kami of rock and wave, and mighty demons of war and torment all play a part in the Middle Kingdom's legends. As such, conflicts between *shen* from both sides of Death's Veil occur frequently. As the wraiths of the Yellow Springs conduct their affairs, they inevitably cross paths with the Kuei-jin — who, many occult scholars are quick to note, are little more than animate Spectres themselves.

The greatest spiritual threat, of course, stems from the plots of the Yama Kings. From their nightmare realms in Yomi, the Yama Kings battle among themselves to determine who will mount the throne of Demon Emperor. They find nothing more satisfying, however, than to manipulate a Kuei-jin, a Yama King's ancestral enemy, into becoming an unwitting — or, better, willing — agent.

Kuei-jin Versus Mortals

How can the lowly sheep of the Middle Kingdom provide opposition to the monstrous devils of the night? There are two answers for those players seeking to create some conflict between mortals and Eastern Kindred.

First, there is no Masquerade, and mortals still possess the overwhelming numbers necessary to oppose creatures who arouse their ire. Should a belligerent Kuei-jin prove too much to bear, mortals may take matters into their own hands. As steeped in tradition and superstition as the residents of the Middle Kingdom are, those hands may prove quite detrimental to an overconfident Kuei-jin. In fact, certain mandarins have been known to direct an angry mob against rivals....

Second, certain mortals in the Middle Kingdom devote themselves to stemming the tide of night. Shih demon hunters and enthusiastic agents of the Japanese Strike Force Zero make the darkness their home and battlefield, taking the crusade against evil to the soldiers of Hell themselves. Further details on these groups may be found in the **Demon Hunter X** sourcebook.

Hun Versus P'o

The struggle to maintain one's *wa* nature in the face of the Demon is inherent to the Kuei-jin condition. It may take the form of a duel of conscience between what individual members of a *wu* consider acceptable behavior. It may also manifest in a physical

confrontation between P'o-aspected Kuei-jin and ones who oppose their depredations. Indeed, a character who falls too deeply into the Demon's grip may act against his *wu* or Dharma without his Hun consciousness even being aware of it!

This conflict ties in quite well with themes of morality and gives the characters an opportunity to define where, precisely, they stand on issues of ethics.

Dharma Versus Dharma

Another powerful moral conflict, the incompatibility of Dharmas among the players' characters is a fount for advanced and mature roleplaying. Like religion and political outlook, a character's Dharma is a very personal thing — one in which she likely believes very strongly (and if she doesn't, she's probably pretty close to being erased from the Cycle). When differing opinions clash over such fundamental and personal issues, relationships are bound to be tested. Even the most open-minded Kuei-jin may have difficulty accepting (let alone condoning) some behavior espoused by a belief that she herself considers anathema.

This sort of conflict is very powerful and profound, and it results in some extremely intense roleplaying. Don't undertake this sort of conflict lightly, as passions may be aroused to the point of discomfort. It is, nonetheless, an extremely rewarding roleplaying opportunity, as it gives the players a chance to truly "get inside" their characters' minds and hearts.

Chronicles

Now that you've got some fundamental ideas about stories in the Middle Kingdom, how do you tie them all together? The chronicle in which you set your stories is a vital part of playing **Kindred of the East**. If you've decided to move past one-shot, stand-alone stories and wish to create a longer-term game, you'll want to build a chronicle.

Kuei-jin in the Middle Kingdom

This chronicle is the "default setting," as most of **Kindred of the East** is designed to be fairly self-contained. Although the basic Storyteller rules are not reprinted herein, most of the other mechanical details you need are present in this book.

The Middle Kingdom is a diverse and populous part of the World of Darkness, and untold numbers of stories may take place in this locale. As everything roughly from Tibet all the way to the easternmost edge of Japan falls under the auspices of the "Middle Kingdom," both geography and breadth of cultures should inspire many ideas in the minds of clever Storytellers.

Kuei-jin society is vastly complex, and any of the mood, theme and conflict combinations above should create some wonderful stories with Cathayan vampires at their center. How does the characters' *wu* react to its situation? What contacts and enemies do its members make along the way? How well are they repaying their karmic debt?

Kuei-jin in the West

As the inexorable tide of Eastern vampires covers the World of Darkness, the Cathayans arrive in the West. In particular, the western United States has suffered incursions of Kuei-jin, and the status of the Anarch Free State and other coastal territories, whether Camarilla, anarch, Sabbat or contested, may soon be in doubt.

Western Kindred refer to this influence as the "Asian Threat," and they are understandably concerned with the future of their fragile empires. As the nights wear on and the Camarilla's tenuous grip upon Western society slackens, the Kuei-jin move with increasing ease through the lands outside the Middle Kingdom.

A chronicle expanding upon the Asian Threat would be an excellent forum to explore many different aspects of Kin-jin and Kuei-jin relations. Is the characters' *wu* on a mission of exploration? Is it a guerrilla war *wu*, intent on sabotaging the West one bit at a time? Or are the characters emissaries of a powerful ancestor who wishes to pursue cooperation with the Kindred? Any number of stories may be told, from elegant intrigue to wanton carnage and everything in between, all united by the constantly changing state of affairs in the West.

Mixed Chronicle (Kuei-jin and Kin-jin)

Of course, one of the strengths of the Storyteller System is its universality and versatility. Integrated mechanics allow you to take your Kindred East and your Kuei-jin West.

Or perhaps to meet in between.

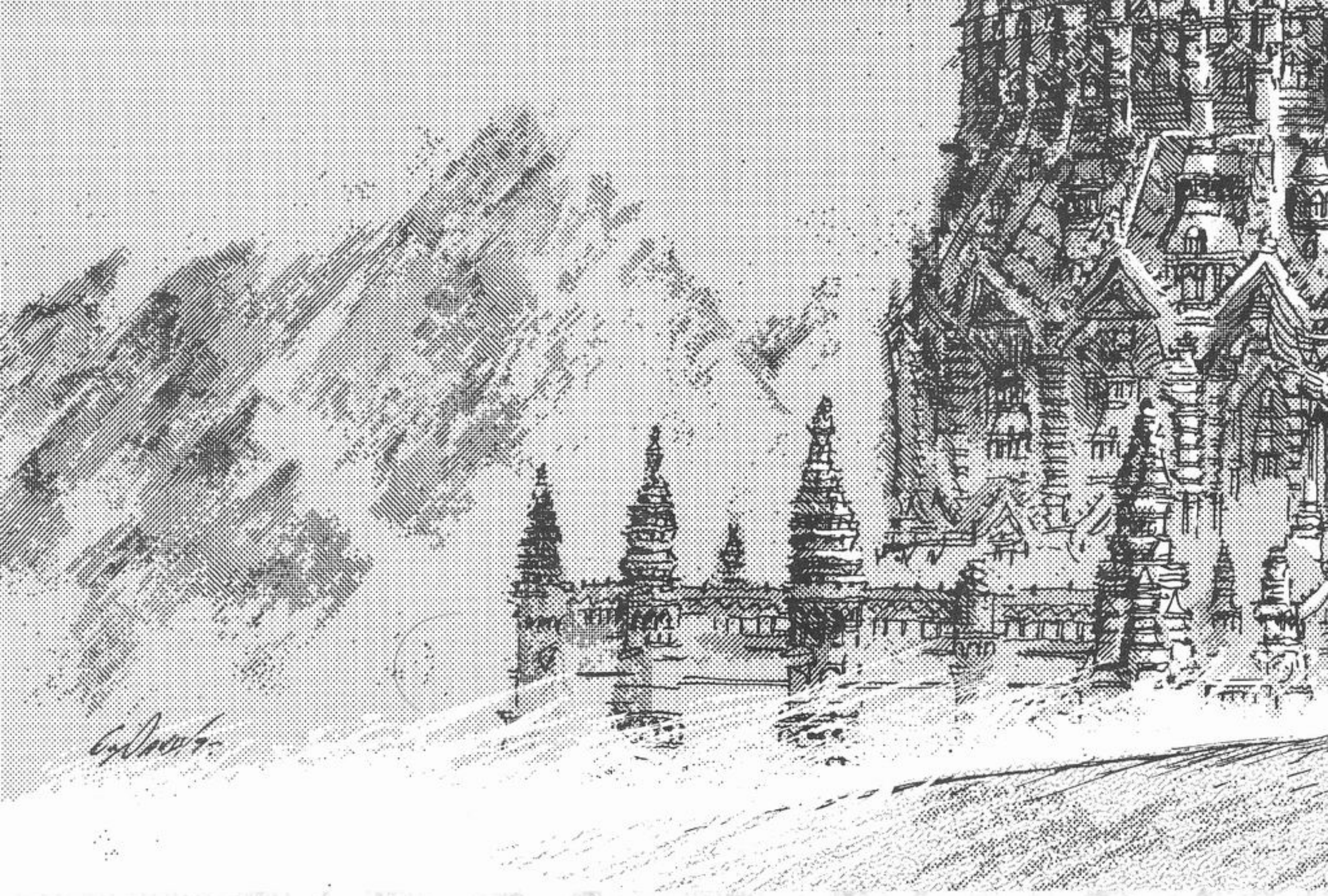
Whether the chronicle takes place in the East or West, the simple presence of members of the "other" society intermixed with the native one can prove fascinating. Alien cultures clash and confuse some characters, while other characters accept and revel in such newness. Both worlds — East and West — are magnificent visually and viscerally, and visitors are often taken aback by the simple "look" of their location. Traditions and customs differ wildly between the two regions, and while some characters can mesh seamlessly into the "other" environment, others are sure to stick out like the proverbial nails — and be pounded for their pains.

Take advantage of a storytelling game's cinematic scope — keep all the players on their toes with a wild ride through the entire world.

Dharmic Progression

A chronicle may take an introspective turn, as the players' characters concern themselves with fulfillment of their karmic debts and their ever-increasing understanding of what it means to be Kuei-jin. Although not usually as action-packed or cinematic as other chronicles (but there certainly are exceptions!), a chronicle that traces characters' spiritual enlightenment can be one of the most rewarding experiences in gaming.

Of particular interest is a chronicle in which characters pursue different Dharmas and relate to each other with disparate codes of conscience. As discussed before, morality is a prime motivating force behind a character's reincarnation into the Middle Kingdom. Comparing and contrasting ethics during the course of the game builds an exceptional experience, both for characters and for players.



Mystery

Players familiar with **Vampire** undoubtedly recognize the inherent unknowability of the world. This inscrutability is perhaps the most powerful tool in a gifted Storyteller's repertoire.

That may sound a bit heavy-handed, but it's true. Consider:

Not only is every *new* mystery contained in this book at the disposal of the Storyteller, but every mystery established in the parent **Vampire** game is at her disposal also.

Even better, every stereotyped presupposition of your players' *wu* is at your disposal as well.

What if the Kuei-jin have been tormented in their daytime dreams—plagued by visions of impending apocalypse and immense personal trauma? Each character confronts the bestiality of her P'o; some characters revel in it, others deny it, but all succumb to its urges. The characters' dreams lead them to a collapsed and dilapidated temple in a vicious, decayed ghetto of Bangkok, where they fight howling bakemono and rampaging local gangs. They enter the temple, in which they find a subterranean vault: the lair of a slumbering Kuei-jin. Immediately, they are assailed by overpowering nightmares. Their shadow nature rises to overwhelm them, and the *wu* disintegrates as its members turn against one another.

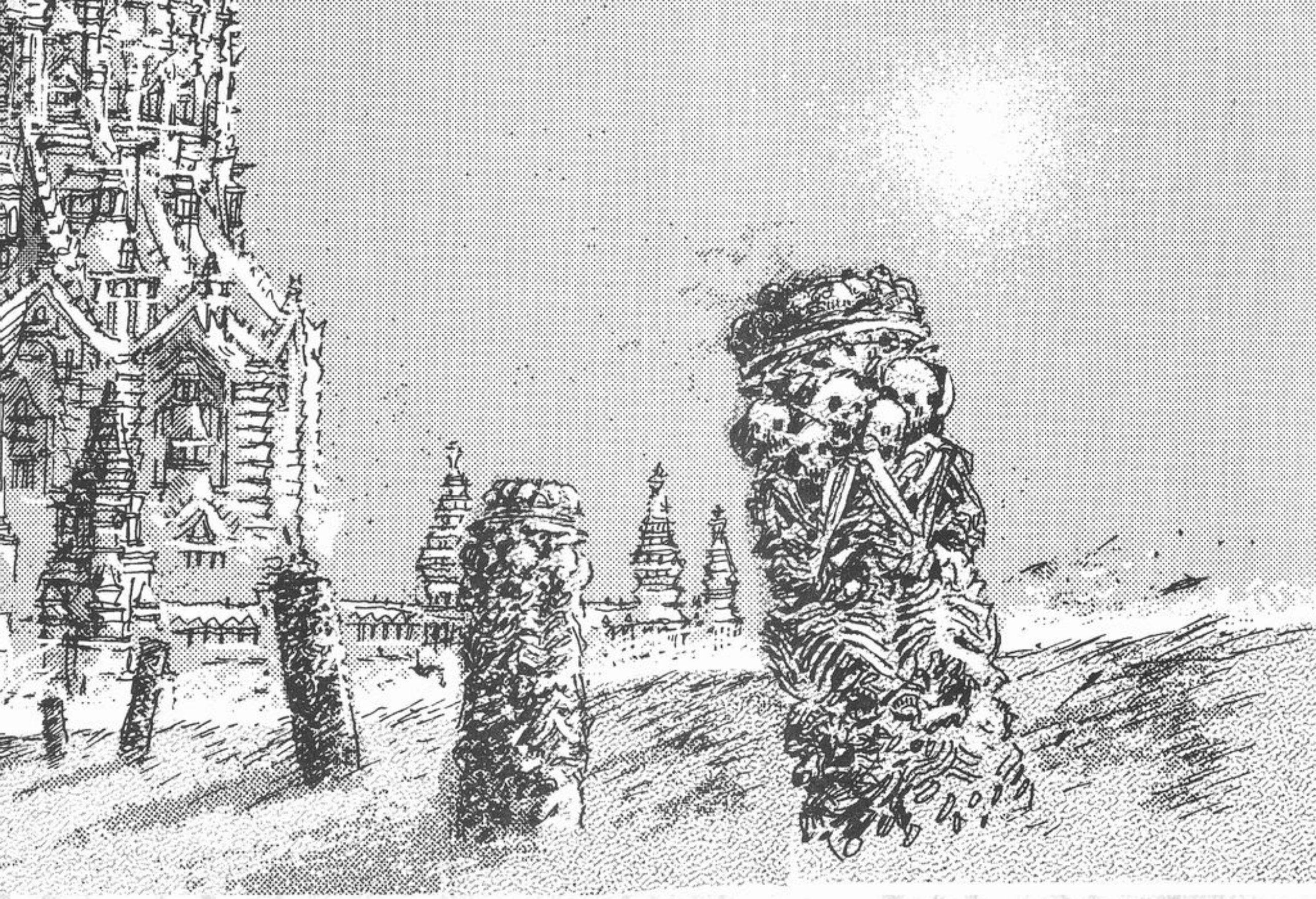
Only you, as the Storyteller, know that these sorcerous effects are the workings of the "slumbering Kuei-jin"—who is, in truth, a Malkavian Methuselah using his powers of Dementation on the unsuspecting Cathayans.

Even after (hell, even *if*) they unravel the mystery of the Kindred's true nature, they have not even begun to fathom *why* he is there or what he has in store for them....

Canny Storytellers can use this vast portfolio of apocryphal legendry as an almost endless source of plot ideas and story hooks. Was Caine truly Kuei-jin himself, failing in his search for karmic understanding? Or were the Wan Xian descendants of Caine, seduced by different ideals and assured of other places in the Great Cycle? Are the two entirely unrelated? If so, how to explain the similarity between Zao-lat and Saulot? Is the Scarlet Queen the Crone? Is she Lilith?

Even if you don't wish to tackle the greatest mysteries in your chronicle, utilizing the elements presented throughout the **Vampire** line is a way of keeping players on their toes and, thus, entertained. Twists, both subtle and blatant, prevent the players from ever becoming complacent and "knowing it all."

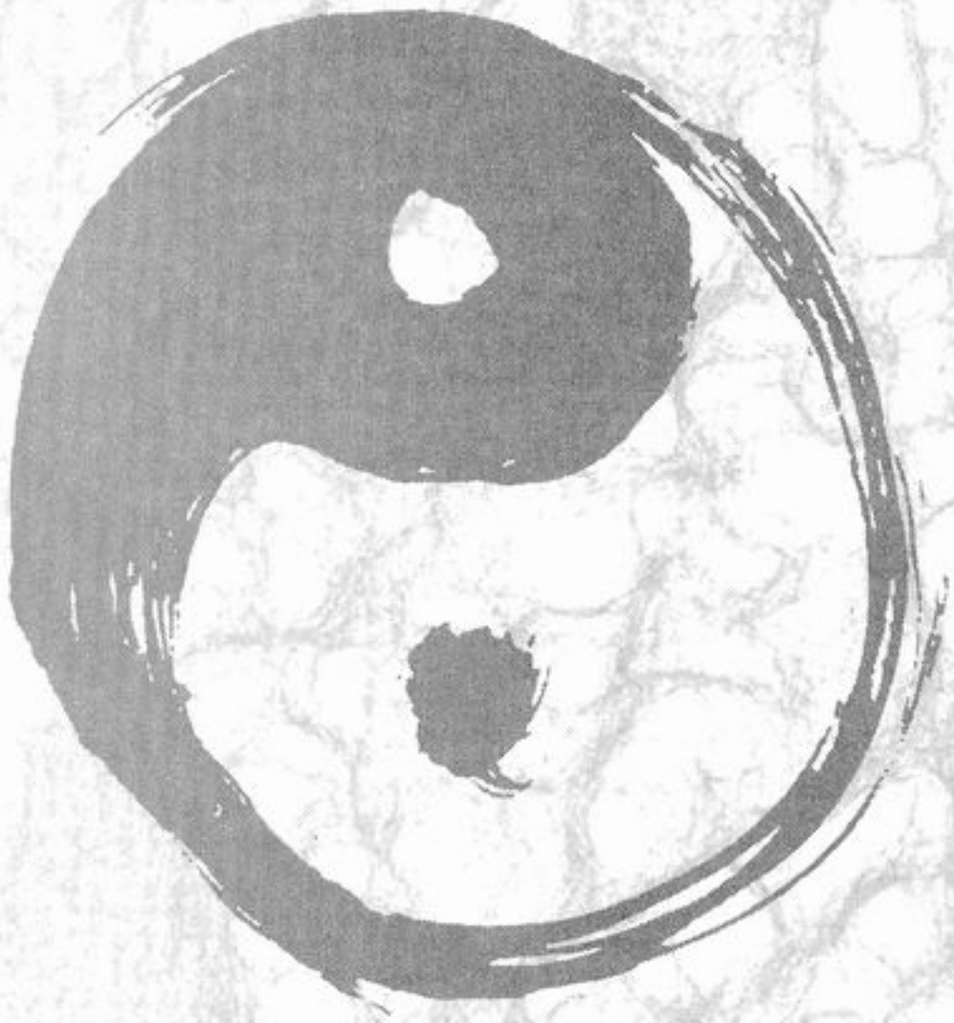
Truly skilled Storytellers can weave in these mysterious threads without even letting the players know their characters are parts of a greater drama. Only by peeling back the layers of



intrigue can the characters find that vaster powers than they are pulling the strings — and only then do they realize that another enigma hides beneath the one they just uncovered.

One thing to bear in mind while on this topic is that many elements of mystery will never be disclosed in any White Wolf books. The purpose of this reticence is twofold. First, writing down the secrets of the ancients is just plain foolish. It strips the setting of a great deal of inherent horror and mystery. No sooner would it be written than some wiseacre player would go off at length about how his character "found out" the answer to the earth-shaking question and now has 30 new Disciplines to show for it. Second, the World of Darkness is an ever-changing, ever-unknowable thing. As was previously mentioned, as one layer of intrigue dissipates, another forms beneath the seven layers under the first.

What does all this mean? Essentially, that there is never a definite "end." Wheels turn within wheels, and ancient plots hatch where all loose ends were formerly thought to be tied. Mystery is a tremendously powerful element, and one that pervades the setting of **Kindred of the East**. Try it; you'll like it.



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CHAPTER EIGHT: RIVALS AND BARBARIANS

The tree that was a man sits on Mount Togai.
He waits for a bird with rainbow feathers.
When she arrives, the world will end.
The sky weeps for the sound of her wings.

The method of self-strengthening lies in learning what they can do, and in taking over what they rely upon.

— Li Hung-chang, from *China's Response to the West: A Documentary Survey*

The supernatural makeup of the Middle Kingdom differs from that of the Western World of Darkness — or, at least, its inhabitants perceive it as different. The categorizations — vampire, shapeshifter, wraith, etc. — that divide Western supernaturals are not so important in the East. All supernatural entities are considered to be *shen* — spirits — of one form or another. A Cathayan demonstrates its spirit nature by its possession of a corpse, while a shapeshifter displays its spirit nature through its ability to transform itself and walk the spirit worlds.

This chapter describes the other supernatural denizens with whom the Kuei-jin share the Middle Kingdom's nights. From the savage hengeyokai to the spirits of the Yin and Yang Worlds, the remnants of the August Personage's courts are covered here. Also, this chapter gives sample artifacts of early Ages, items that enterprising vampires can find and use.

SHEN — THE OTHER SPIRIT WALKERS

Kuei-jin share the Middle Kingdom with many other supernatural entities, collectively (including the Kuei-jin) called *shen*. The term implies a unity among supernaturals, a family of sorts, which, indeed, is more the case here than in the West. Although a shapeshifter might scorn a Kuei-jin as shamefully incarnated or even strike him down, should their goals conflict, she is hardly likely to revile him as an abomination.

According to *The Blood Sutras*, all *shen* had roles to fulfill in the early Ages, and fulfill them they did. As the Wan Xian oversaw the flow of Chi, so did the hengeyokai serve the celestial ones as guardians and spies. As the ghosts watched over their living relatives, so did the faeries preserve the sublime essence of the unknowable, and the sorcerers keep the Wheel of Ages in motion.

As the Fourth Age progressed, the various *shen* forgot their duties and were dismissed from their posts. Now, in the Fifth Age, few *shen* remember their karmic responsibilities. At any rate, it matters little, for the spirits themselves squabble like petty warlords in the absence of the gods and dragons.

Some *shen* compete with the Kuei-jin for the Middle Kingdom's dwindling Chi: the shapeshifting hengeyokai, the faeries of the wilds, and others. Kuei-jin must also contend with the plots of the Awakened willworkers who shape the very nature of the Ten Thousand Things. Also, the Kuei-jin often interact — or war — with spirits of all descriptions, from the Yin-heavy ghosts of the Jade Kingdom to Banes from the Realm of Fighting Spirits.

HENGEYOKAI — THOSE WHO CHANGE

Sometimes allies, more often rivals, the shapeshifting hengeyokai are a presence in the Middle Kingdom that the Kuei-jin cannot ignore. Although hengeyokai do not feel toward Kuei-jin the same hatred that their Western counterparts hold for the Kindred, the shapeshifters have long memories and trust the Cathayans little. The animal-people are a diverse lot, born from both humans and beasts, and they are inheritors of a rich spiritual legacy. They are accomplished walkers in the Yang World, and many know the secrets of the Yin World as well. What's more, they come in a baffling variety of forms and abilities, from dark tricksters to noble warriors. A meeting with a cunning Nine-Tails, for instance, does nothing to prepare one for the might of a Middle Dragon.

As diverse as they are, the hengeyokai are bound by a common duty, one that sets them at odds with the other *shen*. The

hengeyokai act with one heart and spirit to right the Wheel of Ages, to return it to the point where matter and spirit are again as one. As it was in the wondrous First Age, so shall it be once more. And if the hengeyokai must hasten the turning of the Wheel through the Age of Sorrow, the better to work openly where necessary, then so be it. When the time comes to spill blood in the streets, the skinchangers will be ready.

Physically, hengeyokai come in a myriad of guises — some are fearsome beasts of the land, while others are subtle, devious assassins. All do possess a few common traits, however:

• Hengeyokai can appear as humans, as the animal of their particular breed, or as a humanoid amalgam of the two. They can shift freely among their forms, though changing from full human to full animal necessitates passing through the hybrid form. Each shift takes one turn.

• In her half-animal "war form," a shapechanger has greatly increased Physical Attributes, the particulars of which depend on her breed. Fox-shifters enjoy uncanny Dexterity, the saurian Middle Dragons are incredibly strong, and so on.

• All hengeyokai regenerate their wounds at great speed and heal a Health Level each turn unless directly involved in combat. They may not regenerate aggravated damage in this manner.

• All hengeyokai have Rage and Gnosis ratings similar to the ones for spirits. They may spend Rage points to gain extra actions in combat, and they regain Rage whenever completely infuriated. For hengeyokai, the Rage rating equals the effective P'o score, though hengeyokai are much more harmonious with their P'o than Kuei-jin are with their Demons. As such, hengeyokai don't have to worry about P'o takeover, although they can enter fire or wave nature. A shapeshifter's Gnosis rating, much like that of a spirit, reflects its ties to the spirit world and indicates how practiced it is with its sorcerous powers. Gnosis measures the amount of temporary Chi available to a hengeyokai. Unlike Kuei-jin, hengeyokai can regain Chi through meditation and homage to the spirits.

• Most hengeyokai are reservoirs of Yang energy. Hengeyokai magic resembles Kuei-jin Yang Disciplines and can be simulated as such. Hengeyokai do not typically suffer from Chi imbalance.

• Most hengeyokai can freely travel between the Middle Kingdom and the Yang World. To do so, a shapeshifter must gaze into a mirror, a still pool of water or some other reflective surface. He then rolls his Gnosis rating versus a difficulty of the local Wall. If he succeeds, he "walks the cloud trapeze" into the Yang World.

• The beast-folk all retain some ties with the sun and the moon, often one more than the other. However, this linkage also explains their weakness, for (with the exception of the Nine-Tails) they are allergic to silver, the moon-metal, which causes them aggravated damage.

The Tribes

The hengeyokai are of many breeds, and legend holds that there were once even more. The centuries have taken their toll, however, and the Fifth Age shapeshifters do not hold as much glory as their forebears. However, the following groups are known to retain some power in the Middle Kingdom.

• **Nine-Tails (Kitsune):** Possibly the craftiest of all *shen*, the *kitsune* foxes are clever, dangerous sorcerers, assassins and even ninja. They have an exceptional sense of humor, though it tends to run toward the black — many a Nine-Tails, upon hearing about the painful demise of an ally who dared too much, has laughed until the tears came.

Nine-Tails, unlike other hengeyokai, are aspected to Yin, and typically know a great deal of Yin magic. A few can even enter the Yin World and walk through the Dark Kingdom of Jade.

• **Hakken:** The wolf-soldiers of Japan are among the strongest hengeyokai warriors. Although their strength is not as great as that of the Zhong Lung, nor their speed as uncanny as the Tiger-Children, their packs are of one heart and one mind in service to the kami Duke of Thunder. Few cross these wolf-changers more than once.

Other wolf-folk include the nomadic Stargazers and the feral Scarlet Talons.

• **Zhong Lung — the Middle Dragons:** Not as powerful as the Dragon Kings who shake mountains and bring rain, but mighty nonetheless, the Zhong Lung take the animal forms of crocodilians. When angered, however, they assume war forms that are nothing short of the Great Dragons of old. Although sluggish and slow to rouse, they have memories that stretch back to the Second Age, and they are the keepers of the most ancient lore. Many *shen* go to the Zhong Lung for wisdom from primordial nights. However, such pilgrims must mind their tongues while visiting, for an aroused Middle Dragon can tear a band of Kuei-jin to fleshy ribbons.

• **Khan — the Tiger-Children:** There are fewer and fewer children of the Tiger these days, for the extermination of their beast brethren has also struck a mighty blow against the Khan. These great warriors fight the armies of corruption even more fiercely now, for they sense that they may well be extinct before the coming of the Sixth Age. Kuei-jin fear them, for the Khan see the Cathayans as they move among the mortals, and vampires who stray from their Dharmic paths often find themselves face to face with a tiger.

• **Tengu:** Although the reclusive raven-shifters strike few pacts with other *shen*, they are renowned for uncovering the darkest secrets of even the most powerful households. The Tengu serve the Sun itself by ferreting out the most sacred and secret lore and exposing it to the day's brightness. Some say that the Tengu also train various humans in the art of battling *shen*, thus striking cunningly and indirectly at their enemies. Whatever the truth, other hengeyokai often curry the favor of these sly but sagacious tricksters, the better to keep informed of what shapeshifters' foes are plotting.

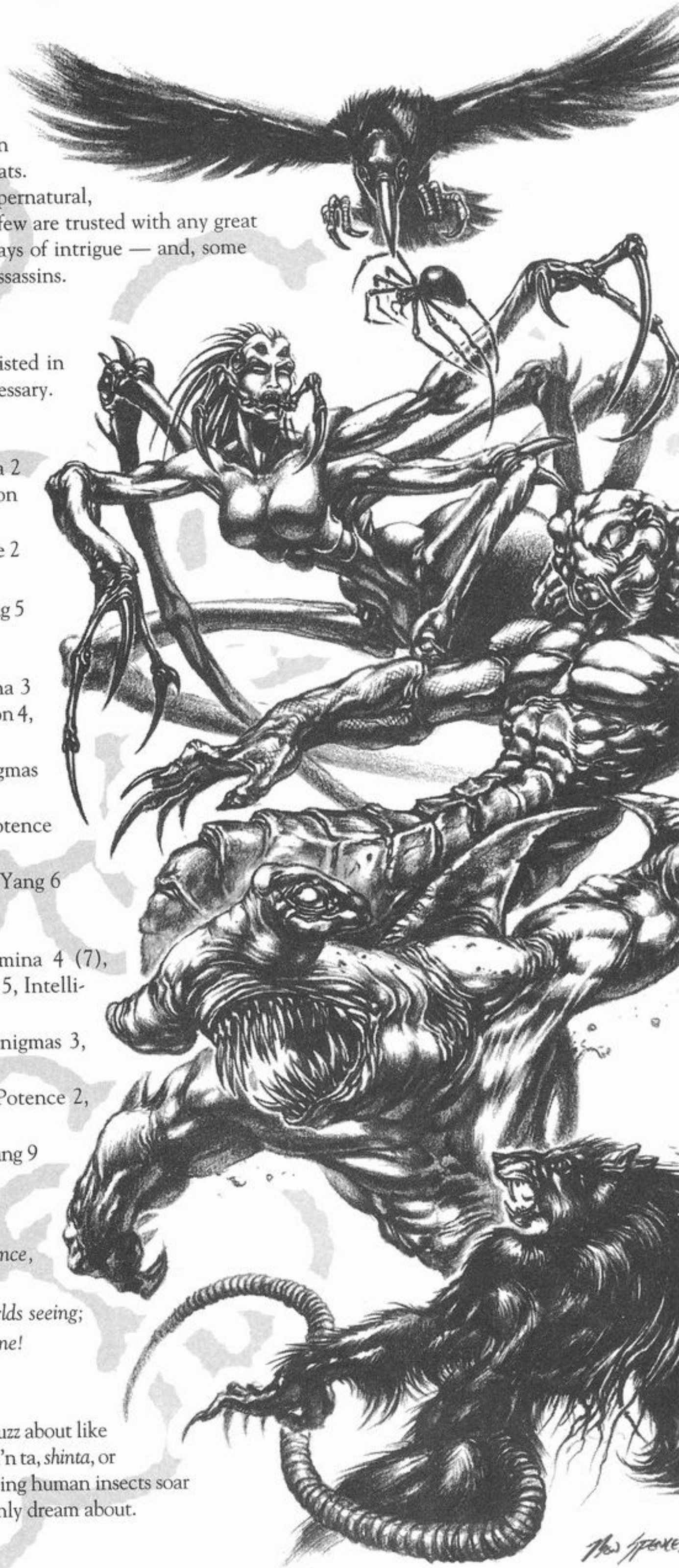
• **Kumo — Goblin Spiders:** The ancient tales of devilish spiders are indeed true; the worst of these monsters are the Kumo. The Goblin Spiders are sworn to the service of the darker, more twisted spirits, and they often serve as demented assassins for their masters. The Kumo are noted for their ability to assume the form of either great, misshapen spiders or swarms of tiny spiders. Some *shen* whisper that the Kumo have ties with the Mukade, terrible centipede-devils from the Yomi World. However, few Kuei-jin know the truth.

• **Nagah:** The rivers of India have traditionally been the homes of these wise and noble serpent-folk; however, their influence is also powerful in the jungles and temples of Southeast Asia, and it is said that their blood still flows in the veins of fallen kings. Although the Nagah rarely appear before outsiders, their word is law in the mortal and supernatural courts of their homeland.

• **Same-Bito:** Rarely seen on land, the terrible shark-

shifters are nonetheless well known and rightly feared. Many are samurai sworn to the Dragon King of the Sea, and they mercilessly dispense his punishments and enforce his edicts. In the waters of the physical realm and the Yang Realms alike, none can match the Same-Bito's prowess.

• **Nezumi:** Despised offspring of the cities, the children of Rat care less for the wild places than for humanity's habitats. Nonetheless, Nezumi exist throughout the courts of the supernatural, usually acting as councilors or minor officials. Although few are trusted with any great amount of power, the rat-born are most skilled in the ways of intrigue — and, some whisper, are unparalleled poisoners, plague-bearers and assassins.



Sample Hengeyokai

Statistics for archetypal hengeyokai war forms are listed in parentheses; Storytellers may modify these numbers as necessary.

Young Trickster

Attributes: Strength 2 (4), Dexterity 3 (7), Stamina 2 (4), Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 2, Animal Ken 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 2

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 2, Celerity 2

Rage (P'o) 2, Hun 3, Gnosis 4, Willpower 4, Yin 1, Yang 5

Experienced Warrior

Attributes: Strength 3 (6), Dexterity 4 (5), Stamina 3 (6), Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Animal Ken 3, Dodge 3, Enigmas 1, Martial Arts 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 3, Celerity 2, Potence 1, Shintai (any) 1

Rage (P'o) 6, Hun 3, Gnosis 5, Willpower 7, Yin 1, Yang 6

Animal Lord

Attributes: Strength 4 (8), Dexterity 5 (7), Stamina 4 (7), Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5, Perception 5, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 5, Animal Ken 4, Dodge 4, Enigmas 3, Martial Arts 5, Melee 5, Stealth 4

Equivalent Disciplines: Animalism 5, Celerity 4, Potence 2, Shintai (any) 3

Rage (P'o) 8, Hun 5, Gnosis 9, Willpower 9, Yin 2, Yang 9

Chi'n Ta — The Magi

In this world wrapped in the darkness of its great ignorance,
The blessed Dhamma's bright light He lit,
Aglow with his iddhi powers, far into the end of the worlds seeing;
Unto his feet I bend low, the wond'rous Enlightened One!
— The Dhammapada, Prologue

It's not fair.

Quest as they might for enlightenment, the Kuei-jin buzz about like bumblebees when compared to the dragonflies known as chi'n ta, *shinta*, or magi. Despite the fragile nature of their wings, these annoying human insects soar with a strength and precision that the dead Kuei-jin can only dream about.

It is frustrating.

It is intolerable.

It is, in many ways, an insult, especially when a chi'n ta prevails in some contest with his superior, the vampire.

True, few of these bodhisattvas-in-training ever achieve the grand powers of the immortal Kuei-jin; it's also true that most chi'n ta become so enmeshed in politics, selfishness or the convolutions of their own enlightenment that they provide little resistance to their betters. Still, when a mage remains aware, when he survives the trials of his existence long enough to become a threat, *especially* when he gathers with others of his kind, the annoying dragonfly becomes a dragon, instead. Vampires learned long ago to step lightly around one who seems to walk among miracles. Chances are, those miracles flow from his awareness, and they may become very dangerous indeed. Kuei-jin call magi "The Lightning People," and for good reason; lightning, figurative or literal, is never far from their eyes.

People who believe they understand the prismatic world of the chi'n ta look to the small but accessible Akashic Brotherhood. Disciplined masters of mental and physical arts, the Akashics appear to be perfect Oriental magi. Anyone who believes such nonsense, however, is wrong. Although their affiliation with the Council of Nine Mystic Traditions (see **Mage: The Ascension**) and their archetypal "martial artist" façades provide the Akashics a rather high profile among the Lightning People, they are but one color of the chi'n ta spectrum. Other, deeper hues signify two ancient rivals, the Wu Lung and Wu-Keng (see **The Book of Crafts**), and the shadowy Go Kamisori Gama of Japan. A scattering of minor lights symbolizes the numerous tiny sects that dot the Asian lands. Speckles too sublime to see without a great effort signify the lone monks, hermits, wise folk and shamans who embody the flame of enlightenment, but choose to keep it to themselves. The brightest beacon among the Lightning People, however, comes from a single fortress tower, one that rises out of the sea of colors like a cracked but imposing monolith: The Technocracy.

The Technocracy

Called "Stone People," "the Five Metal Dragons" (a reference to the five Technocratic divisions) or the "Subtle Thunders," these wizards of structure and substance grew from a medieval alliance of Western philosopher-scientists and Eastern Legalists and craftsmen. Blending the best of both worlds, these early visionaries forged a cross-cultural bond that, in time, became a vise upon the supernatural world. Dedicated to the idea of perfect order through harmonious achievement, the Five Metal Dragons constructed elaborate machines, refined materials and ruthless stratagems of war, then used all of the above to devastate their opposition.

Following the advice of Sun Tzu, the Technocratic Dalou'laoshi used the divisions between their enemies to do their work without much risk. By pitting rivals against each other, the Dalou'laoshi undermined groups such as the Wu Lung, then swept them out the door with a few quick strokes. In the meantime, the Technocrats spent their time perfecting legal codes, inventions, and political strategies. When trade routes opened, the Dalou'laoshi held the contracts; when rulers needed money, the Dalou'laoshi held the gold; when Westerners occupied the Orient by force, the Dalou'laoshi fragmented. A purgé began. Ultimately, the Metal Dragons who remained allied with their Western counterparts survived the wars; together, the allies built the foundation for the

modern Oriental Technocratic juggernaut — a juggernaut fueled by an international Syndicate and propelled by the man-machines of Iteration X.

Having cut their mystick rivals down to size, the Eastern Technocrats have recently turned their attention to other "unnatural" threats — including the Kuei-jin. Utilizing an array of hypertech Devices and information networks, the main offices in Singapore, Japan and China have begun an open war with the vampires. Their activities have crushed many Kuei-jin strongholds in a few short years.

Not that Technocrats don't have their own problems; international strife continues to make large-scale cooperation across Asia impossible. In that void, large companies and individual Metal Dragons have taken the initiative, advancing their own agendas, alliances and innovations. Some turn their heads away when old Cathayan associates walk by; others shoot first and examine the remains afterward. Clever Kuei-jin have learned to exploit the rivalries between the Metal Dragons and to survive by hiding in their shadows.

These Lightning People employ their Arts through scientific mediums — hardware, biomodification, market controls, information technology, mass media and education. By convincing the Masses of one scientific truth and showing them the benefits of technology, the Technocrats undermine the sense of mysticism that keeps their rivals strong, replace it with an image of their own superiority, then reinforce that image with displays of miracles and power. After centuries of subtle manipulations, many Stone People now open the doors of their secret laboratories and release heavy troops — clones, cyber-assassins, robots, viruses, police forces, politicians and businesspeople with more money than God — upon their enemies. Many Kuei-jin take this new showdown as one more sign that the Sixth Age is descending — or has already begun.

The Akashic Brotherhood and Other Mystick Traditions

Tracing their lineage back to a mythical prehistoric village (possibly located on Mount Meru), the supposedly "enlightened" Akashic Brothers provide a paradox for the Kuei-jin: These ascetic hermits refine their mental and physical talents to inhuman (through rarely to vampiric) degrees, preach peace and harmony, and supposedly pursue a godlike enlightenment that takes lifetimes to achieve; conversely, they beat the hell out of anything that annoys them, speak in irritating parables and (as elder Kuei-jin love to remind them) once waged a 300-year war over a small difference in doctrine. Even so, there's no debating the powers they wield, or the serene tranquillity that seems to follow most Akashics like a spring breeze.

Once, centuries ago, Kuei-jin and Akashic Brothers shared space in the Shaolin monastery. The idea behind this "experiment" was a laudable one — that any seeker of enlightenment should be welcome to search for it there. The harmony the masters sought was not to be, however, and the Akashics were expelled. Today, a handful of Kuei-jin still study the Brothers (from afar or otherwise) to discern their secrets. Like leaves from a dying tree, however, these vampires inevitably leave their hosts' temples disappointed. Although the magi seem to have some good advice, say the dissenters, the "serenity"

they're so proud of appears to flow more from mind control than from true enlightenment.

Akashic chi'n ta focus their Arts through martial arts of almost legendary caliber. Old Kuei-jin say that many of the greatest mythic warriors were, in fact, masters from this sect. Some Akashics seem to prefer telepathic and empathic coercion over brawling, but none of them avoid a fight if the opportunity presents itself. Despite their peaceful claims, these chi'n ta seize powerful dragon nests and channel the energies for their own purposes. Anyone who resists takeover will be beaten (or bored) to death by the "Harmonious Brothers."

Long ago, these dragonflies allied themselves with an upstart organization of Western magi (most likely to protect themselves from the Wu Lung, Dalou'laoshi and each other). These so-called "Traditions" then saw fit to make themselves at home in the Akashics' ancestral Eastern homelands. Although their Arts seem far weaker than mythology would have you believe (how *did* they survive so long with their penchant for failure?), these annoying strangers have some interesting secrets of their own. The most common, by far, call themselves "Dreamspeakers"; taking Mongol, Malaysian, Polynesian and Ainu shamans under their wing, these wanderers share a deep affinity for the spirits of Yin and Yang Worlds alike. Through their chants, dances, songs and other primal rites, the Dreamspeakers infiltrate the Kingdoms of Earth and Heaven, then walk about the corridors like honored guests.

Ruder magi, such as the vulgarly Western "Sons of Ether" and pompous "Magi of the Hermetic Orders," exhibit no such manners. Wrestling with the powers of Heaven, these Lightning People grab their lightning from the sky and channel it through strange devices and arcane commands. Naturally, the so-called "Mystic East" draws such fools like a beacon; as many Kuei-jin discovered long ago, however, what works in the West might become worthless in Eastern lands....

Dragon Wizards and Subtle Ladies

The rightful heirs of the grand Chinese traditions have had to seek shelter in other, more magickal, worlds. These so-called Dragon Wizards, the Wu Lung, have lost so much ground in the centuries-long struggles with the West, modernization and a host of rivals that they rarely show their faces, even in their ancestral lands. Masters of *feng shui*, alchemy, Taoist and Buddhist crafts, and Arts that were old when the Yellow Emperor was a child, these regal Lightning People once commanded Mongols, Chinese and dragons alike. Old Kuei-jin still speak fondly about the days when these magickal kings entertained the Cathayans with 15-course feasts and golden rice. The gifts they gave the Kings of Night (as they supposedly called the Kuei-jin) included fine jade, gold, carved ivory and succulent human slaves bred especially for the Hunger. They sheltered the vampires when the mood struck them, or they declared magnificent wars with no pretext at all. Unlike the oh-so-humble Akashics, the Wu Lung built grand palaces and spacious pagodas, summoned the winds into their hearts and called themselves "Masters." They may have been arrogant, but at least they were honest.

Their opposites, the subtle ladies of the Wu-Keng, maintain a peasant tradition that has warred with the Dragons for 3,000 years. Hobbling on the sawn-off stumps of rebellious

shamans, the original Wu-Keng sect grew from a collection of women. Shamed, mutilated and widowed, these poor but powerful sorceresses withdrew into the hills and villages and planned an intricate revenge. Unable to best the hated Wu Lung (who, the tales say, had conspired to wipe out the female sect) directly, they wove a basket of intrigues that make even the Kuei-jin jealous. On many nights throughout the years, Cathayans have joined this Society of the Crippled Lotus (a polite name for the Wu-Keng, based on their calling card) or have run errands at the Society's request. The rewards for such services are generous, if humble, and the price of refusal — a spell that literally boils its victims alive inside their own skin — is rarely worth the rebuff.

Both societies fled to Hong Kong during the March of the Sun; although each one maintains strongholds in mainland China, they keep low profiles indeed. The hatred between these groups, while millennia old, is but a breeze compared to the hurricanes they reserve for the Five Metal Dragons. Working from their secret homes and otherworldly kingdoms, these ancient rivals conspire to rid their lands of trespassers before they finally settle their own timeless score. Kuei-jin have always been glad to help either side, and occasionally play both against each other for their own amusement.

The Arts these chi'n ta ply reflect their origins: The flamboyant Wu Lung use high ritual magick, precise rites and mystickal numbers to invoke the spirits, the elements and the creatures of the twilight; the lowly Wu-Keng cast simple spells through art, speech and household items. Although humble and quiet in demeanor, these women display a cold ferocity that, contrasted with their silent ways, seems crueler than the Dragon Wizards' thunder. (For details about both groups, see the **Mage: The Ascension** supplement **The Book of Crafts**.)

Other Sects and Independent Chi'n Ta

Like flashes in the sky, the mystickal sects of Asia are too numerous to be counted. Like the winds, they caress the Eternal Mountain, carry away a sifting of dust and take it to some new and distant place. Even the oldest Kuei-jin lose track of these silent wisps; in deep forests, jungles, cities and mountains, the voices of the Awakened are lost, even to immortals.

Most chi'n ta keep to themselves; many others carry on traditions that run in families, or pass on their enlightenment to a handful of students who may or may not follow their masters' paths. The old hermit on the mountain is very real, but he speaks to no one, least of all to a dead thing. And so, the ways of the magi become one more enigma in the night, even to those who are called kings of it.

Bright flashes do appear, of course: the deadly Go Kamisori Gama ninja clan; the White Lotus Women, who bring their madness to the mortal world, then disappear into tea rooms in a distant Heaven; the cannibal Toc Faan, who feasted on the victims of Pol Pot; the blind Tay Hoi Li, who supposedly found enlightenment in the rat-tunnels of Vietnam; and so on. In a land of nearly two billion souls, the dragonflies dart and hover in the most unexpected places. In the last few years, a series of chi'n ta sects have arisen from the droppings of the Five Metal Dragons; bred by the world media and raised with computers at their fingertips, these young Lighting People send their thunder through the Internet, virtual reality and home-made cybernetics. To the handful of Cathayans who recognize this new breed, the hypertech sects — the Gon Lo, the Thousand Canes Society, the Five Rings Gama, and several others — present fascinating possibilities for alliance and resources.

Running Chi'n Ta

Magi have powers that puzzle the rather focused Kuei-jin, powers that reshape reality itself upon command. Although the best way to represent these powers is to use the systems offered in **Mage: The Ascension**, it might be easier simply to define one or two (or more) areas in which a mage specializes, assign a Dice Pool based on the general expertise of the mage, then assign difficulties based on the precise task the mage tries to accomplish. Oriental magi commonly master magick based on the control of spirits, elemental forces and *joss*. Mages specializing in the elements typically have high Yang ratings (which govern the Dice Pools used to cast magick), while mages skilled in controlling *joss* tend to have high Yin ratings.

Although their magickal styles often define the powers they possess, chi'n ta are as individual as river stones. Each one, while shaped by similar forces, has a symmetry all his own. Mages tend to follow Arts suited to their personalities and cultures; thus, a chi'n ta, with his unpredictable range of powers, presents a challenge to the Kuei-jin who thinks she knows everything.

Chi'n ta are capable of miracles, but even the best of them occasionally screws up; when this happens, terrible things follow: Firestorms burn the mage to ashes; huge rips open in his skin; invisible spirits torment the offender; occasionally, he simply disappears. These side effects, called Ch'ung Tu or Paradox, come when a mage oversteps his bounds and Heaven sees fit to collect a toll.

Young Martial Artist Chi'n Ta

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Dodge 2, Crafts 2, Empathy 3, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 2, Expression 3, Linguistics 2, Martial Arts 3, Medicine 2, Melee 1, Meditation 2, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Powers: Elemental Control (three dice), *Joss* Control (three dice)

Hun 5, P'o 0, Yin 3, Yang 3, Willpower 5, Chi Pool 6

Equipment: Light clothing, backpack, bo staff, nunchaku, pocketful of shuriken

Metal Dragon Enforcer

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6, Charisma 2, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Computer 3, Dodge 3, Drive 4, Empathy 2, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 2, Firearms 5, Intimidation 5, Investigation 4, Law 3, Linguistics 4, Medicine 2, Melee 5, Occult 2, Politics 3, Science 3, Security 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 4, Survival 2

Powers: Subdermal armor (four extra soak dice, protects against aggravated damage), built-in flame-thrower (six dice aggravated damage, difficulty 6), mindlink to base (three extra dice to resist psychic attacks), retractable claws (Str + 2 aggravated damage)

Hun 1, P'o 1, Yin 7, Yang 2, Willpower 8, Chi Pool 10

Equipment: Dark glasses (with infrared settings), black clothing, trenchcoat, heavy automatic pistol, communication link, badge, paranormal activity scanner

GRAND CHINESE WIZARD

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 4, Animal Ken 3, Crafts 3, Dodge 2, Empathy 4, Enigmas 4, Etiquette 5, Intimidation 5, Law 4, Leadership 3, Linguistics 5, Martial Arts 2, Medicine 3, Melee 2, Occult 5, Politics 3, Portents 4, Subterfuge 4, Torture 3

Powers: Elemental Control (six dice), *Joss* Control (six dice), Spirit Magick (six dice), Mind Control (five dice)

Hun 8, P'o 2, Yin 5, Yang 5, Willpower 9, Chi Pool 12

Equipment: Robes, pins, silk fan, jewels, powders, blood of the dragons

HSIEN — CHANGELINGS

During the legendary Second and Third Ages, the *hsien* were the servants and messengers of the spirit worlds. The noble *kamuii* and clever *hirayanu* traveled freely between the spirit worlds and the Middle Kingdom. They were the emissaries of nature, guardians and protectors of the dragon nests, and messengers to all of mortal kind.

The *kamuii* — elemental spirit beings who led the *hsien* — rarely interacted directly with mortals, for they were the ones charged with the protection of dragon nests. They usually showed themselves only to punish trespassers of their sacred shrines.

The bestial *hirayanu*, those spirits who had been given animal forms, traveled among humankind more readily, and some of their kind even enjoyed living among mortals. The *hirayanu* often served as the messengers of the August Personage by delivering messages and sometimes gifts to mortals favored by the gods, although they also delivered punishments and meted out justice to all deemed guilty in the eyes of the Great Ones.

The Wan Xian's treachery not only sundered the Middle Kingdom from the realm of spirit, but trapped many of the *hsien* here as well. Unable to return to their native realm, the *hsien* had to adapt to life in the Middle Kingdom. Weakened by the separation of the realms, the *hsien* found it safer to hide themselves in mortal forms, for to remain in their true forms made them vulnerable to attack by other *shen* and even by mortal magicians who would trap them and steal their magic.

The *hsien* (or changelings, as they are known in the West) are the descendants of spirit creatures who were trapped in the Middle Kingdom after the worlds separated. Divided by both form and court, the *hsien* struggle to survive in a world full of hostile mortals and *shen* who would destroy them.

The *kamuii* are the self-proclaimed rulers of this race of outcasts, but theirs is an uneasy leadership at best. Many *hirayanu* resent the rulership of the *kamuii* and seek to undermine them at every opportunity. The *kamuii* themselves are divided. Half of their kind would see the *hsien* adapt to a new and modern age of technology, while the other half strives to hold on to the ancient ways and seeks to reestablish a link with their lost home.

Physically, the *hsien* resemble humans in form, though their true form is easily recognizable to other *hsien* and even some other *shen*. The five *kamuii*, or noble families, represent the five elements, which usually shows in their mortal forms — for example, fire *kamuii* have blazing red hair, while metal *kamuii* have silvery skin and "chiseled" features. The *hirayanu* possess animalistic features reminiscent of the animal with which they have an affinity.

• Changelings appear as mortals, at least to the mortals of the Middle Kingdom. Other *shen* can always recognize a changeling for what she truly is.

• All changelings have a wani (faerie) form, which is visible to all other changelings. It is the equivalent of the fae mien of Western changelings. A changeling can assume her wani form at will, though it can be difficult in the presence of mortals. Mortals who witness a changeling in her "true" faerie form nearly always forget the experience.

• Changelings heal their wounds normally (though some possess magical powers that allow them to heal faster) unless they are within a Yang dragon nest. In this case, they heal their wounds 10 times faster than mortals.

• Changelings all have Yugen (Glamour) and Banality Traits. These loosely correspond to Yin and Yang — Yugen/Yang being a force of creativity that changelings use to power their magic (cantrips), and Banality/Yin being the stifling force of the Fifth Age.

• All changelings have the ability to cast magical spells, called cantrips.

• Because of their close ties with the realm of spirit, the blood of Eastern changelings is coveted by both vampires and mortal magi.

• Their ties to the spirit realm also give Eastern changelings (especially ones who are filled with Yin) connections to the realms of the dead.

THE KITH

Many varieties of *hsien* exist within the Middle Kingdoms. Among the *hsien*, the *kamuii* are considered to be the most noble, while the *hirayanu*, having suffered the shame of reincarnation into an animalistic state, are the equivalents of the Western commoners.

• **Kamuii:** Each of these five noble houses of the *hsien* represents one of the elements: Water, Metal, Earth, Wood and Fire. Water and Metal *kamuii* are closer to Yin and prefer to dwell among humans, while ones affiliated with Wood and Fire cling to the old ways and are forever striving to preserve the ancient places of Yang power. The Earth *kamuii* are fickle and refuse to take sides, forever playing one side off the other.

Many *kamuii* maintain their traditional role as protectors of dragon nests. They take this role very seriously and deal harshly with anyone who dares violate their sacred places.

• **Cats:** Eastern lore associates these *hirayanu* with Western vampires because of their methods of obtaining Yugen. Cats have an almost insatiable need for mortal companionship and gain their Yugen through sexual contact with mortals. Mortals who have an encounter with a cat are usually left exhausted and emotionally drained — thus the association with vampires.

• **Tanuki (badgers):** These solitary *hirayanu* are the warriors of the *hsien*. The *kamuii* consider the *tanuki* to be some of the most loyal *hirayanu*. Despite their solitary nature, the *tanuki* are renowned tricksters among the *hsien*, and many mortal tales speak of the badgers' irascibility and viciousness.

Sample Changelings

Tanuki Trickster

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Animal Ken 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Powers: Illusion Casting (can cast an illusion; to detect it, an opponent must score three or more successes on a Perception roll)

Hun 1, P'o 5, Yin (Banality) 3, Yang (Yugen) 7, Willpower 6

Kamuji Chu Jung (Fire Lord)

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 5, Manipulation 3, Appearance 5, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 2, Dodge 3, Etiquette 3, Linguistics 3, Martial Arts 4, Melee 3, Occult 3

Powers: Fire Mastery (as Lure of Flames) 5, Illusion Casting (as *tanuki*)

Hun 3, P'o 3, Yin (Banality) 1, Yang (Yugen) 9, Willpower 7

The Ten Thousand Spirits

The term *spirit* is a general one indicating a variety of otherworldly beings. Cathayans encounter spirits of one kind or another all the time. Most inhabitants of the Yin and Yang Worlds fit this bill, as do ghosts and the demons of the Yomi World. Many spirits can take material form for a short time. The tales and lore compiled over the ages, shot through with personal experiences, religious beliefs, folklore and prejudice, offer few hard answers about these entities. Troupes are advised to use their imaginations as freely as possible when dealing with spirits. We offer a few hard rules below, but there should be many exceptions to these guidelines. Spirits are meant to be mysterious things.

"Spirit" is an easy label stuck on a dizzying variety of entities. Even Ki himself, in the *Ki Chuan*, found it impossible to name them all. Their general ranks range from the "greater entities" — gods and Celestines, if there's a difference at all — to the "lesser powers" — dukes, mandarins, minions, elementals, kami, Banes and such. There are more proper names for these spirits than any book could list.

Spirits are defined as beings made of either Yin or Yang Chi. Yang-spirits are composed of ephemera, the material of the Yang World. Ghosts, the Restless Dead of the Yin World, hold a slightly different form — ectoplasm. In game terms, both are essentially the same thing; each is immune to physical attacks unless the spirit takes on solid form (see the "Materialize Charm," below), and most Disciplines fail against spirits unless the vampire charges herself with Chi or passes into the spirit worlds. A Yang-spirit exists only in the Yang World; it cannot go to, or even perceive, the Yin World, and *vice versa*. However, certain spirits are composed of both Yin and Yang; these spirits can travel from the Yang World directly to the Yin World, though such a journey is often perilous. All spirits are invisible to mortals unless they choose to Materialize or Appear. However, most Kuei-jin know ways of sensing spirits.

Ghosts and spirits aren't particularly fond of Kuei-jin, though they do work with vampires from time to time. Most spirits see vampires either as beings lower in the karmic order or as renegades fortunate enough to have cheated fate's decree. Certain spirits become allies (or masters, or servants) of Kuei-jin; such spirits are commonly known as nushi (see the Nushi Background, p. 87).

People — and vampires — often see whatever they expect to see when dealing with spirits. Spirits certainly have their own identities — most embody specific concepts or elements. Vampires who meet spirits face to face, however, often see the same spirit in different ways. Most "lesser powers" have one set form that stays fairly constant. The greater entities, however, can be all things to all people — at once.

Some known types of spirits include:

• **Gods (a.k.a. Celestines, Incarna, Dragon Kings, etc.):** Whether these beings are still mere "spirits" is a bone of contention among many Cathayans. The dreams of these vastly powerful beings are said to have shaped the Middle Kingdom and all things. During the early Ages, gods and dragons freely crossed from the Yin and Yang Worlds to the Middle Kingdom, and they ultimately shaped both realms. Some of these entities are said to serve the August Personage of Jade in P'eng Lai, the Heavenly Realms, beyond the cares of the Middle Kingdom. Certain mortals and *shen* of profound enlightenment supposedly have transcended the Middle Kingdom to become as gods; among vampires, Xue is the most widely known.

The Kuei-jin's Ebon Dragon and Scarlet Queen, should they exist at all, would be considered gods.

• **Ghosts (a.k.a. wraiths, the Restless Dead):** The Middle Kingdom is full of ghosts, the Yin-heavy souls of the dead who cannot or will not pass on to their final rest (see the section on wraiths, later in the chapter, for more information). Yin-aspected Kuei-jin typically spend a great deal of their existence reconciling problems between the living and the dead.

• **Demons and Demon Hordes:** Demons, the denizens of the Yomi World, have troubled the Middle Kingdom since the Second Age. Some sages revile demons as abominations, while other scholars claim that even demons serve the purpose assigned to them. All theories agree that demons are evil and destructive, at least as far as interactions with other beings are concerned. Little else is certain; all of them, however, have some spirit nature. The greater demons often lair in the deepest regions of the Yomi World and are unable to cross the Wall under their own power.

All but the weakest demonic beings routinely shift form, name and purpose. For whatever reason, such creatures seem shut off from material reality by the Wall and may be summoned only with great rituals (if at all). The exact nature of such dealings is left to the Storyteller, but should involve massive magics, great peril and a heavy dose of sheer terror.

For game purposes, treat demons as spirits with power to spare, plenty of cunning and an influence that extends beyond their

simple powers. Mood, atmosphere, foreshadowing and other tricks are helpful Storyteller tools if or when demons appear.

The mightiest demons, the Yama Kings, rule their fellows from vast Hell-realms within the Yomi World. Kuei-jin, as half-demonic beings themselves, often suffer the attentions of the Yama Kings and their minions; the service — or, more likely, enslavement — of a Kuei-jin is a valued prize.

• **Spirit Entities:** A staggering array of ephemeral beings, from powerful dukes to simple minions, who personify concepts, elements or living things. Kuei-jin are quite familiar with these beings, some of whom agree to serve as nushi.

• **Mythic Beasts (a.k.a. Bygones):** These formerly material creatures fled or were taken into the spirit worlds when the Wall arose. Sometimes summoned, sometimes simply invited, they cross the Wall from the spirit worlds to wild and isolated reaches of the Middle Kingdom. Without Chi to sustain them, these monsters usually die within hours or days. However, in that time they may do great damage.

Such Bygones often exist in a semispiritual form. They are not ephemeral, but must have a suitable host body prepared in order to enter the physical world unless the Wall is torn open. The more powerful varieties come and go under their own power by stepping sideways like hengeyokai. Either type must penetrate the Wall, and most don't consider the trip worth the trouble. Generally, the larger and more outlandish the creature, the harder the excursion.

A special sort of mythic beast is the dragon, embodiment of Chi. These fearsome creatures, aspected to Yin or Yang, served as the greatest ministers of the gods. When the Wall arose and the Celestial Courts fell into disgrace, the dragons, disgusted, resigned and left the world. Few dragons haunt the modern Middle Kingdom; most are asleep in the Earth, near lines of Chi, where they await a more auspicious Age. Were one to awaken, it would be powerful beyond belief.

Spirit Traits

Spirits play by different rules than material beings. The Traits and Charms below represent their natural abilities and powers. All Traits, except Chi Reservoir, range from 1 to 10.

Willpower

This Trait allows a spirit to take actions such as attacking, chasing or flying through the spirit worlds. Contests of this nature between spirits are resolved by opposed Willpower rolls.

Difficulty	Action
3	Easy
5	Fairly simple
6	Normal
8	Difficult
10	Virtually impossible

Rage

This Trait, the spirit analog of a Kuei-jin's P'o, reflects a spirit's raw anger and anguish. Spirits use their Rage to harm physical beings and each other. For each success on a Rage roll (difficulty 6), an attacking spirit inflicts one Health Level of normal damage on a material being or one Chi point on another spirit.

Gnosis

Spirits use this Trait, analogous to Hun, for any sort of Social or Mental roll. A spirit in a race with a vampire to open

a Chinese puzzle box rolls Gnosis, while the vampire rolls Intelligence. The being with the most successes wins. A Gnosis roll also comes into play when a spirit tries to intimidate, seduce or trick a target, either in or out of the spirit worlds. Social Abilities, such as Intimidation or Seduction, are added to the spirit's Gnosis if they apply.

Yin and Yang

Spirits have Yin and Yang ratings, which function similarly to the ones of Kuei-jin. Most spirits are aspected to either Yin or Yang, though many spirits remaining close to the Middle Kingdom have developed a small amount of ability in their opposing Virtue. A spirit's precise rating depends on its overall power; weaker spirits typically have ratings of between 3 and 5 in their aspected Virtue (and no more than 1, if that, in the opposing Virtue), while great spirits have ratings of 8, 9 or even 10 in their aspected Virtue.

Chi Reservoir

In combat, spirits use "batteries" of Chi harnessed from the spirit worlds. The stronger the spirit, the greater its Chi Reservoir. Chi is depleted through special abilities and damage. Additionally, Kuei-jin with appropriate powers can "drink" from spirits, siphoning spirits' Chi into their own Chi reserves on a one-for-one basis.

Spirits who have depleted their Chi begin to look translucent, not fully there. When Chi loss is due to combat damage, the spirit looks ragged and torn. When Chi reaches zero, the spirit dissipates into the Fabric for a number of hours equal to 20 minus its Gnosis. After this time, it Re-forms with one Chi point.

Spirits recharge their Chi by entering a state called Slumber. In Slumber, a spirit finds a quiet spot in the spirit worlds and floats there in a deep sleep. For each hour that the spirit Slumbers, it regains one Chi point. While a spirit is in this state, it may be easily bound with spirit-based magics, regardless of Chi or willingness.

Tasks

- **Movement**

All spirits can fly or float in the spirit worlds. The maximum distance (in yards) that they may move in a turn is 20 + Willpower. However, yards and feet don't mean very much in the Tapestry; distances can warp without warning.

- **Pursuit**

A spirit trying to flee rolls its Willpower against difficulty 6. It begins with three automatic successes because it's on home ground. A Kuei-jin in the spirit worlds rolls Willpower to follow. Difficulty for the roll is 8, because the Kuei-jin is *not* on her home ground. A spirit with more than 10 successes gets away clean. A spirit with the **Re-form** Charm can dispense with rolls and simply declare escape.

- **Communication**

Spirit communication is not so much a language as a form of comprehension between both parties. Not everyone can understand spirits, though. A successful Hun roll (difficulty 6) is required to speak to and understand them, unless those beings also speak familiar human languages.

Charms

Each spirit possesses special magics called Charms. These magics require a certain amount of Chi to use. Unless otherwise noted, Charms last for one scene. However, a combat-related Charm lasts for one turn per use.

- **Appear:** With this Charm, a spirit can manifest to an earthly observer without taking on material form. It cannot, however, affect the material world in any way while using this Charm. A specialty of demons, who use it to taunt their victims. Costs five Chi.

- **Armor**: This Charm provides a spirit one soak die per Chi point spent. It is the only way a spirit can soak damage unless the spirit is Materialized. The spirit may use this Charm at any time in the combat turn before damage is rolled.

- **Blast Flame:** The spirit can blast a gout of flame at opponents. The Chi cost is two per die of aggravated damage.

- **Blighted Touch:** The spirit can bring out the worst in a target. If the spirit successfully attacks, the target must immediately make a Willpower roll. If she fails, her negative characteristics dominate her personality for the next few hours. When this power is used on a Kuei-jin, the P'o automatically dominates the vampire for a number of hours equal to the P'o rating. The Chi cost is two.

- **Calcify:** This Charm allows the spirit to bind a target into a static web. A Willpower roll is made against the target's own Willpower. Each success subtracts one from the victim's Physical Attributes (or Willpower, in the case of other spirits). When Attributes or Willpower reaches zero, the victim is bound fast until freed. Rescuers must attack the web and score as many damage successes as the spirit scored. The Chi cost is two.

- **Cleanse the Blight:** This Charm purges spiritual corruption in a vicinity. Chi cost is 10.

- **Control Electrical Systems:** The spirit can exert control over an electrical system. The spirit rolls its Gnosis (difficulty from 3 to 9, depending on the system's complexity). Chi cost is from one to five points.

- **Corruption:** The spirit can whisper an evil suggestion in a target's ear; the target is inclined to act on that thought. The Chi cost is one.

- **Create Fires:** By succeeding on a Gnosis roll, the spirit can create fires. The difficulty varies (from 3 for small fires to 9 for conflagrations). The Chi cost varies from one to five points.

- **Create Wind:** The spirit can create wind effects. Chi cost varies from one for a breeze to 20 for a tornado.

- **Dragon Sight**: Most spirits have a natural sense of the dragon tracks of the spirit world and are able to travel about without much difficulty. It costs one Chi to find any particular thing.

- **Influence:** A spirit can change the target's mood. The spirit need not speak to its target to use this Charm, and the effects are more gradual than sudden. Each die of effect costs three Chi.

- **Lightning Bolts:** The spirit can generate lightning bolts and launch them at opponents. The Chi cost is two per die of aggravated damage inflicted.

- **Materialize:** A spirit with this Charm may materialize and affect the physical world. To do so, the spirit's Gnosis must equal or exceed the Wall rating for that area. When a spirit Materializes, it must spend Chi to create a physical shape and

give itself bodily Traits. However, a spirit still rolls its Gnosis for Social or Mental activities. The Chi costs are as follows:

Chi Cost	Trait
1	Per one Physical Attribute level
1	Per two Ability levels
1	7 Health Levels (as a mortal)
1	Per additional Health Level (each extra Health Level also increases size)
1	Per one Health Level healed (regenerate damage to the physical form), per three if the damage was inflicted in aggravated attacks
1	Weaponry: Per die of aggravated damage done in addition to Strength (Bite is one die, Claws are two, etc.)

Spirits have no limits on their Attribute and Ability levels. It is possible for them to form extremely strong or fast bodies if they spend enough Chi. Most, however, have a "prime form" to which they default when Materializing.

Example: A demon wants to Materialize into the physical world, the better to terrorize mortals. It wants the following characteristics: Str 3, Dex 4, Sta 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Stealth 3 and seven Health Levels. This form costs it 16 Chi.

A spirit may stay Materialized as long as it desires, but it cannot enter an area with a Wall rating higher than its Gnosis. While Materialized, the spirit may not recharge its Chi unless it has a Charm that allows it to do so. When a Materialized spirit is attacked, damage is applied to its Health Levels. If a spirit is reduced to zero Health Levels, it dissipates into the spirit worlds and may not reuse this Charm for (20 hours minus its Gnosis).

Note that aggravated damage suffered by a spirit is applied to Health Levels *and* Chi. Thus, a spirit cannot always escape its sojourn unscathed.

• **Mind Speech:** A spirit with this Charm can speak directly into a subject's mind. Chi cost is three points.

• **Possession:** The spirit may possess a living being or inanimate object. Chi cost is three. Possession requires a successful Gnosis roll (difficulty of the victim's Willpower, automatic in the case of an object). The number of successes equals the speed with which possession occurs; refer to the chart below:

Successes	Time Taken
1	six hours
2	three hours
3	one hour
4	15 minutes
5	five minutes
6+	instantaneous

Before possessing its victim, the spirit finds a dark, isolated part of the Fabric and remains there, concentrating on the possession. During this time, the spirit can take no other action. If it engages in spirit combat, the possessive link is broken. Possessing spirits are often guarded by others of their kind to ensure that the possession process remains undisturbed.

• **Re-form**: This Charm allows a spirit to dissipate and Re-form somewhere else in the spirit worlds, usually far away from its enemies. Chi cost is 20.

• **Shapeshift:** The spirit may take the form of anything it desires. It does not gain the powers or abilities of its new shape, only the form and visage. The Chi cost is five.

• **Short Out:** The spirit can cause electrical systems to short out (Gnosis; difficulty 6). The Chi cost is three.

• **Solidify Reality**: This Charm is possessed primarily by spirits in urban areas. It enables a spirit to spin a pattern web, thus reinforcing the laws and rules of static reality. This power requires only a Willpower roll. The spirit could, with a successful enough roll, make a spiritual wall so solid as to be impassable. The difficulty is determined by the extent of the solidification and how interesting, sensible and clever the description of the action is. The number of successes obtained determines how much solidifying is allowed. Chi cost ranges from one to 20, depending on the magnitude of the feat.

Success makes the object or spirit more solid. An object's effective "Health Levels" are increased by one per success. The effect lasts for about a day. Each spirit can make only one roll for each object.

• **Spirit Away:** The dreaded power of the worst demons. With this Charm, a human may be snatched from the material world and taken straight to the Yomi World. If the demon scores four or more successes with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7), the mortal passes through the Wall and into the spirit's personal demesne. He may then try to escape — if he can…. The Chi cost is 25. The charm takes the spirit along with its target.

• **Tracking:** The spirit can unerringly track its prey. Chi cost is five.

Sample Spirits

Below we present a tiny sampling of the multitudinous spirits, demons and godlings that haunt the spirit worlds of the East. Many more exist, but these few are intended as templates for Storytellers seeking to create their own spirits and nushi.

All of these spirits have a Nushi Cost, which is the total cost to purchase the spirit in question with the Nushi Background (see p. 87). If purchased as a nushi, a spirit can provide its supplicators with certain powers (listed under "Approaching the Spirit"), but it extracts a ban as well.

Lady Yukio, Gej-ryo

Rage (P'o) 5, Gnosis (Hun) 6, Yin 3, Yang 5, Willpower 6, Chi 20

Nushi Cost: 3

Charms: Appear, Dragon Sight, Sharpen (can make her host blade inflict an additional die of damage for one turn; Chi Cost 2)

Image: Lady Yukio typically stays within her katana. When she does choose to appear before others, she takes the form of a beautiful but severe woman clad in shining, silvery garments. Her hair and eyes are also silver, and she sports long razored nails on her hands.

History: During Japan's tumultuous feudal period, the great smith Misawa, mourning the loss of his beloved Yukio (who had been raped and murdered by a wandering *ronin*), turned his grief and rage into the forging of a masterwork katana. Night and day Misawa worked on the weapon, and when he finally held the finished blade to the light, he knew that he had created his lifework. And so, he found a modicum of contentment in using the blade to behead his beloved's murderer, then ripping the bloody weapon through his own entrails.

Subsequently, a Yang-spirit, attracted by the powerful *yugen* of the blade, bound itself to the sword. Sensing the powerful psychic impressions left by the blood of the slain, the spirit took the name and form of Lady Yukio. Since that day, Lady Yukio has inhabited the katana and lent aid to warriors of fair aspect and skilled arm. Individuals who displease the spirit find that the blade turns on them in the midst of battle, while ones upon whom the spirit bestows favor find themselves capable of prodigious feats of swordplay.

Habitat: Her katana, which is respectfully displayed in a Sony senior vice president's corporate office — or in the characters' hands, if they have chosen Lady Yukio as a nushi.

Approaching the Spirit: Lady Yukio does not even condescend to speak with beings possessing a Charisma + Etiquette total of 5 or less. Neither does she allow her host blade to be wielded by one failing to meet the above criterion; moreover, a being seeking to impress Lady Yukio must have a Melee rating of at least 3. As a nushi, Lady Yukio can grant the power of Perfect Kata — a being wielding Yukio's blade can make a Dexterity + Melee roll (difficulty 6), and if three or more successes are scored, all opponents are so awestruck by the supplicator's swordplay that, for the duration of any combat, their defensive Dice Pools are reduced by two (from nerves and lack of confidence). However, any who take Yukio as a nushi must display correct and propitious behavior at all times.

Chih-Chiang-Fyu-Ya, the Demon Archer

Rage (P'o) 8, Gnosis (Hun) 3, Yin 5, Yang 5, Willpower 5, Chi 50

Nushi Cost: 6

Charms: Appear, Blighted Touch (on arrows), Materialize (as hideous, demonic archer — Str 5, Dex 5, Sta 5, Alertness 3, Archery 6, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, 8 Health Levels, Bow: Str + 1, Claws: Str + 1, Chi Cost 27), Re-form, Spirit Away, Tracking

Image: Chih-Chiang-Fyu-Ya appears as an eight-foot-tall, monstrous demon with a fanged mouth, tusks, cloven hooves and elephant ears.

History: The demon Chih-Chiang-Fyu-Ya has been a scourge of the spirit worlds since the Second Age. Formerly kept in line by the August Personage of Jade, he now stalks the worlds beyond the Wall as a masterless *ronin*. The demon, in keeping with his nature, is bloodthirsty and sadistic, and he willingly serves vampires and spirit lords in exchange for blood and the prospect of taking souls to torment.

Habitat: Chih-Chiang-Fyu-Ya roams the Yin, Yang and Yomi Worlds indiscriminately, serving powerful spirit lords as a punisher and "bounty hunter."

Approaching the Spirit: Chih-Chiang-Fyu-Ya is foul-tempered and cruel; beings who seek to make use of his services would be well advised to keep this fact in mind. In exchange for services, Chih-Chiang-Fyu-Ya demands either human sacrifices or acts of violence directed at a target of his choosing. As a nushi, the demon can invest a worshiper with Perfect Aim, which provides two extra dice to any missile attack made. However, as a condition of service, Chih-Chiang-Fyu-Ya insists that supplicators never leave a fight without drawing blood.

Raiden, Duke of Thunder

Rage (P'o) 9, Gnosis (Hun) 8, Yin 2, Yang 9, Willpower 7, Chi 80

Nushi Cost: 8

Charms: Appear, Armor (appears as samurai armor), Control Electrical Systems, Create Wind, Dragon Sight, Influence, Lightning Bolts, Materialize (as red-skinned samurai warrior — Str 8, Dex 6, Sta 8, Alertness 6, Dodge 5, Martial Arts 5, Melee 6, 10 Health Levels, Katana: Str + 3, Chi Cost 41), Re-form, Short Out

Image: Raiden is a formidable figure — a 10-foot-tall, red-skinned samurai warrior of old, clad in black armor that crackles with electricity. He wields a katana that sparks and crackles similarly to his armor. He is bearded, and his laugh is a booming roar.

History: Formerly a great spirit duke of Yang, Raiden lost his post during the Fourth Age. Now, like many other spirits, the ex-noble roams about aimlessly, causing havoc and waiting for the Sixth Age to give him a purpose once more. He tries to act honorably, in hopes that the August Personage will notice him and restore him to power; unfortunately, his impulsive actions often harm the very people Raiden tries to help.

Habitat: Raiden haunts the stormy reaches of the Yang World, but he occasionally descends into the Middle Kingdom during violent storms. He loves to "surf" the winds of typhoons.

Approaching the Spirit: Like his element, Raiden is violent and blustery. Beings seeking favors from Raiden must always agree to serve as vassals in one of Raiden's schemes. As a nushi, Raiden can temporarily endow a supplicator with his Create Wind and Lightning Bolts Charms, but each use of these Charms costs the supplicator a point of Willpower. All who take Raiden as a nushi must swear some form of oath to the spirit.

Ghosts: The Restless Dead

By and large, the common folk of the Middle Kingdom see little difference between the spirits of the dead and the spirits of the world. Most folks conversant with the Underworld, however, know that ghosts, or wraiths, are dead people who have become stuck between cycles of reincarnation. Their passions are such that they remain in limbo, sometimes for millennia. There, they try to finish up their business in the Middle Kingdom or to seek sanctuary from whatever lies beyond.

Wraiths are insubstantial and cannot be harmed or even perceived except through Chi magics. They exhibit a wide range of supernatural senses, but can generally affect the physical plane only through a possessed host. Some, however, have strong psychokinetic abilities, and many even take on insubstantial form in haunted places. Ghosts seem unfettered by distance or material obstacles, but are restricted by the Wall.

Wraiths are rarely encountered outside the areas they frequented in life and are very possessive of their old belongings. The best way to cope with a wraith is to leave it to its own affairs. Failing that course, try to locate one of its old possessions. Threaten to destroy the object, or destroy it outright. Theories suggest that the psychic shock should annihilate the spirit.

THE DEAD OF THE JADE KINGDOM

The ghosts of east Asia are united under the benevolent rule of Yu Huang, First Sovereign Emperor of the Dead, Lord of Hell and the Yellow Springs, and Vanquisher of the Yama King Lung Wang. Flanked by his loyal Immortal Guardsmen, the Emperor provides stability and guidance for the souls of mortals from Zhongguo, as well as the occupied territories of Nippon, Mongolia, Korea and Tibet. His armies defend these souls against the aggression of the barbaric Empire of Iron, whose troops mass even now beyond the Great Wall, and against the demons and pirates of the great rivers. His Hell provides punishment for those souls who are wicked and rebel against the laws of the Empire, and his four Ministries provide the structure and policies to guide the many Families of the Empire through eternity. His ministers mete out justice and keep the peace, maintaining prosperity throughout the realm.

Any talk of rebellion against Yu Huang is, of course, treasonous and inaccurate. While certain misguided rebels may point to the so-called "Great Revolts" that have threatened the stability of the Empire over the millennia, the fact that the Emperor remains firmly in the seat of power indicates clearly that he maintains the Mandate of Heaven to rule. In an effort to discredit Yu Huang, some rebels have even gone so far as to insinuate (falsely!) that our Emperor has, in fact, been replaced by the Yama King Lung Wang, and that a demon wears his guise and sits on his throne. The prosperity of the Yellow Springs proclaims this a vicious lie, however, and any ghosts heard propagating such slanderous rumors should be reported to the local branch of the Protectorate of the Prosperous Realm.

— Wu Chow-Yun, Imperial Censor

INDIVIDUAL WRAITHS

Just like Kuei-jin, each citizen of the Jade Empire has two halves to his soul: the Hun and P'o. The Hun is the higher soul, concerned with abstract thought and philosophy, and it is normally the Hun that controls the ghostly body each wraith possesses. The P'o, on the other hand, is earthy and sensual, concerned only with duties and Hungers. It is considered a great shame to allow one's P'o to gain any influence over one's actions, though there are some wraiths who strive for balance between the Hun and P'o. Most, however, decorously strive to subdue their P'o and to follow the dictates of Hun instead.

FAMILIES

The vast majority of citizens of the Yellow Springs are adopted into ghostly Families, which, not surprisingly, consist of families of ghosts that have watched over their descendants for centuries. Occasionally, exceptional wraiths with no Family affiliation are adopted by an established Family; less frequently, wraiths found new Families.

A Family serves as both a support mechanism and a political policy for the wraiths it comprises. Each Family has a political agenda and seeks to place its members in ever-more-elevated ranks within the four Ministries. The higher a member of a Family rises, the more prestige and power the Family has, and the more of its members are accepted into Ministry ranks.

At the same time, however, a Family is a social construct to provide a "home" and support for the Restless Dead. A ghost's rank within her Family is a combination of her actual age and her apparent age when she died, as well as her importance in the Empire, and each Family has a clearly delineated hierarchy. A Family provides a place for each of its members in an uncertain afterlife, and, in return, each member works to support and advance the Family as best he can.

The Families often interfere with their living — and unliving — descendants. It is the veneration of the living (and the consistent sacrifice of items that become relics) that enriches and sustains a ghostly Family, after all. Thus, it is in each Family's best interest to help its earthly representatives. This cross-Wall cooperation extends to Kuei-jin as well, who can be far more effective purveyors of a Family's agenda than mere mortals can. In exchange, members of a Kuei-jin's Family (for vampires are occasionally adopted) act as intermediaries for the vampire with powers in the Yin World. Yu Huang, the Ministers of the Dead and other dwellers in the Yin World often have direct imperatives for Kuei-jin, and in such cases it falls to members of the vampire's wraith Family to pass along the greater power's wishes.

POWERS AND POTENTATES

The Empire of Yu Huang, which functions on a Legalist model, is administered by four Ministries. They are:

- The Jade Censors, who tax souls and relics. The Jade Censor, who runs the Ministry, is Hu Jin.
- The Judges of the Dead, who maintain the laws of the Empire and sentence criminals to Feng-Tu (Hell). Li Gao is the head Judge.
- The Protectors of the Prosperous Realm, who serve as an internal intelligence community for the Empire. They ensure loyalty and happiness among the populace. Fan Wushang, the Emperor's oldest advisor, leads the Protectors.
- The Military, which comprises almost all of the armed forces of the Jade Empire. Peng Xin is the supreme commander of the Emperor's forces.

The remainder of the Empire's military consists of the Immortal Guard, eerily solid and brightly colored wraiths created from the souls of Qin Shihuang's most loyal mortal soldiers and the thousands of terra cotta statues who lined the First Emperor's tomb. While the Guard's numbers have slowly diminished over the centuries, their power and legend are both still formidable.

HUNGRY GHOSTS

Sometimes, just the P'o of a dead person is left in the Underworld. The Hun goes on to its reward, leaving behind the animalistic, mechanistic half of the person's spirit. These half-wraiths are called *kuei*, or hungry ghosts, and they are a peril to both the living and the dead. Out of balance with their own natures, they destroy and devour incessantly. Occasionally a *kuei* can be harnessed and trained, *a la* a Stygian barghest, to act as a hound. This practice is fraught with peril, however; usually, packs of *kuei* are hunted down and destroyed or forged into cheap building materials.

Ironically, the living have more power to affect *kuei* than do the dead. Blood and spit both wreak havoc on a *kuei*, assuming a would-be exorcist can actually hit his target. An-

other tactic for the living is to place amulets of jade on the corpse from which the *kuei* has sprung. Assuming the *kuei* has returned home to rest (as such ghosts often do), this practice imprisons the hungry ghost inside its own corpse until such time as it fades into Oblivion.

Kuei-jin know this well; before their Second Breath, they themselves are essentially *kuei*. Souls marked to become Kuei-jin, but who lack the strength to claw through the Wall and reinhabit their bodies, typically become *kuei* instead.

Normal wraiths who are Moliated into hound form and muzzled into obedience are called *kuei-go*, for they are like true *kuei* in many respects. *Kuei-go* are feared and hated, and their keepers (who dwell primarily in Hell) are social outcasts as a result. *Kuei-go* are usually kept in packs, beaten and starved of Pathos. When released, they hunt down their prey mercilessly, feeding on the fear and pain of their victims. Occasionally, *kuei-go* packs escape and terrorize a section of countryside; in these cases, it can take a detachment of Imperial Guards to restore the peace.

Each wears a special muzzle that keeps the *kuei-go* docile. Should the muzzle snap or be broken, the *kuei-go* either reassumes its original demeanor or goes completely feral, with terrifying results. Even with the muzzle in place, a *kuei-go* obeys only its trainer and the wraith who holds its leash. Little wonder, then, that both *kuei-go* and their trainers are loathed throughout the Empire.

Citizens of the Empire

Soldier of the Emperor

Soldiers enjoy tremendous prestige in the Jade Empire, as they defend the Empire against demons, Spectres and other invaders. Most soldiers fall into ranks and stay there, sometimes maintaining the same rank and title for hundreds (or thousands) of years. Doggedly loyal to their superior officers, soldiers of the Imperial Military rarely mutiny, though some have been known to set up independent fiefdoms in the field, far from the watchful eye of the other Ministries.

The average soldier is male and has been dead at least a century. Younger soldiers are often prevented from engaging invaders of the Yellow Springs, as the Emperor's generals fear (rightly) the consequences of having untested troops meet potential intruders. In most cases, a soldier is armed and armored with White Jade and bears a breastplate, helmet, shield and longsword. Officers carry more powerful weapons, often swords imbued with Arcanoi or even relic firearms.

Officers of the Imperial Military routinely have their commands obeyed without question, at least by soldiers whom they consider to be inferiors. Thus, if a Kuei-jin can manage to convince a troop of Imperial Soldiers of his mandate to assume command, they obey him as if his orders had come from the Emperor himself.

Traits: Rage (P'o) 6, Gnosis (Hun) 3, Willpower 6, Yin 7, Yang 0, Pathos/Chi (Yin) 25*

Charms: Armor, Dragon Sight, Materialize

* For Storytellers using **Wraith: The Oblivion**, feel free to substitute the Pathos/Arcanoi rules therein for

the simplified rules presented here.

Bureaucrats of the Jade Palace

The Ministers who inhabit the halls and courtyards of the Emperor's Tempest-shrouded Palace are a special breed, the most effective connivers and bureaucrats in the entire Empire. Each is the epitome of his particular ministry and oversees vast numbers of faceless clerks, inspectors, judges and grunt troops doomed by incompetence to an eternity in the provinces. Neither is there any abundance of humility among these ghosts, each of whom aspires to lead her particular ministry.

Any ghost who has received posting to the marvelous, terrible palace of Yu Huang's fevered dreams is among the very best in his Ministry. A Minister assigned to the Palace is dedicated, ruthless and endlessly experienced at the deadly political dances of the Ministries. Ministers at this level have one interest: advancement for themselves. They are as likely to turn in intruders as they are to attempt to use an interloper on the Palace grounds to their own advantage. The lone certainty is that one never finds a Jade Palace bureaucrat willing to help another soul out of the goodness of his heart.

Traits: Rage (P'o) 2, Gnosis (Hun) 6, Yin 8, Yang 0, Willpower 5, Pathos/Chi (Yin) 20

Powers: Blighted Touch, Dragon Sight, Influence, Possession

Demon Jailer

Form follows function in Yu Huang's Hell. The jailers, torturers and taskmasters of Hell have all used the ghostly power Moliate to fashion themselves into demons out of legend. While their spirits are still ones of Restless souls, their faces and bodies reflect the worst that the Yomi World has to offer. Horns, fangs, claws, vestigial wings, tentacles, rubbery Corpora and other abominable transformations abound, all the better to horrify the prisoners.

Most of the jailers (as distinguished from the artisans) of Hell have come from the ranks of the prisoners themselves, and all are thoroughly terrified of going back. As such, they make sure to be as brutal as possible to the hapless souls in their charge, the better to distinguish themselves as a superior to the ruck and run of prisoners. Their sadism is motivated by fear: fear of returning to the ranks of the imprisoned, fear of being forged into White Jade, and most of all, fear of being guarded by a soul they once guarded — and punished — themselves.

Traits: Rage (P'o) 7, Gnosis (Hun) 5, Willpower 6, Yin 8, Yang 0, Pathos/Chi (Yin) 30

Charms: Armor, Dragon Sight, Materialize, Shapeshift, Spirit Away, Tracking

(This template can also be used to represent a typical Spectre from the Yomi World. If used in this manner, the Hun rating should be dropped entirely.)

Hell

On the periphery of the Yomi World, the Emperor maintains a Hell filled with miscreants and criminals. Hell is ruled by Ti-Tsang Wang and Yen-lo Wang, with able assistance from a host of torturers, demons and other creatures all loyal to the Emperor. Ti Yu, Hell's capital city, is the primary site for the manufacture of White Jade.

Contained within Hell are innumerable smaller Hells, each essentially a torture chamber for imprisoned souls. Jailers — wraiths who have reshaped themselves through Arcanoi into the guise of demons — use these lesser Hells to break the spirits of prisoners and prepare them for transformation into White Jade. In the meantime, many of the elite from the Emperor's Court travel through the Tempest to Ti Yu to watch and wager on the torments of the damned.

The Yama Kings also have dominions and Hells tucked away within the Tempest, but such realms are hidden from the eyes of Yu Huang's servants. Servants of the Yama Kings still dwell in the Empire, there making obeisance to the Emperor, but secretly serving the ones who were here before Qin Shihuang (as the Emperor was known in life) died and who hope to be here long after he is gone.

Oblivion

Many wraiths in the Empire do not fear and hate Oblivion the way their Stygian counterparts do. Oblivion is seen as the gate to the next incarnation, not an absolute end. While there is a steady trickle of souls who seek paradise, or P'eng Lai, this practice is frowned upon by the Imperial government. Instead, wraiths are encouraged to spend as long as they can in the Underworld, for the greater glory of their Families and the Empire.

The Tempest

The eternal storm of the Underworld, the Tempest, has surged and screamed beneath the Shadowlands for centuries. The Tempest marks the border between the Yin and Yomi Worlds. Strange creatures roam its storm-tossed depths to waylay travelers and occasionally burst forth into the Shadowlands. Deep within the storm's heart is the infinite madness of the Labyrinth, home to demons, Spectres and the mouth of Yomi itself. Whirling memories and hungry ghosts flutter on the winds of the storm, which can be heard screaming the names of every soul lost there.

There are safe paths through the Tempest, called dragon lines of Yin, or Byways. They manifest in any number of forms, from dirt roads to railway lines to canals, all floating amid the emptiness of the storm. Some veer dangerously close to the lands of the living and empty into places in the Middle Kingdom where clever Kuei-jin can find and access them.

Jade

As a substance, jade is among the most magical known. It has the power to lay wandering ghosts to rest and can be crafted into any number of magical artifacts. Furthermore, jade can keep the halves of the soul from separating, meaning that mortals who are buried with enough jade often become wraiths instead of passing on to their eternal reward.

However, it is on that other side of the Wall that the real power of jade (there called True Jade) becomes apparent. This material is as strong as Stygian steel, yet easier to work, and it has other properties as well. Amulets of True Jade can help a wraith (or Kuei-jin) to subdue his unruly P'o or to store Pathos (emotional energy similar to Chi) for later use. True Jade weapons can shear through items of the lesser White Jade, and they also cause aggravated damage to wraiths when they connect.

White Jade is forged, like soul-steel, from the bodies of

unfortunate wraiths. It is more common and more utilitarian than True Jade and, thus, is often used for construction, weapons and the like. Unlike True Jade, which is a luminous green, White Jade is milky and pale, and it is instantly recognizable as such.

Powers of Wraiths

• Wraiths, with rare exceptions, are completely invisible and intangible. While Kuei-jin can often see wraiths, few others can, and unless the wraith chooses to materialize in the Middle Kingdom (an arduous task), the ghost cannot be touched physically. On the other hand, any reasonably forceful contact with the area where a wraith is "standing" inflicts one Chi point of damage on the wraith and disrupts the ghost's physical state for a number of turns equal to the wraith's Willpower rating. During this time, the wraith can suffer no further physical damage (except from another ghost). Ghosts willing to risk this level of injury can walk through doors, walls and other physical objects.

• A ghost's vision is sharper than a mortal's. Wraiths have the ability to see the auras of the living (which, incidentally, lets them pick Kuei-jin out of a crowd). Furthermore, death has sharpened their senses to a preternatural degree: A ghost can hear whispers across a crowded room or scent fear in a mortal.

• Wraiths feed on raw emotion. Usually, positive emotions fuel the wraith's Hun, while strong negative feelings give strength to the wraith's P'o.

• Wraiths are tied to objects in the Middle Kingdom called Fetters. If these items are connected or destroyed, the impact on the wraith is enormous (and extremely bad). Wraiths go to any lengths to protect their Fetters. Egged on by their P'o, desperate ghosts may even resort to violence — or worse.

• Wraiths consumed by their P'o are called Spectres. Some of them are indistinguishable from normal ghosts, others are patently creatures of evil. Most Spectres serve one Yama King or another.

• Wraiths have unique powers called Arcanoi, though, for purposes of this book, Arcanoi can be duplicated by spirit Charms. Charms common to wraiths are: Dragon Sight, Materialize, Possession, Influence, Mind Speech and Shapeshift. Yu Huang's subjects have developed six Arcanoi of their own: Way of the Scholar, which enables a wraith to overmaster another's Hun; Way of the Artisan, which allows a wraith to work with White Jade; Way of the Farmer, which teaches a wraith to master the P'o; Way of the Merchant, which permits a wraith to interchange Pathos with others; Way of the Soul, which also works to tame the P'o; and Chains of the Emperor, which is known only to the Immortal Guard.

• Certain rare ghosts can drain — or restore — Chi with a touch. As one might expect, this ability leads to all sorts of complications.

Beasts of Yin

As the Empire's troops push further and further into the hinterlands, more and more reports come back of legendary Beasts of Yin. The tales come from Bangkok, Tibet, Nippon and occasionally even from the road to Feng-Tu, but always the details are the same. From the shadows of the Tempest come monstrous beasts in the shape of tigers, dogs and serpents, forged from bizarre metals unknown within the bounds of the Empire. On rare occasions the beasts have been known to speak, uttering prophecy or warning. On other occasions, they move silently by, and sometimes they even attack without warning.

Demon Hunters

Although the Inquisition's fires never raged through the Middle Kingdom, *shen* know to temper their forays with caution. The mortals of the Middle Kingdom have their own witch-hunters, less obtrusive but equally as lethal.

The Shih

Tracing their lineage back to the dawn of history, the mendicant order known as the Shih walks the back roads and seamy alleys of the Middle Kingdom. Since the nights of the Chou Dynasty, the Shih have sworn to protect the Middle Kingdom from greedy and rapacious *shen*.

Shih are loners; each master takes but one or two students, preferably children orphaned by evil *shen*. Students retreat into the wilderness or hidden monasteries; there, they train for 20 years to master martial arts and to learn to awaken Chi powers of their own. The mightiest of them are capable of battling *shen* face to face, though most prefer to use cleverness and misdirection against their "demon" foes.

Character Creation: Attributes: 8/6/3, Abilities: 21/12/7, Backgrounds: 6, Hun 4, P'o 0 (or, for emotionally scarred veterans, 1), Yin 4, Yang 4, Willpower 10. All Shih know Melee, Martial Arts and Occult at 4+. Additionally, through years of training, Shih have learned to focus their Chi. Shih have a total *usable* Chi Pool equal to their Chi Virtues. Most Shih have the equivalent of three dots in Chi and Soul Disciplines, though any use of these Disciplines costs a point of Willpower in addition to the listed cost. Shih "Disciplines" rarely exceed 2.

Equipment: Sword (sometimes enchanted), papers inscribed with protective calligraphy, flask of wine, casual clothes

Full information about the Shih is to appear in **Demon Hunter X**.

Strike Force Zero

In 1989, acting on information discovered during World War II, the Japanese government founded a top-secret intelligence branch dedicated to uncovering paranormal activities in the nation's midst. This group, code-named Strike Force Zero, includes agents deemed too "unorthodox" to function in more conventional intelligence branches. Although the group is still

experimental, and many government higher-ups find the agency both unnecessary and insufferable, Strike Force Zero has uncovered enough interesting information to keep it active...for now.

Strike Force Zero agents routinely receive the latest in intelligence and technology. Additionally — unbeknownst to anyone outside the agency — agents are outfitted with a variety of super-high-tech devices, including cybernetic implants and biotech.

Strike Force agents typically assemble into teams of five, dubbed Zero Teams. Ten Zero Teams (labeled A through J) currently exist. Members of a Zero Team are chosen for complementary abilities and specialties (one is the leader, one the computer expert, one the occult researcher, etc.). Rivalry between teams is fierce.

Unbeknownst to the agency, Strike Force Zero is actually a pawn of the Japanese Technocracy, which uses the group to track down and purge "reality deviants" in the Japanese Isles. The Technocracy supplies the various teams' cyberware and other accouterments that make them just "believable" enough to conform to static reality.

Character Creation: Attributes: 7/5/3, Abilities: 13/9/5, Backgrounds: 7, Hun 3, P'o 0, Yin 2, Yang 4, Willpower 7

Equipment: Various gadgets (see below), business suit, field gear, sunglasses, flashy car

Common Gadgets

• **Finger Needler:** This bionic appendage replaces the agent's hand (+1 Strength for punching and gripping). It houses a gun allowing the agent to fire high-velocity magnetic needles from her fingers (Diff. 6, Damage 5, Rate 4, Clip 16, Range 40). Theoretically, the weapon can use silver alloy needles if the agent suspects the presence of creatures vulnerable to such ammunition.

• **"Ghost Grenade":** These devices are experimental and extremely rare. The agent hurls the grenade at a site she believes to be "haunted," then makes an Intelligence + Science roll (difficulty 8). Success activates the grenade, which explodes in a corona of hissing, lunar sparks. Wraiths and Spectres caught in the coruscation lose one Chi point per success.

• **Kirlian Visor:** This visor provides low-light vision, but in addition allows agents to make a Perception + Science roll (difficulty 8) to detect the presence of supernatural energies (high concentrations of Chi, Gnosis, Pathos, Quintessence, etc.) or beings storing significant quantities of those energies. Such energies manifest as weird, ghostly auras.

• **Subdermal Armor:** These polymer implants, grafted under the agent's skin, provide Class Two body armor.

Full information about Strike Force Zero is to appear in **Demon Hunter X**.

Other Denizens of the Middle Kingdom

Bakemono

Bakemono, or "fomori" as many Europeans call them, are humans who have succumbed to the corruption of the Yama Kings or their minions. The supernatural change from human to bakemono typically causes physical transformations in the person. He becomes an unclean reflection of what he once was, his personality warped as well. Most often, these wretches have obvious deformities, but some bakemono can hide the changes within their bodies, thus allowing them to lurk among humanity and spread their corruption. Ones who cannot hide their malformed bodies often live deep within shantytowns, prison camps and the wilderness, where they resort to cannibalism as

a means of survival.

A bakemono is created when a demon from the Yomi World possesses a living body. Most often, it is a human, but sometimes an animal can become a bakemono. Normally, the victim's personality and consciousness remain intact, but are fused with the malevolent disposition of the demon. If the person was already corrupt and evil, the resulting bakemono is a truly psychotic creature, uncontrollable and unrelenting in its pursuits.

Bakemono despise Kuei-jin, for the two were enemies during the Third Age. Unfortunately for the Kuei-jin, bakemono are more numerous than ever, as the Fifth Age's corruption, squalor and misery allow the Yama Kings their pick of souls on which to feed. Bakemono act as the Yama Kings' agents in the Middle Kingdom, and many Kuei-jin first learn of a Yama King's plot upon being overwhelmed by hordes of shrieking, gibbering bakemono.

The following statistics are a simple guideline for bakemono creation. The Storyteller is encouraged to create new powers for bakemono in order to make them more personalized.

Attributes: Strength 3+, Dexterity 2+, Stamina 3+, Charisma 1+, Manipulation 1+, Appearance varies, Perception 2+, Intelligence 1+, Wits 2+

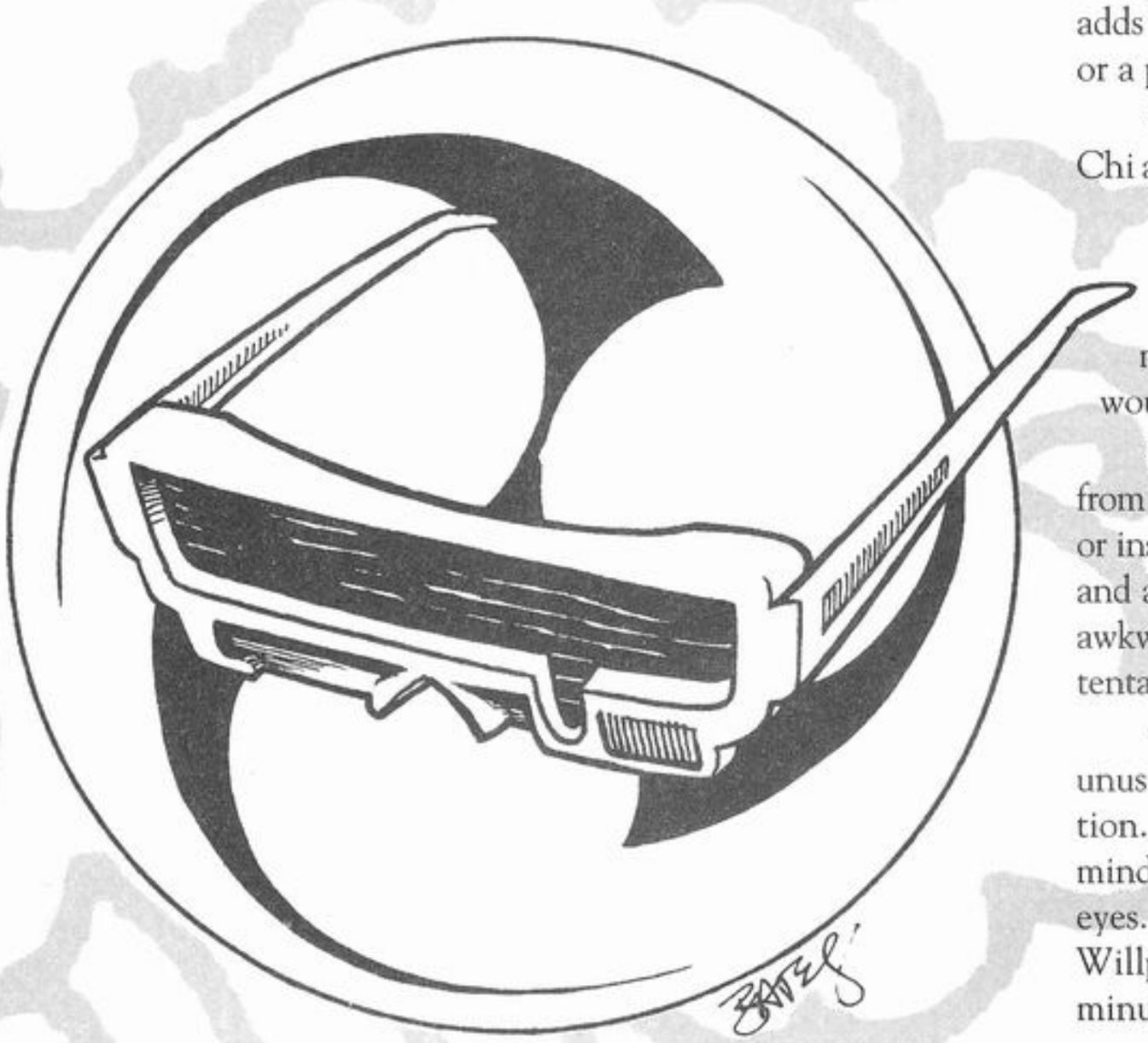
Abilities (typical): Alertness 1, Athletics 1+, Brawl 1-3, Dodge 1, Firearms 1+, Intimidation 2+, Melee 1+, Occult 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 2+, Survival 2

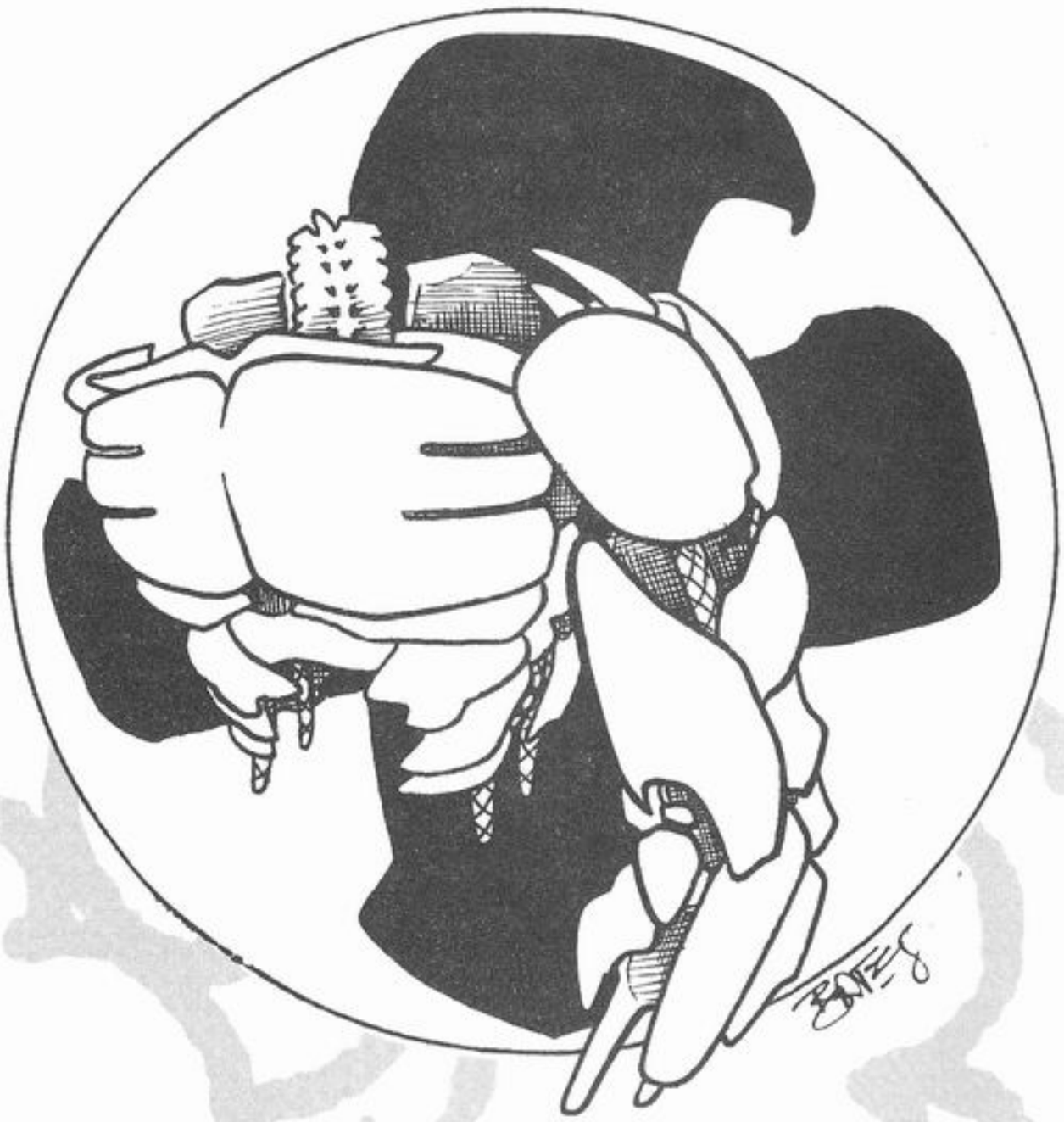
Powers: All bakemono have one or more special abilities, "Gifts" from the Yama Kings that help the demons in their corruptive endeavors. See the list below for examples, or feel free to make up your own.

Virtues: Hun 0, P'o 5, Yin 3-5 (depending on which Yama King the bakemono serves), Yang 3-5 (depending on which Yama King the bakemono serves), Chi Pool 10

Willpower: 4

Equipment: Handgun, knife, heavy clothing





Bakemono Powers/Characteristics

Most bakemono have three special powers; some have more and some have fewer. The most powerful bakemono, often the leaders through brute strength, are considerably deadlier than their brethren. More often than not, though, the more powerful bakemono suffer side effects that are debilitating in the long term. While these detrimental conditions exist (such as a body that's rotting from the inside, or a form that mutates more as the days go on, leading to eventual death), they aren't always a factor. Some take place over the course of months, even years.

- **Armor** — The bakemono has thick, scaly skin, which adds three dice to all soak rolls. This flesh is often mottled gray or a pale green.
- **Berserker** — The bakemono has five points of Demon Chi and can use them just as Kuei-jin do. The bakemono is also susceptible to fire nature.
- **Claws and Fangs** — The bakemono has natural weapons to employ against his enemies and victims. He may attack using claw and bite maneuvers, and such wounds are aggravated damage.
- **Extra Limbs** — The bakemono has extra limbs growing from his body. These normally resemble tentacles, tendril clusters or insectlike arms. These limbs are useful for feinting maneuvers and adding to the confusion in a battle, but they often grow in awkward places; an arm may grow from the side of the head, or a tentacle may sprout from the bakemono's stomach.
- **Eyes of the Thousand Hells** — The bakemono has unusual eyes that can dilate, revealing visions of Yomi's corruption. Dark images and torturous sights of damnation fill the mind of anyone unfortunate enough to gaze into the bakemono's eyes. Anyone meeting the bakemono's gaze must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) or be frozen in horror for five turns minus Wits rating, minimum of one turn. While holding a

victim in thrall this way, the bakemono can neither attack nor defend. His friends are another story.

• **Monstrous Strength** — The bakemono adds +5 to his Strength.

• **Poison Tumors** — The bakemono's skin is covered with heavy, pus-bloated blisters that erupt on hard contact. Whenever the bakemono is hit with a claw attack or is bitten, the blisters explode, spraying a powerful venom. The attacker must immediately roll to soak three levels of damage (five if biting), or suffer severe burns. Characters attacking with Melee weapons must make a Dexterity roll (difficulty 6) or suffer the same fate.

• **Quills** — The bakemono is covered with thick, heavy spines that work as armor (+2 to soak rolls) and as weapons. These quills are hooked at their tips, much like a hunter's arrow, and must be cut loose or pushed completely through the body in order to be removed. Anyone attacking the bakemono in hand-to-hand combat must make a soak roll or suffer half the damage he inflicts, as the quills sink into the attacker. This damage is aggravated. Some bakemono can actually launch the quills from their bodies, inflicting their Strength in damage.

• **Slick Skin** — The bakemono's hide excretes a thick, slippery mucus that coats its entire body. All Melee and hand-to-hand combat damage inflicted on the bakemono is reduced by half after soaking, and attempts to grab the bakemono are at a +3 difficulty.

CHIH-MEI

The "larval" form of many Kuei-jin, *chih-mei*, are feral carnivores recently returned from the dead. It is a Kuei-jin's obligation to rescue these errant children, lest they destroy themselves in their rage or become exploited by unscrupulous rivals.

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 1

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 1, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Virtues: Yin 3, Yang 3, Hun 0, P'o 5, Dharma 0

Willpower: 3

Powers: All *chih-mei* have one Demon Art (Black Wind or Demon Shintai) at 1.

DHAMPYRS

Dhampyrs, the exceedingly rare offspring of human and Cathayan parents, play lesser though still important roles in Kuei-jin society. They often serve as liaisons between Kuei-jin and mortals, as daylight minions and free agents. A few, disgusted by their heritage, become demon hunters.

Dhampyrs are mortal, but typically live hundreds of years. As the closest thing to "family" a Kuei-jin can possess, dhampyrs are typically valued greatly by their "parent" vampire. Because dhampyrs can breed with humans, certain *wu* gain surrogate mortal families, which the vampires protect (and exploit). The child of a dhampyr and a human is fully mortal, though often possessed of strange *joss*.

Character Creation: Attributes: 7/5/3, Abilities: 13/9/5, Backgrounds: 5, Hun 3, P'o 3, Yin 2, Yang 4, Willpower 6

Powers: Dhampyrs can use Demon Chi as if they were Kuei-jin. A few manage to master a Shintai Discipline or two, raising such powers to 1 or 2. However, because they are half Kuei-jin, they are susceptible to fire and wave (not shadow) nature.

ARTIFACTS

Middle Kingdom mythology speaks of many wondrous items, holdovers from the days of gods and dragons. These artifacts were made by the spirits themselves and used by mighty *shen* to battle demonic forces. Tales still speak of the sorcerous weapons used by the founders of the Five Courts, of pearls that drank souls and fans that called forth typhoons.

Most of these artifacts are lost, destroyed or depleted, casualties of the Fifth Age. A few are still held by the Hundred Corpse Families of the Kuei-jin and passed down from worthy scion to worthy scion. Others are now in the hands of the Yama Kings and their *akuma* minions, or they are simply lost in forgotten places and waiting for a *shen* to find them.

The following artifacts are a sample of the myriad tools used in the Middle Kingdom's first nights. Only *shen* can wield them. Kuei-jin can purchase artifacts with the Magic Artifact Background (see the Character Creation chapter); the descriptions below provide the point costs for the various devices.

IDEOGRAPH CHARMS

Level One Artifact

These charms, bearing pictographs of the ancient *kaja* script, may be made of silk, jade or even paper; jade, however, tends to keep the best. There are several varieties of these charms; some notable ones are:

• **Fire Watch:** This charm, placed on an item or within a room (no more than about 25 feet by 25 feet), wards flame. While the fire watch charm is in use, normal fires refuse to light here, and the difficulty to soak magical or superhot (propane torch, etc.) fires is reduced by one. This talisman works only on inanimate objects.

• **Harmony:** The harmony charm must be activated with a point of Chi. So long as the vampire remains calm and makes no threatening or offensive statements or actions, all in the

vicinity must roll Willpower or P'o (whichever is higher; difficulty 6) to act aggressively toward the vampire. The power lasts for a scene.

• **Joss:** The *joss* charm must be activated with a point of Chi. Once per story, the bearer may reroll a single die (attempting to change a botch into a success, etc.).

Golden Talons

Level Two Artifact

These 10 spikes of gold bear *kaja* characters and fit on most fingers. Upon activation (and the expenditure of a point of Yang Chi), the spikes stiffen into diamondlike claws. The claws inflict Str + 2 aggravated damage and reduce the difficulties of all climbing rolls by one. Once activated, the talons maintain their magical properties for a scene.

Mandarin Mask

Level Three Artifact

Kuei-jin mandarins used this featureless jade mask to check on their herds. The user may activate the mask by spending a point of Chi. Upon activation, the Kuei-jin may designate a particular "caste" of mortal he wishes to disguise himself as, making a Wits + Etiquette roll (difficulty 7) to emulate the bearing and mannerisms of that particular station. Success causes the wearer to appear as a fairly nondescript mortal of the "caste" (businessperson, beggar, tong soldier, etc.) desired. During use, the vampire's aura appears to be that of a mortal; to detect the Kuei-jin's true nature, an onlooker must use an appropriate power (Chi Sight, Aura Perception, etc.), then make a Perception + Alertness roll and score more successes than the Kuei-jin scored on the Wits + Etiquette roll.

The mask does not allow duplication of a specific individual. The magic lasts for one hour, after which it must be replenished by Chi expenditure.

Wayang Sash

Level Four Artifact

This sash is woven in the style of Indonesian garments. By investing the sash with two points of Yin Chi, the vampire can cause the garment to animate, resembling a shadowy, dragonlike creature from the *wayang* puppet theatre. This creature is sentient, can communicate with its owner (in a sibilant whisper) and makes an excellent spy. It is absolutely silent and can blend, chameleonlike, with any shadow. The two-point Yin expenditure allows the creature to act for a scene; each additional scene of action requires an additional Yin point to be spent. Upon cessation of animation, the creature collapses into a sash once more.

The creature has ratings of 3 in all Attributes, a Brawl rating of 3, a Dodge rating of 3, and a Stealth rating of 5. It bites for Str + 2 (normal) damage and can constrict a foe in its coils for Str damage per round. It has seven Health Levels and, if "slain," collapses into a useless pile of rent cloth, its magic forever spent. If partially damaged, it can be "rewoven" by its owner; each Health Level healed requires its owner to invest a point of Yin Chi and make a Dexterity + Crafts (Sewing) roll (difficulty 7).

Star Shower Blade

Level Five Artifact

This wondrous weapon appears in many tales of Japan's Kuei-jin. Only a few heroes among the Bishamon are known to possess one, though. The Star Shower Blade appears as a triple-bladed weapon; a user grips it in the middle and whirls it at victims. It may be used in Melee (difficulty 6, Str + 3 damage). By spending a point of Chi, the weapon may be "charged" for a scene. A charged weapon crackles with Chi energy and inflicts aggravated damage.

When charged, the weapon may be thrown to a range of 25 yards per point of its wielder's Strength. When thrown, the weapon automatically homes in on its target (difficulty 6, no matter the target's range). A thrown Star Shower Blade inflicts Str + 3 damage. Alternatively, while the weapon is in flight, the wielder can utter a command word to split the weapon into three edged shards. Each of these shards may strike separately (difficulty 6, Str damage) at the same or different targets. Best of all, once thrown (hit or miss), the weapon (or its pieces) boomerangs back to the wielder's hand, instantly re-forming into the Star Shower Blade.

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KINDRED OF THE EAST

NAME:
PLAYER:
CHRONICLE:

NATURE:
P'O NATURE:
DEMEANOR:

BALANCE:
DIRECTION:
WU:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ●○○○○○
Dexterity ●○○○○○
Stamina ●○○○○○

SOCIAL

Charisma ●○○○○○
Manipulation ●○○○○○
Appearance ●○○○○○

MENTAL

Perception ●○○○○○
Intelligence ●○○○○○
Wits ●○○○○○

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ○○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○○

SKILLS

Animal Ken ○○○○○○
Crafts ○○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○○
Martial Arts ○○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○○
Performance ○○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○○
Survival ○○○○○○

KNOWLEDGES

Computer ○○○○○○
Finance ○○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○○
Law ○○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○○
Rituals ○○○○○○
Science ○○○○○○

ADVANTAGES

DISCIPLINES

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BACKGROUNDS

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RITES

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XIN CHI

XANG CHI

DHARMA _____

HUN
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WILLPOWER
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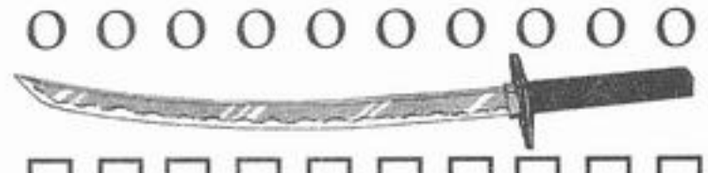

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DEMON CHI

HEALTH

Bruised		☐
Hurt	-1	☐
Injured	-1	☐
Wounded	-2	☐
Mauled	-2	☐
Crippled	-5	☐
Incapacitated		☐

IMBALANCE

_____
_____
_____
_____

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