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## WAITING FOR THE QUEEN/ TEA AT MIDNIGHT

JONATHAN WALTON  
with JOSHUA KASHINSKY

*A short game for two players, reverse engineered from early text-based computer games of the “get lamp” variety.*

I knew all along that I didn’t want *PUSH* to resemble most roleplaying publications and this meant going with a very non-traditional cover image. No big battle scenes. No cheesecake. No iconic figures striking dramatic poses. No monsters. What about just a girl and a boy, meeting in some awkward fashion?

When I commissioned the cover from Clio, I was writing an article on “arthouse wuxia,” an emerging sub-genre of Chinese filmmaking (*Ashes of Time*, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, *Hero*, *House of Flying Daggers*, *The Promise*) and co-writing a game for emulating those movies with Shreyas. At that same time, Shreyas, Josh, Thomas Robertson, and I were collaborating on a “young adult wuxia novel” and I was hoping to use excerpts of our work-in-progress as examples in the game. But the game never materialized.

Nevertheless, the cover depicts a meeting between two of the novel’s main characters, Ruhi Nankachema and Gai Zheng, on the steps of Zu Mountain. Gai Zheng has just lost a bucket.

Even though it seems pretty appropriate for this journal’s cover to have nothing at all to do with the contents, considering all the other wacky problems and delays we’ve had getting it published,

**VG:** These computer games are generally called “interactive fiction,” and there is actually a rather small but very active community still writing them. Many interesting parallels between this community and the indie RPG scene can be drawn, and both communities could benefit from more interaction.

**BR:** I like cheesecake. I like RPGs. But the two don’t always go together like chocolate and peanut butter. Unless your game is specifically about sex (few are, which is too bad), you have to ask why you are using sex to sell it. Second, most RPG cheesecake is horribly, appallingly bad cheesecake. I love me some Betty Page, but what graces the cover of most RPG books is embarrassing not because it is sexual, but because it’s adolescent, poorly executed, and puerile.

part of me just wasn't willing to let it go. So I wrote a neat little two-player game based on the scene from the cover.

### OVERVIEW

This is a short game for two players which builds on two earlier designs, *Heavenly Kingdoms* ("the game of drunken Taiping exegesis!") and *Kazekami Kyoko Kills Kublai Khan*.

Each player takes on the role of a single character, either Ruhi Nankachema (warrior maiden from the Country of Daughters) or Gai Zheng (determined son of a former Shaolin monk). The game takes place in two phases:

**AR:** Short can be a relative term. Give your play partner time to feel comfortable reading three pages of text aloud.

During the first phase, each player selects one of the following short passages to read aloud. These passages are small stories that will help introduce the characters. After both passages are read aloud, the players should decide who will play Chema and who will play Gai Zheng. The choice of who-plays-which-character shouldn't necessarily reflect who-read-which-passage.

**PT:** I'm on a big constraint kick right now (as you might have guessed from my previous comments), so this idea really excites me.

During the second phase, the players will verbally enact a single scene, telling the story of Gai Zheng and Chema's first meeting and trying to resolve a problematic situation that the characters confront. They do this by taking turns selecting actions from a limited list of potential options, which, in turn, describe what their character does. Performing certain actions allows the characters, in turn, to perform new types of actions. One of these "unlockable" actions (The End) brings the game to a close.

### STORY TIME

The passages for the first phase are printed below. Notice how Chema's story is about her birth and how she was named while Gai Zheng's story is about the last practice session with his father. Both these stories define their respective characters, but they are very different kinds of stories that reflect some of the differences

between the characters.

If the game is being played over email or using a chat client, players can either exchange audio recordings of these stories or simply read both passages in advance.

### **RUHI NANKACHEMA'S STORY**

It was eight days into the Lesser Cold when my Ama began screaming. Labor had begun at dawn and darkness was falling quickly. She pushed with her whole heart, but I remained unwilling to enter this world. Infatuated with the glories of the Time Before – the stars dancing in eternal twilight, the pillars of lama flame that refined souls towards their buddha nature, the glittering palaces of the Celestial Sisterhood – I clung to the hinges of the Reincarnation Gate. I was too pure, too perfect, and would not descend into a place of misery and death.

Once I was finally coaxed from the star land, my own screams quickly drowned out my Ama. The birthing women were amazed. What lungs I had! What vigor! The eight lamas in attendance blessed me, gazing deeply into my cloudy eyes, and knowing me to be a child of destiny, perhaps even a bodhisattva, a saving angel, one come to liberate all souls-in-tyranny with my transcendent compassion. The lamas didn't dare to name me. This was too important for rural clerics. And so I was called the Blessed Child for the first month of my life, until my Ama regained her strength and could journey to the capitol.

The Queen Mother's city is quite distant from my small mountain village. My Ama, strong as a she-yak though she was, desired for me to be named quickly, child of destiny or not. Then she could return home in time to harvest the winter squash.

Along the road to the capitol lies Rambulatta, the holiest lamary outside of the Western Paradise. My Ama stopped there and offered me up to the Abbott. Diligently, she recited the circumstances

**MT:** I'm beginning to suspect that Jonathan and Shreyas conspired to create games with yaks. In fact, "tea at midnight" is code for "The *bos grunniens* revolution is at hand!" Beware their cunning wiles.

of my birth, watched them examine me for signs of a developed buddha nature, and asked if, indeed, I could only be named by a grand lama of the temple mount. The Abbott looked upon my Ama with his sparkling, childlike eyes, saw the weariness that remained from a difficult birth, and took compassion on her.

“Though your path does indeed lead to the Queen’s city,” he said, “it will not keep you there for long. Once you pass under the Eastern Gate, turn and question the next person to enter. They will name the child and you will be free to return to your squash.”

Thanking the lamas for their indulgence, my Ama proceeded upon her journey. She had not been to the Queen’s city since she was a young woman, so my Ama found it a bit tragic to stand just inside of the Eastern Gate, watching patiently for the next traveler, unable to catch a glimpse of the shining alabaster temple of the Queen Mother and the Sisterhood-in-Life. But she thought of her current lovers, Yisso and Ache, trying to clumsily manage the harvest without her. She sighed. No, the sooner she returned home, the better.

Just then, my Ama heard the sound of a dozen yak-horn trumpets, signaling the arrival of some important personage. Gazing into the distance, she recognized the fluttering banner of the Queen herself! Her Majesty rode at the head of a victorious hunting party, returning to her city with a train of suitors, lovers, and former lovers riding at her coattails. My Ama was suddenly ashamed. How could she ask the Queen herself to name a peasant child, even one born under such fortunate circumstances?

However, when Her Majesty rode through the Eastern Gate and saw my Ama holding me, looking up with wonder and apprehension, the Queen Mother reigned in her horse, dismounted, and gently took me from my Ama’s arms.

“And what is the name of the newest daughter to grace those-in-life with her presence?” the Queen asked.

My Ama quickly found speech, explaining the circumstances that brought her to the capitol.

The Queen nodded sagely, but shook her head. "I am not the one who will name this child," she said.

My Ama was crestfallen. If not the Queen, who else? Perhaps I would remain nameless forever.

"There is one who rides before me," Her Majesty continued. "She scouts ahead, along my path, dispersing ghosts and demons with her radiant fury. She is our strongest vanguard and most best protector: the mountain goddess Seggenamu, White Princess of the South. Though you did not see her, it was the goddess who rode first through the Eastern Gate, exhausted from protecting me on the hunt and happy to return to her temple. Come with me. We will visit her and beseech Seggenamu to name my youngest warrior."

And so the Queen Mother and my Ama rode side by side to the temple of the White Princess. Offering up fresh snow, a bowl of icy mountain water, and wine made from last year's winter squash, they thanked the goddess for protecting the Queen and all the Sisterhood-in-Life. Then, the Queen lifted me up above the twirling streams of incense and asked the goddess to name me, predicting that I would become the greatest warrior in ten-thousand years, bringing honor to the Sisterhood and, through them, our patron Seggenamu.

The next morning, my Ama rose from her luxurious guest room in the temple mount, attended morning prayers with the Queen, and prepared to depart for home. She was accompanied to the Eastern Gate by one of the high priests of the White Princess. The priests are Seggenamu's mortal lovers, who keep her happy between epic trysts with the gods of neighboring regions. The White Princess whispers divine secrets to them in the darkest hours of the night, amid bouts of lovemaking, and this is the source of their great wisdom.

“The young warrior’s name,” the priest said, “is Nankachema, ‘Snowflakes in Martial Array.’ Seggenamu blesses her with a strong heart and a brave destiny. I only regret that I will not live to see the glories she will bring forth into this unworthy world.”

Once I grew old enough to understand, my Ama instructed me that, upon entering any gate, I should always turn and introduce myself to the next person to pass through, for you never know when you may be followed by a goddess.

### **GAI ZHENG’S STORY** (original text by Joshua Kashinsky)

“Gai Zheng!”

The water pot on my left elbow shifted slightly, I had to lean to keep it from falling.

“Gai Zheng, where have you run off to?”

My right leg began trembling. It took all of my concentration not to drop any of the pots. I began, achingly slow, to lower them onto the railing I was perched on. If mama found me...

“Gai Zheng! How many times have I told you never to practice those forbidden teachings?”

Mama’s voice, right behind me, was a surprise. I tumbled off the railing and onto the floor. The sound of breaking ceramics was followed closely by the splash of water. I sat in an expanding pool of water, clutching my bruised knee as my mother stood glaring at me.

“Look at the mess you’ve made! You know that your baba has given all that up. It’s dangerous to practice these training methods. If anyone ever found out who your father was, we could all be killed! They could burn the inn! What do you think the women in town would say then?”

Mama kept going for a few minutes, and I accepted it silently. Father said that a true master is like a pond that does not ripple

when a stone is dropped into it. I'm not quite sure what he meant, because whenever I dropped something into our well there were always ripples. I just tried very hard not to let my face show the shame I was feeling. Mama stopped with a sigh, and told me to sweep up the broken bits of pot and mop up the water.

I was busy the rest of the day, tending to my chores. Mama's family had owned the inn for generations and, after father married her, he worked as the cook. At mealtimes it was my job to serve everyone their food and to clean up afterwards. Other times I swept the rooms and hallways. The work was hard but simple. The inn was right next to the bridge over the river, so we got a lot of different people coming through. Sometimes in the evening, I would listen to the stories of travelers. It sounded like great fun: going from place to place, having other people clean up your room and cook your food. The evenings helped compensate for the boring days, but I really lived for nighttime.

That night, as with many nights, father could not sleep. He would leave his room and stand in the courtyard, bathed in moonlight. Often, he would then move into the standard exercises of what mother called the "forbidden teachings." The lunges and kicks would take him around the yard. Soon he would advance to more complex movements, blurry circles of motion. He was no longer a tired innkeeper, he was a warrior monk of Shaolin! Even across the darkened courtyard, I could see the joy on his face.

Mama claimed his sleeplessness was because he was so full of energy. She didn't know how he spent those midnight hours. I knew that every time he slept he would dream, and every dream was filled with fire. The destruction of the temple had scarred him deeply, and he spoke of that time with a bitterness and despair I knew mama had never seen. Night was our time together, when he would speak to me of Shaolin and things that have now perished. He taught me those forbidden secrets which mama feared would destroy us, and he did so gladly.

“Gai Zheng,” he said, “You are my future. Your name means ‘to return to the proper way.’ This is your purpose. I have taught you these techniques so you can continue my legacy. What your mother says is true, to a point. If you continue to flaunt your skills, you will be identified and the hunters will come.”

I was surprised. Usually father supported me, though he never did so in front of mama. “But you told me that constant practice is the only way I will become as great as you.”

“I did tell you that, Gai Zheng, but you must only practice here, with me. Now defend yourself!”

Father picked a weed from the ground, and lunged at me. I danced back, laughing. We often played these games. I plucked some stones from the ground, and began throwing them at father. He moved his weed slightly, and the stones flew off as if parried by a sword. I picked up the broom I had used earlier, and began a slow advance. We fenced thus for what seemed like hours, father deftly evading my attacks and occasionally launching some of his own when I had overextended myself. Whenever I ran out of breath, he would stop and lecture me on Shaolin principles.

Tonight seemed different somehow. Usually father would teach one or two things, and then we would practice them. Not all were as fun as combat. Most of the time the exercises involved me holding very still for a long time or breathing in a certain way. Tonight, father was harsh, bruising me whenever I made a mistake. It was almost as if he was testing me for something. Finally he held up his hand.

“Gai Zheng, you are very dear to me. Soon, everything will change. Your mother and I will no longer be here for you. I wish I could teach you more, but there is no more time. Listen, you must follow their commands as if I had given them to you.”

“Whose commands, father? I don’t understand.”



“I know you don’t, but you will in a few days. Now, get some rest. Tomorrow you will have to get up early and go into town to replace the pots you broke.”

I sighed deeply, but returned to my room, leaving father alone in the courtyard. When I looked back, he was staring at the sky, his hands trembling. That was the last time we practiced together.

### THE SITUATION

To summarize the situation in a single sentence: Chema is waiting for the Queen; Gai Zheng is making tea at midnight.

**JH:** A double situation for two characters? Story soup!

Chema has recently arrived at Zu Shan, the temple where she will train to be a true warrior maiden. After crossing the stream at the base of the mount, Chema arrives at a large gate. It stands imposingly in front of the stone steps which lead up to the temple compound. Obeying her mother’s teachings, she sits near the gate and waits for the next person to arrive, so she can greet them and proceed up to the temple. However, no one arrives. The sun sets, it begins to grow very cold, but Chema, being stubborn and proud, continues to wait.

Gai Zheng arrived at Zu Shan a few days before, having left his family and been placed in the care of Master Black Wind. On the evening of Chema’s arrival, the Master wakes Gai Zheng around midnight and orders him to fetch two buckets of water from the stream and make tea. Black Wind ignores all protests about the lateness of the hour and pushes two empty buckets into his student’s hands. Tired and miffed, Gai Zheng grabs a carrying pole and trudges down the steps, through the blistering cold outside, towards the stream.

As Gai Zheng nears the bottom, he slips and loses one of the buckets, which rolls down the hill. The lost bucket ends up resting against the feet of Chema, who is still waiting beside the gate.

This is where our story begins.

## DURING YOUR TURN

In the second phase of the game, the players take turns making statements which describe what their character does. Making a statement is the player's primary task during their turn, but they can also do two other things: make comments and ask questions.

Comments are just remarks about what's going on in the game that don't necessarily influence either player's view of "what happens." Players might say "Wow!" or "That's so cool!" for instance, or "Ouch, that was cold! Gai Zheng's gonna go cry now..." The player doesn't mean that Gai Zheng actually will go cry, but is making a comment about the way the game is going.

Players can also ask each other questions about details of character, setting, or other aspects of play. For example, Gai Zheng's player might ask, "Where is Chema standing now?" or "Is the snow still falling hard, or has it let up a bit?" Chema's player might ask, "How many steps are there, leading up to the temple?" Questions are a way of getting more information about the situation at hand when you are preparing to make statements. However, note that this information is contributed by the other player when you ask them for it. Players can freely answer any question they are asked by their partner. Neither player is allowed to say "there are 167 steps from the gate to the temple." That is not a statement (at least not a valid one), a comment, or a question.

Asking questions can be helpful for making sure you're not doing or saying something that doesn't make sense. For instance, if you've forgotten if one of the characters is holding a bucket, you might want to ask, "Is Chema still carrying one of the buckets?"

## EXPRESSIONS

There are two types of statements: expressions and actions. Actions alter the kinds of choices that can be made later. In taking an action, a character is actionally *doing* something. Expressions

**PT:** Pull, pull, pull.

**VG:** In interactive fiction, the command used most is undoubtedly "examine...", which generally doesn't affect the state of the game, but gives more information to the player. It is cool how this game mimics that behaviour, having the other player take on the role of the computer program.

are the character saying or indicating something (Chema points at the moon; Gai Zheng shouts, “Who’s there?”), but do not affect the kinds of actions that can be taken. Expressions are still critical to the game, however, since they provide color and context. They may not be actions, but they make character choices make sense.

Expressions are likely to constitute the majority of play and can include any combination of speech, facial expressions, body language, positioning (Chema stands a few feet from Gai Zhang), or even simple activities (Gai Zheng makes a snowball; Chema splashes Gai Zheng, “Take that!”), but they can only affect real actions to the extent that they prepare for them or encourage another player to have their character perform an action.

From the examples above, you can see that expressions generally take the form:

*Chema/Gai Zheng + expression(s) + , “dialogue” (if any)*

## **ACTIONS**

Action statements are made by selecting one of the actions from your character’s table (see the action charts on pages 98-99) and making the statement in the following form:

*Chema/Gai Zheng + adverb + selected action*

For example, if you are playing Chema and selected the action *picks up a bucket*. You might make the statement: “Chema reluctantly picks up a bucket.” Once you get comfortable with the basic form, players should feel free to not be quite so exact, placing the adverb after the action or adding short descriptive phrases to the statement.

Note that the action chart is arranged in several different ways. The most basic way is location. There are some actions that can only be performed in certain places. These actions are written in

**JH:** In fact, one could read this game as an exploration of the notion that it is not the events of a story but rather their emotional content that matters.

boxes labeled with specific locations. The actions in the “OPEN” box can be performed no matter what location a character is in. A character can change locations by choosing an appropriate action from their current location box. For instance, if Gai Zheng is on the stairs, making a statement such as “Gai Zheng carefully climbs down to the gate” would move him to the gate. Expressions and actions are generally only visible and/or audible from the location in which they originate, unless the description (“Chema yells at Gai Zheng...”; “Gai Zheng strains to hear...”) would seem to change things. Snowballs, sadly, cannot be thrown into adjacent locations.

**PT:**

>get ye flask  
Ye cannot get ye flask.

Secondly, some actions are arranged in little trees, such that the indented actions below are only possible after completing the action above. For example, you can’t select the action “sets down the bucket” before your character has performed the action “picks up a bucket.”

Furthermore, some actions are preceded by a plus sign (+). These are actions that the other character must perform in the same location as your character before you can select the actions listed below. You can’t “accept the bucket” unless a nearby character has handed a bucket to you. Many of Chema’s basic movement actions are marked with a plus (+), due to her not knowing her way around the temple and not being able to climb up to the temple before someone else comes through the gate. Once she has witnessed Gai Zheng perform the required (+) actions, Chema can move freely to the new location whenever and as many times as she wants.

Finally, there are some things on Gai Zheng’s action chart that are in brackets [like this]. These are conditions he must meet before proceeding to the indented actions below. Notice that these create a series of things that Gai Zheng has to do before he can get to bed. In order to climb into bed he has to have already rung the tea bell; in order to ring the tea bell, he has to have boiled two buckets of water; in order to get the water, he has to have filled both buckets at the stream.

In the “OPEN” box, both players have access to the stopping and continuing actions. These enable situations in which one character expresses something or takes an action, but then an expression or action by the other character causes them to stop or reconsider what they are doing. Having stopped a previous statement, they can then continue it, if they so choose. For example, consider:

- Gai Zheng slowly picks up a bucket.
- Chema objects, “Hey, that’s MY bucket!”
- Surprised, Gai Zheng stops picking up the bucket.
- Chema grins and holds out her hand, “If you don’t mind…”
- Rolling his eyes, Gai Zheng continues picking up the bucket.
- Chema smiles in triumph.
- Gai Zheng exasperatedly hands the bucket to Chema.
- Chema accepts the bucket, kissing Gai Zheng on the cheek.
- Gai Zheng, red-faced and baffled, flees to the stream.

That also illustrates the power of expressions, which may not be immediately obvious. In the exchange above, Gai Zheng makes only action statements and Chema makes 3 expression statements leading to a single action. Chema has a much shorter list of potential actions than Gai Zheng and many of hers are contingent on Gai Zheng doing certain things, but this does not necessarily mean that Gai Zheng has an advantage. However, it is certainly possible and even desirable for Chema to be *more talk* (and gestures and body language and teasing) while Gai Zheng is *more action*, wanting to finish this idiotic chore so he can return to his warm bed.

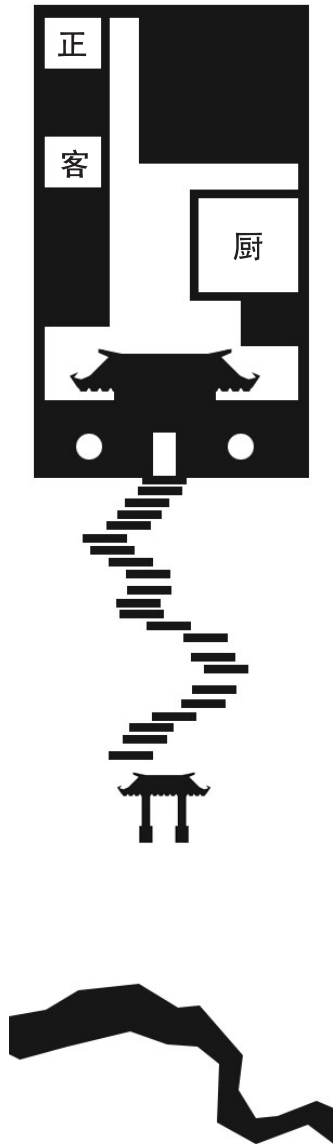
Stopping a movement statement (“Gai Zheng suddenly stops trudging to the stream”) means that the character is still at their original location. Continuing a stopped movement statement (“Gai Zheng reluctantly continues trudging to the stream”) changes that character’s location.

The following pages provide a chart and map that each player can easily reference, giving all the actions available to each character:

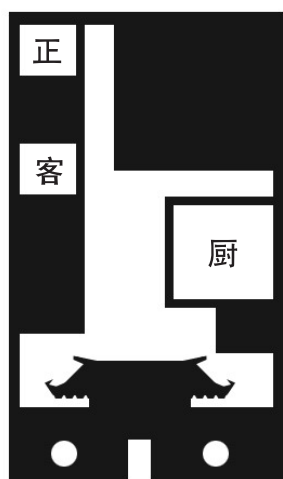
**MT:** Constraint is a fascinating thing. By not only constraining the number of players but also strictly limiting and scripting the pool of actions that a character can take, Jonathan, in *Yak 2: The Reckoning*, has shoved the emphasis of the game on expression. I’d be interested to see how folks who mainly socket into games in a thinking (as opposed to a feeling) mode would do in this situation.

**AR:** I think I’m going to redraw the map to fit my apartment, distill the rule phrasings a bit, and play this live action with my play-partner.

**MT:** Hell yeah! Rework the map and customize the expressions/actions into a seduction scene – instant romance (or at least sex)! You could call it *Come See My Etchings/Casbah Until Breakfast*.



GAI ZHENG...	
<b>OPEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EXPRESSES</li> <li>- picks up a bucket</li> <li>- sets down a bucket</li> <li>- hands the bucket to Chema</li> <li>+ <i>hands a bucket to Gai Zheng</i></li> <li>- accepts the bucket</li> <li>- stops (previous statement)</li> <li>- continues (stopped statement)</li> </ul>
<b>stream</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- trudges back to the <b>gate</b></li> <li>[has a bucket]</li> <li>- fills a bucket with water</li> </ul>
<b>gate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[arrives from the steps]</li> <li>- climbs back up the <b>steps</b></li> <li>- exits through the gate</li> <li>- trudges to the <b>stream</b></li> <li>[arrives from the stream]</li> <li>- trudges to the <b>stream</b></li> <li>- enters through the gate</li> <li>- begins climbing the <b>steps</b></li> </ul>
<b>steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- climbs down to the <b>gate</b></li> <li>- reaches the <b>temple</b></li> </ul>
<b>temple compound</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- heads down the <b>steps</b></li> <li>- walks to the <b>kitchen</b></li> <li>- walks to the <b>guest room</b></li> <li>- walks to <b>his room</b></li> </ul>
<b>kitchen</b> 厨	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[has two buckets of water]</li> <li>- puts the water on to boil</li> <li>- fixes a tea tray for the Master</li> <li>- rings the tea bell</li> <li>- walks back to the <b>compound</b></li> </ul>
<b>guest</b> 客	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- walks back to the <b>compound</b></li> </ul>
<b>his room</b> 正	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- walks back to the <b>compound</b></li> <li>[has rung the tea bell]</li> <li>- climbs into bed</li> <li>- falls asleep</li> <li>- THE END</li> </ul>



	CHEMA...
<b>OPEN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EXPRESSES</li> <li>- picks up a bucket</li> <li>- sets down the bucket</li> <li>- hands the bucket to Gai Zheng</li> <li>+ <i>hands a bucket to Chema</i></li> <li>- accepts the bucket</li> <li>- stops (previous statement)</li> <li>- continues (stopped statement)</li> </ul>
<b>stream</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- trudges back to the <b>gate</b></li> <li>[has a bucket]</li> <li>- fills a bucket with water</li> </ul>
<b>gate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <i>enters through the gate</i></li> <li>- begins climbing the <b>stairs</b></li> <li>+ <i>trudges to the stream</i></li> <li>- trudges to the stream</li> </ul>
<b>steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- climbs down to the <b>gate</b></li> <li>- reaches the <b>temple</b></li> </ul>
<b>temple compound</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- heads down the <b>steps</b></li> <li>+ <i>walks to the kitchen</i></li> <li>- walks to the <b>kitchen</b></li> <li>+ <i>walks to the guest room</i></li> <li>- walks to the <b>guest room</b></li> <li>+ <i>walks to his room</i></li> <li>- walks to <b>Zheng's room</b></li> </ul>
<b>kitchen</b> 厨	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- walks back to the <b>compound</b></li> </ul>
<b>guest room</b> 客	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- walks back to the <b>compound</b></li> <li>- climbs into bed</li> <li>- falls asleep</li> <li>- THE END</li> </ul>

**BR:** I have noticed a tendency in recent designs, and not just by the indie crowd, to move boards and other boardgame elements into RPGs. I think this is a fascinating thing and want to see it developed even further. Sometimes our divisions give us focus. Sometimes they just divide us.

**JH:** Nick Montfort's *Twisty Little Passages* is a great exploration of the narrative power of text-driven interactive fiction, for those who want to read more on the topic.

## STARTING POSITIONS

When the second phase begins, Chema is at the gate and Gai Zheng is on the stairs. There is a bucket lying on the ground near each character (i.e. in the same location).

And you're off! The story is yours to tell!

## INSPIRATION

While the setting of this game is inspired by our young adult wuxia novel project, *The Ashes of Shaolin*, the game system owes major debts to Ben Lehman's *Polaris* (2005) and Emily Care Boss' *Breaking the Ice* (2005), the first roleplaying games to strictly limit the number of players that can play at one time. Additionally, this is the third game in a series of short, 2-player games about China and owes a debt to its predecessors, especially *Kazekami Kyoko Kills Kublai Khan*.

Finally, this game would never had been written if I hadn't spent more than a few hours beta-testing Skotos Tech's multiplayer chat game, *Castle Marrach*, or thinking about important issues first raised by Mo Turkington and Thomas Robertson (who also playtested this game with me). Special thanks go out to Josh Kashinsky for allowing me to edit and reprint his work here.

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