

CREDITS

DRAGON & PHOENIX

AN ADVENTURE FOR DRAGON FIST

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DRAGON  FIST

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF MARTIAL ARTS ACTION

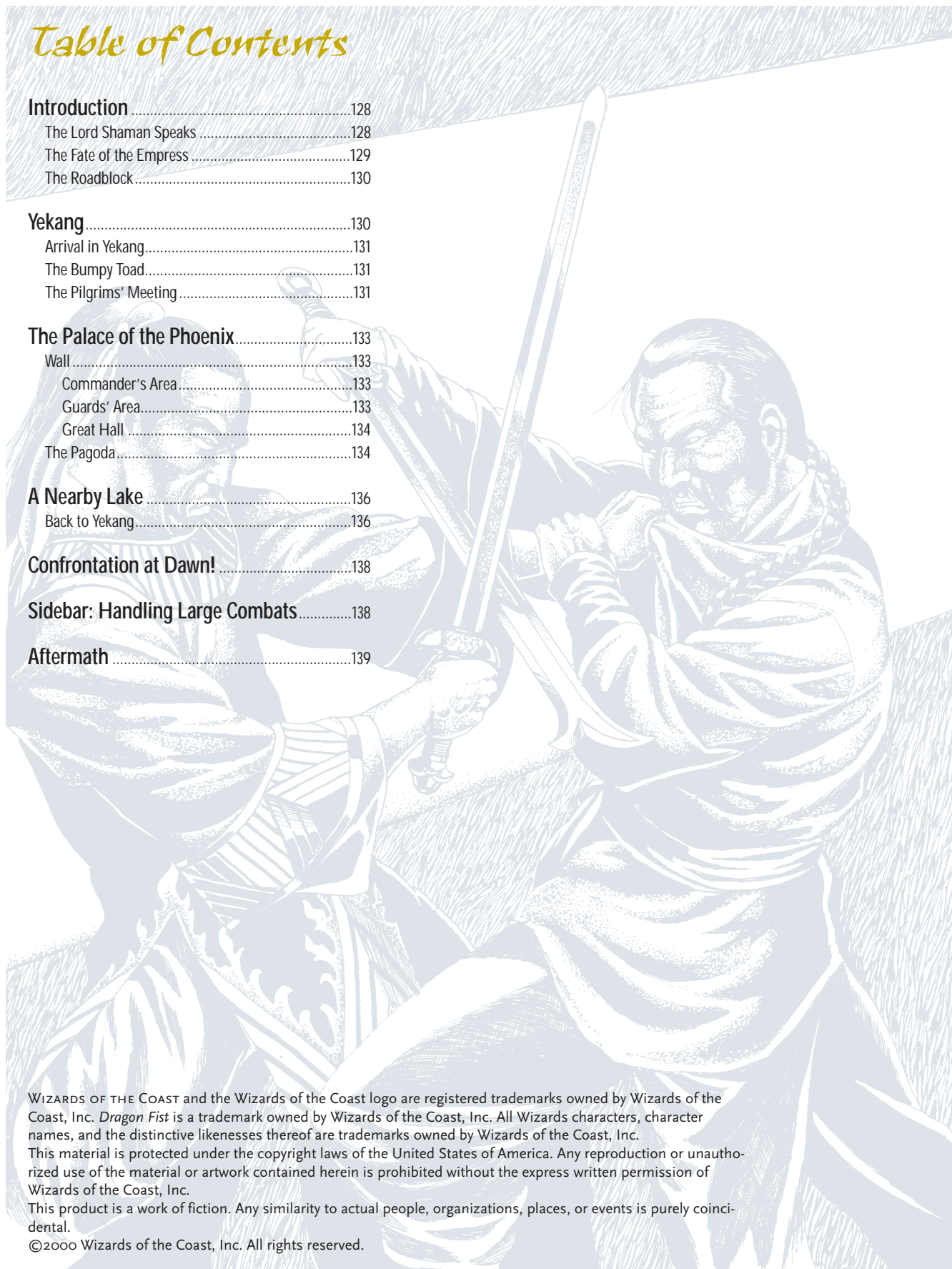
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Dragon and Phoenix is an introductory *Dragon Fist*TM adventure for four to six starting, 3rd-level characters. It is designed to familiarize players with the world of Tianguo, the storyline of the game, and the style of Hong Kong cinematic action. (See Chapter 1: The Heavenly Kingdom in the *Dragon Fist* rules for a background on Tianguo.) At the conclusion you'll find suggestions for developing further adventures.

Throughout the adventure there are boxed areas of text. This is background information for the players, which you can either read aloud to them or paraphrase.

Introduction

As the adventure opens, the nine secret societies who form the World of Martial Arts have just agreed to unite against Emperor Jianmin. Whereas each had previously pursued its own goals in isolation, the oppression of Jianmin has thrown them together. The societies' leadership has been putting together cohorts of martial artists, each with members from at least four of the secret societies. The player characters (PCs) are just such a group.

The PCs have gathered in the city of Xing, the provincial capital of Hou. Here they will find out what their first mission is and begin what will hopefully be a long and fruitful relationship.

The Lord Shaman Speaks

Each of you has been sent to the city of Xing at the behest of the leaders of your secret society, who have instructed you to join members of other societies and form a cohort to help overthrow the emperor. Through contacts with your society, each of you has been led to a secret underground meeting place. As a precaution, you were all blindfolded and brought here separately.

Now that the blindfolds are off, you find yourself in a low-ceilinged room of rough-hewn stone. There are representatives of all nine secret societies in the room, but deference is given to an older man in white robes. From the excited whispers of fellow travelers you learn that this is none other than Luo Hongbo [LWA TSOONG-PWA], the Lord Shaman of the White Lotus. This is truly an auspicious day.

Luo Hongbo bows to you all, then motions for everyone to sit. "I thank you for coming so far," he begins. "As you know, our societies have only just begun to struggle together. Thus, our first operations are of crucial importance. We must learn to forge a trust that cannot be broken by the minions of the emperor.

"We have formed many cohorts, and these have spread across Tianguo to do our work. Now it is your turn. I need true heroes to take on a mission of the utmost importance. Can I count on you?"

(The PCs should answer in the affirmative if they have an ounce of heroism among them.)

Once you have agreed, Luo continues. "Good. Let us begin then." With that, he motions everyone else out of the room. They file out silently, obviously used to the secrecy of such meetings. After they have left, the Lord Shaman addresses you again.

"Many of you are too young to remember it, but Emperor Jianmin and Empress Jieli [JYEH-LEE] used to be inseparable. She was the phoenix to his dragon, just as the Jade Emperor decrees. You may have heard tales of Jieli's generosity and good works. Many remember her with great fondness and wonder why she has been so silent for so long.

"After Jianmin turned to evil, Jieli tried to curb his worst excesses. He quickly tired of her interference and sent her to the Palace of the Phoenix in Yekang. That was eighteen years ago; no one has heard from Empress Jieli since. Pronouncements are still made in her name, but we fear her palace has been turned into a prison.

"I don't need to tell you how much it would help our cause to have the rightful empress on our side. From all we know of Empress Jieli, she would gladly lend her aid if she had the chance. Therefore I need you to travel to the Palace of the Phoenix, find the empress, and free her from the minions of Jianmin. It is a dangerous mission, but it must be done. The blessings of Heaven go with you."

A Few Questions

The player characters no doubt have some questions about their mission. Luo Hongbo's answers to the most likely are listed below. Since the PCs need to know this information, you'll have to work it in even if they don't ask.

- Where are Yekang and the Palace of the Phoenix?

Yekang is near the source of the Scarlet River, in the northern part of the province of Bei Ji. It is the furthest point a boat can go upriver, and many pilgrims on their way to White Tiger Mountain travel through there. The palace is a few miles outside of town.

- What can you tell us about the Palace of the Phoenix?

As the Righteous Fists know, the Palace of the Phoenix was originally a monastery of the Jade Brotherhood. It was gifted to Empress Yuji in the year 900 N.Z. to honor Shangwei's reunification of the empire. There are likely soldiers of the Imperial Guard there, but how many we do not know.

- Can we expect any aid in Yekang?

Yes, we have agents there. When you arrive in Yekang, you should go to the Bumpy Toad Inn. The owner, a man named Li, will provide you with rooms and information. Make sure to tell him you are carrying a lotus to White Tiger Mountain. This will identify you.

- If we free the empress, where should we bring her?

The closest safe haven is the Jade Mountain Monastery. I can provide a map that will lead you there, but you must promise to destroy it if you are ever in danger of capture.

Note: If there is a Righteous Fist member among the PCs, assume he or she knows how to get to Jade Mountain Monastery.

- Will we be given any supplies?

We will provide food for a week and 10 tael each to pay for inns and equipment. I have also brewed three potions of healing for you. Be sure to use them wisely.

Once the PCs have their answers, Luo summons some of his aides to once again blindfold and take them back to their inn. They can leave in the morning. If they are wise, they will get a good night's sleep: A long journey lies ahead.

Savvy PCs may work out a cover story for the group before they start their journey and want to disguise themselves as peasants, tradespeople, or what-have-you. This is a wise precaution: Let them have whatever they think they need to make the story believable (within reason, of course).

The Fate of the Empress

What neither Luo nor the PCs know is that Empress Jieli has been dead for fifteen years.

The empress was banished to the Palace of the Phoenix in 1164 N.Z. A contingent of the Imperial Guard, under the command of the emperor's cousin Geng Jiming, [GUNG JEE-MEEN] accompanied her to ensure she could not leave the palace. Geng knew that he was just as much an exile as Jieli, even if he did hold the keys. Shut away together in a remote corner of the empire, Geng Jiming and Jieli fell in love. In 1166, Jieli became pregnant. Despite the danger, she chose to carry the baby. One of Geng's underlings sent a secret message to the capital, informing the emperor that his wife was pregnant with the child of another man.

Jianmin, of course, was furious. He dispatched the Lord of the West Wing to the Palace of the Phoenix to "take care of the matter." The eunuch sorcerer and his entourage arrived shortly after the birth—a girl. He ordered the arrest of Jieli and Geng and had them both secretly executed, but a group of Jieli's loyal retainers spirited the baby away and fled to the

lands of the Yi barbarians in the south. Meanwhile, the Lord of the West Wing set up an imposter in the role of the empress. As far as the empire sees, Empress Jieli is alive and well. Her real fate is known only in the Palace of the Phoenix, a place the PCs will soon become very familiar with.

The Roadblock

You leave the city of Xing, taking a ferry across the Nine Maidens River and following the roads through the province of Shang Shen. You pass through many villages as the days go by, and signs of trouble never seem far away. While some villages look prosperous and busy, others are deserted or destroyed. The devastation seems almost random, which makes it that much more disturbing.

A week after leaving Xing you are in the heart of Shang Shen. As you crest a low hill, you see a roadblock up ahead. A group of imperial soldiers have cordoned off the road and are searching the wagons of those passing through. From their manner, it is evident that they are more interested in lining their pockets than finding “contraband.” A line of carts awaits inspection, accompanied by nervous-looking peasants and skittish beasts of burden.

The PCs can deal with the roadblock in a number of ways. They might try to talk their way through, try to sneak around it, or fight the soldiers and help out the poor peasants.

There are four rank-and-file soldiers and one sergeant. They are greedy and corrupt, using their office to bully those in their power. They are likely to be suspicious of a large and well-armed party. A cover story certainly would come in handy, if the players have thought ahead.

This encounter is designed to get players used to the *Dragon Fist* combat rules and familiarize them with the stunt system. It’s an easy fight if they choose to go that route. If your players prefer a nonviolent solution, however, you needn’t discourage them. It’s just as useful a learning experience to try out the feat system, perhaps using some Charm stunts or the thief’s ability to bribe.

Sergeant, male F3: AC 14; HD 3; hp 21; Att/round 1; To hit +2; Damage 1d8 (sword); Stunts—M 1d3, A 1d3-1.

Equipment: Iron lamellar breastplate, shield, double-edged sword, dagger.

Soldiers, male F1 (4): AC 12; HD 1; hp 6; Att/round 1; To hit +2; Damage 1d6 (spear); Stunts—none.

Equipment: Leather lamellar breastplate, shield, spear.

The morale of the soldiers is not very high: After a couple of rounds getting beat up, they’re likely to flee. As long as the PCs don’t linger at the scene, they needn’t worry about reinforcements. They can simply disappear into the countryside and continue on to Yekang.

Yekang

Yekang [YEH-KONG] is an ancient city near the source of the Scarlet River. Originally a center of riverborne trade, it became a fortress city in the Seven Kingdoms era. After the reunification of the empire, the city’s military significance declined. Although the walls remained, Yekang once again embraced its mercantile roots and became a routine stopping point for those making a pilgrimage to White Tiger Mountain.

In recent years, the imperial army has returned to Yekang. The city’s walls and defenses have been strengthened, and a permanent garrison has taken up residence. These troops patrol the area around the city and have been very active in hunting for members of the nine secret societies. In charge of Yekang is Commander Hang Fuhan [HONG FOO-TSEUN] of the Imperial Guard. He lives in the Palace of the Phoenix, supposedly in attendance to the empress. Captain Ni Junshi [NEE CHUN-SHEU] commands the garrison, whose headquarters is in the Plaza of Heroes.

Arrival in Yekang

The rest of the journey to Yekang is uneventful. Ten days out of Xing you crossed the Scarlet River and were able to take passage on a riverboat that took you the rest of the way.

Yekang is a city of medium size surrounded by a sturdy wall. You land at the busy docks, which are crowded with traders and pilgrims. Ahead is a large market, in which merchants sell all manner of goods. As you step off the boat, you are accosted by a swarm of young boys who have come from the many local travelers' inns. Each tries to entice you to stay at a particular establishment: "Cao's Inn, only 40 fen!" "The Happy House—30 fen!" and so on. As this wave of youthful enthusiasm washes over you, you pick up a small voice saying, "The Bumpy Toad, a place for discerning travelers."

The boy is Jinbo, [CHEEN-PWA] the son of the innkeeper Li. Once the PCs express interest in the Bumpy Toad, Jinbo happily replies, "Follow me, aunts and uncles, and I will take you there." Jinbo is true to his word and leads the PCs through the crowded streets of the marketplace. On the way, he keeps up a constant stream of dialogue. He's a curious lad and wants to know about the characters' travels and what they've seen outside of Yekang. This should come across as more endearing than annoying, so don't overdo it.

The Bumpy Toad

It takes fifteen minutes to wade through the crowds to the Bumpy Toad. Typical of traveler's inns throughout Tianguo, it offers a welcome refuge from the bustling streets of Yekang. You are no sooner inside than you are seated and served hot tea and pork buns. Once you're settled in, the genial host appears. "Welcome to the Bumpy Toad," he says. "My name is Li, and it is my pleasure to serve you."

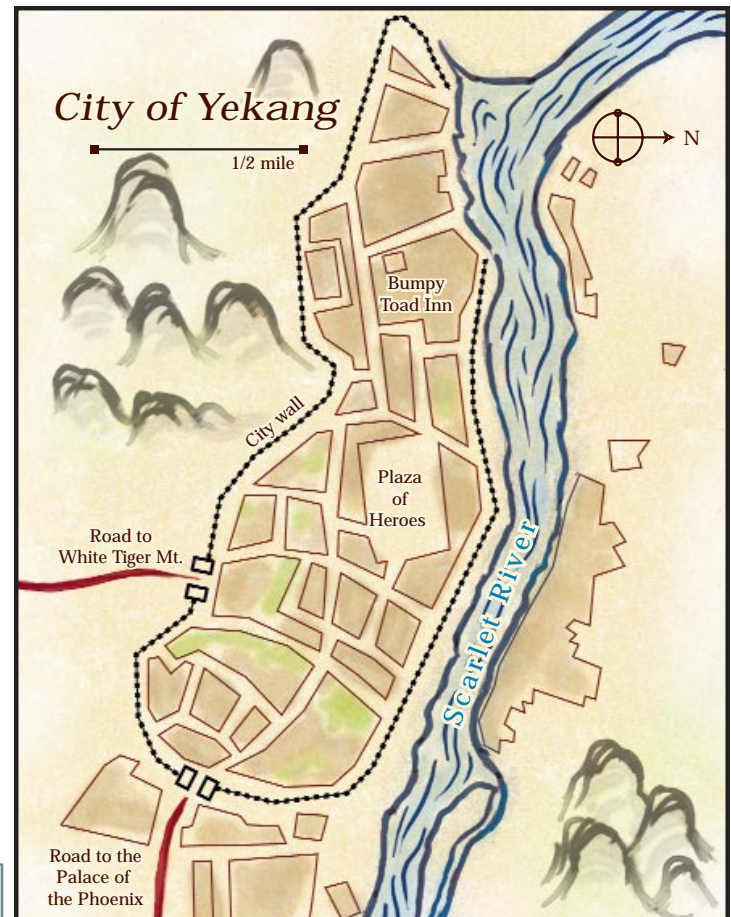
Li is the PCs contact in Yekang. If they tell him they are carrying a lotus to White Tiger Mountain, he nods quickly and says, "You have come just in time. The other pilgrims are meeting here tonight. I'll fetch you from your rooms when it's time."

Li and his staff serve the PCs a fine meal and then lead them to their rooms upstairs. The characters are free to wander about Yekang during the afternoon if they wish, and they can avail themselves of the wares at the outdoor market near the docks. Jinbo is happy to show them around the city, should they need guidance. Unless you decide to add in some local encounters, the afternoon passes without incident.

The Pilgrims' Meeting

That evening Li comes to your rooms and leads you down the back stairs to the basement of the Bumpy Toad. He introduces you to two other people: Pinmei [PEEN-MAY], a local Iron Monkey wearing a black peasant outfit, and Rendi [LEUN-DEE], a White Lotus shaman disguised as a merchant. Both greet you enthusiastically.

These three are the entirety of the local leadership, and they are excited to have you on board. Once the meeting and greeting are over with, Pinmei briefs you on the situation in Yekang. She squats on the floor, ignoring the chair that Li has provided for her.



Background

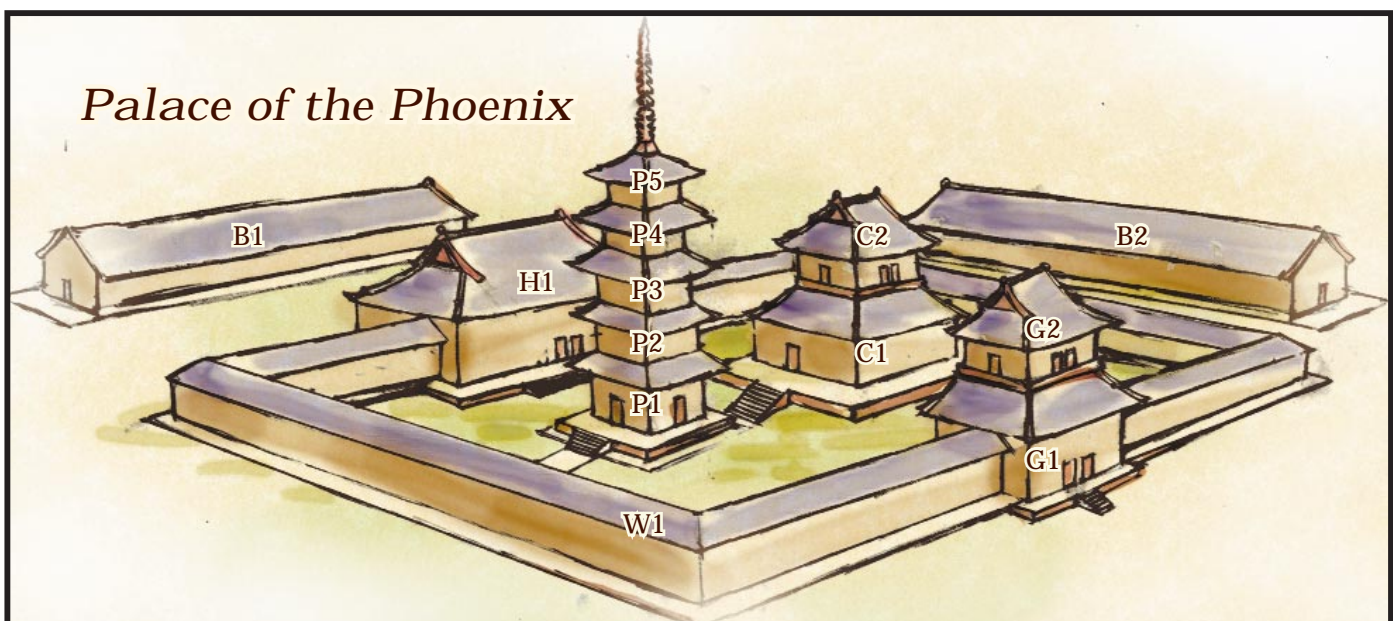
Pinmei provides the following information:

- The commander of Yekang is Hang Fuhan. He lives in the Palace of the Phoenix, guarding the empress with his contingent of the Imperial Guard. Hang has been rather distant, leaving the unpleasant work to his underlings.
- The garrison is commanded by Captain Ni Junshi, a sadistic officer who has had pickpockets impaled to “make examples of them.” His headquarters is in the Plaza of Heroes, an enormous practice ground for the garrison.
- The army has stepped up activity in the region of late, causing many local secret society members to go to ground. Pinmei and the others have not yet figured out what is behind this action.
- A spy within the palace has informed Pinmei that Hang Fuhan is leading some troops south tomorrow. The purpose of this excursion is unknown.
- The spy is a domestic who travels to the palace during the day to wash the garrison’s clothes. She is not there at night, which unfortunately is the best time to sneak in and find the empress.
- The empress spends most of her time on the top floor of the palace’s pagoda. It is said she prays to Heaven for the deliverance of the empire. She never comes to Yekang, and no one from the capital ever visits her.
- The local leadership are willing to help however they can. They don’t have an abundance of resources, but they can provide food, disguises if required, and a boat to use once the mission is complete. There are also enough Iron Monkeys in the countryside to create a diversion if desired, but they are not willing to throw their lives away.

The Plan

The PCs must now concoct a plan to break into the palace. It’s best if they wait for Commander Hang to lead his troops away, then sneak in that night. Should your players decide on a different course of action, you may need to modify the information provided below.

Suspicious characters may want to watch the Imperial Guard march out before the raid, lest Hang spirit the empress out of the palace. This is easily accomplished: There are trees along the road where the PCs can hide and observe. A column of some 20 cavalry and 50 infantry leaves at dawn. There is no litter present, and no sign of the empress.



The Palace of the Phoenix

The Palace of the Phoenix is entirely made of wood. A former monastery, it is a little austere for a palace but quite suitable for its original purpose. The complex is dominated by a five-story pagoda.

This night is a fortuitous one for the PCs' intrusion, because the remaining soldiers started drinking and gambling as soon as their commander left the area. Many are passed out in their bunks, and the rest are not at peak fighting efficiency.

B1, B2: Barracks

These large buildings house the palace garrison and are best avoided. Consisting of one large room with bunks for the troops, each is large enough to house sixty soldiers, though only twenty-five are currently in residence.

At the moment, both are disaster areas: Broken wine jugs litter the floor, and many bunks have been pushed aside. Most of the soldiers are either unconscious or drunkenly gambling.

Drunken Imperial Guard soldiers, male F1 (25): AC 14; HD 1; hp 6 each; Att/round 1 (normally 3/2); To hit +2; Damage 1d8+2 (specialized with sword); Stunts—M 1d3-1.

Martial Arts Maneuvers: Speed of the Leopard.

Equipment: Iron lamellar breastplate, double-edged sword, dagger.

Note: Many of the soldiers aren't wearing armor, which reduces their AC to 10.

W1: Wall

All of the walls of the palace are 20 feet tall and patrolled by two soldiers each. The PCs can (and probably will) use Wuxia to jump right onto them.

Commander's Area

C1: Commander's Receiving Hall

This is where Commander Hang receives visitors and makes decisions. Silk banners hang from all the walls, and on a dais are statues of the Three Legendary Emperors behind a lacquered chair. There are a number of tables, with maps and scrolls scattered about. This is a good place for DMs who want to "seed" future adventures to drop some clues.

This building is locked while Hang Fuhan is away.

C2: Commander's Private Quarters

A huge bedchamber for a huge ego, as the troops like to say. These are Hang Fuhan's personal quarters, and they are sumptuous. His large bed is surrounded by silk curtains, his bathtub enclosed by beautifully painted bamboo screens, and even his wardrobe skillfully carved of teakwood.

Guards' Area

G1: Gatehouse

The gate is, of course, locked at night. A sturdy wooden beam seals it shut and can be lifted only from the inside (Might feat, TN 15). Three torches are mounted above the gate, so the guards can detect anyone that approaches.

G2: Gallery

The guards on duty spend their time in this sparse room, containing a table and four chairs.

Three guards and one sergeant are always on duty, and they take turns watching the road. These guards are not drunk, so they get their normal attacks.

Imperial Guard soldiers, male F1 (3): AC 14; HD 1; hp 6 each; Att/round 3/2; To hit +2; Damage 1d8+2 (specialized with sword); Stunts—M 1d3–1.

Martial Arts Maneuvers: Speed of the Leopard.

Equipment: Iron lamellar breastplate, double-edged sword, dagger.

Imperial Guard sergeant, male F1: AC 14; HD 2; hp 13; Att/round 3/2; To hit +2; Damage 1d8+2 (specialized with sword); Stunts—M 1d3, A 1d3–1.

Martial Arts Maneuvers: Claw of the Crab, Iron Palm, Speed of the Leopard.

Equipment: Iron lamellar breastplate, double-edged sword, dagger.

Great Hall

Years ago, when important visitors would sometimes grace the Palace of the Phoenix, the Great Hall was used for formal audiences. It has not seen such an event in a very long time and now is used only when Hang Fuhan addresses all of his soldiers.

The Great Hall is quite spacious, with room for at least 200 people. Faded banners hang from the walls, and a 20-foot-tall statue of Emperor Jianmin dominates the far end. Benches line the sides, but the room is otherwise bare of furniture.

The Pagoda

The PCs are likely to make straight for the pagoda, perhaps using Wuxia to jump up the outside. This can let them avoid fighting the spider demon (see “The Pagoda,” below) right away. (Make sure the demon does pop up at an inopportune moment, though, so the PCs can face a real challenge.)

P1: Guard Room

There are two soldiers here, both drunk and asleep. They are slumped over a table with an empty wine jug between them.

P2: Sorcerer's Quarters

Hang Fuhan retains the services of Ni Hao [NEE TSOH], a eunuch sorcerer from the capital. At the moment, Ni Hao is in the city of Yekang. His quarters are full of books and scrolls, including classic works of literature, religious tomes, and books of magic. Finding anything amid this jumble of knowledge is difficult, especially if the PCs are in a hurry. Those who want to search can make an Acrobatics feat (TN 18): Success lets them find a copy of *A Treatise on Needlework* in the pile.

P3: Shrine of Diao Zu'en

The God of Loyalty has always been popular with soldiers, so it should be no surprise that there is a small shrine to him. A shield painted to resemble a tortoise shell hangs on the wall, but the room is otherwise empty.

A dark stain on the floor is the only clue that an evil deed happened here. The White Lotus shaman who kept the shrine was murdered when the emperor turned against the order. Casting *commune with local spirit* spell in this room will contact his ghost, though the dead shaman cannot provide any useful information. He never knew what hit him: He was lighting incense when a soldier beheaded him from behind. The ghost is saddened to learn about the fate of the empire and the White Lotus.

A ladder leads up to the fourth floor. From below, the opening is dark and mysterious. The spider demon (see P4, below) will jump anyone poking a head inside.

P4: Lair of the Spider Demon

Commander Hang is serious about keeping the secret of the empress. He ordered Ni Hao to summon a demon as the pagoda's guardian. This horrid creature has made its lair on the fourth floor. The entire place is sticky with webs, which subtract 1 from all physical stunts performed in the room (this does not apply to the demon, of course). Close examination of the webs reveals over a dozen human bodies enshrouded inside. These appear to be local peasants, used to feed the demon's appetite.

There is a hole in the ceiling that leads to the home of the fake empress (see P5, below). The spider demon simply leaps up through the hole when required, so there is no ladder here. Even if the PCs enter the empress's quarters from the outside, the spider demon will surely make an appearance (though this buys them some time).

Spider Demon: AC 18; Move 150; HD 6; hp 35; Att/round 2; To hit +2; Damage 11-8/1-8; Special attacks—poison, web; MR 10%; Stunts—M 1d6, A 1d3, F 1d6, S 1d4, I 1d6, C 1d4.

Special Attacks: Poison—save vs. poison or take 3d10 additional points of damage; web—missile attack (range 40 feet), anyone hit is entangled and can take no action other than to break free (Might feat, TN 18).

For detailed information about the spider demon, see *Chapter 6: Gods and Monsters* in the Dragon Fist rules.

P5: The Empress's Prison

The top level of the pagoda houses the empress—or so Hang Fuhan would have Tianguo believe. The room itself is austere, with one bed, two smaller cots, a dresser, a table, and one nod to opulence in the form of a large mirror. The fake empress spends her days here in the company of two attendants. The windows are screened with paper. Occasionally, Hang has the “empress” and her retainers move about the grounds so the soldiers can see her. She wears elaborate gowns with veils on such occasions, keeping her face concealed.

When the PCs break into the room, they are confronted by an impossibly young “Jieli,” no more than thirty years old, The actress, caught without her veil, nonetheless insists that she is the Empress of Tianguo. However, she tearfully confesses to the ruse if pressed.

If the PCs ask where the real empress can be found, one of the attendants speaks up. Her name is Bailu [BY-LU], who was an attendant to the true empress before her death. Bailu is a small woman, wrinkled with age, but maintains a certain dignity. She tells the PCs that she knows where the empress is and can lead them there. It is nearby, she asserts, but they will have to leave the Palace of the Phoenix quickly before the guard is roused. Bailu wants to escape from the palace, and this is her best chance: She will not reveal where she is going or mention that the empress is dead.

This is a good moment for the spider demon to attack, if it hasn't yet.



the ghost of the empress speaks

A Nearby Lake

If the PCs agree to Bailu's offer, she leads them out of the Palace of the Phoenix into the woods, away from Yekang. In less than a half-hour, they come to a small lake.

Bailu leads to you a large tree near the lake. She walks assuredly, as if she has been here many times before. Beneath the sagging boughs of the ancient tree are two unmarked graves. Bailu kneels down in front of the left-hand grave and starts to cry.

"Empress Jieli has been here for fifteen years," she says, voice choked with emotion, "with none but me to mourn her."

Before you can even ask the empress's fate, a wind blows up as if in answer to your unspoken question, whistling among the trees. Wisps of fog that glow with an unnatural light swirl across the lake. A lone figure appears from out of the fog, walking across the water as if it were dry land. Even without her imperial regalia, you recognize the Empress of Tianguo from her bearing. Only the rightful empress could have her confident step and regal air. Though dead, she is yet the phoenix to the emperor's dragon.

"Do not cry for me, sweet Bailu," she says tenderly. "Shed your tears for all of Tianguo."

The Empress Speaks

The PCs should be suitably awed at meeting the ghost of the empress. In a Hong Kong movie, they'd likely be on their knees weeping and swearing oaths, but that may be a bit much to expect from your players. Nevertheless, the PCs will certainly have questions. The empress answers a reasonable number, then flies away into the night.

This is a good place to plant the seeds of later adventures. If you have ideas about how you want your campaign to progress, you can have the ghost drop some clues or provide appropriate information.

- How did you die?
Two years after the emperor ate the tainted lotus, I was banished to the Palace of the Phoenix. He could sense the goodness in my heart, I think, and knew I would oppose him if I remained in the capital. His cousin, Geng Jiming, escorted me as my jailer. Yet Jiming knew he was as much a prisoner as I, and soon he and I fell in love. When I became pregnant with his child, word escaped back to the capital. The Lord of the West Wing arrived shortly after the birth of our daughter. Geng Jiming and I were brought here, executed, and buried.
- What happened to your daughter?
A loyal retainer whisked my child out of the palace when the Lord of the West Wing arrived. They escaped to the south, into the land of the Yi barbarians. I do not know my daughter's fate in that savage land.
- Why do you linger in the mortal world?
No shaman was present at my burial, nor does my family say prayers for me, for they believe I yet live. I fear I shall walk the mortal world until a new emperor rules Tianguo.
- What can we do to help?
You are heroes; that I can see plainly. One of you must win the Mandate of Heaven, defeat Jianmin, and found a new dynasty. A true Son of Heaven must rule Tianguo before the land will know peace again.

Back to Yekang

By this point, it is late in the night. The nearest shelter is back at the Bumpy Toad, so the PCs probably head back to Yekang to cancel the rescue plans for the empress if nothing else.

When they get close to the city, they hear the sound of running feet. (If they decide to spend the night in the woods, this encounter instead takes place at their camp.)

The panting figure of Jinbo appears out of the dark, sweat and tears mingling as they roll down his face. When he sees you, a wave of relief washes over him. Though he is desperately short of breath, he blurts out his message. “Thank the gods I’ve found you! My father and the others were arrested by soldiers after you left. Captain Ni says they are to be executed at dawn. Hurry, aunts and uncles, you must save them!”

It takes a few minutes to calm down the boy. Once the PCs convince him that his father won’t be executed, they can find out some additional information.

- Li, Pinmei, and Rendi were surprised at the Bumpy Toad and arrested. Jinbo ran away from the soldiers and was able to escape.
- Captain Ni Junshi presided over a “trial” that lasted all of five minutes. Now all three comrades are scheduled to be beheaded at dawn in the Plaza of Heroes.
- There will probably be at least fifty soldiers at the execution.
- The townsfolk are outraged but do nothing because they are afraid of Captain Ni.
- Jinbo has delivered messages for his father before and can contact the local Iron Monkeys if that would be helpful.

The PCs now face a dilemma. Their mission complete, they could just leave Yekang and report the fate of the empress. But abandoning comrades-in-arms to face execution at the hands of the cruel Ni Junshi just isn’t right. If they are true *wuxia* heroes, they’ll immediately start planning for a confrontation at dawn!

A New Plan

It should be clear that the PCs will be desperately outnumbered in the coming battle. If they try to slug it out toe-to-toe with Ni Junshi and his soldiers, they’ll probably end up dead. They do, however, have several advantages.

First, Captain Ni doesn’t know of their existence. He thinks he has just neutralized the local rebel leadership, so he’s not expecting an effective response. Second, the citizenry of Yekang are up in arms about the arrests—Li in particular is a well-loved resident. The PCs can use this popular outrage to their advantage. Third, if the PCs act swiftly (by themselves or sending Jinbo as a messenger), they can summon twenty armed Iron Monkeys from the countryside to the Plaza of Heroes by dawn.

Whatever plan the PCs make, they only have a few hours to get organized. If players get mired down in pointless arguing, remind them that the clock is ticking.

Handling Large Combats

The last thing anyone wants to do is roll all the dice for a melee involving a hundred combatants. The **Dragon Fist** stunt system easily resolves large-scale actions, using simple abstractions.

Military Struggle

If the Iron Monkeys enter the fray, treat it as a series of Savvy contests. This represents a battle of wits between the commanders, enacted by the soldiers in the field. It works best if one of the PCs commands the Iron Monkeys, but if not, assume there is an Iron Monkey with Savvy 1d3 in charge (Pinmei, if freed, can take over; she has Savvy 1d6). Captain Ni orders his troops while he can, but once he gets into personal combat, one of his lieutenants will have to take over (also with Savvy 1d3).

Each round, resolve a new contest to determine how the battle is going. Compare the scores as normal, but do not use the usual contest outcomes. Rather, the loser takes casualties equal to the difference between the two scores. For example, if the Iron Monkeys' score is 19 and the soldiers' is 11, the soldiers lose eight of their number that round.

Appealing to the Crowd

The PCs can also attempt to stir up the crowd (who are already riled) and turn them against the soldiers. This is best resolved as a series of Charm feats. What with the noise and chaos of the scene, each feat can affect only a small part of the crowd, but the PCs can make repeated attempts. *Players* trying this should give a rousing speech if possible, to enhance the Hong Kong feel of the scene.

The feat has a TN of 13, and once again the final score is important. The difference between the final score and the TN is the number of soldiers overwhelmed by the crowd that round. For instance, a charismatic PC plays to the crowd's outrage and rolls a 22 on his Charm feat. Subtract 13 from 22: The crowd has neutralized nine soldiers that round. (They aren't necessarily killed, but they are out of the combat.)

Confrontation at Dawn!

The crowd starts to gather early at the Plaza of Heroes. Hundreds of townsfolk wind their way through the streets, determined to watch the unfolding drama. As the first rays of the sun begin to glint over the horizon, the Plaza of Heroes is packed with a mob of angry merchants, farmers, laborers, and peasants. A cordon of soldiers with spears blocks the crowd off from the execution area.

Statues of famous heroes line the plaza's sides, and a 30-foot image of the First Emperor acts as a centerpiece. On a raised dais in front of the garrison barracks, Captain Ni Junshi presides over the occasion. He is flanked by a imperial bureaucrat and his chief lieutenant. In front of the dais is a chopping block, where the headsman readies his ax. Li, Pinmei, and Rendu are nearby, tied to posts and guarded by a squad of soldiers.

The crowd quiets as Captain Ni begins to speak. "Good people of Yekang, I bring before you three criminals of the worst sort. These rebels have disgraced their ancestors by conspiring against the Son of Heaven himself. The penalty for such treason is unchanging and implacable. They will be executed this morning, as the law decrees. To show that I am not the monster that some of have dubbed me, however, I have reduced their sentence from impaling to beheading. Such is my mercy."

Li, Pinmei, and Rendu have only minutes to live. What do you do?

Cue one climactic fight scene, no doubt filled with tragedy and heroics. The PCs certainly have their hands full. In addition to Captain Ni, they must face a eunuch sorcerer (the "bureaucrat") named Tong Lixing [DUNG LI-SHEEN], the executioner, and some 70 soldiers. The crowd, and hopefully the Iron Monkeys, can help deal with the soldiers, but taking down the two villains is up to the PCs.

Captain Ni Junshi, male F5: AC 18; HD 5; hp 32; Att/round 3/2; To hit +2; Damage 1d6+3 (specialized with sword); Stunts—M 1d4, S 1d4, A 1d3.

Martial Arts Maneuvers: Claw of the Crab, Cobra Stance, Crane Stance, Iron Palm, Mantis Stance, One Hundred Eyes, Ride the Wind, Spring of the Tiger, Wuxia.

Equipment: Nine-ring broadsword.

Tong Lixing, male W5 (eunuch sorcerer): AC 12; HD 3; hp 21; Att/round 1; To hit +0; Damage 1d4 (war fan); Stunts—S 1d4, A 1d3-1, C 1d3-1.

Martial Arts Maneuvers: Blood of the Dragon, Crane Stance, Wuxia.

Spells: Cobra's breath, iron scarf, rain of needles (all preferred).

Equipment: War fan, spell scrolls.

Executioner, male F2: AC 15; HD 2; hp 14; Att/round 3/2; To hit +2; Damage 1d8+2 (battle-ax); Stunts—M 1d4; F 1d3.

Equipment: Iron lamellar armor, battle-ax.

Soldiers, male F1 (70): AC 12; HD 1; hp 4; Att/round 1; To hit +2; Damage 1d6 (spear); Stunts—none.

Equipment: Leather lamellar breastplate, shield, spear.

The Plaza of Heroes is big enough to fit 500 spectators. The plaza is packed with people—both a boon and a bane during the fight.

Captain Ni uses his soldiers, the eunuch sorcerer, and his own martial arts ability in an attempt to crush any resistance. He is a sadistic man, but he's not an idiot. If it becomes clear that he's going to lose this battle, he will flee using Ride the Wind. Until then, though, he tries to stymie the PCs. He may also try to kill the prisoners before they can be freed, just to be a bastard. Should he escape, the PCs will have made a long-term enemy.

Aftermath

If all goes well, the people of Yekang help the PCs defeat Captain Ni and free the imprisoned secret society members. After the big battle in the Plaza of Heroes, things can go a number of different ways. Here are several options for further adventures, which DMs can develop as they see fit.

Stay or Go?

The most immediate question is whether or not to remain in Yekang. The town has been liberated from the emperor's yoke—for now. It probably has several months before retribution falls, likely in the form of an imperial army. The PCs might stay and help organize the town's defenses, or they may try to spread the fervor to nearby towns and villages. Alternatively, they may decide that leaving Yekang is the most prudent course of action.

The PCs could decide to travel south to the Yi lands in search of the empress's daughter. This is a long journey to a strange and hostile place, but finding the child is of enormous importance to the rebel movement.

Final Peace

Perhaps the ghost of Geng Jiming also haunts the mortal world. The empress may ask the PCs to find him and lay him to rest. Alternatively, the PCs can help the empress herself pass on by performing certain deeds.

Mysterious Mission

It is noteworthy that the Imperial Guard commander, Hang Fuhan, left the Palace of the Phoenix with most of his troops. Where was he going, and why did he leave so suddenly? These questions can be answered in future adventures.

On the Run

After the incident in Yekang, the PCs will likely become wanted criminals. This is especially true if Captain Ni escapes, since he can provide descriptions of the instigators. The PCs may now find that agents of the emperor dog their steps, spearheaded by Ni Junshi if he is still alive.

The PCs stand at the threshold of history. The future of Tianguo rests with you and your DM. The blessings of Heaven go with you!