

DRAGON 龍拳 FIST

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF MARTIAL ARTS ACTION



Chris Pramas

CREDITS

DRAGON 龍 MIGHTY FIRST™

THE ROLEPLAYING GAME OF MARTIAL ARTS ACTION

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INTRODUCTION

Ji Dayi, Lord Shaman of Tianguo, approached Emperor Jianmin's private quarters. His eyes were creased with concern, and he hardly noticed the imperial guards lining the corridor. He had been summoned to attend the emperor, and he knew better than to refuse. Jianmin had been increasingly unstable of late; Dayi feared he knew the reason.

Passing through the gold-lacquered doors of the imperial bedrooms, the shaman tried to maintain a blank face. He knew he would find a gaggle of eunuchs inside, filling Jianmin's ears with nonsense. It angered Dayi that these half-men had managed to worm their way into the emperor's favor—yet another sign that Jianmin was not well.

As expected, the emperor was attended by his eunuch favorites. Ji Dayi tried to ignore them, dropping to his knees and intoning, "Ji Dayi of the White Lotus greets the Son of Heaven. I am humbled before your magnificence, my lord."

The emperor, eyes sharp even though his face was drawn, motioned him up. "We're alone, Dayi; no need for ceremony."

The shaman glanced meaningfully at the eunuchs and cleared his throat. Emperor Jianmin quickly ordered them out, and Ji relaxed. "Now we are alone, my lord. So tell me, what ails you?"

The emperor sat up on his divan. "I am hungry," he said simply.

Ji Dayi looked about the emperor's chambers. The suite was littered with trays of food, most of it uneaten. Delicacies from all nine provinces were scattered about, enough to feed a dozen families for a week. The shaman smiled. "Surely you have your choice of the empire's foodstuffs, my lord. What could you possibly crave that you cannot have?"

The emperor stood up and began to pace, "That's just it, Dayi—I don't know. I only know that I . . . hunger. I eat this food, and it tastes like ash. I cannot tell you what I want, only that I need it."

Ji walked up to the emperor and said, "Let me examine you." Jianmin nodded, and the shaman began. He called upon all the spirits under his command; he cast spell after spell; he invoked the Lord of Heaven and the Celestial Bureaucracy, and still he could not alleviate the emperor's condition. After several hours, he slumped before the divan, exhausted.

Jianmin looked at him intently. "Well?"

Ji sighed. "I have used all my magic, and it has told me nothing. Yet, I think, any fool could solve this puzzle."

"What do you mean, shaman? And don't forget who you are talking to!"

"I could never forget, my lord," Ji whispered. He had feared this moment, but he knew it had to be said. He jumped to his feet and looked into Jianmin's eyes. "One year ago you were approached by a peasant who offered you a lotus blossom and promised you immortality. You ate that flower and got your youth back—but there was a cost."

The emperor stared right back at Ji, and the shaman could see anger beginning to smolder in his eyes. "Go on," barked Jianmin.

"We all know that was no peasant. He said that his price was souls and that you'd have to pay. Did you think you could escape? This hunger of yours stems from that tainted lotus, and it is dark indeed. I tell you plainly, Jianmin, that peasant was a demon, and his gift was cursed. If you do not let me remove the curse from you, it will be a disaster for the empire!"

The emperor stood still for a moment, then moved with blinding speed. Before Ji Dayi could react, Jianmin jabbed him in the throat, the chest, the abdomen. As quickly as that, Ji was paralyzed. Focusing his chi to its utmost barely allowed him to speak. "You've . . . blocked . . . my . . . valves," he choked out.

The emperor laughed. "That's right, shaman. My martial arts are superior!"

Ji Dayi could say nothing in reply. The emperor looked him up and down, his face full of disgust. With a roar, Jianmin spun about and delivered a kick that sent the shaman flying across the room. He tore through drapery and smashed through a wall, landing in a heap amid a pile of masonry. Although he could feel every broken bone in his body, Ji still could not move.

Jianmin jumped through the wall, destroying more of it with his powerful fists. "I knew you were jealous of me, shaman. That lotus gave me immortality and ultimate fighting power! And you ask me to give it up?" The emperor picked up Ji with one hand and spun the rigid shaman over his head

before launching him back into the bedchamber.

“I am the Son of Heaven!” roared Emperor Jianmin. “You have betrayed me, and the price of betrayal is death!”

Ji Dayi could only watch as the emperor’s hand wrapped around his windpipe. Despite his focused chi, he could not resist such power. Cackling with glee, Jianmin tore the throat from his Lord Shaman. As the blood gushed over the priceless imperial robes, Jianmin felt a peculiar kind of satisfaction. In a flash, he understood how to feed his hunger—and he laughed again.

“Now I know the secret you tried to keep from me, Ji Dayi. Thanks to your meddling, I am truly invincible!”

Ji Dayi could not answer. His eyes were glassy in their deathly stare. But his soul was screaming its way to Hell, and the Earth echoed with his cries for vengeance.

Welcome to Dragon Fist!

Dragon Fist™ is a game inspired by Hong Kong martial arts movies, especially those of the wuxia genre. This is a game of high-flying kung fu fighters, cackling eunuch sorcerers, weird hopping vampires, and awful demons who are dead only when they blow up. Realistic? Hell no! This is pure cinema. If you want a precise simulation of martial arts, look elsewhere. If you want to have a blast playing an action hero, read on.

Is This an AD&D Supplement?

While this may look like an **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons®** supplement, it is in fact a standalone roleplaying game. The rules are an **AD&D®** variant, though, so if you’ve played **AD&D** before, you’ll find much here that’s familiar. Read carefully, however, since some liberties have been taken with the rules to better simulate the genre.

If you’ve never played **AD&D** before, not to worry. This rulebook contains everything you need to enter the exciting world of Dragon Fist. You’ll learn about the Empire of Tianguo, how to make a character, and, most importantly, how to kick butt HK style.

What the Hell is Wuxia?

Wuxia [woo-zha] is the Hong Kong name for martial arts films that combine kung fu with magic and other fantastic elements. It translates literally as “flying people” for the way that characters routinely defy gravity with mind-boggling leaps and magical flights. The director and producer Tsui Hark [choy-hok] is the man most associated with the popularity of this genre, and he is responsible for many of its classics: *A Chinese Ghost Story*, *Swordsman II*, *Zu: Warriors of the Magic Mountain*, and *New Dragon Inn*. Other good wuxia films include: *The Bride with White Hair*, *The East is Red*, *Deadful Melody*, *The New Legend of Shaolin*, and the excellent *Burning Paradise*. These films create a fantastical reality populated by heroic sword-fighters, seductive ghosts, foul demons, and gender-bending villains. Any of them offer one wild ride and are ripe with roleplaying possibilities.

If you’ve never seen a wuxia film, don’t despair. You’ve probably played one of the current crop of arcade fighting games; if so, you’ve got the right idea. Check out some of the movies mentioned above, if you can find Hong Kong films in your local video store. Otherwise, try John Carpenter’s *Big Trouble in Little China*. This was inspired by Tsui Hark’s film *Zu* and does a credible and fun job of translating HK action to the American screen.

What You Need to Play

Apart from this book, you need very little beyond imagination and a willingness to get a little crazy. Some paper and a pencil are always handy for noting important information. And you’ll need dice. Not just the usual cubes (or six-siders); it’s best to get a full set of polyhedral dice, which includes four-, six-, eight-, ten-, twelve-, and twenty-sided shapes. A few extra six- and ten-siders are a good idea. Polyhedral dice should be available at most hobby gaming stores.

Throughout these rules, you’ll see cryptic notations about rolling the various dice. These

follow a simple convention: a number of dice (or individual rolls) followed by “d” (for “dice”), followed by a numeral indicating the type of dice. For example, an instruction to roll one six-sided die would be written “roll 1d6.” Five twelve-sided dice would be “5d12.”

When the rules say to roll “percentile dice” or “d100,” you need to generate a random number from 1 to 100. One way to do this is to roll two ten-sided dice of different colors. Before you roll, designate one die as the “tens” and the other as the “ones.” For example, if the blue die (representing tens) rolls an “8” and the red die (ones) comes up “5,” the result is 85. (A result of “0” on both dice is read as “100.”)

Like all roleplaying games, **Dragon Fist** is about telling a story, and requires one person to act as the referee. This person, known as the Dragon Master (or DM), manages the game for the rest of the players. He or she spins the story, adjudicates the rules, and makes sure everyone has a good time. The other players each create a character using the rules provided, then describe these characters’ actions as they participate in the story.

The Story

Dragon Fist takes place in Tianguo [tyen-wo], a fictional land based on wuxia films and on Chinese folklore and legend. Jianmin [jyen-meen], the emperor of Tianguo, became obsessed with immortality and went on a mad quest to ensure that he lived forever. Despite all his schemes, he failed to find the secret of immortality. Then he was approached by a peasant who offered him a wilted lotus flower and a promise. The emperor ate this flower and instantly became young. Overjoyed, he asked the peasant what he wanted in return. “Souls,” said the peasant, “and you had best provide them if you want to retain your youth.”

In the twenty years since, the Empire has become an evil land, and its emperor, twisted by the tainted lotus, a brutal tyrant. Opposing him are nine secret societies, collectively known as the World of Martial Arts. These societies have recently banded together in a pact to overthrow Jianmin and put a new emperor on the throne. In **Dragon Fist**, you play a member of one of these outlawed societies, fighting for your land and the honor of the World of Martial Arts. Your kung fu may be strong, but is it strong enough to change the world?

An Introduction to Tianguo

Tianguo, the “Heavenly Kingdom,” is a complex land with a long history. As a player or DM, you’ll need to learn a bit about how its society works. Below is a brief look at the empire’s history, followed by a portrait of the new Tianguo. Chapter 1: The Heavenly Kingdom goes into more detail for the DM and those players who’d like to become more familiar with the empire.

The Way It Used To Be

At the apex of Tianguo is the emperor, the Son of Heaven, divinely chosen ruler of the land. He is served by seven ministries, which regulate life in the empire, and the army, which defends it. Anyone can take the civil service exams and rise through the ranks of officialdom. Similarly, anyone can enlist in the army and advance in rank if of proven ability.

The cities are full of merchants and tradespeople. They keep the economy thriving and move goods between town and country. They are aided in this by the empire’s extensive road system, busy sea lanes, and regular army patrols. The peasants in the countryside grow food, harvest the ocean’s bounty, and mine or otherwise gather the raw materials needed by artisans. Traveling judges provide imperial justice when it’s needed.

In both city and country are the gentry. These nobles trace their lineage back to the Three Kingdoms era (see below) and have used their family wealth to ensure a pride of place in Tianguo. Some have rural estates that are worked by countless peasants, while others choose careers in government or the military.

Throughout the empire, clans form an important feature of social organization. These

extended family units provide opportunity for their members and look out for the clan interests. Some villages belong entirely to one clan.

The Way It Is

Since Emperor Jianmin ate the tainted lotus, things have changed in the Heavenly Kingdom. He rules unchallenged, but for those with eyes to see, it is clear that the emperor has lost the Mandate of Heaven. The governmental structure remains in place but has been subverted. The eunuchs, once mere palace servants, have become the emperor's right hand, with nearly limitless power to act in his name. The remaining officials are largely corrupt and are more interested in maintaining their position than serving the nation. Similarly, the army has become a refuge for thugs and hooligans, padded out by peasants who have been conscripted.

In the country, life is chaotic. Some regions are untouched, while others consist of nothing but burnt-out ruins of former villages. The imperial army has become a source of terror rather than protection for the peasants. Its appearance usually heralds confiscation of food, conscription into the army, or forcible recruitment for the emperor's building projects. Many people—sometimes entire clans—are whisked off to the capital and never seen again. Dark stories of the emperor's inhuman appetites have filtered back to the countryside and only confirm the peasants' worst fears.

In the cities, merchants try to maintain business as usual, but it's increasingly difficult when imperial troops simply confiscate goods. Peasants seeking refuge from the terrors of the countryside have swelled the cities, and many are hovering on the brink of starvation.

Meanwhile, the remaining gentry have their own problems. Holdovers from a bygone era (even if they don't realize it), they are confused and have no unity in purpose or action. More than one noble family has been dispersed and its monies taken for the imperial treasury. Some of the gentry have found a safe place in the army, while others continue their outdated ways, squeezing the peasants in a vain effort to appease the emperor. It is likely that the emperor will simply destroy them piecemeal.

This then is the empire under Jianmin. A man of monstrous evil sits on the throne and crimes are perpetrated in his name daily. Who will stand up for the people, and who will win the Mandate of Heaven to become the next emperor of Tianguo?

It is a time for heroes and a time for martyrs. Which will you be?

This chapter familiarizes you more completely with the land of Tianguo. Here you'll find its history, from the time of the legendary emperors to the present day. This is followed with a province-by-province breakdown, complete with details on the capitals of each and other places of note. If you are itching to start playing right away, skip to Chapter 2: Character Creation, but do come back! The more you understand the Heavenly Kingdom, the richer your games will be.

The Empire Gone By

The Three Legendary Emperors

When Heaven and Earth were formed and the Ten Thousand Things were brought into existence, the Jade Emperor descended to Earth. He decided that the Earth needed a mortal emperor, one who was wise and just. After searching all the lands under Heaven, he finally found Zu.

Zu [tzoo] was a woodcutter who lived alone on Huang Ren [tsong lyun] Mountain. Over the years, he had used his ax to shape the forest into a harmonious place. The Jade Emperor, impressed with Zu's instincts, made him ruler of the new empire of Tianguo ("heavenly kingdom"). Zu became known as the Builder, who established the first laws and founded the royal city of Zuyang [tzoo-yung]. He also instituted a calendar, which began with the first year of his reign. To this day dates are in the form Nian Zu [nyen tzoo] to commemorate the founding of the empire; for example, the current date is 1182 N.Z.

When Zu grew old and infirm, he scoured the land for a worthy successor, ignoring his own kin. He found a peasant known as Shao [soh], noting the strength of his chi [CHEE], or spiritual energy, and his humility. Despite the pleas of his family, Zu named Shao his heir. When Zu died, his family feared the wrath of his angry spirit, so they obeyed his commands and made Shao emperor.

Shao remained close to the land. He taught the people how to cultivate plants and for this reason is known as the Sower. He also invented written language and set up the first courts. Like his predecessor, he chose a common man of virtue to be his successor. This man, Xian [syen], was not as fortunate as Shao, and he had to survive a dozen assassination attempts before he could ascend to the throne.

Xian was the last of the Three Legendary Emperors. He is revered as the great flood controller, for it was he who had dikes and irrigation canals built along the Scarlet River. He divided the empire into the Nine Provinces and reorganized the army when the Yi barbarians attacked from the south. He promoted soldiers of ability from the ranks and made them his most prominent generals. Together Xian and his generals expelled the Yi from the empire. In the closing moments of the final battle, though, an arrow fired by a fleeing horseman mortally wounded Xian. He thus died before he could choose his successor.

Xian was surrounded by his generals when he died. No one really knows if he named a successor or not, but the truth soon became irrelevant. Within a year of Xian's death, seven different generals claimed the Mantle of Heaven. The mighty empire was divided into seven kingdoms, each ruled by a man claiming to be the true emperor of Tianguo. Thus was the age of the legendary emperors brought to an end, and that of the Seven Kingdoms begun.

Shangwei and the New Spring

The seven kingdoms warred amongst themselves for countless generations, and it seemed that none would triumph. As the decades passed, the weaker kingdoms fell one by one. At last only three kingdoms—Mu, Ren [lyun], and Zhuo [jwah]—remained, and none could break the stalemate. When one was near to victory, the other two would unite in opposition. Marauding armies crisscrossed the lands of Tianguo, and all who could fled to the cities for protection.

In 889 N.Z. a man named Shangwei [song-woo] became the king of Ren, a kingdom that had been on a slow decline for the previous generation and seemed likely to be the first to fall. But Shangwei had spent many years in the field as a general and immediately prepared for a new war. The other kings thought these were the desperate measures of a doomed man, but Shangwei was soon to teach them otherwise.

Shangwei secretly opened negotiations with both enemy kings, persuading each that he would be that king's ally against the other. So the kings of Mu and Zhuo gathered huge armies and marched to war. Shangwei brought his much smaller army into the field as well, continuing to promise his aid to both. Finally, the armies of the enemy kings engaged in a mighty struggle. Each called to Shangwei for aid, but Shangwei and his forces did not move from their camp. He waited until the armies of Mu and Zhuo had nearly destroyed each other, then ordered his troops forward. The remaining enemy soldiers were exhausted, confused, and in disarray. Shangwei's army, well-trained and energized, tore into them with zeal. Before nightfall, the other two kings were slain and their armies all but destroyed.

Shangwei immediately declared himself the Son of Heaven and emperor of Tianguo. This decree didn't become reality for some time, though, for relatives of the dead kings also laid claim to the imperial throne and rebellions sprang up. Shangwei's armies of conquest marched from city to city and added land to his empire daily. Within ten years, the three kingdoms were no more. Shangwei ruled unchallenged over all Tianguo.

Once secure in power, Shangwei set about reorganizing the renewed empire. He knew that to survive his death, it must be bound together by law and custom. He decreed new laws, codified holidays and festivals, and made sure the new ways were spread to every part of the empire. He reconstituted the ancient Nine Provinces, and appointed a governor to each. Worried about the rise of a powerful warlord who would overturn his reforms, he suborned the army commanders to the governors. However, he retained an imperial army under his own direct command.

Shangwei looked to the ancient empire and the legendary emperors for precedent and constantly quoted the historical record to justify his actions. His revival of the ancient ways was so complete that his reign became known as the New Spring. The only way in which Shangwei chose to differ from his ancestors was on the issue of succession: He groomed his descendants to succeed him in a true dynasty.

Summer Storms

Shangwei died at the age of one hundred. His reign had been so long that his own children had all died before him, so the throne passed to his grandson, Baoxin [bow-sheen]. Although only twenty years old when he became emperor, Baoxin proved as strong a ruler as his grandfather. He protected the borders and strengthened the empire with a series of ambitious building programs. Baoxin had been trained as a scholar and continued to think of himself as one. He commissioned an encyclopedia of all contemporary knowledge and employed a thousand scholars for twenty years in its preparation. This precious document was housed in the newly built Library of the Sages in Zuyang.

In the latter part of Baoxin's reign, the eastern coasts of Tianguo came under attack by strange barbarians. These attacks were followed up by a full-scale invasion. None in Tianguo had seen people such as these before. Baoxin's first son, Yiwang [yee-wong], led an imperial army to crush the barbarians, but his overconfidence proved his undoing, and both he and his army were destroyed.

A Note on Names

Names in Tianguo are different from those used in the western world. The first word in the name identifies the person's family, while the second word is the given name. So Ji Dayi [zee tie-ee], the Lord Shaman of the introduction, would be referred to as "Dayi" only by close acquaintances or those demonstrating their superiority, as the emperor did.

THE BARBARIAN FLEET BURNING



Tianguo Timeline

Year (N.Z.)	Event
1	Zu chosen as first Son of Heaven.
131	Death of Zu and ascension of Shao.
220	Death of Shao and ascension of Xian.
295	Xian slain by the Yi.
296	Seven Kingdoms era begins.
603	Only three kingdoms remain.
889	Shangwei becomes King of Ren.
900	Shangwei crowned Emperor of Tianguo.
969	Death of Shangwei and ascension of Baoxin.
1042	Death of Baoxin and ascension of Chaoshi.
1082	Death of Chaoshi and ascension of Jianmin.
1162	Jianmin eats the tainted lotus.
1182	Current year; one hundredth anniversary of Jianmin's ascension.

In this dark hour, a local militia captain named Diao Zu'en [dyoh tzoo-eun] rallied the remaining troops and launched a series of raids into the barbarian-occupied area. These attacks delayed the invaders until a second imperial army could make it to the scene. This army, along with the survivors of Diao's force, defeated the barbarians and drove them back to the sea, where many of their ships were set alight. The glare of their burning was said to be so bright that night turned into day. For this reason, the engagement became known as the Battle of Midnight Sun.

In the invasion's wake, Emperor Baoxin decided that Tianguo should never undergo such a trial again. He sent the war hero Diao Zu'en as an emissary to the Dragon Kings of the Four Oceans. After an arduous journey, Diao found the dragons and made a plea in the emperor's name that they protect Tianguo. They agreed, on condition that he perform one service for them. Diao assented, and the Dragon Kings whipped up a mighty storm in the middle of the sea. Known as the *baofeng* [bow fung], or "storm wind," this protects Tianguo from any seaborne threat; the churning wall of darkness prevents all foreigners from reaching the Heavenly Kingdom.

Diao Zu'en, who served the empire so faithfully, was never seen again by mortal eyes. He departed on a journey for the Dragon Kings and never returned. Although he is now worshipped as a god, Diao's ultimate fate and the nature of his mission remain unknown.

Autumn of Discord

With Baoxin's eldest son dead, the throne next went to Chaoshi [tso-seuh], the emperor's fourth child and second son. Baoxin had died quietly at the venerable age of ninety-three, and the transfer of power went smoothly.

Unlike his father, Chaoshi was not much of a scholar. Rather, he fancied himself a soldier. Soon after assuming power, he decided to prosecute a war in the north. The Neeg [nayNG] people, who lived in the mountains and were considered barbarians, were his target of choice. The Neeg had been driven out of the lowlands by the armies of Shangwei but continued to launch occasional raids into Tianguo. Chaoshi used these raids as a pretext to launch a full-scale invasion of the Tibneeg [teenayNG] Mountains, with the goal of incorporating this land into the empire.

Chaoshi's armies marched north into the mountains and the jungle. The Neeg, in their home territory and defending their way of life, fought back savagely. They rarely engaged Chaoshi's armies in set-piece battles but rather fought a guerilla war. The initial forays were total disasters, and much of the imperial army died of disease and starvation. Chaoshi was undeterred. He raised taxes, instituted conscription, and renewed his assaults. While these destroyed many Neeg villages, the difficult terrain continued to make pacification difficult. There always seemed to be more warriors to disrupt the lines of supply and more shamans to launch deadly spells.

Chaoshi responded by raising taxes again and personally leading his armies north. Members of his court objected to the tax increase and the continued war, but he paid them no heed and disappeared into the mountains with his troops, leaving his elder sister Wanli [wen-lee] in charge. When Chaoshi reported continuing difficulties, Wanli ordered forcible confiscation of food from the peasants and further conscription. The peasants, fed up with such abusive treatment, started a full-scale rebellion. The Red Eyebrow Rebellion, as it came to be called for the distinctive facepaint of the rebels, flared up all over the empire.

Wanli sent desperate messages to her brother, who finally ended his campaign and returned to Tianguo. It took a full three years to crush the rebellion, though eventually the imperial army prevailed. The price was high, however. The treasury was bankrupt, the army decimated, and the peasantry so depleted that a famine swept over Tianguo. As if this weren't misfortune enough, the Yi barbarians in the south poured into the border province of Tui and seized half of it before they could be stopped.

The Winter Emperor

Chaoshi spent the last years of his reign trying to rebuild the empire he had brought to the brink of destruction. After all the war, rebellion, and invasion, however, he was never the same again. Chaoshi died at the age of 65, succeeded by his son Jianmin.

Jianmin continued the work of rebuilding that his father had begun. He reduced taxes, encouraged trade, and made sure the borders were well defended. For seventy years Jianmin's reign was a time of peace and prosperity. Those who had feared the winter sure to greet the fourth emperor were surprised to find that, if anything, spring had come again. This peace, however, had an ultimate price.

Jianmin was surrounded by courtiers who assured him he would be deified on his death and take his place in Heaven. Still, as Jianmin aged he grew to fear death. He began to gather all the information he could on the subject of immortality and soon became obsessed with it. If he really was the Son of Heaven, he reasoned, then he should not die as mere mortals do. He should ascend directly to Heaven and his rightful place, next to his revered ancestors. So convinced, he offered untold wealth to any who could make him immortal.

Scores of wizards and shamans came before the emperor with promises of immortality, and all of them failed. Jianmin ordered them all slain. But just as the emperor's despair reached its lowest depth, a simple peasant appeared in court holding a wilted lotus. He claimed that the emperor would realize his dream by eating the flower. Ji Dayi, the Lord Shaman, advised against it, but Jianmin ignored the advice and ate the lotus.

Power coursed through him as he swallowed the bitter flower. He felt the weight of years lift from his shoulders and the ache in his bones disappear. Overjoyed, Jianmin turned to the peasant and asked what the man wanted in return for this wondrous gift. "I want souls," the peasant said, "and you will give them to me or die." With that the man disappeared. The identity of the emperor's mysterious benefactor remained unknown for years.

Jianmin used his newfound energy to expand the empire, and he led all-conquering armies in every direction. The lost lands of Tui were fully recovered and the Yi barbarians pushed back beyond the Horse's Tail River. Neeg strongholds were destroyed in lightning raids, eliminating the northern threat. The emperor, however, grew increasingly hungry but found that no food could satisfy him. He called for his Lord Shaman to attend him and discover the cause of his hunger. The shaman told him that the lotus had cursed him, and that the curse would abate only when the emperor gave up his immortality. Enraged, Jianmin grabbed Ji Dayi and with his bare hands tore the shaman's throat out. As the blood of Ji gushed over him, the emperor felt a peculiar satisfaction and knew the answer. The essence of life was what he had craved, and taking that essence would keep him alive forever.

EUNUCHS CONTROLLING
THE IMPERIAL COURT

The Empire Today

It has been twenty years since Jianmin ate the tainted lotus. In that time the empire has become a dark place indeed. Forced conscription has returned, and as the army continues to swell, thousands are brought in chains to the capital city of Zuyang to feed the emperor's evergrowing hunger. Demons walk the Earth, and spirits of the dead rise from the grave.

A new and fearsome force in the empire is Jianmin's eunuch council. The emperor's predecessors had used emasculation as punishment; those unfortunate enough to live through the procedure



were condemned to perform menial tasks in the palace. Jianmen took this small group of eunuchs into his confidence and made them his eyes and ears. Soon he began to rely on them above all others—one word from a eunuch could bring swift death to anyone in the palace. Eventually, the emperor demanded that all his most faithful servants become eunuchs to prove their loyalty.

Now all the empire lives in fear of the eunuchs. Four eunuch lords are the principal agents of the emperor, each ruling a quarter of Tianguo. These lieutenants are known as the Lord of the North Wing, the Lord of the South Wing, the Lord of the East Wing, and the Lord of the West Wing. Each is a sorcerer of great power and all are fanatically loyal to Jianmen.

Rise of the Secret Societies

There is a long tradition of secret societies in Tianguo. During the Seven Kingdoms era especially, such groups thrived. Some were interested in overthrowing one kingdom or another, while others had more esoteric goals. After the reunification of the empire, most of the societies declined (with the notable exception of the Ghost Eaters; see Chapter 2: Character Creation). But the emperor's turn to evil has caused a great resurgence in their activity. Ironically, many of these groups had been forced underground by Jianmin's preemptive strikes. The emperor felt particularly threatened by the societies forming the "World of Martial Arts," who had fighting traditions that stretched back for centuries.

Recently, the leaders of the nine major secret societies gathered in a secluded location. Previously, each group had worked alone and to its own ends, but after twenty years of Jianmen's evil, all were ready to join forces in defeating him. This doesn't mean that the societies entirely trust one another or that previous enmities have been forgotten, but all agree that the emperor must be ousted.

The Lands of Tianguo

Tianguo is a vast land with a variety of climates. Located in the world's southern hemisphere, its north is hot and tropical and the south, cool and windswept. The empire is divided into nine provinces, which are detailed below. Each entry includes a physical description, political information, and places of interest within its borders.

Bei Ji

Description: Bei Ji [bay jee] is one of the western provinces, nestled between the Dragon's Spine and Ling Mu Mountains. The entire province is highly elevated and heavily forested.

Capital: Anmei [EUN MAY], former capital of the Kingdom of Mu, is now Bei Ji's political center. This ancient city has seen a great deal of warfare and still acts as a rallying point during incursions by the Yi barbarians.

Places of Note: White Tiger Mountain, one of the Five Sacred Mountains, is in Bei Ji. Hidden in its mountain borders is the Jade Mountain Monastery, secret headquarters of the Righteous Fists.

Bi

Description: Bi [BEE] is Tianguo's easternmost province and bore the brunt of the barbarian invasions during Baoxin's reign. Because of its long coastline, much of the province's populace is engaged in fishing.

Capital: Huajian [tswa-jyen] is the center of government, an excellent port on the eastern coast. The harbor is very deep, an advantage in trade but an unfortunate aid to the enemy during the invasion.

Places of Note: On the very eastern edge of the province is Green Dragon Mountain, another

of the Five Sacred Mountains of Tianguo.

Hou

Description: Mostly lowlands, nearly the entire province is given over to rice production, although there is some mining in the hills. The northern provinces act a buffer between Hou [tsoh] and the Neeg barbarians, so it is considered a safe, if somewhat dull, place to live.

Capital: Hou's capital is Xing [sheen], a bustling port city in the delta of the Nine Maidens River. Rice and iron are shipped downriver from the interior to Xing, where they are traded for other goods.

Places of Note: The small islands in the delta of the Nine Maidens are home to many pirates who prey on the many trade ships bound to and from Xing. These pirates have only gained in strength as the emperor's depredations continue.

Jing

Description: Jing [JEEN] is the northernmost province of Tianguo. It borders on the Tibneeg Mountains, which are under the firm control of the Neeg barbarians. The jungle dwellers are fierce warriors, and even Jianmin has been unwilling to launch a full invasion of the north. Instead, a series of border forts on the plains keep the Neeg at bay.

Capital: Peiding [pay-teen], a fortress city with access to the sea, serves as the seat of government.

Places of Note: According to the locals, a dragon lives in the mountains and guards a hoard of treasure dating from the Three Legendary Emperors. Such "hoard dragons" are unlike others of dragonkind, brutish and usually hostile to humans. Many treasure-hunters have sought the hoard, but none have ever found it.

Qu Ti

Description: Qu Ti [shee tee] is the largest of Tianguo's provinces, encompassing all the land south of the Scarlet River. Much of the province is covered by the enormous An Ying [eun yeen] Forest, with the rest given over to wheat production. Since Qu Ti is directly south of the imperial capital, the emperor's control of the province is unchallenged. Many of the conscripts for the army come from Qu Ti, and the province is in serious danger of becoming depopulated.

Capital: Baixu [bie-shu], a port city in the south, is the provincial capital. Wheat and timber are shipped here for trade with other provinces.

Places of Note: Just south of An Ying Forest is Black Tortoise Mountain, one of the Five Sacred Mountains of Tianguo. Even in these dark days, many pilgrims come to the mountain to entreat the spirits.

Shang Shen

Description: Shang Shen [song seun] is mostly given over to agriculture, especially rice production. It was the center of the Red Eyebrow Rebellion and is a stronghold of the Iron Monkeys, a peasant-based secret society. Most of its coastline is made up of steep cliffs, except for a few miles of beach near the Nine Maidens River.

Capital: Pangdong [teng doong], a fortress city in the Yishu [yee-soo] Hills, is an ancient city strategically located on a rise overlooking the lowlands.

Places of Note: The kings of Mu are buried in a hidden valley in the Yishu Hills. According to legend, the Mu descendants guard this place still and ensure no one disturbs the graves of their ancestors.

Tou

Description: Tou [toh] is a small province in the northeast of Tianguo. Although it borders the lands of the Neeg, the terrain is so impassable that there is little contact between the two peoples. Like other northern provinces, Tou is a great producer of rice. Its long coast and myriad isles give the provincial economy a healthy maritime component.

Capital: The provincial capital is Beisen [bay-seun], a large port that has been a base of exploration for centuries.

Places of Note: The Dragon's Tooth, the new headquarters of the Dragon's Breath secret society, is located on an island off the coast of Tou. The province also contains Red Phoenix Mountain, the northernmost of the Five Sacred Mountains.

Tui

Description: Tui [twee] is a border province to the south whose primary purpose is to stave off the Yi barbarians. Most of the province is made up of coastal plains, ideal ground for the Yi riders. Jianmin had to reconquer much of the province after the last invasion, and he maintains a large military presence here. A number of bastions in the Dragon's Spine Mountains serve as refuges in times of trouble.

Capital: Kai [kie], an impressive fortress on the coast, is Tui's capital. Since the Yi have shown little aptitude for sieges, Kai has never fallen. Even when surrounded by barbarians, the city has been able to resupply and reinforce using naval power.

Places of Note: The Horse's Tail River marks the southernmost boundary of the empire. Although attempts have been made to subjugate the Yi homeland on the steppes beyond, such forays have always ended in failure. Many battles have been fought on the shores of the Horse's Tail, which are thick with watchtowers and fortifications.

Xin

Description: Xin [shin] is the central province of the empire and the home of the imperial capital. This land is directly under the control of the emperor and his eunuch lieutenants. The northern half of the An Ying Forest is in Xin, as is the delta of the Scarlet River. Before Emperor Xian, this area was prone to terrible floods; now such disasters occur but infrequently.

Capital: Zuyang, the provincial capital, is also the seat of the empire itself. The city is built on a large island in the middle of the Scarlet River. Six bridges connect Zuyang to the mainland, but its location makes it eminently defensible.

Places of Note: Huang Ren Mountain, the central of the Five Sacred Mountains and the focus of the imperial cult, is in Xin. A great temple on the summit honors past emperors and was formerly within the purview of the White Lotus, a shaman society. The nearby Ling Mu [leen moo] Mountains house the imperial tombs. These have recently fallen into disrepair.

