

Tianxia



STRIFE, FIRE & SMOKE
BY JAMES DAWSEY



Tianxia

**STRIFE, FIRE &
SMOKE**

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JADE DRAGON VILLAGE

GAO DU

WHITE TIGER PLATEAU

BRIGHT RIVER

DA JIANG

CLOUDED PEARL

FRAGRANT HARBOR

NINE DRAGONS





CHAPTER 1

THE SOUTH

ROCKETS RED GLARE

From his hiding place on the overlook, Ma Wei Sheng watched the agents of the Red Banner Brotherhood unload at least two dozen crates from the docked river junk. The ship belonged to the Bright Viper Circle, a group of dangerous, if somewhat overreaching, river pirates. The crates belonged to the empire, as evidenced by the imperial army seal that marked each one. They contained weapons and armor, stolen and marked for distribution among Red Banner cells across the south. If they were not either reacquired or destroyed now, they would soon be in the hands of dangerous dissidents who would think nothing of using them to spill innocent blood in the furtherance of their goals.

Unfortunately, Wei Sheng was only one man. Instead of an army, he only had three allies available to aid him. Four if he counted Smiling Ox twice, which was probably fair given the man's size and physical might. Even so, the enemy easily outnumbered them twelve to one

and counted at least a few highly skilled fighters among them.

"This isn't going to be easy," he muttered to himself.

"Is it ever?" a voice next to him asked. Despite himself, he jumped. He looked at the wild woman Wolf-Eyed Yue. She had not been there a moment ago. He would never get used to that.

"Is everyone else in position?"

"All two of them, yes." She whispered, "Well, three if we count Ox twice."

The young swordsman took in the scene one more. At least four dozen opponents; all dangerous rebels or bloodthirsty pirates. They had surprise on their side, but surprise only went so far. Still, something had to be done.

"Okay, get into position and wait for my signal." Ma Wei Sheng said, turning to address Yue. But she was already gone. Yes, he would indeed never get used to that.

Alone again, he reached into his pack and withdrew three small cylinders. He placed them on the ground and unwound the short fuse that linked them. He withdrew

his fire piston as well. He had made the fire starting device himself years ago, during one of his rare camping excursions with his father, the Great General Ma Rong. He quickly loaded the end with tinder, lined up the piston with its housing, and slammed it home. He extracted the piston and set the now red-hot tinder to the fuse. It smoldered for a moment and then ignited.

Ma set down the fire piston and picked up his sword. He walked to the edge of the overlook and waited. A moment later the fuse reached the first of the fireworks. The rocket screamed as it shot skyward before exploding in the sky above. Ma Wei Sheng leapt from the overlook as the second rocket launched.

By the time he heard the third rocket explode above, he saw Smiling Ox appear. The big man knocked over a stone wall onto two nearby Red Banner warriors. Nearby Han "Dragon Dog" Ping leapt from her hiding place to disable three pirates in as many seconds. He did not actually see Yue, but he noticed the pirate's ship had already begun to burn.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Southern Provinces! *Tianxia: Strife, Fire, & Smoke* details the southern regions of Shenzhou, the setting for Vigilance Press' *Tianxia* game setting. While this book is filled with all sorts of fun locations, NPCs, and plot hooks it is not a stand-alone product and requires a copy of *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, & Jade* and the *Fate Core* system to get full use of it.

This book is divided into five sections: a general introduction to Southern Shenzhou, sections detailing the two Southern provinces of Gaozhou and Guangzhou, a new sample PC with a new Kung Fu Substyle, and adventure seeds to help get the GM

and players started adventuring in the region.

Throughout the book, sidebars detail various ideas, optional rules, or concepts that may be of use in *Tianxia* campaigns. As always, these are not required but are there to help out those GMs and other players who find them interesting, enlightening, or valuable.

The following section gives an overview of major landmarks and concepts shared by Gaozhou and Guangzhou, the provinces which form Southern Shenzhou. Locations, individuals, and concepts unique to a particular province are detailed in the section for that province.

THE HUNDRED YI

Much of Gaozhou and a fair amount of western Guangzhou is made up of various tribal groups and their descendants. Known collectively as the Hundred Yi, these tribes were integrated peacefully into the empire. Others were conquered or relocated to the area after being displaced by earlier dynasties. Many of these tribal groups share ethnic or cultural similarities with conventional Shen society, though others have distinct customs and appearance. In the past, various tribes sought to break off from the empire or otherwise gain their independence. Others seek to gain power and influence to increase their power within Shenzhou while still maintaining their own identity and heritage. Some Yi have even founded or maintained independent kingdoms near Shenzhou, though as the might of the empire has grown over the centuries this became more difficult. For every one of the Hundred Yi, there is a unique way in which they handle living within the borders of Shenzhou.

Most Shen view the Yi tribes with a mix of acceptance and ignorance. They often see various tribal customs or dress as strange or quaint but not necessarily corrupt or improper. However, since many in Shenzhou tout the inherent superiority of their own way of life, cultural clashes and misunderstandings are not uncommon. These conflicts rarely turn violent without some form of provocation, but Yi in Shenzhou

must take care some opportunistic politician or violent extremist does not manage to lay the blame for a problem at their feet and turn the majority against them. The somewhat deserved reputation of the southwest regions of the empire as being friendly to rebels, dissidents, and outsiders also contributes to these issues.

While there are many tribes and people with tribal ancestry in southern Shenzhou, there are also many lost or forgotten tribes as well. Some of these groups are simply gone, having faded into history after being absorbed or eliminated by the empire or another larger group. Others dwell in **HIDDEN PLACES** and preserve their customs and way of life. Some of these Yi groups know powerful Kung Fu or shamanic magic, others focus on more peaceful pursuits.

While the southern provinces possess the greatest concentration of tribes near the borders of Shenzhou, other tribal settlements and groups are found throughout the empire. Northern Shenzhou has tribes who dwell in remote locations or beyond the Great Wall but close enough to the Empire to regularly interact with many Shen. However, even the more populous and developed Eastern and Central provinces have the occasional tribe who maintains their own cultures and customs in the face of social and imperial pressure to conform.

SHENZHOU HAS A LOT OF TRIBES, JACK

Indeed! The Hundred Yi, combined with the various tribes in the Northern Provinces and elsewhere, means that there is a lot of ethnic and cultural diversity. The GM and players can easily find this confusing—how does one tell a Yi-Lang from a Shan-Yi without a ton of research and note taking? Generally, the advice is not to try unless it is important in play. There are so many distinct tribes and groups spread across a millennia of history that trying to account for them all would be the subject of several books. It is also part of why various tribes and ethnic groups are discussed in this and other Tianxia books: to give the GM and players ready-made examples for

use and inspiration.

Of course, ignoring these groups carries an uncomfortable subtext for many people. It also raises setting issues for GMs seeking to emulate various periods in actual Chinese history. How can anyone have a Manchu invasion or dynasty without the Manchus? So what to do?

In most cases, the best approach is to recognize there are a lot of tribal and ethnic groups in China and by association Shenzhou, more than the average player is aware, but only focus on groups key to adventures, plots, and stories. Much like how the GM and players might not explore the details of various bureaucratic

positions, it is okay to focus on only what is actually used in play. Also, it is okay to create new tribes if necessary. While Shenzhou is inspired by Imperial China, it is not exactly the same place. An advantage of this is that one can create new groups and factions as needed. Wu xia and Kung Fu media does this frequently, and many tales feature lost tribes with powerful shamanic arts or Lost Techniques of Kung Fu.

Finally, while many of the tribal groups presented in this book are based upon real cultures, they are not intended to be those cultures exactly. These are presented for entertainment, not historical or anthropological accuracy.

DA JIANG

The “Great River” is one of the ***MOST IMPORTANT WATERWAYS IN SHENZHOU***, rivaled only by the Silk River and complimented by the Bright River further south. Beginning in the Snow Mountains beyond the western border of Gaozhou, it snakes through the province before forming the northern border of Guangzhou before moving north and east to the sea. The river covers so much territory and varied terrain that its waters are as varied as the lands through which it passes. In the west, there are many ***DANGEROUS RAPIDS*** and isolated regions where travelers must constantly watch for raiders and bandits. As the river moves east, it slows and widens, providing potable water and safe transport to numerous cities and villages. Piracy is not unheard of on the Da Jiang in this region, though ***FREQUENT IMPERIAL PATROLS*** near populated sections of the river help confine the worst attacks to remote or economically less important areas.

The Da Jiang is the life’s blood for various settlements along its banks. From large cities to small towns and trading posts, many locations in Southern Shenzhou would wither and die without the trade and resources the river provides. Droughts and floods can devastate such settlements, as can obstructions or disruption of regular transport and trade. In some places ***BITTER TRADE WARS*** occasionally break out among transport companies and merchants, as various businesses seek to dominate access to locate resources including fishing and docking space. In many cases, these groups hire mercenaries to provide security and raid or harass their rivals. Imperial officials often allow or even encourage such conflicts right up to the point they lead to widespread violence or a disruption of tax revenue.



THE BRIGHT RIVER

Beginning in eastern Gaozhou and emptying into the sea in southern Guangzhou, the Bright River is the **THIRD LONGEST RIVER IN SHENZHOU** and the only one of the three that runs completely through the south. It is **WIDE AND RELATIVELY CALM** for most of its length, making it a great resource for trade and transport. The river takes its name from iridescent, pearl-colored shells that line the riverbeds as it nears the sea. Compared to its larger cousin the Da Jiang, government oversight and imperial monitoring of trade and transport is less frequent. This makes piracy common, especially in remote areas between important ports. Various pirate gangs claim parts of the river as their territory, though conflicts and alliances between these groups are common. The most influential of these gangs, the Bright Viper Circle, are often allied and warring with several lesser gangs at any given time.

THE BRIGHT VIPER CIRCLE

These river pirates are among the most powerful and dangerous of the gangs that raid along the Bright River. However, due to the prevalence of sea-faring pirates on the southern coasts, the Bright Vipers are not as feared or well-regarded by their fellow bandits, criminals, and raiders as their counterparts elsewhere in the empire. This has the side effect of making these pirates particularly dangerous, as they feel they have **SOMETHING TO PROVE**.

The leader of the Bright Viper Circle is Shining Pike, the younger brother of famed pirate Shining Shark whom imperial pirate hunters recently claimed they had killed in a fierce battle on the high seas. Pike's status as the junior sibling to a "real pirate" does not do much for his gang's reputation, but it drives him to further acts of daring and depravity to prove himself. This desperation mixed with Pike's flair for deception and treachery makes the Bright Vipers more dangerous than their reputation suggests.

MOTLEY CREWS

The GM is encouraged to make up new pirate gangs to prey upon ships and travelers on the Da Jiang and Bright River. Most pirates just want to keep their heads off the executioner's block and get rich, but some may have ties to larger pirate syndicates near the coast or other organizations. A gang of heretical cultists seeking a river demon as a patron (real or imagined) are just as appropriate as a gang of rebels turned to piracy to fund their insurgency.

SHINING PIKE

ASPECTS

LEADER OF THE

*BRIGHT VIPER CIRCLE
DESPERATE TO PROVE HIMSELF
STILL IN THE SHADOW
OF SHINING SHARK
NEVER FIGHTS FAIR
WANTED OUTLAW*

SKILLS

Great (+4): Deceive

Good (+3): Athletics,
Burglary, Fight

Fair (+2): Contacts, Physique,
Rapport, Stealth

Average (+1): Empathy, Drive,
Notice, Provoke, Will

STRESS

3 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE

Iron Serpent

IRON SERPENT FORM

Iron Cleaves the Stone:

Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an Attack to inflict physical stress.

Serpent Bites the Hand: If the character gains shifts on a Defend, he can sacrifice his action on the next turn to immediately inflict an Attack on his opponent using the shift value of his Defend as his Attack result.

Serpent Strikes First: Use Fight to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat.

Serpent Strikes Twice: +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to Create an Advantage based on disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents the character has already inflicted stress on this combat.

STUNTS

Bright Viper Circle Leader

(May use Burglary instead of Resources when the character has access to plundered or stolen wealth)

Sneak Attack (The first physical Attack the character makes in a scene can use Deceive and has a +2 bonus)

Tricky Bastard (Invocations using advantages Created with Deceive give a +3 bonus instead of the normal +2)

Shining Pike is not the strongest or even necessarily the smartest member of the Bright Viper Circle, but he is by far the sneakiest. Serving as an officer in his brother's pirate fleet in his youth, he eventually decided to move inland with some of his most trusted followers to set himself up as leader of his own pirate band. Unbeknownst to anyone in his gang, authorities captured Pike and released him only after he gave information about his older brother's hideout. This betrayal resulted in his brother's defeat and supposed death, a fact Shining Pike is somewhat surprised to find he has not lost any sleep over. In fact, as unflattering comparisons between Shining Pike and his brother continue, he feels less and less guilt about his actions.

Shining Pike is a thin-faced, wiry man with a long drooping mustache who covers his generally unlikeable, petty, self-serving nature with a web of lies and deceptions designed to make him seem rakish, daring, and dynamic. He prefers not to fight if he can help it, but when cornered or pressed he seeks to end things quickly with a strike from his sleeve arrow; a single-shot spring-loaded device concealed up his sleeve that fires a short arrow-like shaft. If this fails to bring down a foe, only then does he resort to his short jian, or straight bladed-sword.



GAOZHOU

GOOD MAGISTRATE, BAD MAGISTRATE

The prisoner looked bored. Dishi sighed to himself. Bored was bad. He could work with scared, angry, confused, and even happy. Bored, by contrast, communicated two very unproductive states of mind. Either the prisoner was resolved to his fate and would not say anything useful, or he was sure he would be released and would not say anything at all.

The prisoner was not a typical bandit or criminal, which made things more difficult. He was a member of a Red Banner Brotherhood. A rebel and a dissident, confident in his own righteousness and superiority.

"I don't suppose you want to confess," Dishi began.

The prisoner sneered and then, with precision and purpose, spat in Dishi's face. His face flashed a defiant smirk before returning to a mask of disinterest.

"That's what I thought..." Dishi replied, wiping his face with a black silk handkerchief. Then he looked over his shoulder at the glowering man behind him. "Would you care to question the prisoner?"

Brass-Eye Yong stared at the prisoner with his one good eye. Unlike Dishi, Yong was big. Muscular, tall, and possessed of an almost feral character. He locked

his right eye on the prisoner, his brass prosthetic left eye shined in the lamplight.

Without warning, Yong moved. Despite youth and superior reflexes, Dishi barely moved out of the way as Yong brought his iron ruler down hard on the table, breaking it in two.

The prisoner jumped back as far as his chains would allow. With a snarl, Yong flung the broken table aside and pointed his weapon at the prisoner.

"I know you were the one who killed Minister Yen! Confess and surrender your compatriots, or I will personally oversee your punishment!" the older magistrate yelled. His voice boomed in the small interrogation room in the Hall of Eagles, the magistrate headquarters of the provincial capital of Gao Du.

Dishi interceded as Yong raised his ruler to strike the prisoner. He shoved the larger man and then followed him as he slammed into the wall.

"What is wrong with you?" Dishi demanded.

"That rat knows more than he's saying!"

"Clearly, but beating it out of him isn't the answer." Dishi did not need this. He had been told Yong was a top-notch magistrate, but this sort

of simple-minded brutality was not demonstrating the man's talents.

"We just haven't hit him hard enough..." Yong said, shoving Dishi away.

Dishi pulled his iron judge's pen from his robe in one swift motion and pointed it directly at Yong's brass eye. It hovered an inch from Yong's face.

"I suggest you leave. I will continue to question the prisoner."

Yong snarled at the younger magistrate and for a moment Dishi thought he would attack. Then, he relaxed slightly and...winked. At first, Dishi was not sure he had even seen it, but the one-eyed magistrate had winked at him.

His face turned away from the prisoner, Dishi smiled. Yong grabbed Dishi's arm and shoved the judge's pen away from his face before leaning in to whisper to the younger magistrate. His tone was low and menacing, but his message was positively conspiratorial.

"Now, see if you can get him to talk." With that, Yong cursed Dishi's ancestors and stormed out.

Dishi erased his smile before he turned around. The prisoner no longer looked bored.

"Now, let's try this again," Dishi said, retrieving his chair and sitting down to resume the interrogation.

Gaozhou (“High Land”) is a province of great mountains, hills, and highlands in southwestern Shenzhou. The beautiful and vast mountains border a great plateau that makes up most of the western and central part of the province. The land gradually lowers to the east into hills and river plains where it meets Guangzhou. Gaozhou is the most **ETHNICALLY DIVERSE** of all the provinces, holding various tribes and cultures that have been assimilated into Shenzhou with varying degrees of success and enthusiasm.

While the entirety of the south is often considered friendlier to dissidents and rebels than much of Shenzhou, Gaozhou’s spread out population, elevation, and general geography make it especially attractive to groups trying to gather, train, or organize in secret. These groups are viewed by the general populace

with a wide range of reactions from sympathy to indifference to outright hostility. An altruistic bandit or renegade tribal noble might find great support from the people if they are virtuous, fights corruption, and acts heroically. On the other hand, a murderous raider or cruel insurrectionist finds support only among like-minded individuals and anyone they can bully or push into aiding them. Over time, the reputations of various groups can shift. The infamous Red Banner Brotherhood was once welcomed in Gaozhou as heroic rebels seeking to oppose corrupt ministers and government inequities. Now, they are generally feared and reviled as violent bullies who steal land, secrets, and supplies from the locals under the guise of supplying the people.

WHITE TIGER PLATEAU

This plateau in western Gaozhou is home to **VARIOUS TRIBAL SETTLEMENTS** and the occasional trading post. While the tribes that call this region home are technically part of Shenzhou, they have their own **UNIQUE CULTURAL TRADITIONS** and ethnicities. These differences result in some considering the tribes Yi (“outsiders”) and adding Yi to their tribal names and identities—thus, a member of the Musha tribe might be called a Musha-Yi. Some tribes, seeking to separate themselves from the rest of the empire, adopt these labels themselves while others find this off-putting or even offensive. This cultural diversity combined with **HARSH TERRAIN** means that guides are particularly valued when traveling through this region. Many locals make a decent living selling their cultural and geographic knowledge to merchants, visiting dignitaries, traveling scholars, and anyone else traveling on the White Tiger Plateau.

The locale takes its name from the mystic animal who reportedly only appears when the Emperor is just and righteous. This far western section of Shenzhou is so-named as its inclusion in the empire is seen as a sign that the empire must be strong and favored by Heaven to hold such distant lands. Ironically, its remote location and **LACK OF OFFICIAL PRESENCE** means that White Tiger Plateau is also a natural haven for rebels,

dissidents, raiders, and political exiles—a fact kept out of most official reports and histories.

Recent sightings of a large white-furred beast in the most remote reaches of the plateau have given rise to speculation about the current state of the Empire. Some claim this is the **FABLED WHITE TIGER OF LEGEND** and its presence suggests the Emperor and the current dynasty is **FAVORED BY HEAVEN**. Others claim it is a hoax perpetrated by pro-Imperial forces to soothe people’s anxieties or even that the beast guards some **LOST IMPERIAL HEIR** being **RAISED IN SECRET** who will rise up in the South and deliver the people from the current regime. Predictably, most people’s opinions about the tiger sightings and its meaning for Shenzhou line up with their political sympathies and opinions on the current dynasty. Various rebel factions have placed a **SIZEABLE BOUNTY** for proof that the recent sightings are faked or have a mundane explanation. This has led to attempts to kill or capture the beast, but so far no one has succeeded and a few hunting parties disappeared while seeking the tiger.

TRIBES, ETHNIC GROUPS, AND RACISM

The real history of the various minority ethnic groups in historical China is rich, varied, and complex. The occasional comments in this book about prejudice and labeling these groups as Yi echo this reality, but in the end it is up to the GM and players to decide how various groups and individuals in their campaign handle such issues. Like issues of sexism or other discrimination, it might be interesting to address these topics in play, or it might be an unwanted distraction to other plots and themes.

As always, do what best suits the game but with one small piece of advice most GMs and players likely do not even need: racism is never cool. It might be an interesting story element if

everyone is comfortable addressing it in play, but discrimination against people based on ethnicity is overreaction and ignorance.

Of course, an otherwise heroic character might hold some bigoted ideas about a hill tribe or another ethnic group, especially in campaigns seeking to emulate some themes common in Imperial China. Such a character might even cling to these ideals strongly due to some personal experience that convinces them these irrational feelings are merited. For example, a young warrior whose family was murdered by a corrupt shaman who happens to be a member of a particular tribe might find himself not thinking highly of any members of that tribe. This is not fair to everyone from that group,

but under certain circumstances it is easy to see how such ideas might form.

In the end, however, racism is a character flaw and should be treated as such. It should be overcome or eliminated in heroes, despised in villains, and fought against in society if it is addressed at all. Again, it is completely acceptable to not even tackle this sort of thing in a game and just assume that Shenzhou is progressive and enlightened with regard to cultural differences. In fact, if the players are uncomfortable or just actively disinterested in tackling such themes it is probably best to do exactly that.

SNOW MOUNTAINS

This mountain range in western Gaozhou extends beyond the borders of the empire. The mountains in the range that lie within the borders of Shenzhou are impressive but pale in comparison to the towering peaks outside the empire which form a formidable barrier to the lands beyond. The Snow Mountains are less actively mined and settled than other ranges in Shenzhou. The reasons for this are both practical and spiritual. Their relatively remote location and the presence of various tribes, bandits, and **DANGEROUS WILDLIFE** make the mountains less profitable than their raw natural resources suggest. In addition, the mountains have great **SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE** to various religions and groups. This leads to the presence of many **REMOTE MONASTERIES** and **MOUNTAIN SHRINES** to various saints, gods, and honored ancestors but little in the way of industry. Trade routes through

the mountains are well known and frequently traveled in warmer months, but one can still travel for days or weeks without seeing signs of civilization.

The Snow Mountains are also home to various rebel factions, secret societies, and insurgents. Some simply hide in the **ISOLATED MOUNTAIN VALLEYS**, training and plotting. Others live in exile, having already lost their bid for power. The infamous Red Banner Brotherhood reportedly has their stronghold somewhere in the Snow Mountains, but they are far from the only ones to hide there.

JADE DRAGON PEAK

The Snow Mountains inside the empire are often divided into regions based upon their most notable peak or nearby important villages or landmarks. One such peak is Jade Dragon, the **TALLEST MOUNTAIN IN GAOZHU**. A place of great scenic beauty, it is the source of many legends and tales from Bodhist lore. Various enlightened scholars and warriors are said to have spent time in study and contemplation here. Various important landmarks, including Jade Dragon Village, the Black Dragon Pool, and the Bounding Tiger Gorge surround the mountain.

JADE DRAGON VILLAGE

This small Yi village is home to one of the more influential tribes in Gaozhou. Usually simply called the Jade Dragon Tribe, the villagers are members of the Mosha-Yi people, one of the Hundred Yi of Shenzhou. The Mosha have their own shamanistic traditions, though many have incorporated elements of Bodhist and Legalist thought into their spiritual beliefs. Mosha shamans and priests are often female, though males are not forbidden from religious pursuits.

The Mosha are known for their **DISTINCTIVE CULTURE AND CUSTOMS** that include their own music, language, and literature. Music is particularly important to the Mosha, who perform great orchestral and operatic pieces. Many performers from Jade Dragon Village and the nearby countryside have played before kings, generals, and even Emperors. In addition to music, the Mosha of Jade Dragon Village are renowned for their skill at falconry. Mosha falconers even learn to combine music with their training techniques, directing birds with distinct notes and tones.

BOUNDING TIGER GORGE

On the western side of Jade Dragon Peak is Bounding Tiger Gorge. This impressive canyon carved through the Snow Mountains by the Da Jiang is teeming with **NATURAL BEAUTY** and wildlife, including bears, wolves, wild dogs, and various breeds of leopards. The river here is **EXCEPTIONALLY DANGEROUS**, and it

is considered to be generally impossible to navigate by conventional means. This forms a barrier to river-based trade further up the Da Jiang, which has slowed imperial efforts to develop the region. Traveling the gorge by foot is possible, and some explorers, travelers, and merchants use this route to travel to and from the southwestern edges of Shenzhou.

Many believe the ghosts of those who drowned in its waters haunt Bounding Tiger Gorge. While this may be true, most sightings of “spirits” in the region are actually of Hammerhanded Lo, a former member of the Red Banner Brotherhood who lives in a cave near the base of Jade Dragon Peak. Once a famed warrior of violent temper and murderous inclinations dedicated to the overthrow of the government, Lo rejected his past and withdrew from the world. Since his self-imposed exile, he has spent years contemplating the nature of violent thought and how it leads to suffering and violent action.

BLACK DRAGON POOL

This deep, freshwater lake lies at the foot of Jade Dragon Peak near Jade Dragon Village. Despite its remote location, many important dignitaries have taken pilgrimages to the pool to seek the blessing of the dragon spirit believed to sleep in its waters. According to legend, ten dragons rampaged across the land until they were defeated by a powerful immortal. The last dragon was tasked to atone for the destruction by settling in the lake and protecting humanity from evil and strife.

A Daoist temple with a great shrine to the black dragon stands on the edge of the lake, constructed centuries ago. A **THICK FOREST** that runs right up to the edge of the lake surrounds these structures. The temple, shrine, and forest all share the name Black Dragon, reinforcing how important the legend is to the region.

The founder of the current dynasty in Shenzhou visited the Black Dragon Pool at the beginning of his reign. He ordered a plum tree symbolizing his family’s reign to be planted in the forest on the edge of the lake, so that they might be strengthened and nourished

by the dragon spirit. It is said if this tree ever withers and dies, the dynasty perishes with it. To prevent this tragic outcome, a group of monks, the Black Dragon Gardeners, are tasked with the care of the Imperial Plum and other **SACRED TREES** in the forest.

The Black Dragon Pool's waters are believed to have **CURATIVE PROPERTIES** and are favored by local physicians for inclusion in various remedies. However, locals are careful to keep the water pure and clean lest they anger the dragon spirit.

BLACK DRAGON GARDENER

ASPECTS

PROTECTOR OF

BLACK DRAGON FOREST

"WE SERVE THE WILL OF HEAVEN"

DAOIST MONK

EXPERT GARDENER

SKILLS

Good (+3): Chi, Craft, Lore

Fair (+2): Fight, Empathy, Will

Average (+1): Athletics,
Notice, Physique, Rapport

STRESS

3 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE

Forest Dragon

FOREST DRAGON FORM

Dragon Rules the Fields:

When the character succeeds with style on an Attack, gain a boost—with a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2—without reducing the value of the Attack.

Dragon Rules the Heavens:

Use *Chi* instead of Athletics in rolls involving entering zones or preventing others from doing so.

STUNTS

Green Thumb (+1 bonus

with Lore and Craft

actions relating to

gardening and plants)

Tools of the Trade (When

wielding a monk spade

or other tool-inspired

weapon, the character

gains a +1 Weapon Rating

and +1 Armor Rating)

The Black Dragon Gardeners are all Daoist monks sworn to protect the Imperial Plum, the sacred Black Dragon Forest, and the Black Dragon Temple in roughly that order. Each believes the current dynasty is ordained by Heaven and even if some of the more cynical members doubt the veracity of the legend of what could happen if the Imperial Plum dies, all understand it is an important symbol of the tie between the Emperor, Heaven, and the people of Shenzhou. In addition to being skilled horticulturists, these holy men are all skilled Kung Fu practitioners who favor the monk spade and other tool-like weapons.

Note: *the statistics here are for a typical Black Dragon Gardener. Veteran members, abbots of their order, and other exceptional individuals are even more skilled, talented, and dangerous. To create individual Black Dragon Gardeners using these statistics as a base make the following changes: Increase a Good skill to Great and add at least one additional aspect and stunt. More powerful members have more Kung Fu, skills, stunts, and possibly Lost Techniques.*



HAMMERHANDED LO

ASPECTS**HERMIT OF**

BOUNDING TIGER GORGE
BLOOD STILL ON HIS HANDS
EX-RED BANNER ASSASSIN
"I DON'T KILL ANYMORE"
INFAMOUS BREAKER OF MEN

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Physique

Great (+4): Fight

Good (+3): Athletics, Craft, *Chi*

Fair (+2): Lore, Notice, Will

Average (+1): Empathy,
 Provoke, Stealth

STRESS

4 Physical

3 Mental, one additional
 mild consequence

JIANGHU RANK: 2**KUNG FU STYLE****Iron Leopard (Master)****IRON LEOPARD FORM**

Flesh Breaks on Iron: When the character Defends against a Fight Attack with style, he may inflict a 2 shift hit instead of taking a boost on his attacker.

Iron Body, Iron Mind: +2 bonus to Create an Advantage relating to resisting or coping with pain, intimidation, or fear.

Iron Cleaves the Stone:

Ignore 2 points of Armor when making an Attack to inflict physical stress.

Iron Leopard Palm: Spend 1 fate point and make a Fight Attack action. This has a +2

Weapon Rating, and also removes one invocation on the target's Form or *Chi ARMOR* (target's choice). If the Attack succeeds with style, it removes another invocation in addition to gaining a boost.

Leopard Fears No One: Gain +1 Defense bonus when Defending against Attack, Overcome an Obstacle, or Create an Advantage actions based on fear or intimidation.

Leopard Bites the Throat: If the character succeeds with style on a Fight Attack, he can add a +3 Weapon Rating to the current Attack instead of taking a boost.

Leopard Stands in Shade: Spend 1 fate point. For the rest of the scene, whenever the character invokes an environment-based aspect for combat or stealth-oriented actions, gain a +3 instead of the normal +2 bonus. The character may gain one free invocation with an appropriate aspect when he activates this Technique. If an opponent fails any Create an Advantage action against the character based upon combat or perception, add a free invocation to an environment-based aspect instead of the advantage they failed to Create.

Leopard Waits in Shadow: When making a Fight Attack action, gain a +1 bonus and +1 Weapon Rating if the

character's action last turn was not an Attack. Free normal Defend actions do not count for determining the character's last action, but Full Defense does.

STUNTS

Cultivated Control (2 Armor Rating against mental Attacks based on inciting violence or fear)

Killer Reputation (+2 bonus to Provoke Attacks where **INFAMOUS BREAKER OF MEN** has been invoked)

Powerhouse (When invoking a Physique-based advantage, they grant a +3 bonus instead of the normal +2)

Wild Man (+2 bonus to Stealth actions related to hiding or evading detection in the wilderness)

Ting Lo was once one of the greatest killers in the Red Banner Brotherhood, an achievement that earned him the title of Hammerhanded. A true believer in the Red Banner's cause, he served without question. His life took a tragic turn when he was sent to kill an imperial minister and his family for crimes against the Brotherhood. Afterward, he discovered the minister was only targeted because of a Brotherhood superior's personal vendetta. Furious at this deception, he broke the superior's neck and left the order. For two years, he killed every assassin the Red Banners sent after him including his own brother and sister. Finally, over the bodies of his slain siblings he vowed to reject

killing. Since then, he has lived as a hermit. A few have sought his help against the Red Banner Brotherhood, but he has yet to leave his new life Hammerhanded Lo is a towering,

muscular, wild-haired brute of a man who, even when he was a killer, preferred his powerful bare hands to weapons. Now a pacifist, he only fights in self-defense and refuses to kill under

any circumstance and is not above using his old reputation to scare off would-be attackers if it means no one gets hurt.

THE BAI TRIBES

Named for their preference for white (“Bai”), a color traditionally associated with death and mourning in Shenzhou, the Bai are an ethnic group organized primarily into small settlements on the southwestern borders of Gaozhou. Many are Bodhists, though ancestor worship and animism is very common among various tribes. Seen as a civil and peaceful minority for centuries, this image has shifted somewhat with the founding of the Bai-ruled Kingdom of Nan to the

southwest. Now many in Shenzhou view Bai living within their borders with some caution and suspicion, regardless of an individual’s true loyalties.

Despite their name, these tribes have no special connection to the White Widows. The Widows use the color for its associations with death to scare and intimidate rivals and enemies, whereas for the tribes it is seen as a lucky, auspicious, and saintly color.

BEYOND THE BORDERS: THE KINGDOM OF NAN

While many Bai dwell within Shenzhou, even more of them dwell in the Kingdom of Nan to the southwest. These lands and their people were briefly part of Shenzhou, pacified and unified under various kings and lords with aid of the imperial army. However, shortly after its founding, the kingdom rose in a rebellion that defeated and drove off the imperial army forces sent to pacify them. Spurred by these early victories, the Nan expanded, capturing various lands in and around Shenzhou. Recently, after roughly a century, the Nan were driven out of Shenzhou and their kingdom declined in size and power but maintained its independence.

Now not much larger than a province of Shenzhou, the Kingdom is in clear decline from its glory days. Currently an *UNEASY PEACE* exists between the kingdom and the Empire of Shenzhou, though there are still those in both nations who remember the conflicts from a generation ago.

Very recently, the ruling family was massacred by a traitorous minister who sought to claim the throne himself, leading to *POLITICAL UPHEAVAL* and *VARIOUS FACTIONS* striving to establish a new dynasty to rule the land. For now, the Shenzhou government is content to wait and see what happens to their former vassal, but how long this remains the status

quo is anyone’s guess.

Note: the Kingdom of Nan in Tianxia is very similar to the real world Kingdom of Dali shortly before its founding, which was established from the rebellion of the kingdom of Nanzhou. The murder of the royal family really took place and eventually resulted in three failed dynasties before the successful line was established that ruled for longer than any single Chinese dynasty of that period. Of course in a Tianxia campaign, anything could happen and intrigue or even war between Shenzhou and Nan could become the focus of an entire campaign.

WHITE WIDOW FOREST

Though much of it is found in the neighboring province of Jiangzhou, the White Widow Forest covers a large section of northeastern Gaozhou. This **DENSE BAMBOO FOREST** is largely unpopulated except by the sect who shares its name. The White Widows rule

here, and only those they allow to stay or operate in forest can pass safely. More information on the White Widow Forest can be found in *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade* (p. 39)

GAO DU

Compared to provincial capitals elsewhere in the empire, Gao Du (“High City”) is most remarkable because of how unimpressive it looks. This small city is **REALLY NO MORE THAN A LARGE TOWN** with a low static and high transient population. Situated near the eastern edge of the White Tiger Plateau near the Da Jiang, far more people stop in Gao Du to trade or on their way to other places than regularly live or work there. This gives the town a **FRONTIER SENSIBILITY** despite it being fairly close to the more “civilized” eastern border of Gaozhou. Officials are often assigned here as punishment or to keep them out of the way for political reasons. As such, most bureaucrats and magistrates are not particularly concerned with enforcing regulations and laws that would require much effort. Unlike Bao Jiang in Jiangzhou to the north, those who rule Gao Du in the Emperor’s name are not so much corrupt as they are **DISENFRANCHISED AND UNMOTIVATED**. An **UNDERSTAFFED GARRISON** provides some defense for the city, but not nearly enough to hold off a large force. Most of soldiers assigned here are unseasoned recruits or unexceptional veterans.

Despite its small size and lack of regulations, Gao Du is an important stop along the trade routes leading out of Shenzhou to the south. Merchant caravans are often found here resupplying or recuperating from lengthy journeys. Various vendors, inns, courtesan houses, and security companies do brisk business seeing to the needs of these travelers. The presence of members of various regional tribes also make it one of the most diverse cities in the empire. The presence of so many different groups leads to various **CULTURE CLASHES**. Depending upon the nature of such conflicts and the tone of an individual campaign, these

can be **AMUSING MISUNDERSTANDINGS** or seriously **DANGEROUS CONFLICTS**.

Due to its **WEAK IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT**, Gao Du is home to a number of influential civilian groups and organizations. Various security companies, merchant houses, and guilds hold power in the provincial capital and by association, throughout the rest of Gaozhou. While seen as a bleak posting for an Imperial official, Gao Du is a **LAND OF OPPORTUNITY** for mercenaries and merchants alike. Only the relatively small population and cultural clashes between various groups undermine this, creating a **POTENTIALLY PROSPEROUS BUT UNSTABLE** political and economic climate.

Outsiders find Gao Du **SURPRISINGLY CONFUSING AND FRUSTRATING**, as often official action depends on getting the right unofficial groups or individuals on your side. While a particular official or Imperial office might be the one to issue permits, rarely does this happen without the approval of influential factions. This situation has two effects. First, it forces many groups and individuals to operate without official permits, setting up shops, trading posts, and other operations wherever they can. Second, it means much of the city’s economy functions effectively only so long as officials display their characteristic lack of effort and ambition. A strong leader with the edicts and manpower to back up their actions could redraw the whole political and economic landscape of the city—for good or ill.



CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS FOR FUN AND PROFIT

It is usually beyond the scope or desire of most GMs to deeply explore the customs of all the various ethnic groups. A little can go a long way. To assist the GM and players in injecting colorful and interesting customs and cultural beliefs into their games, this book calls out a few ways in which various tribes and other ethnic groups differ from the majority of Shenzhou. These differences are rarely at the forefront of a game, but they can be wonderful fodder for a game session.

For example, say a chief of the Bai Tribes is invited to a wedding of some famous or influential figure. In most of Shenzhou, white is associated with funeral and death,

making it an unlucky color for such an event. However, the Bai view white as auspicious. So when the Bai chief and his whole entourage show up all decked out in white, their hosts are insulted because they are dressed for a funeral, and they are insulted that their show of goodwill is taken so badly. Stick the PCs in the middle of a situation like that and everyone has a night's entertainment, especially if the game has heavily comedic or political themes.

The only real trick to such themes is not to overuse them or make them offensive. Remember, in the previous scenario, it is not that the Bai chief and his people are stupid or less civilized, they

simply were not aware of a custom or assumed that adhering to their customs in a respectful way would be noticed and appreciated. That sort of cultural clash is fun. Painting one group as ignorant fools and children is not. Note that does not mean individual members of a larger group involved cannot occasionally be ignorant fools or children. If not overdone, a brutish oaf taking ridiculous offense at something or a highly important but unaware child causing trouble can spawn an entertaining conflict. Just avoid having those encounters be the same for every interaction with a culture, tribe, or ethnic group.

THE GOVERNOR'S MANOR

Situated in the center of Gao Du is the home of the current governor of Gaozhou, Yin Guiren. The manor, like many governments homes and offices in the city is **RUSTIC AND FUNCTIONAL** but not particularly impressive. Still, as a provincial governor, Yin Guiren lives very well by local standards and is a **GENERALLY WELL-LIKED IF RARELY THOUGHT OF** ruler. He cautions the soldiers under his command to not disrupt trade or upset the local tribes, preferring a hands-off approach to governance whenever possible.

Unlike many of his subordinates, who aspire to transfer out of the province to more affluent or influential positions elsewhere in the empire, Governor Guiren is happy where he is. He is **GETTING OLD**, his wife passed years ago, and all his children are grown and already have lives of their own. These factors combined to make the governor an **INOFFENSIVE BUT SOMEWHAT TOOTHLESS OFFICIAL** who prefers to paint landscapes and host modest dinners for visiting merchants and dignitaries to aggressive governance.

BROKEN SPARROW CLAN

This clan of warriors has served as **GUIDES AND GUARDS** for travelers in Gaozhou for several generations. An Imperial captain who was richly rewarded for meritorious service but sought retirement due to her injuries founded them. She settled in Gao Du with her family, taking with her several loyal retainers and lieutenants. Offering protection and security to merchants, travelers, and visiting dignitaries, the Broken Sparrows are respected throughout the province for their Kung Fu skills and **RECORD FOR SUCCESS**.

The current head of the Broken Sparrow Clan is Red Dove, the great-great granddaughter of the clan founder. She is a **SKILLED SWORDSWOMAN** who **COMMANDS THE LOYALTY OF HER CLAN**. However, unknown to many, she recently contracted a **MYSTERIOUS AILMENT** that is weakening her *Chi* and even starting to impair her judgment. She has kept her illness a secret as she searches for a cure, but she has so far met with no success.

THE MYSTERY OF RED DOVE

The exact nature of Red Dove's **MYSTERIOUS AILMENT** is left up to the GM to decide. She could have contracted a serious but mundane disease, a **Chi-destroying condition linked to corrupt Kung Fu**, or maybe an enemy or rival is poisoning her. In any event, this is not a normal aspect but a consequence (or condition if the campaign is using that option from the Fate Toolkit) that she has not been able to recover. Any PC who manages to discover and cure Red Dove earns her gratitude, but only if they can manage to do so without her appearing weak to her clients and clan.

THE BLACK MALLARD

A combination trading post and inn catering to merchant caravans, the Black Mallard is known for its **EXCELLENT SECURITY** and **AMPLE STORAGE** that can be rented for a modest fee. While the proprietor, Hei Fu, makes no promises for a person's goods or safety after they leave the premises, he prides himself that there has not been an incident of theft or violence on house grounds for over twenty years.

At least, that is the story. In truth, the Black Mallard is indeed quite safe, but it is **NOT PERFECTLY SAFE**. Incidents do happen from time to time, and Hei Fu sometimes needs to pay sizeable bribes or hire talented individuals to deal with problems when they occur. Hei Fu makes a lot of money on the Black Mallard's sterling reputation, and he uses his Great (+4) Contacts and Resources to maintain it.

HALL OF EAGLES

The Hall of Eagles is the nickname for the local magistrate office. Like much of the government in Gao Du, the Hall of Eagles is **UNDERSTAFFED AND UNDERFUNDED**. Unlike many officials and ministries in Gao Du, the magistrates here are **HIGHLY MOTIVATED** to root out corruption, apprehend criminals, and keep the peace. The magistrates of the Hall of Eagles are led by Brass-Eye Yong, commonly considered one of the toughest lawmen in the south, if not all of Shenzhou.

BRASS-EYE YONG

ASPECTS***Toughest Lawman in the South***
Excessively Stubborn***Head Magistrate of Gao Du******Ex-Elite Guardsman******Blind in One Eye*****SKILLS****Great (+4):** Fight, Shoot**Good (+3):**

Investigate, Notice, Will

Fair (+2): Athletics, *Chi*,

Physique, Rapport

Average (+1): Contacts,

Empathy, Lore, Provoke

STRESS

3 Physical

4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 2**KUNG FU STYLE****Stone Serpent (Master)*****Stone Serpent Form*****Mountain Does Not Fall:** The character gets a +2 bonus to Defend against attempts to Create an Advantage based on unbalancing, pushing, tripping, or knocking over the defender. If a Technique from an opponent instead allows them to Create an Advantage with free invocations, one less free invocation is granted though the advantage is still Created.**Serpent Bites the Hand:** If

the character gains shifts on a Defense, he can sacrifice his action next turn to immediately inflict an Attack on his opponent using the shift value of his Defense as his Attack result.

Serpent Strikes First: Use Fight to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat.**Serpent Strikes Twice:** +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to Create an Advantage based on disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents the character has already inflicted stress on this combat.**Stone Resists the Blow:** The character gains 2 Armor against any physical Attack he is aware of.**Stone Weathers the Storm:** If the character succeeds on a Defense with style, he may remove his physical 1 stress box or covert another physical stress box to 1 lower instead of taking a boost.**STUNTS****Criminal Informants** (Use Investigate in place of Contacts when dealing with snitches and informants)**One Riot, One Magistrate** (May use Investigate instead of Provoke against mobs)**Never Surrender** (+2 bonus to Will Create an Advantage actions)**Sixth Sense** (+2 bonus to Notice actions to detect traps and ambushes)

Once part of the elite guard unit assigned to protect the imperial family, Brass-Eye Yong lost his eye saving one of them from an assassin. Granted a magistrate position as a reward, Yong took a position in the south. He quickly became known as a highly successful and uncompromising lawman in Gao Du. He is fair but tough, known for his integrity and adherence to the law even to the occasional detriment to his own reputation.

Brass-Eye Yong is a tall, wide-shouldered man with broad features, a heavy beard, and a brass left eye to replace the one he lost. He favors practical, rugged clothing over more traditional magistrate attire, though he is rarely without some badge of office. He is equally skilled in close and ranged combat, preferring no nonsense weapons to more exotic armaments. He is rarely seen without his iron ruler and his lian nu or repeating crossbow.



GUANGZHOU

DRINKING BUDDIES

"You're going to regret that!" the 64 Bamboo Viper Union soldier said through broken teeth.

"I already regret it," Slumbering Hound replied, eyeing the broken wine jug.

It was not particularly good wine, but it was all they could afford right now. Now with it spilled on the tavern floor, Hound found he had not enjoyed breaking the jug across the triad soldier's sneering face as much as he had hoped. Worse, he swore he could feel himself sobering with each passing moment.

"I can't believe you did that!" Smiling Ox stared over his shoulder at the ruined jug with a mix of anger and shock.

"I know."

"That was our last jug." Ox's statement came out in a very loud and slightly slurred whisper.

"I know! Making me feel bad about it won't help," Slumbering Hound snapped, wheeling to face his large and somewhat inebriated companion.

The 64s surrounding the two men, weapons drawn, began to look confused. Could these two maniacs not see they were surrounded by soldiers of one of the biggest and most dangerous triads in Nine

Dragons? Did they not understand they were minutes from a bloody and painful demise?

In fact, Ox and Hound did not realize any of this.

"Well, perhaps if you'd felt worse about it earlier you wouldn't have broken our last jug!" Ox's meaty hand gestured to a nearby table filled with several empty clay wine jugs, "Why couldn't you have used one of those? We were done with those!" Ox was yelling now.

"Well, we wouldn't be out of money if someone didn't eat enough for six people!" Hound shouted. He was in Ox's face now.

"Um...excuse me," the leader of the assembled 64s tried to interject.

"Stay out of this!" both men warned him.

"A hero of my status requires heroic sustenance," Ox said, returning to their argument.

"If you get any more...heroic... we'll need to carry you around in a cart." Slumbering Hound accentuated his statement by making rounded gesture with hands stretched wide.

"Why you old wine-wasting sleepy-faced..."

"Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey!" the leader of the 64s shouted, all the while banging the flat of his saber on a table to accentuate each word.

Ox and Hound finally turned to face him on the fourth "Hey!"

"Oh you boys are still here?" Ox asked, looking quite surprised. "You're free to go." He waved his hand in the direction of the tavern door.

"Yeah...scram," Slumbering Hound said and then belched.

"That's it!" the leader of the 64s yelled, pointing his saber at the two quarreling men. "50 silver tael to whoever brings me their heads!"

Slumbering Hound and Smiling Ox both stopped arguing and turned in unison. They stared blankly at the red-faced triad enforcer and his thugs for a moment. Then they both broke into slow smiles.

"Hey!" Smiling Ox said, "We can buy a lot of wine with that."

Slumbering Hound grunted in agreement as he drew his saber, "Well, then let's go get it."

Guangzhou (“Vast Land”) is an expansive area of coastal plains and low hills in the southeastern region of Shenzhou. It is known for its robust trade and agriculture, with both activities based near the two rivers that flow through the province. The region has been part of the empire for centuries, conquered shortly after the first Emperor of Shenzhou united various warring kingdoms under his rule.

Now part of Shenzhou for several centuries, the province supplies food and resources for itself and much of the empire. The region is **RELATIVELY SECURE**, though due to the large open areas and a **SPARSE MILITARY PRESENCE** compared to its size does give pirates, opportunists, and brigands ample opportunities to ply their shady trades. The provincial capital of Nine Dragons is one of the richest ports in the empire, with officials, pirates, smugglers, and merchants all competing for position and profit.

Guangzhou has a robust population, but outside of a few port cities and larger towns, they are fairly spread out. Local lords and ministers have much authority here so long as taxes are paid, the people are calm, and trade is uninterrupted. This situation means that the welfare and stability of various parts of the province depends largely on the integrity and skill of those who govern in the Emperor’s name.

Due to its prosperity, strong infrastructure, but scattered Imperial presence, Guangzhou is a prime target for various ambitious rebel groups and even the occasional foreign power for establishing a foothold inside Shenzhou. While neighboring Gao Du is mostly landlocked and sparsely populated, Guangzhou would be a potent staging area for either a would-be new dynasty or invading power. This is mitigated by realities of geography and population. The only way to take Guangzhou effectively is from the sea or from within. The former requires navigating dangerous waters and contending with both a formidable Imperial navy as well as patriotic pirates and privateers. The latter would require a massive uprising among the people and the support or elimination of factions already holding power.

Despite this, at any given time there are several plots to turn the province into the staging area for a grand campaign to overthrow the Emperor and conquer Shenzhou. These range from the absurd

and impotent ravings of armchair revolutionaries to motivated, patient, and dedicated conspiracies. The Emperor and his officials keep a watchful eye on Guangzhou, but they wisely do not push too overtly lest they create too many allies and opportunities for dissidents and rebels. In this way they keep the peace and maintain stability in the province without dedicating excessive manpower and resources to maintaining order. For most in the Imperial court, it is enough if Guangzhou provides taxes, food, and foreign trade while only allowing the occasional criminal enterprise or small-scale upheaval. However, should a major calamity occur, this approach could quickly and dramatically change.

SO HOW STABLE ARE THINGS?

The default presumption in Guangzhou is that the political and economic situation is mildly corrupt but mostly stable, barring the occasional villainous NPC who seeks to break the status quo. However, things can be as stable or tumultuous as an individual campaign requires. The whole south can be ready to rise in rebellion and break with the empire at a moment’s notice, or things can be fine except for some bandits and extremists. Officials can be deeply corrupt and abusive, or they can be some of the most loyal and reliable in all of Shenzhou.

The exact conditions in the south affect trade and the availability of various important crops, especially rice. With the wrong set of circumstances, the whole empire could find itself on the edge of collapse, while various tribes, rebels, cults, and would-be warlords rise up in attempts to seize power or gain their independence.

THE SOUTHERN SEA

This area of the *VAST OCEAN* that borders Shenzhou to the east is a main source of trade and food for the coastal provinces, especially Guangzhou. During the stormy seasons of spring and summer, *GREAT MONSOONS* and violent weather patterns at times endanger both ships and coastal settlements. All year round, knowledge of currents and various hazards is vital to navigation. It is for this reason that many who live and work on the water do not tend to stray far from shore, leaving such voyages to explorers, merchants dealing in foreign goods, and pirates. Legends of *SEA MONSTERS* and *LOST ISLAND CIVILIZATIONS* further entice the adventurous and drive off the incurious.

Historians and sailors are aware of various island nations in the Southern Sea, though to the average citizen these places are mysterious and alien. Travel to these lands is restricted by cost and in some cases, official edict.

BEYOND THE SEA

What lies beyond the Southern Sea is left mostly for the GM to determine. It is suggested briefly that some analogs to the various Indianized kingdoms of Java, Tondo, and others can be found on islands that bear strong resemblance to Indonesia and the Philippines. There is likely someplace like Japan out there as well. And beyond? It is easy to imagine that Tianxia equivalents of Portugal and other European powers might cross vast distances to trade with Shenzhou.

Or maybe not. It is up to the GM and players if they want to even address such issues, much less incorporate them into their games. Shenzhou is a big enough place for most adventures, and sometimes more is not always better.

That said, if a PC wants to play a displaced Javanese-inspired warrior or Portuguese-style explorer and everyone thinks that sounds fun? That is pretty awesome.

RED HEAVEN TEMPLE

This *CENTURIES-OLD DAOIST TEMPLE* is located on the banks of the Bright River near the western border of Guangzhou. It is near a number of small settlements but far from any major cities. Its *REMOTE LOCATION* hides a potent secret. The monks who dwell here are not simple Daoist holy men but a splinter faction of the infamous Red Banner Brotherhood. Calling themselves the Devil Mirror Sect, this group believes that true balance and advancement of civilization can only come through violent annihilation of existing structures.

Visitors to the temple are treated according to their behavior. If they suspect nothing strange about the site or its inhabitants, they are given blessings, shelter, or whatever else gets them to do their business and move along. If they give any hint

they know the temple's secret, they are eliminated. These *MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCES* are blamed on wild animals, bandits, or even evil spirits. In some cases, the Devil Mirrors even fake attacks by bandits or animals, reinforcing the deception.

DEVIL MIRROR SECT

The Devil Mirror Sect began as an arm of the Red Banner Brotherhood under Jing Juntai, a minor nobleman from the exiled dynasty that provided the core of the group's founding members. Though politically weak and impoverished, Juntai possessed great charisma and fighting skill. Using these talents, he gathered a small collection of like-minded scholars, soldiers, and dissidents to found the Devil Mirror Sect.

At first, the Red Banners welcomed the Devil Mirrors. That changed as the group grew more radical. The Red Banners shared Juntai's dream of a world without the current imperial regime, but they had no interest in burning cities or demolishing temples to make way for some mythical new age. The Devil Mirror Sect was exiled from the Red Banners and fled beyond the borders of the empire for over two decades. They returned recently under the leadership of Jing Junmei, Juntai's daughter. They selected Red Heaven Temple as their new base of operations, eliminating and replacing the monks who lived there. Since then, Devil Mirrors have worked on implementing their founder's grand dream of destroying the current empire.

MIRROR, MIRROR...

The Devil Mirror Sect's name draws from an ancient myth that alternate worlds once existed within mirrors whose inhabitants were spirits with great powers. Realizing that one day the inhabitants of the mirror world would seek to overcome and destroy the old, one of the first Emperors used his divine powers to trap the denizens of the mirror world in that place, forcing them to serve as servants to the rulers of Shenzhou. Some mystics and scholars warn that one day these mirror creatures might regain their powers and rule the world. Of course that is just an old story.

Unless it is not. A GM who wants to give the Devil Mirrors a supernatural twist could decide that Jing Junmei and her followers are in fact ancient mirror demons seeking to rule the world. Assuming they are not somehow still bound to mortal forms, such creatures would have more abilities than just strong Kung Fu, including sorcery, shapeshifting, and other potent supernatural powers. Inspirations for such supernatural threats are included in *TIANXIA: SPIRITS, BEASTS, AND SPELLS*, a supplement that deals with magic and mysticism.

Note that the myth referenced here is inspired by one recounted by famed fantasist Jorge Luis Borges in his *Book of Imaginary Beings* and does not show up in other Chinese myths and legends. As such, it is likely a creation of that author and not an "authentic" Chinese myth. However, it is still great fodder for a supernatural threat that requires heroism and stalwart action to defeat.



ASPECTS

**LEADER OF THE
DEVIL MIRROR SECT
FANATIC NIHILIST
"I WILL BURN THE WORLD!"
EERIE MAGNETISM
NEVER WHAT SHE SEEMS**

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Rapport
Great (+4): Deceive, Will
Good (+3): Contacts, Fight
Fair (+2):
Athletics, Lore, Stealth
Average (+1): *Chi*, Craft,
Investigate, Physique

STRESS

3 Physical
4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 2

KUNG FU STYLE

**Forest Serpent (Master)
FOREST SERPENT FORM**

Forest Hides the Beast: A tie on a Fight- or Athletics-based Defend action grants no boost to anyone Attacking the character.

Forest Opens Its Paths: If the character uses Athletics to Overcome an Obstacle with style, she may turn the obstacle into an advantage with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

Leaves Like Razors: When invoking a situation aspect or environment-based advantage in a Fight Attack, the character adds +2 Weapon Rating to that Attack.

Serpent Bites the Hand: If the character gain shifts on a

Defense, she can sacrifice her action next turn to immediately inflict an Attack on her opponent using the shift value of her Defense as her Attack result.

Serpent Strikes First: Use Fight to determine turn order instead of Notice in combat.

Serpent Strikes from Tail Grass: Spend 1 fate point as an opponent is about to make a Fight Attack against the character. She may interrupt this Attack with an Attack of her own with a +2 bonus to the Attack roll. This Attack does not count against the character's next action. If the opponent is still active, he may then Attack normally.

Serpent Strikes Twice: +2 bonus to Deceive rolls to Create an Advantage based on disorientation, distraction, or unbalancing against opponents the character has already inflicted stress on this combat.

STUNTS

Armor of Fanaticism (Use Will instead of *Chi* to generate **CHI ARMOR**)

Hypnotic Charm (The character may make mental Attacks with Rapport against those of lower Will than her Rapport)

Mistress of Disguise (Spend 1 fate point to join a scene by revealing the character was masquerading as a member of a mob, extra, or minor character already in the scene)

Web of Secrets (+2 bonus to Contacts actions involving agents and allies of the Devil Mirror Sect)

Jing Junmei is the second and only-surviving child of Jing Juntai, the founder of the Devil Mirror Sect. Her father and brother were both killed by assassins during their twenty year exile from Shenzhou. Junmei does not know if it was the empire, the Red Banner Brotherhood, or some other enemy who killed her family—in truth is scarcely matters to her. She is devoted to carrying out her father's vision of a great golden future brought by the destruction of established structures, institutions, and traditions. It matters little to her who killed him as long as his dream is realized.

Indoctrinated by her father since birth, Junmei is a fanatic, but a shrewd and practical one. She realizes that it takes many acts of destruction, assassination, and chaos to destroy the existing order. She does not throw all her resources behind any one plot or plan. Instead, she courts contacts, agents, and allies wherever and however she can. She prepares for the day when she decides to have the Devil Mirrors strike and burn Shenzhou.

Possessing her father's preternatural charm accentuated by an attractive demeanor, rhetorical skill, and strong personality, Junmei is able to bend many to her will with time and opportunity. These talents have given her an impressive network of followers and agents. She is skilled at disguise, often masquerading as a monk at Red Heaven Temple to better spy on or manipulate visitors. She favors weapons that are easily concealed and is especially proficient with the use of the rope dart.



CLOUDED PEARL VILLAGE

Located several days travel west of Nine Dragons along Guangzhou's southern coastline, Clouded Pearl Village is a **HUMBLE FISHING VILLAGE** whose unassuming appearance hides one very important resident, Ten Task Zian. A great warrior of the Jianghu, Ten Task Zian now lives in semi-retirement in the village. He spends his days fishing, instructing the local children in the basics of Kung Fu, and seeking to avoid conflict or attention. However, Zian has one important task that disrupts his tranquil life in Clouded Pearl Village and requires his periodic wanderings. He has ten great deeds he must accomplish before he can leave the Jianghu for good.

Other than the presence of Ten Task Zian, Clouded Pearl Village is only notable for being home to many **SKILLED FISHERMEN** and having **NO GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS** assigned to its administration due to its small size and relative lack of industry. An assistant minister normally assigned to Nine Dragons collects taxes and performs other official functions twice each year, but otherwise the village elders handle most matters of governance. The senior elder is Lu Ye, an uncle of Ten Task Zian who tries to hide his nephew from curious wanderers and vengeance seekers.

NO GOOD DEED...

The exact nature and number remaining of Ten Task Zian's deeds are left for the GM to decide. He might be on his last one, or he might have six or seven to go. In all likelihood, he has accomplished at least one or two at a minimum, but that is not a hard and fast rule. Also, just because these deeds are supposed to redeem Ten Task Zian does not mean that they could not bring him into conflict with the PCs or their allies. One such possible scenario is discussed in the Seeds of Shenzhou section, but it is far from the only possibility.

Ten Task Zian's reputation within the Jianghu is considerable. Any PC heroes meeting him are likely to know at least one tale of his prowess and deeds. However, given that until recently Zian was far more arrogant and impulsive than he is today, the stories they know may lead them into conflict. It is even possible that Zian once killed, maimed, or humiliated someone important to one of the characters and that correcting this is one of the tasks he must complete to find peace.

TEN TASK ZIAN

ASPECTS

PEACE-SEEKING WARRIOR

TEN TASKS OF PENANCE

*"I WILL NOT DRAW MY
BLADE UNLESS I MUST"
DECEPTIVELY
HUMBLE APPEARANCE
FABLED BLACK LION SABER*

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Fight

Great (+4): *Chi*

Good (+3): Athletics,
Notice, Physique

Fair (+2): Craft, Empathy, Will

Average (+1): Contacts,
Drive, Lore, Rapport

STRESS

3 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 2

KUNG FU STYLE

Storm Crane,

Storm Tiger (Master)

STORM CRANE FORM

STORM TIGER FORM

Crane Hides in Reeds: Add an additional +2 bonus when using Full Defense to Defend in combat. If used to Defend others, gain 2 Armor Rating instead.

Crane Sleeps Standing: +2 bonus when Overcoming an Obstacle based on physical obstruction or poor footing.

Storm Shakes the Foundation: When Creating an Advantage, you may spend free invocations to remove free invocations from another character's aspect.

Storm Rumbles in Distance:

Make a Fight or Athletics roll with a +2 bonus to Create an Advantage based on controlling or redirecting momentum. If you move at least 1 zone as part of this action, or your opponent has moved at least 1 zone as part of their last action, gain a +3 bonus instead.

Storm Flows Around Mountain:

If a target uses Full Defense in combat against you, gain a +2 bonus to your next Attack against them. You gain this bonus regardless of whether their Full Defense succeeds or not.

Tiger Moves With Purpose:

Move at least 1 zone and make an Attack using Athletics on a target that just moved into your zone on their last action. Add 2 shifts to any stress you deal with this Attack.

Tiger Rends the Flesh: When you tie on an Attack using Fight for Defense you can inflict a 2 point shift physical Attack instead of taking a boost.

Tiger Roars Like Thunder:

Spend 1 fate point and gain +4 to use Chi to Create an aspect called Thundering Tiger on your opponent. If you make a Fight Attack against the same target on your next turn, you may invoke this aspect once without spending a free invocation.

Tiger Rules the Jungle:

Gain 2 Armor Rating against Provoke Attacks.

STUNTS

Master of the Black Lion

Saber (When you make a Fight Attack, you gain +1 Weapon Rating. If this Attack succeeds with style, you may add a free invocation to *FABLED BLACK LION SABER* instead of taking a boost)

Seeking Peace (+1 bonus and +1 Armor Rating with Fight and Athletics Defend actions if you are unarmed)

Tasks at Hand (You gain an additional mild consequence you can utilize when actively pursuing one of your Ten Tasks)

Years ago, Ten Task Zian killed a Bodhist priest. Fearing the stain on his soul, Zian asked the dying priest how he could make amends. The priest told Zian of ten tasks he must complete to atone. Some tasks proved easier than others, and Zian fears he might die without accomplishing all of them.

Each task relates to an event in Zian's past: avenging his master, protecting the family of a swordsman he killed, making amends to a woman he loved, and so on. Zian has waited years between opportunities to pursue his atonement, for not all of these deeds are possible at any given time. He lives a life of humility and peace in Clouded Pearl Village as he waits.

Ten Task Zian appears unimpressive. He is short, favors simple garb, and keeps his graying hair nearly shaved. He keeps his famed saber, Black Lion, buried in a box near his hut, only unearthing it to travel, and even then using it sparingly. Black Lion is a masterfully crafted saber made of a black metal and engraved with the image of a charging lion.

NINE DRAGONS

The port of Nine Dragons is at the southeastern edge of the empire. The story goes the city received its name when a past Emperor was touring the region seeking a site for a new settlement and noted **EIGHT NEARBY MOUNTAIN PEAKS** that resembled dragons in the area. When the Emperor suggested naming the new settlement Eight Dragons, a particularly bold minister prone to flattery stated that he saw “Nine Dragons,” explaining he meant the eight peaks and the great Emperor himself. The Emperor liked the minister’s suggestion and Nine Dragons was founded. Since then, Nine Dragons has grown to become the capital of Guangzhou and one of the richest cities in Shenzhou.

Nine Dragons is a **BUSY TRADING PORT** with **HEAVY SHIP TRAFFIC** and **REGULAR CARAVANS** carrying goods to and from the city. This makes the city a popular entry and exit port for those wishing to leave or enter Shenzhou, as the authorities are not able or

even willing to track the movements of every ship, cargo, or traveler.

SIXTH DRAGON MANOR

Home to the governor of Guangzhou, this **FORTIFIED MANOR** is built on one of the mountains overlooking Nine Dragons. A **NARROW PATH** up the mountain provides ample privacy and security for Zhu Zedong, the current governor. Sixth Dragon Manor relies on position and environment more than manpower for protection, with the governor’s elite Azure Guard being the manor’s only regular military presence. These twelve highly trained men and women are recruited from across Shenzhou, each using their expertise in Kung Fu to protect Zhu Zedong and his family.



ZHU ZEDONG, THE EARTHBOUND DUKE

ASPECTS

GOVERNOR OF GUANGZHOU

FOREVER REACHING

UPWARDS AND OUTWARDS

"THE EARTHBOUND DUKE"

RETIRED PRIVATEER

RUTHLESS PRAGMATIST

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Contacts

Great (+4): Fight, Notice

Good (+3): Athletics, *Chi*,
Resources, Will

Fair (+2): Deceive, Drive,
Provoke, Rapport

Average (+1): Investigate,
Lore, Physique, Empathy

STRESS

3 Physical

4 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 2

KUNG FU STYLE

Storm Leopard (Master)

STORM LEOPARD FORM

Leopard Fears No One: Gain +1 Defense bonus when Defending against Attack, Overcome an Obstacle, or Create an Advantage actions based on fear or intimidation.

Leopard Bites the Throat: If the character succeeds with style on a Fight Attack, he can add a +3 Weapon Rating to the current Attack instead of taking a boost.

Leopard Waits in Shadow: When making a Fight Attack action, gain a +1 bonus and +1 Weapon Rating if the character's action last turn was not an Attack. Free normal Defend

actions do not count for determining his last action, but Full Defense does.

Leopard Dances in Clouds: Spend 1 fate point and make a Fight or Athletics Defend against an incoming Attack with a +4 bonus. On ties, they gain the boost instead of the attacker. On success, inflict a shift hit to the attacker equal to the shift gained on their Defend action. If the character succeeds with style, they also add a free invocation to their Storm Leopard Form instead of a boost.

Storm Shakes the Foundation: When creating an advantage, the character may trade free invocations to remove free invocations from another character's advantage.

Storm Rumbles in Distance: Make a Fight or Athletics roll with a +2 bonus to Create an Advantage based on controlling or redirecting momentum. If the character moves at least 1 zone as part of this action, or his opponent has moved at least 1 zone as part of their last action, gain a +3 bonus instead.

Storm Flows Around Mountain: If a target uses Full Defense in combat against the character, gain a +2 bonus to his next Attack against them. The character gains this bonus regardless of whether their Full Defense succeeds or not.

STUNTS

Ex-Privateer (+2 bonus with Create an Advantage actions based on naval experience and training)

Ruthless (When invoking an opponent's consequences in an Attack or Create an Advantage action, gain a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2)

Terrestrial Power (When invoking aspects based on the political power, gain a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2)

Web of Alliances (May use Contacts in place of Resources within Nine Dragons)

Caught between the respect of the locals and the disdain high officials hold him in, Zhu Zedong occupies an unusual place in the ruling class. Zedong is an illegitimate son of an imperial heir, which denies him any connection to the Mandate of Heaven. This is the source of his nickname, "THE EARTHBOUND DUKE." Thus, despite his hereditary title, he was forced to take on the role of a privateer to accrue the necessary wealth and fame to secure his present governorship.

Zhu Zedong is seen as a fair and just administrator, but is feared by his political rivals and dissidents as undeniably ruthless. He courts contacts and allies in all walks of life, always seeking to increase his power and reputation. He is almost never seen without his favorite weapon, the jian (straight-bladed sword) or without members of his Azure Guard.



ZHU ZEDONG: HERO OR VILLAIN?

Whether Zhu Zedong is a potential ally or enemy is heavily dependent upon the state of Shenzhou in a particular campaign. If the empire is corrupt or overly concerned with keeping and abusing its power, Zedong can be a fierce, if sometimes ruthless, defender of the people who could aid PCs in seeking justice, eliminating corruption, and protecting the needy.

On the other hand, if the empire is fairly benevolent and well-meaning, Zhu Zedong's drive to increase his power and station could turn him into a sophisticated, complex, and dangerous foe. He could even plan to break from the empire, turning southern Shenzhou into its own kingdom with Zedong at the head of a new dynasty.

Which version of Zhu Zedong that exists in a GM's campaign also affects whom he counts as allies

and servants. A heroic Zedong finds support with respectable merchants, wise scholars, and heroic pirates. A villainous Zedong draws power from slavers, murderous pirates, corrupt officials, and violent rebels. Of course, it is very likely Zedong ends up a mix of hero and villain—doing what he feels is right but occasionally blinded by his own ambition and experiences.

SHRINE OF THE SEA DRAGON

Devoted to the Dragon King of the Southern Seas, this **POPULAR SHRINE** is frequented by sailors, pirates, and anyone seeking safe travel by sea. Even many who do not believe in the existence of the Dragon Kings leave sacrifices and offerings here, a mix of hedging spiritual uncertainties and keeping more superstitious crewmembers and associates happy. As such, the shrine is very well maintained and heavily trafficked. This makes it an excellent **MEETING PLACE** for many, though more clandestine gatherings tend to happen later in the evening when only a few attendants are present.

Treasure seekers take a particular interest in the shrine because it is mentioned in an **ANCIENT PROPHECY** about the famed **DRAGON KING TRIDENT**. Supposedly bringing the right offering to the shrine on the right day is destined to reveal a clue to the location of the weapon, supposedly able to pierce any armor and channel to power of the Dragon King himself. To date, no one has uncovered the proper combination to unlock this secret, assuming it exists.

WHITE LOTUS CLUB

This **MEMBERS ONLY SOCIAL CLUB** functions as a mixture of recreation hub and headquarters for three of Nine Dragons' most powerful triad criminal syndicates: the Eternal Prosperity Circle, the Golden

Crane Society, and the 64 Bamboo Viper Union. In addition, various pirate leaders frequent the White Lotus Club while in town, especially those who deal heavily with the three triads. Members are given a special chop that marks them as a member of the White Lotus Club, and there is a **STANDING BOUNTY** for the return of any lost or stolen chops. A committee selected by member vote runs the White Lotus Club. Each committee member serves a five year-term.

The White Lotus Club's ground floor is an **OPULENT TEA HOUSE** where all members of the various syndicates and their vassal gangs meet and discuss business or socialize. The upper four levels are **INDIVIDUAL SUITES** and **MEETING ROOMS** that are rented for special occasions or to house important guests. The basement is used for storage, including a **HIGHLY SECURE VAULT** that can house important items for members at a nominal fee.

The White Lotus Club is considered **NEUTRAL GROUND** by those who frequent it. Any individual attacking or harassing a fellow guest is dealt with harshly. In extreme cases, a troublemaker's membership to the club may be revoked. This is more serious than it might seem to outsiders, as this robs the exile of both contacts and a useful sanctuary. Many who find themselves unwelcome at the club also suffer demotion or are quietly eliminated—that is how seriously the members take the rules of the establishment.



NINE DRAGONS, THREE TRIADS

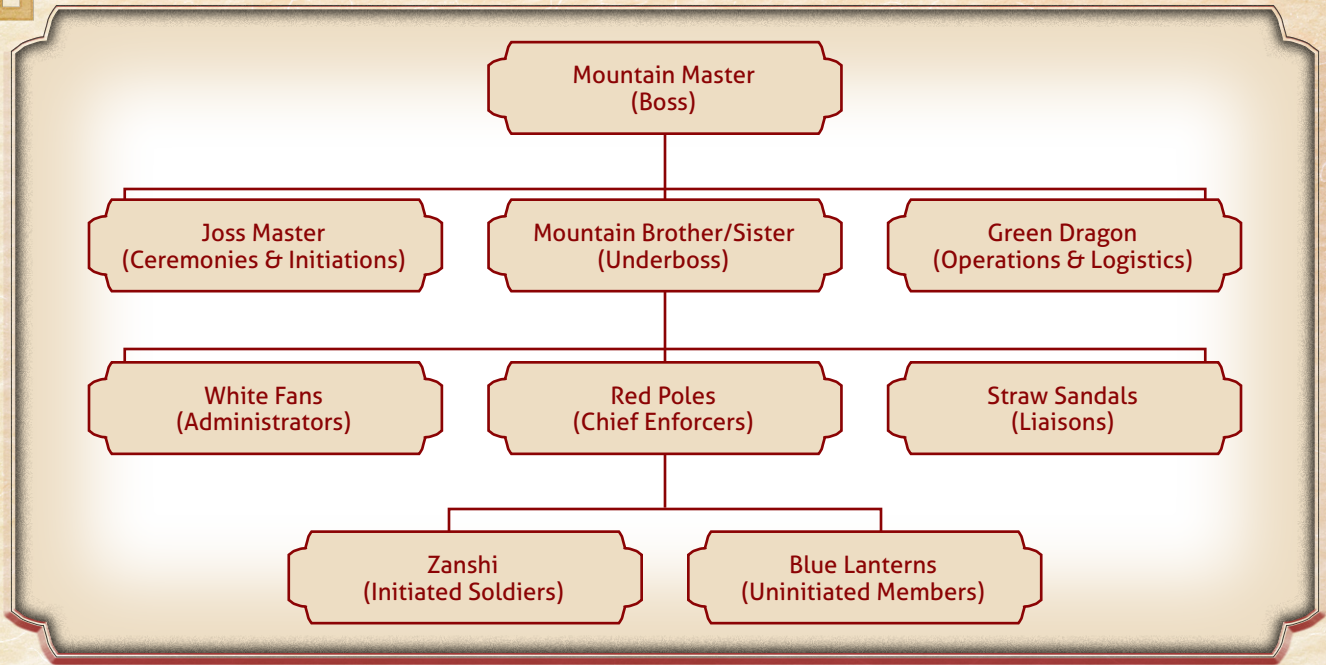
While there are numerous syndicates and gangs in Nine Dragons, the majority of power is split between three criminal triads. These three organizations co-exist in a **SHAKY PEACE** that has lasted two generations after a vicious gang war that utterly destroyed the 333 Violet Saints, the fourth triad that once operated out of Nine Dragons. They compete fiercely for various criminal enterprises in the city, but often pool resources to deal with other organizations and individuals such as rival syndicates from elsewhere in Shenzhou and magistrates and ministers tasked with rooting out crime and corruption. Should this state of cooperation and détente be disrupted, all of Nine Dragons could erupt in **BLOODY GANG WARS**.

ETERNAL PROSPERITY CIRCLE

According to legend, survivors of a political and religious purge of a previous dynasty founded the Eternal Prosperity circle, leaving it one of the older and more traditional triads in Shenzhou. They have strong **TIES TO THE RED BANNER BROTHERHOOD**, but

use different methods and have their own leadership. The same family holds the upper echelons of the triad, adding to cooperation and loyalty within the organization. The group focuses on gambling and protection rackets, though they have associated gangs and smaller secret societies that dabble in murder for hire, slavery, and other even less savory pursuits. The Eternal Prosperity Circle does not explicitly recognize these activities, but they also are not condemned.

The current Mountain Master of the Eternal Prosperity Circle is Salubrious Lee. This **AGING TRIAD MATRIARCH** is known for her **STERN AND STOIC** demeanor and Superb (+5) Will that has enabled her to weather various upheavals and conflicts while maintaining an iron-fisted grip on power. Her chief subordinates are her son and Mountain Brother Salubrious Dai, her niece and Green Dragon Clouded Jun, and her cousin and the triad's Joss Master, Salubrious Long. All members wear a piece of jewelry or tattoo depicting the triad's symbol—the Shen characters for Heaven and Earth surrounded by a circle.



TRIADS & ANACHRONISM

In reality, triads and other major Chinese secret societies are a bit new for many historical Chinese settings. The large and relatively famous modern triad, the 14k, was founded in 1945. Many older groups only date back to the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Even the term triad is only a few hundred years old and was likely coined by the British. They are included in the setting for the thematic and campaign opportunities that organized crime syndicates provide and to layer another level of secret societies and hidden hierarchies on the setting for the GM and players to use and explore.

Of course, they do not need to be used in play exactly as presented. A GM seeking a more historically accurate setting might turn the triads and other syndicates in Shenzhou into criminal secret societies with less uniform hierarchies and structure, which have been around much longer. This does not change things in major ways, but it makes these groups less able to withstand loss of leadership and key figures.

Note that the ranks and titles of the Triads provided in this book do not map exactly to classic triad organizations. Some, like Mountain Master, are the same, but others such as the Green Dragon have been adapted for stylistic reasons—changed from Vanguard to a more dramatic titled inspired by Guan Yu's (a common patron of real life triads) famed spear.

GOLDEN CRANE SOCIETY

This triad is notable for its progressive policy of reaching out to other syndicates, triads, and gangs across Shenzhou to form an extensive criminal network of spies, agents, and black marketeers. They have close connections to the 38 Dragons in Jiangzhou and the 555 Devils in Dongzhou, among others. They also regularly deal with various pirate clans and local shipping guilds. The Golden Cranes control much of the import and export of illegal or restricted goods into and out of Nine Dragons. They do not concern themselves with most other endeavors preferring instead to specialize. The Golden Cranes also pay a *HEFTY TITHE* annually to the governor to overlook most of their criminal activities, though any members breaking triad guidelines and rules can expect no protection from the authorities.

The Golden Crane Society's current Mountain Master is Jing Yong Rui. Middle-aged and charming, Yong Rui is a *CAREER CRIMINAL* who worked his way up through the ranks with a combination of *DARING STRATEGIES* and a keen understanding of human nature—reflected in his Superb (+5) Rapport and Great (+4) Empathy skills. Yong Rui's people are fiercely loyal to him, a trait he rewards with favor and position. His chief subordinates are Joss Master Whistling Wing, Yong Rui's childhood friend and closest confidant; Green Dragon Ban Lok, a towering

half-Yi powerhouse with a **SURPRISING GIFT FOR NUMBERS**, and Mountain Sister Lost Spider, an orphan whom Yong Rui raised alongside his own children. Jing Yong Rui's four adult biological children also belong to the Golden Crane Society, but they occupy lower ranks in the organization until they can convince their father they are worthy of promotion. The symbol of the triad is a golden crane clutching a serpent in its beak, which all members have tattooed or branded on their bodies as part of their initiation.

64 BAMBOO VIPER UNION

The Bamboo Viper Union is the third of the triads to control Nine Dragons. They are also the youngest, formed from the chaos of the gang wars that existed right before the current peace. Because of this, the 64s have been forced to grab influence and power where they can and be more aggressive in their efforts to expand their reach. They have interests in most criminal endeavors, from gambling to murder-for-hire and they have made serious in-roads into areas some other triads avoid such as slavery and drugs. More so than the Eternal Prosperity Circle or Golden Crane Society, the 64 Bamboo Viper Union has been seeking to expand its operations into the larger nearby towns and possibly even to ports beyond the empire. This ambition has paid off, making the triad more wealthy and powerful than their brief existence might suggest.

The current 64 Bamboo Viper Union Mountain Master is Bao Gang. Grandson of the 64s' first Mountain Master, Bao Gang has only recently come to power after his father, the old Mountain Master, finally stepped down due to age and illness. He is capable and charismatic but also **QUICK TO TAKE OFFENSE** and definitely **HAS SOMETHING TO PROVE** to the more experienced soldiers and members who followed his father. Bao Gang is a fierce fighter known for his skill with both sword and saber. His chief subordinates are his father, Bao Meng, who now serves as Joss Master and Mountain Sister Bao Shan who is Bao Gang's half-sister and heir apparent. The 64s' Green Dragon position is currently vacant following the previous Green Dragon's death for betraying his triad oaths and seeking to overthrow the 64s' leader. The two current most likely candidates for Green Dragon are Broken Saber, a young Red Pole enforcer and longtime friend

of Bao Gang, and Red Bear, the aging White Fan who revealed the former Green Dragon's plot to replace Bao Gang. All 64s bear the symbol of the triad in tattoos, jewelry, or clothing—a green bamboo viper coiled around a black circle bearing the number 64 in Shen characters.

TWIN LION HOUSE

This gambling house is among the more famous establishments in Nine Dragons, mostly due to its **REGULAR PRIZEFIGHTS** and the two bronze lion statues that stand before its main entrance. Competitors from all over Southern Shenzhou and beyond are recruited to battle for the amusement of the patrons, who bet heavily on the outcomes. **AGING FORMER FIGHTING CHAMPIONS** Dai Qing and his sister Dai Qi own and operate the house. They were once known in the Jianghu as the Twin Lions. Dai Qing runs the gambling operation and manages the regular staff who supply visitors with food and drink between bouts. Dai Qi manages the fighting, recruiting both in-house fighters and talented freelancers. The Dai siblings are always on the lookout for new talent, realizing that variety keeps things fresh and leads to more business.

Twin Lion House has a reputation for **CLEAN FIGHTS**, something that makes it a popular place for Jianghu fighters looking to settle a personal grievance. Most fights are unarmed to keep serious injuries to a minimum, though weapon-oriented bouts are arranged for special occasions, drawing heavy attendance and major profits. It also makes the establishment a **TARGET FOR GANGSTERS** seeking to rig fights, capitalizing on this good reputation to avoid suspicion and maximize profits for such scams. The current champion of Twin Lion House is Kao Run Shan, a burly local fighter who is known for his tenacity and superior grappling skills.

KAO RUN SHAN

ASPECTS*BURLY YOUNG GRAPPLER**DRIVEN TO WIN**CHAMPION OF TWIN LION HOUSE**LOYAL SON OF SIMPLE FOLK**BIG BRAWLER***SKILLS****Great (+4):** Athletics**Good (+3):** Fight, Physique**Fair (+2):**

Provoke, Drive, Empathy

Average (+1): Craft,

Notice, Rapport, Will

STRESS

4 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1**KUNG FU STYLE****Stone Leopard***STONE LEOPARD FORM***Leopard Fears No One:** Gain

+1 Defense bonus when Defending against Attack, Overcome an Obstacle, or Create an Advantage actions based on fear or intimidation.

Leopard Bites the Throat:

If the character succeeds with style on a Fight Attack, he can add a +3 Weapon Rating to the current Attack instead of taking a boost.

Mountain Does Not Fall: The character gets a +2 bonus to Defend against attempts to Create an Advantage based on unbalancing, pushing, tripping, or knocking over the defender. If a Technique from an opponent instead allows them to Create an Advantage with free invocations, one less free invocation is granted though the advantage is still Created.**Stone Resists the Blow:** The character gains 2 Armor against any physical Attack he is aware of.**Stone Weathers the Storm:** If the character Defends with style, he may remove his physical 1 stress box or convert another physical stress box to 1 lower instead of taking a boost.**STUNTS****Champion** (Treat the character's Jianghu rank as one higher in one on one fights)**Skilled Wrestler** (The character wins ties on Fight or Athletics Defend rolls involving grappling, holds, or wrestling, gaining the boost normally given to the attacker)**Laugh it Off** (If a physical Attack against the character fails to inflict stress or consequences, gain a +2 bonus against the next Provoke Attack he makes against that opponent)

Kao Run Shan is solid block of muscle standing well over six feet in height. Growing up in the south, he saw fighting for money as a way to escape his family farm and his parents' assumption that he would toil beside them in the earth until one day taking over their duties. Now, he makes good money in the city, sending a generous portion back to his family to make up for his absence. As long as he keeps winning and making money, he is a good-natured and pleasant fellow outside the ring and not one to hold grudges. However, he knows failure and obscurity could send him back to the farm, meaning he takes losing badly.

Kao Ru Shan prefers unarmed matches in the ring to better employ his grappling skills, but he is not shy about entering the occasional armed fight for the right money. In these cases, he prefers to use paired chui, or heavy maces.

FRAGRANT HARBOR

Based on the island south of the central region of Nine Dragons, Fragrant Harbor is both a major port and a center for the southern pearl diving industry. It is currently a modest collection of docks, tradesmen and fishermen's dwellings, and local businesses. However, as *YI TRADERS* take more notice of the riches and opportunities trade with Shenzhou provides, Fragrant Harbor is poised to grow in the future.

BLUE CRICKET SECURITY

Most security companies operate within the borders of Shenzhou, guarding caravans and establishments under both short and long term contracts. However, Blue Cricket Security is notable for their focus on providing maritime security. While not possessing their own ships beyond a few short-ranged transports, the Blue Crickets have a stellar reputation as *EXPERIENCED MARINES*, effective against pirates. Many merchants and civilian vessels hire at least a couple Blue Crickets to protect their cargo and crew and the largest merchant fleets employ dozens of skilled Blue Cricket fighters on their ships. The company sometimes chases down pirates for their bounties, though they prefer contract work.

Blue Crickets are rarely on assignment when in port, employed almost exclusively as guards on maritime vessels. Between assignments, members are often found at their compound in Fragrant Harbor or at the various taverns and gambling dens in Nine Dragons. In the past, the governor employed Blue Cricket Security to act as supplementary law enforcement during times of strife and upheaval, but it has been years since this last occurred. However, the history and tradition run strongly within the group, and sometimes individual members act as gangbusters or step in to defend locals.

Unlike some businesses in Shenzhou, Blue Cricket Security has no qualms about employing foreign talent. Any skilled warrior with a decent pair of sea legs is given a chance to join. In fact, one of the company's current officers is a dark-skinned Yi from far across the sea known only as Black Sing, a slight mispronunciation of his family name combined with the color of his ever-present turban. This great bearded

warrior uses a *DISTINCTIVE SABER* with an extreme curve compared to its local counterparts, though his skill with it rivals most warriors of the Jianghu. Sing serves as a *STALWART SECOND-IN-COMMAND* behind Fishhawk Gen, the current Head of *BLUE CRICKET SECURITY* and grandson of its founders. Gen is a lean man in his mid thirties who fights with a mix of experience, enthusiasm, and energy that is hard for most foes to match. He is particularly skilled with a pair of short-hafted hatchets. Fishhawk Gen recently clashed with the Kang Chun, the daughter of the pirate queen Kang Chi, and finds himself torn between wishing to capture the pirate and getting to know the intriguing young woman under less combative circumstances.

BRASS CRAB INN

This large inn is on the southern edge of Fragrant Harbor and nominally caters to sailors and traders. It is a sizeable but otherwise unremarkable establishment, only distinguished from other nearby buildings by the large brass crab that hangs over the entrance. Astute observers may note the Brass Crab is *RATHER FAR FROM THE DOCKS* to be a hangout for seamen and merchants. In truth, the majority of its patrons are pirates and smugglers, often those who have their ships anchored offshore or hidden in *SECRET COVES* far from more official ports.

Those seeking to join, hire, or parlay with members of the region's various pirate gangs and syndicates can usually contact them through the Brass Crab. Doing so requires knowing the proper *CODE WORDS & PHRASES*. Giving the incorrect code to the innkeeper, a *SOUR-FACED EX-PIRATE* named Happy Chong, can result in being kicked out, scammed, or led into an ambush.

Chief among the pirate syndicates who uses the Brass Crab for meetings and information gathering are the Verdant Flag Fleet. The infamous Kang Shi currently leads the Verdant Flags, the *LARGEST PIRATE GANG IN THE SOUTHERN SEAS*. Their interest in the Brass Crab means that any who cause too much trouble for Happy Chong and his inn soon find themselves in conflict with the Verdant Flags.

QUEEN OF THE PIRATES

While numerous pirate fleets, gangs, and individual ships operate in the oceans around Shenzhou, none are as famous or feared as Kang Shi, the “Widow of Kang” and self-styled Queen of the Pirates. While far from the only person to claim to rule a veritable kingdom of pirates, Kang Shi has a more valid claim to her title than anyone else alive. Beginning her career as wife and partner to the head of a large and established pirate clan, she grew her influence and power after her husband’s death. After three decades on the high seas, she now rules a fleet of **WELL OVER A HUNDRED SHIPS**. Many associated gangs and clans pay her tribute.

Kang Shi maintains order within her ranks with a series of **STRICT CODES AND GUIDELINES**. Success and loyalty is rewarded, but mistreatment of prisoners or disloyalty is harshly punished. Many greedy, treacherous, or needlessly brutal pirates have lost life and limb under her command. She is uncompromising

in enforcing her rules, and is particularly harsh on anyone who mistreats women and children.

Outside of pirates and smugglers, reactions to Kang Shi are mixed. The peasantry regards her with a mix of terror and awe, seeing her as both a **FOLK HERO** and **LEGENDARY VILLAIN** depending on which stories they choose to believe. The government, of course, seeks Kang Shi’s head, but some ministers and officials often wonder if it might be more profitable to reach an arrangement with Kang Shi, especially since all efforts to kill or capture her have met with utter failure.

The upper echelons of Kang Shi’s organization are peopled by hand-picked subordinates, many with strong ties to the pirate queen. Most notable for their loyalty and fearsome reputations are Captain Red-Bearded Leung and the Daughters of the Deep.

Red-Bearded Leung is a former lover of Kang Shi and the two remain close friends and confidants. Leung was a **BARREL-CHESTED STRONGMAN** turned **PRAGMATIC PIRATE CAPTAIN**. Though **GETTING ON IN YEARS**, he is still a strong leader and dangerous fighter who commands six ships. His flagship, The Black Whale, is a former Imperial pirate-hunter that Leung captured and converted to his own purposes. His nickname comes from the same battle when he acquired The Black Whale, when after hours of battle his graying beard was stained red with blood.

Kang Ning, Kang Ya, and Kang Chun—the Daughters of the Deep—are three of Kang Chi’s daughters, each with her own ship and crew. Of the three, only Kang Chun is related to Kang Chi by blood. The other two were orphans whom the pirate queen raised as her own. All three women love their mother and would do anything to protect her. Kang Chi returns their love and loyalty in kind and entrusts the trio with the most important assignments. Each of the Daughters of the Deep are skilled swordswomen and sailors. Furthermore each has a unique talent: Ning is an **EXCELLENT STRATEGIST**, Ya is a **TALENTED SHIPWRIGHT**, and Chun is a **SKILLED ARCHER**.



KANG SHI

ASPECTS

QUEEN OF THE PIRATES

UNCOMPROMISING LEADER

EXTREMELY PERSUASIVE

SKILLED NAVAL TACTICIAN

"I'M GETTING TOO OLD FOR THIS..."

SKILLS

Great (+4): Drive, Resources

Good (+3): Fight,
Provoke, Rapport

Fair (+2): Contacts,
Empathy, Shoot, Will

Average (+1): Athletics,
Contacts, Notice, Physique

STRESS

3 Physical

3 Mental

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE

Storm Crane

STORM CRANE FORM

Crane Sleeps Standing: +2 bonus when Overcoming an Obstacle based on physical obstruction or poor footing.

Crane Stuns the Carp: If the character succeeds on a Fight Attack with style, she may Create a Stunned Advantage on a target with a free invocation instead of taking a boost.

Storm Shakes the Foundation: When Creating an Advantage, the character may trade free invocations to remove free

invocations from another character's advantage.

Storm Flows Around Mountain:

If a target uses Full Defense in combat against the character, gain a +2 bonus to her next Attack against them. The character gains this bonus regardless of whether their Full Defense succeeds or not.

STUNTS

Charismatic (+1 bonus to Rapport Overcome an Obstacle or Create an Advantage actions)

Infamous (+2 bonus to Provoke Attacks against those who know her reputation)

Pirate Tactics (When leading a pirate mob, she can treat both herself and the mob as 1 Jianghu Rank higher for all purposes other than bonus movement)

Opportunistic (The character win ties in Fight or Athletics Defend actions if she is armed and aware of the attacker)

Pirate Fleet (+2 bonus to Resource actions based on pirates and piracy)

Kang Shi was concubine and later wife to Red Kang, a fearsome pirate who eventually came to lead a fleet of over two dozen ships. When Kang

passed away, his widow maneuvered herself to take over. Allying herself with her husband's siblings and other relations, she took command of the fleet as Kang Shi, the "Widow of Kang."

Kang Shi is a charming and capable woman who has managed to hold power and grow her influence through a mix of keen diplomacy and ruthless action. She surrounds herself with an extended "family" of her late husband's relatives, lovers, protégés, and allies who help her lead and control the Verdant Flags. Now over fifty, she spends more time planning large fleet actions and overseeing her syndicate's resources than actively raiding ships, leaving such actions for her subordinates.

While preferring to avoid fights, Kang Shi is a skilled warrior. She might not be a master combatant, but she is very capable and rarely goes into battle without many lieutenants and pirates to back her up. Consequently, when dealing with skilled warriors such as members of the Jianghu, she prefers to work through agents or allies. Kang Shi uses whatever weapons are at hand, but prefers a short heavy saber for its simplicity and effectiveness and always tries to keep at least one weapon hidden on her person. Despite getting on in years and having lived a hard life at sea for decades, she still cuts a striking figure. Kang Shi prefers functional clothing with minimal decoration, but she often dons more elaborate and expensive garb when meeting with fellow syndicate leaders or other important figures.



CHAPTER 4

SAMPLE CHARACTER & NEW KUNG FU

MUTINY ON RED MANTA

“It’s so difficult to find honest pirates these days.” Tian Fei muttered to herself as she watched the body of Three Waves Lao pitch overboard and into the waters below, her whip still wrapped around his neck from when she had used it to strangle him.

Lao had been her third mate on *Red Manta*, Tian Fei’s ship, until he and his compatriots decided to kill their captain and take the ship for themselves.

It was a bold plan that could work. Lao’s men were twenty strong and the mutineer’s initial attack had killed or disabled half of Fei’s remaining loyal crew of fifteen. As Lao fell dead into the sea, she could see his remaining men pause for a moment. If she was to have any hope of turning the tide, she had to act fast.

“Fall back to the upper deck and regroup!” she barked to her quartermaster, a tattooed ex-blacksmith turned pirate named Striding Anvil. The big woman nodded, dragging two wounded pirates with her as she called for retreat.

Her crew retreating, Tian Fei held her position, covering them. If they could secure the wounded and rally, this could still go her way, provided she could buy them time.

“Surrender, dogs!” Tian Fei shouted, trying to inject her voice with as much steel and menace as possible. She called it her “pirate voice”—the one she used on merchant captains and others upon whom *Red Manta* preyed.

Unfortunately, these were her own people until a few hours ago. They had heard the dread Tian Fei’s

“pirate voice” before, many times. It no longer had the same impact with a gang of bloodthirsty mutineers facing death or marooning if they failed to take over the ship as it did with a merchant captain or imperial privateer. Her assailants paused for only a moment, and then with a scream, the nearest mutineer charged. He was an ugly bald brute with dragon tattoos and a wicked looking cutlass. Another pirate joined him and then another.

Tian Fei gripped the polished handles of her knives, the curved blades like a cat’s claw jutting from her fist. This was not going to be easy and one thing was certain—she was going to need to hire a new crew.

TIAN FEI

ASPECTS

DARING PIRATE RENEGADE
WANTED FOR VARIOUS CRIMES
"THIS IS ALL A BIG
MISUNDERSTANDING..."
MIXED ANCESTRY
PIRATES' CODE OF HONOR

SKILLS

Great (+4): Athletics
Good (+3): Fight, Drive
Fair (+2): Burglary,
Rapport, Stealth
Average (+1): Empathy,
Provoke, Physique, Will

JIANGHU RANK: 1

KUNG FU STYLE

Lightning Leopard

LIGHTNING LEOPARD FORM

Leopard Bites the Throat:

If the character succeeds with style on a Fight Attack, she can add a +3 Weapon Rating to the current Attack instead of taking a boost.

Leopard Fears No One: Gain +1 Defense bonus when Defending against Attack, Overcome an Obstacle, or Create an Advantage actions based on fear or intimidation.

Lightning Crosses the

Sky: When the character succeeds with style on a Fight Attack, she may move 1 zone in addition to gaining a boost. If someone or something tries to stop this movement, gain +2 to rolls to Overcome an Obstacle.

STUNTS

A Pirate's Life for Me

(Use Burglary instead of Contacts when dealing with pirates and smugglers)

Incredible Balance (+1 bonus to Athletics Overcome an Obstacle and Create an Advantage actions based on balance and footing)

Master Mariner (+2 to bonus to Drive when sailing ships)

Refresh: 2

Born of a Shen fugitive and a Yi prince from islands beyond the empire, Tian Fei fell in with pirates when assassins killed her parents seeking revenge for her mother's part in a failed rebellion. She quickly learned the pirate's trade and won her own ship, Red Manta, at age nineteen. Tian Fei has already built an impressive record of crimes in her young career, including multiple counts of piracy and theft. Her deeds have not won her any friends among the authorities, though few in the Jianghu are concerned with her past and many are outlaws themselves. Her parents trained Tian Fei in combat, and she is a skilled acrobat, thief, and sailor. She is particularly effective with her whip and paired knives, a weapon of her father's people modeled after a cat's claw. Her Shen name is taken from one of the names of a sea goddess and means "Heavenly Princess." Her name in her father's language is Kalangitan ("Heavenly").

Recently, pirate hunters sank Red Manta, and Tian Fei narrowly escaped with her life. She now stands at a crossroads—she must find a way to acquire a new ship and crew and return to piracy or seek her destiny elsewhere.

Note: Tian Fei's **PIRATES CODE OF HONOR** is for individual players to define. It should limit her to fair dealings and good conduct in certain situations, but still allow for a life of piracy, thievery, and law-breaking. Likewise, the role her mother and any surviving relatives played in rebellion against the government is left to explore or ignore as players and the GM see fit.



STRESS

3 Physical **1** **2** **3**

3 Mental **1** **2** **3**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild

2 Mild

4 Moderate

6 Severe

NEW KUNG FU: LEOPARD STYLES

The following section introduces a new Substyle to the Kung Fu system for Tianxia, Leopard. While rumored to have originated and grown in popularity in the south, Leopard stylists can be found throughout Shenzhou. The Leopard substyle is presented first and the individual Secret Techniques for the Leopard styles follow.

LEOPARD

Alternative Names: Cat, Panther

A mix of grace and power, the Leopard is not as fast as the serpent or as strong as the tiger, but they strike a deadly balance between the two. The Leopard stylist focuses on striking opponents where they are vulnerable, evading strong attacks and countering weak ones, and maneuvering to attack from positions that seem guarded or safe. Practitioners of Leopard styles favor quick kicks, rapid advances and retreats, feints, and strikes to soft or sensitive areas. Many barehanded blows in Leopard styles use the fabled “Leopard Fist”, a closed hand striking Technique where the fingers are curled over with the second knuckle, forming the paw-like shape. Claw-like variants of this blow are also common. Practitioners favor rigorous physical conditioning, especially that which balances muscle power and agility. Despite their speed and power, Leopard stylists are very patient fighters, waiting for the right target and opportunity to finish a foe.

Leopard Fears No One: Gain +1 Defense bonus when Defending against Attack, Overcome an Obstacle, or Create an Advantage actions based on fear or intimidation.

Leopard Bites the Throat: If the character succeeds with style on a Fight Attack, they can add a +3 Weapon Rating to the current Attack instead of taking a boost—effectively +2 when accounting for the shift cost normally associated with a boost.

Leopard Waits in Shadow: When making a Fight Attack action, gain a +1 bonus and +1 Weapon Rating if the character’s action last turn was not an

Attack. Free normal Defend actions do not count for determining their last action, but Full Defense does.

SECRET TECHNIQUES

The Secret Techniques of the Leopard Styles capitalize on the balanced nature tailored to the needs and strength of the particular Element. Whether focused on offense or defense, they are respected and feared throughout Shenzhou.

FOREST LEOPARD

FOREST LEOPARD FORM

Forest Leopard stylists concentrate on becoming one with the battlefield. They use obstacles, terrain, and even their opponents to aid their movement, attacks, and defenses. Practitioners learn to springboard off walls, slide over and under obstacles, and perform similar maneuvers even as they attack and defend. Practitioners seem to blend into the chaos and rhythm of a fight until the moment they act. If an opponent ever loses track of the Forest Leopard, it is usually too late.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: LEOPARD STANDS IN SHADE

Forest Leopard Masters truly become one with the ebb and flow of their surroundings. Using keenly cultivated awareness and conditioning, they align their energies to everything around them. The Master becomes difficult to track and pin down, even when standing in plain view. They are not invisible, but superior footwork and spatial awareness makes their positioning deceptive. A Forest Leopard Master can deliver an attack while seeming far away and any missteps by their opponents only reinforce the impression the Forest Leopard is everywhere and nowhere at once.

Effect: Spend 1 fate point. For the rest of the scene, whenever the character invokes an environment-based aspect for combat or stealth-oriented actions, gain a +3 instead of the normal +2 bonus. The character may

gain one free invocation with an appropriate aspect when they activate this Technique. If an opponent fails any Create an Advantage action against the character based on combat or perception, add a free invocation to an environment-based aspect instead of the advantage they failed to Create.

GHOST LEOPARD

GHOST LEOPARD FORM

Ghost Leopard stylists are as introspective as they are deadly. They begin a fight with slow, measured precision on defense and offense, increasing speed and power as their foes tire. Once a target is worn down, they strike without mercy or pause. A Ghost Leopard practitioner rarely starts a fight, but often finishes them.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: LEOPARD HAUNTS THE BATTLEFIELD

Ghost Leopard Masters perfect the art of aligning their *Chi* with the flow of combat and their opponent's own energies. This Technique makes it easier for them to avoid blows and eventually places them in position to overwhelm their opponent's defenses and deliver a blow that breaks both body and fighting spirit.

Effect: Spend 1 fate point after the character succeeds with style on a Fight Defend action. In addition to taking a boost, they gain a +1 bonus to Fight or Athletics Defend actions against their foe for the rest of the scene. For the purposes of this Technique, a mob counts as one foe. In addition, the character may “burn” this bonus before making a Fight Attack against the same target for a +2 Attack bonus that ignores 2 Armor Rating from any source, including *CHI ARMOR*. The character may stack these bonuses if desired.

IRON LEOPARD

IRON LEOPARD FORM

Iron Leopard stylists are among the hardest hitting fighters around, mixing strong blows with deadly precision to deliver powerful blows to an opponent's weakest points. They rely upon speed and maneuverability in defense, preferring a more aggressive, less defensive approach than other Leopard practitioners. They are neither careless nor reckless but unrelentingly persistent in their offense.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: IRON LEOPARD PALM

Though all Leopard stylists favor the dread Leopard Fist, Iron Leopard Masters have learned to channel their strikes to deliver bone-breaking force to precise targets. These blows do great damage to soft tissues and organs, destroying an opponent's ability to keep fighting. Despite this Technique's name, Masters learn to land these blows with hands, feet, and weapons.

Effect: Spend 1 fate point and make a Fight Attack action. This has a +2 Weapon Rating, and also removes one invocation on the target's Form or *CHI ARMOR* (target's choice). If the Attack succeeds with style, it removes another invocation in addition to gaining a boost. If a target has no invocations to remove when the Attack hits, it does an additional +1 Weapon Rating instead (+2 additional if Attack succeeds with style).

LIGHTNING LEOPARD

LIGHTNING LEOPARD FORM

There are few fighters faster than the Lightning Leopard practitioner. With respectable power and alarming speed, they combine graceful, quick dodges and blocks with fast, vicious strikes. Acrobatic movements and skillful feints allow the stylist to attack from unpredictable angles. Combined with the speed of the Lightning Leopard, these attacks can quickly take down a target.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: LEOPARD FOLLOWS THE LIGHTNING

Masters of this Style learn to combine patience with bursts of blinding speed to capitalize on even the briefest lapses in defense. A series of deceptively flashy feints appear as powerful attacks, but in fact exist to distract and reposition targets so that the Master can deliver a very real and dangerous attack. Only those with exceptional awareness have a hope of avoiding this blow.

Effect: Spend 1 fate point and perform Fight Create a *LEOPARD LIGHTNING FEINT* Advantage action with a +2 bonus. The target uses Notice to Defend. If the character uses invocations on this advantage to Attack this target with a Fight Attack, they provide a +3 bonus instead of the usual +2. For the purposes of this Technique, a mob counts as one target.

STONE LEOPARD

STONE LEOPARD FORM

Stone Leopard stylists are among the most patient fighters around. Their solid defenses let them wait out most opponents and pick the perfect moment to strike. They are less aggressive on attack than practitioners of other Leopard styles, but balance this with being decisive and ruthless when they do attack. Anyone mistaking a Stone Leopard's deliberate and economic defenses and movements for lack of speed or skill are in for a painful lesson.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: LEOPARD SLEEPS ON THE ROCKS

Stone Leopard Masters learn to feign slowness and defensive posture so completely that even the savvy and experienced fighter can fall prey to a sudden switch to rapid evasion or attack. The practitioner relies on using a target's own instincts against them, pushing them into foolish action which results in them aiding their own defeat through misdirected momentum and ineffective offense. Even on defense, a Stone Leopard can be deadly.

Effect: Spend 1 fate point when an opponent fails to Create an Advantage against the character using Fight or Athletics. Instead of the advantage they tried to Create, Create an **OVERCOMMITTED** Advantage with a free invocation instead. The character may spend **OVERCOMMITTED** invocations to grant a +3 bonus and +2 Weapon Rating on Fight Attacks or a +3 bonus and +2 Armor Rating on Fight and Athletics Defend actions until the target Overcomes this advantage. They may Defend against such Overcome an Obstacle attempts with Fight or Athletics with a +1 bonus.

STORM LEOPARD

STORM LEOPARD FORM

Storm Leopard stylists are regarded as some of the most balanced fighters—faster than the strong, stronger than the fast, more guarded than the aggressive, and more aggressive than the guarded. They often incorporate considerable movement into their actions, both theirs and their opponents. It might be possible to outdo a Storm Leopard practitioner in some aspect of battle, but this usually just means yielding another advantage to them.

SECRET TECHNIQUE: LEOPARD DANCES IN CLOUDS

Storm Leopard Masters learn to use their own agility and the movement of their opponents to produce a potent edge in combat. They roll, leap, shift, and dodge around their target, striking as they move. Foes are often cut or battered to pieces in a flurry of motion without getting their bearings enough to mount an effective counter-offensive. For the Storm Leopard, attack and defense fuse into a seamless and deadly display.

Effect: Spend 1 fate point and make a Fight or Athletics Defend action against an incoming Attack with a +4 bonus. If the character ties, they gain the boost instead of their attacker. If the character succeeds, they can inflict a shift hit to their attacker equal to the shift gained on their Defend action. If the character succeeds with style, they also add a free invocation to their **STORM LEOPARD FORM** instead of gaining a boost.



SEEDS OF SHENZHOU & INSPIRATION

BATTLE AT THE BLACK DRAGON POOL

“I can’t believe they’re going to all this trouble over a tree!” Han Ping said, ducking the Devil Mirror Sect assassin’s saber at the same time she shot out a kick that caught her attacker under the chin, dropping him.

“I can’t believe we’re going to all this trouble over a tree,” Tian Fei replied, withdrawing her curved karabit knife from another assassin. The Devil Mirror let out a wet gurgle and slipped to the forest floor, never to rise again.

“The grove is sacred to the Empire as a symbol of prosperity and harmony,” Sister Chuntao replied as she threw her staff at two charging assassins. They caught it instinctively, giving the young nun the moment she needed to strike both assailants with a spiraling windmill kick that caught first one and then the other. Disabled, the assassins fell. Chuntao snatched her falling staff from the air as she completed the maneuver, landing with it raised and ready.

“And?” Tian Fei asked. As a pirate, she certainly had strong opinions

on just how convincing Chuntao’s explanation was.

“And if they poison or burn the trees, it will sow dissent and may offend the Will of Heaven,” Chuntao continued, her eyes darting around to locate more assassins. For the moment, she only saw none those who already lay motionless around them.

“And?” the pirate pressed. She was not getting paid for this, and she was not sure given her status with the authorities that any reward due would be replaced with a lengthy prison stay. Or worse.

“And these guys are real jerks,” added Ping. “Remember what they did to those travelers?”

At this, Tian Fei’s resistance softened. She understood that the Devil Mirrors had killed the pilgrims they came upon while traveling to protect their secrets. She could understand that. It was harsh, but sometimes to keep oneself and one’s crew safe, one did difficult things. However, she could not justify the cruelty and sadism evident in the carnage. It

was one thing to kill to protect that which one treasured. It was another thing to enjoy it.

“Yeah, well... Why does it have to be us stopping them?” she asked, but it was a weak protest at best.

“Because unless Dishi and the others can return in time to cure the poison afflicting the caretakers of this place, there is no one else,” Chuntao answered. Then she heard Sun, her pet golden monkey, shriek from his lookout post high in the treetops.

“More are coming.” She heard Sun shriek again and again, “Many more.” Soon all three of them saw shadowy shapes begin to appear, running through the trees towards them. First one, then six, then a dozen, then more.

“This won’t be easy,” Ping said.

Tian Fei thought about the faces of the dead pilgrims. Her hands gripped her knives tightly as she brought them up and prepared to fight.

“And?” she asked, her face a mask of grim amusement and determination.

SECRETS OF SHENZHOU

The following plot and adventure seeds can be used as the basis for adventures in the southern provinces.

THE EMPEROR AND THE PLUM

The Emperor makes a pilgrimage to the Black Dragon Temple to visit the Imperial Plum and pay his respects to the monks entrusted with its care. The Devil Mirror Sect has gotten word of this visit and seeks to attack the Emperor and destroy the tree, striking a terrible blow that shows the populace that Shenzhou's ruling dynasty has clearly lost the Divine Mandate of Heaven to rule. Unfortunately for the Devil Mirrors, an acquaintance of the PCs discovered the plot while visiting Red Heaven Temple and was able to get a message to them before the sect's assassins cut him down. Their deceased acquaintance was earnest in his assertions and there is no reason to doubt his honesty,

but without proof to take the authorities the PCs are the only ones currently able to stop the plot.

To make matters worse, the Devil Mirror Sect are not the only ones with an interest in the Emperor's visit. Though they have broken with the Devil Mirrors, the Red Banner Brotherhood would love to capture or kill the Emperor. In addition, though they do not wish the Emperor harm per se, some Bodhist or Legalist luminaries would delight in seeing the Daoists of the Black Dragon Temple lose favor. Thus, even if the PCs can get word of this plot to the Emperor's ministers, they may find themselves dealing with spies and opportunists instead of loyal subjects of the Son of Heaven. On the other hand, the Black Dragon Gardeners could prove skilled and enthusiastic help, if they can be convinced of the threat. In any event, it is up to the PCs as heroes of the Jianghu to foil this plot.

The Devil Mirrors have two targets: the Emperor and the Plum. If they cannot get to one, they redouble their efforts to destroy the other. They seek to position themselves to strike before the Emperor even arrives, giving the PCs ample time to stop them. With such an important target, Jing Junmei, the leader of the Devil Mirror Sect, oversees this operation personally, which makes the whole situation much more dangerous.

The GM can use the Red Banner Brother NPC and Evil Cultist mob entries in *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade* (pages 154 and 156) for the average Devil Mirror Sect militants. The Lin Kuei Assassin (page 153) works well for Devil Mirrors who have infiltrated the Emperor's entourage or the Black Dragon Temple. Simply replace the core concept aspects with **DEVIL MIRROR SECT FANATIC**, and they should work fine.



THE RESURRECTION OF THE SAINTS

The 333 Violet Saints were the fourth triad who once ruled a significant chunk of the underworld in Nine Dragons and its surrounding territories. After a terrible gang war, they were wiped out, and the three remaining triads formed an uneasy peace. Now, the triad has returned and seeks to disrupt the current balance in the Nine Dragons' underworld and reclaim their old territory and holdings. The leader of the reborn 333 Violet Saints and his lieutenants gather allies and forces to prepare for their big push. As skilled warriors in the Jianghu, the PCs make attractive allies or deadly foes. In any event, they cannot remain neutral as the streets of Nine Dragons begin to bleed.

The GM can run this scenario three different ways based upon the sort of people leading this resurrected crime syndicate. If the leader of the triad is an **AMORAL SOCIOPATH**, most even vaguely heroic PCs run afoul of the triad as they seek to seize power, eliminate rivals, and restore their power base. PCs allied with the existing three triads could be asked to help eliminate the 333 Violet Saints. On the other hand, if the triad's leader is more of a **PUCKISH ROGUE**, the syndicate could be a useful ally and more positive alternative to the existing criminal order. PCs could be recruited to help the reborn triad secure power. Either way, dealing with the triads is dangerous but potentially very profitable.

Finally, the PCs could be the leaders and lieutenants of the reborn 333 Violent Saints. This would require an aspect connecting them to the old triad such as **LAST OF THE 333 VIOLET SAINTS** or even **HIDDEN TRIAD HERITAGE**. This setup could be the basis for several campaign arcs, with the PCs gaining wealth, influence, and powerful Kung Fu they can use to overthrow the existing triads and take over Nine Dragons. Eventually, one of them might even take over Zhu Zedong's position as governor!

DEBTS OF BLOOD

Melodious Song, a fellow warrior in the Jianghu contacts the PCs. She tells them the sad story of her father, a kind and brave swordsman whom a rival murdered years ago. Song has spent most of her adult life seeking the man who killed her father, and she believes she has finally found the killer—Ten Task Zian of Clouded Pearl Village. Though masquerading as a humble fisherman and occasional Sifu to the local children, Song is sure Zian is the same vicious swordsman who killed her father. She asks the PCs to help confirm Zian's identity and, if necessary, help her destroy her father's murderer.

Of course, things are not that simple. Zian did kill Melodious Song's father, Melodious Fan, years ago in a drunken duel that could have easily been avoided, but he is not the man he once was. Now a humble man seeking peace, he wishes only to atone for his past sins. The death of Song's father is one such act. If informed of Song's identity, he seeks to make amends anyway he can. However, as he has other past karmic debts to pay, he does not simply allow Song or the PCs to kill him. For her part, Song is unwilling to leave Zian in peace or forgive him. She wants his blood for robbing her of her beloved father. Her obsession and the dark emotions that drive her could easily lead her down a path similar to the one Zian took in his wild and violet youth. Assuming the PCs do not immediately attack Zian and talk with him and others in Clouded Pearl Village, they quickly come to understand Zian lives a kindly life and helps many who live there.

Can the PCs convince Melodious Song to abandon her quest? Or perhaps they seek to kill Zian despite his attempts to reform? What if another old enemy or rival uses Song to locate Zian, then he and his followers attack when the former warrior is located? Perhaps Zian agrees to surrender his life to Song if the PCs can help him repay his other spiritual debts so he can pass on the next life without the karmic stain of his past actions. It is even possible that a PC who impresses Zian with their skill and strength of character might receive the swordsman's fabled Black Lion Saber when he dies.

For Melodious Song, the GM should give her Kung Fu skills that are impressive but definitely below those of both the PCs and Ten Task Zian, ensuring she needs their help with her quest for revenge. Ten Task Zian's statistics are in **Chapter 3**.

INSPIRATIONAL MEDIA

For readers looking for more inspiration for their *Tianxia* games, a few additional pieces of media are added to the lists in *Tianxia: Blood, Silk, and Jade* and other supplements.

DRAGON (2011)

Also titled *Wu Xia*, this excellent and tense film starring Donnie Yen and Takeshi Keneshiro involves a paper maker, a detective, and an order of brutal killers in a story where few things are how they first appear. Similar to a wu xia version of Cronenberg's *History of Violence* and other film noir style works, the film has its own unique energy and style. The film is a great example of how to inject mystery and intrigue without sacrificing action. Its early 20th century setting is different from *Tianxia*'s default setting, but there is still plenty from which to draw.

MARCO POLO (2014)

While definitely more historically accurate than *Shenzhou*, Netflix's *Marco Polo* series is filled with plenty of inspiration for wu xia and Kung Fu action games. Very loosely based on the famous travels of the title character, Marco Polo himself is arguably the least compelling part of this tense action-drama that centers on the court of Kublai Khan and his Yuan Dynasty. Filled with assassins, battles, intrigue, and plenty of surprisingly great Kung Fu, this series features fantastic performances by several Asian and Asian-American actors such as Rick Yune and Benedict Wong. Tom Wu's blind Sifu Hundred Eyes in particular is a fantastic example of what a Grandmaster looks like in a more grounded, somewhat realistic, wu xia and Kung Fu action setting. While the setting might seem more appropriate for *Tianxia* games set in Northern *Shenzhou* given the various Mongol characters, the variety of ethnic backgrounds paint a nice picture of what adventuring in the South might look like as well.

THE AVENGING EAGLE (1978)

Another Shaw Brothers classic and arguably one of their best films, *The Avenging Eagle* follows two enemies who end up uniting as allies against an order of fanatical assassins. It is a basic story framework that pops up in various films of that era, but *The Avenging Eagle* is definitely among the best in terms of execution and style. In this case, Chik Ming-sing (Ti Lung) is a former member of a cult of orphans raised as killers by a corrupt old Kung Fu Master. Cheuk Yi-fan (Alexander Fu) is the mysterious warrior who seeks his family's murderers. The story has plenty of twists and turns, though it is hard to call many of them truly surprising to fans of the wu xia and Kung Fu action media, but that is due more to the film and influencing similar works than anything else. The story is compelling, the characters interesting, and the Kung Fu is remarkable. Every fighter in the film has his own style and weapons. Some very gifted physical actors give the movie a very dynamic and entertaining visual style. Ti Lung's performance is particularly noteworthy, both for his intense but effective acting and some impressive three section staff fighting.

The plot might seem a overblown to modern audiences, but if one can accept the conventions and style of the 1970s Shaw Brothers wu xia and Kung Fu action films, the film delivers a highly entertaining story with strong mix of action and drama. This film was remade as *13 Cold Blooded Eagles* in 1993, which is also entertaining but lacks some of this version's melodramatic grandeur.

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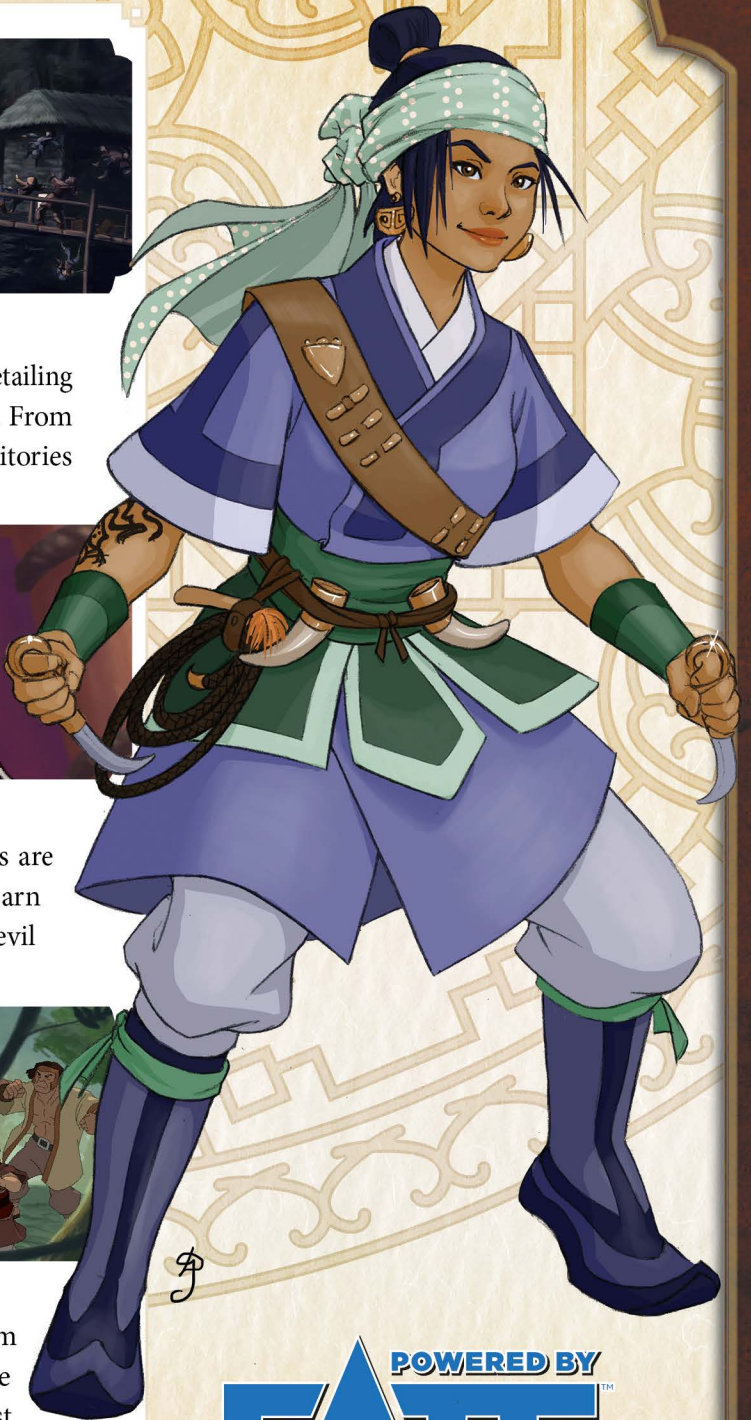
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